



**Kindergarten Parents Victoria**

## ***Solutions Pilot Project***

### **Report on Needs and Issues**

**For Committees of Management and Clusters  
in the State of Victoria and in Project Pilot Municipalities**

**June 2009**

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**KPV Solutions Pilot Project**  
**Report on the Needs and Issues Analysis**  
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**Introduction**

The KPV Solutions Pilot Project, has been funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) for two years – September 2008 to September 2010. The project is in partnership with Monash University, Peninsula Campus, and the Municipal Association of Victoria. Early childhood education is being shaped by the growing understanding of the importance of children's early experiences in shaping their life chances. This is reflected in government initiatives that aim to improve the quality, provision and management of services delivering early childhood education. This is an exciting time as we stand on the brink of great change.

Current issues and policy developments include:

- Children's Services Regulations 2009, implemented May 25 2009
- 15 hour kindergarten per week, 40 weeks of the year by 2013
- The Early Years Learning Framework, due to be implemented in July 2009
- Transition to school plans due to be implemented for the beginning of the 2010 school year
- National Quality Framework
- Industrial changes – new employment agreement for teachers and assistants
- Flexible service delivery that fits within families changing and busy lifestyles.
- Universal access to funded kindergarten
- Affordability – parent fees

There is currently an unprecedented focus on early childhood education. Both in Australia and internationally, governments are acknowledging that quality early childhood education can have a positive impact on a child's future and as a result more demands are being placed on independent kindergarten committees of management and cluster managers..

During the project, KPV will be looking at ways to support effective governance, collaborative service planning, purposeful parental involvement, greater community engagement, networking and professional development.

As part of the pilot project a needs and issue analysis was undertaken to clarify and determine the needs and other issues around governance and management of the kindergartens in Victoria, both independent and cluster managed and in particular services in the pilot municipalities. The combined surveys, documents and individual meetings, meant approximately 200 kindergartens were represented and 16 clusters and 14 individuals were consulted.

The needs and issues were gathered via the following methods:

Surveys:

- An internal survey of a sample of independent kindergarten committees of management in the three pilot municipalities, mainly presidents;

- An internal survey in conjunction with the Parenting Resource Centre of all the independent kindergarten committees of management throughout Victoria;
- An internal state wide cluster manager survey.

Documents:

- The state government response to the Review of Kindergarten Cluster Management July 2008.

Individual meetings:

- The three pilot municipality council early childhood personnel
- Regional personnel in the two Department of Education and Early Childhood Development that cover the pilot areas: the Eastern Region and the Gippsland Region.

This needs and issue analysis will be used to inform the project plan and specifically the implementation plan of the work to be undertaken alongside independent kindergarten and cluster managed committees of management.

The needs and issues analysis was undertaken between October 2008 and March 2009.

Throughout this report the needs and issues identified will be linked to the project outcomes and deliverables as detailed below:

**Solutions Pilot Project Outcomes:**

1. Enhanced sustainability for cluster managed and independent kindergartens through new models of support particularly in terms of:
  1. good governance,
  2. community responsiveness,
  3. service planning and;
  4. professional development and networking.
2. More effective and efficient management of early childhood programs through improved governance practices of participating independent kindergartens and cluster managers.
3. Increased understanding amongst participating independent kindergartens of the potential benefits of cluster management and closer relationships with their local council.
4. Improved coordination and responsiveness of participating services to:
  - o families and children,
  - o parent committees and;
  - o the broader local community in targeted municipalities.
5. Improved mentoring and supervision of staff including through increased professional development.

**Solutions Pilot Project Deliverables**

1. A coordinated system of leadership including collaborative service planning across the municipalities linked to Municipal Early Years Plans (MEYs). Include dissemination of information about cluster management, government policy directions, governance issues, etc from the Office of Children, and other relevant organisations. (Early Childhood Education support system)
2. A model of Early Learning Networks that can be replicated across the field providing professional leadership, mentoring and supervision for kindergarten staff and early childhood career opportunities to undergraduate students (ELNs)
3. Resources:
  - a. Fleximodels

- b. Second resource to be developed in second financial year of project
- 4. Recommendations for new models to support sustainable independent kindergarten
- 5. Assist cluster managers participation in the pilots to meet the standards required of a sustainable cluster management, including drawing on existing cluster management via KPV cluster management reference group.

## Main needs and issues identified

### 1. Independent kindergartens

**1a** *The following findings are from the KPV survey of independent Committees of Management in the three pilot municipalities: City of Monash, Bass Coast Shire and Shire of Yarra Ranges.*

The presidents surveyed were asked several questions about committee of management processes. One of the important issues for the Solutions Pilot Project is that 45% of respondents have no previous experience on the Committee of management (CoM) but 40% of those surveyed had been involved for more than one year. The attendance rate at CoM meetings could be considered low at between 50-70%. Committees of management numbers varied from 10 to up to 25 members. 25% of kindergartens had more than 15 people on their committee of management. 80% of kindergartens have subcommittees but very few had subcommittees dealing with staff, policy development or grievance issues, and interestingly 40% in the KPV survey reported handling staff conflict as their most difficult role.

The handover for presidents is considered by 63% as not useful, which is a key management process that will be addressed in the project. Financial leadership is one area that needs more clarity. Most of the presidents interviewed said there were financial processes in place but may not be followed all the time. 95% of committees in this survey received a monthly financial report and made collective decisions regarding expenditure. Two thirds of centres did employ a bookkeeper. The main key theme from the survey is there appears a lack of confidence around financial management and planning even if there are processes in place. Stronger financial management will be addressed through new models of support in the governance area.

Other issues identified included:

- The committees seldom engage independently with staff over professional development;
- Overall, CoM were aware of their legal responsibilities and were familiar with key documents;
- 95% of centres surveyed families each year and 40% of CoM said they had made changes as a result.

In regards to cluster management, when asked presidents of the independent CoM had concerns about lack of parental involvement and were unsure if clusters were a good management model. 75% said they had investigated cluster management but only 30% of these indicated they would be likely to join one in the future. Outcome three of Solutions Pilot Project addresses the potential benefits of cluster management and to dispel misunderstanding about the cluster management model.

**1b** *Relevant key findings of the KPV survey of independent kindergarten Committee of Management state wide. The Parenting Research Centre carried out the analysis in January 2009. 179 surveys were returned representing 29% of state wide independent committees.*

The following needs and issues identified range from concerns about developing practice and infrastructure around the 15 hour kindergarten federal government policy to cluster management, training topics and identification of what is onerous for CoM. These concerns can be addressed in the Solutions Pilot Project by the Leadership Workshops which can specifically address some of these concerns and also via the Web2 technology that KPV is working to develop as part of the Solutions Pilot Project. Once again, some of the concerns of CoM will be addressed through taking a closer look at different models of support for governance procedures. Specifically, concerns raised included:

- 15 hour kindergarten:
  - 40% of centres reported they should be able to offer 15 hours of funded preschool
  - Those centres who said they could offer the 15 hours were long daycare centres
  - To support 15 hour kindergarten support included: increased funding, more time and/or staff and more space
- Centres were more likely to have considered joining a cluster management model when the average hours worked by the Treasurer were greater. When the Committee Secretary hours are seen to be reasonable, centres were less likely to consider joining a cluster model
- 90% of centres reported that their staff have access to professional networks
- Centres indicated the most interest in staff training was around 'communicating with families', follow by 'inclusive practice and children with disabilities' and 'effective transition to school'. Interest in online training was indicated by 62% of centres. This finding endorses that Web2 technology that is being developed as part of the Solutions Pilot Project may be well received.
- Committees were asked to name their most onerous responsibilities. These were listed as:
  - Consideration of cluster management
  - DEECD requirements
  - Industrial relations
  - Managing conflict
- To offer integrated kindergarten and childcare programs, CoM reported they would need more space and more qualified staff but it was sometimes reiterated kindergartens were not childcare centres

## 2. Cluster managed kindergartens

Cluster managed kindergartens are a relatively new policy direction stemming from the government response to the Kirby Review in 2003. In 2007 a government funded review of cluster management was undertaken. The Solutions Pilot Project outcome no. three addresses the concerns of cluster management kindergartens: Increased understanding amongst participating independent kindergartens of the potential benefits of cluster management and closer relationships with their local council.

**2a** *The findings below of the needs and issues surrounding cluster management have been taken from the government response to the KPMG review.*

- Some clusters are hampered by insufficient funding and lack of organisational infrastructure.
- Federated and amalgamated cluster managers were experiencing difficulty in developing governance and management practices
- Local government cluster managers could draw on existing governance structures
- Poor alignment of government policy and kindergarten cluster management
- Limited promotion and understanding of cluster management
- Limited understanding of the early childhood sector by some cluster managers
- Limited engagement in local planning processes
- In some cases the cluster manager system was competitive

**2b** *The findings from the KPV survey of 16 cluster managers representing approximately 203 early education sites. The survey was conducted in October 2008.*

- Almost half of the respondents adopted the federated model which relies on volunteer parent committee representatives for management and the model the government has stated will no longer endorse

- 94% of cluster managers provide administration assistance to sites within their cluster
- The majority of clusters indicated they are not in a strong position to implement 15 hours of funded preschool. Reasons given are:
  - More funding required
  - Increased availability of qualified staff, especially in rural areas
  - More facilities and extension of existing buildings

Parental involvement was mainly in the form of program development, fundraising, kindergarten events and parent committees that work with the cluster manager. Less than half of clusters have parents committee representatives on their board.

- 68% of cluster managers reported they that overall their board members have an understanding of their role while 13% said their board did not. There was support for governance training, publication and assistance in developing governance policies.
- In terms of training more than half of head office indicated they would be interested in online training while only 25% of individual site staff were interested in online training.
- Interest in training included engagement with the broader community and parents and support of committees, transition to school, family law and privacy and information sharing.

### **3. Individual meetings between KPV, council staff and DEECD staff**

In October and November 2008, the Project Manager and Project Coordinator visited the pilot municipalities, DEECE in early childhood education and development staff. The following is a summary of the issues highlighted during those conversations:

#### **Bass Coast Shire**

- Consideration of central enrolment in the Bass Coast Shire
- The proposed desalination plant in the Bass Coast Shire may mean there will be greater demand on a limited number of places to accommodate the children of the increased workforce.
- There is an aging workforce
- The Shire is very short of relief teachers
- There is a development of a community hub

#### **City of Monash**

- Children from a CALD background are not attending preschool
- The perception of cluster management model is not good
- Longer hours kindergarten viewed as childcare

#### **Shire of Yarra Ranges**

- Viability concerns with some kindergartens
- The main administration needs are to do with central enrolment, financial and general administration
- Most of the kindergartens feel supported by their local government
- There is a need for many preschool upgrades

#### **Other concerns mentioned**

- Kindergarten teachers still recovering from the amalgamation process

- There is a view longer hours kindergarten as child care and/or there is resistance to a longer model
- The support of cluster management is dubious
- Limited council resources
- HR and administration people feel isolated
- Teachers believe the amount of hours they work in administration support as unreasonable
- Greater support is required for new clusters
- Service delivery goes rotational if numbers are low, teachers reluctant to use longer models
- There needs to be a greater understanding of cluster management
- Programs are being offered on the same day. There needs to be better planning between services

### **What do these findings mean for the KPV Solutions Pilot Project?**

The implementation of Federal and State Government policies will need support (Early Years Learning Framework 2010, transition to school, 15 hour kindergarten for all four year olds 2013). According to this analysis, more space, staff and funding are required. KPV can undertake some advocacy for greater funding and the Early Childhood Management Consultants (ECMC) for each pilot area can investigate the needs and the 'how to' of the policy implementation during the life of the project and help prepare committees and clusters.

In terms of clusters, the level of support required would be similar to that of independent CoM as the federated model relies heavily on parental voluntary support. However, there seems to be a lack of clear or persuasive information regarding cluster management. The Solutions Pilot Project will have a strong role here in working with the independent kindergarten committees in explaining this management model in more detail. In addition, new clusters are considered vulnerable and needing more support.

As for governance and management, many issues were identified from lack of experience of the president, a heavier than expected workload, few subcommittees dealing specifically with policy development, low attendance at committee meetings, to managing staff conflict and finances. The lack of engagement in training could be seen as an issue needing addressing along with handover considered not very useful. The ECMC will have a strong role in working with presidents and developing more useful ways of organizing subcommittees, attendance at COM and finances. This falls within outcome one: Enhanced sustainability for cluster managed and independent kindergartens through new models of support in good governance.

There was a good deal of interest in online training but few CoM had participated in either KPV or local government training. Networks seem to be valued and active but their facilitation of them and the numbers supporting the networks could be an area of support given to the municipalities via the project. The Solutions Pilot Project has two strategies: developing a Leaders Workshop and a Early Years Support Network. These strategies will support the idea development through Web2 technologies to further the training and implementation of new models of governance and leadership.

This needs and issues analysis has revealed that each municipality has its own unique areas of interest and need. For example, Bass Coast has an aging workforce. Concern has been raised therefore that any changes in service delivery may be seen as unnecessary. The City of Monash has a high CALD population that is not engaged in early childhood education, and some kindergartens in the Shire of Yarra Ranges may be unviable and have indicated a strong need around central enrolment. In terms of the Solutions Pilot Project the issues raised in the needs analysis for each municipality need to be taken into consideration as well as working to provide 'solutions' to some of the major issues identified across the board.

Many of the concerns highlighted stem from an operational dependence on planning rather than governance and strategic. Part of the problem facing independent kindergartens is there is no budget for the operational and therefore many committees of management work toward the more practical operational procedures. A great focus on long term strategic would be a great outcome for kindergartens through the Solutions Pilot Project. Also, attracting leaders that think more strategically to move kindergartens toward this level of thinking and not so much task driven would be a good approach for and way of thinking to be nurtured in the Leaders Workshops and in the Early Years Support Networks.

## **Conclusion**

The needs and issues analysis undertaken for the Solutions Pilot Project of independent kindergartens and clusters has identified a broad range of concerns. Some are common to the three municipalities while each municipality also has its unique needs and issues. The Solutions Pilot Project is broad ranging in its goal to build some supports to develop a more sustainable kindergarten system. Those kindergartens and clusters engaged in the project will likely benefit a great deal from the strategies employed to address some of the needs and issues identified.

The following questions specifically highlights some of the needs identified for the purposes of guiding initial discussion both internally with the KPV Solutions Pilot Project Team and externally with the project participants.

### **Key questions for the solutions project in addressing these needs:**

1. How can the Solutions Pilot Project help COM and clusters, through change management processes, to adapt for the future policy impacts?
2. How can the Solutions Pilot Project help sustain those existing professional networks to flourish and identify areas where establishing other networks may be of value?
3. Although it was identified through this analysis that kindergartens engage families via surveys and the like, less than half made adaption's to their services in response. More information is required to find out why that is along with an exploration with cluster and COM in how to engage families in service development in response to their changing needs.
4. Collaborative service planning was not identified as a need or issue in this analysis. This could be because collaborative service planning may be a relatively new concept or it is being done by others outside the COM for some other reason. As the Solutions Pilot Project has, as one of its outcomes, greater collaborative service planning between kindergartens, cluster managers, local government and the DEECD, the question arises how best to do this without overburdening already burdened COM and clusters? This one of the key government policy agenda needing to be supported through the Solutions Pilot Project.
5. It appears from this analysis that most COM are not involved in the mentoring or professional development needs of staff. There is a benefit through the Solutions Pilot Project that more information be gathered on the professional development and mentoring needs of staff and how the COM, as the employer, can support their needs.

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