



Sing With Me!



Evaluation of the *Sing With Me!* Pilot Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program 2018

School of Education
Early Childhood Research Group
Edith Cowan University

Dr Natalie Leitão
Professor Caroline Barratt-Pugh



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A vital component of this evaluation was to hear the views of various stakeholders, including outreach partners, and we are appreciative to those who made themselves available to discuss their insights about *Sing With Me!*

Research Team:

Project Director: Caroline Barratt-Pugh

Chief Investigator: Natalie Leitão

Research Assistants: Diane Durham

Cindy McLean

Sally Murphy

Elizabeth Newman

Michelle Pearce

Executive summary

This report describes and evaluates the impact of the 2017 implementation of the Better Beginnings *Sing With Me!* program developed by the State Library of Western Australia (SLWA). The program is aimed at two-year-olds and their parents/carers and was promoted through participating libraries across Western Australia and their associated outreach partners. Specifically, the *Sing With Me!* program introduces children to developmentally appropriate books and language activities, supports parents/carers as their child's first teacher, raises

awareness of the value of reading together, and links families to the range of free services available at their local library. A key aim of the *Sing With Me!* program is to encourage parents and carers to read, talk, sing and play with their children on a daily basis to strengthen early literacy development. This evaluation utilised qualitative and quantitative methodology to learn about the involvement of librarians, parents/carers, and outreach partners in the *Sing With Me!* program, and to learn of their perceptions of the effectiveness of the program.

Key Findings

The implementation and sustainability of *Sing With Me!*

- A multi-pronged approach was used to distribute *Sing With Me!* It was implemented through libraries and outreach partners. This created opportunities for families to access *Sing With Me!* in a number of different contexts. Librarians and outreach partners had access to a number of support mechanisms including information, training and a dedicated website provided by SLWA to help implementation of *Sing With Me!*
- The nature of the outreach partner organisation, the roles of the individual members within those organisations, and their access to their local librarians determined their level of involvement in and understanding of *Sing With Me!* This ranged from no involvement (simply handing out the packs) to active engagement, promoting *Sing With Me!* at the library and in individual settings.
- Some outreach partners saw the librarian as a resource for furthering their knowledge and confidence in delivering *Sing With Me!* Resources were used in early literacy programs and additional activities were created to support *Sing With Me!* Some outreach partners liaised with their colleagues and early childhood networks to promote *Sing With Me!*

The relationship between libraries and outreach partners

- Relationships between local librarians, across libraries and with outreach partners were reciprocal, positive and valued. Where possible, librarians visited the outreach partners and the partners visited their local library. Both parties welcomed the opportunity to broaden the reach of *Sing With Me!*
- Contact across libraries in the same community was seen as advantageous, as a means of ensuring efficient delivery of *Sing With Me!* and for professional enrichment, as librarians shared information, ideas and experience.
- Outreach partners indicated a desire for more contact with their local librarian to implement and sustain *Sing With Me!* and strengthen their relationship. The outreach partners identified the librarian as the expert in engaging parents and children in *Sing With Me!* and saw this as central to success.

Design of *Sing With Me!*

- The *Sing With Me!* resources were considered engaging and appropriate for both children and their families. The quality and relatability of the resources were rated highly, with the Australian children's picture book and the nursery rhyme CD being most popular. The information booklet was welcomed by some parents/carers as it either confirmed or introduced them to literacy practices.

- The Better Beginnings website was considered valuable by some librarians and outreach partners. Not everyone was aware of the website or found it accessible. However, it was used to plan programs, purchase books and send information to parents/carers, as well as access the librarian training modules.

Outcomes of *Sing With Me!*

- 82% of parents/carers reported *Sing With Me!* increased their confidence in singing and reading with their children. It increased their knowledge about the importance of early literacy and gave them skills to engage in literacy with their children. In particular, *Sing With Me!* was identified as influencing fathers' shared book reading and singing.
- For 77% of parents/carers, *Sing With Me!* improved their understanding of the importance of singing with and reading to their children.
- Almost 80% reported an increase in their engagement in early literacy activities, with the *Sing With Me!* program supporting them to sing and read with their children more frequently.
- Parents/carers said *Sing With Me!* facilitated greater use of their local library. An added outcome was the perceived benefit for children who needed extra assistance with their language development.
- *Sing With Me!* supported outreach partners in promoting early literacy and providing strategies and resources to help parents/carers nurture in their children a love of literature. In addition, families who spoke English as an Additional Language also used *Sing With Me!* resources in their first language/s. The promotion of printed books and nursery rhymes in an increasingly digital world was also commended.
- *Sing With Me!* helped to create connections between the local librarians, the parents/carers and the outreach centres. The librarians came to know families who attended library sessions through the outreach centres and the outreach partners enriched their relationship with families through the promotion of early literacy.

Impact on library membership, participation and library practices

- 3% of parents indicated their child took out library membership after receiving *Sing With Me!* 54% of parents indicated their child was already a member of the library.
- 78% of parents indicated the librarian had talked to them about library activities and membership when receiving their *Sing With Me!* pack. However, the librarians had not talked about the Better Beginnings e-resources or the website.
- 50% of librarians indicated that *Sing With Me!* had increased library membership. In addition, they reported an increase in parent/children visits to the library and engagement in library activities as a consequence of receiving *Sing With Me!* 26% indicated that it was difficult to measure the impact of *Sing With Me!*

- Some outreach groups meet regularly at the library for Rhyme Time and Story Time sessions but did not necessarily have library membership. Some librarians modified library resources and spaces in response to the *Sing With Me!* program. Librarians built positive relationships with families and in one library, the activities were co-led by two librarians, one of whom signed the words. Librarians were seen as knowledgeable, enthusiastic and engaging.

Relationship between *Sing With Me!* and other Better Beginnings programs

- *Sing With Me!* bridged the gap between existing Better Beginnings programs. The introduction of a child health check by the child health nurse at two years old provided an ideal opportunity to introduce *Sing With Me!*

Factors that hindered program distribution and message

- Librarians identified the need for more time and more staff training to promote the program, the lack of marketing materials, public library budget restrictions and confusion regarding who was eligible for the *Sing With Me!* pack.
- Outreach partners were hindered by a lack of knowledge regarding whose responsibility it was to distribute the pack and talk about it, and a lack of documentation about who had received a *Sing With Me!* pack. Some were also hindered by their lack of understanding about *Sing With Me!* and their limited relationship with the local librarian.
- Outreach partners were also limited in the opportunity to promote the *Sing With Me!* program to parents/carers, especially if parents/carers were not present when the *Sing With Me!* pack was being distributed to the children.

Factors that supported program distribution and message

- The *Sing With Me!* program used a flexible delivery model. This allowed local librarians to decide the extent of their commitment depending on issues such as staffing, budget, time availability, and connections in the local community. Furthermore, the delivery schedule was customised to meet individual needs.
- The support offered by the Better Beginnings State Library team was both practical and efficient. They helped local librarians to market the *Sing With Me!* program, and to prepare and distribute packs. They ensured regular communication and provided rapid responses when requests for help were made.
- The training received by the local librarians enabled them to become “experts” in delivering the packs and activities and in demonstrating early literacy strategies to parents/carers and outreach partners.

- The high-quality and attractiveness of the *Sing With Me!* pack ensured the pack was well received and durable. Adults and children were eager to receive their packs and to use the contents. The strong sponsorship ensured the packs were provided free of charge. Bringing *Sing With Me!* under the banner of Better Beginnings meant it became part of a recognisable brand with consistent messaging.
- Engaging with outreach partners and local community events was recognised as supporting the *Sing With Me!* distribution and message. Offering activities in the library that made library visits meaningful (such as Rhyme Time) was another factor.
- Despite the challenges outreach partners faced in promoting the *Sing With Me!* program, some outreach partners used additional means to communicate directly with parents/carers. For example, sending a note to families explaining the nature and content of the *Sing With Me!* packs and placing flyers on the notice board. Another strategy was to include the words to the songs featured in the *Sing With Me!* program in the newsletters sent to families.

Suggestions for the future

- **Changes to the *Sing With Me!* pack:** It was thought additional items could be included, such as more books, bookmarks, pencils with the Better Beginnings logo, hands-on artefacts such as puppets, games, a jigsaw puzzle, ideas and instructions for making craft items using recyclable materials and a feedback form for parents.
- **Changes to the Better Beginnings Website:** Changes included directing users to related, online resources and ensuring the training resources were easier to find. It was also suggested the resources in the pack and information about the *Sing With Me!* program on the Better Beginnings website could be documented in various languages in addition to English. A further suggestion was made for an “app” to be developed for users to download the nursery rhymes and it could include visuals to go with the audio.
- **Ongoing *Sing With Me!* training:** The continuation of training for librarians, with specific guidelines for implementing the *Sing With Me!* program to different sized groups and different demographics. Training for outreach partners in how to deliver the *Sing With Me!* program and how to engage parents/carers in the program were also identified.
- **Continued evaluation:** Particularly in relation to ways of building partnerships between the librarians and the outreach partners and ways of documenting the number of packs distributed and who receives a *Sing With Me!* pack. There is also a need to support librarians to document the relationship between *Sing With Me!* and library impact.

Introduction

Better Beginnings is an award winning Western Australian initiative reaching over 680,000 families in the last 13 years to support and promote early literacy. Better Beginnings comprises a suite of family literacy programs, of which *Sing With Me!* is the newest. *Sing With Me!* was first introduced as a pilot in 2016 aimed at two-year-olds and their parents/carers. Resources for the *Sing With Me!* program were specifically created to give parent/carers tools and strategies to read, talk, sing and play with their children daily. This is considered particularly important with regard to early learning and brain development. The resources were packaged in an attractive polypropylene fabric bag and included a nursery rhyme CD and a book. The nursery rhyme CD contained thirteen popular nursery rhymes including “*The Wheels on the Bus*” and “*Old McDonald*”. Audio tracks for the nursery rhymes could also be accessed through the Better Beginnings website. The book provided in the pack was an Australian children’s picture book based on a nursery rhyme so that parents/carers could read it aloud to their children as well as sing it to, and with them. The Better Beginnings *Sing With Me!* pack also included a nursery rhyme puzzle magnet to be kept on the fridge at home, a booklet entitled *30 Books to read before you’re 3*, and information booklets for parents/carers. One of the information booklets included the words to the nursery rhymes featured on the CD and ideas to support parents/carers to read, talk, sing and play with their children daily. The complete *Sing With Me!* pack was made available to parents/carers at no charge through participating local libraries and their associated outreach partners (for example, child health centres, child care centres, playgroups and community kindergartens).

In 2017, *Sing With Me!* was made available more widely across Western Australia. To evaluate the perceived effectiveness of the *Sing With Me!* program, data were collected from librarians and parents/carers participating in the program, as well as from outreach partners. This report summarises these findings.

Research Methodology

This evaluation utilised qualitative and quantitative methodology to learn about the involvement of librarians, parents/carers, and outreach partners in the *Sing With Me!* program, and to learn of their perceptions of the effectiveness of the program. A mix of data collection methods was used, including online surveys, interviews, observations and a focus group. Survey data was analysed using a quantitative approach and the remaining data were analysed by identifying emergent themes as they related to the research questions. This research methodology was favoured as it enabled a reasonably broad reach of participants via the online surveys (particularly valuable given the vast distances that exist between the library sites in Western Australia) and opportunity during the interviews to deepen the information obtained.

The research methodology allowed, to a certain extent, triangulation of the data. For example, the online surveys gathered initial responses from librarians and the follow up interviews with selected participants provided a means for more in-depth responses that consolidated and/or extended the initial set of findings. In addition, an observation schedule was used to guide observations made of librarians conducting a session for children and their parents/carers (being either *Sing With Me*, *Rhyme Time*, *Story Time* or a mixture). The resulting information was considered in light of the survey responses previously provided. Further, the inclusion of numerous data sets (librarians, parents/carers, outreach partners and SLWA staff) and a variety of means for collecting data enabled cross comparisons to be made. For example, hearing what librarians said about the delivery of *Rhyme Time* and hearing parents’/carers’ perceptions as a participant in *Rhyme Time* meant a broader dimension of understanding could be obtained.

The evaluation had two main aims. The first aim was to evaluate the implementation of the *Sing With Me!* program and the outcomes for stakeholders including library staff, parents/carers, and outreach partners. The second aim was to identify the relationship between a) libraries and outreach partners, b) libraries in the same community and c) *Sing With Me!* and other Better Beginnings programs.

The research questions that guided the evaluation were:

1. How is *Sing With Me!* implemented and sustained in each community?
2. What is the relationship between libraries and outreach partners and between libraries delivering *Sing With Me!* in the same community?
3. What are the participants’ and stakeholders’ perceptions of the design and implementation of *Sing With Me!*?
4. What are the outcomes of *Sing With Me!* for participants and stakeholders?
5. What is the impact of *Sing With Me!* on library membership, participation and library practices?
6. What is the relationship between *Sing With Me!* and other Better Beginnings programs?

Participants

There were four main groups of participants; librarians, parents/carers, outreach partners and SLWA staff. Altogether 123 people participated in the online survey, 25 of whom were also interviewed. Eleven observations were made of librarians across nine libraries, each conducting a session for children and their parents/carers (being either Rhyme Time, Story Time, *Sing With Me!* or a mixture). Given the demands on child health nurses and their ongoing involvement in the longitudinal evaluation of the Better Beginnings Birth to Three family literacy program it was decided to only invite outreach partners who were new to Better Beginnings to contribute to the evaluation. Thus, interviews were conducted with nine outreach partners and a focus interview was conducted with three members of the Better Beginnings team at the State Library of Western Australia. The table that follows shows the involvement of the participants and the means by which participants' perspectives were elicited.

Table 1.

Number of participants

	Librarians	Parents/ carers	Outreach partners	SL WA staff
Online surveys	40	83		
Interviews	9	16	9	
Observations	11			
Focus group				3

Amongst the 83 parents/carers who participated in the online survey 80 identified as being female and three identified as male. Of these 83 participants, the majority identified as being parents (76) and the remaining identified as being either grandparents (4), foster carer (1), aunty (1) or chose not to disclose their relationship status (1). (See Table 2).

Table 2.

Gender and relationship status of online survey parent/carer participants and their children

		Gender of online survey parent/carer participants		
		Male	Female	Total
Relationship status	Parent	3	73	76
	Grandparent	0	4	4
	Foster	0	1	1
	Aunty	0	1	1
	Not disclosed	0	1	1
	Total	3	80	83

With regard to languages used at home amongst the parent/carer participants, English was identified as being the most common. Of the 83 respondents, 71 said English was spoken the most at home with their child; of these, three said an additional language was used equally as often (namely, sign language, Sinhalese and Ukrainian).

The remaining 12 respondents indicated a language other than English was spoken most often at home; five identified Chinese/Mandarin, one respondent each identified French/Spanish, Punjabi, Russian, Telugu, and Urdu, and the remaining respondents did not answer the question (see Table 3).

Table 3.

Languages used most often at home

		Sign language	Sinhalese	Ukrainian
English	68			
English and another language		1	1	1
Chinese/Mandarin	5			
French/Spanish	1			
Punjabi	1			
Russian	1			
Telugu	1			
Urdu	1			
No response	2			

The evaluation was intended to take place across 12 identified libraries situated within nine community library sites. These nine community "targeted sites" represented a mix of metropolitan, regional and remote areas. Within the metropolitan area there were three targeted sites comprising six libraries, within the regional area there were four targeted sites comprising one library each, and within the remote area there were two targeted sites comprising two libraries (see Table 4).

Table 4.

Number of identified library sites

	Community "targeted sites"	Libraries
Metropolitan	3	6
Regional	4	4
Remote	2	2
Total	9	12

As it happened, participants were additionally drawn from across Western Australia more broadly. This was due in part to the surveys being made available online, resulting in a wider reach. With regard to the librarians who participated in the evaluation it was possible to track which library sites were represented. Of the 40 completed online surveys 11 of them were completed by librarians from across all nine targeted sites. Additionally, the interviews conducted with librarians and the observations made were across the nine targeted sites as shown in Table 5.

Data collection

Table 5.

Representation of library sites by librarian participants

	Online survey	Interview	Observation
Metropolitan	19 (4 of whom were from the target sites)	3	5
Regional	16 (4 of whom were from the target sites)	4	5
Remote	5 (3 of whom were from the target sites)	2	1
Total	40 (11 from target sites)	9	10

While it was not possible to track which library sites were represented by the parents/carers who completed the online survey, it was possible to see which sites were represented by the parents/carers who participated in the follow up interview (see Table 6).

Table 6.

Representation of library sites by parent/carer interviewees

	Interviewees
Metropolitan	11
Regional	5
Remote	0
Total	16

Data were collected through online surveys, interviews, observations and a focus group. Permission was sought and given by all participants. Schedules were used in the interviews (including the focus group) and for the observations to guide the focus of the researcher. This meant certain intended topics were covered while allowing for additional topics to emerge. Audio recordings of the interviews were made and later transcribed. The data were analysed by collating answers to questions and identifying similar answers and common themes. The perceptions of the librarians, the parents/carers, the outreach partners and the SLWA staff were analysed separately.



Method

All participants were invited to participate in the research on the basis of their involvement in *Sing With Me!* Librarians working across 90 libraries were initially contacted by phone followed by an email inviting them to participate in the online survey. Forty librarians took up this invitation and upon the completion of their survey, they were then invited to participate in a phone interview. Nine librarians were selected to be interviewed to ensure feedback from across the nine target sites. These interviews were held over the phone and were audio recorded with the consent of the participants.

Librarians were asked to invite parents/carers of two-year-olds at their libraries to participate in the evaluation and to pass on the online survey link to all who were interested. A number of parents/carers were also recruited via invitations on the Better Beginnings website and the Better Beginnings Facebook page where the online survey link had been posted. In addition, a small number of parents completed paper copies of the survey at their local library and the data was later entered electronically by a research assistant. Upon completion of their survey, parents/carers were invited to participate in a phone interview. With their consent, audio recordings were made of the sixteen interviews with parents/carers. In total, 11 parents/carers were from the metropolitan area, five were from regional areas (of which one was from a target site) and there were none from remote areas.

Eleven observations were made of librarians conducting a literacy session for children and their parents/carers (being either *Sing With Me*, *Rhyme Time*, *Story Time* or a mixture). These librarians consented to being observed. Due to time and travel limitations some of these observations were made by ECU research assistants while other observations were completed locally by a library colleague. An observation schedule was used to ensure observer consistency.

Three members of the Better Beginnings team at the SLWA were contacted directly about participating in a focus group interview. The interview took place at the State Library; there was consent for an audio recording to be made.

All audio recordings were transcribed and grouped according to the data set. Each data set was analysed using classifying and coding to identify key elements and common themes.

Librarians were also asked to identify their *Sing With Me!* outreach groups. These included, new mothers' groups, playgroups, day care centres, child care centres, community kindergartens, early childhood centres, family day care centres, kids' cafes, and pre-schools. Altogether thirty-six outreach groups were nominated by the librarians and contacted to ask if they would agree to be interviewed about their role in and perceptions of *Sing With Me!* Of these, 13 were in the metropolitan area, 11 in regional areas and 12 were in remote Western Australia. Out of these, the staff in three metropolitan, three regional and 11 remote areas could not recall receiving *Sing With Me!* (n=17). Of the remaining 19 outreach centres, staff in ten of the centres or playgroups believed that they did not have sufficient knowledge of *Sing With Me!* to undertake an interview. This left nine partners from outreach centres willing to participate in an evaluation of *Sing With Me!*, one from a remote community, two from regional communities and six from metropolitan communities. The interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the interviewees and were approximately 30 to 40 minutes in duration.

Seven of the outreach partners were staff in early childhood centres or pre-schools: four educators, one supervisor, one director and one coordinator and the other two partners were volunteer playgroup participants and also parents. Five of the outreach centres were private businesses.

Table 7.

Representation of outreach partners

Outreach Centres	Number	Role	Region
Playgroup	1	Playgroup treasurer	Metropolitan
Playgroup	1	Playgroup secretary	Regional
Child Care Centre	1	Supervisor	Regional
Child Care Centre	1	Director	Remote
Family Day Care Centre	1	Coordinator	Metropolitan
Community Kindergarten	1	Director	Metropolitan
Early Childhood Centre	1	Teacher	Metropolitan
Pre-school	1	Teacher	Metropolitan
Pre-kindergarten	1	Teacher	Metropolitan

Findings

This section of the report documents the findings from the data. There are three main pools of data; that from the librarians, from the parents/carers and from the outreach partners. The librarian data comprises four distinct sets including online surveys, follow up interviews, observations and a focus group. The parent/carer data comprises two distinct sets; the online surveys and follow up interviews. The sole data set for the outreach partners was gathered through interviews.

Librarians

The librarians who participated in the evaluation contributed to four distinct sets of data; the online survey data, the follow up interview data, the observation data, and the focus group data. Forty librarians across Western Australia contributed to the online survey data set and shared their thoughts about the value of the individual resources in the *Sing With Me!* pack, and about the implementation of the program. Nine librarians who took part in the follow up interviews provided further detail about the *Sing With Me!* resources and program implementation. Their interview responses related to the nine community “targeted sites” across metropolitan, regional and remote areas of Western Australia. The observation data was collected from nine libraries across the metropolitan, regional and remote areas and provided a “snap shot” of how 11 literacy activities at the different locations took place. The focus group data was contributed to by the library staff from the SLWA and provided insight into the “bigger picture” of *Sing With Me!*, including the broad objectives, challenges and achievements experienced along the way, and expectations for the future.

Online survey data

The online survey data was collected from 40 librarians across the state of Western Australia. Two main areas were explored: what librarians thought about the *Sing With Me!* resources, and what they thought about the implementation of the program. A third area concludes this data set, namely, the open-ended responses given about the *Sing With Me!* program generally. Their responses are presented in the following sections.

Perceptions of the *Sing With Me!* resources

The librarians who participated in the online survey were asked to indicate how useful they thought the *Sing With Me!* resources were for parents and carers. The individual resources of the *Sing With Me!* pack included the Australian children’s picture book, the nursery rhyme CD, the nursery rhyme puzzle magnet, the nursery rhyme booklet with activities, and the booklet 30 Books to read before you’re 3. All 40 librarians gave their opinion about the usefulness of each resource, with the exception of one librarian who did not record a comment about the nursery rhyme puzzle magnet. Overall, the librarians agreed all the individual resources of the *Sing With Me!* pack were useful for parents/carers. Most responses indicated all the resources were considered either “very useful” or “extremely useful.” The resource considered to be most useful was the nursery rhyme booklet with activities. In equal second place the next two resources considered most useful were the children’s picture book and the CD. Only one person considered a resource to be “slightly useful”, and that was the nursery rhyme puzzle magnet (Figure 1)

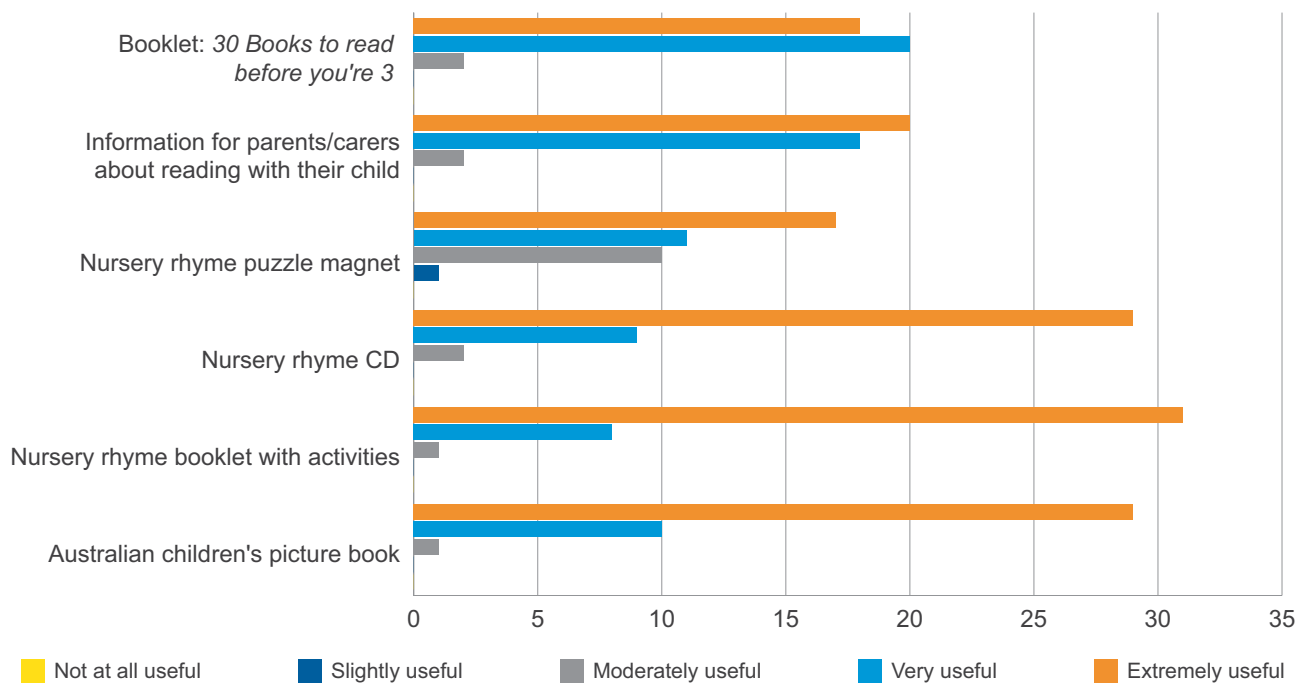


Figure 1. Librarians' perceived usefulness of the *Sing With Me!* resources for parents/carers.

Perceptions of the implementation of the *Sing With Me!* program

When asked to share their perceptions about the implementation of the *Sing With Me!* program, the librarians were invited to comment on a number of areas. Specifically these areas included the delivery of the packs, the nature of liaison with outreach partners, the liaison with other librarians within the community, the effect on library membership, links made with other Better Beginnings programs, and factors that appeared to hinder and those that appeared to support the *Sing With Me!* distribution and message. The survey concluded with a question about the usefulness of the training modules to help deliver the Better Beginnings messages, and an invitation for the librarians to record any other comments they wished to make about *Sing With Me!*

Delivery of packs

While the local libraries were used as a distribution point for the *Sing With Me!* packs, some librarians had outreach partners who assisted in the delivery of packs. The main ones named included Community child health nurses, Parents' Group nurses, Indigenous organisations, playgroup leaders and day-care educators. Additional outreach partners who assisted in the delivery of packs for some of the libraries included KindiLink and other pre-kindergarten groups, primary schools, and in one instance, a mothercraft nurse at the local pharmacy. While library staff reported liaising with outreach partners, the frequency of contact varied from three times a week to once every three months depending on the circumstances. In most instances the contact was made as needed, that is, once more bags were required.

Nature of liaison with outreach partners

When asked about the main purpose of the liaison between the library and the outreach partner/s, 33 librarians responded with a comment. Most comments related to ensuring sufficient packs were in stock and making arrangements to deliver more stock as needed. One librarian said the contact was needed to give the outreach partner *"information about the Sing With Me! packs and to organise visits and Story Time sessions to give out Sing With Me! bags."* Another librarian said the purpose of the contact was to *"provide information about library services and encouraging access to literacy programs."* For one librarian contact was made to *"make sure they [the outreach partners] have up to date information. To find out about any changes that are occurring in their delivery."* For some librarians the liaison with child health nurses was very strong. For example, *"the child health nurses are vocal advocates for Better Beginnings and are in regular touch to request more yellow or orange bags. I host a new parents' group at the library every 6 weeks."*

Liaison with other librarians within the community

A question in the online survey asked if the librarians had liaised with other librarians in the community who were also involved in the *Sing With Me!* program. All 40 survey participants responded, with more than half (23) reporting they had. There emerged two main reasons for the liaison; first, to ensure efficient delivery of the materials, and second, to share information and ideas. With regard to ensuring efficient delivery of the materials, the librarians' comments about this purpose of the liaison included *"coordinating our delivery," "discussing how many packs are being delivered,"*

“oversee[ing] the distribution,” and being a “contact point for extra bags, [and] promotional material.” With regard to sharing information and ideas, the librarians’ commented this liaison enabled them to “find out how [others] run this program”, “discuss different ways to promote the packs”, “compare activities and get ideas”, and to “shar[e] network contact information.” One librarian commented the liaison enabled them to “provide support and advice to smaller libraries within the SW consortia about the program.”

Effect on library membership

The online survey question asked if the librarians thought the *Sing With Me!* program had increased library memberships. Of the 38 who responded to the survey question nine said “no”, 18 said “somewhat”, one said “greatly” and 10 responded with “other.” The comments made in this final response category indicated it was not easy for the librarians to ascertain whether or not memberships had increased as a result of *Sing With Me!* Responses included, “difficult to measure”, “hard to say”, and “no direct indication.” One librarian noted it was, “very hard to tell, however we did have an increase in attendees at our Rhyme/Story Time sessions following the distribution of the *Sing With Me* bags at the Playgroup Australia morning tea last year. Participants have not necessarily signed up as members, but certainly meet here on a weekly basis.”

Links made with other Better Beginnings programs

When asked if the librarians linked the *Sing With Me!* program with any other Better Beginnings programs, 35 responded “yes” to say they did and four said “no”. Of those who said they did, 27 went on to describe how this was done. Most responded they used other Better Beginnings programs to promote *Sing With Me!*, particularly during the Rhyme Time, Toddler Time and Story Time sessions. One librarian expressed it this way, “When we explain to the parents about borrowing the Better Beginning Bags before or after Story Time we usually ask the ages of children and if they have received a *Sing With Me!* backpack.” Another librarian simply said, “When Story Time or Rhyme Time is on, we promote the *Sing With Me!* bags.”

For one librarian links were made between *Sing With Me!* and other Better Beginnings programs by focusing on how to use the resources. She said, “I try to discuss resources that are available to enhance a family reading experience eg the Discovery backpacks and puppet sets. And also talk about the importance of Better Beginnings in babies and toddlers learning journeys. I try to use the Better Beginnings resources frequently at Story Time and Rhyme Time sessions to make sure that families are aware that they exist, this also provides a great opportunity to demonstrate how to use them.”

In another instance, a librarian explained how she made links between the programs when meeting with new parents, “When I speak with the New Parents Groups I explain that Better Beginnings now has a pilot program called *Sing With Me!*. I then let them know details of the program and that they can see me or the child health nurse if they have a 2 year-old, to pick up the pack.”

Factors that appeared to hinder the *Sing With Me!* distribution and message

A question in the online survey asked librarians if they thought there were any factors that hindered the distribution of the *Sing With Me!* resources or hindered the overall message of the program. Of the 39 respondents, 12 were not sure if there had been any hindrances, 22 said there had not been any hindrances, and five identified there had been some. For the five who identified there had been hindrances they were invited to explain what these were. For one librarian the concern was regarding the demands made on staff time to promote the program. She said “we just don’t have enough staff time to promote it as much as it deserves.” She also added there was a need for staff training and she had found it difficult to “find specific resources on the Better Beginnings website.” Another librarian commented that the availability of marketing materials to go with the packs had been a hindrance. A further hindrance was identified as being budget considerations. The final comments were regarding confusion about who is eligible for the *Sing With Me!* pack. One librarian suggested, “it needs to be clearer if we give them to people with children turning two in the calendar year, or in the next twelve months. That can be a little confusing.” Another librarian elaborated as follows: “It is a small issue but the Better Beginnings programs follow a slightly awkward age based progression which confuses the parents and our staff. Currently there is the “Birth to Three” packs, the “Sing with Me” packs (aimed at 2 year-olds) and the “Four to Five” packs. From our perspective, it would make more sense to rename them in a consistent manner so children move consecutively from one to the next. It would make it a lot easier for library staff and the community partners to hand the packs to the appropriate children.”

Factors that appeared to support the *Sing With Me!* distribution and message

When asked if there were any factors that appeared to support the distribution of the *Sing With Me!* resources and the overall message of the program, 34 librarians recorded their responses. The content of these responses have been grouped into nine themes:

- A number of comments were made about the invaluable support offered by the Better Beginnings team at the State Library. From help with “preparing and distributing” materials to the provision of marketing materials, and the rapid response received “when a request has been sent to the Public Library Officer’s help desk.” These were cited as factors that supported the *Sing With Me!* distribution and message.
- Comments were made about the value of having community links. These were seen to support the *Sing With Me!* distribution and message and included interest and support from playgroups, child care centres, and child health nurses. An event with a literary focus held annually in one particular community was mentioned as reinforcing the message of *Sing With Me!* by highlighting “the need to talk, sing, rhyme, play with your child every day.” Social media was also cited as a support factor.

- The *Sing With Me!* message was seen to be supported when visits to the local library were made to be meaningful. A couple of librarians felt it was important to make “coming to the library special for both parent and child” and ensuring a “positive connection with the Library” was being made. This was seen to happen through the delivery of programs such as “Rhyme Time, Story Time, various children’s programs like Lego, craft club, [and] school holiday programs.”
- Being part of a recognisable “brand” that had consistent messaging was seen as an important support mechanism. It was thought this helped, “parents [to make] the connection with the library when the babies are young.” Further, the early literacy messages “are consistent throughout all stages of Better Beginnings” meaning parents could build on the “foundations established with the yellow bags.”
- Having a “finished quality product” was seen as a factor that supported the *Sing With Me!* distribution and message. Other comments about the quality of the resources included, “the contents in the bag are excellent,” and “they are well designed and have a clear purpose.”
- The *Sing With Me!* program being “so well sponsored” was identified as a support factor. Having “no charge to our library” and the provision of resources that were “currently free” was seen to provide strong support for the *Sing With Me!* distribution and message.
- Local library staff were identified as a support factor for the distribution and message of *Sing With Me!* It was considered valuable, not just to have staff who were involved, but also those who were “happy to promote” the *Sing With Me!* packs.

- The appeal of the resources to children and their parents was identified as a factor that supported the *Sing With Me!* distribution and message.
- A final supporting factor that was identified was the flexibility of the delivery of the *Sing With Me!* program. The librarian who raised this point said, “the program is very flexible with delivery both inside and outside of the library to a variety of groups, schools and organizations.”

Usefulness of the training modules to help deliver the Better Beginnings messages

Librarians who completed the online survey were asked about their perceptions of the four training modules that can be accessed on “Public Libraries Online” (a member restricted website for WA public libraries). These four training modules have been designed to help librarians deliver the Better Beginnings messages and cover the following topics: Learning; Speech, language and communication; Literacy; and, Diversity and developing cultural competency. Twenty-three librarians said they had accessed the training modules, and 20 of these commented on their experiences. Overall, the librarians reported they found the training modules to be useful. None of the training modules were reported to have been “slightly useful” or “not at all useful”. When asked if the training modules had helped them to deliver the Better Beginnings messages, 19 librarians said “yes”, and one person said “no”. The negative response was from a librarian who said she had “not been able to find these modules on the Better Beginnings website.” The figure below shows the perceived degree of usefulness of each of the four training modules. The follow up comments provided about the training modules have been grouped under three main themes. These are professional development, provision of resource ideas and building confidence.

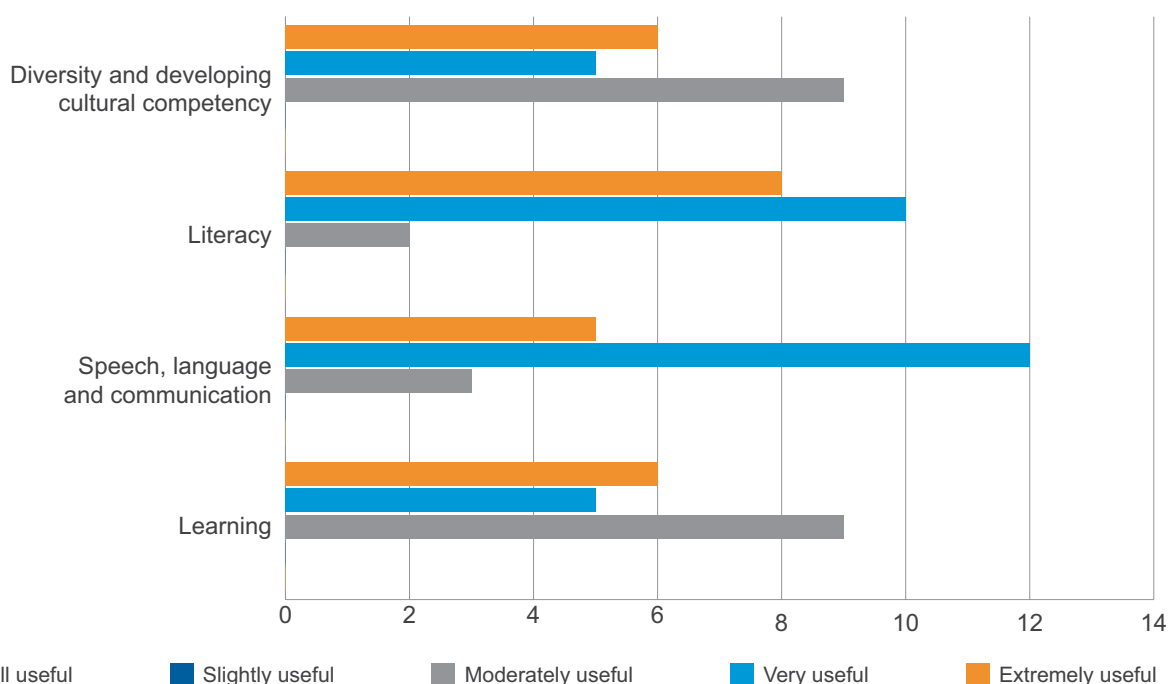


Figure 2. Librarians’ perceived usefulness of the training modules on the Better Beginnings website.

- Professional development emerged as a common theme with regard to the benefits derived from completing the training modules. Librarians reported the online training ensured “knowledge [had been] transferred,” and it had “inform[ed] our children’s services practice.” It was felt the online modules provided them with “excellent messages to share with the local community members”, along with help to “develop the best ways to describe the programs and how to word my explanatory ‘speech’ to parents and carers”, and the necessary support to “run Rhyme Time, Story Time and early parenting programs effectively.”
- The provision of resource ideas was seen as a benefit of completing the online training modules. One librarian commented the website, “provide[d] an abundance of information, tips and skills [along with] evidence based stats.” Further comments from librarians included “It was great to have the ideas all there in front of me,” the website was considered a “good place to find inspiration and ideas to incorporate into regular programs that we run.” Another librarian commented “the resources and modules are a great reference to keep going back to for information and ideas.”
- Two librarians reported the modules helped to increase their confidence to deliver the Better Beginnings programs. They commented, “I feel a lot more confident in delivering programs”, and “[the modules helped] to boost confidence to deliver early literacy messages throughout Rhyme Time and Story Time sessions.”

Open-ended comments

The online survey concluded with an invitation for librarians to contribute any other comments about the *Sing With Me!* program. Of the 40 librarians who completed the online survey, 27 accepted the invitation to record an additional comment. The majority of the comments that were made highlighted favourable aspects of *Sing With Me!*, two librarians made suggestions for further improvement and five aspirational comments were recorded whereby the librarians acknowledged the direction they next hoped to go in. Most of the comments showed the librarians were favourably disposed towards the program, as typified by the following responses:

The Sing With Me! program is very much appreciated by our young parents. Families with 2 year olds join [and] they feel special and welcome when they receive this pack. The contents in the pack are(sic) encourages reading and provides stimulation to kids.

The books are fantastic and the children really love them. The children get really excited to receive a backpack that is just for them. It is great to see them come in to the library again and again still using their backpack.

I think the Sing With Me pack fills a gap between the first yellow Better Beginnings bag, and the green reading pack given to Kindy children. [It is] a wonderful giveaway to parents of 2 year-olds. They are always appreciative.

Sing With Me is a wonderful addition to the Better Beginnings range of programs and resources. The flexibility of delivery makes it easy for librarians to decide how it can be provided at a local level. Promotion of rhymes to educate families about the importance of this aspect of literacy and language development is a different focus. It is fantastic that public libraries can promote these messages to their local communities. I am planning to engage with child health nurses to see if they can deliver packs at 2 year-old health checks.

- In the open-ended comment, two librarians took the opportunity to suggest ways in which *Sing With Me!* could be improved. One librarian suggested making the resources on the Better Beginnings website easier to access. The second librarian suggested improvement “around developing a stronger awareness and distribution campaign. It would also be great to see more comprehensive skills development resources, tips and information in the booklets.”
- The third and final grouping of comments from librarians within the open-ended section of the online survey provided insight into their Better Beginnings aspirations for the future. Within this grouping, five comments were made by five different librarians. One said she hoped “to hold *Sing With Me, Story Time and Rhyme Time* sessions weekly within the library” since “staffing issues [had] been rectified.” One acknowledged they “so much WANT to do it [Better Beginnings activities] but [experience] so much struggle with getting daily things done.” Two comments related to the involvement of child health nurses with one librarian saying she was “planning to engage with child health nurses to see if they can deliver packs at 2 year-old health checks” and the other anticipating “I think it will be more successful now child health nurses are doing 2 year-old check-ups.” The final comment in this grouping was made by a librarian who noted her participation in the online survey had had an effect on her plans for the future:

We think it is a fantastic program, but in doing this survey, feel we have been a bit remiss in exploring the program further than we have. I believe we can do more with the outreach side of things, and as mentioned previously, would like to have the discussion with the library officers about embedding it in our current rhyme time/story time sessions.

Librarian follow up interview data

The nine librarians who took part in the follow up interviews represented each of the nine community “targeted sites” across metropolitan, regional and remote areas of Western Australia. In the follow up interviews, these librarians offered further information about their perceptions of the implementation of the *Sing With Me!* program and their perceptions of the *Sing With Me!* resources. With regard to the implementation, comments were offered that concerned the relationship with outreach partners, the relationship with other libraries, role definition, training, confidence levels, impact on their work, changes to resources/library spaces and the perceived impact on library membership and engagement in library activities.

With regard to the *Sing With Me!* resources, comments were offered that concerned the Better Beginnings website, the *Sing With Me!* pack and suggestions for changes to be made to the pack. Additional general comments were made including perceptions of the value of the *Sing With Me!* program.

Perceptions of the *Sing With Me!* program implementation

Relationship with outreach partners

Most of the librarians commented on the positive relationships that had been fostered with their various outreach partners. These outreach partners included child health nurses, midwives who run parenting groups, KindiLink leaders, Playgroup leaders, Community Kindergarten directors, Childcare coordinators and those who ran pre-kindy groups such as Kindy Cafés and Play in the Park. In particular, the child health nurses were identified as effective partners. Three main factors were identified as being influential in this regard; a shared understanding of the importance of early literacy, enthusiasm and consistency. A sample of quotes from librarians to reinforce these ideas include “[child health nurses] know about the needs of brain development ... from that early age”, “[the child health nurse] is really keen and on board”, and,

I'm not sure whether [other outreach partners] just change staff a little bit too frequently or what, but we kind of lose the contact, you know, sort of regular contact with them. Whereas the child health nurses with the Department of Health are perhaps a little bit more steady and we don't have to sort of keep trying to reconnect.

One librarian identified a further benefit of working with outreach partners noting, “we're actually getting to spread the word about *Sing With Me!* ... we're noticing it's bringing a different demographic of people into our Story Time and our Rhyme Time sessions.”

Relationship with other libraries

Not many comments were contributed that revealed the relationship between libraries delivering the *Sing With Me!* program in the same community. This would appear to be because when the program was delivered by more than one library in a particular community, it was coordinated by one librarian across those communities. For example, within one particular metropolitan region, one librarian coordinates the *Sing With Me!* program across six libraries, two of which have been identified as target sites for the *Sing With Me!* pilot evaluation. However, what was made clear is the librarians across different libraries within the same community have a strong sense of collegiality and are dedicated to sharing ideas and supporting one another. As one librarian reported, “we share information ... and resources.” She went on to say:

Collaborating and talking to other libraries helps create a bit of momentum and strength behind the support for the program. So we can discuss ways that we're using it, so for example, we do outreach sessions to the Pre-kindies and Kindy Cafés, and though that's something that perhaps

*maybe another library isn't doing, they might decide to pick that up as a way to share the *Sing With Me!* program in their area. So I think it's a really good way of strengthening those connections and sharing ideas about how to use the program and gain support for the continuation of it.*

Role definition

The librarians were able to clearly state their role in implementing the *Sing With Me!* program. The role included communicating a “big picture” message about the importance of early literacy so “[families] take on board the importance of early family literacy.” It also included letting families know about the various resources and programs available at the library, such as *Sing With Me!* The communication role was seen to extend from face-to-face conversation with patrons, to print media in the library (including posters and newsletters), and social media (for example, Facebook). Additionally, librarians identified their role entailed ensuring sufficient supplies of the *Sing With Me!* packs were available. As one person said, she was responsible for “making sure that the packs are available at a number of different locations... primarily [my role] it's facilitating the delivery and promotion of the program.”

Training

Of the nine librarians interviewed, eight were enthusiastic about the possibility of further training to enhance their role in delivering and promoting the *Sing With Me!* program. Comments ranged from “I never say no to training,” to “I think training is always fantastic for all of us” and “we always look at the training schedule ... I'm always on the lookout for courses.” Only one librarian commented she'd be satisfied with regular written communication in lieu of formal online or face-to-face training. She said, “I think maybe an e-mail or little document [to] remind you of tips, new ideas, you know, maybe once a year or every six months would be great.” Another librarian identified the barriers of time, distance and cost that made training opportunities prohibitive.

Additional comments were made suggesting ways to enhance future training opportunities. One suggestion included advanced planning. Their particular training budget receives approval twelve months in advance so early identification of training requirements is needed. Two librarians from outside the metropolitan area suggested ways to make training more accessible for those in rural and remote areas. One idea was to use online training, including watching DVDs. The second idea was to offer training in regional areas as this would be “easier and cheaper.”

Confidence levels

During the nine follow up interviews, seven librarians described themselves as confident when it came to their delivery of the *Sing With Me!* program. Comments included, “[I'm] pretty confident”, “I don't have a problem at all. It's a lot of fun” and, “absolutely fine, and same with all of my staff, too.” The two librarians who said they were not particularly confident explained, “I'd like to sort of have more knowledge of the expectations of what we would say or do or whatever, so yeah,

something ... a little bit more information from that would help my confidence” and, “not confident with the program because I haven’t had any training in it.”

Impact on the work of a librarian

One librarian said the delivery of the *Sing With Me!* program had not had an impact on her work, and another said “not to a great degree, a very slight degree, you know, just the occasional kind of activity here or there.” Three librarians indicated there had been an impact in terms of the demands made on their time, and a further three identified the impact had been on offering them an additional opportunity to engage with their communities. One of these added the *Sing With Me!* program had the extra impact of a staff member getting “quite inspired to get a bit more creative in the way that she delivers.”

Changes to resources/library spaces

The librarians were asked if there had been any changes to the resource allocations on account of Better Beginnings. One librarian said there had been a change to their selection of library resources:

We’ve actually been purchasing some early literacy resources, you know, like alphabet games and alphabet bingo or magnetic letters and stuff like that, so we’ve actually set up an area that have(sic) got those kinds of resources there for parents to use with their kids. And that’s probably because generally, Better Beginnings is bringing that kind of thinking into our activities.

Two other librarians commented on changes that had been made to the use of their library space. One said their junior area had been made “a little bit more visual for people to be able to, you know, obviously see ... the [Better Beginnings] posters and that sort of thing.” The other librarian described the recent changes that had taken place where they had:

reclaimed a space, a room that we’re hoping to use as a bit of a “make a space” room but also a room to hold the more sort of like, the Learning English Through Story Time, that might need to be a bit more contained, and also hoping to introduce some sensory Story Time sessions throughout the year.

Perceived impact on library membership and engagement in library activities

Most librarians found it difficult to confirm if the *Sing With Me!* program had made an impact on library membership and engagement in library activities. Only one librarian was confident to say, “there were new members because of receiving the pack.” Another said there had been an increase in library membership but did not know if it could be directly attributed to delivery of the *Sing With Me!* program. The remaining seven librarians said they “hadn’t noticed”, or were “unable to say”, or they simply did not know as it was “difficult to determine” and there was “no way of tracking whether it’s due to *Sing With Me!*”

Perceptions of the *Sing With Me!* resources

Better Beginnings website

Seven librarians commented on the perceived usefulness of the Better Beginnings website. One said “sometimes it’s a little tricky to navigate. There’s a lot of information on there, and a lot of it is useful information. It’s just the user interface could do with some improving to make it easier to navigate.” Five librarians said they liked and used the website. Comments included, “I refer to it quite often”, “I’ll hit the website before I call anyone”, and “I find it very, very useful now that I’ve had some training.” One librarian requested additional information by way of “a little bit more of a spiel there about how the library should be handling the [*Sing With Me!*] program.” A further suggestion was to include online resources for parents and carers to access on the Better Beginnings website.

The *Sing With Me!* pack

Five librarians made comments regarding the *Sing With Me!* pack with three of these comments describing how children had responded to the backpack and the CD. The children had been observed enjoying the actual backpack, as one librarian explained:

The kids love the idea of a backpack. They love it when they get the bag and they can put it on their back and they can wear it out of the library ... you just sort of see a little sense of pride in them with their little backpack on, you know, heading out of the library.

Another librarian made a similar observation; “The kids love walking around with them on their backs and older kids, I don’t know, they get a bit jealous and they get a bit cranky when they don’t get one.”

Children were seen to enjoy the nursery rhyme CD, “the kids have loved the disk and listen to it everywhere they go in the car and around town.” This librarian went on to add, “[families are] thrilled, they think it’s just lovely, they can’t believe they’re getting [the pack] free.”

The remaining two comments made by librarians about the *Sing With Me!* pack highlighted the perceived value of the resources. One indicated its value as an introduction to reading:

[the resources] cover learning new vocab and learning the rhymes and there’s a visual element with the little magnets and ... they can listen to the songs over and over again with the CD. And that book is, you know, they can learn that off by heart ... it’s their first steps into reading.

The last comment indicated the perceived value of the resources for families of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds: “[The nursery rhymes are] great for parents that are perhaps from diverse cultures and backgrounds, so they might not have had them available or they might not know about them previously, so I think it’s a great resource.”

Suggestions for changes to be made to the *Sing With Me!* pack

A number of suggestions were made by the librarians with regard to possible improvements that could be made to the contents of the *Sing With Me!* pack. For example, one librarian suggested including all the words to the nursery rhymes on the magnets, and another suggested the magnet be used as a sequencing activity where the pieces have to be put in a certain order “so that when kids are just sitting on the floor waiting for dinner to come or whatever at their fridge with their magnets, they could perhaps sequence the nursery rhyme or sequence the story.” Another suggestion was to dispense with the magnet altogether and “change it to a wooden jigsaw puzzle” instead. Other suggestions included, adding “a little game or something interactive”, more nursery rhymes in other languages, a little nursery rhyme booklet, an extra book, and changing the book back to the one used in the first year of the program (that is, Knick Knack Bushwhack). One librarian declared no changes were needed. She said, “I think it’s perfect” and went on to add:

As a librarian though, it does make your job a lot easier when you’ve got a really quality product that you can ... I mean, you’re selling reading, selling literacy, and it just makes it so much easier because it’s ready to go, it’s professional, and it’s got all the important information in it.

Additional comments

A request was made for the provision of some guidelines to assist librarians to implement the *Sing With Me!* program in ways that cater “for libraries of different sizes and different demographics.” One librarian commented on the challenge of working in a town with a transient population where, she said, “people come and go a lot.”

A number of comments were made about the *Sing With Me!* program filling a gap between the existing Better Beginnings programs. One librarian described it this way, “I think it’s fantastic to have a similar approach across WA. I can see these different packs as building blocks.” This idea was echoed by another librarian who observed the *Sing With Me!* program:

...sort of keeps it on people’s radar because if you just go from the yellow pack, and then to the Kindy pack, that’s four years, and that’s sort of a long time between to lose the thread. So I think it’s a great opportunity to remind people, remind families, that literacy is important for their kids.

The final two comments identified the value of the *Sing With Me!* program in connecting people in the community to their local libraries. One librarian said, “it’s a tangible item that creates [a link] between the library and the people.”

Another commented:

It’s a free quality resource, and it’s very mobile, like it’s in the car, in the home, you know, it’s a nice little package that you can add things to it and sort of their first ... their own little library package.

Observation data

The observation data collected from nine libraries across the metropolitan, regional and remote areas provided a “snap shot” of how 11 literacy activities at the different locations took place. While there was no stand-alone *Sing With Me!* session, elements of *Sing With Me!* were embedded in the traditional Rhyme Time and Story Time sessions. This was explained by one of the regional librarians:

We have a Story Time ... it might not necessarily be promoted as a Sing With Me! Story Time, but a couple of times a year we’ll have a Story Time where the focus will be on the [Sing With Me!] backpacks. So we’d just take the backpack, we do songs and rhymes around the contents of the backpack, we read the story that’s in the backpack, and talk about how people can use the contents and sing some rhymes and then let people take them home from there.

Of the 11 literacy activities observed for this evaluation, four were Baby Rhyme Time, one was Toddler Rhyme Time, two were Story Time, and four were a mix of Baby Rhyme Time and *Sing With Me!*. Most of the sessions were 30 minutes long, with one going for 25 minutes, and three sessions lasting a full hour. For most sessions 15 to 20 adults were in attendance. The smallest group of adults (seven) attended the session offered at the remote library, and one of the metropolitan libraries recorded the largest group of adults (43). In most cases the adults were mothers, however a small number of fathers, grandparents and an au pair also attended. At one of the metropolitan libraries adults were observed being turned away due to the limited capacity having been reached. Generally speaking the ratio of adults to children was 1:1. An exception was the regional library identified as #6; one session did have twice the number of adults to children and the other session almost had twice the number of adults as children. The table that follows summarises these details including the broad location of each library, the type of literacy activity observed, the duration of each session, and the number of adults and children in attendance.

Table 8.

Observations made of library literacy activities

Library	Location	Literacy Activity	Duration (minutes)	Number of attendees	
				Adults	Children
#1	Metropolitan	BRT	30	10	10
#2	Metropolitan	Mix of BRT & SWM	30	21	22
#3	Metropolitan	Mix of BRT & SWM	30	43	38
#4	Metropolitan	Mix of BRT & SWM	30	19	17
#5	Metropolitan	Mix of BRT & SWM	30	16	18
#6	Regional (1st observation)	BRT	60	20	10
#6	Regional (2nd observation)	ST	60	18	10
#7	Regional (1st observation)	BRT	30	14	15
#7	Regional (2nd observation)	ST	60	15	17
#8	Regional	BRT	30	20	22
#9	Remote	TRT	25	7	10

The observations of the 11 literacy activities held across nine libraries offer information about how the sessions were run. In particular, if the components of singing songs, saying nursery rhymes and reading stories were included. In most cases all three components did feature. Table 9 shows which components featured for each session.

Table 9.

Components featured in library literacy activities

Library	Location	Literacy Activity	Session included		
			songs	rhymes	story
#1	Metropolitan	BRT	✓	✓	✓
#2	Metropolitan	Mix of BRT & SWM	✓	✓	✓
#3	Metropolitan	Mix of BRT & SWM	✓	✓	✓
#4	Metropolitan	Mix of BRT & SWM	✓	✓	✓
#5	Metropolitan	Mix of BRT & SWM	✓	✓	✓
#6	Regional	BRT	✓	✓	
#6	Regional	ST	✓	✓	✓
#7	Regional	BRT	✓	✓	
#7	Regional	ST	✓		✓
#8	Regional	BRT	✓	✓	✓
#9	Remote	TRT	✓	✓	

Key:

Baby Rhyme Time (BRT), Toddler Rhyme Time (TRT), Story Time (ST), *Sing With Me!* (SWM)

During the observations of the literacy activities, additional key aspects of each session were noted with respect to Better Beginnings in general and the *Sing With Me!* program in particular. Specifically, observations were made to note whether or not mention was made of the *Sing With Me!* program and resources and, whether or not any Better Beginnings packs were given out. Additionally, observations included if the librarians talked about the following topics. (Please note: these have been numbered to correspond with the numbering in the columns at the far right of the table to follow).

- 1) aspects of early literacy,
- 2) the Better Beginnings program and where to access the bags,
- 3) library membership and the availability of Better Beginnings library resources, and
- 4) Better Beginnings e-resources including the website.

The *Sing With Me!* program and resources were mentioned during all the sessions apart from one Baby Rhyme Time session. *Sing With Me!* packs were given out at seven of the sessions (noted in the table as SWM). During seven sessions the librarians were observed to talk about aspects of literacy, Better Beginnings, library membership and availability of resources. None of the talks included information about Better Beginnings e-resources or the website (see Table 10).

Four metropolitan libraries offered a literacy activity that included a mix of Baby Rhyme Time and *Sing With Me!* There were common elements observed across the four sessions. These elements are grouped as follows; use of *Sing With Me!* resources, interaction by the librarians, interaction by the parents, and, interaction by the children.

Table 10.

Key aspects of library literacy activities

Library	Location	Literacy Activity	Mention made of SWM & resources	Packs given out	Librarian talked about			
					1	2	3	4
#1	Metropolitan	BRT	✓	SWM				
#2	Metropolitan	Mix of BRT & SWM	✓	No	✓	✓		
#3	Metropolitan	Mix of BRT & SWM	✓	No				
#4	Metropolitan	Mix of BRT & SWM	✓	No				
#5	Metropolitan	Mix of BRT & SWM	✓	SWM			✓	
#6	Regional	BRT	✓	SWM	✓	✓	✓	
#6	Regional	ST	✓	SWM	✓	✓	✓	
#7	Regional	BRT		No				
#7	Regional	ST	✓	SWM	✓	✓	✓	
#8	Regional	BRT	✓	SWM		✓		
#9	Remote	TRT	✓	SWM		✓		

Key:

Baby Rhyme Time (BRT), Toddler Rhyme Time (TRT), Story Time (ST), *Sing With Me!* (SWM)

Use of *Sing With Me!* resources

Resources from the *Sing With Me!* pack were showcased across all four sessions. In one session the children's picture book was shared, and in all sessions songs were included that feature on the *Sing With Me!* CD. Words to songs and rhymes were made available using laminated word cards, or by displaying the words on a large screen, or both.

Interaction by the librarians

In all four instances the librarians were observed to initiate personalised interaction with the adults and children, and often addressed the children by name. The librarians were described as being “*animated*”, “*outgoing*”, and “*humorous*”. One session was co-led by two librarians, one of whom signed the words of the story as it was being read.

Interaction by the adults

Parents across all four sessions imitated the actions of the librarians and joined in with the songs, rhymes and storytelling. At one of the sessions the parents were observed to be “*fully involved*” and “*[knew] most of the songs*”. It was noted that going through each song or rhyme twice helped parents to learn the words. A further observation was made regarding the interaction between adults and each other's children, noting a “*great rapport*” had been established.

Interaction by the children

In most cases the children were too young to say the rhymes or sing the songs but they joined in by laughing, jumping, moving, dancing and intently watching the adults around them. Most of the children were too young to imitate the librarians' actions independently but did so with the assistance of adults. It was noted that the majority of children were “*totally engaged*” and “*had a sense of involvement throughout*”.



Focus group data

The focus group comprised three Better Beginnings team members from the SLWA who each have an integral role in the *Sing With Me!* initiative. Of the three, one was involved in the creation of the *Sing With Me!* resources, one has a liaison role (with public libraries in Western Australia regarding their participation in the *Sing With Me!* program, and is also responsible for the distribution of the resources across the state), and one is the coordinator of Better Beginnings (with oversight of the development of the *Sing With Me!* program, the delivery of the pilot and, liaison with funding partners and other key stakeholders). These three SLWA team members provided further information about the *Sing With Me!* program, including the rationale for the program and key issues regarding its delivery and sustainability.

Rationale for the *Sing With Me!* program

The rationale behind the *Sing With Me!* program was clearly stated; it aimed to support parents and carers to read, talk, sing and play with their children every day. The *Sing With Me!* program not only provides the tools to make this happen, but also fills a “gap” between the messages portrayed at birth through the existing Better Beginnings “yellow bag” and later in Kindergarten with the “green bag”. As one team member explained:

We had our attachment with families at the eight-week check when their babies were born. We then didn't have anything to reconnect with them again until later in Kindy. We're very aware of the research, about 75% of brain development happening within those first three years, [although we were] reconnecting at the four-year-old point, we were just missing that really critical opportunity to sustain the messages and the engagement with parents.

Another team member saw the added value of connecting at the two-year point in terms of supporting families who may have “lost their way”:

Between that baby and two-year-old mark, a lot of things can happen; the parents can return to work, people can move house, people can have a tough time with the baby and perhaps they wanted to go to Rhyme Time and then motherhood became challenging and so they perhaps might have been in a bit of a bubble or suffered from post-natal depression or something. I think by putting out this beautiful pack, it can re-inspire them to come back, and then go, “Oh, hang on, that's right, this is here.” So just giving them some sort of inspiration and helping reconnect when perhaps they've lost their way a little bit.

The benefit of the *Sing With Me!* program was also seen to extend to adults:

*Having a child can be quite an isolating experience; particularly for someone who perhaps has been in the workforce full time, and then you're faced with a baby all day every day. [The *Sing With Me!* program] provides a motivation ... to get to the local library and have the Rhyme Time, not just for your child but as adults meeting together.*

Key issues regarding program delivery and sustainability

The SLWA team members identified a number of key issues regarding the delivery of the *Sing With Me!* program that would need to be retained to ensure ongoing sustainability. These included relatability of the resources, the focus on the importance of singing, opportunity to engage members of the public with their local library, flexible delivery model, customised delivery schedule, support structures and the need for informal and formal evaluation.

Relatability of the resources

It was thought the resources in the *Sing With Me!* pack were ideal for children and their families based in Western Australia. Reasons included the Australian animals featured in the illustrations, and the simplicity and expected familiarity of the songs on the CD and the tunes that went with the two books selected for each year of the pilot. “We’re obviously selecting books that are designed to be sung,” said one team member, while ensuring the books were “accessible to most families.” Another team member added, “It’s a good way to go because the families that are coming in from a different cultural upbringing, they may still be familiar with the tune [of the nursery rhymes], even if they don’t know the words that are sung locally here.”

The inclusion on the CD of a specially written Indigenous song, called “The Growing Tree”, was seen to be an additional point of relatability while also paying tribute to local Indigenous culture. A team member talked about the song:

There is(sic) some Indigenous words in the Bibbulmun language ... it’s a two-page spread [in the nursery rhyme booklet with activities], it’s got some beautiful sort of Aboriginal artwork and a picture of a beautiful Indigenous mother and child. So point of difference wise, you know, presenting that to all children of that age is a really wonderful thing again, helping them connect to the local culture of where we are.

An additional reason for including the Indigenous song was explained: “what we wanted to just give a nod to was that singing in your home language was of an equal value as singing these traditional nursery rhymes that we had put together.”

While it was acknowledged not every culture could be reflected in the nursery rhymes and in the accompanying booklet, a deliberate effort had been made to represent different cultures and different family members in the photographs used. In particular, dads and males of different ages were depicted. As one team member explained:

We are quite consciously aware of when we’re developing our resources that through our use of photos that we are reflecting ... younger dads as well as the older dads so that they do see our resources as speaking to them and including them.

A final point regarding the relatability of the songs on the CD was that it had been produced locally. “[The CD] was created by some local West Australian singers.”

The importance of singing

The SLWA team members indicated the *Sing With Me!* program had been well researched and the focus on singing was a deliberate inclusion. One team member shared, “We clearly identified that singing was an activity that families enjoyed and should be engaging with [their young] children.” She went on to say the *Sing With Me!* pack was “a great resource to promote something that families can be doing wherever they happen to be when they’re going about their day-to-day lives.”

The opportunity to engage members of the public with their local library

The delivery of the *Sing With Me!* program was expected not only to help families to engage in good literacy practices at home, but also to encourage them to connect with their local library on a regular basis and utilise the resources available there. As one team member explained, “we really want our families to be using their library regularly and seeing that library as a really relevant community resource that is a regular part of their life, and a part of their daily routine, their weekly routines.” Looking longer-term another team member later added the goal was to, “engage families to become lifelong library users.”

Flexible delivery model

The *Sing With Me!* program delivery model was seen to be flexible and could be customised to suit individual libraries across the state. “[Local librarians] were given that option to choose whether or not they just wanted to hand out the packs at the library or whether or not they wanted to go a step further.” Going “a step further” meant making “connections with community groups in their area” and establishing outreach partners. While connections with outreach partners were encouraged, the flexibility remained for local librarians to choose for themselves as described by one team member:

We really did leave it up to libraries to know their own community and find the strengths of the delivery avenues within their community, so we put some thoughts out there to get them started, and that was along the lines of playgroups, childcare centres, and other services in the community where they might find these families.

In this way individual libraries were responsible for identifying and contacting outreach partners as they saw fit, while being mindful of the pressures their staff may already be under and with consideration for what they felt they were capable of doing.

Collaboration established in July 2017 between the State Library and the Health Department has provided an additional channel of delivery. By involving child health nurses in distributing *Sing With Me!* packs during the scheduled two-year-old check, a more holistic approach has been achieved. This was seen to be beneficial, as two of the SLWA team members elaborated:

particularly [for] public libraries who are maybe slightly short staffed, and who are wanting to engage with the program but going, 'We have really limited capacity to maybe get this resource in the hands of our community.' Again, it's been a great way [to] say, 'Hey, look, you can actually collaborate with Health to actually just deliver the resource within your community,' and hopefully, again, that will have the impact of reconnecting some of those families with their library.

For the well-resourced library it also works well because they'll connect with Health in a different way, so they'll collaborate on new parent group presentations, so that's an opportunity for either the librarian to come in to the Health group or to invite them in mothers' groups, sort of the parents' groups out to the library, to collaborate on how the packs are delivered, to provide a really gentle introduction to a baby Rhyme Time program, to model the resources in the pack together so that that library link is really, really strong. So it works for us at almost every level.

The partnership with child health nurses was seen to be of further benefit in that some librarians, who had initially indicated a reluctance to be involved, were able to get on board.

There were a number of libraries that weren't keen to participate until we were able to talk through the Health option, and that actually became the point of difference for them, that they were now prepared to take it on.

Customised delivery schedule

Libraries across the state had customised delivery of the stock to their door. This was outlined as follows:

We work with Activ which is a disability enterprise just out in Bentley, so they do all the collating and the receiving ... well, they receive the stock and then they collate them into reading packs. We then push the reading packs out to the libraries based on a delivery schedule that we negotiate with the libraries. So that takes a little bit of juggling as well. We have to be able to manage our stock coming and going with a schedule that is quite bespoke for each individual library. And that's taking into account the number of packs that they wanted, their ability to store packs, so some are able to take a larger delivery upfront and then work through that over a six-month period while others need more regular smaller deliveries that they don't have to store and manage. So that's an element of the program that does take a bit of time and a bit of juggling to do that.

Support structures

A number of support structures have been put in place to enable librarians to fully engage in the delivery of the *Sing With Me!* program. For example, "a special *Sing With Me!* Rhyme Time session plan" was created, along with "little introductions that libraries can grab and drop into a community newsletter, or even a media release." Additionally, posters have been created for librarians to personalise and display "to advertise that the program was available at the library."

Another support structure established for local librarians was the Public Libraries Help Desk; "an online portal that all public libraries have access to." A SLWA team member went on to describe how the Public Libraries Help Desk worked:

It means [the librarians] don't have to know the name of who they need to talk to. They can find the right form, and it will go straight to the right person who can then take that up with them. So we have our admin assistant who triages the enquiries that come through, so if it is making adjustments to a delivery schedule, that would often just sit with our admin assistant. If it's that a library is perhaps struggling with the program, that then gets escalated, usually to [another staff member] who can then actually pick up the phone and have a conversation with them and sort of draw out what the issues are and how we can then support.

A final support structure was described as "regular touch points" with key contacts. These included, "an internal survey with libraries," an "e-mail group ... so whenever there is something that we can share we would just send an e-mail out to everybody," and meetings between the "joint management group with Child and Adolescent Health." It was noted the meetings were, "six monthly by default but as things come up, we can schedule additional meetings."

Formal and informal evaluation

Mention was made of the importance of ongoing evaluation. Informal feedback was sought from librarians, and formal feedback through this particular evaluation of the program. As one team member explained, "the evaluation obviously is the next critical step for us, ... we need to know that libraries and families value the resource and that it's achieving what we want it to achieve."

Parents

The parents who participated in the evaluation described their perceptions of *Sing With Me!* This included their thoughts about the usefulness of the individual resources in the *Sing With Me!* pack, about the benefits of the *Sing With Me!* program, and about the implementation of the program. These three main areas are outlined below and reference data from the online surveys and the follow up interviews. (Please note: the findings are based on the information that was made available to the research team; survey answers were not recorded from every respondent for every question).

Perceived usefulness of the resources in the *Sing With Me!* pack

In the online survey data, the parents who stated receiving the *Sing With Me!* pack overwhelmingly reported the resources were found to be useful. The most useful resources were found to be the Australian children's picture book and the nursery rhyme CD. These were mainly reported as "very useful" and "extremely useful". Components of the *Sing With Me!* pack that were found to be least useful included the booklet entitled *30 Books to read before you're 3*, and the nursery rhyme puzzle magnet (see Figure 3).

These responses were reinforced by the open-ended comments made by parents and carers in the online survey and in the follow up interview. For example, in the online survey in response to "Describe the BEST thing about receiving *Sing With Me!*" most comments were made about the book and the CD. One parent said, "My daughter LOVES the *Row Your Boat* book. We read it every night before bed, along with other books. She also loves listening to the CD when in the car." Another parent said, "The free book, rhymes and CD ... encouraged both me and my son to learn new songs and stories." In the follow up interviews the comments again reflected the popularity of the book and the CD. For example, one parent said, "The CD is used probably the most out of anything, the CD was brilliant and I have it in my car. The book was lovely, yeah, that was really nice, mostly because ... you can sing as well as read." Another parent summed it up by saying, "The best thing, I love the CD ... I love that it was very different from anything I already had. Even though it has well-known nursery rhymes on it, it was done in a different way, and very easy to move to and sort of sing along with your child. I really like the way that was done. And I love the inclusion of a musical story in the pack. That was great."

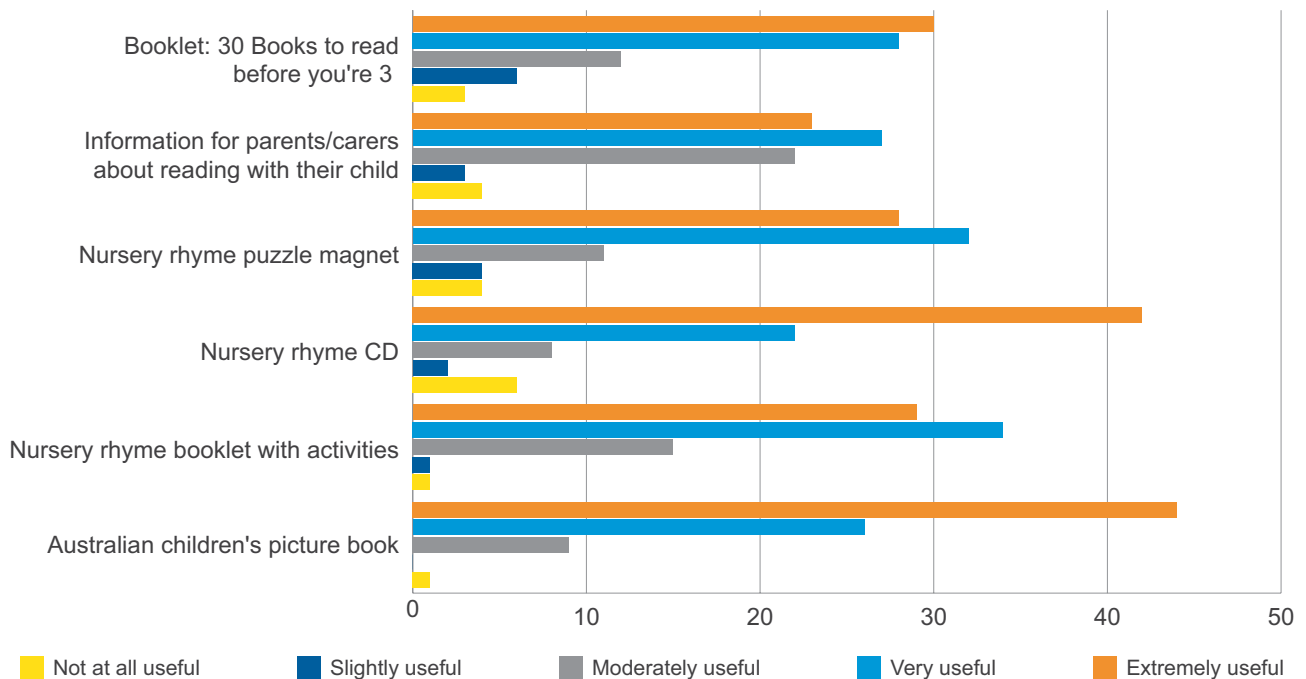


Figure 3. Parents'/carers' perceptions of the usefulness of contents of the *Sing With Me!* pack.

Apart from the book and the CD, positive comments were also made regarding the other resources in the pack, namely the nursery rhyme puzzle magnet, the nursery rhyme booklet with activities, the booklet *30 Books to read before you're 3* and the actual bag itself. People who commented on the puzzle magnet described it as a great way for the children to make links with the nursery rhymes. For example, one parent said, *"When my little boy sees them, [puzzle magnet] he's like, 'Oh!'. He actually recognised them as Baa Baa Black Sheep. And he will start singing it ... and then that of course encourages me to start singing it with him. So I think other than it engaging me as a parent, it engages him."* Another parent commented, *"Yes, we've used the magnets a lot actually, all my girls like playing with the magnets on the fridge.... the magnets have got a lot of use, a lot more than I expected, to be honest."*

The booklets in the *Sing With Me!* pack were found to be valuable as one parent explained, *"I love the idea of the Better Beginnings backpack, with the other stuff, it's not only a book, it's other stuff as well that helps with encouraging my kids to interact with me or sing."* Parents described the benefit of the Nursery Rhyme booklet in helping them to learn the words to the nursery rhymes. One parent said, *"It kind of help(sic) us memorise the song, which did work" and a second parent simply said the "lyric booklet is very helpful."* The *30 Books to read before you're 3* booklet was also considered a valuable resource as evidenced by this remark: *"I've actually marked a couple of the books that we want to go and get for [our daughter]."* One of the mothers said, *"my hubby and I, we try and go to the library and at least try and look for one of these [from the list of 30 books]."* Another parent made a comment along similar lines, *"[The booklet] motivates you to try and get to those 30 books."*

The bag in which the resources were packed was a bright orange cloth bag with two shoulder straps so the bag could be worn as a backpack. It was large enough to hold materials slightly larger than A4 size. It had an attractive Better Beginnings logo emblazoned on the front along with the logos for the three main stake holders: The State Library of Western Australia, the Government of Western Australia Department of Regional Development, and Rio Tinto. Although parents/carers were not questioned directly about the bag in either the online survey or the follow up interviews, a number of comments were made about the usefulness of the bag. It was described as "handy", and "awesome", with one parent explaining how their child used it *"to put in his library books"* and another parent saying *"my child loves wearing it into the library."*

Some parents/carers made general comments in appreciation of the quality of the *Sing With Me!* resources. For example, one parent said the resources were of a *"great quality"* and another described them as *"all high quality and beautifully made."* With reference specifically to the CD, one parent said *"the singers did an awesome job"* and another found the CD was of *"excellent quality."*

It is interesting to note there were no negative comments made about the quality of any of the resources in the *Sing With Me!* pack. Further, of the 83 people who completed the online survey and the 16 who participated in the follow

up interviews there was only one person who said *"we didn't use the CD much"*, one person who said they didn't use the *30 Books to read before you're 3* booklet, and two parents/carers who said they did not use the booklet that contained information for parents (although one of these said they would have read it when it first came but it would now be *"in the house still somewhere"*).

Perceived benefits of the *Sing With Me!* program

In the online survey comments and the follow up interviews, parents/carers shared information regarding the perceived benefits of *Sing With Me!* Such benefits included having increased confidence to sing with and read to children, an increased understanding of the importance of singing and reading, singing with and reading to children more frequently, assistance with language development, and an enriched library involvement.

Increased confidence to sing with and read to their children

A benefit of the *Sing With Me!* program was that the resources assisted parents and carers to sing with and read to their children with greater confidence. Eighty-two percent of the respondents who completed the online survey indicated they felt more confident singing and reading with their children. This finding was reinforced by comments supplied in the open-ended response and the follow up interviews. For example, some parents/carers felt they previously did not have the knowledge to sing with their child as one mother reported: *"I didn't know a lot of nursery rhymes which is why we've never really sung any and then now I've actually got a small repertoire, I can actually go with her and sing with her and feel comfortable with it."* In other instances, *Sing With Me!* reminded parents/carers of songs they used to know, as explained in this comment *"[Sing With Me!] gives me more ideas of songs to sing that I had forgotten about."*

It is worth noting the comments made specifically regarding fathers who received a confidence boost from *Sing With Me!* For example, one mother observed, *"my husband now sings a lot more nursery rhymes because like, yep, he hasn't much of a background with nursery rhymes. So, he was a bit like, he doesn't know what to sing, and now he has a broader idea of what to do."* A similar comment reinforced the perceived benefit of the CD, *"My husband has been using the CD as well.... if he's got that CD in his car, he would put it on more so than before when he might not have known what to put on. Give him a little bit of ... yeah, a bit of support and confidence in thinking, oh, I've got something appropriate here to put in."* Another mother commented on how *Sing With Me!* had influenced reading and singing with her daughter, *"I definitely read more, and we definitely started singing to her more as well, when we changed her nappy. That was the one thing that we did incorporate, the singing songs during nappy changing time. ... my husband sings to her as well now during, because that's sort of caught(sic) on now."* One mother said, *"this has assisted my husband. He was shy and is really trying hard to read and sing with our two sons."*

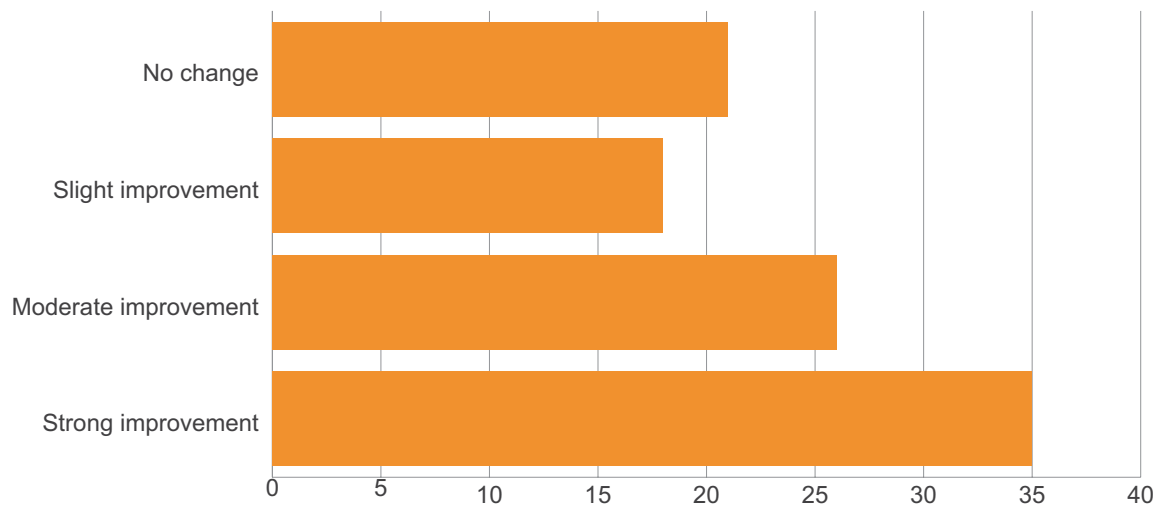


Figure 4. Understanding of the importance of singing and reading.

Increased understanding of the importance of singing and reading

Seventy-seven parents and carers reported the benefit of *Sing With Me!* in influencing their understanding of the importance of singing with and reading to their children. As shown in Figure 4, almost 80% acknowledged there had been a degree of improvement in this area. Thirty-five percent reported a strong improvement, 26% reported a moderate improvement and 18% reported a slight improvement. Only 21% said there had been no change in their understanding, with many of their follow-up comments saying the program had simply reinforced what they already knew to be true. For example, one parent said, “it’s just reassured me of what I already thought,” and another parent said, “my child loves singing, and this has reminded me to have fun singing with her more often.”

Singing and reading with children more frequently

The *Sing With Me!* program was found to be beneficial because it helped parents and carers to sing with and read to their children more frequently. The online survey responses showed almost 80% of parents/carers sang and/or read with their children more often as a result of *Sing With Me!* The CD was cited as one of the reasons for this increase in frequency. For example, one parent said they often had “the CD on so we sing it a lot now, especially in the car.” Another parent acknowledged they “try and have more fun”, because they now realised “singing and dancing is important.” Interestingly, one parent reported the influence of the *Sing With Me!* program had spread to members of the extended family. She had observed a change in the behaviour of the grandparents who now sang more often with her child. She said, “definitely with grandparents there’s been change.”

Assistance with language development

Although not a specific question on the survey or the interview, another perceived benefit that emerged from the data was that of support for children’s language development. A survey respondent described the *Sing With Me!* pack as “fun, interactive and great for literacy learning and speech development.” When asked in the follow up interview to describe what they thought their child had gained from the *Sing With Me!* pack, one parent responded, “pronouncing her words better ... before she couldn’t really pronounce things but now with the nursery rhymes getting more use she’s pronouncing the words properly.” A similar comment was made by another parent who said her child had language delay but the singing had helped, “it has improved her speech, because we’ve been working with a speech therapist and the one thing that they did say is sing more, read more, do things like that, and the pack has helped with that.”

Some parents who spoke languages in addition to English commented on the benefit *Sing With Me!* afforded in terms of English language development for them and their children. As one parent commented, “We are bilingual, so some of the songs we weren’t aware of, other than the just common ones, so it increased our kind of song dictionary.”

Enriched library involvement

Parents and carers who participated in the online survey were asked if their children had joined the library since getting the *Sing With Me!* pack. Of the 81 responses, 44 indicated their children already had library membership, 19 said their children signed up after getting the *Sing With Me!* pack, and 18 said their children did not have library membership. Parents and carers who participated in the follow up interviews were asked about their own library membership as adults.

Of the 16 participants, 14 said they already had library membership prior to receiving the *Sing With Me!* pack, and two said they received the pack when they went to join their local library.

The online survey item sought to determine if, at the time of collecting the *Sing With Me!* pack, the librarian had spoken with parents and carers about joining the library and about other library activities. Of the 58 people who responded to this item, 45 said this had happened for them, 11 said this did not occur, and two people couldn't recall.

A number of parents and carers reported the *Sing With Me!* program was found to be beneficial in that it encouraged them to make greater use of the library, even though they already had library membership. As one parent put it, *"Before the packs we didn't really go all that often [to the library], only really when I had a chance. But now I make an effort to go ... every week for Story Time at least."* Another parent commented that the *Sing With Me!* program had encouraged her and her husband to read to their son *"a lot more now"* and that they were now prioritising *"going to the library. He has his own card and it's a big thing for him and we make it a big thing that he's got to have stories and books."*

Implementation of the *Sing With Me!* program

Parents and carers were asked about aspects of the *Sing With Me!* implementation. These aspects included, how they received the *Sing With Me!* pack and who spoke with them about the program and whether or not that conversation included information about the contents of the pack. In most cases it was the local librarian who distributed and talked about the program. Sixty-eight respondents said their librarian had given them the pack, and 61 said the librarian had talked about the program with them. Of those, 46 said the librarian had also talked about the contents of the *Sing With Me!* pack. Eleven said this hadn't happened, and five were unsure. Nine respondents said their child health nurses gave them the *Sing With Me!* pack; seven said this had included a conversation about the program and just four said the contents of the *Sing With Me!* pack had been discussed. Two people said the nurse at their Parents' Group had distributed the packs, and only one of these had discussed the program. The contents of the pack had not been discussed with the Parents' Group nurse, but with a librarian later on. For the three respondents who said they had received their *Sing With Me!* pack from their Playgroup Leader this had also included a conversation about the program and about the contents of the pack.

Table 11. Distribution of the *Sing With Me!* packs

	Gave out the <i>Sing With Me!</i> pack	Talked about the <i>Sing With Me!</i> program	Talked about the contents of the <i>Sing With Me!</i> pack		
			Yes	No	Unsure
Librarian	68	61	46	11	5
Child health nurse	9	7	4	2	2
Parents' Group nurse	2	1		1	
Playgroup Leader	3	3	3		

Outreach partners

The interview data were collected from nine outreach partners across the state of Western Australia. The outreach partners were asked about their perceptions of the *Sing With Me!* resources, the implementation and perceived benefits of the program, the relationship between *Sing With Me!* and other Better Beginnings programs, sustainability of the *Sing With Me!* program, and the impact on library membership, participation and practices. The outreach partners were also asked about the factors that appeared to support or hinder the *Sing With Me!* distribution and message and about any suggestions they had for further improvement of the program. (Please note: the findings are based on the information that was made available to the research team; interview answers were not recorded from every respondent for every question. In particular, the director from the remote child care centre was only able to respond to the interview questions about her involvement and implementation of *Sing With Me!*). The outreach partners' responses are presented in the following nine sections.

Perceptions of the *Sing With Me!* resources

The outreach participants were very positive about the *Sing With Me!* pack, they felt that the bag was distinctive because of its bright orange colour. They reported seeing a number of young children wearing the bag to their local libraries. Although one of the playgroup participants wished that it had been constructed from more durable fabric and the other playgroup participant suggested that the *30 Books to read before you're 3* list could be printed on the outside of the bag.

Australian children's picture book

The outreach participants from the pre-kindergarten centre, the pre-school, the early childhood centre and the community kindergarten were all enthusiastic about the book, *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*. The coordinator at the family day care centre felt that it was a very positive resource for children who spoke English as an additional language and introduced them to Australian animals. The director of the community kindergarten initially expressed some concern that children from different cultures may find the text too difficult to read, but reflected that the illustrations enabled families to talk about the book in their home language. The pre-kindergarten teacher believed the language was at an appropriate level for children in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The teacher from the early childhood centre commented that the rhyming text encouraged the children to clap or pat their knees, engaging in the text even if they did not fully understand the words. The coordinator at the family day care centre reported that the book was original, free and linked music, text and reading in an engaging and fun way for children and families. The regional playgroup partner appreciated the book and explained how their children liked it and it had become part of their home library collection, however, the metropolitan playgroup partner could not remember the book, explaining *"kids at that age are not the sort to keep things. They just play with it, and then they move on."*

Nursery rhyme booklet with activities

All of the outreach participants liked the *Sing With Me!* nursery rhyme booklet, claiming that it engaged children and adults. The pre-school teacher admired the booklet's *"simple but powerful message that brings back memories of traditional rhymes while reinforcing the literacy message"*. The pre-kindergarten teacher praised the booklet for explaining the importance of the parent's role in reading, singing and talking to children every day, and for giving them quick, simple, easy activities to do in language that was accessible. The director of the community kindergarten valued the inclusion of an Aboriginal song at a time when their organisation was trying to build cultural competency.

Nursery rhyme CD

There were markedly different reactions to the nursery rhyme CD, ranging from no knowledge of its existence, delegation to the bin, and never having listened to it, to daily use in the centre. The pre-kindergarten teacher considered CDs to be ancient artefacts that had been superseded by apps, iPods and other technology. One of the playgroup partners had discarded the CD because she played the guitar and piano and preferred the children and families to create their own music. However, the family day care coordinator asked her staff to encourage parents to play it in the car, and the pre-school teacher used it daily when the children entered the classroom and prepared to go home, explaining that the children loved it.

Nursery rhyme puzzle magnet

The teachers and the director of the community kindergarten reported that the nursery rhyme puzzle magnet was important and innovative because it could be placed on the fridge at home to act as a prompt to *"remind the parents to sing, that takes a couple of seconds, even when getting dinner ready ... to take some time to sing or read a book"*. One of the playgroup participants indicated that the children liked to play with the magnet and therefore it gave them opportunity to engage the children in problem solving and literacy.

Information for parents/carers about reading with their child

The participants only had vague memories of the booklet *Information for parents/carers about reading with their child*. One playgroup partner said she would have read it at the time, then probably thrown it away. The other playgroup partner believed that she *"didn't need it because I already know it. I think I already have it all sussed out with my three kids"*. The other participants seemed to place greater value on this item, suggesting it was an important resource for parents in relation to literacy and bonding, one of the teachers claimed *"parents should know this information. It is so important to bond with your children."*

30 Books to read before you're 3 booklet

One of the playgroup participants had no recollection of the *30 Books to read before you're 3* booklet. The other claimed that as a result of the booklet she now owned most of the books and introduced some at playgroup. The other six participants placed great value on this resource, using it as a guide to purchase books for their centres. One teacher had published the list in her centre's newsletter.

Better Beginnings website

The teachers in the pre-kindergarten, pre-school and early childhood centre were aware of the Better Beginnings website but the majority had not used information on the site to deliver *Sing With Me!* They indicated they felt confident having used the site in previous years and had not thought to use it for *Sing With Me!*, or could not find any *Sing With Me!* suggestions on the website. However, the teachers reported they had found the website useful when they first became involved in Better Beginnings.

The pre-school teacher included ideas from the Better Beginnings website for children 0-4 years and activities the State Library was offering in their school's newsletters to parents. She had also borrowed some of the resources recommended on the website for her children to use in class. A teacher from the community kindergarten used Better Beginnings lesson plans and teacher guides, and had purchased books recommended for children of particular ages for the centre. The child care centre supervisor thought that it would be a good idea to direct parents to the website. The family day care centre and the pre-schools ordered *Sing With Me!* packs through the Better Beginnings website to be delivered by the librarian when she visited.

The child care centre supervisor and the playgroup participants from metropolitan and regional areas were unaware of the website's existence.

Perceptions of the implementation of the *Sing With Me!* program

Delivery

The *Sing With Me!* pack was either delivered and introduced to the children at the outreach centre or the local library by the librarian, or given to the outreach partner to give out at their centre.

The librarians introduced the *Sing With Me!* pack directly to the children at five outreach centres on their visits once a term, twice a year or annually. For example, the librarian used *Sing With Me!* in a Rhyme Time/Story Time session in the metropolitan family day care centre, and at the pre-school in a Book Week presentation, then distributed the packs to the children at the conclusion of each session. In addition, the local librarian visited the pre-kindergarten, community kindergarten and regional early childhood centre and either distributed the *Sing With Me!* packs or gave them to the outreach partner to distribute. For example, the librarian delivered the packs to the regional childcare centre, and the supervisor gave each child

a *Sing With Me!* pack when the child turned two. The childcare centre supervisor said, "*we just hand it on*", indicating their role is as a delivery point. However, once a term, the local librarian attended this centre and used the *Sing With Me!* resources during a Story Time session for the children.

In contrast, the children and outreach staff at the early childhood centre and the remote childcare centre were introduced to *Sing With Me!* at their local library during their regular visit. However, only three packs were given to the remote childcare centre director and these were distributed to the staff in each child care room. Furthermore, librarians did not always have the opportunity to introduce *Sing With Me!* at Story Time or Rhyme Time, instead they simply gave the packs to the outreach partner, as in the case of the playgroup partners.

Engaging with parents and carers

The method of distribution seemed to have an effect on the extent to which parents were informed about *Sing With Me!* For example, some of the outreach partners who had observed the librarian using *Sing With Me!* indicated that they were able to use their observations and growing knowledge of the *Sing With Me!* program to explain the *Sing With Me!* pack to the parents if time permitted; others had little knowledge and just handed the pack to parents.

For example, the director from the community kindergarten in the metropolitan area explained she observed the librarian distribute the packs. This had included each item being introduced and an explanation of how they could be used, a reading of *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*, singing the rhymes as part of Rhyme Time, talking about the library, Rhyme Time and Story Time sessions, and describing how the pack could be used with families who spoke English as an additional language. The coordinator from a family day care centre sent a letter home explaining the *Sing With Me!* program to the parents.

The family day care coordinator asked the educators to explain the *Sing With Me!* pack to the parents and show them how to use the contents as the librarian had shown them. Each educator was given their own pack to use with the children and the coordinator instructed them to use the CD in the car when they transported the children and to use the resources as much as possible with the children. The coordinator was unaware how successful educators were in explaining the pack to parents. This centre scheduled the arrival of the librarian at the start of the day so that parents dropping children at school could remain to be involved in the Rhyme Time session if they chose, but the coordinator explained most parents seemed eager to get to work.

The director of the community kindergarten who distributed the *Sing With Me!* pack after reading the book to the children, tried to explain the contents of the pack and talk about the library to the parents waiting to take their children home. She explained that she was somewhat limited in the time she could devote to the task while managing the children's departure and ensuring they were collected by the appropriate adult. Flyers advertising

library services were placed on the noticeboard and songs that were used in class were printed on the back of the newsletter to further draw the parents' attention to the *Sing With Me!* information.

The participants from the metropolitan child care centre, early childhood centre, pre-school and pre-kindergarten explained they did not have a great deal of opportunity to talk to parents about *Sing With Me!* and how to engage their child in reading and singing, because the parents only came to their centres briefly to deliver or collect their children. The director of the remote child care centre only had three packs and these were used with the children at the centre and therefore did not involve the parents. The regional playgroup partner explained that she distributed the *Sing With Me!* packs and told the parents and children: "Here's a free book and a shopping bag". The parents viewed the *Sing With Me!* pack as a gift for their children from the library, "a freebie". She explained that there was virtually no discussion about the contents of the bag amongst the parents in the playgroup, parents preferring to discuss sport or cooking. The playgroup decided not to "workshop" *Sing With Me!* because it was a book to be used at home.

Incorporation into outreach centre programs

Although they indicated that they had not received any specific guidance on *Sing With Me!*, the teachers from the early childhood centre, pre-kindergarten and pre-school who had observed the librarian felt that they had the necessary skills to incorporate the packs into their programs. The *Sing With Me!* pack was another literacy resource and literacy was a key part of their roles. One of the teachers explained,

I'm quite confident with early literacy and the absolute importance of it in early years, reading every day and talking about the development of reading through rhymes and singing, the stepladder of the importance of how to read.

The director from the community kindergarten observed the librarian use the *Sing With Me!* resources during a Rhyme Time session in her classroom, then repeated the session herself in several other classrooms because the librarian only had time to deliver one Rhyme Time session with one group. The director of the remote child care centre indicated the packs were kept in the "mat time basket" and sometimes brought out at "mat time", but was not sure how often her staff used the packs. However, the staff used singing and dancing activities which were recognised as being consistent with the message of the *Sing With Me!* program.

Nature of liaison with libraries

The outreach participants became involved with *Sing With Me!* between 2016 and 2018. Each outreach centre had an ongoing relationship with their local library and had been accessing library services on a regular basis. All the outreach partners, in metropolitan, regional and remote areas, viewed their relationship with their librarian very positively. They used descriptors such as "very supportive", "open", and "they've done a great job working with the schools and within the local area". The implementation of the *Sing With Me!* program

was a two-way process as the outreach partners visited their local library with their children and the librarians visited their outreach partners. This varied according to the capacity of the outreach partner and the number of library staff available.

For example, the pre-kindergarten teacher and the educators at the family day care centre visited their libraries with their children weekly. Seven outreach groups were visited by the librarian, two on a monthly basis, two once a term, one twice a year and one was only visited annually. The teachers in the pre-school, pre-kindergarten, early childhood centre and child care centre had regular contact by phone and email with the librarian at their local library, or visited the library throughout the year. These teachers frequently sought advice and information about books and strategies from the librarians and had developed strong professional relationships. The director of the remote child care centre explained that she liaised with two librarians and the centre visited the library about once a month for Story Time and as part of their excursion program. The teacher from the pre-school noted that the librarian constantly reminded her that she was available if the teacher needed anything. The librarians recommended and brought new resources for the children and were always willing to attend special events. The children looked forward to their visits. When a teacher arranged for the local newspaper to come to the centre to take photos of the librarian using the *Sing With Me!* resources with the children and to write an article on the program, the centre, the library and the *Sing With Me!* program received positive publicity.

The availability of the librarian, size of the outreach group and the number of supervisory adults contributed to the visits to the library and librarian visits to the outreach groups. For example, the family day care centre received a visit from the librarian once a year but because of the ratio of children to adults (1:4), they visited the library for Rhyme Time and Story Time and to use other library services on a regular basis.

Apart from a pre-school teacher and the remote childcare director, all the other outreach participants expressed a desire for more regular contact with their local librarians. However, they indicated that they felt local librarians were under immense pressure to meet local demands delivering Rhyme Time, Story Time, Kindergarten packs, and other library initiatives, in addition to requests to attend community activities and outreach centres. For example, in one regional community there was only one librarian, so if she visited the outreach group, the library had to close. In addition, the proximity of the regional playgroup to the library, the large number of children who needed transportation and the capacity of the library meant that there was not enough room in the library for all families. The coordinator of the family day care centre explained that the librarian was only permitted to visit them once a term because the centre was a business and the staff were employed and remunerated to teach the children. In addition, the family day care centre that drew children from many suburbs was only permitted to allow children who lived in the library area to attend its *Sing With Me!* Rhyme Time session once a year.

Liaising with other staff members about *Sing With Me!*

If the outreach centre had a fairly substantial intake, with classes ranging from 2 to 4 year-olds, there was more likely to be some discussion about the *Sing With Me!* program between the director, the teaching staff and the office staff. For example, the teacher in the pre-school who had initially engaged with the local librarian and used the *Sing With Me!* resources in her class, saw the potential for Better Beginnings in other classrooms. By liaising with her teaching colleagues, various other aspects of the Better Beginnings program were introduced to additional classrooms. It was also arranged with the school's teacher-librarian for the local librarian to deliver Story Time in the school library. Teachers in the metropolitan early childhood centre also liaised with their assistant and the centre's management committee, keeping them informed of the attendance of the librarian and about the *Sing With Me!* program. If, however, the *Sing With Me!* program was only given to one group of children (usually the two-year-old group), with only one such group in the centre, the staff member involved was unlikely to discuss *Sing With Me!* with other members of the organisation.

Perceived benefits of the *Sing With Me!* program

Building relationships between families and the library

The outreach participants mentioned the way in which the *Sing With Me!* program helped to forge partnerships between the library and the centre. The pre-school teacher thought that many of the children in her centre may never have attended a library if the librarian had not attended their centre each week. She reported that through this intervention, the children were introduced to the library and the Better Beginnings programs. This had positive benefits for the children, their literacy development and likelihood of them attending the library with their families and enjoying books into future years. Every week, parents were reminded of the importance of the library and early literacy. The director of the community kindergarten also appreciated the link the *Sing With Me!* program created between the centre and the community library. She too praised the *Sing With Me!* program and Better Beginnings for the relationship being created between the family and the library, with long-term benefits for everyone concerned. The teacher at the early childhood centre regarded the *Sing With Me!* program and other Better Beginnings programs as a means of linking new migrant families to their library, and through the library to the community.

The coordinator at the family day care centre reported that liaising with the library was a way of promoting literacy with the parents and developing literacy in the outreach centre. The director of a community kindergarten explained *"we believe in early literacy and developing a love for reading, so we work with our local library in doing that."* The pre-kindergarten teacher pointed out that literacy and connections with the community through the library were part

of the Early Years Learning Framework in Western Australia. She went on to explain that Better Beginnings was part of each centre's holistic approach to literacy, with the parents, the centre and the library working in partnership. Regular contact with the library was a means of bringing more literacy resources into the outreach centre.

Supporting home and centre relationships

The outreach participants felt that the *Sing With Me!* program had helped to forge a relationship between families and the outreach centre and that *Sing With Me!* was *"exciting and special"* for all the children, parents, librarians, teachers and outreach workers involved. The director of the community kindergarten described the children's response to *Sing With Me!*:

The children get very excited about getting a gift with their own backpack and their own book. It's very age-appropriate with the rhyming words and nursery rhymes. It's just been really beneficial. It's been a great part of our program that we look forward to reusing each year.

The teacher from the early childhood centre recalled that the parents really appreciated the *Sing With Me!* pack. She reported that the children went home after receiving the *Sing With Me!* pack singing nursery rhymes and the next day some children came in with drawings of the librarian giving them the *Sing With Me!* packs. The teacher displayed these in the classroom. She believed that the children's excitement would inspire the parents to open the *Sing With Me!* packs and read the book and nursery rhymes to their children, thereby using the resources to engage their children in speaking and listening, singing and reading. She felt the parental guidance was quite clear, easy to understand and user friendly. It gave the parents a tool to read to their children every night without having to spend time finding out about ways of supporting their child's literacy or purchase information, *"I think it shows [the parents] that we really value reading in our class and our community and that there are fun ways that they can be part of this and they can see the enjoyment from their children as well."*

Increasing outreach participant confidence and knowledge

The *Sing With Me!* program had an impact on teaching and learning at the centres. The family day care centre coordinator explained that the *Sing With Me!* program had rejuvenated her in the way that a new teaching resource gives educators impetus with new ideas and activities. She had learned a great deal from watching the librarian present Rhyme Time, especially about the structure of the session, and now used the same structure in her play sessions. The early childhood centre teacher said that she had become more confident in presenting books in different ways having observed the librarian using *Sing With Me!*, Rhyme Time and Story Time. She explained the way in which the librarian integrated reading, singing and rhyming had increased the children's engagement in the *Sing With Me!* program and had shown her how to use strategies that were effective and personally fulfilling.

Creating additional activities to support the *Sing With Me!* program

The teachers from the early childhood centre, pre-kindergarten and pre-school designed reading, singing and language activities to support the *Sing With Me!* program and used the resources in their classrooms. For example, the pre-kindergarten teacher laminated the nursery rhymes in the *Sing With Me!* nursery rhyme booklet to use during other activities. The teacher at the pre-school gave the children craft materials so they could construct musical instruments to use when they sang the songs. Craft activities, such as making bookmarks or characters were often added to the songs, rhymes or story. Some of the children played musical instruments while they sang the *Sing With Me!* rhymes and songs. The child care centre supervisor nominated other activities that supported the *Sing With Me!* program, such as music and dance programs and using the CD, but she herself did not specifically design the activities to support the program. She and the coordinator of the family day care centre perceived their roles as being supportive of the librarian rather than leading *Sing With Me!* activities; they seemed to lack the confidence to initiate *Sing With Me!* activities.

Promoting the importance of early literacy

Literacy was a high priority for every outreach participant; they all felt that any program that reminded parents of the importance of early literacy was greatly appreciated by the staff and parents. The director of a community kindergarten in a metropolitan area explained, “we have used the [*Sing With Me!*] bags as a promotion to help send the message out to the parent body the importance of reading to your children early.” The teacher from the early childhood centre applauded the message being given to parents about having meaningful conversations with their children through book sharing and singing and sharing rhymes. She also believed that shared literacy practices helped the child and parent bond, in addition to developing early literacy and supporting brain development. She described the *Sing With Me!* program as “a really great initiative. I think anything that reaches children that young and also introduces them to reading and the family can only be a positive thing, so I think it’s fantastic.” “Really successful and positive” was another comment made by the pre-kindergarten teacher in relation to supporting early literacy. The coordinator of the family day care centre explained the *Sing With Me!* program reinforced the message about the importance of early literacy, which was discussed during the first interview she had with new parents.

Supporting families who speak English as an additional language

The coordinator of the family day care centre who had a number of children who spoke English as an additional language had observed that the majority of children in her group did not attend the local library with their families and did not appear to have many books at home. She saw the *Sing With Me!* program as an important avenue for introducing families to the local library and Better Beginnings activities and an important means of engaging children and families in book sharing practices.

Promoting printed books and nursery rhymes

Two teachers from the pre-school and pre-kindergarten were very concerned about the impact of television, iPads, screens and technology on children. They believed Better Beginnings was an essential means to “keep that love of books alive in our children and keep people going to the library.” The pre-school teacher claimed that “not many kids now have books or access to books ... there’s no more touch and feel like the smell of a new book or pages.” She was trying to implement library sessions for three-year-olds at her centre because she believed that parents worked long hours and did not have time to access their local library.

The pre-school teacher was concerned children and their parents no longer knew nursery rhymes and that the school curriculum was losing its focus on rhyme. She was pleased the *Sing With Me!* program was re-dressing this imbalance. There was agreement amongst the participants that traditional nursery rhymes were being revived through *Sing With Me!* with the addition of an Aboriginal rhyme written especially for the *Sing With Me!* program in the Aboriginal Bibbulmun language “Ma-laj-ow Nurnu.” They felt that three generations now had nursery rhymes in common. In addition, the family day care coordinator was planning to arrange a playgroup activity with people from an incorporated aged care unit and their children to sing the nursery rhymes from the *Sing With Me!* program together.

Relationship between *Sing With Me!* and other Better Beginnings programs

The participants all knew about one or more of the Better Beginnings programs such as Rhyme Time and Story Time, and saw the link between the programs and library activities as an important part of the continuity of promoting early literacy. Some could remember being given the Birth to Three pack as new parents; others knew about the kindergarten pack. The family day care coordinator observed that children developed at different rates and the three packs (Birth to Three, *Sing With Me!* and Kindergarten) covered different developmental stages. The director of the community kindergarten saw the different parts of the program as regular reminders to parents that they should be spending a few minutes each day to support their children’s literacy development by singing, talking or reading. The pre-kindergarten teacher preferred the *Sing With Me!* pack to the kindergarten pack for her class because she felt it was more inclusive, involving all the children in the family regardless of their age or stage of development, whereas she believed the kindergarten pack was specifically for the older children.

The director of the community kindergarten described Better Beginnings as a “vital program that needs to continue to prevent literacy problems that have a domino effect. Children get left behind because they have not been exposed to text or literature.” The teacher from the early childhood centre appreciated the whole Better Beginnings program serving as regular prompts to remind parents to talk, sing and read

to their children. She claimed that once families had more than one child, if both parents worked and life became hectic, it was easy to forget to take a few minutes each day in the car, while preparing dinner or at bedtime, just to sing a song, say a rhyme or read a short story. The playgroup partner from the metropolitan area, also stressed the need to continue to promote the importance of early literacy to parents through the Better Beginnings programs. She argued that all parents wanted the “*best for their children*” but some needed more support than others. Better Beginnings was an ideal vehicle to repeat and reinforce the importance of early literacy.

Sustainability of the *Sing With Me!* program

Need for ongoing funding

The outreach participants highly valued the *Sing With Me!* program and hoped that the funding would continue to sustain it. Distributing *Sing With Me!* packs through the libraries, community health centres and outreach centres was regarded as central to sustainability. The family day care centre coordinator suggested the *Sing With Me!* program could be promoted in other groups in the community who may not be accessing Better Beginnings. She suggested for example, families playing in local parks, arguing that “*every child and family needed to be contacted.*”

Need for training

All the outreach participants requested *Sing With Me!* training from librarians, or as an alternative, information being made available to them on the Better Beginnings website to help them present the *Sing With Me!* program. Although they were confident in using the *Sing With Me!* resources, they considered the librarians to be the experts and felt they could learn more if they had greater access to the librarian. The teacher at the early childhood centre stated she would value knowing how other outreach centres were running the *Sing With Me!* program, suggesting examples and videos could be made available on the website. The director of the community kindergarten suggested a checklist could be provided to guide the outreach centre staff in their use of the pack to ensure “*I am delivering it as clearly and thoroughly as the librarian.*” She wanted additional tips to those contained in the book, and suggestions for promoting the *Sing With Me!* messages to parents/carers.

Feedback and evaluation

Overall the outreach participants had not received a great deal of feedback from parents/carers, possibly because they had not sought feedback and/or the parents/carers did not comment after the initial day of receipt. The pre-kindergarten teacher commented:

Families don't always give a lot of feedback. I think when they receive it, they're really surprised at the contents and that it's a really lovely pack with lots of things that they can go home and use. ... They just say they really enjoy it and it's a nice way to link home and Kindy. But apart from that, I haven't had any formal feedback. Just the initial "thanks very much" or "Wow!" sort of expressions.

The family day care centre coordinator observed: “*I don't actually get to see the benefits of what happens at home.*” She explained that she was not aware if the families in her centre were using the *Sing With Me!* resources, and noted that to obtain funding, data had to be collected to identify if and how families were using the resources and if it was having a positive impact on literacy. She also noted that continued funding was vital for sustainability.

Impact on library membership, participation and library practices

None of the participants could supply this information.

Factors that appeared to hinder the *Sing With Me!* distribution and message

Several participants reported that it was difficult to reinforce the *Sing With Me!* message as generally they only had contact with the parents/carers when they dropped their children off and collected them afterwards. It appeared that in some outreach centres parents/carers were not learning about the *Sing With Me!* program and library activities from the librarian or teachers and childcare staff directly, but indirectly and randomly, almost by chance.

The majority of outreach participants regarded the librarian as the *Sing With Me!* program expert, and saw their own key responsibility as being the distributors of the *Sing With Me!* packs. Although the teaching staff used the *Sing With Me!* resources, they did not feel they had the knowledge or opportunity to educate the parents/carers about the *Sing With Me!* program and needed more knowledge and skills to reach the competency level of the librarian. Additionally, the participants felt the librarians were under immense pressure in the many roles they undertook and had limited time to present the *Sing With Me!* program to families.

Some outreach participants reported being unsure or confused about which member of staff had received the *Sing With Me!* packs and who had or should have given them out. In addition, some participants felt it was their role to simply hand the packs to the families with little or no discussion about the contents or the link to the library.

The outreach participants had not kept records of families who had received the *Sing With Me!* packs, thus it was hard to determine who to give extra or surplus packs to. In addition, participants reported they did not record feedback and therefore had little evidence to support further funding.

Factors that appeared to support *Sing With Me!* distribution and message

The opportunity to observe the librarian presenting packs to families was identified by the teachers and the director of the community kindergarten as an important part of the successful distribution and consolidation of the *Sing With Me!* message. By observing the librarian, the outreach partners were able to explain the *Sing With Me!* program to parents/carers and incorporate it into their own programs. They also felt the positive response of the families and children on receiving the pack,

especially in relation to the children's picture book and the nursery rhymes, was an incentive to continue and extend their involvement in the *Sing With Me!* program.

Suggestions for improvement

When asked if they would change any of the contents of the *Sing With Me!* pack, a teacher summed up the general feeling that *"a lot of thought has gone into what goes into it ... More could be too much. Anything less could be taking something away."* Nonetheless, suggestions for additional items included more books and hands-on artefacts such as puppets, games, or ideas and instructions for making craft items using recyclable materials. A teacher thought bookmarks or pencils with the Better Beginnings logo could be included to promote *Sing With Me!* and remind parents to read the books or sing the songs on a daily basis. A list of websites dedicated to speech and child development was another idea. One teacher felt the pack was well designed and appropriate, *"I think there is enough flexibility in there so that different people can use the bits that they like."*

The coordinator from the family day care centre that included many students who spoke English as an additional language suggested the *Sing With Me!* pack should be translated into different languages and the Better Beginnings website

needed to include translations of the information about the *Sing With Me!* program into several languages. The coordinator was also concerned about the children in her group with special needs who required visual supports. She recommended the nursery rhymes on the *Sing With Me!* CD be made available in a PDF format or an app that parents could download from the Better Beginnings website to put on an iPad, iPhone or computer. Currently, the coordinator explained that she uses Google and YouTube on the Internet to find visuals for the nursery rhymes, but would have appreciated links on the Better Beginnings website. The pre-school teacher offered similar suggestions.

Several outreach participants, including the director from the remote child care centre suggested *"more emails with upcoming events"* would be very useful. In addition, the pre-school teacher suggested a parental feedback form could go in each bag, with a book prize as the incentive to return the form. Finally, the director of the community kindergarten suggested information about the *Sing With Me!* packs and library activities and *"training"* for parents should be delivered by the librarians as they were seen as the experts.



Discussion

This evaluation had two main aims. The first aim was to evaluate the implementation of the *Sing With Me!* program and the outcomes for stakeholders including library staff, parents/carers, and outreach partners. The second aim was to identify the relationship between a) libraries and outreach partners, b) libraries in the same community and c) *Sing With Me!* and other Better Beginnings programs. In this section the research questions that guided the evaluation will be used as a framework to present the key findings from the blended perspectives of librarians, parents/carers and outreach partners. In addition, key findings will be presented regarding factors that appeared to hinder and to support the *Sing With Me!* program distribution and message. This section finishes with key findings regarding suggestions for the future.

How is *Sing With Me!* implemented and sustained in each community?

A multi-pronged approach was used

Local librarians distributed *Sing With Me!* packs directly to parents/carers as well as indirectly through various outreach partners. In addition, the *Sing With Me!* program was delivered through literacy programs held by librarians at their local sites, and occasionally off-site in collaboration with outreach partners. The SLWA further supported the implementation and sustainment of the *Sing With Me!* program by providing local librarians information, training and support. The Better Beginnings website was another means by which local librarians, outreach partners and parents/carers could access information about the program.

Librarians received training

The provision of professional development through the online training modules meant local librarians were fully informed and equipped to implement the *Sing With Me!* program. This also meant increased confidence when talking with parents/carers and when running Rhyme Time and Story Time sessions.

Outreach partners used resources to enhance program delivery

Some outreach partners used the *Sing With Me!* resources to enhance their literacy and music programs. In addition, activities and additional resources were created to further enhance delivery of the *Sing With Me!* program. This included laminating the pages in the *Sing With Me!* nursery rhyme booklet to preserve them, and using craft materials to make musical instruments, bookmarks and story characters.

Outreach partners used local librarians as a resource for furthering their knowledge about and confidence in preparing and presenting early literacy sessions. This was mainly done through observing the delivery of Story Time and Rhyme Time and was noted to increase children's engagement.

The level of involvement varied widely across outreach partners

The nature of the outreach partner organisation, the roles of the individual members within those organisations, and their access to their local librarians determined their level of involvement in the *Sing With Me!* program. All the outreach partners learned about the *Sing With Me!* initiative from their local librarians and were eager to become involved in the delivery and implementation of the program. The outreach members observed librarians distributing the *Sing With Me!* packs directly to the children during Story Time or Rhyme Time either at their location or at the local library. At times, distribution involved the assistance of the outreach partners, with the exception of playgroups who generally handed the packs to parents/carers as a gift from their local library.

Outreach partners were advocates of the *Sing With Me!* program

Outreach partners reported sharing information about the *Sing With Me!* program and other Better Beginnings programs within their collegial networks. In this way, the potential of the *Sing With Me!* program to support early literacy was seen to extend beyond their own particular centres. Those outreach partners with a large number of staff or with links to other organisations, (such as schools) liaised with other early childhood educators to promote the *Sing With Me!* program.

What is the relationship between libraries and outreach partners and libraries delivering *Sing With Me!* in the same community?

Relationships between local librarians and outreach partners were reciprocal, positive and valued

The local librarians recognised their responsibility for supplying outreach partners with sufficient *Sing With Me!* packs and providing information about library services, particularly with regard to early literacy programs. In return, the outreach partners distributed the packs, incorporated elements of the *Sing With Me!* program in their own programs, and directed parents/carers to their local library.

Relationships between local librarians and outreach partners were positive and valued. This was evidenced by personal contact and visitation. Personal contact was maintained by phone and email. Outreach partners visited the library with the children in their care and received visits from the librarians to present Story Time or Rhyme Time. The extent of the contact was determined by a number of factors. For the local librarians frequency of contact varied from three times a week to once every three months depending on availability of time and staff. For the outreach partners contact was dependent on the level of staffing, child/adult ratio, the distance to the library and availability of time.

The librarians valued the support from outreach partners, especially with broadening the reach of the *Sing With Me!* pack distribution. Outreach partners welcomed the support they received from the local librarians to promote early literacy, particularly regarding books recommended for children and strategies for sharing stories and songs.

Outreach partners indicated a desire for more contact with their local librarians in order to strengthen their relationship. Ongoing contact between outreach partners and local librarians was identified as necessary for enhancing their professional relationship and effectively implementing the *Sing With Me!* program.

Liaisons between librarians within the same community were developing

Some local librarians reported the development of the relationship that was taking place with other libraries within their community. These liaisons were seen as valuable from a functional point of view, that is, ensuring the efficient delivery of materials, and from a professional enrichment point of view as opportunities were created for librarians to share information, ideas and experience.

What are the participants' and stakeholders' perceptions of the design and implementation of *Sing With Me!*?

The *Sing With Me!* resources were considered engaging and appropriate for both children and their families

The local librarians considered every resource contained within the *Sing With Me!* pack to be valuable. Each item was identified as “useful” with most rated “extremely useful” and “very useful”. The relatability of the resources was identified as a strength, in particular the representation of people and cultures within the nursery rhyme booklet and the Australian flavour evident in the children’s picture book. Overall, librarians considered the pack to be highly effective for engaging families in early literacy, including those for whom English is an additional language.

Feedback received from parents/carers about the *Sing With Me!* pack was highly favourable. They were appreciative of receiving a high quality, free resource and while each item in the pack was valued, the Australian children’s picture book and the nursery rhyme CD proved most popular. The *Sing With Me!* pack helped to inform and motivate parents/carers regarding their literacy practices and for some, affirmed what they were already doing. Additionally, the resources had the effect of boosting the confidence of parents/carers, particularly fathers, to sing with their children.

Overall the outreach partners felt the contents of the *Sing With Me!* pack were well designed and engaged children and their parents/carers in early literacy activities. The outreach partners liked the variety of resources and the emphasis placed on sharing books and singing nursery rhymes.

The Better Beginnings website was considered valuable

The information on the Better Beginnings website was considered valuable by the librarians and the outreach partners. Librarians reported liking and using the website, and outreach partners said information about early literacy had been accessed and used in planning programs, purchasing books and sending information home to parents/carers.

What are the outcomes of *Sing With Me!* for participants and stakeholders?

Promoting early literacy and a love of literature

Most parents/carers indicated the *Sing With Me!* resources had improved their understanding of the importance of singing with and reading to their children. In addition, many were influenced to engage their children in literacy activities more frequently and to make greater use of their local library. An added outcome was the perceived benefit for children who needed extra assistance with their language development.

The outreach partners believed the *Sing With Me!* program promoted early literacy and provided strategies and resources to help parents/carers nurture in their children a love of literature. This was seen to extend to families who spoke English as an additional language. The promotion of printed books and nursery rhymes in an increasingly digital world was commended.

Forging community relationships

The interactions around *Sing With Me!* helped to forge connections between the local librarians, the parents/carers and the outreach centres. Local librarians came to know parents/carers and their children who regularly attended library sessions. They also connected with parents at information talks. Local librarians and outreach partners developed supportive relationships through the delivery of the packs, and running the literacy activities. The outreach partners felt the program assisted them in making a connection with families through promoting literacy. Parents/carers were encouraged to attend library sessions with their children where they met and got to know other parents/carers with their children.

Engagement with library-led literacy activities

Parents/carers who attended the library literacy activities with their children tended to become fully engaged in the activities. The adults joined in with the songs and rhymes and encouraged their children to do as well. Even if children were too young to join in with the songs and rhymes they were observed moving and dancing, shaking rattles, mimicking actions and listening while stories were read.

What is the impact of *Sing With Me!* on library membership, participation and library practices?

Link strengthened between families and the local library

Even though librarians were unable to discern if library memberships amongst families had increased as a result of the *Sing With Me!* program, they were able to confirm increased attendance at library sessions (particularly Rhyme Time and Story Time).

Parents/carers reported only a minor shift in regard to library membership with many saying they already had library membership. For some, *Sing With Me!* had enriched their library involvement with regular visits to the library being prioritised.

The outreach partners felt the *Sing With Me!* program created a significant link between families and their local library. For some parents/carers, hearing about the *Sing With Me!* program became their first introduction to their local library; for others it was a reminder of the activities and resources on offer at their local library.

Modifications made to library resources/spaces

In some instances, librarians modified library resources and spaces in response to the *Sing With Me!* program. For example, early literacy resources such as alphabet games and magnetic letters were purchased and set up in a designated area for parents and children to play together. Another two libraries had modified their junior area to more closely align the activities held there with the *Sing With Me!* program.

What is the relationship between *Sing With Me!* and other Better Beginnings programs?

The *Sing With Me!* program bridges the gap between existing Better Beginnings programs

A gap was identified between the first Better Beginnings yellow bag given to babies, and the green reading pack given to kindergarten children. The value of *Sing With Me!* was recognised in bridging this gap. The provision of *Sing With Me!* as an additional resource was seen as essential to encourage and support parents/carers during the critical period of early language development.

Factors that appeared to hinder the *Sing With Me!* program distribution and message

Limitations observed by librarians

Of the few hindrances identified, these included the need for more time and more staff training to promote the program, the lack of marketing materials, budget restrictions and confusion regarding who was eligible for the *Sing With Me!* pack.

Limited opportunity for outreach partners to promote the *Sing With Me!* program to parents/carers

Some outreach partners found it difficult to find time to promote the *Sing With Me!* program to parents/carers. They indicated that parents/carers were generally not present when the *Sing With Me!* pack was being distributed to the children. This difficulty was compounded for some outreach partners by a lack of knowledge regarding whose responsibility it was to distribute the pack and talk about it, and a lack of documentation about who had received a *Sing With Me!* pack.

Factors that appeared to support the *Sing With Me!* program distribution and message

Flexible delivery model

The *Sing With Me!* program used a flexible delivery model. This allowed local librarians to decide the extent of their commitment depending on issues such as staffing, budget, time availability, and connections in the local community. Furthermore, the delivery schedule was customised to meet individual needs.

Support offered by the Better Beginnings team at the State Library

The support offered by the Better Beginnings State Library team was both practical and efficient. They helped local librarians to market the *Sing With Me!* program, and to prepare and distribute packs. They ensured regular communication and provided rapid responses when requests for help were made.

Training

The training received by the local librarians enabled them to become “experts” in delivering the packs and activities and in demonstrating early literacy strategies to parents/carers and outreach partners.

A high-quality, attractive, free product with a recognisable brand

The high-quality and attractiveness of the *Sing With Me!* pack made distribution easy. Adults and children were eager to receive their packs and to use the contents. The strong sponsorship ensured the packs were provided free of charge. Bringing *Sing With Me!* under the banner of Better Beginnings meant it became part of a recognisable brand with consistent messaging.

Strengthening community links

Engaging with outreach partners and local community events was recognised as supporting the *Sing With Me!* distribution and message. Offering activities in the library that made library visits meaningful (such as Rhyme Time) was another factor.

Outreach partners communicating directly with parents/carers

Despite the challenges outreach partners faced in promoting the *Sing With Me!* program, some outreach partners used additional means to communicate directly with parents/carers. For example sending a note to families explaining the nature and content of the *Sing With Me!* packs and placing flyers on the noticeboard. Another strategy was to include the words to the songs featured in the *Sing With Me!* program in the newsletters sent to families.

Suggestions for the future

Changes to the *Sing With Me!* resources

Suggestions were made regarding making changes to the *Sing With Me!* pack and the Better Beginnings website. It was thought additional items could be included, such as more books, bookmarks, pencils with the Better Beginnings logo, a feedback form for parents/carers and hands-on artefacts such as puppets, games, a jigsaw puzzle, and ideas and instructions for making craft items using recyclable materials. Possible modifications to the magnet included having all the words to a nursery rhyme on the magnets, and turning the magnet into a sequencing activity. Suggested changes to the Better Beginnings website included directing users to related, online resources and ensuring the training resources were easier to find. It was also suggested the resources in the pack and information about the *Sing With Me!* program on the Better Beginnings website could be documented in various languages in addition to English.

A further suggestion was made for an app to be developed for users to download the nursery rhymes and it could include visuals to go with the audio.

Ongoing training

Local librarians would benefit from ongoing training. In particular, with the provision of guidelines for implementing the *Sing With Me!* program to different sized groups and different demographics.

There was interest amongst some outreach partners to receive training in how to deliver the *Sing With Me!* program and how to pass on the program messages to parents.

Further evaluation

The number of participants who provided feedback in this evaluation was less than initially hoped for due to a couple of uncontrolled factors. First, there was a delay in printing the Australian children’s picture book which resulted in a delay in distributing the *Sing With Me!* packs to local librarians, families and outreach partners. This effectively narrowed the window for the data collection phase. Second, there was no opportunity this time around to include the child health nurses in the outreach partner group of participants. It is anticipated their input would provide additional rich detail. For these reasons it would be worthwhile engaging in further evaluation of the program in the future.

Conclusions and recommendations

This research builds on the previous Better Beginnings 0-3 years evaluation, informing the development of *Sing With Me!* and its relationship with existing programs.

This evaluation contributes to new knowledge in the following ways:

1. An understanding of the implementation and impact of the program from the perspective of each group of participants;
2. An understanding of the impact of the program on library membership, participation and library practices; and,
3. Mapping the relationships between libraries and between libraries and outreach partners within the same community.

This evaluation shows *Sing With Me!* is an early literacy program that successfully delivers the message to parents/carers of the importance of talking, sharing books and singing with their children every day. There was evidence of increased early literacy activities and increased parent/carer awareness of the importance of early literacy. Further, the crucial role played by local libraries was evidenced, particularly in connecting with families and outreach partners and encouraging library engagement.

Key to the success of the program were the high-quality resources, the training and commitment of the librarians and the interagency collaboration between librarians, families and community outreach partners. The continued success of the *Sing With Me!* program depends upon a number of vital elements including ongoing funding, ongoing training for staff involved and ongoing feedback from participants.

On the basis of the research evidence and in order to build on the early success of *Sing With Me!* the following six recommendations are made:

1. Continued funding to keep producing high-quality resources
2. Consideration of adding items to the *Sing With Me!* pack
3. Further development of the Better Beginnings website to include more information about *Sing With Me!* and additional resources for parents/carers
4. Ongoing training for local librarians with the possibility of extending training to outreach partners
5. Ongoing contact between local librarians and outreach partners
6. Continued evaluation of the *Sing With Me!* program and resources to include feedback from child health nurses

The *Sing With Me!* program presents a unique opportunity to bridge a gap between the existing Better Beginnings resources in a way that will reinforce to parents and carers the importance of early literacy activities with young children. Through the gift of a set of high-quality resources, families are supported by their local libraries to talk, read and sing with their children each and every day. This sentiment is echoed in the words of one mother who said: *“I do sing and read with my child but sometimes when I get busy I forget to make time. The resources and the library programs help me to just make it part of our day and routines.”*

And the final words of this report are from a father who described the way in which *Sing With Me!* revolutionised his approach:

As a Dad I do the bedtime story every night but I've never sung rhymes with my daughter. I don't like singing and feel like a dog. But seeing how much she enjoyed it we now sing songs in the car and sometimes make up our own words.

Contact ECU by
phone on **134 ECU (134 328)**

Email us at **enquiries@ecu.edu.au**

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