

VICTORIAN EARLY YEARS LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

PRACTICE PRINCIPLE GUIDE PARTNERSHIPS WITH PROFESSIONALS





Practice Principles cultural knowledge story
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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is part of a series of eight guides to the practice principles in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF).

Use this guide for individual critical reflection on your practice, for discussion with a mentor or critical friend and as a guide for discussion with colleagues.

The VEYLDF was written for all professionals working with children from birth to age eight, including:

- maternal and child health nurses
- all early childhood practitioners who work directly with children in early childhood settings (educators)
- school teachers
- family support workers
- preschool field officers
- inclusion support facilitators
- student support service officers
- primary school nurses
- primary welfare officers
- early childhood intervention workers
- play therapists
- health professionals and teachers working in hospitals
- education officers in cultural organisations (VEYLDF, P. 6).

The guide draws on the Evidence Paper for Practice Principle: Partnerships with Professionals written for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development by the University of Melbourne. For detail about the evidence mentioned in this guide, and for more depth on this Practice Principle refer to the evidence paper www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/eyldf/profresources.htm

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES – CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE STORY

- Bunjil the Eagle and Waa the Crow represent Aboriginal culture and *partnerships with families*.
- The water hole symbolises *reflective practice*.
- The gum leaves with their different patterns and colours represent *diversity*.
- The stones underneath the leaves represent *equity*. They reflect the additional support put in place in order for all children to achieve.
- The child and adults standing on 'Ochre mountain' symbolise the *high/equitable expectations* we hold for children and adults.
- The family standing on and looking out from 'Ochre mountain' reflects *assessment for learning and development*. Such assessments draw on children's and families' perspectives, knowledge, experiences and expectations.
- The child and adult figures also represent *partnerships with professionals*.
- The land symbol as mother earth represents the basis for *respectful relationships and responsive engagement*.
- The symbols for land, water and people signify *holistic and integrated* approaches based on connections to Clan and Country.

(Dr. Sue Lopez-Atkinson, Yorta Yorta)



PARTNERSHIPS WITH PROFESSIONALS

Early childhood professionals work in partnership to:

- research, share information and plan together to ensure holistic approaches to children's learning and development
- respect each other's practice, skills and expertise
- collate and use the evidence of children's prior and current learning and development to build continuity in learning and development
- continue to learn and deepen their expertise in order to best support children's learning and development
- acknowledge the significance of transitions in early childhood services and schools, and work in partnership to ensure that families and children have an active role in transition processes
- work to improve the continuity of practice between settings, including the daily transitions for children and their families
- foster engagement in early years learning communities, where individuals mentor, coach and learn from each other
- develop and promote collaborative partnerships in early years' networks
- provide accountable leadership for learning and development outcomes and support research-based practice in learning networks.

(VEYLDF, P. 16)

The Partnerships with Professionals Practice Principle emphasises the importance of partnerships among the broad range of professionals whose focus is children under eight and their families. The ultimate aim of these partnerships is to support children's learning and development.

The VEYLDF was written to guide the work of a broad range of professionals, and it provides shared language and common principles that enable professionals to work toward all children achieving the learning and development outcomes.

Case study

A family day care educator has participated in a number of professional learning experiences about the Frameworks (VEYLDF, My Time Our Place: Framework for School Age Care and the Early Years Learning Framework) and bases her practice on them. She has been taking children to the local kindergarten for years. She said that for the first time she had had a good conversation with the educator at the kindergarten recently about a child's learning. She said, 'Because of the Framework we now speak the same language and we are working with the same learning and development outcomes. We have that in common, and this helps us to work and learn together.'

WHAT ARE PARTNERSHIPS WITH PROFESSIONALS?

Partnerships with other professionals are ongoing long-term relationships based on shared values and commitment. Collaboration is working together to achieve shared goals. Effective partnerships always involve collaboration. Professionals may collaborate for brief or extended periods of time and for a specific purpose or for a number of purposes. For example, a speech therapist and an educator may collaborate over a year to support a child's speech development. A maternal and child health nurse may collaborate for a short time with a supported playgroup facilitator to provide access to and inclusion in a supported playgroup for a recently arrived refugee family.

Early childhood professionals working with young children have diverse disciplinary backgrounds, levels of training and experience. A culture of inquiry and challenge builds robust collaboration and continuous improvement. Effective partnerships with other professionals require leadership, common goals and communication across disciplines and roles to build a sense of shared endeavour.

(VEYLDF, P. 16)

Reflective questions

- What does collaboration mean to you?
- What about partnership?

COLLABORATION DOES NOT MEAN SETTING ASIDE YOUR SPECIALISM OR CREATING A 'GENERIC' EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL. COLLABORATION MEANS EACH PROFESSIONAL IN A PARTNERSHIP IS RESPECTED FOR THEIR PERSPECTIVE AND INSIGHTS INTO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

Partnerships can be formed between individuals and between organisations or services. Partnerships between early childhood professionals are characterised by:

- respect for each other's experience and expertise
- open and ongoing constructive communication
- trust
- clarity about roles
- agreed goals or purpose
- openness to different views and perspectives and willingness to learn from others
- commitment to building relationships
- collaboration with families and children.

Discussion starter

Do the partnerships you and/or your service have match the characteristics listed above? If some of the characteristics are missing or could be stronger, what steps can you take to establish or strengthen them?

THE TERM 'LEARNING COMMUNITIES' IS SOMETIMES USED TO REFER TO A COLLABORATIVE CULTURE WITHIN A SERVICE, AS WELL AS TO PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS SERVICES THAT PROMOTE CRITICAL REFLECTION AND ONGOING LEARNING. WORKING TOGETHER IN PARTNERSHIP IS A KEY FEATURE OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES, AS LEARNING OCCURS THROUGH COLLABORATION.

WHY ARE PARTNERSHIPS WITH PROFESSIONALS IMPORTANT?

Partnerships with other professionals benefit not only children but also families, professionals and local communities.

There is an increasing variety of types of early childhood services in many communities.

Services you may form partnerships with include:

maternal and child health services
long day care services
Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services
family day care
kindergartens
playgroups and supported playgroups
occasional care
outside school hours care services
a range of services for children with a disability or developmental delay
specialist support services
schools.

Many children access several different education, health and other services over the first eight years of life, sometimes simultaneously. When professionals do not work in partnership, there is a risk of gaps or duplication in services. For example:

- families may receive conflicting or confusing information
- relationships between families and professionals may break down
- there is little or no consistency and continuity in children's experiences and learning
- educators don't get the support they need
- the child and family are not supported well.

Supporting young children's learning, development and health is complex and cannot be done adequately by one professional, as the following example shows.

Case study

A four-year-old diagnosed with cerebral palsy attends kindergarten for two sessions a week, goes to a long day care service on two days and also sees a physiotherapist and a speech therapist through an early childhood intervention service. Sometimes he sees the specialists in the early learning settings and sometimes at home. This child has multiple needs and is advantaged by the fact that all of these professionals communicate regularly with each other and the family and plan together.

These professional partnerships focus on maximising the learning and development opportunities for this child in each setting, developing common and complementary goals and working together toward the same learning and development outcomes.

Towards the end of the year, after the family has selected the school that the child will attend, all the professionals will collaborate with the family and the child to ensure that the same strategies are used to ensure continuity of practices.

Partnerships benefit children and families

Benefits for children and families when professionals work in partnership include:

- holistic approaches to children's learning and development
- individual responses to children and families, for example when there is a need for an assessment or to be seen by a specialist
- efficient and timely responses to urgent needs, such as financial assistance, housing or medical treatment
- inclusive practices
- transitions for children that support continuity in their learning and development
- improved access to services
- less likelihood of conflicting or confusing advice or information
- families not having to continually retell their story.

These benefits occur for all children and families and are especially important for children with disability, developmental delay or additional learning needs, those from at-risk families, gifted children and those who have experienced abuse and neglect. These children and families may be supported by a range of services with different focuses, strategies and expectations. Working in partnership ensures that goals and approaches are compatible and that everyone operates with a more complete picture of the child and family.

Without partnerships and collaboration among professionals there is a risk that some children and families will not receive the support that they need and will remain isolated or become further marginalised.

Partnerships benefit professionals

Partnerships among professionals benefit professionals in a number of ways, including:

- a more holistic, complete and integrated picture of the child, which makes it easier for professionals to give every child the support they need to meet their learning and development needs and build on their strengths
- identify gaps and duplication in service delivery and identify how to best ensure that these are minimised and all aspects of learning and development are addressed
- opportunities to learn from each other – to be exposed to different perspectives and new information and to critically reflect together
- making the best use of skills, knowledge and experience and applying their collective expertise to their work
- more opportunities to participate in professional development
- the satisfaction of sharing their particular expertise and knowledge with others
- opportunities for coaching, being mentored, mentoring and reducing professional isolation
- a more powerful voice coming from a broader and larger network and therefore a stronger base for advocacy and greater potential to influence policy, practice and general understanding within the community.

Discussion starter

A family day care educator works closely with a maternal and child health nurse, a social worker and a physiotherapist to support a child attending her service who has recently been diagnosed with a developmental delay. The child's mother is 17 and a single parent. The educator says that she has learned so much from the other professionals – not just about their roles, but about how to support young mothers and about developmental delay. She said that being included in planning meetings with the parent and other professionals once every two months has boosted her confidence and her image of herself as a professional educator.

She said 'I was surprised at first that I could tell them things about Joel that they didn't know – that even his mum hadn't noticed. I've learned so much from them about how to help Joel become more confident and also about how to support his mum. As a result, I've joined a community network of professionals who support young single mums. Before Joel started coming I didn't know there were so many single mums in our community.'

- In what ways does this partnership benefit Joel and his mum?
- How does it benefit the educator?
- What factors might contribute to the success of this partnership?

Partnerships ease transitions and promote continuity

Partnerships among professionals support smoother transitions for children and families and greater continuity in children's experiences. Continuity of experience can take different forms:

- continuity between family childrearing practices or traditions and those practices found in early childhood settings
- continuity of professionals' relationships with the child and family over time
- continuity of practice/pedagogy between settings, such as between a kindergarten and a Prep class.

Case study

An educator in a long day care service working with babies and toddlers explained how they provide continuity for children when they move to a new group within the service. The educators talk and plan as a team and with families about:

- routines for sleeping, feeding and nappy changing
- any special rituals to help children and parents separate or that are important for the child to feel secure and relaxed
- the child's way of communicating needs or interests
- the significant people in the child's life
- what the child is interested in or enjoys doing the most.

These educators talk continually with families about the children to ensure that the educators have up-to-date information. They use this information to plan more responsively for each child and where possible continue familiar practices. Although this centre places a lot of emphasis on ongoing communication with families and shared decision making at all times, this educator believes that having the three-way discussion when the child is moving to another group helps the parent as well as the child feel more secure about the move. She also said that educators visit the three-year-old group with the children and they encourage families to visit as well.

From birth, young children and their families make transitions daily - from one service to another, within and/or between early childhood settings and schools. Reasons for these transitions include:

- families adding new services (specialist or family support services)
- starting school (a major transition for both children and their families)
- moving to a new community
- moving to a new group within a service
- families' changing wants and needs.

Transitions can be complex and challenging for young children and their families. Partnerships and collaboration among professionals, children and families can reduce stress and contribute positively to the transition process.

The Victorian Government's *Transition: A Positive Start to School* initiative aims to improve children's experience of starting school by strengthening the development and implementation of a variety of strategies. The initiative:

- recognises the critical nature of early learning and development and the importance of support to provide continuity of learning
- builds on the understanding that transition is a process, not a point-in-time event, and starts well before, and extends far beyond, the first day of school
- identifies strategies for facilitating and supporting children's adjustment to the changes they will experience, and creates a common planning approach for families, services and schools to access and adapt to local contexts.

A range of strategies and activities could include:

- visits by children, families and early childhood educators to schools to observe and participate in school community events
- Prep teachers visiting children in early childhood services to meet the children starting school and observe early learning and pedagogical practice
- buddy systems where children starting school are paired with and supported by an older child at the school
- transition meetings between prior-to-school educators and Prep teachers
- transition statements prepared by prior-to-school educators in kindergarten programs to share information with parents and Prep teachers about a child's early learning, development, strengths and interests
- sharing resources to support continuity of experience for children
- working with bilingual educators so that information, concerns, expectations and preferences can be shared between educators and families and providing translated materials where needed
- working with the school, specialist services and families to assist children with disability or additional needs to make the transition a positive experience.

Effective transitions lead to the following positive results:

- increased likelihood that children's new experiences take account of and build on their prior knowledge and experience
- greater understanding by Prep teachers of curriculum and children's learning and development in prior-to-school services and vice versa
- Prep teachers having accurate up-to-date information about each child's strengths, abilities, interests, cultural and family background and therefore being able to plan for and respond to individual children more effectively
- families and children feeling more positive and secure about starting school
- prior-to-school educators feeling more valued for their knowledge
- stronger connections and relationships among educators and service providers
- more comprehensive planning for children with disability starting school.

Partnerships between educators in prior-to-school settings and Prep teachers support and encourage critical reflection and greater understanding of the complex and challenging issues about children being ready for school and schools being ready for children.

WHAT DO PARTNERSHIPS WITH PROFESSIONALS LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

Each service's context is unique and impacts on partnerships.

Some services are isolated because they are remote. Services in urban areas, too, can be relatively isolated – for example, standalone services where professionals are not linked in to broader professional networks. The more isolated a professional or service the more important it is to take even small steps to establish partnerships. When a service is committed to partnerships, it is important to have:

- a designated person whose central role is to bring about and strengthen collaboration and partnerships
- commitment and support from managers and leaders to provide required resources.

Case study

An outreach worker for a family support agency said, 'Some people think it [collaboration and partnerships] just happens naturally. They don't realise that it won't happen without someone making it happen.'

Case study

A team leader in a kindergarten that includes several children with additional needs said that she spends a lot of time 'playing phone chases' with specialists: 'Everyone is busy and for many professionals collaborating with other professionals is an 'extra', not something that is built into our jobs. That means it takes extra effort.' She emphasised the fact that the benefits far outweigh the extra effort. She looks forward to a time when every professional's job description includes building and strengthening partnerships.

Case study

An early childhood educator in a small rural town, whose position included building partnerships with other professionals, commented, 'I do a lot of informal behind-the-scenes work to build partnerships. It is sometimes fairly invisible, but it's about building trust and a shared vision of what we're on about. Usually you don't see the results straight away.'

It is critically important that leaders in organisations appreciate not only the value of partnerships but also the time and energy they take. This applies even within organisations, where traditionally professionals working in different parts of the organisation may not have collaborated much. Collaboration outside the organisation may require even more time and resources.

There are a number of practices that bring about or contribute to partnerships and collaboration. These are discussed below.

PRIVACY

WHEN PROFESSIONALS WORK IN PARTNERSHIP THEY HAVE ETHICAL AND LEGISLATIVE OBLIGATIONS RELATED TO FAMILIES' AND CHILDREN'S PRIVACY, BOTH IN WRITTEN RECORDS AS WELL AS CONVERSATIONS ABOUT A CHILD WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS.

RELEVANT VICTORIAN PRIVACY LEGISLATION INCLUDES THE INFORMATION PRIVACY ACT 2000, THE HEALTH RECORDS ACT 2001 AND THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT 2002. THE COMMONWEALTH PRIVACY ACT 1988 MAY ALSO APPLY TO EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES.

Communicate openly and constructively with other professionals

Some communication strategies that support collaboration include:

- holding meetings that encourage open communication and consideration of all perspectives
- embedding formal processes to support collaboration rather than it being an 'add-on' – for example, ensuring that in an integrated service regular meetings are held with all the professionals who work in the service
- sharing information, for example through newsletters, electronic networks and shared professional learning opportunities.

Case study

A group of teachers and the educators working in the out of school age care (OSHC) programs at a school explained that they found it easier to talk with each other when they were familiar with each other's setting. They visited each other regularly and talked about their respective work. Over time both groups of professionals felt more comfortable raising concerns about the children such as doing homework in the after school program or how the Prep children can be supported in transitions from and to the school age care programs and the classroom, especially in Term 1.

There are likely to be communication challenges when professionals from different backgrounds and disciplines collaborate. They may not share a common professional language and their particular priorities for children may differ. The VEYLDF with its broad audience provides a solid foundation for communicating and focusing collaborative efforts. The Learning and Development Outcomes provide the basis for shared language and perspectives about children's learning and development in the first eight years of life.

Work toward shared goals: supporting children's learning and development

All successful partnerships are built on a foundation of shared goals, which must be clearly articulated and understood by those involved. When goals are shared professionals are more likely to meet challenges, overcome obstacles and respond effectively to children's strengths, abilities and interests.

Developing common goals and a shared philosophy so that everyone is involved is critical to building successful teams. This leads to developing approaches to supporting children's learning and development that are holistic and include elements from a range of content areas.

The aim of planning is achieving the best outcomes possible for children as described in the Learning and Development Outcomes in the VEYLDF. Keeping the Practice Principles and the five Learning and Development Outcomes of the VEYLDF in mind when planning curriculum in every early childhood setting for children from birth to eight years, provides for pedagogical continuity.

Planning with other professionals when a child participates in more than one service helps to ensure that:

- educators take account of children's experiences in different settings – for example, a family day care educator builds on the child's excursion to a farm with his kindergarten group
- professionals gain multiple perspectives on a child's learning and development. For example, a pre-school field officer is invited to a planning meeting with a child's kindergarten educators
- plans are based on shared comprehensive assessments of children's learning and development, which provides a more holistic and complete picture of the child – for example, a maternal and child health nurse shares (with parents' permission) information from her assessments with child care educators, and this informs their planning for this child.

Reflective questions

- What interferes with planning together with other professionals? How can the obstacles be minimised or eliminated?
- Have you or your colleagues had the experience of giving a family advice or information that conflicted with what other professionals had said? What was the effect of that? How could it have been prevented?
- Lack of time is often identified as a barrier to partnerships. What steps can you take that make optimal use of the time you have available? How could you adjust priorities to focus more on collaborative partnerships?

Discussion starter

Abid recently moved schools and enrolled in the OSHC program attached to his new school. The educators are concerned that he isn't settling in. He is often by himself and appears to have no friends. He stays in the reading area for much of the afternoon. The educators' hunch is that this is not because he wants to use the books but rather because he feels safe there.

After discussing the situation with his family, the educators got permission to approach his Year 2 teacher. She said that his behaviour was much the same in school. The only time he seemed happy and eager was when the class went off to music sessions. These sessions are led by a local musician who comes into the school once a week. The teacher hadn't spoken to the music teacher but said that she would.

She reported when they met a few days later that the music teacher said that Abid had amazing skills on drums, far exceeding other children. One of the school age care educators had recently seen a busker in the city who was drumming on a variety of metal containers – rubbish bins, olive oil drums, buckets, saucepan lids and tin cans. The educators decided to bring in a few of these objects and talk to the children about creating a homemade drum set. They discussed it with the group, not singling out Abid, and when it was assembled Abid amazed everyone with his skills.

The classroom teacher meanwhile had integrated discussion of different sounds made by different sized containers into the science focus with the aim of inspiring some new ideas for 'drums'. The teacher spoke to the music teacher about the need to build Abid's strengths and confidence and to help him make friends. The family commented that Abid had talked about his interest in drumming and they discussed ways to encourage this interest at home and at school.

The professionals agreed that talking to other staff who worked with the child had been very useful. They decided that school age care educators and the relevant teachers in the school would meet monthly to discuss children and to build in better continuity and responsiveness to children's strengths and abilities.

How did this simple example of collaboration benefit Abid?

How did it benefit the professionals?

This is an example of an initial collaboration that could eventuate into a partnership. What might contribute to its success? What might be some obstacles?

Value the expertise of other professionals and make referrals when appropriate

Collaboration starts with respect for others' skills and knowledge, along with appreciation of the boundaries of one's own professional expertise. Collaboration does not mean setting aside your specialism or creating a 'generic' early childhood professional. Collaboration means each professional in a partnership is respected for their perspective and insights into children and families.

Collaboration leads professionals to refer children and families when the skills and expertise of others are called for and work closely with those professionals when needed. Positive, respectful relationships with other professionals may require confronting biases or misconceptions about their work.

Case study

A supported playgroup facilitator was concerned about a two-year-old child who attended the playgroup with his dad. The child spoke very little and had an unusual gait when he walked. His dad said he had only started walking a few months ago. She suggested that it would be useful to talk to the maternal and child health nurse about his concerns. Through talking with other parents in the group she learned that most families hadn't visited the maternal and child health service since their children were babies. She invited the local maternal and child health nurse to come to the playgroup to talk informally with the parents. After chatting with the dad over a few sessions, the nurse suggested that if he had concerns she could refer the child for an assessment.

Lead collaboration and partnerships and encourage others to lead

Leadership is essential for partnerships. Leaders must take responsibility for creating regular time and opportunities to communicate and share expertise. Leaders must be able to inspire and empower other professionals to work toward agreed goals. Shared professional learning, both informal and more formal, as well as opportunities to mentor and be mentored can both involve close communication and support ongoing communication.

Capable leadership is essential and includes recognising that partnerships may involve:

- bringing together different philosophies and expertise
- coordinating an agreed shared vision and purpose for meeting
- dealing with varying expectations
- confronting hierarchical power and status differences
- working through different views about roles and responsibilities.

In these and other situations leadership that demonstrates respect, responsiveness, honesty and openness can help to resolve issues.

Effective collaborators are good communicators and work across traditional boundaries and overcome obstacles.

Reflective questions

- Can you think of an approach within your own profession or discipline that is different from your own? What could you do to understand this approach better? What steps would you take to work collaboratively with a professional who uses that approach?
- What would be the benefits of such a partnership?
- What are some of the power or status issues you deal with in your work?
- What is the source of these? How do they affect partnerships? How can they be addressed constructively?

Commit to working together to advance knowledge about children's learning and development

Early childhood professionals advance their own skills and knowledge as they learn from one another when they work in partnership and establish a culture of reflective practice. Building knowledge about children's learning and development requires commitment by both individual professionals and their organisations.

Early childhood professionals can also play a key role in advancing and adding to knowledge about young children's learning and development. Many professionals and services are involved in formal or informal partnerships with research institutions and government departments. These partnerships help to translate research into policy and practice. In these partnerships early childhood professionals help to produce new knowledge as they share their valuable expertise and experience.

Case study

An early learning centre in Melbourne participates in a university- based research project that has ethics approval to identify benefits to children and families of an intensive early education and care program. The educators work collaboratively with a range of health, welfare and other professionals to develop the curriculum and plan their work with families and children. The VEYLDF and the national Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) guide the research, relationships and everyday practice with children and families.

The Key Worker approach to partnerships and collaboration involves one early childhood intervention service (ECIS) professional becoming a family's primary point of contact with the ECIS team. The Key Worker co-ordinates the information and support the child and family receives.

The Key Worker approach minimises the number of visits to families' homes and the number of professionals who work with a child with a disability and their family without reducing the expertise available to them.

The Key Worker can help to arrange referrals based on advice from the ECIS team and in consultation with the family.

Case study

Vien is a key worker in a large early childhood intervention agency that employs a range of professionals including physiotherapists and speech and occupational therapists. She shared this example of collaboration among professionals working in partnership with families to support inclusion:

Toby is a four-year-old child who is attending a local kindergarten this year. He has cerebral palsy and is mobile, using a walker at times.

Toby and his family have used the services of the early childhood intervention agency for three years, and Vien, who has worked with them during that time, knows them well. Toby and his family have had little contact with other services, and Toby had spent little time apart from his family before starting kindergarten. It was anticipated that he would find separating from his mum difficult.

Vien made contact with Maria and Rosie, the educators at the kindergarten, to introduce herself and discuss how they would work together soon after Toby's parents chose a kindergarten. Maria had considerable experience with inclusion and was positive and open about including Toby. Vien says that this is the most significant contributor to the success of Toby's inclusion and to their partnership. They met with Toby's family to plan his transition into kindergarten. As part of this plan they decided to apply for additional funding to ensure Toby's full inclusion.

Vien took photos of Toby when he visited the kindergarten as he arrived, putting his bag on his hook, at the puzzle table and made up a book with the photos and notes for his parents. She gave the book to Toby and his family to use to talk with him before he started.

Vien attended the first two sessions at the beginning of the year, in part to support Toby's mum. Vien said that Toby's mum was anxious and after saying goodbye stayed in the kitchen and Vien went in and gave her regular updates on how Toby was going.

Vien said that one focus for her early work with Maria and Rosie was modelling ways to help Toby with movement and emphasising the importance of letting Toby do all that he could do on his own rather than helping him too much. Together they figured out how to modify the indoor and outdoor environments so that he could easily use his walker.

They discussed how he could sit comfortably on the mat.

Toby was a very verbal child but not always easy to understand. Vien gave the educators a visual photo pack to use with Toby and talked about the importance of encouraging him to transition to other activities rather than spending most of his time at the puzzle table.

Vien, who has a physiotherapy background, said that a lot of her work is about supporting educators to do their job, including all children fully in the program. She said it's important in her role to appreciate that what matters in the kindergarten setting is that children participate in the curriculum. She admitted that earlier in her career she might have tried to get the educators to do special exercises with Toby, but now she says her challenge is to observe how the children play and learn and how the educators guide the learning. Then everyone involved, including Toby's parents, discusses how to help Toby make the most of his time there. She said that 'Learning how the program works is really important'.

After Toby settled in Vien had a few phone conversations with Maria and made another visit at Week 8. At the end of each term Maria, Vien and Toby's parents, in consultation with other professionals, will review the goals they've set and alter them.

Vien emphasised that the key to success is:

- partners welcoming each other's contributions
- building a strong relationship among all professionals involved and
- parents making contact early and starting to plan together.

Discussion starter

Reflect on the professional partnerships you have with individuals or organisations. Use the table to identify who, why and benefits for professionals, children, families and community.

CURRENT PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS (WHO?)	PURPOSE (WHY?)	BENEFITS TO PROFESSIONALS, CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY
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