



Promising Practice Profiles

Project title	HIPPY (Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters), Burnie
Project practice	HIPPY is a home-based early childhood enrichment program for pre-school children that builds upon parental strengths so they can provide their child with necessary skills and confidence to begin school with a positive attitude towards learning.
Project undertaken by	Circular Head Rural Health Services, Smithton (Tasmania)
Start date	October 2006
Focal areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting families and parents • Early learning and care • Healthy young families
Program	Communities for Children (CfC)
Issue	<p>HIPPY works with parents who find it difficult to engage with mainstream services. These parents are socially, educationally, and financially disadvantaged and their lives are frequently shrouded in trauma. They tend to be very mobile. They are therefore easily distracted and, because of other pressing priorities, find it difficult to honour commitments to programs that may otherwise be helpful in addressing their specific disadvantages. Consequently they also find many parenting tasks particularly challenging and require support to better engage with their children. They need increased self-confidence in their own ability to provide a nurturing environment that equips their children for the social and academic challenges of the early years at school.</p> <p>Burnie—an industrial city on the north-west coast of Tasmania—has a relatively high proportion of socio-economically disadvantaged people, many of whom are single parents. The Burnie community is acknowledged as one of the more disadvantaged regions in Australia. The Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA), ranks parts of Burnie in the lowest decile of advantage. Research conducted for the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) shows that on a number of measures, significant parts of the Burnie community are very disadvantaged (AEDI National Support Centre, 2007). These findings are supported by national studies that show Burnie’s relatively high dependence on social welfare payments (National Economics and Australian Local Government Association, 2004, 2005). HIPPY Burnie works with some of the most disadvantaged parents within the community.</p>
Program context	HIPPY (Home Interaction with Parents of Preschool Youngsters) is a 2-year, home-based, early childhood enrichment program for preschool children that targets communities who have experienced various forms of social disadvantage. It provides intensive education and support to parents with children up to 5 years of age, using tutors that work with both parents and children within their homes. The tutors are chosen from participating families in the program and hence provide peer support. The program enables parents to spend more time with their children in activities that enhance cognitive development, social/emotional development, stimulate positive parent/child interactions, and empower parents to view themselves as primary educators of their children. Extensive resource material is provided as part of the process.

The tutors are parents who have undergone a training program. They receive ongoing supervision and support provided by the local HIPPY coordinator.

The program operates internationally in the USA, Germany, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and South Africa. In Australia, the Brotherhood of St Laurence has auspiced the program since 1998, with programs operating in New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania (HIPPY Australia 2008).

Practice description

Each HIPPY program, as typified by the Burnie program, aims to:

- increase school readiness;
- increase parent confidence and engagement; and
- provide employment and training.

Increased school readiness:

- Parents are visited at home at least once a fortnight to be shown, via role play and demonstration, various reading activities/games that they can do with their children,
- At the individual home visits and monthly group meetings (which are run with professionals), parents are provided with weekly feedback, discussion opportunities, and child development information.
- Families are provided sequentially with nine picture storybooks and 30 weekly activity packs, along with developmental activities, games and exercises.
- Parents are shown how to set up regular patterns of positive engagement with their children (15 minutes per day, 5 days per week) and taught positive reinforcement skills.

Increase parent confidence and engagement:

- Speakers from the community, as well as visits to local services are organised (e.g., local teachers, librarian, local health nurse, dietician as per request and perceived local need).
- Workshops and non-formal training provide practical ideas relating to child development, positive parenting, art experiences, healthy eating, dental hygiene, stress management and women's health.
- Accredited training for parents up to Certificate IV in Community Services is offered.
- Tutors from within the parents' community and subculture are employed to support their learning.

Employment and training:

- Home tutors are paid to deliver the program to families.
- Home tutors are provided with pre-employment training followed by weekly training, feedback, mentoring, and ongoing support from a qualified coordinator.
- In consultation with the coordinator, home tutors set their own appointment times, visiting families within their own community as a peer support, working between 15 and 20 hours per week.
- Certificate IV and Diploma level training in Community Services (Protective Care) is provided with support and supervision.

Other non-accredited training is provided. This includes: child-inclusive dispute resolution; understanding abuse and trauma; family partnership training; facilitating skills; and building resilience in children.

Key ingredients

A number of factors contribute to the effectiveness of HIPPY. The key ingredients from the Burnie site include:

- coordinator leadership;
- one-to-one tutor and parent interaction;
- tutors drawn from the HIPPY parent group;
- parent group meetings; and
- building on CfC networks.

Coordinator leadership

The leadership provided by the HIPPY coordinator is very significant. A HIPPY coordinator recruits families to the program by gaining their confidence. Coordinators help parents/caregivers believe in themselves as their child's first teacher in order to gain their commitment to the program. Coordinators train and motivate home tutors to deliver the program to parents in an enthusiastic, professional manner. Home tutors are supported by the coordinator to empathise with parents while remaining detached from the family's problems. Any issues the home tutor cannot manage are referred to the Coordinator.

In the case of HIPPY Burnie, the coordinator supports the program by:

a) drawing in additional resources for the program

Local CfC community partners provide additional resources offered to families. These include: "Let's Read" program books and backpacks for borrowing; the "Eat Right, Grow Bright" educator visits to parent group meetings (providing hands on demonstrations of healthy eating options); "APW Training"—units towards Cert III, IV, in Community Service training offered to HIPPY parents; "Mobile Resource Van"—information on events and services available to residents of Burnie; and the Teddy Bear hospital and Check-up where the children come along with their teddy or doll.

Participants noted early in the program their dislike for lecture-style meetings. Information therefore is provided in a fun and interactive manner. For example, one activity was a Pyjama Party where all children attend in pyjamas. The activity included bedtime stories (with another Burnie CfC partner—"Let's Read"), hot chocolate (with marshmallows), and teddy bear biscuits. This session also included a little dental hygiene information. Facilitators talked to the children about cleaning their teeth after eating—especially after eating sweets—before going to bed. A toothbrush set was offered as a lucky door prize, and all families received flyers and pamphlets about the children's first visit to the dentist, along with foods to keep teeth healthy.

Another successful group meeting utilised the Teddy Bear Hospital where the children came along with their teddy or doll. Communities for Children Community Partner "Bernie on Wheels" (a mobile family resource van) attended. The coordinator had all the instruments for the children to check their toy's ears, heart, etc. They were given bandages and bandaids to treat any injuries. They then received a certificate to say their teddy or doll (by name) had been checked and found to be in good health. Child safety information was included in this session.

The Coordinator attends networking opportunities, including a North West Service Providers forum (monthly) to promote involvement in—and information about—other services available in the area. Contacts made here create opportunities for enhancing "enrichment segments" of fortnightly HIPPY parent group meetings (e.g., the women's health educator, the library, counselling services, parenting information, dental services and men's support).

b) providing focus for reflective practice and learning among tutors

This is done in a variety of mainly informal ways through regular (weekly) feedback meetings, and by the Coordinator joining with tutors in workshops and professional development opportunities. These training/information sessions are mainly reactive to what is available in the area. These sessions included: CfC partner "Family Transitions" with Child Inclusive Practice; Playgroup Tasmania's "The Secret of Happy Children with Steve Biddulph"; and a "Bringing up Great Kids" seminar hosted by the Australian Childhood Foundation. A part of the coordinator's role is to ensure that the tutors are adequately prepared for issues that arise, and that there is an opportunity to debrief and consider what has been learned in the process of home visits. This is done as part of the tutors' weekly training.

c) being a central point of contact helping service providers connect with clients

At Burnie, the coordinator liaises with schools, speech therapists and other professional services regarding children in the program. In some cases, the

coordinator refers families on to service providers in the area. For example, in one case, a child was suspected by the coordinator as having speech difficulties. While it is not the role of the coordinator to refer parents to professionals for support, she was able to support the parent in such a way as to facilitate a connection between a school-based speech therapist and the child, while maintaining the confidence and trust of the parent. This would not have happened had it not been for the strong relationship that had been built between the parent and the coordinator and her network of contacts.

One to one tutor and parent interaction

In the early phase of the program parents are naturally wary, vulnerable, and to some extent unsure about their own ability to fulfil the requirements of the program in terms of its activities. Tutors are able to reassure parents and slowly build their confidence and self-esteem in the non-threatening environment of the parents' homes.

Home tutors are parents who are doing the HIPPY program with their own child. They are from the same socio-economic background as the parents they are tutoring. They understand what it's like in their world and the constraints/obstacles they face every day. This understanding gives them credibility with the parents and the ability to empathise with them. The home tutors will draw on their own life experiences when encouraging families through problems. A HIPPY Burnie home tutor may take additional resources (such as a child's favourite character colour-in or dot-to-dot) to the family to engage a younger child, and therefore free some of the mother's attention to concentrate on the week's activity pack that is delivered that day.

Home tutors encourage parents to join the group of other HIPPY parents as they visit and engage with other activities in the area. These include "National Simultaneous Story time" at the Burnie library, and the "Communities for Children: Lets Read" launch (a walk through the main street, followed by reading at the beach).

Tutors also receive training in delivery of the curriculum as well as dealing with issues that need referral to the coordinator or an external service provider. These issues are identified by the tutors themselves and are therefore directly relevant to their community context as opposed to being generic or predetermined by HIPPY.

Tutors drawn from the HIPPY parent group

An intentional part of the design of the program is the employment of parents who are also using HIPPY with their own child(ren). This aids the process of building trust and rapport between tutors and other parents. It also gives the tutors the ability to relate the resources they are using to the lives and experiences of other parents.

Home tutors are often in a "turn around" phase of their life. This may, for example, involve entering or returning to the paid work force, or getting their life together after relationship breakdowns etc. HIPPY is an opportunity to do this in a supported, flexible environment.

Parent group meetings

Parents, children, home tutors and the coordinator meet fortnightly for parent group meetings. At this 2-hour meeting the following week's curriculum is role played for an hour. The meeting also includes an hourly enrichment segment. The topics for this segment are the result of a survey conducted by the coordinator to determine interests of families. To maintain the interest of families and particularly children, the activities are usually very "hands on" while offering valuable information to parents (sometimes with a guest speaker). These activities include: cooking (healthy options—including dental hygiene information), teddy bear hospital (with children's safety hints), and craft (while mums learn a little about women's health). As such the topics are grounded directly in the needs of the subculture of these parents.

Group meetings provide an opportunity for parents to discuss issues about the children and learn together in a mutually supportive environment. The meetings are also a forum for introducing information about available community services.

The group meetings provide a pathway towards creating friendships and decreasing the sense of isolation felt by many families in disadvantaged environments.

Building on CfC networks

While HIPPY is an international program, local coordinators are able to adapt the form of delivery to suit the parent group they work with. In the case of Burnie HIPPY, the coordinator has drawn on the collective resources of other local CfC activities to build on the strengths of the core elements of the program. For example, HIPPY parents have been engaged in CfC sponsored nutrition programs, a mobile family resource van, and a "Let's Read" program. The networks generated by CfC are very important for a number of reasons: (a) other community partners are able to help the coordinator identify parents who may benefit from HIPPY, (b) the activities offered by CfC in Burnie provide useful connections to a wider array of community services than would normally be available; and c) other community partners have benefited from access to HIPPY program participants.

At monthly CfC meetings, community partners make contact and share information about their program with others. Discussions around how each program works and common links result in support for each other's programs. In one instance the HIPPY coordinator was able to link in with CfC community partner Mobile resource van to promote the program in down-town Burnie. The resource van operator (coordinator/facilitator) had gained the confidence of many target group families by parking the van in an accessible position in Burnie. This meant that the HIPPY coordinator was able to make contact with these "hard to reach" people. They were then able to promote the program and recruit families for a new year because of the base work done by CfC community partner in advance.

An enrichment segment of parent group meeting included CfC Community Partner, "Let's Read". Children came dressed in pyjamas. The "Let's Read" coordinator modelled reading to the children, then gave each parent a book to read with their own child. This was further reinforcement of the need to read stories in an animated and engaging manner to children. With everyone doing it in this fashion, the more reserved and shy parents from HIPPY were a little more confident.

Research base

Within Australia, evaluation of HIPPY programs conducted during the period 1998 to 2007 has shown a number of outcomes that follow from the experience of HIPPY participants. Dean et al. (2007), in a review of Australian HIPPY research point to the following findings from multiple evaluation studies conducted in a variety of contexts. They suggest that "relationships form the core of HIPPY". This means that the relationships and networks formed as a result of engaging in HIPPY, support increasing attachment of participants within their community. They also report increasing parent-child attachment as a result of participation in the program. Australian longitudinal studies reviewed by Dean et al. show that HIPPY has a significant impact on school readiness for disadvantaged children. It also produced significantly improved socio-emotional development outcomes.

The evaluations show that parents report increased self-confidence in their own parenting abilities; they feel a greater sense of closeness with their child(ren) and 'an expansion of relationships with others in the surrounding community' (Dean et al., 2007, p.14). Tutors also reported increased confidence and knowledge, with many taking steps toward further education. Stanley (2007), in pre-empting a further Australian national evaluation of HIPPY notes that:

Parents' skills and confidence as their child's first teacher are developed through these home visits and through gatherings with other parents. The intensive, extended contact with parents is an essential component in facilitating long-term development in these families.

Many of these findings are supported by a series of theses relating to HIPPY research reviewed by Victoria University (2007), and are echoed by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, which acts as an umbrella organisation for HIPPY in Australia (Gilley 2003; Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2007). International

studies and evaluations (LeMare & Audet 2003; Barlow et al., 2007) draw similar conclusions, though there is some research that suggests that home-based programs such as HIPPY would be more effective if a “centre-based” or institutional component was added to the program (Blok et al., 2005).

While it is fair to say that the literature relating to the specific outcomes of HIPPY in Australia is still emerging, there is considerable international support for many of the principles underpinning HIPPY methodology (e.g., OECD, 2006; UNESCO, 2006). The need for such programs to address factors impacting on outcomes for disadvantaged families and children is also supported by national and international literature (e.g., Centre for Community Child Health and The Smith Family, 2004; The Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee, 2004). Notable international reports such as the OECD’s *Well-being of the Nations* (OECD, 2001) and *PISA* (OECD, 2003, 2004) highlight the significance and value of early interventions that support parents and young children—particularly those from less advantaged backgrounds.

Outcomes

HIPPY Burnie has observed the following outcomes from its program in 2007:

- increased self-esteem and self-confidence of parents;
- improved early learning outcomes of children; and
- improved community engagement of families.

These outcomes are discussed in more detail in the following section.

Evidence of outcomes

HIPPY Burnie uses a variety of data collection instruments to assess the above outcomes. These are discussed below.

Journal records

Any verbal feedback good news stories observations made at home visits or parent group meetings are recorded in a journal. Analysis of these records summarise the perceptions, observations, and interactions of the parents and children as they engage in the activities.

Family interview and review

Each family is interviewed at the commencement of the program and their expectations noted. Their expectations and outcomes (including goals and the extent to which they were achieved) are reviewed half way through the program and again at the completion. The analysis of the interview data shows development of each family’s capacity and progress over the duration of the program. It also provides an understanding of the factors that contribute to the parent’s confidence and skills. The review sheet identifies that all parents recognised the value of the program and benefits for their children.

Weekly feedback sheets and sample work from the home tutor

All families return weekly feedback sheets on that week’s activity pack. This includes comments on the activities especially around enjoyment and difficulties, with a section for the home tutor to record their observations and general comments. The children also note their comments on the weeks work by colouring either a happy or a sad face (or something in between). A sample of the child’s work is collected to be bound and presented at graduation. Analysis of data from this tool is used to provide specific information on changes/development of family’s resources. It also provides a longitudinal assessment of the changes in children’s perceptions, confidence and self-esteem over the duration of the program.

Group meeting record

A comprehensive record of all family members attending parent group meetings is kept. By tracking the attendance of parents, children, and other family members to these meetings, changes in parent-child relationships and their time spent interacting together are also observed.

Analysis of the data gathered utilising the above methods provided evidence of achievement of the identified outcomes. This evidence is presented below.

Increased self-esteem and self-confidence of parents

The formal review processes (interviews and reviews) used at the beginning, middle, and end of the program are used to identify changes that occur in terms of confidence and self-esteem. Reported changes include that parents are empowered to view themselves as the primary educators of their children. Parents are supported in processes of engagement with their peers, the service providers that come into the groups, and organisations and service providers that are outside their usual sphere of networks. For example, parents who had never visited a library are encouraged to do so within the security of the group and ultimately independently of the group.

Parents are also encouraged to participate in learning activities themselves, initially within the group but eventually on their own in a more formal setting. HIPPY Burnie publishes a monthly newsletter with local events and activities listed. One event was "Simultaneous Reading" at the library. Follow up with the librarian reported that two HIPPY families attended during that week. Original HIPPY interviews established that none of the families attended activities at the library. As they build confidence, parents also begin to engage with teachers, principals and health professionals. For instance, 80% of the parents who were interviewed mid-way through the program reported that being involved with HIPPY as their child's first teacher gave parents confidence to become involved in their child's school.

Also, because the professional first comes to them in their own environment, parents have increased confidence to ask questions and follow up on health and learning issues relating to themselves and their children. Eighty percent (80%) of the parents who were interviewed mid-way reported better interaction with their child and in their own ability and skills to teach them. The program requires the parent to formally interact with their child in a positive way. Some parents reported improvement in their parenting skills and ability to engage their child/ren (also with siblings). Twenty percent (20%) of parents interviewed said they hadn't noticed any changes. They reported enjoying and valuing the positive interaction time with their child, but hadn't noticed any changes (negative or positive).

It is interesting to note that the mid-term goal review saw a 40% decline in the number of parents thinking that forming social connections were a priority. We believe that this is because parents at this stage had formed social connections and were now more confident in this area, where previously they were not.

Coordinator and home tutors discuss parent group meetings, attendance, engagement with enrichment topic, and parental engagement with children. These observations and any changes are noted in journal records. On a case-by-case basis it is evident from these qualitative observations that parents' confidence and engagement progressively develop through the life of the program.

Improved early learning outcomes of children

The weekly feedback sheets and sample work help identify the progressive change in learning outcomes of children. They are also used in review processes to reinforce to parents the significance of changes that are occurring as a result of the program. Consistent with other HIPPY programs, the project manager at Burnie has observed improved cognitive development, as well as socialisation and academic performance of children following involvement in HIPPY activities. Weekly activities that develop in complexity as the program progresses are included in the curriculum. Tutors support parents through role plays to engage with their children in these regular activities. Children's language development is improved by activities that include listening to stories, telling and retelling stories, and describing imaginary situations. The children's sample work reflects many of the language development changes that occur.

The mid-way interviews with parents shows that all parents attending the program reported benefits to their children, with the most significant benefit identified as the extended concentration span, cognitive development and their child's preparedness for school. Some parents reported unexpected outcomes such as their child's improvement in social skills and behavioural improvements.

Analysis of the Goal Sheet Review confirms that all parents had observed learning benefits for their children. In particular, parents noted that children's

preparedness for school, cognitive development, and concentration span had all improved. These benefits are confirmed by weekly feedback forms where children and parents provide feedback of each week's work.

Improved community engagement of families

HIPPY helps break down social isolation; firstly building confidence through one to one home visits and relationships formed with the home tutor, and then by engaging parents in a group meeting. Next the group goes out to an unfamiliar community location. An example of this is when CfC partner "Let's Read", held a street walk and event in the park to launch their program. Four HIPPY families attended this walk through the streets of Burnie carrying a nursery rhyme banner.

Some parents have gone on to independently study in formal and non-formal settings. For example, six of the 2007 HIPPY cohort worked towards units in either Certificate III or IV in Community Services (Protective Care). Approximately five others have started volunteering in community organisations and their children's schools. The significance of these outcomes for this group of previously disengaged parents is noteworthy. The case study prepared as part of an evaluation report for the training organisation (McDonald & Guenther, 2007), reflects the observations of the trainer as he interacted with HIPPY participants and demonstrates some of these outcomes.

The trainer observed that:

This [training] too contributed to the social capital of those involved. Or more accurately, a bedding down of the change process as individual participants spoke of their capacity to transfer the skills they were developing into other group contexts, rather than viewing those skills as unique to their primary group. It provided practice for the application of skills into other community groups/activities, that participants were involved with.

This has further been supported by a local evaluation that found positive findings particularly with regard to social capital, noting that:

... there are now twenty plus people trained and accredited with the capacity and confidence to engage in community projects and activities, knowing they will do no harm, potentially enabling other developments like supported playgroups, social hubs, community parenting, support to grandparents, etc. etc. Their encouragement and support for others to take up similar opportunities will have a long lasting impact. (From local evaluation report prepared by Gordon McDonald (APW Training) and John Guenther (Cat Conatus), November 2007)

<p>Policy analysis</p>	<p>The project is a positive example of a place-based early intervention and prevention approach to child protection and development. It offers a successful model of practice for "hard-to-reach" families, providing both in-home and community based activities to foster parents' skills to support child development. The program utilises parent-tutors as a mechanism to engage disadvantaged families. Findings from this program echo findings from HIPPY programs both within Australia and internationally.</p>
<p>Project evaluations</p>	<p>This PPP has been prepared on the basis of the evaluation findings conducted by the local evaluator and program manager of the local program run within the Burnie CfC site. An evaluation report (November 2007) has been prepared by Gordon McDonald (APW Training) and John Guenther (Cat Conatus).</p>
<p>Project related publications</p>	

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