

TOWARDS CONTINUITY OF LEARNING:

# Influencing Home Learning

MAY 2026





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CITATION • Taylor, E., Rogers, S., Walker, L. and McKenzie, F., 2026,  
Towards Continuity of Learning: Influencing Home Learning, Our Place, Mulgrave, Victoria.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the First Nations people of Australia and Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live, work and learn. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and community, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

At Our Place, we honour Bunjil's lore by caring for Country and nurturing children and young people. We are committed to building respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, learning from their knowledge and leadership, and taking genuine action toward reconciliation. Through this work, we strive to create an inclusive environment where all cultures are celebrated and respected, and where every child and family can thrive.

#### APPRECIATION

We would like to acknowledge the authors of this publication, Fiona McKenzie and Sarah Rogers, and First Nations' Perspective author, Lisa Walker, for their invaluable contributions and dedication.

We extend our gratitude to our content experts who reviewed our publication for their meticulous feedback and guidance, including Professor Edward Melhuish, Associate Professor Penny Levickis and Dr Joanne Tarasuik.

Lastly, our heartfelt thanks go to the Our Place sites that participated in the case studies; your involvement has been crucial in bringing this publication to life.

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# Introduction

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## THE OUR PLACE APPROACH

Our Place is an initiative of the Colman Education Foundation, delivered in partnership with the Victorian Department of Education and supported by philanthropy. Together we work in 11 school-based community hubs across nine Victorian communities, shaping schools as trusted places where families can easily access joined-up support.

We are independent from any single service sector. Instead, we act as a broker, connecting families to existing services and enabling partners to work in more integrated ways. This independence allows us to keep families at the centre by designing support around their needs and experiences, rather than the boundaries of individual services.

The Victorian Department of Education provides the enabling infrastructure and governance that allows our school-based hubs to operate. We work across departments, jurisdictions and sectors supported by a whole-of-government approach to governance that drives greater integration of service delivery.

In a nutshell, the Our Place Approach is a way of working that brings early education, schooling, adult engagement and employment, health and community services together at local schools and supports them to work in more integrated ways to respond to local needs. We help families navigate a complex service system and enable services to work better together, helping break cycles of disadvantage and improve educational outcomes.

## The Glue

Our Place provides the 'glue' that connects families to support and helps the services we partner with to work together effectively at our sites. The Glue is supported by infrastructure and Our Place provides the people and governance that link families with services and keeps partners connected and focused on shared goals. The four P's of the Glue are described below:

**PEOPLE:** Skilled staff and leaders who strengthen relationships, coordinate services, build trust and engage families.

**PLACE:** The infrastructure that supports schools to function as community hubs, where services operate and communities connect.

**PURPOSE:** Shared governance and common goals, created through collaborative structures that align partners and drive integration.

**PRACTICE:** The use of evidence, learning and systems to guide joint action and continuous improvement.





## The Elements

The Our Place Approach operates within the context of five essential elements, which evidence shows every community needs to thrive. They are:

- **High-quality Early Learning, Health and Development:** Supports parents and carers to nurture their child's early development and ensures families can access quality early learning and health supports from birth, building the foundations for lifelong learning and wellbeing.
- **High-quality Schooling:** Strengthens schools as welcoming, inclusive environments where student voice and wellbeing are valued, families are engaged in their child's learning, and positive school culture supports every child to thrive.
- **Wrap-around Health and Wellbeing Services:** Connects children and families with holistic health, mental health and allied health supports, with a strong focus on early intervention and joined-up care that promotes wellbeing for the whole family.
- **Engagement and Enrichment Activities for Children and Families:** Offers out-of-hours activities and programs for children and families that build

confidence, connection and a sense of belonging through creative, cultural, sporting and community experiences.

- **Adult Engagement, Volunteering, Learning and Employment:** Supports parents and carers to connect with their community, build new skills and access pathways to learning and employment that strengthen families and local capacity.

At each Our Place site, we facilitate partnerships between the school, local government, early learning service providers, accredited trainers, and the wider community to enable schools to offer supports and services that will improve the lives and aspirations of children, young people, and their families.

Our Place's expertise lies in understanding and prioritising the needs of children, families and community and is dedicated to cultivating enduring relationships, orchestrating engagement and consultation efforts, and employing data-informed planning to catalyse innovation, targeted service development, and ultimately, working in collaboration with children and families to elevate community voices in creating transformative change.

## OUR CONTINUITY OF LEARNING SERIES

Continuity of Learning means making sure children experience steady, connected support as they move through early learning and into school. It ensures services, educators and families work together so transitions are smooth, expectations are aligned, and children keep building on what they've already learned, helping children stay confident, engaged and progressing over time.

At Our Place, supporting continuity of learning across environments, such as playgroups, early learning centres, and schools, is central to our work. We partner with services, communities, and systems to strengthen continuity in practice, while also advocating for policy and system-level changes that enable it. As part of this work, we publish the Continuity of Learning Series, which is available on our website.

This is the fourth paper in our Continuity of Learning Series; 'Towards Continuity of Learning': Influencing Home Learning

### [Our previous publications:](#)

- [Pathways from Early Learning to School](#)
- [Continuity of Assessment](#)
- [Continuity of Social and Emotional Learning](#)

## FOCUS AND PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

This paper examines how service hubs, like those supported by Our Place, can influence the broader home learning environment and strengthen what happens for children beyond formal learning environments. Because children spend most of their time outside structured education settings, we have made partnering with families and the wider community, including through adult engagement, a key feature of the Our Place model.

Drawing on a combination of research and on-the-ground experience, our aim is to offer insights, reflections and practical resources that help shape thinking about how the wider home learning ecosystem can be influenced and supported. In doing so, we hope to prompt new conversations and support a shift from aspiration to implementation across practice, service delivery and system design.

This paper is intended to be useful for practitioners, educators, leaders and policymakers across the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector, as well as schools, integrated child and family hubs and associated services. To support this, it includes 'snapshots of practice' from across Our Place sites.



We acknowledge that many organisations and individuals are already doing excellent work in understanding the influences upon, and shaping home learning. This paper seeks to bridge the gap between research and practice, highlighting examples from across Our Place sites. We do not purport to have all the answers, but intend to contribute to the conversation, sharing our experiences to provide a holistic perspective on influencing home learning and the wider context in which children grow and learn.

Home learning is the responsibility of everyone who works to support children and families. Considering how home learning can be strengthened at all levels, from systems, policy and funding through to practical implementation may influence different ways of thinking and working, helping to improve outcomes for children and families. This paper is a small contribution for those seeking to support families in strengthening their home learning ecosystem.



# 01. Why Focus on Home Learning?

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## WHAT IS HOME LEARNING?

Home learning refers to the everyday experiences, interactions and routines that support a child's development outside formal education settings such as schools or early learning services.

Home learning is commonly understood in two ways. The first focuses on specific learning domains, for example, literacy, numeracy or language rich activities at home. The second takes a broader 'ecosystem' view that considers the wider set of people, places and influences that shape how children learn in their daily lives.

Throughout this paper we refer to both the home learning environment and ecosystem. While the 'home learning environment' refers to the immediate interactions, resources and practices within the home, the 'home learning ecosystem' encompasses the broader network of relationships, settings and influences that shape and support this environment, thereby indirectly influencing children's development. The 'home learning ecosystem' draws on both the Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2006) Ecological Systems Theory and the framing of the home learning ecosystem by Gregoriadis and Evangelou (2022).

In this definition, home learning is not tied to a single location but occurs within an interconnected ecosystem that encompasses the physical spaces children inhabit, the interactions and relationships around them, daily routines and caregiving activities, play, learning and leisure experiences, digital engagement and community-based activities. The home learning ecosystem also incorporates the broader conditions that shape children's developmental opportunities, such as social, cultural, political and financial factors. This holistic framing matters because children's development is influenced by the cumulative and interacting effects of experiences across multiple contexts (Gregoriadis & Evangelou, 2022).

Across both definitions of home learning, the core idea is the same: home learning is about creating rich opportunities for play, conversation, exploration and connection that nurture children's language, social, emotional and cognitive development. It recognises that learning is not confined to structured environments, but occurs continuously through the interactions and relationships that surround children.

## A high quality, positive home learning ecosystem may be defined as:

*'a safe and developmentally conducive environment that offers consistent opportunities for formal and informal teaching and playing activities, indoors and outdoors. It provides space, stimuli and time for autonomy and individual play and also for ample caregiver-child learning activities of various types, executed in a positive and supporting climate.'*

*The warmth, support and responsiveness of the caregiver-child interactions (e.g. parents, siblings, grandparents) during these activities defines to a great extent the quality of this home learning ecosystem.'*

(Gregoriadis & Evangelou, 2022, p. 209)

While we consider the home learning ecosystem broadly in this paper, our intention is to focus on the factors that Our Place and similar services can influence when supporting families to improve their home learning environment. For this reason, our focus on the home learning ecosystem will also include ECEC services and schooling.

## WHY HAVE WE FOCUSED ON HOME LEARNING?

First and foremost, we have focused on home learning because of its importance in children’s wellbeing, including physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. Children spend the majority of their time, particularly in their early years, within the home learning ecosystem. While there has been much focus on the role of education and learning in more structured environments, we know that learning and skill acquisition occur for children across all environments. Groundbreaking studies by Melhuish et al. (2001; 2008) established that there is a link between the home learning ecosystem and children’s long-term learning outcomes, and their findings have been confirmed by later studies, including Cahoon et al., (2023) and Toth et al. (2020).

While there is strong evidence that home learning matters, there is far less clarity on how universal and centre-based services can effectively influence it. Much of the existing guidance focuses on targeted intervention programs, leaving a gap for approaches that work at a broader, population level. This gap is concerning, given these everyday environments are critical to children’s development and long-term outcomes, and given the growing body of evidence that suggests this is particularly the case for families experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage (Tham, 2025).

One promising and scalable approach within universal service systems is the provision of supported playgroups. As low-threshold, relational settings, playgroups provide a practical mechanism through which services can influence the home learning environment. They create opportunities for practitioners to model child–parent interactions, build parents’ understanding of child development, and support the translation of everyday learning practices into the home. In doing so, supported playgroups function as a critical bridge between services and the home learning environment, demonstrating how the broader ecosystem can actively shape what happens for children in the home.



# 02. What does the Evidence tell us?

Evidence on the importance of the home learning ecosystem is still growing. Traditionally, home learning has largely been considered through the lens of individual skill acquisition, focusing, for example, on the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills (Lehrl et al., 2020a; Lehrl et al., 2020b). Some studies even distinguish between the home 'Literacy Environment' and the home 'Mathematics Environment' (Gregoriadis & Evangelou, 2022).

Operationalising home learning this way has led to a number of key findings. For example, researchers have demonstrated that a child's early and emerging academic skills are a strong predictor of educational achievement, with language and numeracy skills being strongly connected to home learning experiences in the early years (Anders et al., 2012; Klucznik et al., 2013; Lehrl et al., 2020b) and early home learning having long-lasting impacts into secondary school, irrespective of the later home environments (Anders et al., 2012; Lehrl et al., 2020b). It was also found that how often families read to and with their children is associated with improved academic outcomes in adolescence (Hackworth et al., 2017; Taggart et al., 2014).

More recently, however, the focus of research has extended to consider other structural and demographic factors such as race, ethnicity and languages spoken at home and how these factors influence home learning such as reading to children or books in the home (Inoue et al., 2020; O'Brien et al., 2024; Taggart et al., 2014).

For hub-based practitioners, a key finding is that when parents and carers are supported to understand how children learn and recognise the value of play, children's behaviour and learning outcomes improve (Tham, 2025). There is still work to be done to better understand how different components of the home learning ecosystem interact with one another and how they influence broader developmental domains, including social and emotional development, not only academic outcomes.

## FACTORS INFLUENCING THE HOME LEARNING ECOSYSTEM

Given that home learning is a powerful predictor of children's development, the question becomes: how can the home learning environment be strengthened? Research shows there are multiple influences shaping the system. Overall, the quality and frequency of stimulating, interactive and varied home learning experiences – spanning literacy, numeracy and everyday family activities – are strong predictors of children's cognitive, academic and behavioural outcomes (Niklas et al., 2016; Sylva et al., 2008). In short, interactions drive development.

Below, we delve into the factors that influence the home learning environment, and create a positive environment:

### Key influences include a range of activities and interactions –

- Access to books;
- Shared reading;
- Responsive parent-child interactions around literacy and numeracy; and
- The frequency of activities such as storytelling, singing, and playing games with educational content (Melhuish et al., 2008; Niklas et al., 2016).



**Active and interactive practices make the most difference** – Interactive practices, such as reading with a child, are more strongly linked to language and literacy outcomes than passive exposure, such as a child observing parents reading or watching television (Burgess et al., 2002). While passive reading supports early verbal development, in isolation, it is not adequate to support children to acquire literacy skills (Chen et al., 2012). Reciprocal interactions are important to consider. This is especially relevant for families where literacy may be a challenge, or books are not available in the family's first language, activities such as pointing to and naming objects or engaged discussions about what is in the pictures are an important part of language development.

**All parents and carers can model foundation literacy techniques** – The modelling of foundation techniques is something all parents and carers can engage in and has been shown to improve literacy outcomes. Examples include teaching songs and nursery rhymes, pointing to and naming letters, and making letter sounds (Evans et al., 2000; Niklas et al., 2016).

**Both explicit teaching and experiential learning help** – Both explicit teaching (e.g., teaching letters, numbers, or counting) and experiential learning (e.g., learning through activities such as storytelling, games, block play, matching games, playing at the playground, reading signs while on a walk, measuring while cooking, sorting socks and many other everyday routine activities) contribute to a child's skill development. Explicit practices often build symbolic knowledge, whereas experiential practices foster vocabulary, comprehension, and non-symbolic number skills (Skwarchuk et al., 2014).



**Family partnership is fundamental** – Family partnership is fundamental to children's development, building trusting, respectful partnerships with families that recognise their knowledge of their children and strengthen their capacity to support learning and development is central, rather than an optional extra. Parenting interventions in the first three years of life have been shown to boost cognitive, language, motor, and socioemotional development, while also improving parent-child interactions and parenting practices (Jeong et al., 2021).

**Warmth and responsiveness matter** – Another important factor to consider is parental warmth and responsiveness (Hackworth et al., 2017). Responsive back-and-forth exchanges, often referred to as 'serve and return' interactions between adults and children, are essential for brain development and build the foundations for social, emotional and language skills (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2020).

Activities such as shared book reading and interactive games provide further opportunities for this type of 'serve and return' interaction. Warm responsive interactions such as expressions of encouragement, respect and affection help promote a child's sense of mastery and interactions by family members that build upon and respond to a child's interests may result in sustained attention and engagement, creating further learning opportunities and potential exposure to more complex language (Lehrl et al., 2020; Montroy et al., 2016; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2019).

To effectively influence the home learning environment, it is essential to collaborate with families in meaningful ways. The following section outlines guiding principles for working with families, drawing on both research evidence and practical insights from Our Place.



## A note on our digital future

The impact of digital technology on the home learning ecosystem is still poorly understood. It is assumed that digital technologies have resulted in significant changes to the nature of interactions, home activities, and children's routines. Analogue activities, such as reading or hands-on play, are more strongly linked to positive socio-emotional development, practical life skills, and academic outcomes. By contrast, digital activities tend to be associated with weaker socio-emotional skills, though they can support some academic skills, particularly when parents are engaged in their child's use of technology (Lehrl et al., 2021).

However, further research is required. What we do know is that digital devices are increasingly shaping children's home learning ecosystems, but their effects differ from traditional, analogue activities. Their impact appears to depend heavily on the role of parents, specifically their involvement, media choices, and the extent to which they support and guide their child's digital experiences. Providing guidance to help families use digital technology effectively in learning is a new frontier and requires urgent attention as well (Lehrl et al., 2021; Quan et al., 2025).



# Our Place Frankston North: Messy Play

Messy play is important for supporting children's sensory and motor development and can be used as a vehicle to support other activities, such as parent-child engagement and interaction, as well as literacy and numeracy activities. Following consultations with parents and families, Our Place Frankston North identified that although parents were interested, many were not engaging in messy play at home. To encourage messy play, they launched 'Messy Play Playgroup'. This is a playgroup designed for children aged 6 months and older, and was initially established in collaboration with Frankston City Council and Creative Makes. The playgroup offers a series of engaging, sensory-based activities. In 2026, the playgroup has been maintained through philanthropic funding to continue the program offered by Creative Makes and is supported by Peninsula Health. Messy Play has helped reinforce the idea that parents are their child's first educators, and that learning can happen anywhere. Parents are now continuing the play at home, using what they've learned to create fun, educational experiences. This playgroup program forms part of the broader home learning environment strategy on site, building parents' confidence and understanding of how simple play-based activities can support their child's development and learning at home.

## What supported these activities to transition to the home environment?

The playgroup was based firmly on the premise that parents are their child's first educators.

- Activities were designed to be easily recreated at home, using everyday materials such as flour and paper.
- Playgroup was limited to ten participants. This allowed facilitators to engage with families and children individually to reinforce, demonstrate and discuss how the activity could be used at home.
- Facilitators modelled and supported parents, demonstrating how to make the materials and how to use open-ended questions to support their child's play.
- Children were actively exploring, and parents were learning alongside them.
- Strong positive feedback was provided to families – there was no 'wrong way'.

*"I didn't know how easy it is to make moon sand.  
I'm going to make it in every colour and  
show my wife how to make it too."*

- Playgroup parent



# 03. Principles for Family Partnership

Service providers, particularly those in universal settings, rarely have the opportunity to enter the home and provide structured activities and suggestions tailored to the environment. However, one of the most important ways in which services can enhance the home learning environment is by supporting the adults in a child's life to become more confident and knowledgeable about the role they can play in their child's development.

Knowing that the home learning ecosystem is diverse, a range of interventions should be considered at numerous different levels. In the sections below, we will outline guiding principles for supporting home learning and identify the role of hubs and specific activities in fostering home learning. This mix of 'what works' comes from both research and practice, and incorporates insights from Our Place strategies and programs.



## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES

### 1. Build trust through authentic relationships

- Families are more likely to change practices when they feel safe and connected.
- Engagement must be relational, respectful, and non-judgemental.

Beyond the provision of resources, it is essential to build trust to influence home learning. Working with families to build mutual connection and trust, and understanding one another's perspectives, is vital to engaging parents. Relational models of family partnership emphasise that trust grows through two-way communication, shared goals, and respectful partnerships, all of which strengthen collaboration to support children's learning (Kim & Sheridan, 2015; Jeon et al., 2020).

As services have limited visibility into what happens within the home environment, impact cannot rely on oversight and instruction alone. Parents need to see the value in what is occurring in order to transfer it to the home setting. Relationships and a relational way of working with families are central to supporting families in creating positive home learning environments. This creates trust.

Strong engagement relies on respectful, judgement-free connections between families and educators. This is particularly important in relation to the home learning ecosystem, where centre-based staff lack insight into what is occurring beyond what parents discuss. Families, therefore, need to feel comfortable enough to disclose challenges that are occurring in order to be supported to work through them and enhance the home learning environment. Research also shows that these trusting relationships have broader benefits – for families experiencing adversity, they can increase attendance and continuity of engagement in early childhood services, which in turn creates more opportunities to support home learning (Jeon et al., 2018; Jeon et al., 2020).

Authentic engagement may look different for different families. With the growing preference for online engagement, using varied, parent-focused communication methods, including social media and apps, improves accessibility and strengthens relationships. Low-cost online strategies, such as social media, have been found to be an effective way to strengthen parent-educator engagement and support children's development, particularly for low-income families (Barnes et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2019).



## 2. Focus on everyday interactions

- Highlight learning opportunities in daily routines: talking, reading, playing, cooking, singing, storytelling.
- Emphasise that small, frequent actions have a big impact.

An often-overlooked aspect of home learning is not the activity itself, but the opportunities it provides for family-child interaction, and the ability to support social-emotional learning. Small, frequent, high-quality interactions can have the greatest impact (Benigno & Ellis, 2004; Bjorklund et al., 2004; Niklas et al., 2016). A high-quality interaction is one that supports the 'back and forth' or 'serve and return' with the adult or caregiver responding to the child with attention, interaction and encouragement. For children, high-quality interactions are also those which scaffold and support the child to extend, grow and develop their skills or understanding of the world (Harvard University Centre on the Developing Child, 2025).

Research indicates that interventions to support the home learning environment can be valuable, regardless of their intensity. While some advocate for intensive, resource-rich programs (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Starkey & Klein, 2000), others highlight that even low-intensity approaches can deliver positive outcomes whilst making them feasible in contexts with limited budgets (Niklas et al., 2016). Role modelling for and encouraging families to focus on the everyday interactions is an important component in influencing home learning.



# Our Place Northern Bay: Building a Toy Library

Our Place Northern Bay helped to establish an [on-site toy library](#). The library is a collaborative venture; run by Toywell, funded by philanthropic funders and led by parent volunteers and retired early childhood educators.

The staff at Our Place Northern Bay have supported families across the site and local community to access toys that develop their skills and imagination in the home through diverse play experiences.

They have achieved this by:

- Showcasing a 'toy of the week' and sharing both online and on site how the toy supports children's learning, skills and development.
- Coordinating library opening times with playgroup sessions to ensure easy access.

- Cross-promotion of the toy library at playgroup and vice versa to strengthen engagement.
- Hosting 'come and play' mornings where volunteers engage with families, role model play and support families to learn about the wide range of toys available to support their child's development at home.
- Collaborating with Toywell to support volunteers and strengthen community partnerships and connections. This has led to an environment where volunteers support and encourage families to explore new toys and ways of playing and interacting with their child.

The annual evaluation survey for the toy library found 93% of library members had changed their approach to home learning since joining. This included "more play time together" and greater connection between parent and child.



### 3. Model and nudge, don't lecture

- **Demonstrate strategies in action and encourage parents to practice them.**
- **Provide gentle, ongoing nudges and prompts to reinforce learning.**

Parents shape their children's development not only through direct teaching but also by modelling positive behaviours and gently nudging learning in everyday contexts. Warm, sensitive, and responsive interactions—such as showing affection, encouraging curiosity, and responding to children's attempts at communication—help build self-confidence, autonomy, and language development (Farrant and Zubrick, 2012; Landry et al., 2006).

When educators also model effective strategies and prompt parents with simple, practical ways to extend learning at home, families are better equipped to reinforce developmental skills in both structured and informal ways. Evidence indicates that provision of resources alone is not adequate to support increased school readiness, literacy and numeracy outcomes (Tham, 2025). In addition, a service's ability to work in partnership with families, build trust and support them to translate strategies and techniques into the home is vital.

### 4. Sustain engagement over time in safe and trusted spaces

- **Ensure culturally safe, welcoming environments so all families can engage fully.**

This refers to spaces that are both culturally safe and welcoming and comfortable for children and families. A culturally safe environment is an environment that is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe, and people feel secure and respected (State Government of Victoria-Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, 2025). If families do not feel culturally safe, they are less likely to engage with services, reducing opportunities to build trust and support. Children and families also learn better when they are culturally safe and trust service providers.

Cultural safety looks different for different multicultural groups and therefore requires place-based responses that reflect the strengths, cultures and experiences of local communities. For example, at Our Place Westall, children's songbooks have been created featuring songs and rhymes from the many languages spoken within the community, supporting families to see their language and culture reflected in daily learning experiences. At other sites, multilingual playgroups and partnerships with settlement services help families feel welcomed, understood and connected to local supports.

Without culturally safe and welcoming spaces, efforts to strengthen the home learning environment are unlikely to be sustained. Cultural safety is therefore not an optional feature of service delivery, but a foundational condition for impact.



### 5. Value families as first educators

- **Recognise and affirm what parents already do, rather than focusing on deficits.**
- **Strengthen parents' confidence, agency, and belief in their role in their child's learning.**

Families are children's first educators, shaping their early understanding of themselves and the world and laying the foundations for future growth and development. Most young children spend the majority of their time in the home environment and with families. Supporting families to grow and develop their skills and build their confidence, agency, and belief is an essential contributor to the home learning ecosystem (Cahoon et al., 2017; LeFevre et al., 2010).

# A First Nations home learning ecosystem

WRITTEN BY LISA WALKER

For First Nations people at home, in our communities across our diverse Clan and Language Groups and various Nations and Countries, home learning happens in different ways with a range of people. Our family are our first teachers, and they know how we learn and guide us in relatable ways that are familiar to us and our environment. They also bring in others to scaffold, support and extend our learning where needed, depending on our individual learning and developmental needs at the time.

We learn with our brothers and sisters (siblings and cousins) from our parents (primary caregivers), Aunties (Mums), Uncles (Dads), Nans (Aunties), Pops (Uncles), Old People, Elders, Knowledge Holders, Ancestors and other kin and community members. We are always drawn to each other through our connection and understanding, and when we feel culturally safe and have a culturally responsive connection with others, we can engage and learn more easily.

Our people learn on Country (classroom) through everything that comes from her (resources). Our Knowledge Holders (teachers) follow our cultural calendars (programming/timetables) and teach us when it is our time, or an opportunity presents itself (learnings).

Our people teach us about our roles and responsibilities within our mob on how to give back to Country, empower our community and guide others.

Some learn traditionally, while some learn in modernised ways or a mix of both. Either way, our connection, knowledge and culture run deep, although we have had to adapt to making it flow through our two worlds that we navigate daily. This ensures we remain balanced and true to our people, ourselves and Country and everything that comes from her.

There are many differences between a non-Aboriginal learning space and our learning at home across community on Country, and this is why a lot of First Nations families prefer to send their children to First Nations learning spaces. Because in these spaces the leader and their team are culturally respectful, their learnings, practice and approach are culturally responsive, their philosophy is relatable, and the community can see, hear and feel themselves across the team and within the space. The community feel safe and accepted here because they know their children will get the western education they need to succeed in the white man's world, but they will also thrive in their identity as First Nations children in authentic ways with the guidance and support from local Knowledge Holders.

However, there is potential for non-Aboriginal learning spaces to meet us halfway if leaders and teams are open to respectfully embedding First Nations perspectives and understanding the importance of our little children remaining true and connected to who they are as First Nations Peoples.



# Our Place Morwell: Look, Say, Sing, Play

Our Place Morwell delivered the [Look, Say, Sing, Play](#) program, which involved sharing resources to support and encourage interaction between parents and carers, and babies. The program was designed to support development and encourage families to identify and respond to their child's needs. Each week, services highlighted a learning tip and paired it with at-home resources for sharing.

## What supported the implementation of this program?

- The program has many accompanying resources, enabling participants to download and print posters, activities, leaflets and home resources easily, which can be used onsite and in home environments. The resources are also available in multiple languages.
- Maternal and child health nurses and other practitioners were provided with printed resources in advance to distribute to families.
- Parents were engaged with the resources through existing activities, such as new mothers' groups and maternal and child health nurse visits. Posters and QR codes were also put up around the site.

## What do practitioners need to know about this program?

- Strengthening the home learning environment requires more than providing resources; it relies on relational approaches, ongoing support and thoughtful implementation. In Morwell, this included meeting families where they were at through modelling and discussing activity ideas.
- The program is not self-sustaining. In Morwell, staff turnover highlighted the need for ongoing orientation and support to ensure new team members could deliver the program consistently.
- Digital solutions are not always straightforward. In Morwell, some families experienced barriers to using QR codes due to limited access to smartphones or non-functioning links, reinforcing the continued importance of printed materials.
- In sites with multiple services, implementation requires time and coordination. In Morwell, a longer lead-in period was needed to engage services, build shared understanding and co-design an approach to delivery.



# 04. Scaffold of Support

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This section focuses on the supports needed to create the conditions for families to engage in and strengthen home learning. Inherent in the provision of family supports is the underlying belief that the absence of support is a system design issue, not a family deficit. Universal, non-stigmatising support acts as both a preventive measure and a pathway to more equitable service provision. In many cases, this begins with meeting families' basic needs as a foundation for children and families to thrive.

## Support families to meet material basics and connect to wrap-around services.

Evidence indicates that when families' basic needs are not being met and there are significant stressors, such as food insecurity and housing instability, their focus is on survival. Such challenges can lead to a poorer home learning environment, not only because the focus on obtaining material basics such as food and housing may distract families from educating themselves and their children (Chen et al., 2012), but also because of the importance of adequate nutrition for development (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2020).

When considering the most important ways to positively impact early childhood development, the Early Years Catalyst (2024) identified the most critical leverage point is to ensure all children and their families have their basic material needs met. Supporting families to access the services and supports necessary to address these needs may allow for a greater focus on children's learning and development.

In a similar vein, the Nest Framework (ARACY, 2024) outlines six interconnected domains that support children's lifelong wellbeing: 'healthy', 'valued, loved and safe', 'material basics', 'learning, participating' and 'a positive sense of culture and identity'. Considering the interconnection of these domains, it becomes clear that material basics are critical in the context of the home and home learning ecosystem, as the physical conditions of the home, including housing stability, food security and access to learning resources, directly shape a child's capacity to engage in learning.



## Use trusted settings – schools, hubs, playgroups – as the anchor for sustained engagement.

Familiarity and trust are essential foundations for engaging families. When families feel comfortable with a setting and its staff, it becomes easier to introduce additional supports and services in ways that feel safe and accessible. This is particularly important for families who may be hesitant to engage with unfamiliar people or environments, including First Nations children and families (Turner, 2025). This underscores the value of government investment in universal supported playgroups, which extend beyond social connection to actively build parents' understanding of child development and the importance of the home learning environment through practical, guided experiences.

At Our Place sites, informal activities such as coffee mornings, craft sessions, library and reading sessions, and cultural celebrations have played an essential role in creating spaces where families feel known, respected and comfortable to participate.



## Tailor services and respond to families' needs.

Any interventions must be designed to respond to the individual differences and the unique contexts of everyone's 'home' (Cahoon et al., 2023). Each family may require different inputs and interventions to support the home learning environment. Even within a particular setting, such as a playgroup, different families may have very different requirements, and the service must have the ability to flexibly respond to these needs, where feasible.

For example, one family may need to be shown an activity once to replicate it at home, whilst another may require the provision of materials, modelling, and support to bring it into their home environment.

## Engage families from the earliest years, including pregnancy and infancy.

Services that engage families as early as possible help to encourage early support of home learning. This can be done through structured services, such as maternal and child health nurses, or less structured services, such as 'coffee and cake' sessions or drop-in play sessions. These services can be universal in nature. Activities such as council vaccination sessions and story time, where a breadth of families attend, support this style of engagement.



## Engage all families.

Universal services delivered through a trusted, accessible platform create opportunities for families to engage without stigma or judgement. While targeted services play an important role, they are often less effective when offered in isolation. Universal entry points help build familiarity, belonging and trust over time, creating pathways for families to access more targeted supports when needed.

Universal services that are available to all families, not just those identified as 'at risk', can help to reduce stigma and increase reach. This, in turn, can promote equity and social cohesion (Alston, 2026; Daro et al., 2019). This includes offering activities such as 'library time,' and reading groups, playgroups, music time, and information sessions that are open to all families.

### Practice Note

Australia is a culturally diverse country. It is important to consider a family's first language and literacy. Where program resources are provided, these should ideally be in a family's first language. If this is not possible, resources should be accessible without need for a high level of literacy e.g. picture books text or minimal text that does not require advanced reading.



## Provide the glue to connect families and services

### What is The Glue?



#### PEOPLE

Building community relationships and engagement



#### PLACE

Advocate for space and infrastructure



#### PURPOSE

Forming collaborative governance



#### PRACTICE

Guiding evidence-informed decisions

'The Glue' refers to a systems-level coordinating role that connects families with services while also enabling services to work more collaboratively and responsively in order to better meet families' needs. There are four main components of the Glue; people, place, purpose and practice (Our Place, 2023). At an individual level, this means supporting families to connect to and access services by introducing them to other service providers and facilitating 'warm' referrals, i.e., supporting the family to meet and engage with another activity or service.

At a systems level this means establishing spaces and infrastructure that support connections and working collaboratively to create a governance structure that supports this.

## Consider what is required long term: support stacked, layered interventions and wrap-around supports.

Wrap-around supports refer to integrated supports that address multiple aspects of a child and family's needs in a coordinated, connected way, rather than simply being co-located. Early evidence is emerging, and further research is taking place on the importance of 'stacking' early childhood interventions by combining evidence-based strategies during the ages of 0-5 years (Molloy et al., 2019). This refers to multiple interventions providing differing types of support for children and families, including antenatal care, enhanced maternal and child health nursing with home visits, early childhood education and care, parenting programs and early school experiences. Research has shown a cumulative impact, with an increase in reading scores for each additional service that a child attended (Molloy et al., 2019).

A combination of specialist and generalist interventions may be required, which may include food, housing, and mental health support services. For some children, access to services such as early learning, Maternal and Child Health, and playgroup adequately supports their development. For others, it is important to support the integration of specialist services.

An important component of this approach is ensuring that service provision is not fragmented and rather than being reactive, as issues arise, proactively putting appropriate services in place (Alston, 2026).



## Practical examples of the roles of different services and activities

The following practical examples demonstrate how programs provided in a universal setting can play a critical role in supporting parents/carers to strengthen and influence home learning ecosystems.

- **PLAYGROUPS** - Playgroups provide a setting for young children and their parents/carers to attend together, often tailored to the unique needs of a community geographically, socially and/or culturally, and typically guided by a trusted playgroup leader or facilitator. They offer an ideal environment to support parents to engage actively with their child through play. Playgroup structures allow the modelling of positive engagement and interaction strategies in a relaxed, play environment. At playgroup, families are exposed to a range of different activities, many of which can be easily adapted for the home environment (McLean et al., 2017). Playgroups also provide opportunities for families to learn from one another and offer an engaged setting in which additional activities, such as parent education sessions, can be offered. To ensure that activities and education sessions meet the diverse needs of a playgroup's families, they are often general in nature. (McLean et al., 2017).
- **STORY TIME AND READING CIRCLES** – At story time, librarians or facilitators read aloud picture books to a group of children and their parent/carer. The reading is generally complemented by songs, rhymes, and interactive games to capture children's attention and support early literacy development. These sessions, often run in educational settings, libraries, community centres and hubs, provide valuable opportunities to model reading, songs and other activities and support parent-child interactions. Engaging book-reading interactions have been linked to increased reading frequency and improved literacy outcomes (Sonnenschein and Munsterman, 2002; Sonnenschein et al., 2010).
- **1:1 INTERACTIVE READING ACTIVITIES** – Interactive reading with children supports them to develop skills beyond reading, including communication skills, social skills, and general cognition. This may look like a child and parent reading a book together, one-on-one. However, it also includes exposure to literacy by reading texts on everyday objects such as food packets, magazines and advertisements (Chen et al., 2012). It is less about the specific content and more about the shared activity itself that matters (Farver et al. 2006; Landry et al. 2006; Tamis-LeMonda et al. 2004).



- **ALLIED HEALTH SERVICES AND THERAPIST-LED INTERVENTIONS** - Therapy programs in the early years often make some of their impact through building parental knowledge and capability to support child development. They frequently have a home learning component, where activities are modelled for families and advice is provided on how to adapt them for home use.
- **PARENT AND PARENT-CHILD EDUCATION SESSIONS** - Low threshold, low intervention courses (those without strict entry criteria and minimal intensity), providing information, for example, on nutrition, play, and motor development, are linked to a more positive home learning environment, and offer practical, low-cost benefits for families (Linberg et al., 2020). Beyond information, they provide social opportunities and help practitioners build trust. However, caution is required, as short-term, prescriptive training lacks evidence of efficacy unless tailored to need (Linberg et al., 2020). Sustained, informal and targeted engagement of parents is more impactful, as seen in Our Place's experience.
- **SPECIALIST PARENTING INTERVENTIONS** - Structured, evidence-informed parenting programs that strengthen parents' knowledge, confidence and interactions with their children are often directed to families who would benefit from additional support. Parenting interventions delivered when children are aged 0–3 years have been shown to improve parenting practices, knowledge and parent-child interactions—factors that support the creation of a richer, more supportive home learning environment and underpin optimal child development, including language, motor, social, emotional, cognitive and attachment outcomes. These programs have also been associated with reduced behaviour challenges (Jeong et al., 2021).
  - Examples on Our Place sites include:
    1. [HIPPY Program](#)
    2. [PEEP Learning Together Program](#)
    3. [Baby College](#)
    4. [Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Program](#)
  - Specific programs such as the Smalltalk program have also demonstrated positive effects on the home learning ecosystem on a small scale (Hackworth et al., 2017).



## Support adult literacy and learning, volunteering and employment activities.

The provision of adult learning activities on Our Place sites has the potential for multiple secondary benefits for the home learning ecosystem. Adult learning activities draw families to the site, which supports relationship building and feelings of safety. It also provides opportunities for the families to access resources such as book boxes. Improving adults' English literacy supports families in reading to children at home (Our Place, 2024). It has been demonstrated that parents with higher literacy levels have more literacy-related interactions and engage in more reading-related activities in the home (Chen et al., 2012).

In addition to building adult capability, adult learning also models the value of learning to children. When parents engage in their own education, volunteering or employment pathways, children witness learning as a valued and achievable part of everyday life.



# Our Place Westall: Paint the Town REaD

[Paint the Town REaD](#) is an early literacy movement encouraging reading with children from birth and supporting children to start school ready to learn. It is a flexible collaborative approach that works in partnership with communities and local services, providing support, education, and access to resources.

How Paint the Town REaD was implemented at Our Place Westall:

- Maternal and Child Health, preschool and school were included in the rollout of the program.
- Free books were distributed to support home reading.
- To support families with home reading:
  - Multilingual story times became a regular part of playgroup
  - A speech pathologist modelled early language activities and demonstrated how books support language development
  - Consistent messaging was used across the site to reinforce the importance of reading to children in their first language.
- Stories, storytelling and literacy became a central feature of the conversations and activities taking place across the site.
- To support implementation, a brief survey was run with schools, early learning centres and Maternal and Child Health services to understand how to tailor the program to their routines and busy schedules.
- Focus groups were run with parents to gather feedback and build collaborative partnerships for future activities.



# Continuity of Home Learning – Incorporating a First Nations Lens

WRITTEN BY LISA WALKER

Below, we consider how you could incorporate a First Nations lens across your work. This is essential from a continuity perspective into the home learning ecosystem. When children and families feel culturally safe, they are better able to be part of the learning and engage in a two-way learning process with services. This means that the home learning ecosystem becomes more integrated, with partners learning from and collaborating with each other.

## How can you support this?

When you are open and keen to include a First Nations lens across your approach, team and space, take a really good look at your existing knowledge, connections, history, programming, planning, set up, outcomes, resources and future outlook.

### SELF-REFLECTION

To start, individuals must self-reflect on their understanding of First Nations Peoples across the Country they live, learn and work on. They need to unlearn, relearn and learn along the way and be open to acknowledging their bias, privilege and entitlement as non-Aboriginal people. You must remember First Nations people never got a say in what has happened to us and is still happening today. So, when we share with you it's because we trust that you are going to deeply listen to what is going on, how we may be impacted or how things must be more culturally responsive. Sometimes you might even consider sharing your power with us to try and make a difference in moving forward for much needed equitable and purposeful change.

### TEAM REFLECTION

As a team, be genuine in your reflections of your learning space, your approach, your programming, your connections to First Nations families and community, and your learning outcomes and development of the First Nations children that attend your space. You need to really look at what is working well and where you need to improve. You may even consider doing a cultural pulse check, cultural audit or a cultural self-awareness test.



### LEARNING SPACES

In your learning space, what artefacts do you have on display? Where are they located? Are they local? Do you know the story behind them? Do you engage with local Knowledge Holders and creators to collaborate on creations together? Do you play First Nations music or do you cook with bush tucker?

## DOCUMENTATION

In your documentation, are First Nations people represented and if so, how? Is it tokenistic and 'tick a box', or do you live and breathe it through your daily practice, approach and programming. Have you consulted, or how do you consult, with your local First Nations community for their input and guidance? Are you genuinely committed to the ongoing cultural learning journey where you can ask questions to find the information you are seeking for you to do better? Will you find the time, resources and energy to immerse yourself in these invaluable learnings and opportunities so that you have a better understanding of the First Nations Peoples around you? Are you prepared to learn with openness if you get something wrong and are corrected?

## TEAM MEMBERS

Do you have First Nations people on your team? Do you share our vision on a culturally responsive work environment where we are encouraged to identify and be true to ourselves and our people? Do you offer what our people need to carry the colonial load and expectations that are placed on us e.g. Yarning Circles, community time, Sorry Business Leave and EAP if we need it? Are you open to collaborating and do you offer leadership pathways with culturally responsive engagement, professional development, guidance and opportunities to grow, develop and eventually lead?



## CONNECTIONS

Do you have a respectful, transparent and authentic connection with your First Nations families and community? Do you approach us with open body language and yarn with us (not at us) in ways that we can understand? Do you give us plenty of processing and feedback time so we understand what you are saying when English may not be our first language and we feel safe to engage and share with you? Are you flexible and do you make the necessary time to learn about us and build trust so we can learn who you are and be reassured our children are safe with you? Do you acknowledge us when you see us? Are you mindful of how you may come across to us?

Do you offer parenting programs, yarn ups or connection time at your space where we can come together to learn, share and connect about how our children develop and learn? Do you invite our community in to share cultural learnings within your space and pay them appropriately e.g. Storytelling, song and dance, creative and language learnings, on Country learnings etc.

Do you understand the barriers we face as First Nations Peoples? Do you realise you have power as a non-Aboriginal person and that you can share that power with us e.g. Encourage your First Nations team members to share their truth, listen to their ideas and support them in making things happen across your learning space, encourage them to connect by allowing them to attend culturally responsive PD and allow them to connect by attending community yarns, meetings, days. Are you holistic, relational and context focused and do you attend our events to walk the walk, connect, learn, share, problem solve, co-design and nudge the system or are you transactional and content focused and just talk the talk for the sake of it?

Do you engage with children in ways they positively respond to you? Do you understand their individual learning styles and emotions and what works for them? Are the children developing and learning like their non-Aboriginal peers? Do the children have the opportunity to immerse themselves in cultural learnings facilitated by local Knowledge Holders? Do their families come in and share learnings with them and their class? Does your team have the same expectations for all children in your learning space? Do you have an authentic connection with them and their family, no matter how many mob come at pick-up or drop-off times and do you know the individual child's mob?

Figure 2: Working Authentically with First Nations Communities.  
From: Possum Skin Pedagogy (Atkinson, 2017, p. 9).



**WHAT COULD YOU DO TOMORROW?**

As a culturally responsive team here are three things you can start tomorrow –

- True self-reflection on what you think you know about us
- Truthfully reflect on your documents to see how and where First Nations people are represented e.g., Philosophy, RAP, QIP, program, learning outcomes
- Include a recurring cultural agenda item at your staff meetings for team reflection and accountability

**THINGS TO CONSIDER**

Atkinson’s Possum Skin Pedagogy (2017) (See Figure 2) identifies the steps a service can take to work authentically and effectively with First Nations Communities:

Remember, culturally responsive learning spaces have an open-minded approachable leader who leads their team through a strengths-based transdisciplinary approach, where team members share knowledge and build on their skills together.

The community are welcomed in and encouraged to bring with them a wealth of knowledge that assists in breaking down cultural barriers and promotes authentic cultural learnings that are ongoing for not only the children but the team members too.

Most importantly, the children are seen, heard and felt, and so their families feel safe to leave them with you and are confident to engage, share and collaborate on achievable learning and development goals between both the learning and home spaces because they gain an understanding of the importance of their child’s education and what they can do at home to support this in ways that align with their cultural values in the home, across community and on Country.

Remember our families are more involved when they can relate to the space and the people in it and where the learning goes both ways.



# 05. Understanding Impact

The question that naturally follows engagement of families and structuring of supports is ‘how will we know if what we are doing is working?’ There are many ways to measure impact. A complexity with measuring the influence on the home learning environment is that many practitioners will never enter the family’s home or observe children and families outside of a specific setting. This, however, does not mean that we cannot measure impact, but rather that it needs to be approached differently. Traditional methods, such as brief surveys and questionnaires, can still be used; however, it is the story, or narrative, of what has worked that is often an essential part of understanding.

Below are some questions that can be explored to support understanding:

## FOR FAMILIES

- Have you made any changes as a result of (insert activity e.g. playgroup)?
- What has changed at home? Is this as a result of any specific activity or group (e.g. playgroup, toy library)? Consider changes beyond academic learning, such as improved behaviour and routines.
- Tell me a little about your everyday interactions (talking, reading, play). Have they changed (frequency or quality)?
- How do you feel about supporting your child’s learning? (Are parents more confident or engaged)?

## FOR PRACTITIONERS

- What are you doing that might translate into the home environment?
- How will you be able to tell?
- Are you noticing any changes in your setting e.g. are everyday interactions (talking, reading, play) happening more often and with quality? Are parents more confident and engaged in their child’s learning?
- What has changed for children and families at home? The changes may be beyond academic learning, such as improved behaviour and routines.

## FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS/LEADERS

- Are you considering how your activities, learnings, or resources might be carried across to home? What are you doing as a service to support this?
- Are families feeling culturally safe, connected, and supported?
- Are services working together around families instead of in silos? Are you considering how additional supports can be put in place?
- Are there spaces and opportunities for collaboration and ‘glue’ work?

## FOR GOVERNMENT/POLICYMAKERS

- Are families most in need being reached through universal platforms?
- Are reforms embedding sustained, ecosystem-wide support?
- Are you considering a hub or multi-service approach?
- Are developmental vulnerabilities reducing (e.g., oral language, social-emotional skills)?



# Our Place Carlton: Language and Literacy through Playgroups

The Carlton Learning Precinct focused intensively on strengthening early language and literacy in 2024–25, embedding practical, evidence-based strategies across three playgroups on site and in the Gowrie Early Learning Centre. This initiative included training and coaching through the [Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation \(ALNF\)](#), which was delivered in collaboration with Gowrie Early Learning Centre, the Church of All Nations, and the Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre. (See Appendix 1 for further details on this initiative).

The program was evaluated through small group discussions held during playgroup sessions, conducted in families' first languages wherever possible. Four to six open-ended questions were asked, with one team member facilitating the conversation and another scribing responses. Playgroup facilitators were also asked a series of questions relating to changes in children's oral language development that they had observed over time.

Through these conversations, the Our Place Carlton team identified several key insights that helped support this work:

## Tips for practitioners:

- Make the activity ideas practical for families.
- Choose toys and activities that are readily available or can be made for home.
- Reinforce the message that parents are their children's first teachers. Work alongside families to build their understanding of how early play supports language and literacy development.
- Set up hands-on activities that families can engage with, allowing for practitioners to model strategies and provide support in real time.
- Explain the learning purpose behind each play activity.



## Top tips for services:

- Use publicly available datasets to strengthen the case for funding and to other services. AEDC data provides strong insights into oral language development. For example, AEDC data (2024) indicated that 85% of the Carlton Primary School Prep cohort were developmentally vulnerable in the domains of language and communication skills.
- Explore the possible use of existing funding sources, such as School Readiness Funding.
- Have a long lead-up: it takes time and effort to get buy-in and coordinate delivery with other services.
- Different professionals have different strengths. Through collaboration, you can end up with a stronger program that can create greater impact.

## Tips for Evaluation

- Embed evaluation into existing program timeslots rather than adding extra sessions.
- Use the first language of participants.
- If possible, have a scribe so the 'asker' can focus on the doing.
- Keep it simple and targeted: three or four targeted questions with detailed answers are more valuable than a larger number of unanswered or poorly answered questions.



# 06. Lessons for the System

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The following ‘lessons’ are a synthesis of learnings from literature and research as well as through the on-the-ground experiences of the Our Place teams and staff. See Appendix 1 for Our Place Home Learning Implementation Framework.

## LESSONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

- Families are a child’s first teachers: consider basic strategies for bringing knowledge, strategies and skills into the home learning environment. This may be through modelling and nudging behaviours, providing resources, and referring families to others who can support the home learning ecosystem.
- Relationships come first: understanding and building trust with families is always the first step.
- Start where the family is at: once trust is built then the conversation can progress to what support they might need.
- Always model activities and ways of working: invite families into spaces where practitioners can model positive interactions and activities. This may include mat times, story times, morning tea and fruit, etc.
- Work together: do not assume that families will know how best to support home learning or use books, toys and equipment, and equally do not assume that practitioners know best. Families are often innovative and creative, and it is a two-way learning journey.
- Involve families in all decision-making: seek to understand the wider context of a family’s life and what influences their time and priorities.
- Link families to other supports and services: talk with peers and other services to understand how to do this and what is possible.
- Keep it simple: plan for success but design and adapt for reality. One useful, well-embedded idea is better than ten ideas that go nowhere.

## LESSONS FOR SERVICES AND SERVICE LEADERSHIP

- As part of the home learning ecosystem, services have an important role in shaping the home learning environment by influencing parents’ understanding and everyday practices that support children’s learning.
- Consider the compilation of services offered onsite, and how more responsive and flexible access to additional services might be supported.
- Building partnerships with other services requires work and structure; have clear expectations, shared agreements and systems in place to review and improve partnerships.
- Build relationships and develop a shared language with other services in the local community that support children and families. A shared understanding cannot be assumed and is supported by activities including induction and professional development.
- Promote shared, family-centred ways of working across services. Where possible, align approaches, expectations and communication with families so that interactions feel consistent and coordinated rather than fragmented.
- Put structures in place, such as dedicated time and events, that encourage practitioners to engage and build relationships with other service providers.
- Put structures in place, such as time allocation and role clarity, to ensure the link to home learning is an inherent part of program design and service delivery rather than an ‘add-on’.
- Consider providing practitioners with training around the importance of home learning and strategies for supporting it. This does not need to be expensive or complicated.
- Equity of access to resources and information is essential. Ensure all resources are available in a range of community languages, and in formats that support understanding without written language. For example, this may include pictures and visuals, videos and interactive displays.

## LESSONS FOR GOVERNMENT AND POLICYMAKERS

Governments play a critical role in shaping the conditions that support the home learning environment. Through policy, funding and system design, government settings can intentionally create an ecosystem that supports parents and carers to build positive home learning practices, ultimately improving long-term outcomes for children and families. This includes policy and system settings that enable:

- Investing in universal supported playgroups as accessible, trusted entry points that build parent capability, strengthen the home learning environment, and provide practical understanding of child development.
- Provision of services in alternative trusted settings.
- Engaging families from the prenatal period.
- Supporting families to meet basic needs.
- Provision of home learning supports in both universal and specialised services.
- Supporting adult literacy, learning and volunteering as key to a child's development.
- Incentivising collaborative service delivery that supports home learning.

Lessons for government and policymakers include:

- The Hubs approach, through its wrap-around, integrated service model, strengthens the ecosystem conditions that underpin positive home learning and supports sustained engagement with families. This includes leveraging universal supported playgroups as accessible and trusted entry points to build parent capability and model quality home learning practices.
- Government can play an enabling role in the relational “glue” work by funding and recognising coordination roles that build trust, do warm referrals, align messaging across services, and help families carry strategies into the home. This paper repeatedly shows that relationships and modelling, not resources alone, drive translation to the home learning environment.
- Design policy and funding settings that intentionally create an ecosystem supporting parents to build positive home learning environments. This includes aligning health, education and family services to support families consistently across settings and stages of development. This will ultimately contribute to improving long-term outcomes for children and families.
- There is a need to support further innovation and adaptation of systems and services to effectively influence the home learning ecosystem. This ongoing learning is particularly relevant as we see the rapid influence (and potential) of emerging technologies and AI.



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## APPENDIX 1: OUR PLACE HOME LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

	Practitioners and Teachers	Leaders and Managers	Policy and System Leaders
Trust, Safety and Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create welcoming, culturally safe environments where families feel respected and not judged</li> <li>• Prioritise relationship building</li> <li>• Offer universal, low threshold activities that invite participation without stigma</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable time and conditions for staff to build relationships with families</li> <li>• Support culturally responsive practice and reflective supervision</li> <li>• Ensure universal entry points (playgroups, drop-ins, shared activities) are valued and resourced</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support universal platforms (schools, hubs, playgroups) as trusted access points</li> <li>• Reduce admin and funding barriers that limit relational engagement</li> <li>• Endorse place-based, culturally responsive approaches as legitimate system practice</li> </ul>
Relational Engagement and Modelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model warm, responsive interactions (talking, singing, play, shared reading)</li> <li>• Embed learning in everyday activities rather than formal instruction</li> <li>• Explain learning purpose in the moment, using plain language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage practice that values modelling over information delivery</li> <li>• Support shared language and approaches across teams and services</li> <li>• Protect space for reflective practice focused on family engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise relational work as core practice, not “soft” activity</li> <li>• Fund and support roles that enable modelling and engagement (e.g. Facilitation, coordination)</li> <li>• Avoid compliance-driven measures that undermine relational work</li> </ul>
Translation into the Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design activities that are easy to replicate at home using everyday materials</li> <li>• Support families to adapt ideas to their own context and culture</li> <li>• Reinforce strengths and build confidence in families as first educators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure consistency of messaging across services and programs</li> <li>• Support staff to follow up with families and reinforce learning over time</li> <li>• Create opportunities for families to share what works for them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support flexible, family-centred approaches rather than prescriptive programs</li> <li>• Invest in initiatives that prioritise parent capability, not just attendance</li> <li>• Enable adaptation to local and cultural context</li> </ul>
Family Capability and Child Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notice and reinforce changes in family confidence and everyday practices</li> <li>• Support early identification and timely support for children</li> <li>• Sustain relationships over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor impact using family voice, observation and narrative evidence</li> <li>• Support staff wellbeing to sustain relational work long-term</li> <li>• Use learning to refine practice and share insights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measure success through family experience and child outcomes, not just service outputs</li> <li>• Embed home learning and continuity into policy and funding frameworks</li> <li>• Invest in long-term, place-based approaches that build family capability</li> </ul>

