KYABRA LIMITED HOURS CHILD CARE EVALUATION

BACKGROUND
Kyabra community association have run a limited hours child care centre for many years. The purpose of this evaluation was to determine to what extent attending children showed evidence of growth in important developmental outcomes in the short term (vocabulary and self-regulation); and to explore parent perceptions about the benefits of attending the centre. The evaluation also explored past parent perceptions about the role of centre attendance in relation to school transition for children, and benefits for families.

AIMS
The evaluation focused on three key research questions:

1) Is childcare participation associated with improvements in child development in a range of domains over a four month period?
2) What are parents’ perceptions about the role of childcare attendance in supporting parenting?
3) What are parents’ perceptions about the role of childcare attendance at this centre in relation to preparing children for school transition?

KEY FINDINGS

THE CENTRE
- Service is welcoming of diversity.
- Service builds trusting partnerships through open communication and collaborative decision making.
- Service provides holistic care by understanding the whole child and their connections with their family.
- Kyabra is a learning place, a place where parents build parental capacity and learn how to assist their children with transitions such as going to school.
- Sense of community created through connections for families and children which transcends generations and socio-economic status.
- Connections included links with other family members and parenting services provided including parenting capacity training and playgroup.
- The community volunteers and local high school students were strongly valued by past and present families.

"Not Clinical. Has Soul"

"Like it's a community"
Key Findings Cont...

CHILDREN

- At the group level there were no significant improvements over time in any of the developmental measures.
- At the individual child level there were substantial gains for some children in expressive vocabulary and self-regulation skills. Children who showed the most improvements were those who were identified as at-risk by early measures (using comparisons with Australian norms). These are important factors which influence school transition.
- Individual growth trajectories showed the equivalent of one to two years growth through the testing period for children who were initially at risk.
- A number of children moved from the at-risk range in relation to self-regulation and behavioural skills, to the normative range for Australian children in their age group.

DONALD’S STORY

Donald a 47-month-old boy from a non-English background, has attended Kyabra for approximately six months, two days a week. His grandmother commented she had not used any other services as he was “too naughty”. Her perception of Donald’s behaviour was reflected in the teacher report which showed Donald had slightly high externalizing behaviours, was low on sociability, low on behavioural self-regulation and very low on prosocial skills. Donald was in the bottom 25th percentile of expressive vocabulary scores. Over the testing period, Donald showed substantial improvements in externalizing behaviour (decrease in blue line below), sociability (orange line), behavioural self-regulation (grey line), and prosocial skills (yellow line). While Time 1 data placed Donald in risk categories according to Australian norms, Time 2 data showed he had moved close to average for externalizing behaviour, from low to slightly low on behavioural self-regulation skills, and from very low to slightly low on prosocial skills. Donald’s scores remained in the low range in sociability despite some improvements. He did not show any improvements in vocabulary.
Key Findings Cont...

PARENTS

- Families primarily used the service to support their child’s development, growth and transition to school.
- Around half of families surveyed would not send their child to another ECEC setting such as long day care. Carer to child ratios was considered an important factor in this area.
- Families were highly satisfied with the Kyabra service.

FAMILY NARRATIVE

HELEN’S STORY

Helen lives with her mother, husband and their only child, Paul. The cost and limited hours of the Kyabra program attracted her to the centre.

Helen speaks of Kyabra as a learning place a place where she learnt alongside her child.

...I really appreciate they let me stay there for one day for the volunteer job. Then yeah I have the opportunity to know about Paul and know about the children and know how they deal with the problem and teach the children.

Through her time at Kyabra, Helen learnt about the importance of play for young children’s development.

...in China we get used to always sit down to learn something. That is core way we learn something. But in here when you are playing then you will learn something through the playing.

She learnt how to talk to her child through the teacher child interactions she observed. She was encouraged to volunteer at the centre, which allowed her to practise new skills in an open and accepting environment.

...also when I just start to work there then some time when Paul was in trouble then I will get in first. Then the teacher always tell me sit back please, because we are teacher. You just observe the situation and watch us how to deal with it.

The teachers worked with Helen and her son to ensure Paul was prepared holistically for school.
IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Kyabra should **continue to operate the limited hours service** in its current form.
- Continue to offer a range of **services to support families parenting needs**.
- **Continue with practice of embedding high school work experience** and trainee students in the service.
- Consider **differential pricing structure** based on financial circumstances.
- Strengthen **promotion of the service through positives identified by families**.
  For example: community connections and play based learning with a holistic focus on families and children.

SPECIAL THANKS

Kyabra Director, Teachers, Parents past and present, and Children involved in this study.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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STUDY METHODOLOGY

The project was a mixed method study using quantitative and qualitative measures.

Quantitative measures assessed children’s development at two time points (Time 1 June 2018; Time 2 October 2018).

Measures included:

- Teacher report of child social emotional skills and self-regulation skills using the Early Years Toolbox (EYT) child Self-Regulation and Behaviour Questionnaire (CSBQ) (Howard and Melhuish, 2016)
- Direct assessments of expressive vocabulary using the EYT expressive vocabulary test (Howard & Melhuish, 2016) and visual motor skills using the Design Copy task from the Early Screening Inventory (ESI-R; Harrison, 1990)

A facilitated survey with current parents at Time 1 only, collected information about their recent experiences at Kyabra.

Qualitative interview data was collected with three past families who accessed the service in 2017 to develop narratives about their transition to school experience following their attendance at Kyabra.