Better Beginnings
Making a Difference: The evaluation of the Better Beginnings Birth to Three family literacy program

Developed through Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program, an initiative of The State Library of Western Australia

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Year 5 - 2012
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To what extent has *Better Beginnings Birth to Three* influenced early literacy practices since the last survey?

Findings from the Librarians: Interview data 2012

Findings from the Community Health Child Nurses: Interview data 2012
We would like to thank Margaret Allen (Chief Executive Officer and State Librarian, State Library of Western Australia), Susan North and Nola Allen for their support of the development and implementation of the evaluation of Better Beginnings: Birth to Three. The evaluation of Better Beginnings was made possible by the continuing support of the Better Beginnings Project Coordinator, staff from the State Library of Western Australia, the librarians from the Local Government libraries, Community Child Health Nurses and parents/carers in four communities over five years.

The Project Coordinator gave the research team a generous amount of her time to describe the planning, development and implementation of Better Beginnings from a pilot program in 2005 to a state-wide program in 2008, incorporating several new projects. She was always available to answer unexpected questions or elaborate on new aspects of Better Beginnings to ensure clarity and depth of understanding.

The librarians and the Community Child Health Nurses (CCHN) gave a wealth of information, both spoken and written in individual and focus group interviews. Over the five years of evaluation their enthusiasm did not waiver, they were frank and open in their responses and enabled us to identify factors that had an impact on the successful implementation of Better Beginnings.

The parents, who are at the centre of the Better Beginnings program, continued to complete a survey each year about Better Beginnings. Overall they completed five surveys and took the time to write comments about the Better Beginnings program. Their responses gave us insight into the impact of Better Beginnings not only on their literacy beliefs and practices but how these influenced their child and wider family.

Finally, we would like to thank all those families who welcomed us into their home year after year to share the ways in which Better Beginnings had impacted on them and their family. We thank them all for their interest and commitment, and acknowledge that the evaluation could not have been undertaken without their generous support and enthusiasm. We would like to give a special thanks to those mums who were brave enough to share a story with their children while we videoed them and to all the children who shared their ideas about books and reading with us.

We would also like to thank all the parents who gave us permission to reproduce their photographs to use on the cover and as part of the text of the report.

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The Centre for Early Childhood Research at Edith Cowan University has been evaluating the State-wide Better Beginnings: Birth to Three program over four years, from 2007-2010. Three hundred parents who received a Better Beginnings Reading Pack in 2007 took part in the ongoing evaluation. This report describes the findings of the fifth year of the evaluation and addresses the continuing implementation of the program for the year 2012. Throughout this report, the program Better Beginnings: Birth to Three will be referred to as Better Beginnings.


Better Beginnings is an early intervention family literacy program that has been developed by the State Library of Western Australia. Its purpose is to provide positive language and literacy influences for young children through supporting parents as their children’s first teachers. The program is based on strong cooperation between health professionals, local governments and public libraries. In planning and developing the program, there has been a high degree of consultation and engagement with local communities.

The participants in this phase of the study were:

- Thirty nine parents from four diverse communities across Western Australia. These parents received the original Better Beginnings Reading Pack in 2007 and were surveyed in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010;
- Six case studies. Mothers in the case studies volunteered to be videoed sharing a book with their child. Children in the case studies shared a book with the researcher and were asked about concepts of print;
- Three librarians who were interviewed about their on-going involvement in the program; and
- Four community child health nurses who were interviewed about their on-going involvement in the program.
Summary of findings from surveys and interviews with the mothers who received the Better Beginnings Birth to Three program in 2007

The Better Beginnings Birth to Three Reading Pack
Five years after receiving the Reading Pack, 97% of participating mothers remembered receiving it. Where there had been a new baby since 2010, 57% reported that receiving the Reading Pack for their first child had influenced communication and the sharing of books with the subsequent new baby. Forty percent of mothers reported that they still had the nursery rhyme chart and used it with their child. Of the 53% of mothers who remembered the book suggestion pamphlet, only 11% were still referring to it.

Library Membership
By 2012, 81% of mothers surveyed indicated they were members of the local library and of these respondents, 73% borrowed books for their child. Sixty seven percent of children were library members. In addition to books, other items were borrowed including DVD’s, CD’s and puzzles. The majority of mothers who had taken out membership of the library for themselves and their child indicated that their decision to do so was influenced by Better Beginnings.

When asked about choosing books at the library, mothers indicated that their children were assuming more responsibility for selecting books based on personal interest and on features of the books such as style, pictures, colour and length of book. In four out of 19 responses, mothers indicated that the process of selecting books was still a joint activity between mother and child.

In the survey it was noted that attendance at Better Beginnings library activities had declined since the last survey. However, 8% still attended Baby Rhyme Time while over 20% were attending Story Time. Sixteen percent of mothers attended Parent/toddler workshops, and of the 16% who did attend, 90% found them useful or very useful.

Attitudes to early literacy
Since the last survey 47% of mothers reported that their confidence in sharing books with their child had increased as the child grew older. Most mothers (97%) indicated that since the last survey they now felt very or quite confident in sharing books with their child and of these mothers, 74% felt the Better Beginnings program had influenced book sharing with their child. This included starting to read to their child earlier, acting as a reminder of the importance of reading to children, and of literacy development, and improving the quality of the interaction between mother and child.

It was noted that since the last survey (2010) the majority of mothers’ opinions about ideas around literacy had not changed greatly, they still thought that young children could enjoy and benefit from books, rhymes and songs and be members of the library. However, 10% reported that they had changed their opinion and now felt that children could benefit from books, rhymes and songs and 16% now realised that their child could take out library membership. All of these mothers attributed their change in opinion to Better Beginnings, thus it appeared that even after five years the program was still influencing mothers understanding of early literacy and knowledge of library membership.

Influence of Better Beginnings Birth to Three on early literacy practices
The mothers who were surveyed indicated that there were many books in their homes that they read to their child. Thirty-one out of thirty-
Evidence from the video-taped shared book episodes clearly shows that all the children were highly engaged in shared book reading with their mother. They appeared to follow the narrative with interest and enjoyment and join-in where appropriate. Evidence from the assessment and discussion about books and their views of reading demonstrated that all the children were developing key concepts about print, they liked to choose books and were looking forward to learning to read. Interestingly, all the children claimed they were already good at reading or would be good at learning to read. Four of the children identified a favourite book and two children indicated that they liked most books.

Additional comments about Better Beginnings Birth to Three

In the survey, mothers indicated that they were involved in a number of reading or writing related activities with their child including, writing letters, writing their name, practicing letters, tracing letters and numbers, sound and letter recognition, saying the alphabet, colouring and drawing. They attributed Better Beginnings to stimulating interest in books at a much earlier age, of reading to children at an earlier age, and to raising their awareness of the importance of literacy, reading and sharing books. Some mothers also indicated that they had referred other young mothers to the program. After five years of being involved in the Better Beginnings program, mothers were asked for further general comments about their involvement. They commented on the benefits of the program for families, their desire to see the program continue with further funding, and the positive impact of the program on children, families and communities.

Children’s literacy attitudes and behaviours

In the survey, parents who had received the Better Beginnings Reading Pack five years previously, reported that their children were continuing to develop some highly important concepts about books and print. Ninety per cent of mothers reported that their child pointed to words, 70% reported that their child talked about the words in books and 79% reported that their child talked about letters and sounds. Interestingly, 70% of mothers indicated that their child tried to read while books were being shared. Additional comments about children’s literacy behaviours included: making up own stories; ‘pretending’ to read; picking out familiar words or sounds on a page; trying to sound out words with familiar letters; trying to put letters together to form words and enjoying trying to read.

Nine participants had between 100-300 books in the home. Most mothers read to their child between 4-7 days a week and this frequency of reading was attributed by 63% of mothers to the influence of Better Beginnings. In addition, other members of the family also regularly read to their children. It was noted that at the time of the survey, 100% of participants indicated that their child had been involved in sharing a book with either themselves or someone else in the family in the past week. These book sharing practices included discussing and talking about the story or pictures, telling the story, re-reading favourite books, finding a comfortable place and time to share the book, and letting the child hold and play with books. Mothers reported that Better Beginnings had influenced the way they read books, in that they used more expression and were more confident in reading. In addition, mothers who had a baby subsequent to receiving the Better Beginnings Reading Pack reported that this had encouraged them to start sharing books with their new baby from an early age. Thus the program appeared to be having a ripple effect influencing other members of the family and new members of the family.
Summary of the findings from the Community Child Health Nurses and Librarians

Interview data 2012
The librarians and community child health nurses described their role in the Better Beginnings program within their own communities and their views of its implementation. The issues that are outlined below emerged from the interviews.

Roles and delivery
The community child health nurses were regarded as a vital link to Better Beginnings. Their involvement with the program centred around distribution of the pack at the six week health check, talking to parents about the program, advocating for Baby Rhyme Time, Story Time, library membership and explaining the benefits of the program for children’s development. All community child health nurses talked about the significant impact the Better Beginnings program had on parents. They commented on the encouragement it gave parents to read and talk to their children and the message it gave them about the importance of reading to their children from birth. Community child health nurses, liaised with their local library to replenish the supply of packs and build up networks to support the sustainability of Better Beginnings.

The librarians were responsible for providing the Reading Packs for Better Beginnings and for the supply and delivery of these to the community child health nurses. The inter-agency collaboration between community child health nurses and the librarian was regarded as crucial as most families and new born babies were in contact with the local community child health nurse. In addition librarians were responsible for library activities such as Baby Rhyme Time and Story Time. Two of the librarians were maintaining key Better Beginnings activities and developing new activities. Two librarians had made contact with local schools for the introduction of the Better Beginnings for 4 and 5 year olds program and felt this was an important way of offering continuity for families involved in the Better Beginnings program, as well as introducing the importance of early literacy to parents/carers with older children.

Training
All three librarians had received some form of Better Beginnings training, including Baby Rhyme Time training. They were very positive about the training and saw this as an opportunity to network as well as develop new ideas and knowledge. All librarians felt further training would be advantageous in order to keep up with the latest research about literacy, to share ideas about implementation of the program and consider different models of disseminating information to parents. All librarians felt the Better Beginnings web site was very helpful as a resource and also as a means of keeping in touch with the Better Beginnings team. Since the introductory training session, none of the community child health nurses had received any further ‘formal’ training, however liaison with the local librarian helped to keep them informed of new developments. In addition, meetings with other community child health nurses enabled them to share ideas and issues about Better Beginnings.

Logistics of the Better Beginnings Birth to Three program
The library has responsibility for setting up the Better Beginnings Reading Pack for distribution to families, via the community child health nurse. Community child health nurses distribute the packs and hold discussions about the contents of the pack, the importance of reading to children, different ways of reading to children, and the advantages associated
with Baby Rhyme Time and Story Time. The Reading Pack also contains an enrolment form for the library, to encourage mothers to take out membership. The librarians saw their role as multifaceted. They were responsible for the overall delivery, implementation and sustainability of Better Beginnings. This included responsibility for liaising with the community child health nurses and delivering the Reading Packs to the clinics, along with organising, advertising and developing Better Beginnings activities. With the increase in demand for Better Beginnings activities, librarians noted the need to expand the program to weekends and after school to meet working family needs. There were also some comments about the increasing need to provide more resources for the diversity of families within the local community. Two librarians were also involved in the Better Beginnings for 4 and 5 year olds program and saw this as important for the continuity and sustainability of the Better Beginnings message.

Perceptions of Better Beginnings Birth to Three

The librarians felt the Better Beginnings program was now an essential part of their library activities. They believed that it was making a difference to families and were committed to continuing and sustaining the program. Community child health nurses were positive in their view that the messages about the importance of early literacy from the Better Beginnings program were being sustained in the community. These messages were continuously reinforced at the regular health checks attended by families. They identified a need to find ways of reaching those families who did not attend the clinic and were perhaps in ‘most need’ of the program. The community child health nurses saw the need for more variety in the books and packs to sustain the program especially for CaLD families. A suggestion was made to collect email addresses from parents to enable more follow up to occur.

All community child health nurses and librarians spoke highly of the Better Beginnings program and identified the Reading Pack as one of the most valuable elements of Better Beginnings as it provided the impetus for discussion and conversation. The librarians believed the program was being sustained in families and in the wider community as more parents became involved and library membership increased. They also commented that its continuation over a number of years had impacted on a new generation. They all argued that it was important to engage families in the program to encourage them to continue participating as it was hard to re-establish contact once they left. They also saw the program as a means of engaging families who traditionally did not visit libraries and were identified as ‘hard to reach’. The state library coordination was seen as central to supporting the sustainability of the Better Beginnings program. Librarians saw sustainability as linked to future funding and that lack of funding may hinder the longevity of the program.
Five years after becoming involved in the Better Beginnings program, the majority of mothers in the 2012 survey reported that it was continuing to have a positive impact on many aspects of their literacy practices with their children. Mothers were also more confident in carrying out literacy practices with subsequent new babies in the family. Mothers reported they read and shared books more often to their child, communicated and interacted more often, and that their child asked for a book to be read more frequently.

Wider impact of Better Beginnings on families was also reported, as partners saw the benefits of reading to young children and the number of books in the home rose substantially, ranging between 100-300 books. As the frequency of reading to children increased a wider range of book sharing practices resulted. These practices were attributed to the influence of Better Beginnings and included choosing a comfortable place and time to read, discussing and talking about the story or pictures, moving fingers from left to right while reading, asking questions about the story, and encouraging the child to predict what happens next in the story.

Mothers reported they were more confident and used more expression when reading with their child and consequently their child’s literacy attitudes and behaviours had changed. Children were turning pages, asking questions, pretending to read, pointing to words and pictures and beginning to talk about letters and sounds.

In addition, evidence from the videotaped shared book episode, assessment, and discussion with seven children, indicated that they were developing concepts about print, finding enjoyment in sharing books and becoming confident in their ability to learn to read. This indicated that the children were clearly developing some of the foundations of literacy.

Library membership and involvement in Better Beginnings activities had been significantly influenced by the Better Beginnings program for the majority of mothers. These mothers reported their child borrowed books and other items from the library and 86% of mothers surveyed indicated that they visited the library every two to four weeks. Children chose books based on personal interest, book features and on parent recommendations and children were taking greater control over their choice of library items.

Overall the benefits of the program were highly praised by mothers for the encouragement it gave them to make time to share books and to remind them of the importance of reading to their children from an early age. It provided encouragement to parents who might not have read to their children and engaged other members of the family in early literacy practices. It also had an inter-generational impact as mothers who had not previously read to their baby began to do so now. The program was seen as being very useful to new parents particularly for the encouragement it gave families who would not have seen reading to young children as important. Mothers also reported the impact their book sharing practices had had on their children.

Community child health nurses and librarians expressed a continuing commitment and support for the Better Beginnings program and both were actively involved in promoting the program as an integral part of their roles. The liaison between the community child health nurse and librarian was seen as pivotal to the effective delivery and outcomes of Better Beginnings. The community child health nurses expressed the need to go beyond receiving and distributing the Reading Packs to taking an active role in explaining and discussing the content, and following up by linking with Mother’s Groups where possible.
They acknowledged that this had already happened in some of the communities they had worked in. While librarians regarded the role of the community child health nurse as important in making initial contact with mothers and new born babies they acknowledged that an on-going relationship was critical to the longevity and sustainability of the program.

Recommendations

In addition to the overall conclusions outlined above, a number of recommendations were identified from the 2012 data analysis. It is clear from the data that Better Beginnings has significantly influenced literacy practices, attitudes and confidence within and across families, making a positive contribution to early literacy learning. The liaison between the community child health nurses and librarians has supported and sustained the program over the years, 2007-2012. Overall, the data indicates that Better Beginnings should continue to support parents’ early literacy practices as a means of developing literacy from birth. The two major challenges identified in the 2010 evaluation, remain key challenges after the 2012 evaluation. That is, engaging families in the program who are traditionally hard to reach; and finding ways of increasing the involvement of linguistically and culturally diverse families. The research team acknowledge that several strategies have been put in place to support both these concerns since the last evaluation. However, there is an opportunity to strengthen and extend these and on the basis of findings from the research the following is recommended:

1. Establish and strengthen links with agencies that can contact ‘hard to reach’ parents/carers;
2. Develop Better Beginnings resources and ways of working with linguistically and culturally diverse families;
3. Strengthen the relationship between community child health nurses and librarians through joint training or networking opportunities;
4. Establish strategies to encourage and extend professional learning and development;
5. Continue to strengthen links between the library and schools to support children’s developing literacy through promoting the Better Beginnings for 4 and 5 year olds program;
6. Promote Better Beginnings through stronger links with families and the use of technology. Reaching and sustaining families is a challenge that could be addressed through, for example, the use of email and other ICT strategies.
Introduction

The Better Beginnings State-wide program has been involved in a longitudinal evaluation over four years, from 2007-2010. Three hundred parents who received a Better Beginnings Reading Pack in 2007 took part in the initial evaluation. This report describes the findings of the fifth year of the evaluation and addresses the continuing implementation of the program for the year 2012.

What is the Better Beginnings: Birth To Three program?

The overall focus of Better Beginnings is for government agencies to work in partnership with families to support children’s early literacy learning. The key elements of the program are outlined below.

1) A Reading Pack usually given to parents of young babies by the community child health nurse at the 6-8 week health check, although in a few communities it is given out by librarians. The contents of the Reading Pack may vary somewhat, but normally would include:
   - a colourful board book for babies;
   - a frieze with nursery rhymes printed on it;
   - a brochure containing suggestions for enjoying reading experiences with a baby;
   - a list of first books for babies and toddlers;
   - information about local library resources;
   - a library membership form; and
   - a DVD that shows adults reading and singing rhymes and songs to young children and babies of various ages, and information about the value of this (the DVD is not available in all packs and in some areas is distributed at a later date).

2) A Better Beginnings Birth to Three handbook and electronic training module developed to support library partners working with the program. These provide a guide to the responsibilities of all partners and include samples and templates to follow when delivering the program.

3) Baby Rhyme Time and Story Time sessions and workshops at the library, designed to provide enjoyable shared early literacy experiences for parents/carers and young children. Parents and their children are invited to free sessions that introduce them to stories, rhymes and games to use with their babies/children. In some libraries there are workshops that address various topics, including speech and language development, child development, nutrition and parenting.

4) Story Time boxes (also called ‘Outreach Toolboxes’) that contain a rich variety of literacy resources for children and their families. These are lent by public libraries to community agencies and are also used ‘in-house’ to support Baby Rhyme Time and Story Time.

5) Family resource centres in libraries providing interactive early childhood learning spaces, in addition to resources designed to increase parental knowledge of early childhood language and literacy.
6) **A Reading Gateway** that includes information about *Better Beginnings* (http://www.better-beginnings.com.au). This has been established as part of the website of the State Library of Western Australia. The website provides news and information for parents, teachers and librarians about early literacy and links to games and activities for children in order to encourage an interest in books and stories. It also includes access to interactive electronic books that can be read to children by the computer.

The participants

The participants in the fifth year of *Better Beginnings* evaluation (2012) were:

- Thirty nine mothers from four communities across Western Australia. These parents received the original *Better Beginnings* Reading Pack in 2007 and were surveyed in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010.

- Seven children who received the *Better Beginnings* Reading Pack in 2007, and whose mothers were part of the 2012 cohort of research participants.

- Three local librarians [the librarian from the fourth community had only been at the library for two weeks and felt she could not contribute to the research and therefore was not interviewed]. The three librarians followed up the distribution of the packs with invitations to visit the library, provided information about library services for mothers and babies and conducted Baby Rhyme Time and Story Time sessions and information sessions for parents.

- Four community child health nurses. The community child health nurses distributed the *Better Beginnings* packs to mothers, introduced the program and invited mothers to join the library.

How the research was conducted

Mothers who had received the *Better Beginnings* Reading Pack in 2007 living in four diverse communities were interviewed by telephone as a follow up to the original surveys and interviews conducted in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010. A survey was conducted by a research assistant over the telephone. Mothers were asked to answer the questions in relation to the child who had received the *Better Beginnings* Reading Pack in 2007. Out of the 39 mothers, four mothers referred to their four year old child who had received a *Better Beginnings* Reading Pack and one mother referred to her child who had turned three when answering the questions.

The mothers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Survey</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayview</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killarney</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marni</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kangru</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey consisted of the following sections:

Section A was about receiving the *Better Beginnings* program in 2007 and current demographics.

Section B was about memories and use of the *Better Beginnings* Reading Pack since the last survey.

Section C was about the impact of the *Better Beginnings* program since the last survey.

Section D was about library membership and involvement in *Better Beginnings* activities since the last survey.
Section E was about the influence of Better Beginnings on attitudes to early literacy since the last survey.

Section F was about the influence of Better Beginnings on early literacy practices since the last survey. This section also included items about their child’s literacy practices.

In addition to the survey, mothers were asked if they were willing to read to their child and allow their child to take part in a concepts about print assessment and a discussion about their views of reading and writing. Six mothers agreed, and seven children actually took part in these two activities. The shared reading was videoed.

Each mother was asked to choose a book she and her child enjoyed and asked to read the story to her child in the way she normally would. This took place in the family home.

Following this the child was invited to join the researcher to talk about a book. The concepts about print assessment was based on a simple story, which was read to the child. The child was then asked a series of questions related to concepts about print using the same book. The child was given a gift book at the end of the assessment. The assessment took place in the child’s home with her/ his mother present.

The librarians and the community child health nurses

The librarians and the community child health nurses took part in a telephone interview. They were asked about their past and current involvement in Better Beginnings, training they had received, the logistics of the program and their perceptions of Better Beginnings. In addition the librarians were asked about their involvement in the Better Beginnings for 4 and 5 year olds program and continuing and new activities at the library associated with Better Beginnings.
Findings from the mothers: Survey data 2012

This section of the report presents the data from the mothers who had received the Better Beginnings Reading Pack for their new baby in 2007. In 2012, 39 mothers were located from Bayview, Marni, Killarney and Kangru, and completed a telephone survey. The mothers were asked about demographics, their children, the Better Beginnings program, library membership and involvement in Better Beginnings activities, the influence of Better Beginnings on their attitudes, confidence and early literacy practices with their children and their children’s and family literacy practices. They were asked to consider their answers since the last survey.

Characteristics of the children

Of the 39 children in this study, one child had turned six years of age in 2012, 33 children had turned five years of age, four had turned four years of age, and one child had turned three. In this group, more girls than boys have remained in the data set since the 2010 report (54% girls and 46% boys), while 45% of the cohort were the eldest child in the family. Fifty four percent of mothers reported that their child attended Kindergarten, 41% reported their child attended Pre-Primary while 5% indicated their child attended daycare.

Receiving the Better Beginnings Birth to Three Reading Pack

In 2012, 5 years after receiving the Better Beginnings Reading Pack 97% of mothers remembered receiving the pack in 2007. During this time, almost 20% had noticed advertisements in the community including, at day-care, in the city, playgroup, newspaper, shops and child health centre. Mothers reported that on the birth of their second baby, they (78%) did not receive another pack. However, mothers reported that the Better Beginnings Reading Pack received for their first child had influenced:

- Communication with their new baby (57%).
- Sharing books with their new baby (65%).
- Use of the book suggestion pamphlet (40%).

Better Beginnings Birth to Three Reading Pack Content

Mothers were asked about the retention of the Reading Pack content and 58% of mothers reported they no longer had the nursery rhyme chart. However, remarkably 42% still had the nursery rhyme chart, and 39% of mothers still used the chart often with their child. Comments about the whereabouts of the nursery rhyme chart indicated that 13 respondents had either packed it away or were unsure of its whereabouts while seven had it visibly displayed on a bedroom wall, or in the playroom.

Almost half of the mothers (47%) remembered the parent information pamphlet, although none of the participants were still using it – possibly because they no longer needed the information as the majority were putting the suggestions into practice. Over half of the mothers (53%) remembered the book suggestion pamphlet and 11% still referred to it.
The mothers were asked to think about how *Better Beginnings* had influenced aspects of their literacy practices since the last survey in 2010.

### Changes in literacy practices since the last survey were reported as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Has anything changed since the last survey?</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often you read to your child?</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often your child asks for a book to be read?</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How you communicate with your child? (e.g. read more, talk more, less TV)</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often other people (like partner, babysitters or other relatives) read with your child?</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often you read with your other children?</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Seventy one percent of mothers indicated that the frequency of reading to their child had changed since the last survey.
Seventy seven percent of mothers reported that the frequency of their child asking for a book to be read had changed since the last survey.

Eighty seven percent of mothers indicated that the way they communicated with their child had changed since the last survey (for example, reading more and talking more to the child and watching less television).

Sixty eight percent of mothers reported that the frequency of others reading to their child had changed since the last survey.

Fifty five percent of mothers reported that the frequency of reading to their child had changed since the last survey.

Seventy three percent of mothers indicated that Better Beginnings had influenced these changes to their communication and literacy interactions with their child.

Thus Better Beginnings seemed to be having a cumulative effect as mothers reported the program was still influencing their literacy practices and those of their family.

Library membership and involvement in Better Beginnings Birth to Three activities

Mothers were asked about how Better Beginnings had influenced their library membership and involvement in library activities. Eighty one percent of mothers indicated that they belonged to the local library and of those respondents 73% borrowed books for their child.

Fifteen participants also commented that in addition to books, they borrowed DVDs, CD’s and puzzles from the library. Of those mothers who reported that they were members of the local library, 52% reported they attended the library once a month, 26% attended once every two weeks, while 4% went once a week.

When asked about their child’s membership of the library 67% indicated their child was a member of the library and of those all children borrowed books and other items on their own card (100%). Further comments indicated that children also borrowed DVD’s, CD’s, games and puzzles. Sixty three percent of children frequented the library once a month, 26% attended once every two weeks, while 5% went once a week.
The mothers were asked to what extent *Better Beginnings* influenced their decision to join the library and to take out membership for their child. Responses indicated that 55% were influenced by *Better Beginnings* to take out membership for themselves, while 32% replied that *Better Beginnings* did not influence them at all. Interestingly, 61% of mothers were influenced by *Better Beginnings* to take out membership for their child while 21% were not influenced at all.

Mothers were asked how they and their child selected books at the library. The nineteen responses to this open-ended question fell into three main categories.

- **Child chose based on personal interest (8 out of 19 responses)**
  - Look and select something he is interested in.
  - Guided by my son's interests, he helps choose his own books.
  - Child selects own books.

- **Parent chose (4 out of 19 responses)**
  - I pick through and see how much text there is and if it is going to hold her interest.
  - I help her select.

- **Based on book features (6 out of 19 responses)**
  - Author, style.
  - Pictures on cover.
  - Colour and pictures.
  - Length of book.

From the comments above it appears that the children had taken some control over their choice of library items with parents giving guidance. Book features were considered by both the child and parent when making a selection.

Of those mothers and children who were members of the library at the last survey, 65% indicated they were attending the same or more often, while 35% were attending less often. Seventy five percent of children were borrowing the same or more items. Several mothers commented on their child’s borrowing:

- **He is much more interested so he likes to have more to choose from.**
- **I was filling up two cards and it was hard to keep track of due dates on 20 something items, and the fines were too expensive, so I get less out now.**
- **Family go less often as library books get mixed up and hard to find with the books they already own.**
- **Now we borrow from school library so don’t need as many items from public library. Only when we run out of reading material.**
- **We tend to borrow a great pile of books then renew them so we have time to go through them all.**
Better Beginnings Birth to Three library activities
Mothers were asked to consider the Better Beginnings library activities since the last survey. Participation in Baby Rhyme Time indicated that 8% of children still attended these sessions; this is not surprising given the growing maturity of the children. However, 21% of children attended Story Time sessions. Sixteen percent of mothers attended Parent/toddler workshops, and of the 16% who did attend, 90% found them useful or very useful.

Comments about the usefulness of Parent/Toddler workshops included:

- *Helpful for home reading, i.e. parent skills.*
- *Children like them.*
- *Attend school holiday activities which he enjoys.*
- *Wish there were more sessions during the school holidays.*

To what extent has Better Beginnings Birth to Three influenced attitudes to early literacy since the last survey?

Confidence in sharing books
Since the last survey 47% of mothers reported that their confidence in sharing books with their child had increased as the child grew older, while 50% reported that their confidence had stayed the same. Most mothers (97%) indicated that since the last survey they now felt very or quite confident in sharing books with their child. When asked about the influence of Better Beginnings on their confidence, 74% felt the program had influenced book sharing with their child.
Comments made with regard to confidence included:

- Wouldn’t have thought to read to him until he started school.
- Better Beginnings encouraged me to start earlier.
- Better Beginnings set the ball rolling for literacy.
- It is a reminder of how important reading is.
- The quality of the interaction has definitely improved.
- Knowing they’re never too young to start reading.
- Gave me the incentive to start earlier, sharing books with him then with his older brother. You can notice the difference.
- I already had the respect of book reading to children. I was always going to read to my children but Better Beginnings encouraged me to start earlier.

Importance of sharing books
All mothers (100%) indicated that since the last survey they felt it was important to share books with their child with 97% indicating that it was ‘very important’. A large proportion (87%) attributed their views about the importance of sharing books to Better Beginnings.

The child’s interest in books
Most mothers (97%) reported that since the last survey their child’s interest in books had changed with 97% reporting that their child was now very interested in books with 3% being quite interested in books. Children’s enjoyment of reading books was reported at 82% and of these 97% enjoyed having the whole book read to them, while 18% reported their child did not enjoy reading books.

Change of opinion
Mothers were asked if their opinion on certain ideas around literacy had changed since the last survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Since the last survey have you changed your opinion on any of these ideas?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The idea that, children can enjoy and benefit from books?</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The idea that, children can enjoy and benefit from rhymes and songs?</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The idea that, children can join the library?</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this table it can be seen that opinions did not change greatly on these issues since the last survey, reinforcing their understanding that young children can enjoy and benefit from books, rhymes, songs and being members of the library. Interestingly, over 10% of respondents indicated that they had changed their opinion about these three items, since the last survey, perhaps suggesting that Better Beginnings was still having an influence. In addition, 16% now thought that children could join the library. Respondents were also asked the extent to which Better Beginnings had
influenced these changes in opinions, with 31% reporting that the influence ranged from a little to a great deal. Open ended comments included:

- I didn’t see the importance of joining my children to the library previously.
- My daughter now sits in bed with books and looks through them by herself like she is trying to read them to herself.

Comments were made about how the Better Beginnings Reading Pack changed their opinion in other ways and included:

- Reinforced and encouraged to read to newborns.
- That reading to children is very important.
- It reinforced my long held ideas on the benefits of reading and glad it is getting out to other parents as well.
- Highlighted the importance of involving children with books from an early age.
- Went more often to the library after receiving kit initially. Before Better Beginnings I was buying books. Didn’t know I could borrow books for my child or that she could be a member.
- Not really, maybe more encouragement.
- Rather than change my opinion it has reinforced it.
- I was only 19 when I had my child and had no clue. Better Beginnings has shown me what to do with my child so I have then shared it with other young mums.
- No, just justified it.
- Emphasised the need to read.
To what extent has Better Beginnings Birth to Three influenced early literacy practices since the last survey?

Sharing books with children

On the whole, mothers indicated they had a large number of books in their homes that they read to their child. Thirty one out of 39 participants had between 100-300 books.

In terms of how often they read to their child most mothers (69%) indicated seven days a week, with 13% four days a week, and 10% five days a week. Of the participants, 63% indicated that Better Beginnings had influenced the number of days they read to their children.

In addition, most of the mothers reported that their child was read to regularly by at least one other person, most frequently by their father and teachers. When asked if Better Beginnings had influenced to some extent the other people who read to their child, half (50%) responded that Better Beginnings did influence these readers in some way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person reading</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>2-6 days</th>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>Once a month</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child’s father</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s brothers and sisters</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s grandparents</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babysitter/childcare worker</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (includes teachers)</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It was noted that in the past week, 100% of mothers indicated that their child had been involved in sharing a book with either themselves or someone else in the family. The mothers were asked for details of their book sharing practices with their child.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy practices engaged in with family member in previous week</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shared a book with your child?</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussed/talked about the story or pictures with your child?</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told a story, not from a book, to your child?</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used a language other than English when reading to your child?</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition mothers were asked to elaborate further on their book sharing practices since the last survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific book sharing practices</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choose a comfortable place and the right time to share a book together?</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold the book within the child's visual range and turn pages slowly?</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let your child hold and play with books?</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose books with pictures and accompanying print?</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move your fingers under the words, from left to right, as you read?</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read stories aloud with expression?</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose stories with a lot of rhyme and repetition?</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While reading to your child do you point to pictures and name them or describe them?</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While reading to your child do you ask questions about the pictures and the story or information?</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage your child to predict what will happen next in the story?</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read and re-read favourite books?</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about the words in the book?</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about letters and sounds?</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the mothers surveyed, 68% indicated that Better Beginnings had influenced the way they read books with their child. When asked to elaborate on the extent of the influence of Better Beginnings, comments included:

- It gives me more expression, more confidence in reading.
- Try to put a bit more life into the way I read.
- Read to him as if someone was reading to me.

Mothers were also asked about the literacy attitudes and behaviours of their child during book sharing experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s attitudes and behaviours</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have a favourite book?</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point to the pictures?</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about the pictures?</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn the pages of the book by themself?</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Join in with the reading?</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask questions about the story?</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretend to read?</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Say what will happen next?</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point to the words on the page?</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about the words in the book?</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about letters and sounds?</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try to read?</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen that those children whose parents had received the Better Beginnings pack five years previously were continuing to develop some highly important concepts about books and print. Ninety percent of the children pointed to words, 70% talked about the words in the books and 79% talked about letters and sounds. Interestingly, 70% of mothers indicated that their child ‘tried’ to read, demonstrating reading like behaviour, while books were being shared.

Over 46% of mothers provided additional comments about how their child tried to
read. These have been categorised under two headings. The first category relates to comments about how children ‘read’ or create a text and the second category relates to comments about how children are beginning to develop an understanding of the relationships between sounds, letters and words.

‘Read’ or create a text

- Puts his own spin on things, pretends, will hold the book upside down and tell a story.
- Makes up his own story.
- She pretends to read.
- If it’s known book like Charlie and Lola she can repeat it word for word.
- Reads to her teddies.
- She remembers stories and ‘reads’ them to herself.
- She pretends to read.
- If it is a book she is familiar with she reads off by heart, e.g. Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? She will sit and read out loud as she knows it so well.
- Looks like he is [reading] - turns the pages, but has Down’s syndrome.
- Doesn’t know letters or sounds but makes up stories.
- Thinks he knows all the stories even if he hasn’t seen it yet.
- Copies brother when he is reading, remembering sentences from book.

Sounds, letters and words

- If there are some letters that she knows she tries to sound out words.
- She is learning how to put letters together to form words and enjoys trying to read.
- Picks out familiar words or sounds on the page. Tries to spell words.
- Now that he is at school he brings home readers that we sit together and sound out.
- Picks out familiar words or sounds on the page.
- She recognises her letters [in name] and is beginning to try and sound out some simple words.
- I bought her sight word books that are thin and repetitive that are easy for her to try and read to herself. She likes to find words that start with S like her name does.
- Tries to spell words, asks what it says.
Mothers were asked to comment about any other reading or writing related activities they were involved in with their child. Responses were categorised and are presented below:

Reading related activities
- We do letter and sound recognition; we make up stories; alphabet repetition-verbal and written; ABC phonics application on the phone.

Writing related activities
- Writing letters; started to write own name, practicing letter; practice letters and words daily; I write letters for her to copy; copies sentences; writing down stories that she has made up; writes name on birthday card; trace letters and numbers; make cards for people.
- Colouring in, artwork, sing songs, activity books; drawing.

Mothers were also asked about other ways Better Beginnings had influenced them since the last survey. Responses were categorised and are reported below:
- I don’t think he would be that interested in books if I hadn’t started him at an early age which I only did because of Better Beginnings. Originally it encouraged me to read to both my children from an earlier age than I would have thought to.
- Keeps reinforcing the need to read and gives ideas of ways to improve literacy; reiterating the importance of reading and sharing books.
- More confidence in reading to younger children since receiving the pack; more confidence reading to my new baby.
- Referred other young mums on to it. We did a lot of group activities, storytelling, acting when I was crèche leader that Better Beginnings influenced and encouraged. Encouraged me to share with other parents to read with their children. The biggest influence of Better Beginnings has been the effect on my husband. He would never read to my children or see any reason for me to read to them, but with the evidence from Better Beginnings I could show him why he should be doing it, and why it wasn’t a silly thing for me to be doing.

The data from the video clips of six mothers reading to their child illustrated some of their comments about shared reading and their child’s understanding of reading. Four children were read to individually, while the other readings ranged from reading to four children all under five including a baby, to reading to two children of about the same age, as they sat on either side of their mother. All the books were fiction, with a predictable story line and some repetition and rhyme.

It was evident that all the children were highly engaged in shared book reading with their mother. Regardless of the type of book or the number of children all the mothers had chosen a comfortable place, held the book within the child’s visual range and turned the pages slowly. Each book had illustrations with accompanying text and was read with great expression and enthusiasm.

The interaction between the children and mother was dependent on a number of factors including the type of book and the child’s current disposition. For example, in two of the readings the children appeared to want to ‘cuddle up’ to their mother and listened attentively while engrossed in the story with no interruptions through questions or comments. In the other
readings, three of the mums pointed to the pictures and words and named or described them and asked questions and one of the mothers encouraged the child to predict what would happen next in the story. In each case the child responded to his/her mother's encouragement. One child responded to questions about the story ‘Who Sank the Boat’ (Pamela Allen, 1998) as it was read, another child joined in parts of the story ‘Where’s my Teddy’ (Jez Alborough, 1992) and another child pointed and read the names of the engines in ‘Meet the Engines’ (Rev. W. Awdry, 2004). During this reading the child also asked some questions about the engines.

These short extracts of shared reading illustrated the ways in which these children were developing an enjoyment of books and were clearly engaged in some book reading practices. These practices were reinforced by the data from the same children who completed the concepts about print assessment and a discussion about their views of reading and writing.

All of the children identified the front and back of the book and were able to demonstrate how to hold the book and turn the pages. Four of the children identified the title of the book. All the children identified the pictures and six identified where to start reading the story. Six identified a word and five identified a letter. Interestingly only four could point to the words while the story was read, and yet six pointed from left to right when asked about directionality and five were able to point to the beginning of the next line. All seven children knew which direction to turn the pages and at the end of the story, six children located the first part of the story and five located the last part of the story.

Six of the children indicated that they liked looking at books and all seven indicated they liked to choose the book themselves, they were looking forward to learning to read and that it would be easy to learn to read. All seven thought they were already ‘good’ at reading or would be ‘good’ at learning to read. Four of the children named a favourite book, two did not have a favourite book, claiming they liked ‘most of them’ and one child was unsure. Although limited these responses suggest enjoyment in books and confidence in learning to read.

When mothers were asked if they had received a Better Beginnings for 4 and 5 year olds Reading Pack from their child’s Kindergarten, Pre-Primary or local library, 20% said ‘yes’. The Better Beginnings for 4 and 5 year olds Reading Pack is designed to build on the Better Beginnings Birth to Three Reading Pack and encourages links between home and school.

After five years of being involved in the Better Beginnings program, mothers were asked for further general comments about their involvement and just over half of mothers made a comment. Responses were categorised into comments about the benefits of the program, and impact on children, parents and the community.
The Program

- Really great program, it has encouraged me to stay on the track I chose, and remind me of the importance of reading to my children from an early age. A good initiative to encourage the parents who might not have read to their children. I hope it continues in WA. The Government should keep funding it.
- I think it is a good incentive to point parents in the right direction. I just didn’t realise how many people didn’t read to their children, Better Beginnings is needed so everyone knows what needs to be done. The program is awesome and really encourages non-reading families to consider it as a good fun thing to do.
- I appreciate Better Beginnings offering information to the community. Better Beginnings definitely should continue within our community. Where I already had a clue about reading to my child from a young age I am sure many others haven’t had the same upbringing.

Impact on children, parents and community

- Better Beginnings would be very useful to new parents. Reading rocks. I started reading earlier to this child than my older child, and he really shows a lot more interest in books than his older brother. He is obsessed by them.
- I think it is a good incentive to point parents in the right direction. I just didn’t realise how many people didn’t read to their children, Better Beginnings is needed so everyone knows what needs to be done. The program is awesome and really encourages non-reading families to consider it as a good fun thing to do.
- I appreciate Better Beginnings offering information to the community. Better Beginnings definitely should continue within our community. Where I already had a clue about reading to my child from a young age I am sure many others haven’t had the same upbringing.
Findings from the Librarians: Interview data 2012

The librarians were responsible for providing the Reading Packs for Better Beginnings and usually delivered these to the community child health nurses. In addition, activities such as Baby Rhyme Time and Story Time generally take place within the library. Of the three librarians interviewed, two had been involved in a previous interview. All librarians had been involved for three to four years in the Better Beginnings program. When asked about the nature of their involvement in the Better Beginnings programs, two of the librarians described their role as liaising with the community child health nurse, and ensuring packs were delivered and supply was maintained. One librarian described her role as implementing the Better Beginnings program and engaging families and schools in the Better Beginnings for 4 and 5 year olds program:

- Liaising with schools, get enrolment details to give the Better Beginnings team in Perth, handout packs at schools, mothers groups, and library. Do Rhyme Time and Story Time at the library and go to schools to do Story Time.

All librarians described Better Beginnings as being very important.

- Reaches mums that normally might not be involved. Reinforces the reading message and makes connections between school, home and library.
- I think it’s really important. There needs to be a bit more variety of books, but the Rhyme Time DVD is excellent and the information is really good.
- I have become heavily involved, dedicating more time because it is so important.

Liaison with the community child health nurses

All librarians liaised with the community child health nurse and thought this was very important as they were the ones that reached most families with new born babies. Two librarians commented ‘a good relationship is critical to keep the program running smoothly’ and ‘they are in the prime position to really meet just about all new born babies, because not everyone comes to the library’. One librarian explained that she met with the community child health nurse to discuss program needs and development every few weeks. Another reported that although the community child health nurses are very busy, on-going communication is important to maintain continuity and find out how the program ‘has been going and delivered.’

In relation to improving the effectiveness of the liaison between community child health nurses and librarians, one librarian mentioned the restricted funding community child health nurses were under and the difficulties and time constraints they faced with follow up visits to families. A suggestion was made from one librarian about having a register of all the librarians and community child health nurses involved in Better Beginnings to support networking.

Involvement in the Better Beginnings for 4 and 5 year olds program

Two of the librarians were managing the Better Beginnings for 4 and 5 year olds program, which involved visits to local schools and enabled them to build on the Better Beginnings program. They indicated that they were very supportive of this development but this had given them more responsibility and added extra demands to their workload.

One of the librarians explained that she remained in contact with the four and five year olds through Rhyme Time at the library and through her visits
to local kindergarten and pre-primary classes. She added that most of the mothers from Mother’s group ended up joining the library and therefore contact was maintained. In addition, this librarian was involved in delivering packs, implementing parent sessions and liaising with teachers and schools. A second librarian maintained contact with some Birth to Three families through the distribution of the Better Beginnings for 4 and 5 year olds program at kindergarten and pre-primary classes.

One librarian felt that her involvement in the Better Beginnings program had given her confidence and more experience in how to deliver the Reading Pack and handout the books in the kindergarten and pre-primary classes.

Training for librarians
All three librarians had received some form of Better Beginnings training and felt this was very useful:

- Completing statistics had become simpler and the training really helped me to understand how to do this.
- I’ve done Baby Rhyme Time training at the state library recently - this was really good - and some one-on-one training for the Kindergarten program delivery.
- Only one training session at the Birth to Three stage.
- Two members from the Better Beginnings team came to show the packs and gave lots of information on the contents and explained the Teachers Pack [4 and 5 year olds program].

One librarian talked in-depth about how the training had helped her to become aware of the importance of matching the interaction with parents/carers needs. She explained that the level of literacy in her community is quite low and she wanted to be careful not to alienate anyone. She encouraged parents/carers to talk about the pictures, tell the story rather than necessarily read it, ‘I want them to know that anything they can do is good enough, [this] is kind of the message that I try and get across.’

One librarian suggested more visits to the State Library to be informed about Better Beginnings would be a future consideration. When asked about recommendations for further training, a suggestion was made about exposure to different models of ways of delivering the same information. All librarians felt further training would be advantageous in order to keep up with the latest developments and increase their understanding of the most effective ways of implementing Better Beginnings.

Logistics of the Better Beginnings Birth to Three program
The librarians saw their role as multifaceted. Initially, they had responsibility for delivering the Better Beginnings Reading Pack to the community child health nurses, which they saw as one opportunity to strengthen the relationship between the two service providers. They also had responsibility for building the program and offering activities to families, which included Baby Rhyme Time and Story Time. One librarian talked about the link between the Birth to Three years and the 4 and 5 year olds program and how the Better Beginnings program was extended and consolidated by her visits to kindergarten and pre-primary classes.

Two librarians mentioned the Better Beginnings Reading Packs were prepared by the State Library and at a local level by one of the clerical assistants. They all felt this was an excellent development as it saved them a great deal of time. In one instance library membership material was added to the pack along with a resource booklet on borrowing in the junior collection. In the other case, the librarian was careful not to overload the pack as she felt the material would not be read. Both librarians described a
process of distributing packs as summarising or talking about the different components and their purpose and directing attention to important information included in the pack. Two librarians indicated that the funding for Better Beginnings was a standing item in their library budget.

Two librarians reported on the continuing and new activities associated with Better Beginnings. One librarian explained, ‘We offer Rhyme Time, Story Time and holiday activities once a week. On average 30 plus families attend these sessions’. The other librarian talked about expanding the activities:

We offer Rhyme Time fortnightly, Story Time two sessions per week. We are going to expand an additional Story Time session on Saturdays. We have a lot of people asking about weekends and after school activities especially from working parents. These are really well attended and very popular. We also do school holiday activities and Children’s Book Week.

One of the librarians explained how from an initial struggle to attract parents/carers numbers attending Rhyme Time had increased over time. In addition, she was pleased that many of the participants were ‘regulars or semi-regulars’. She explained that many of the participants were from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and spoke English as an additional language so she did the same rhymes each week to familiarise the parents/carers and children with them. She also said that she had thought about doing rhymes in other languages but did not know how this would be received or how she would actually do this.

It is interesting to note that one librarian reported that she had worked really hard to re-engage parents/carers in the Better Beginnings program and library activities after the library had changed venue, ‘it took a lot longer to get the parents back for the Baby Rhyme Time than it did for the Story Time....... I think, with the disturbance it’s sort of, oh, they went off and found something else to find that social involvement in.’ In addition she argued that the new location of the library may be one factor in re-building attendance, she explained that the original library was in the shopping centre and parents/carers would visit the library as part of their shopping trip – now parents/carers ‘had to be more purposeful’.

The librarian explained that in order to encourage families to attend the library sessions and engage in the program they ‘put all our material in simple English and have as many multi lingual books available as possible – but we could always do with more as community language changes’. Two librarians commented that they did not provide for diversity of families in a significant manner and would like to provide more to encourage families from different ethnic backgrounds. One librarian mentioned that there was not a great deal of need at the library to provide resources and support for families who spoke English as an additional language.

Perceptions of Better Beginnings Birth to Three
All the librarians were very committed to the Better Beginnings program; they claimed it was now an integral part of the library, making a difference to families across generations. They felt it was important to target families with new babies, as a ‘crucial phase in life’. They identified the Reading Pack as one of the most valuable elements of Better Beginnings. The pack provided the impetus for discussion and conversation and acted as an ice-breaker to talk about the information contained in it. They felt the parents really appreciated a free book and information to support book sharing practices. They talked about all the aspects of the Reading Pack as a very useful resource, particularly for new parents/carers who needed guidance and re-assurance about the importance of books, songs and nursery rhymes.
All librarians were aware of the Better Beginnings web site and found it very helpful. One librarian used it to access resources and to communicate with the Better Beginnings team. Another said she reinforced the ideas from the site, and used the posters and images from the site.

The librarians interviewed believed the program was being sustained given that it had been running for a significant number of years. They argued that its longevity was having an impact on library attendance and the message was sustained across time – from one generation to another. In addition, the branding was very visible and wide-spread, serving as a reminder of the importance of reading. A factor that was seen as important was the ability to maintain families in the program over time. The librarians felt that once families left the program it was difficult to maintain contact and encourage them to continue to visit the library. However, two librarians felt the connection between the Birth to Three and the 4 and 5 year olds program helped to consolidate and sustain the message and stay in contact with some of the families. All three librarians felt that the State Library coordination was seen as central to the success of the Better Beginnings program. Central coordination ensured continuity, support and networking opportunities, while providing a consistent supply of resources and information.

Librarians saw sustainability as linked to future funding and that lack of funding may hinder the longevity of the program. In addition, they argued that the program was aimed at engaging all families and those who did not meet with a community child health nurse, may not be aware of the program, receive the Reading Pack or know how to access support for early literacy. There was some concern about finding ways of engaging families who did not ‘traditionally’ visit the library and were often identified as ‘hard to reach’. This included culturally and linguistically diverse families and families who had multiple needs.

They identified several features that would make the program more sustainable:

- Strategies to deliver the program to ‘disengaged’ families and families who did not ‘traditionally’ visit the library.
- An extra Reading Pack delivered through the library to children aged between one and three years, to supplement the Better Beginnings Birth to Three program.
- More links to ICT in the packs. How to use ICT to support and engage readers.

One librarian concluded by stating she would not change anything ‘the kids love the books, families love the free information and activities, and mums love somewhere to go’ suggesting that Better Beginnings meets several needs.
Findings from the Community Health Child Nurses: Interview data 2012

The community child health nurses are regarded as a vital link to Better Beginnings as they generally (but not always) have distributed the Reading Packs to mothers at the scheduled 6-8 week health check. In 2012, four community child health nurses were interviewed, three of whom had been involved in Better Beginnings from its inception and one who had been involved for five years.

The importance of Better Beginnings Birth to Three

All were very positive about the program and saw it as having a significant impact on parents. All of them talked about the importance of the program in encouraging parents to read and talk to their children and the message it gave them about the importance of reading to their children from birth. One community child health nurse explained that often new mums were not aware of the importance of sharing books, songs and nursery rhymes remarking, ‘But the baby can’t talk back’, or, ‘They don’t understand what I’m saying’. She encouraged new mums to ‘continue talking to them [the baby] so that they will hear language and speech’. She went on to explain that ‘because a lot of our clients are non-English speaking, we tell them to just talk about the colours in the book or the pictures in the book but using their own language, not worrying about actually having to read the words’.

Another community child health nurse talked about the importance of the program in giving parents resources, she felt that many parents did not know or could not remember nursery rhymes and she encouraged them to use the nursery rhyme chart for the whole family. She noted even when parents have lots of books the program reminds them about the importance of reading and added that ‘there is a special association often with something that is given at the very beginning when they’re very young’. In addition, some parents remembered a previous Reading Pack and talked about the ‘gift book’ being their child’s favourite book.

Involvement with Better Beginnings Birth to Three

Their involvement with the program centred around distribution of the pack at the 6-8 week health check, talking to parents about the program, advocating for Baby Rhyme Time and explaining the benefits of the program for children’s development and the advantages of library membership. Three of the community child health nurses talked about how they go through the Reading Pack and demonstrate and/or explain how to share the book, songs and nursery rhymes. They explain to the mothers that talking about the illustrations, colours and story is really important, especially for those who are not confident readers. One community child health nurse explained that she also used the Reading Pack to give parents strategies for sharing books, songs and nursery rhymes with their new baby.

Another community child health nurse explained that she also talked about the importance of books, songs and nursery rhymes and talking to the baby, for brain development. One community child health nurse talked about the importance of sharing the book with many of her mothers who were refugees, and she thought the choice of book was very important. She argued that ‘Baby Ways’ was very engaging because of the photographs of babies from a range of different ethnic groups involved in different activities, with simple self explanatory text. She also talked about the importance of the Nursery Rhyme frieze in local community languages.
All community child health nurses were unaware of the Better Beginnings website and therefore had not accessed it. One community child health nurse explained that she was not very ‘computer literate’ and therefore would not access the website. However, one community child health nurse looked at the website after reading the question about the site, before the interview. She felt it was excellent and explained that she intended to ‘tell my mum’s to have a look.’

Liaising with local library

Three out of the four community child health nurses liaised with their local librarian to replenish the supply of Reading Packs and build networks to support each other. Contact was made usually by phone, to provide numbers of newborns and the required number of Reading Packs.

One community child health nurse conducted a mother’s group session in the library where talks were given to the group on the importance of reading to children and the impact of ‘literacy for brain development.’ This community child health nurse also emphasised the importance of having very strong connections with the library and that this was essential to the effective running of Better Beginnings. Another community child health nurse mentioned that the librarian used to come to the mother’s group to talk about the library activities and Better Beginnings program but due to staffing shortages and time this had temporarily stopped.

Training for community child health nurses

Since the introductory training session, none of the community child health nurses had received any further training. However, one community child health nurse explained that she met with several of her colleagues from the surrounding area and they talked about Better Beginnings within each community – thereby offering support and ideas for development. Another explained that she talked with the librarian and that this was very helpful in terms of what was happening at the library and recent news about the development of Better Beginnings. Another community child health nurse described the way she worked with new colleagues and explained the Better Beginnings aims and procedures.

Logistics of Better Beginnings Birth to Three

The library has responsibility for setting up the Better Beginnings Reading Pack for distribution to families, via the community child health nurse. On distribution, discussions were held about the contents of the pack, importance of reading to children, different ways of reading to your child, and the advantages associated with Rhyme Time. One community child health nurse commented, ‘you can’t just hand people a bag. Most nurses do go through it’. Another commented, ‘I make sure they know that there is an enrolment form for the library in there’. No additional material was included in the packs by the community child health nurses interviewed.
Two out of the four community child health nurses made links with their First Mother’s Group with one stating that a mother’s group meeting was specifically held at the library. Another community child health nurse ensured that there was a translator at the clinic to help mothers who spoke English as an additional language to become involved in the Better Beginnings program.

Although recognising the potential usefulness of asking parents to fill in a ‘library contact form’ three of the community child health nurses reported that they could not find the time to do this. The other community child health nurse was not aware of the form and raised concerns about confidentiality.

Perceptions of Better Beginnings Birth to Three

When asked if the messages about the importance of early literacy from the Better Beginnings program were being sustained in the community, all community child health nurses responded that the message was continuously reinforced at regular health checks and that it was sustained to a certain degree.

- I hope so. I would like to believe it is. Many parents that come back for follow up checks do talk with me about literacy and reading.
- All the nurses give out packs but there are a lot of social issues; large families have no time, parents have poor education, some are illiterate, Dads work away or long hours so reading becomes low priority-not part of the family routine.

In terms of suggestions for changes to make Better Beginnings more effective or sustainable, the main suggestion was more variety in the books and packs for multiple births. One community child health nurse suggested a pack to hand out at the three year check as a point for talking more about reading and literacy. Another suggestion was to find time or re-instate the collection of email addresses from parents to give them a chance to follow up on Better Beginnings and gain more information about book choices.

All community child health nurses commented that the program was extremely worthwhile and worthy of continuation, commenting that finding ways of engaging families that did not have access to books or did not understand the importance of books was challenging but vital to supporting these families with multiple challenges and needs.

A number of conclusions and recommendations have been identified and presented in the Executive Summary.
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