



Project of the Rotary Clubs
of Balwyn & Hawthorn

KINDER +

*Seeking to address barriers to kindergarten
attendance*

October 2007

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1. Background

Foundation Boroondara in partnership with Camcare and the Rotary Club of Hawthorn commissioned research on ***Child Poverty in Boroondara***. The research, ***Social Exclusion in Boroondara*** Stage One (September 2005) and Stage Two (March 2007) was undertaken by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. This report conservatively estimated that the number of socially excluded children living within Boroondara to be 4,500 or approximately 12%.

The Stage Two research paper included a number of recommendations including:

“That a community led exploration of measures to address barriers to kindergarten attendance be established.”

By way of implementing this recommendation, Foundation Boroondara, supported by the Gandel Foundation together with the Rotary Clubs of Hawthorn and Balwyn has undertaken this project to investigate and identify the barriers for families of preschool children who otherwise would not access kindergarten.

The Project Officer reported regularly to a sub-committee of Ben Bodna (Chairman of Foundation Boroondara), Di Cummins (Foundation Boroondara Executive Officer), Hugh Trumble (Rotary Club of Balwyn) and Noel Halford (Rotary Club of Hawthorn).

Rotary are undertaking a separate project to raise funds to support a possible fee subsidy scheme **Kinder +**. A symbolic tree planting program in a designated park or suitable open space in Boroondara would be initiated to attract the necessary funds to support a future subsidy scheme. Pledges of \$100 to \$1,000 will be sought. This proposed initiative is supported by Council. The tree planting would be undertaken under the guidance of Council's Parks and Gardens Department. The added environmental benefits are seen as positive.

2. Purpose

- a) To facilitate access to 4 year old Kindergarten for *all* children in Boroondara.
- b) Advise on the numbers of children who are unable to access early childhood services. This will include research and discussion with various stakeholders including DHS eastern region, relevant community agencies, kindergartens/early childhood service providers and central enrolment officers.
- c) Identify any structural barriers in the service system to accessing kindergarten services in particular, 4 year old kindergarten.
- d) Identify the barriers for families that inhibit access and participation in kindergarten services.
- e) Recommend what supports could be introduced to facilitate access and participation. This may include a fee subsidy system to assist with the cost of commencing preschool.
- f) The process for implementation of the recommendations.

3. Scope

There are 30 community managed kindergartens within Boroondara.

Whilst both three and four year old children attend kindergarten, the **Kinder +** project focuses specifically on children who would access a funded four year old place in a community managed kindergarten or as it is sometimes referred to, sessional kindergarten. It does not include kindergarten either in long day care or within independent schools.

This decision considered several key factors:

- a) The vital importance of a child attending 4 year old kindergarten before commencing primary school.
- b) Community managed kindergartens are not for profit and is where the majority of children attend kindergarten.
- c) Three year old kindergarten does not receive any form of government funding and does not meet the criteria required for an educational scholarship.
- d) There are insufficient three year old places in Boroondara to meet the demand; any subsidy program would exacerbate this.

4. The importance of Early Childhood Education

The 2006 OECD report titled - Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care states that “early education and care contributes to the public good, ie. to the general health of a nation’s children, to future educational achievement, to labor market volume and flexibility, and to social cohesion.”

The State Government indicated in March 2007, four key policy directions through a proposal under the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Reform Agenda “Victoria’s Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood”.

- improving antenatal care,
- strengthening the health, development and learning of 0-5 year olds,
- enhancing the provision of early childhood education and care services and
- improving the early years workforce.

According to KPV (Kindergarten Parents Victoria) Vision 2011, every child should receive a quality early childhood education experience delivered by a qualified childhood teacher. Every child benefits from increased Government investment in early childhood education.

“Kindergarten is often undervalued and misunderstood. International research indicates the importance of children attending a kindergarten program the year before starting school. The kindergarten year is a rich and stimulating experience that provides a range of important opportunities that not only prepare children for school but life.”¹

Boroondara Council’s Early Years planning states:

¹ Kathy Walker, The Age, 25/4/2005

“The early years of life are critical to intellectual, social, emotional and physical development of our children. These years set the foundation of our future world”

Facilitating access to 4 year old kindergarten in Boroondara is consistent with this policy framework.

5. The City Of Boroondara Profile

The City of Boroondara is a predominantly residential municipality located in Melbourne’s inner and middle-eastern suburbs. The population has increased marginally over the last 10 years and it has 154,450 residents according to the 2006 Census data. Of those 8,538 are aged 0-4 years.

Boroondara is widely regarded as an affluent community with a perception of uniform well being. Recent research undertaken by the Brotherhood of St Laurence (referred to earlier) acknowledged that Boroondara has pockets of place based disadvantage, it also highlighted that Boroondara has scattered disadvantage and that affluence in Boroondara may further compound disadvantage by reinforcing the notion of difference.²

The research also found:

“... a conservative estimate suggests that there are approximately 3,063 families in Boroondara living below the poverty line. The 2001 census shows that there is an average of 1.5 children aged 0 to 14 years of age, per family. Thus, it could be conservatively estimated that there are 4,594 children under 15 years living in poverty in Boroondara.”³

Supporting this finding Boroondara also has one of the highest levels of homelessness in metropolitan Melbourne. The rate of homelessness in Boroondara is greater than the metropolitan region overall (32 per 10,000) and equal with that in the Melbourne subdivision of Frankston. The house prices and rental costs in Boroondara are amongst the highest in Victoria.

6. Sources of Information

6.1 Report Data

Information was obtained from the following sources:

a) 30 Kindergartens

A meeting with the 4 year old teacher’s network, discussions with kindergarten Presidents, kindergarten teachers and a questionnaire was used to gather information on the number of families on Health Care Cards, Fees, families that couldn’t pay the fees and the impact of such on kindergarten operations and budgets.

b) 31 Primary Schools (State and Catholic)

Interviews and a questionnaire were used to gather information on how many children have attended prep in the last two years without accessing

² Social Exclusion in Boroondara Research, B.S.L., March 2007

³ Social Exclusion in Boroondara Research, B.S.L., March 2007

4 year old kindergarten. Valuable feedback was received supporting the need for children to attend 4 year old kindergarten prior to school entry.

c) Support Agencies & Community Services – Interviews were conducted with:

- Camcare – Ashburton
- The Edge, Community Fund – Chadstone
- The Craig Family Centre – Ashburton
- Uniting Care Community Options – Camberwell
- Salvation Army Bowen St, Occasional Care – Camberwell
- Salvation Army East Care

6.2 Additional sources

Additional information was also provided by:

- DHS (Department of Human Services, Eastern Metropolitan Region)
- Boroondara Council – Family Services Department
- KPV (Kinder Parents Victoria)
- HPSA (Hawthorn Preschool Association)
- KPSA (Kew Preschool Association)
- State Government – Victoria’s Plan To Improve Outcomes In Early Childhood (National Reform Agenda)
- AEU (Australian Education Union)
- 2006 census data

7. Results & Findings

7.1 Questionnaire Results – Schools and Kindergartens

a) Primary Schools

i. Attendance at Kindergarten

Thirty-one Catholic and State Primary Schools located within Boroondara were surveyed; of those 12 (38%) responded. 22 children did not attend a funded 4 year old kindergarten program. One child could not access a place when the family moved. One cited cultural reasons for not attending (chose not to attend) and 20 arrived from overseas. The Department of Human Services currently does not collect data from Primary Schools on numbers of children not attending 4 year old kindergarten.

ii. Difficulties arising from non-attendance at Kindergarten

The questionnaires were completed by Prep Teachers, Deputy Principals and Transition Prep Coordinators. The surveys indicated that there were difficulties experienced by children who didn’t access 4 year old kindergarten. This is a list of the comments:

- Children may find it harder to mix in a larger group
- Difficulties with letter/sound recognition
- Delayed literacy development
- Poor motor/fine motor coordination
- Lack of confidence
- Separation anxiety & difficulty forming friendships
- Socialisation problems - taking turns, showing empathy, resilience and coping with change

- Difficulties adapting to routines
- Lack of independence

Conclusion

The survey respondents from Primary Schools did not indicate that children who attended primary school, without attending 4 year old kindergarten, missed the pre-school year due to cost. Considering the low response rate (38%) it is difficult to draw any conclusions in relation to affordability. Some respondents did indicate that children arriving from overseas may have additional social pressures such as not being familiar with the culture/and or language and not knowing any other children.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the comments listed are important, one teacher believed that the difficulties experienced by some children may also be attributed to other issues such as maturity and personality traits.

b) Kindergartens

i. Health Care Card Holders

Thirty Boroondara kindergartens were surveyed, of those 27 kindergartens responded, 90%. This represents 1313 four year old places. The results indicated 84 families have Health Care Cards (6%). Two kindergartens advised that there are eight families with Health Care cards attending their service one kindergarten is located in Ashburton and one in Balwyn North. The respective fees charged equate to a gap of \$270 (\$1,000 less \$730) and \$150 (\$880 less \$730), based on current fees. All fees were eventually paid, although some were very late.

Based upon this data, it is reasonable to assume an average of three Health Care card holders per kindergarten.

ii. Fees

The survey indicated that there were 21 families that could not pay the fees in full or in part over the last two years. In addition, six families were very late with payment. In most cases the kindergartens absorbed the losses. The kindergartens indicated that non-payment of fees put pressure on the committee to increase fees and/or extra fundraising activities. All kindergartens had policies to respond to non payment or late payment of fees and no kindergartens asked families to leave if they couldn't pay the fees. One kindergarten commented that parent committees often feel uncomfortable pursuing other families for fee debts. 68% of the surveys indicated that the provision of fee subsidies would assist their kindergartens.

iii. Family circumstances contributing to non-fee payment

- 47% sole parents
- 14% students
- one migrant family from overseas- (fees paid by church group)
- three families experienced health issues
- one business failure

iv. Reasons why families drop out of Kindergarten

There was no evidence that children are dropping out of kindergarten due to cost as the kindergartens are absorbing non payment or late payment

of fees and or the support agencies are providing financial assistance to families. Agencies such as The Edge Community Fund and Camcare supported several families with fee assistance who may otherwise have not attended.

According to the questionnaires, six families dropped out of kindergarten as the hours offered no longer suited the family circumstances. These are the comments:

- Three families were seeking longer hours care
- One family was seeking flexible session times
- One family required access to before and after care
- One family changed to another kindergarten offering more hours

Only one kindergarten offers extended hours, Auburn Kindergarten & Child Care Centre.

iv. General Comments

- There are various reasons for the late payment of fees. A low income is not the sole reason for non-fee/late payment. It can be due to sudden or unexpected pressures on domestic finances.
- The requirement to enroll your child at age two can be difficult for disadvantaged families. Some are transient, families who relocate to Boroondara and families who are simply not aware of the enrolment policies.
- The lack of Government funding for three year old kindergarten penalized families on low incomes.
- Families can be reluctant to divulge financial difficulties or to seek help. One kindergarten suggested that the subsidy be available to families experiencing short term difficulties such as death, illness or loss of income.

Conclusion

The data indicates that some families experience a problem with affordability of kindergartens in Boroondara. This in turn has a flow on effect in relation to the viability of the kindergartens that currently absorb those costs.

The hours of programs generally fall between 8.45am and 3.45pm which is less than the standard 8 hour work day. It could be concluded that this is the reason six families could no longer attend sessional kindergarten.

One kindergarten mentioned that the new State Government subsidy will not cover the full cost of 4 year old kindergarten program delivery. The data collected supports that comment. (Refer Appendix 4)

7.2 Findings from Support Agencies & Community services in Boroondara

Each of these services offer vital and unique support to those in our community that need it most. Discussions were based around identifying barriers to kindergarten for families that these groups come into contact with.

7.2.1 The Edge Community Fund Inc – Chadstone

The Edge is a local charity established in 2006 to financially support children under 18 years from disadvantaged families in the Neighbourhood Renewal areas of Ashburton, Ashwood and Chadstone. The Edge has financially supported over 45 activities for disadvantaged children in 2006/07. Of those, 20 children were assisted with three and four year old kindergarten fees, three in Boroondara.

Many families who seek financial support for their children experience one or more of the following circumstances:

- 97% live in public housing
- 80% are sole parents
- 20% are CALD families (culturally and linguistically diverse)
- 70% of families seeking assistance were able to make *some contribution* to the cost of kindergarten whilst 30% *made no contribution*

7.2.2 Camcare – Ashburton

Camcare offers counseling and community support services to the people of Boroondara. Camcare also reported that there was a lack of *affordable four year old kindergarten places* that also met the needs of working sole parents. The \$730 rebate was a help but in most cases still left a big gap. Sessional kindergarten's hours tend to be short and many don't offer extended care which is at odds with working parents or students who want to improve their work skills.

Families who moved around mid-year found it difficult to access a place as kindergartens often had no available places. Access to public transport was also a factor as many people don't own cars.

The scope of this project is on sessional 4 year old kindergarten. The limitations of such and the option of looking at Long Day Care have been addressed in the recommendations. Transport and proximity to public transport clearly an issue for some families was not raised by any of the surveyed kindergartens as a specific barrier to currently accessing kindergarten (Refer 8.1). What is not clear is the number of families who don't access a kindergarten due to lack of transport or proximity of services to public transport.

Camcare assisted two families with term fees this year, but were unable to assist for the whole year.

7.2.3 The Craig Family Centre – Ashburton

The Craig Family Centre operates a variety of children's and community programs servicing a large section of their local community. The main children's programs offered are occasional care, a three year old program and playgroups. Many families feel a strong connection to the Craig Centre.

This centre does not provide a funded four year old kindergarten program, however some families prefer to remain in the occasional care program up until school. The occasional care program also assists families who cannot

access a place at a sessional kindergarten. They do offer limited fee support for those families experiencing financial difficulties. Local support agencies also assist some families attending the Craig Family Centre with fees.

Staff at the Craig Family Centre understood that the current criteria for any **Kinder +** subsidy scheme was limited to sessional State funded 4 year old kindergartens at this stage.

7.2.4 Salvation Army Bowen Street – Occasional Care – Camberwell

This service is operated by the Salvation Army and caters for children from six months to kindergarten. It is open to all families, many leave the centre once they secure a kindergarten place. The centre offers a substantial fee rebates to eligible families based on criteria linked to disadvantage. Few families have needed this support. Those that have accessed financial support have experienced housing issues and “tended to be transient”.

7.2.5 Salvation Army Eastcare – Eastern Region

This service provides support for families experiencing homelessness, families linked to the Department of Human Services, parents experiencing substance abuse and the socially disadvantaged. These families are often in crisis and need considerable support to meet the basic requirements of every day life. Kindergarten attendance for the children is often a secondary consideration.

The main priorities of this service is to stabilize housing, to ensure children are taken care of, food and clothing are available, offer support for drug/ alcohol and mental health issues.

Most families are linked with the Salvation Army for one to two years as most often they are experiencing multiple disadvantage with several or all of these problems. Once those problems are stabilised then kindergarten can be looked at. Information on any subsidy programs would be most helpful according to Eastcare.

7.2.6 Uniting Care Community Options

This charity operates under the auspice of the Uniting Church under the umbrella of Uniting Care. It began in 1989 as a pilot program for dementia. The main focus of this charity is working with people with disabilities and elderly citizens. They have assisted 1600 families in the Eastern Region since its inception 18 years ago. A case worker advised of a child not attending kindergarten this year and not enrolled in 2008. They have been referred to a local agency for assistance.

7.3 Barriers to Kindergarten Attendance

The consensus of feedback indicates:

- lack of affordable places
- the high costs of fees in Boroondara
- sessional kindergarten is not compatible with working parents/sole parents

- enrolment process and the lack of understanding of the importance of enrolling the child at two years
- little room for mid year/term transfers
- no formalized support/referral structures for kindergarten staff to assist families experiencing complex personal issues in addition to low income.

Waiting lists are not currently available as the data base is currently being upgraded for Central Enrolment that commences on 1 February 2008.

7.4 Case Studies

Case Study (1): Single parent female headed family with one 4 year old child. The mother is recovering from drug addiction. The family is new to the area experiencing social isolation, little family support and a history of homelessness. They are currently accommodated in public housing in Ashburton.

The mother and child had previously been separated for a 12 month period. The child has been identified as having delayed social skills development. The multiple disadvantages experienced by this family have acted as a barrier to the child receiving the educational input they need in order to promote healthy development. The mother is resettling and experiencing financial hardship and could not afford 4 year old Kindergarten fees. Two local agencies assisted this family with the costs of enrolment and term fees to enable the child to participate in kindergarten in 2007.

Case Study (2): A family of Vietnamese origin comprising mother, father & two children six and four years old. The family has a single low income and lives in public housing in Ashburton. The six year old has autism and is assisted by a local agency who arranged enrolment into a special school in the City of Port Phillip. The younger child was born in 2003 and was attending one day per week at a Long Day Centre but dropped out due to the cost. This child is not enrolled in four year old Kindergarten in 2008. The Department of Human Services has assessed this child and has found a speech delay problem possibly due in part due to her social isolation. This family has no transport.

(N.B. The family case worker has the local agencies' contact details and will follow up on kindergarten enrolment for 2008).

Case Study (3): Family with separated parents from the outer eastern suburbs. Father is working. There are three children, one at school, one currently at a Hawthorn 4 year old kindergarten program and one under four. They relocated to Boroondara in 2006/07. They have no permanent housing and they are living with relatives on a short term basis only. The family is paying the kindergarten fees in installments.

Case Study (4): Single parent family with one four year old child. The child is currently in the care of a foster family. There is no father and the mother is working towards overcoming substance abuse and related issues. The child is enrolled in a Hawthorn kindergarten and an extended family member has paid the fees. The Department of Human Services is working with the family.

8. The cost of attending kindergarten in Boroondara

8.1 Background

Victorian education costs have increased twice as fast as the rate of inflation according to recent Australian Bureau of Statistics data. The general cost of living rose by 1.9% in the year to September 2007, *however kindergarten and primary education costs rose by 2.2%.*⁴

According to KPV (Kindergarten Parents Victoria) data, parents contribute *almost half the resources* needed to maintain an average four-year-old kindergarten program. This is through a combination of parent fees, volunteer labour and fundraising. Parent fees have grown at a rate considerably in excess of CPI (Consumer Price Index) despite the fact that the Department of Human Services contributes \$1600 per child to Kindergartens for all accredited 4 year old places.

8.2 Boroondara Hours & Fees

The fees charged for 4 year old kindergarten vary significantly across the 30 kindergartens. The highest annual fee is \$1880 for 14.75 hours whilst the lowest was \$740 for 12 hours. These are considered the standard hours for each of those kindergartens. Only two kindergartens offer a program of 10 hours. The remaining 28, offer between 11-16 hours per week.

The average annual fee charged in Boroondara is \$1,124 for 12.5 hours (Refer Appendix 1). The median fee is \$1050.

These fees are considerable when compared with the Eastern Metropolitan State median of \$780 per year.

8.3 Current Department of Human Services (DHS) Subsidy

In July 2007, the State Government raised the subsidy from \$320 to \$730 for eligible families, (Health care Card & Pension Card holders). However, that still leaves a significant gap in fees for Boroondara families. This gap which is over and above the \$730 rebate is as high as \$1150 and as low as \$10 per year. **The average gap is \$227 based upon fees of \$1,124 per year for 2007.** This gap reduces when the new funding arrangements come into effect in 2008 (Refer 10).

8.4 Why are Boroondara fees so High?

There may be numerous reasons as to why Boroondara fees are higher than the State average. There is currently no data available on this. Individual kindergarten Committees of Management operate the services and are responsible for setting their fees. Below are some of the possible reasons for higher fees based personal experience of the researcher and knowledge of the kindergartens in Boroondara:

- a) There are more incursions offered (visiting entertainers).

⁴ School Costs Squeeze, Herald Sun, 6/11/07

- b) The standard hours are higher than the State average.
- c) Program modeling. Boroondara families expect additional hours which affectively limits enrolments. The more children attending on minimum programs, the more per capita support a kindergarten receives (\$1600 per funded place).
- d) Groups tend to be smaller than the licensed numbers as it is seen as a quality issue. Boroondara kindergartens are licensed for either 25 or 30 places, depending on the amount of floor space. The majority of kindergartens offer 25 places.
- e) Some kindergartens are responsible for their own maintenance and need to allow for that cost. However, most maintenance is provided by Council for services operating in Council owned buildings.
- f) One kindergarten pays substantial rental for their premises.
- g) Some Kindergartens opt for higher fees rather than an emphasis on fundraising.
- h) Double unit kindergartens may be able to offer lower fees for their programs due to economies of scale. There are three double unit Kindergartens in Boroondara.
- i) The additional revenue from fundraising is spent on upgrading new equipment and programs in order to meet parent expectations.
- j) Some kindergartens employ administration staff to alleviate the burden of human resources tasks.

8.5 Boroondara Kindergartens – Council Supported Maintenance

(Refer Appendix 2)

8.6 How Boroondara compares with other Municipalities

(Refer Appendix 3)

9. Changes affecting the kindergarten sector in 2008

9.1 DHS (Department of Human Services) Subsidy Scheme changes effective from January 1, 2008

In July 2007, the State Government raised the fee subsidy for eligible low income families from \$330 to \$730. In January 2008, all in kindergartens will be required to offer 10 hours of kindergarten at the DHS subsidy rate. In other words, the first 10 hours of kindergarten will be free to these families. If the standard program is more than 10 hours, the kindergarten will be permitted to charge these families for those additional hours. See examples of Boroondara Kindergartens. (Refer Appendix 4)

9.2 **Boroondara introduces a Central Enrolment Scheme**

The City of Boroondara will manage kindergarten enrolments in Boroondara commencing February 1, 2008 for 2009. The new scheme to be known as BKCES (Boroondara Kindergartens Central Enrolment Scheme) supersedes the need to apply to each individual kindergarten. This will streamline the application process for families and reduce the cost of paying multiple enrolment fees. This change will also enable accurate data to be kept on demand and waiting lists as families currently tend to enroll at more than one kindergarten, duplication will be removed. Of the 30 sessional kindergartens in Boroondara, 19 have opted to join the scheme and 11 have not at this stage. A list of participating kindergartens is listed on the Council web site.

9.3 **Kindergartens move from DHS to a New Department**

On August 2 2007, Premier John Brumby announced that the Office for Children would move into the Department of Education creating the *Department of Education and Early Childhood Development*.

“The task of the new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will be to give Victorian children the best possible start in life by streamlining the transition into prep.” “Linking children’s services and schools together will assist in providing the help that it is needed as early as possible, before problems escalate.” “There is strong evidence that children’s developmental and educational outcomes improve when there is a stronger focus on early childhood.”⁵

10. **Challenges facing Kindergartens**

The Hon. Maxine Morand (Minister for the Office of Children) spoke at the Kindergarten Parents Victoria (KPV), Annual General Meeting on October 31st and spoke about the following relevant issues:

a) DHS Subsidy increases to \$730, July 1 2007

Victoria has a participation rate of 96% for four year old kindergarten, which equates to 4,000 children not attending. The Australian average for four year old participation is 88.8%. This subsidy was lifted from \$330 to increase participation amongst low income families.

b) Demand for places is expected to increase

Victoria is experiencing a baby boom not seen since 1971 with 70,158 babies born last financial year, a 10% increase on 2004/05.⁶

An increase during the 2006/2007 financial year in births recorded by the City of Boroondara is consistent with the Victorian trend, although lower. Interestingly statistics for the first quarter of the current financial year represent a significant decline compared with the same quarter in the previous financial year. This supports assumptions based on earlier census data that the population in Boroondara is not expected to increase

⁵ Media Release, Office of the Premier, 2/08/07

⁶ Media release, Office for Children, 23/10/07

significantly but to remain relatively stable with a slight and steady increase projected.

c) Boroondara Kindergarten Places

As has been established above the birth rates in Boroondara have trended upwards recently although not at the same rate as the State average of 10%, Boroondara has experienced a 6.5% increase.

The demand for kindergarten places will continue and may increase in pockets of Boroondara. No reduction in four year old kindergarten places could be absorbed and therefore not justified. The decision by the City of Boroondara to introduce central enrolment is timely, this will provide the mechanism to monitor demand for places. Manresa Kindergarten in Hawthorn currently offers 36 places for four year olds. Manresa currently leases its premises from the Hawthorn Catholic Parish. The Church has indicated that the lease will not be renewed at the end of 2010. The Boroondara community cannot afford to lose these four year old places.

The City of Boroondara has indicated its support for the retention of the Manresa places. Council resolved in April 2007, to include the Manresa Kindergarten places in the planned community hub at the Hawthorn Library Precinct. This was conditional upon sourcing capital funds for the construction.

d) Improving Kindergarten programs within Long Day Care Centres

60% of Long Day Care centres in Victoria do not offer a funded four year old kindergarten program. A subsidy will be introduced to encourage centres to offer 4 year old kindergarten programs.

e) Boroondara Long Day Care Centres

Boroondara has 10 community managed Long Day Care centres with six of those offering a funded four year old Kindergarten program.

Summary

There has been widespread support for this project from all the key sectors, kindergarten, schools and the support agencies within Boroondara. The data collected for this project indicates that there is a need to assist disadvantaged families with both financial and social supports. This project is unique to Boroondara.

At the commencement of this project in August 2007 the State Government had not announced its proposal to increase the financial subsidy for families with health care holders attending four year old kindergarten from 2008. The subsidy applies to 10 hours of kindergarten per week. This policy change is welcome and supported.

Part of the process of introducing a **Kinder +** subsidy fund, includes estimating the demand. Most kindergartens in Boroondara offer more than the standard 10 hours, therefore a **Kinder +** subsidy fund would definitely benefit a number of families. Families that struggle with fees are not always on Health Care cards or technically classified as disadvantaged.

The results of the Kindergarten Questionnaires indicate an **average of three Health Care Card/Pension Card holders per kindergarten.**

- a) The potential outcomes in terms of the State government subsidy for Health Care card holders in 2008 may include:
 - i. Kindergartens may choose not to pass on fees for additional hours over ten. This may depend upon the number of card holders and the number of hours offered.
 - ii. The Health Care Card/Pension Card holders may **choose to pay** for the additional standard hours over ten and not claim any possible **Kinder +** subsidy.
 - iii. Medium to widespread uptake of the subsidy support scheme.

KPV have an Early Childhood Education Foundation which has been operating for 10 years. Last financial year 72 kindergartens and 100 children received a total of \$11,197 in financial support. Only one family from Boroondara received assistance.

11. Recommendations

Based upon this research into the barriers to kindergarten attendance, in Boroondara the following are recommendations:

- a) Implement a Subsidy Scheme for eligible 4 year old kindergarten children (Refer Appendix 5).
- b) Liaise with Boroondara Council to ensure that the dissemination of **Kinder +** information reaches key family contact points in the community, eg. Libraries.
- c) Improve the links between Boroondara Support Agencies and Kindergartens to facilitate referrals for families experiencing multi-layered social & family issues.
- d) As a priority investigate the potential to expand the **Kinder +** program to Four Year old kindergarten programs in community managed Long Day Care centres.
- e) Investigate the potential to expand **Kinder +** into 3 year old kindergarten.
- f) Liase with Council to explore the possibility of facilitating a kindergarten Presidents' network to share relevant and operational information.

12. Next Phase – Implementation

12.1 Implement a Subsidy Scheme – By Term 2, 2008

- a) Prepare documentation – general information and application forms.
- b) Post information on the Foundation Boroondara web site.
- c) Communicate and inform the kindergartens via the President and Teachers of the benefits of the scheme and how it would work (emails, network meetings and mail outs to kindergartens).

- d) Formalise the link to all Primary schools to monitor prep enrolments and the Kindergarten attendance rates.
- e) Liaise with Council to ensure information is available at Libraries and Family Services web site.
- f) Promote and publicise the scheme in the Boroondara Bulletin & Progress Leader (which can double as a fundraising exercise requesting community donations, explaining the tree planting scheme).
- g) Liaise with Office for Children & DEECD
- h) Assist individual kindergartens in understanding the changes effective from 1 January 2008, where they MUST offer 10 hours of free Kindergarten to Health Care Holders and how **Kinder +** links with that.

12.2 Kindergarten Enrolment Information

- a) Liaise with Boroondara Kindergarten Central Enrolment Scheme (BKCES) to ensure all family contact points, ie. Maternal & Child Health centres, playgroups, libraries, toy libraries, occasional care, Family Day Care, Long Day Care and sessional kindergarten, Neighborhood Houses & Community Centres, Bowen Street Community Centre, the Craig Family Centre understand the need to enrol children at two years of age in order to secure a place.
- b) Distinguish between 3 year old and 4 year old kindergarten programs. The difference being 4 year old programs receive State Government funding.
- c) Liaise with Support Agencies and (BKCES) to ensure they have the current information on enrolment procedures as they often receive applications from families from (CALD) backgrounds.
- d) Information in community languages may also be considered beneficial

12.3 Formalise Links between Support Agencies and Kindergartens

- a) Liaise with agencies on the range of services available to Boroondara families.
- b) Put together an information kit with contact details which includes the agencies, all kindergartens and central enrolment information.
- c) Conduct an information session with Teachers and Support Agencies to best develop systems for referrals.
- d) Liaise with Council's Family Services Department, DHS & Office for Children for their input.

12.4 Implementation Summary

Based on the availability of funds and resources, the commencement at Term two 2008 is an achievable time frame.

12.5 Next Steps

Facilitate a forum with key stakeholders to discuss the findings of this report including the recommendations and the process for implementation. The stakeholders include:

- Family Services Department Boroondara Council
- Kindergarten Presidents
- Kindergarten Teachers
- Support Agencies

12.6 Federal Election 24 November 2007

The Australian Labor Party has been elected to government. The Labor Government policy on Early Childhood is an important factor to be taken into consideration.

According to Labor's plan for Early Childhood Labor has committed to:
"Ensure every four year old child has access to fifteen hours a week and 40 hours per year of high quality preschool delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher."

The State Government commitment for is for 10 hours of kindergarten. How the additional five hours for each child is to be accommodated is not clear. Many kindergartens run more than one group so most kindergartens are utilized between 9 am and 3 pm each day. The impact of this policy will require further analysis as more detail becomes available.

APPENDIX 1

2007 Boroondara Kindergartens - 4 year old Hours & Fees

Area	Number of Kindergartens	Average Term Fees	Average Annual Fees	Average Hours per week	Yearly Gap over & above the 10 hours DHS Subsidy of (\$730)	2007 Heath Care Card Holders (potential recipients of Kinder + Subsidy)	*Estimated funding required for Kinder + Subsidy
Ashburton/ Glen Iris	5	\$249	\$996	11.95	\$162.52	20	
Balwyn/Balwyn North	7	\$241	\$964	12	\$160.66	30	
Camberwell/ Surrey Hills/ Canterbury	6	\$278	\$1,112	12.25	\$204.24	16	
Hawthorn	7	\$334	\$1336	13.5	\$346.37	14	
Kew	5	\$303	\$1212	13	\$279.69	4	
Boroondara Average	30	\$281	\$1,124	12.54	Average Yearly Gap \$227.66	Total HCC 84	\$ 19,123.44
Boroondara Median		\$262	\$1050				
DHS Eastern Metropolitan Median	1400	\$195	\$780	10			

*Data based on 90% of questionnaires completed

- State average 10.4 hours per week
- Eastern Metropolitan average 11.7 hours per week

APPENDIX 2

Boroondara Kindergartens provided with Council Maintenance

Kindergarten	Kindergartens provided with Council Maintenance
Auburn Kindergarten and Child Care	√
Auburn South Preschool	√
Balwyn East Kindergarten	√
Bellevue Kindergarten	√
Boroondara Preschool	√
Alfred Rd Kindergarten	√
*Camberwell Baptist Kindergarten	
Canterbury and District Preschool	√
*Canterbury Norwood Baptist Kindergarten	
Cara Armstrong Kindergarten	√
Davis St Kindergarten	√
Deepdene Preschool	√
Estrella Preschool	√
Fordham Avenue Kindergarten	√
Glass St Kindergarten	√
*Glen Iris Rd Kindergarten	
JJ Mc Mahon Kindergarten	√
*Manresa Kindergarten	
The Merrell Kindergarten	√
North Kew Kindergarten	√
*Robert Cochrane Kindergarten	
Rowen Street Kindergarten	√
*St Columba's Day Kindergarten	
*St Dunstan's Anglican Kindergarten	
*St Paul's Anglican Kindergarten	
Studley Park Kindergarten	√
Summerhill Park Kindergarten	√
Surrey Hills Preschool Centre	√
West Hawthorn Preschool	√
Yongala Preschool	√

*** 8 kindergartens pay for their own maintenance**

APPENDIX 3

2007 Municipality Comparisons - 4 year old Kindergartens

Hours & Fees

Local Government Area	Average Hours for 4 year old program	Average Term Fees	Type of Enrolment
Banyule	10.3	\$186	29 Kindergartens (individual enrolment) 2 Council managed
Darebin	10.5	\$190	22 Kindergartens Centralised enrolment
Monash	12	\$210	32 Kindergartens Centralised enrolment moving to centralised for 3 year old programs
Whitehorse	11.5	\$195	33 Kindergartens Centralised enrolment
Yarra	11.5	\$250 Council managed	28 Kindergartens 4 Council managed Centralised enrolment for LDC, FDC & kindergartens
Boroondara	12.5	\$227	30 Kindergartens Centralised enrolment commencing Jan 1, 2008

LDC - Long Day Care
FDC - Family Day Care

APPENDIX 4

A sample of Boroondara Kindergartens offering over 10 hours for 4 year old programs 2007 Fee Analysis by Suburb

Kindergarten	Hours per week	Fees per term	Fees per year	*DHS Subsidy for 10 hours	Rate for additional hours	Annual Fees for Families in receipt of DHS subsidy
Ashburton	11.25	\$220	\$880	\$730	$\$76 \times 1.25 = \96	\$96
Glen Iris	12	\$225	\$900	\$730	$\$75 \times 2 = \150	\$150
Balwyn North	11.5	\$195	\$780	\$730	$\$68 \times 1.5 = \102	\$102
Camberwell	15	\$440	\$1760	\$730	$\$117 \times 5 = \586	\$586
Hawthorn	12.5	\$330	\$1320	\$730	$\$105 \times 2.5 = \264	\$264
Kew	13.75	\$260	\$1040	\$730	$\$75 \times 3.75 = \282	\$282

*** DHS subsidy is payable for Health Care card and Pension card Holders**

- Individual Kindergartens will determine whether these additional charges will be passed on
- Based on fees charged for 2007 fees may increase in 2008

APPENDIX 5

KINDER +

Seeking to address barriers to kindergarten attendance

Fee Subsidy Support Scheme Information & Application Form

Introduction

Foundation Boroondara is an independent charitable organization governed by a Board of Directors which works to build a spirit of community and active citizenship.

4,500 children are considered socially excluded in Boroondara according to the Brotherhood of St Lawrence who conducted a report into child poverty in 2005. The report also stated that a "lack of access to education was a major symptom of child exclusion". As a result of that report, further research was undertaken into the barriers to kindergarten attendance.

One such barrier identified is the high cost of 4 year old kindergarten. The Kinder + Fee Subsidy Support Scheme has been established to assist families with the costs of the 4 year old kindergarten year. The Foundation values preschool education and will work closely with the 30 community kindergartens to ensure that children receive the support they need to complete their 4 year old kindergarten year. This scheme will commence in 2008 and be ongoing.

What does the Scheme offer?

- From Jan 1 2008, kindergartens must offer *eligible families* (Concession card and Health Care Card holders) **10 hours per week of free kindergarten**. However, many kindergartens offer standard programs of between 11 – 16 hours per week. Additional charges may apply for standard session times. Kinder + funds may be available to support these additional charges.
- A maximum of \$500 per child is available per year or \$250 per semester.
- Support for short term financial hardship.
- Facilitate access to local support agencies.
- Eligibility of each applicant will be determined by the Kindergarten. The application must be authorized by President of the Committee of Management and the payments will be made on the applicant's behalf to the kindergarten.
- All applications will be reviewed by a Foundation advisory committee. Confidentiality will be protected. Decisions are expected within a 6 week period.
- If the family in receipt of the fee subsidy leaves the kindergarten before the end of the year, the kindergarten will retain the funds and apply them to an eligible family the following year.
- In October of every year each participating kindergarten will be requested to provide feedback/comments on this scheme.
- You will be eligible to apply if you live in Boroondara and attend a kindergarten outside the area AND if you attend a kindergarten in Boroondara but live outside the area.

KINDER +
Seeking to address barriers to kindergarten attendance
Fee Subsidy Support Scheme

Application Form

Application to be submitted by kinder service provider

The information in this form will be treated CONFIDENTIALLY

1. Kindergarten Details (please print)

Name of Kindergarten _____
Postal Address _____ Suburb _____
Postcode _____ Tel _____

1.2 Contact Person at Kindergarten

Name _____
Position _____
Contact Tel _____

1.3 Fees

Term Fees (before concession and excluding levies)
\$ _____
Term Fees charged to you \$ _____
Amount requested from the Kinder + Fee Support Scheme \$ _____

2. Details of Child

Family Name _____ Given Names _____
Date of Birth _____ Country of Birth _____

3. Parent/Guardian Details

It is a requirement that the parent/guardian consent be obtained for an application to be made.

Name _____
Postal Address _____ Suburb _____
Postcode _____
Signature _____ Country of Birth _____

4. Eligibility Criteria For Kinder + Subsidy

4.1 Does the family hold a Commonwealth Pensioner Concession Card or Commonwealth Health Care Card? Yes No
Number _____

4.2 If No, please provide details of why you are applying for Kinder + fee assistance, e.g Short term illness, unexpected drop in income, family crisis OR funding for additional hours to benefit the child & family, assistance with transport. (You may be asked to provide documentation.)

4.3 Please indicate the family circumstances.(tick all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> unemployment | <input type="checkbox"/> sole parent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> family illness | <input type="checkbox"/> cultural reasons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> housing affordability | <input type="checkbox"/> student |
| <input type="checkbox"/> financial hardship | <input type="checkbox"/> live in public housing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> international student | <input type="checkbox"/> recently arrived from overseas |

Other _____

* Funds may be available for the whole year or on a short term basis.

5. Other Assistance

5.1 Would you like to be put in touch with a local support agency that may be able to assist your family further? Yes No

6. Declaration by Kindergarten President.

I, _____ certify that all the details supplied in support of this application are true and correct.

Signature _____ Date _____
Contact Tel _____

Privacy Statement - The personal information requested on this form is being collected by Foundation Boroondara in order to administer the fee subsidy support scheme. Foundation Boroondara will not disclose this information to any other body or organisation.

Disclaimer - The Kinder + Subsidy may not cover the full cost of 4 year old kinder. Foundation Boroondara reserves the right to seek additional information if required.

APPENDIX 6

September 2007

KINDER +

Seeking to address barriers to kindergarten attendance

Introduction

Foundation Boroondara together with the Rotary Clubs of Hawthorn and Balwyn is undertaking a project to identify the barriers to kindergarten participation and to propose a future program that could be implemented to address those barriers. Such a program may include the introduction of a subsidy fund.

Why is This Project Needed?

More than 4000 children missed out on preschool in Victoria last year, mainly because parents could not afford the fees. Recent research undertaken by the Brotherhood of St Lawrence into child poverty within Boroondara, reported that a "lack of access to education was a major symptom of child exclusion". It recommended that measures to address kindergarten participation be expanded.

About the Project

This project aims to facilitate access to 4 year old kindergarten commencing in 2008 for *all* children in Boroondara by:

- Identifying those children who cannot or do not access 4 year old kindergarten.
- Identifying those children whose families experience difficulties meeting the fees due to financial hardship.
- To explore the option of a kindergarten fee subsidy and/or other supports.

What We Need

We require information from schools, kindergartens and support agencies within Boroondara. The data we are seeking will *form the basis of a fee subsidy program* to assist families in need and will be kept confidential. Your much needed support and co-operation is appreciated and paramount the success of this project. Denise Whitelaw has been appointed as the Kinder+ project officer and can be contacted on 0407 536 673.

Di Cummins
Executive Officer
Foundation Boroondara
Ph - 9278 4763
www.foundationboroondara.org.au
di.cummins@boroondara.vic.gov.au

Seeking to address barriers to kindergarten attendance
Kindergarten Questionnaire

Introduction

Foundation Boroondara is seeking confidential information to identify families in need of help with kindergarten fee assistance and/or other support. We do not require names or seek to identify families. We are simply gathering information about their family circumstances. The sample group will include the 30 sessional community kindergartens within Boroondara.

1. Name of kindergarten? _____
2. How many children did you have enrolled in your DHS funded 4 year old program in-
2006? _____
2007? _____
3. How many families have Health Care Cards?
4. Did you have any families last year and this year who couldn't pay the fees due to financial hardship? Yes/No
5. Were there additional reasons given such as: (*please circle*)
 - unemployment
 - family illness
 - other health issues
 - sole parent
 - student
 - cultural reasonsOther _____
6. How many? _____
7. Short term based or for the whole year? (*please circle*)
8. Does your kinder have a policy to deal with non-payment of fees? Yes/No
9. Do these families remain at the kinder despite non-payment? Yes/ No
10. Does your kinder absorb the cost on non-fee payment? Yes/No
11. How does this impact on the viability of your kindergarten?
eg. Pressure to increase fees.
More fundraising activities
Other _____

12. Are you aware of other reasons why families drop out of 4 year old kindergarten?
(Transfers to other kinders excepted) Yes/No
eg. Access to transport

Other _____

13. Would the provision of fee subsidies for these families assist your kindergarten?
Yes/No

14. Do you have anything further to add?

**Could you please complete the questions by October 12th and return to me via
email dwhitelaw@bigpond.com or post to Denise Whitelaw,
P.O box 2182 Hawthorn .Vic.3122**

Thank you for your time

APPENDIX 7

September 2007

KINDER +

Seeking to address barriers to kindergarten attendance

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