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Better beginnings: A Western Australian State Library initiated family literacy project

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Barratt-Pugh, C., Rohl, M., Oakley, G., & Elderfield, J. (2005). *Better beginnings: A Western Australian State Library initiated family literacy project.* Mount Lawley, Australia: School of Education, Edith Cowan University.
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Better Beginnings

an evaluation from two communities

Caroline Barratt-Pugh Mary Rohl Grace Oakley Jessica Elderfield



Department of Culture and the Arts
Government of Western Australia
State Library of Western Australia

ECU UNIVERSITY
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A Western Australian State Library Initiated Family Literacy Project

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LIBRARY

Publication Details

This project was funded through the ECU Industry Collaboration Scheme by Edith Cowan University and the State Library of Western Australia.

Better Beginnings: An evaluation from two communities.
ISBN: 0-7298-0607-3

Published by Edith Cowan University
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MOUNT LAWLEY WA 6050
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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Margaret Allen (CEO of the State Library of Western Australia) and Susan Feeney (Director of Public Library Services) for their support and encouragement in the development and implementation of the evaluation of *Better Beginnings*. Without their commitment to and endorsement of *Better Beginnings* this project would not have been possible. The research underpinning the evaluation of *Better Beginnings* was made possible by the generous support of the *Better Beginnings* Project Co-ordinator, staff from the State Library of Western Australia, librarians from the Local Government libraries, Community Health Nurses and parents in two communities. The Project Co-ordinator gave a great deal of her time to describing and explaining *Better Beginnings* from its conception to its eventual development and implementation. But more than this, she was always available to answer unexpected questions or elaborate on particular aspects of *Better Beginnings* to ensure clarity and depth of understanding. The librarians and the Community Health Nurses gave a wealth of information, both spoken and written, in focus interviews. Their enthusiasm and openness enabled us to identify factors which had an impact on the successful implementation of *Better Beginnings*. The parents, who are at the centre of the *Better Beginnings* program, completed two surveys and took the time to write comments about the Resource Pack (toolkit) even though their time was limited, as they all had a new baby in the family. This gave us significant insight into their view of *Better Beginnings*, the value and use of the *Better Beginnings* Resource Pack (toolkit), library membership and activities and future directions. Finally, eleven families welcomed a researcher into their home in order to discuss *Better Beginnings* in more depth and demonstrate their interaction around text with their new baby. This gave us a wealth of information about the impact of *Better Beginnings* on individual families and insight into book-sharing practices and library membership and use. We thank them all for their interest and commitment, and acknowledge that the evaluation could not have been undertaken without their generous support and enthusiasm.

We would also like to thank all the parents who gave us permission to reproduce their photographs to use on the cover and as part of the text of the report.

Finally, we would like to thank Rhonda Draper for her excellent design and formatting of the final document and Jo McFarlane for her extensive editing.

Caroline Barratt-Pugh *Mary Rohl* *Grace Oakley* *Jessica Elderfield*

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Executive summary

This report describes an evaluation of the implementation of the 2004 *Better Beginnings* pilot program in two diverse communities.

What is Better Beginnings?

Better Beginnings is an early intervention family literacy program that has been developed by the Public Library Services Directorate, at the State Library of Western Australia. Its stated purpose is to provide positive language and literacy influences for children in their first three years of life. The program is thought to be the first of its kind in Australia and has recently been taken up by another Australian Territory State. A fully evaluated pilot of Better Beginnings commenced in January 2004 in Gosnells, Mandurah, Midland, Carnarvon, Halls Creek and Kalgoorlie and in September was extended to include Armadale, Rockingham, Bayswater, East Pilbara and Ashburton. The program will be expanded state-wide during the next four years to a range of communities that represent diverse geographical, social, cultural and economic contexts. The State Government's continued financial commitment along with that of Local Government and funding from the Rio Tinto WA Future Fund will enable Better Beginnings to be rolled-out to communities across Western Australia commencing in 2005/06.

The State Library of Western Australia has developed and is implementing the *Better Beginnings* program in order to encourage an ongoing exchange of information between early childhood professionals and families. The program is related to the Western Australian Government's *Early Years Strategy* that aims to improve the wellbeing of young children aged 0-8 years. The program is based on strong cooperation between state and local government service agencies and non-government service providers. In planning and developing the program, there has been a high degree of consultation and engagement with local communities. *Better Beginnings* is based on a multifaceted approach to family literacy and aims to encourage parents gain a better understanding of their role as their child's first teacher.

The overall cognitive focus of *Better Beginnings* is for government agencies to work in partnership with families to support children's early literacy and learning. Whilst other program elements are being progressively introduced, the key elements from 2004 described in this report are:

- A resource pack ('toolkit') for parents of young babies, containing a quality children's book, a colourful growth measurement chart with nursery rhymes printed on it, and information about the value of reading to children, some titles of popular children's books and information about local library resources;
- Parent/child workshops and baby story-time sessions, involving young children and their parents and featuring public library, health care and child development professionals.

The evaluation of the pilot project

A team from Edith Cowan University was asked by the State Library of Western Australia to undertake an independent evaluation of the *Better Beginnings* pilot project. The evaluation was jointly funded by Edith Cowan University and the State Library of Western Australia. It was decided that the focus of the evaluation should be the implementation of *Better Beginnings* in two of the six communities in which it was being delivered. The following questions were addressed:

1. What were the key factors in the design and decisions made about the implementation of the *Better Beginnings* pilot program?
2. What were the key factors in the implementation of the *Better Beginnings* pilot program?
3. What was the effectiveness of the *Better Beginnings* pilot program from the participants' perspectives?
4. What factors seem to add or detract from the effectiveness of the *Better Beginnings* family literacy intervention program?

Who took part in the pilot program evaluation?

Mothers in two different communities who had new babies, had received the *Better Beginnings* resource pack and who had agreed to take part in the project completed surveys about the program. Eleven of these mothers were visited by a researcher, were interviewed and were observed reading to their babies. The project coordinator and one of the community librarians were interviewed individually and community health nurses and librarians took part in focus group interviews.

What were the mothers' views about the Better Beginnings *program?*

The resource pack (toolkit)

- The mothers were overwhelmingly positive about the pack as a whole
- Almost every mother found the book to be useful or very useful
- Not all felt able to make comments about the other elements of the pack, but of those who did, most found them to be useful or very useful
- Most did not want anything else added to the pack but some asked for modifications that concerned durability of the materials or additional information on literacy

Better Beginnings activities

- At the time of the evaluation the *Better Beginnings* activities were in the early stages of development and not all mothers were aware of them
- One third of the mothers took part in the baby story-time sessions and a few parents took part in parent-child workshops at the library
- On the whole these parents found the activities to be very useful and some suggested modifications for future sessions

What changes were reported in the mothers' perceptions and practices?

Sharing books, rhymes and songs with babies

- Almost all mothers shared books with their babies after being involved in the *Better Beginnings* program
- A majority of mothers had seen sharing books with babies as important before being involved in *Better Beginnings* activities
- Those who did not see sharing books with babies as important before *Better Beginnings* saw it as important once involved
- Almost all mothers shared rhymes and songs with their babies after being involved in the *Better Beginnings* program
- Most had seen singing songs and rhymes as being important before being involved in the *Better Beginnings* program
- One third of mothers indicated that *Better Beginnings* had changed/reinforced their opinion that babies can benefit from rhymes and songs
- The case study mothers felt that the resource pack had been well explained to them by *Better Beginnings* personnel and they were observed to be following the strategies recommended in *Better Beginnings* resources when reading to their babies.

Library membership and use

- After being involved in *Better Beginnings*, half of those mothers who had not previously been library members joined the library
- A majority of mothers reported that *Better Beginnings* had changed their opinion that babies could have library membership and one third had taken out library membership for their babies
- As their babies became older and more active, there was not an increase in visits to the library by mothers, which is partly explained by the fact that at one library the librarian brought library resources to the mothers in their homes
- The majority of mothers who were library members borrowed books for themselves and their babies after being involved in *Better Beginnings*
- Half of these mothers reported borrowing videos, CDs and DVDs for their babies

What seemed to facilitate the implementation?

Coordination of the program

- The appointment of a State Library-based project co-ordinator with responsibility for the design, training and implementation of the program meant that it was co-ordinated consistently across the communities
- The project co-ordinator co-ordinated collaboration with partner agencies at a central and community level, thus ensuring that the program was inclusive in terms of the professionals involved.
- This collaboration, particularly in the development and distribution of the resource pack ensured that stakeholders voices were heard and that modifications could be made where indicated
- The project co-ordinator was able to respond quickly to community feedback about the program elements
- The project co-ordinator facilitated meetings between the librarians involved, in order to monitor and support the program in their communities
- Because she had an overview of the whole project the project co-ordinator was able to ensure that the program was flexible in terms of meeting the needs of different communities

Inter-agency collaboration

- Collaboration between health and library personnel at State and local levels was important for the effective distribution of the resource packs and information about health and library resources
- The understanding of the Community Health Nurses that *Better Beginnings* complemented their work with families enabled them to communicate more directly the value of sharing books with babies
- The commitment, enthusiasm and shared goals of Community Health Nurses and librarians helped them work towards the aims of *Better Beginnings*
- The flexibility of the program allowed for different ways of inter-agency collaboration and delivery of the *Better Beginnings* program within each community
- Inter-agency collaboration between different professionals enabled the *Better Beginnings* program to be extended through a range of community groups
- Information about the local library included in the resource pack gave the Community Health Nurses the opportunity to talk about babies joining the library at an early age and were able to re-assure mothers that children of all ages were welcome at the library
- As part of the inter-agency collaboration the Community Health Nurses and librarians were able to involve other professionals who had additional expertise in early language and literacy and in turn they had been invited to promote the program in other community groups

Resource pack

The attractiveness and informative nature of the free gift resource pack (toolkit) meant that it was well received by the mothers at a time when they were particularly receptive to new information that they could put into practice.

What were the issues identified in the implementation?

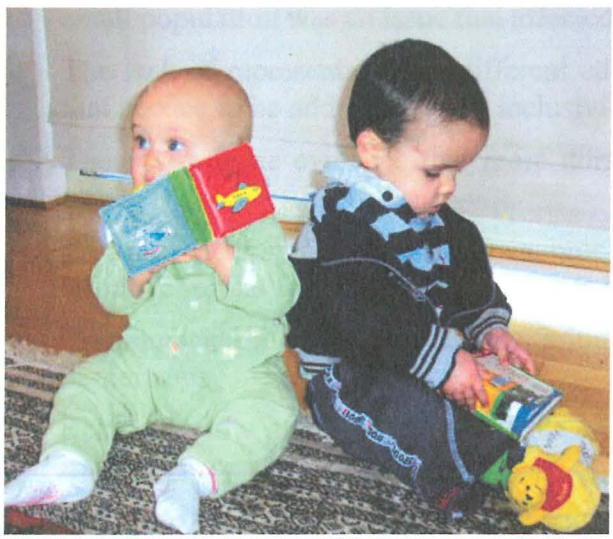
- The extra time and work that *Better Beginnings* entailed for the Community Health Nurses and librarians was problematic in that these enthusiastic and passionate people were involved in developing and implementing activities that were beyond their job descriptions
- The uncertain nature of funding during the pilot project made it difficult for the personnel involved to plan in the long-term
- Some of the professionals involved indicated that they had little training in early years literacy learning and activities and, whilst during the course of the program they had acquired new learning and skills, there was a need for targeted professional development
- Establishing a partnership with other agencies was identified as a challenge in that some initial contacts were problematic
- The limited availability of suitable books within a large diverse state with a relatively small population was an issue that affected the composition of the resource packs
- The lack of representation of different ethnic groups in materials was seen as a factor that needed to be addressed as an inclusivity issue
- There was some evidence that more durable materials could have been more widely used
- The presentation of information in brochure format did not appear to be the most effective format for reaching new parents in the two communities
- Communication about the library initiated activities apparently did not reach all participants
- Relatively low attendance rates at the library initiated activities was identified as an issue of concern
- Perceived lack of timely communication about library initiated activities could have compromised attendance at these events, which were newly developed

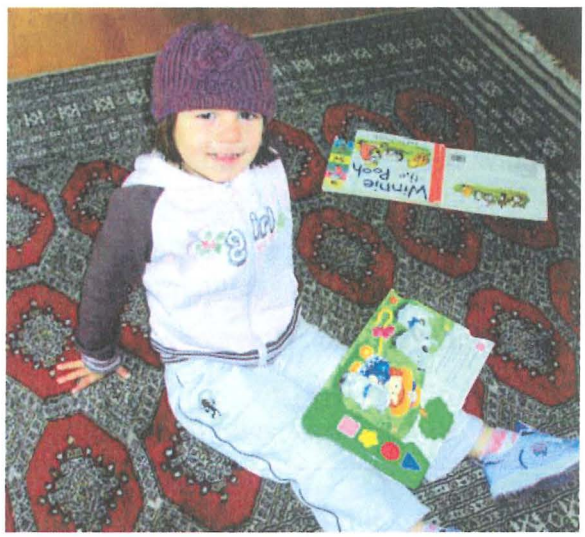
What were the major strengths of the Better Beginnings *pilot program?*

- The initiation and co-ordination of *Better Beginnings* by the State Library has the potential for long-term follow-up activities (not an element of some similar programs in other parts of the world)
- The commitment and passion of the project co-ordinator, the librarians and Community Health Nurses involved
- Inter-agency collaboration
- The flexibility of *Better Beginnings* that has enabled the program to be implemented and developed in a range of community contexts
- The alignment of *Better Beginnings* with the State Early Years Literacy Strategy that has ensured it has a high profile and potential for further development and collaboration across other government and non-government agencies
- A high quality resource pack








Winnie the Pooh

Background to the *Better Beginnings* program in Western Australia

Better Beginnings is an early intervention family literacy program based on the Bookstart program in the UK (Wade & Moore, 1993) that has been developed by Public Library Services, at the State Library of Western Australia. Its stated purpose is to provide positive language and literacy influences for children in their first three years of life. The program is thought to be the first of its kind in Australia and has recently been taken up by another Australian State. This report describes an evaluation of the implementation of the 2004 *Better Beginnings* pilot program in two diverse communities. The program is being delivered across Western Australia during a four-year period to a range of communities that represent diverse geographical, social, cultural and economic contexts.

The State Library of Western Australia has developed and is implementing the *Better Beginnings* program in order to encourage work in partnership with families to provide positive influences for children in their first three years of life by supporting children's early literacy and learning. It is designed to build on parent's existing knowledge and children's experiences in the home to encourage and support the vital role of parents as their child's first teacher. As well, the program encourages an ongoing exchange of information between early childhood professionals and families. The program has been piloted in ten communities and is related to the Western Australian Government's *Early Years Strategy* that aims to improve the wellbeing of young children aged 0-8 years. This strategy focuses on supporting families, engaging communities in the planning and development of resources and providing coordinated and responsive client services and other support. The *Better Beginnings* program is based on strong cooperation between State and local government service agencies and non-government service providers. In planning and developing the program, there has been a high degree of consultation and engagement with local communities.

The overall cognitive focus of *Better Beginnings* is for government agencies to work in partnership with families to support children's early literacy and learning. The key program elements include:

- A resource pack ('toolkit') for parents of young babies, containing a quality children's book, a colourful growth measurement chart with nursery rhymes printed on it, and information about the value of reading to children, some titles of popular children's books and information about local library resources;
- Parent/child workshops, involving young children and their parents and featuring public library, health care and child development professionals;
- A 'toolkit' for health care professionals and community workers to provide information on the value of reading to young children and the resources and support available through the state-wide public library system;
- 'Tool boxes' that promote resources for children and their families that can be used in community centres, child care centres, play groups, and hospitals as well as in high traffic areas, such as shopping centres;
- Family reading centres in libraries that provide interactive early childhood learning spaces;
- A web site that aims to promote family literacy.

The value of sharing books with young children

The promotion of book sharing between parents and young children and the recognition of the importance of the parent as the child's first teacher are central to the *Better Beginnings* program. Children's literacy development begins at a very early age as they imitate sounds, recognize familiar voices and when given the opportunity, engage in shared interactions around simple books (Neuman & Celano, 2001). There is a wealth of evidence which suggests that engaging young children in stimulating experiences with and around texts, has positive consequences for literacy development (Neuman et al., 2001).

Research shows that book reading (Bus, Van Ijzendoorn & Pellegrini 1995; Sulzby, 1994; Wells, 1985) and rhymes and language play (Bryant & Bradley, 1985) in the earliest years have the potential to bring about improved language and literacy outcomes for children. There is evidence that children learn new vocabulary from hearing books read aloud (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Elley, 1998). This is important for early literacy as it has been found that exposure to rich vocabulary and stimulating discussion in the years before formal school predicts literacy development in the first year of school and literacy in fourth and seventh grade (Dickinson & Tabors, 2002). Further, while a rich vocabulary may be achieved through discussion of everyday experiences, exposure to the rich and complex language of books may promote the more complex syntactic and morphological language associated with school (Frijters, Baron & Brunello, 2000).

Other research has shown that interaction patterns around book sharing differ within and across cultures and socio-economic groups, but that ultimately it is parents' own literacy practices which appear to determine opportunities for young children to become involved in literacy related interactions (Bus, Leseman & Keultjes, 2002). Evidence from evaluation of family literacy programs suggests that parents who are not used to sharing books may need ongoing support in selecting appropriate books and in scaffolding interaction (Bus, van Ijzendoorn & Pellegrini 1995; Neuman, 1996). Thus, whilst very young children are the target population for many family literacy intervention programs, the main participants are the parents of these children, which highlights the power of parental 'transfer of behaviour, beliefs, practices, expectations and potential to their progeny' (Gadsden, 2000, p. 873). Further, ongoing involvement in literacy activities seems to be a key determining factor in the success of family literacy programs. The *Better Beginnings* family literacy intervention program offers a range of opportunities to build on and extend initial contact with parents, in order to sustain literacy development over time. This includes parent workshops, story-time sessions, outreach community resource kits and family reading centres.

Family literacy programs

A proliferation of family literacy programs around the world has generated a wealth of data suggesting that the provision of literacy experiences for very young children may produce positive outcomes for all family members. Family literacy initiatives have often meant some form of intervention with a focus on providing specific language and/or literacy experiences for preschool or early primary school children (Clay, 1985; Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Dolan & Wasik, 1992). These interventions have often been targeted at children who could be seen as 'at risk' of developing difficulties in acquiring early literacy skills and knowledge such as those from particular home backgrounds. Research suggests that children's home environments have a crucial effect on early literacy learning and that they learn their family's and community's literacy practices and the value placed on literacy through the process of socialisation (Gee, 1996; Luke, Comber & O'Brien 1996; Moll, 1994; Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez 1992, Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998;). As such, it seems that, ideally, language/literacy intervention should take place in the home and in the community as early in the child's life as possible.

Bookstart family literacy programs

The *Bookstart* program originated in the United Kingdom in 1992. It is a multi-agency partnership between the public services of libraries, health and education. The program is based on the principle that every child should have the opportunity to enjoy book sharing from an early age. There has been a great deal of research in the UK into outcomes that may be attributed to *Bookstart* (Collins, Svensson & Mahony, 2005). For example, children in the program appear to be more advanced in literacy at school entry than their peers who have not taken part in the program.

Evidence from research undertaken in the United States and the United Kingdom has shown that public library-based family literacy intervention programs can result in significantly improved literacy outcomes for parents, children and other community members (Collins et al., 2005) Laughlin, 2003; Monsour & Carol, 1993; Wade & Moore, 1993). Research into outcomes of the *Bookstart* program led to the national provision of a 'book pack' for babies, toddlers and pre-school children in the UK for three years, at a cost of 40 million pounds per year. The impact of *Bookstart* has led to a number of similar initiatives in Japan, Thailand, Korea, India and Australia.

In Australia some form of library initiated *Bookstart* program is available to 1.76 million Australians. In addition, a number of *Bookstart* type programs are provided by infant health agencies or community organizations (Bundy, 2004). These initiatives represent a new policy direction in terms of a focus on intervention and family capacity building to help support and strengthen Australian families. However, the lack of quality assurance measures based on the assessment of outcomes of these Australian programs is of major concern (Bundy, 2004: De Lemos, 2002). With the proliferation of such family literacy programs the need to evaluate intended and real outcomes is crucial to ongoing implementation and future policy development. *Better Beginnings* in Western Australia is one of the first library initiated family literacy programs to be independently evaluated in Australia (Bundy, 2004).

Building language and literacy from birth

Traditionally, early literacy intervention programs in Australia have been implemented once children have begun formal schooling. In contrast, in *Better Beginnings,* babies are targeted within a family and community context. Early intervention at key transition points in

children's lives (for example, the first few months of life) have been identified as a key factor in successful outcomes of intervention programs (Rodgers, Edgecombe & Kimberley, 2004). Family literacy programs that begin at the birth of a child and change through the infant and toddler years have the potential to lead to positive literacy outcomes for families. Further, experiences in the very early years of learning have been shown to make a difference to children's cognitive attainment and subsequent social outcomes (Fleer, 2000). The literature regarding brain-based research articulates the importance of the early years of learning on brain development and later academic achievement (Lindsay, 1998). Providing early education has been identified as a better investment than paying for remediation programs later in life for problems related to poor early development (McCain & Mustard, 1999).

Literacy intervention in low income areas

There is evidence that assisting parents from low socio-economic backgrounds to identify with the importance of particular literacy practices appears to lead to increased frequency of these practices (Jay & Rohl, 2005; Wade & Moore, 1996). The long-term aim of *Better Beginnings* is to improve literacy outcomes for young children across Western Australia who live in diverse communities that contain significant proportions of families of low socio-economic status, some of whom might be seen as being at risk of school failure. Research has identified reading failure as disproportionately affecting children from socio-economically and/or educationally disadvantaged homes and it contributes to the cycle of poverty (Snow, et al., 1998). In the Australian context there is evidence of a relationship between social class and literacy achievement, with students from lower socio-economic levels (in particular Indigenous students) generally achieving lower levels of literacy (Lo Bianco & Freebody, 1997). In longitudinal studies into children's literacy development the lowest performing children have been overwhelmingly located in schools serving children living in poverty (Hill, S., Comber, B., Louden, W., Rivalland, J., & Reid, J., 2000). This remains a major educational and social challenge for governments and educators.

The development of inter-agency collaboration

Many intervention programs in the earliest years have been initiated by health care professionals and do not involve other agencies. In contrast, *Better Beginnings* is based upon a partnership between librarians, Community Health Nurses and other early childhood

professionals. Inter-agency collaboration is seen as a strength, as the aims of the program are reinforced, support is offered at many levels and agencies develop an integrated approach to the provision of services. In a review of the success of short intervention programs Rogers et al. (2004) identified professional involvement, that gives guidance and models shared reading practices with parents, contributes to the success of such programs. They also identified the importance of engaging families and linking them to ongoing services. In the *Better Beginnings* program the library is the key link between initial intervention and continuing support for parents.

The evaluation project

A team from Edith Cowan University was asked by the State Library of Western Australia to undertake an independent evaluation of the *Better Beginnings* pilot project. The evaluation was jointly funded by Edith Cowan University and the State Library of Western Australia. It was decided that the focus of the evaluation should be the implementation of *Better Beginnings* in two communities. The following questions were addressed:

1. What were the key factors in the design and decisions made about the implementation of the *Better Beginnings* pilot program?
2. What were the key factors in the implementation of the *Better Beginnings* pilot program?
3. What was the effectiveness of the *Better Beginnings* pilot program from the participants' perspectives?
4. What factors seem to add or detract from the effectiveness of the *Better Beginnings* family literacy intervention program?

Methodology of the Evaluation

A formative experimental design was chosen in order to evaluate the *Better Beginnings* pilot program. This methodology involves researchers combining qualitative and quantitative methods of investigation with interventions in learning situations and is well suited to exploratory investigations (Jacob, 1992; Oakley, 2003). The design allows researchers to examine not only learning outcomes, but also factors that contribute to or detract from the effectiveness of an intervention in achieving particular educational goals (Jay & Rohl, 2005; Jimenez, 1997; Reinking & Watkins, 2000).

The evaluation, which is based on both quantitative and qualitative data, took place in two of the six communities in which *Better Beginnings* was being implemented. Bura, a mining town, is 600 kms distant from the nearest major city, with a significant Indigenous population. In this community the program was implemented by the local librarians. The second community, Sherwood, an outer metropolitan suburb, has a range of residential settings with a small Indigenous population. In this community the program was jointly implemented by child health nurses and the local librarian.

Quantitative data

The quantitative data-base consisted of two surveys given to parents.

Survey 1

Survey 1 (see Appendix 1) was designed to collect information about demographics, library membership and use, book sharing practices, attitudes towards early literacy and initial reactions to the *Better Beginnings* resource pack. It was completed by parents, with the help of health care workers and/or librarians where necessary. In the two communities the procedures for distributing the *Better Beginnings* resource packs were somewhat different.

In Sherwood, the *Better Beginnings* resource packs were given out to new mothers at child health centres, usually during their first visit with the Community Health Nurse. It was planned that at this visit the Community Health Nurses would distribute both the resource pack and Survey 1. However, due to time constraints, this procedure was not followed by all Community Health Nurses. At this first visit to the child health centre mothers who agreed to take part in the study either completed Survey 1 or provided contact details that were forwarded to the library. The librarian telephoned each participating mother who had not filled out the survey at the child health centre, and the mother then dictated her responses to Survey 1, which were transcribed by the librarian.

In Bura, library staff visited the hospital each week and distributed the *Better Beginnings* resource packs to new mothers. Contact details were collected at this time and once each mother had left the hospital a library staff member telephoned her and the mother then dictated her responses to Survey 1, which were transcribed by the librarian.

In view of the differences in distribution of the resource pack that have already been noted, some survey questions were phrased slightly differently for each community. Mothers in Bura, whose babies were only a few days old, were asked if they *intended* to enroll their babies as library members, borrow books for them, share books with them and sing songs and rhymes to them. In Sherwood the mothers were asked if they actually *did* these things. Data analysis for Survey 1 was based on the valid responses of 57 mothers from Sherwood and 50 mothers from Bura.

Survey 2

Survey 2 (see Appendix 2) was designed to examine program processes, content and suggested modifications, parent-child literacy practices, library use and participation in *Better Beginnings* library activities. Libraries in Sherwood and Bura forwarded to the researchers a list of all mothers who had completed Survey 1. A researcher at ECU attempted to contact by phone each of the 107 mothers who had completed Survey 1, in order for them to complete Survey 2. The researcher was able to contact 66 of these mothers, 65 of whom agreed to take part in Survey 2. Of these 65 mothers, 41 were from Sherwood and 24 were from Bura. It is noted that the lower response rate from Bura mothers was most likely due to the highly transient nature of the population in this mining town. The researcher attempted to contact all families, but was unable after several attempts to contact many of those who had completed Survey 1 even after several attempts.

Qualitative data

Case study of families

Eleven mothers and their babies were visited in their homes by a researcher from Edith Cowan University, who made observations and carried out semi-structured interviews. These mothers were selected from 25 who had indicated in Survey 2 that they would be willing to participate in the case studies. A cross-section of 13 of these mothers was chosen to represent a range of socio-economic, cultural and educational backgrounds. Eleven out of 13 of the mothers selected in this way agreed to be interviewed. The other two could not be contacted. Although some fathers of the children were at home during the visits, they did not contribute to the interviews.

Each visit lasted approximately one hour and the interview was based on the questions shown in Appendix 3. Parents were also invited to read to their babies so as to enable the interviewer to observe their interactions. Where possible the mothers complied with this request; some were not able to take part because their babies were asleep. Five mothers were visited in Sherwood and six in Bura.

Interviews with Better Beginnings *personnel*

The project co-ordinator was interviewed in order to gather information about the design and implementation of *Better Beginnings* across the pilot communities. Librarians and Community Health Nurses took part in focus group interviews with an Edith Cowan University researcher after the *Better Beginnings* resource packs had been distributed to mothers. These focus group interviews provided insights into the implementation of the project, inter-agency collaboration and the content of the resource pack from the point of view of the professionals involved. Focus group interviews were used in order to provide opportunities for rich insights into the views of these people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998). This type of data collection and analysis provided the opportunity to examine the complexity of factors that contribute to inter-agency collaboration in the provision of effective service delivery and participation.

Key factors in the design and decisions about the implementation of the *Better Beginnings* pilot program

The following information is based on interviews with the project co-ordinator, who identified two key aims of the program:

- To encourage parents to read and to share books and stories with their children
- To introduce parents and their young children to public libraries.

> *One of the things that we've found is that even parents who are library users often don't realise that they can join their babies or pre-schoolers.*

The project co-ordinator took responsibility for the design and implementation of the program, in consultation with personnel at the State Library of Western Australia, local library personnel and the Department of Community Development. A key consideration was the diversity of communities in Western Australia:

> *It is a West Australian program and there are such diverse communities throughout WA. We wanted it to be a very flexible program with core elements that were common to the program but so it could be used in different ways in different communities.*

It was decided that new mothers should receive a *Better Beginnings* resource pack to encourage them to share books, songs and rhymes with their babies. The best way to reach the greatest number of new mothers was thought to be through family support agencies. The project co-ordinator explained the rationale behind the collaboration with family support agencies:

> *Although we wanted it to be a library co-ordinated program, if we were going to reach out to people who weren't traditional library users, then we needed to partner with other agencies who had contact with the widest cross section possible. Very early we thought that contacts with Community Health Nurses would be beneficial.*

Nevertheless, she explained that establishing partnerships presented some challenges for the program. For example, some initial contacts were not made with the appropriate personnel:

> *We had contact names for the co-ordinator of the health service in districts and we should have gone to them first and then gone to local. But, because a lot of public librarians already had contact with their local Community Health Nurse, they went straight there.*

Another issue that arose was related to the acknowledgment of program partners in the *Better Beginnings* resource pack:

> *Maybe there's been a feeling from some of the other departments that their work should be acknowledged more in the pack. So we will offer other agencies the opportunity to put things in the pack. One of the reasons we didn't do that initially was because we didn't want to overcrowd the toolkits because we thought that things would get lost.*

The resource pack (toolkit)

A great deal of thought and work went into developing the materials for the resource pack. In order to engage parents in different communities, materials were designed to be simple to read and there was an emphasis on the gift book, in the resource pack. The decision about which gift book to include was extremely challenging and made in consultation with several stakeholders, including speech pathologists, parents and librarians. The project co-ordinator explained the compromise made in the group decision:

> *Everybody agreed that it must be a board book. We wanted it to be photographic and feature photographs of babies. We wanted children from different backgrounds and we managed to find one, but it wasn't Australian, it was British. But in the end we went for that anyway, partly because we could get the numbers that we needed and we thought it did it best.*

During the course of the pilot project it was necessary to choose a series of alternative books for the resource packs, as the original board book was out of print. The project co-ordinator explained that a book featuring Australian animals, asked for by one of the rural communities, was in fact not well received in all communities. On the other hand, a tactile book with photographs of children and families was generally very well received. Ideally the project co-ordinator indicated that she would have preferred to work with local publishers, but this was not possible since board books are relatively expensive to publish for a small market.

In addition to book choice, the program designers considered effective ways of encouraging parents to use rhymes and share books with their young children. As a result a growth chart, containing some traditional nursery rhymes was developed. Two pamphlets, one about reading with young children and the other giving information about recommended books for young children, were also developed for the resource pack. It was planned that these pamphlets would be explored in parent workshops and the baby story-time sessions at the library. Further components of the program that were planned were parent workshops and story-time sessions for mothers and babies to be held at local libraries, involving partner agencies.

Training and workload of Better Beginnings *personnel*

Many librarians do not have an early literacy component as part of their degree. In order to help them implement and develop *Better Beginnings* a comprehensive training manual was developed for the librarians involved in the pilot program. However, this was seen as too time demanding for many of the librarians and, as a result, a new training package was developed, to be used as part of a half-day training module.

The extra work *Better Beginnings* placed on librarians and Community Health Nurses was identified as a issue of concern. The project co-ordinator explained:

I think the biggest single issue has been the workload both for community health nurses and for library staff and I think we always knew it would be, and there's not really any way to overcome that. We just have to help and pull together in the best way possible. I mean although the workload has been big and there's been lots of comments there's never been any suggestion that people didn't want to be involved because of i.t

Funding

[1]During the pilot project, funding for the ongoing implementation of the *Better Beginnings* program was a cause of concern to the personnel involved. There was concern that the funding might not be continued and that sufficient funding for a full-time co-ordinator for the project was not available during the pilot project. The project co-ordinator saw the issues as follows:

I think probably the biggest difficulties with the workload have been in making the program sustainable and getting funding and I think that's just something that we need to keep on working at. I think the program ideally needs a full time co-ordinator and we need funding for that and also of course ongoing funding for the resources, for the physical resources involved in the program.

Nevertheless, she acknowledged the support that had been given by individual agencies:

Local government have been extraordinarily supportive of it. It's been great because they've funded the gift book and that's the major single expense. There's a group called WALGLA, the West Australian Local Government Librarians Association and they actually put in $5,000 to fund the printing of the growth chart and this new brochure that we had done.

1 The State Government's continued financial commitment along with that of Local Government and funding from the Rio Tinto WA Future Fund will enable *Better Beginnings* to be rolled-out to communities across Western Australia commencing in 2005/06.

Key factors identified in the implementation of the Better Beginnings *pilot program*

The following information about the day-to-day running of the *Better Beginnings* program is based on focus group discussions with Community Health Nurses and librarians at Sherwood and individual interviews with the librarian at Bura and the State Library-based project co-ordinator.

Increasing parental awareness of early literacy development and practices through the Better Beginnings *program*

The Community Health Nurses had found that new mothers were often not sure how to talk to their babies or what books to read or songs to sing and that they could not always remember the words of nursery rhymes. The Community Health Nurses had also found that some new mothers felt that two months, the usual age at which they received the resource pack, was too young an age to read to a baby. These nurses saw the value of the pack as giving new mothers encouragement and ideas about reading as well as an appropriate book to share with their new baby. The Community Health Nurses talked about how they continually encouraged parents to talk to their babies. One felt that the book and the rhymes on the growth chart were *'the tools to encourage language development which is so important'*.

The Community Health Nurses approved of the *Better Beginnings* books, suggesting that the content and size were appropriate for babies. The tactile books with mirrors and handles were particularly well received. Nevertheless, in one of the communities there was some discussion about the lack of bilingual books for transient families who had temporary protection visas. A Community Health Nurse commented:

> *I think that if you're going to give books out you should be actually honouring the first language which encourages the child to maintain the language, the home language. It then adds to communication long-term and I think that maybe you need to look at the books you give to them so they are bi-lingual where it has English and the mother tongue alongside each other.*

Increasing literacy interactions in the family

Several of the Community Health Nurses commented on the ways in which *Better Beginnings* complemented their work with families around early language and literacy development. One described how she used the *Better Beginnings* book with a new baby to demonstrate book sharing to parents:

> *The parents see the responses of the babies and then they've got something to go away with and do themselves.*

Some commented that *Better Beginnings* reinforced the work they did in parent groups, emphasising reading to babies and encouraging older children to join in book sharing. As one put it:

> *The message is getting around. Probably because also in all of our groups we talk about reading to the babies as well. They are at least aware now that the babies are able to see the pictures and the pages.*

There was a strong feeling amongst these Community Health Nurses that *Better Beginnings* was important for all families, not just those who could be seen as being at risk. The potential impact of *Better Beginnings* was seen as important to the health of families across all communities.

> *This concept of reading to your newborn baby is for everybody. It's just not for high risk families. It's a whole new concept for across the board.*

Increasing literacy interactions in families was not confined to mothers and babies. A librarian explained that often the books were given by the mother to an older child in the family. In a similar way the project co-ordinator commented about the ways in which family reading was encouraged at the library story-time sessions:

What the librarians have found is that a lot of the new parents also have another child and they're very interested in bringing the older child so they've started having an evening story time session and they've found that good because they're finding the Dads coming along and often grandparents come along as well.

However, although the *Better Beginnings* program and related activities that encouraged book-sharing in families was seen by most of the Community Health Nurses and the Bura librarian as part of their work, several commented that to introduce the program successfully and thoroughly was very time consuming. Further, one of the librarians commented that her initial training had not included early literacy development, although that she had learnt a great deal about early literacy since the introduction of *Better Beginnings*.

Increased parental awareness of and attitudes to the role of libraries

Contact with the library was seen as an important component of *Better Beginnings* by the Community Health Nurses, in that it had the potential to promote early literacy. One commented about the recommended books brochure:

The little leaflet in there (the resource pack) that says titles of other books and authors, that's excellent so I always get that out and show them, you know, here's a list, some ideas for you, you can have a look at it, get them from the library.

The information about the local library included in the resource pack gave the Community Health Nurses an opportunity to talk about joining the library at an early age and make links with the local toy library. However, they pointed out that some mothers were apprehensive about visiting the library with their young children and needed reassurance. One recalled the way in which mothers had said how much they liked the gift book describing how they, 'loved the bright pictures, the clear words, they were durable, babies could chew them, throw them, share them'. Nevertheless, the same group of parents revealed that:

> *They didn't like borrowing things from the library because they were frightened the children would damage them and that they had germs on so they liked the idea of having their own things.*

In order to build on initial library information in the *Better Beginnings* resource pack, the librarians indicated that they were planning and implementing several initiatives to encourage parents to join and use the library. Parent and baby story-time sessions had become a regular feature of library initiatives and a new family literacy centre was being planned in one library. A Sherwood librarian saw encouraging parents to bring their babies to the library as essential for future library use:

> *If the experience is positive, library visits will become part of a child's culture and when they are at school level, they will not be afraid to visit the library for information and approach staff for assistance.*

However, this librarian said she was disappointed with the low attendance rates at the library baby story-time sessions and wanted to find ways of encouraging the mothers and babies to become regular visitors to these sessions.

The Bura librarian was also developing ways of encouraging library membership and use. She had collected data from new mothers to ascertain who wanted a home visit, who was a member of the library and who had stopped using the library, so that she could start working on ways of encouraging membership and involving families in the library activities. She explained that a very low percentage of young families belonged to the library, so she visited them in their homes:

> *I see them for three or four visits depending on how needy they are. Every three weeks I visit them so I'm visiting about twenty families a week. I ask them what they would like and say that we have videos and magazines. We bought some little toolkits of board books so I take those out, little packs of eight and then I take a few other little board books, nursery rhyme books and something for the parents if they want something as well.*

All librarians thought that *Better Beginnings* was starting to have some impact on library membership and use. The Bura librarian explained that some of the young families she had visited were joining and using the library:

> *It becomes a bit of a habit ...they're on their second babies and they say oh we didn't really read to our first baby but now we're reading to him and he's really into a routine and I have to come to the library because he wants more books.*

Although the Bura librarian argued strongly for the need to involve Indigenous workers in the library she did feel that by making contact with Indigenous families through *Better Beginnings* she was helping to overcome negative views of libraries:

> *It's just reducing that barrier of just getting through the door, because for a lot of people libraries are quite intimidating places because people often feel quite dumb when they come into a library because they don't know where anything is and they don't know how to find out. Whereas, if they've got a point of contact and they know their way around a little bit it just makes it so much easier for them.*

The Sherwood librarian also felt that *Better Beginnings* was a way to reach out to parents in a positive and non-threatening way, strengthening early contact with the library:

> *If we can encourage children to visit the library when they are young through story times, and get them hooked, then when they are older they will continue the habit and they will bring their own children to the library.*

Elements of the implementation of the *Better Beginnings* program that impact on its effectiveness

Sherwood

The Sherwood librarian indicated that involving Community Health Nurses in the library-initiated program gave the project added credibility and re-enforced the *Better Beginnings* aims. This collaboration enabled a coordinated approach to library workshops and the development of joint initiatives. In this community *Better Beginnings* was incorporated into an existing library program and several of the Community Health Nurses talked about previous links with the library and how *Better Beginnings* had given them the opportunity to strengthen these links. They described how information about *Better Beginnings* and the library was available and actively promoted in mothers' groups run by the community. Since the program had begun the Community Health Nurses had invited a language and literacy specialist to some of their post-natal groups and, where appropriate, *Better Beginnings* activities were delivered through the mothers' program run by the Community Health Nurses.

In a similar way, the librarian was developing parent-child workshops to which she invited Community Health Nurses, speech pathologists and other professionals from the Department of Community Development to give talks about the importance of early language and literacy at the library. A Community Health Nurse commented:

> *Yes, make connections.... and obviously maybe do some preventative stuff before problems start. Department of Health will provide the expertise of a speech pathologist to participate in baby talk workshops, but if there's any areas that you would identify for baby talk workshops, if you could let me know then I'll organise it.*

The Community Health Nurses and librarians discussed various ideas for parent workshops including singing: *A singing workshop would be wonderful with different languages.*

Bura

The Bura librarian explained that as a result of her experience in another State she decided to visit new mothers in the local hospital to distribute the *Better Beginnings* resource packs and to make a follow-up home visit. She explained:

> *I really wanted to make sure that the contact was made between the library and the literacy kit and for there to be continuity with that and so I felt for it to be successful it had to happen at the hospital, then a follow-up home visit.*

This librarian also made some modifications to the resource pack to better suit the needs of the community. Instead of using the *Better Beginnings* brochure that listed recommended books for babies, she substituted her own list of appropriate reading resources that were available in her library, as she felt this to be more useful. Further, discussion with the librarian in a remote Indigenous community and collaboration with Indigenous Health workers had led to a number of initiatives:

> *In terms of the pack we've tried to address Indigenous languages. We got a grant for make-a-book and we've made some little early readers in the [local Aboriginal] language, so we've got bi-lingual ones. But at this stage they're not in board book format, they're just in heavy card and they're being evaluated by the community at the moment so from that we'll apply for another grant to get a board book made.*

The program director further explained the *Better Beginnings* activities in the Bura community:

> *In Bura what they've starting doing is working with Moyra [pseudonym] who runs an Aboriginal playgroup. They meet in the park and that's fantastic. It's run by Aboriginal women. They have about thirty children there, really popular, and [the librarian] is going along to those to do a story reading. There was an older Aboriginal woman who's telling some stories as well and I spoke to her the other day and she's going up to Bura to do some story telling.*

The Bura librarian identified 'library outreach, follow-up programs and gathering library membership' as key factors in building literacy standards in the community and argued that the coordinated implementation of *Better Beginnings* would enable this outcome to be achieved:

> *It's great when it can be done in a coordinated way rather than just one person getting burnt out doing it there. The only way it's going to be successful and sustainable is doing it this way and I think it's really exciting to be involved in it. It's terrific.*

Building partnerships with community organizations to enhance the effectiveness of *Better Beginnings*

Links between the library and other community organizations seemed to be important for sustaining the *Better Beginnings* program. During the focus group interviews one of the Community Health Nurses described the developing role of community volunteers and their potential for promoting early literacy. In addition a librarian explained that:

> *Once the parent learning centre is up and running I hope to look at collection development in this area to ensure the resources are meeting the needs of our clientele. I would like to have input from child health nurses, other community groups and parents as to suitable resources for the library.*

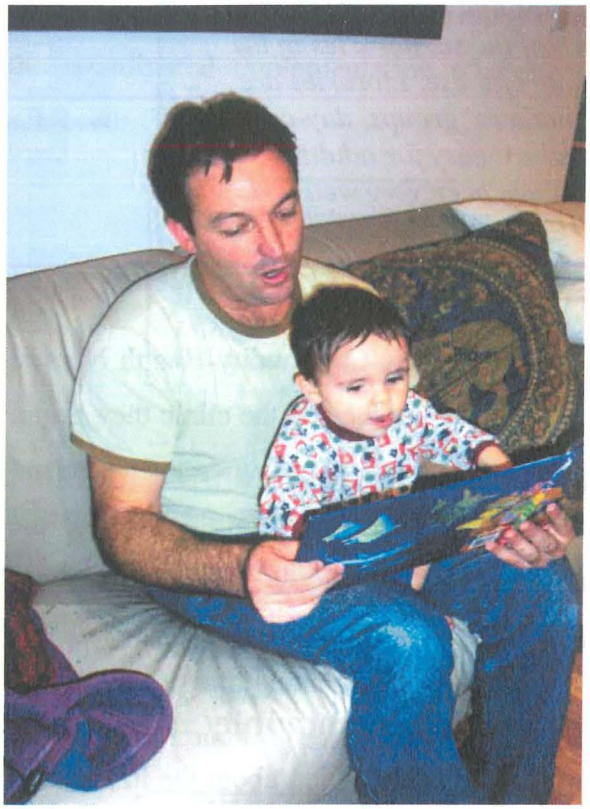
Better Beginnings outreach tool-boxes were being developed to foster links between the library and community groups. These tool-boxes contained a collection of big books, small picture books, board books, pop-up books, novelty books, tactile resources such as a felt-board and felt-board characters, a selection of puppets and finger puppets and a comprehensive activities manual. They were intended to give parents ideas about early literacy learning in the home. The project co-ordinator explained:

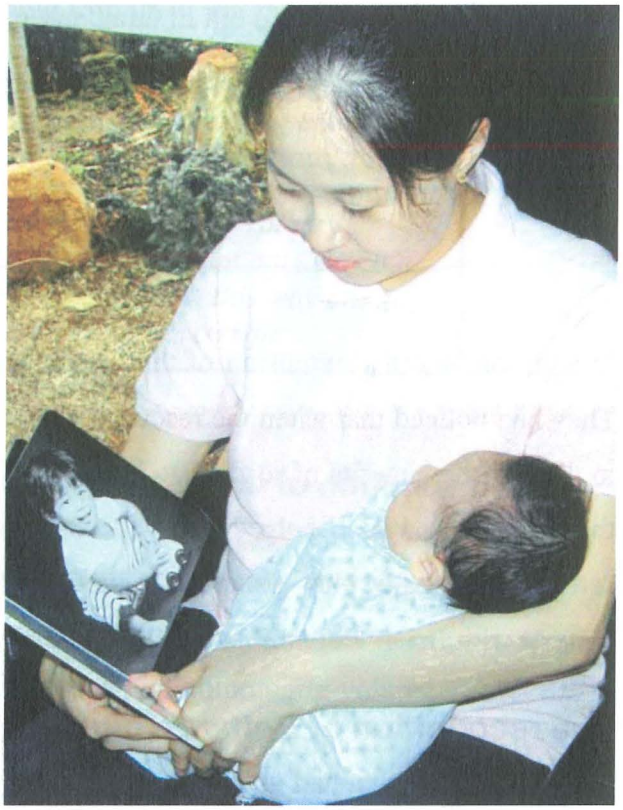
The tool boxes are in 80 litre plastic tubs and they were funded by a grant from LotteryWest and each of the six libraries in the Better Beginnings program has got one of those. Libraries are lending that out to play groups and mothers' groups, day-care centres, just to promote, to try and make it easy for adults to share stories with children. And they have been very well received.

In addition, another extension of the program was identified by Community Health Nurses. They had noticed that when the resource packs were given to mothers at the clinic they began to discuss the benefits of reading to babies, look at the books, talk about nursery rhymes and the pamphlets, which helped them focus on aspects of early literacy. This had led to the setting up of baby play groups 'not just toddler play groups, but baby play groups' Thus, contact with *Better Beginnings* had led to community initiated play groups for babies.

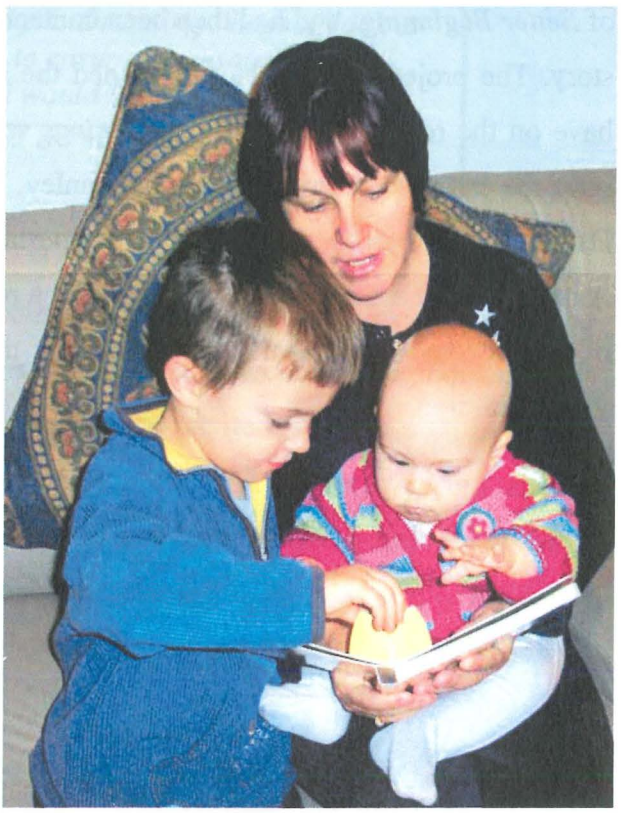
The recognition of *Better Beginnings* in the wider community

In Bura the librarian had given an interview with the ABC radio station about the importance of *Better Beginnings* and had then been contacted by the local newspaper to write a follow-up story. The project co-ordinator explained the impact that high profile West Australians can have on the reception of *Better Beginnings* within the Western Australian community. She gave the example of Professor Fiona Stanley, the Director of the Telethon Institute of Child Health in WA, who mentioned the importance of *Better Beginnings* in her speech as Australian of the Year. She also referred to a report in the local newspaper about the Premier of WA reading books with young children, thus endorsing the importance of reading with young children.









The parent's perspectives on the program: Results of the surveys

As the surveys were designed to describe any changes in parent practice once the mothers and their babies were involved in the *Better Beginnings* project, the following report of the findings combines the results of Survey 1 and Survey 2.

Who were the mothers and babies who took part in the project?

All but one of the mothers indicated that English was the main language spoken in the home and four identified themselves as being of Indigenous descent. Whilst the majority (77%) had completed at least Year 11 or 12 at school and some had a TAFE (20%) or university (16%) qualification, a sizeable group (22%) had finished their education at Year 10 or lower levels. Of the 95 fathers for whom data were available, the majority (65%) again, had completed at least Year 11 or 12, with some having a TAFE (15%) or tertiary (17%) qualification and, like the mothers, a sizeable group (35%) had finished their education at Year 10 or lower levels. In terms of age, just over half (58%) of the mothers were between 25 and 34 years of age and approximately one quarter (26%) were aged between 19 and 25. Only 2 mothers (2%) were aged under 18; the rest (14%) were aged between 35 and 44.

The majority of babies (82%) were born between January and May 2004. The rest (20%) were born between March and December 2003. There were very slightly more boy babies (51%) than girl babies (49%). Nearly half of the babies (43%) were the first child in the family; one third of babies (34%) had one other sibling and the rest had two (16%), three (4%), four (3%) or more than five (1%) other siblings. Most babies (86%) were cared for outside the home for less than half a day.

Parent perceptions of the *Better Beginnings* resource pack

The *Better Beginnings* resource pack was very well received by the mothers. In general, their responses were overwhelmingly positive as most (88%) classified the resource pack in general as useful or extremely useful (see Figure 1).

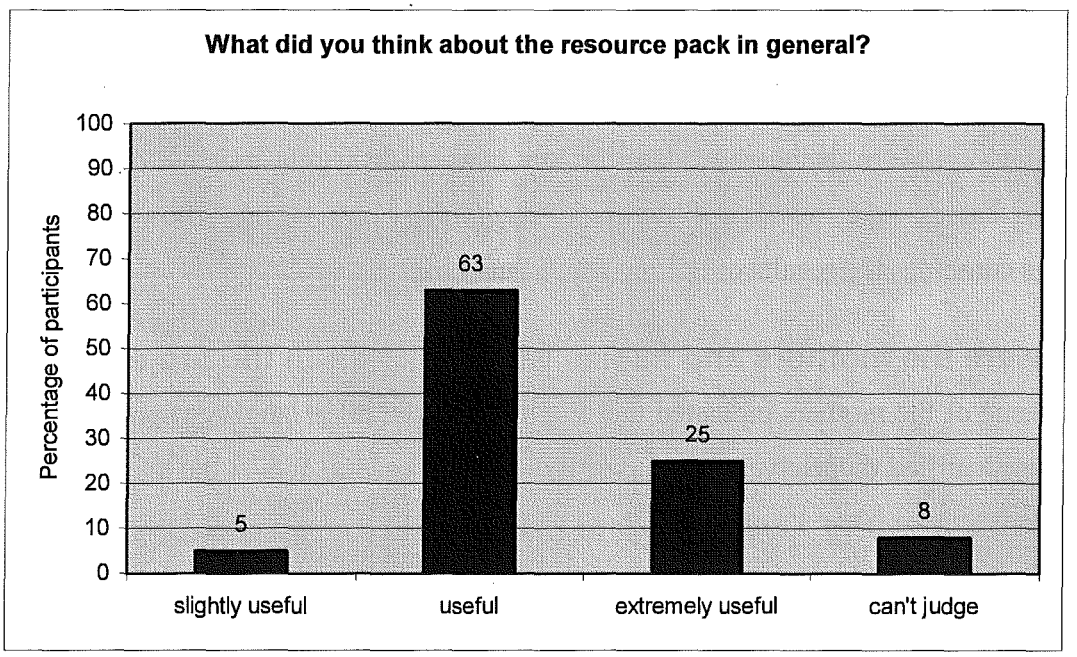


Figure 1. Mothers' perceptions of the resource pack

Many of the mothers volunteered very positive comments about the resource pack, reiterating how good and helpful the materials were. Seven commented that it was wonderful to receive something that was good for both parent and child as a surprise gift. Six commented that the pack was a really good idea as it reminded them how good it was to read and spend quality interactive time with babies, although one mother suggested that the pack should be introduced at a later stage when the baby was more interactive. Nine suggested that the pack would be particularly useful for first time parents who might find it difficult to get to the library in the early days, or who didn't really know what information was available. The following comment indicates one mother's appreciation and use of the pack:

> *Really good. Loved the book. It was Alissa's first gift.*
> *The growth chart is on Blake's [son's] wall.*

Six mothers indicated that they were ambivalent about the relevance of the kit for them. They made comments such as, 'Haven't looked at it. Second child so have lots of books already.'

The most well-received item in the pack by far was the book, with 94% of mothers indicating that it was useful or extremely useful (see Figure 2).

Many made specific comments about how their babies enjoyed it:

> *Loved the book with the built in handle - baby loves looking at the babies in the book.*

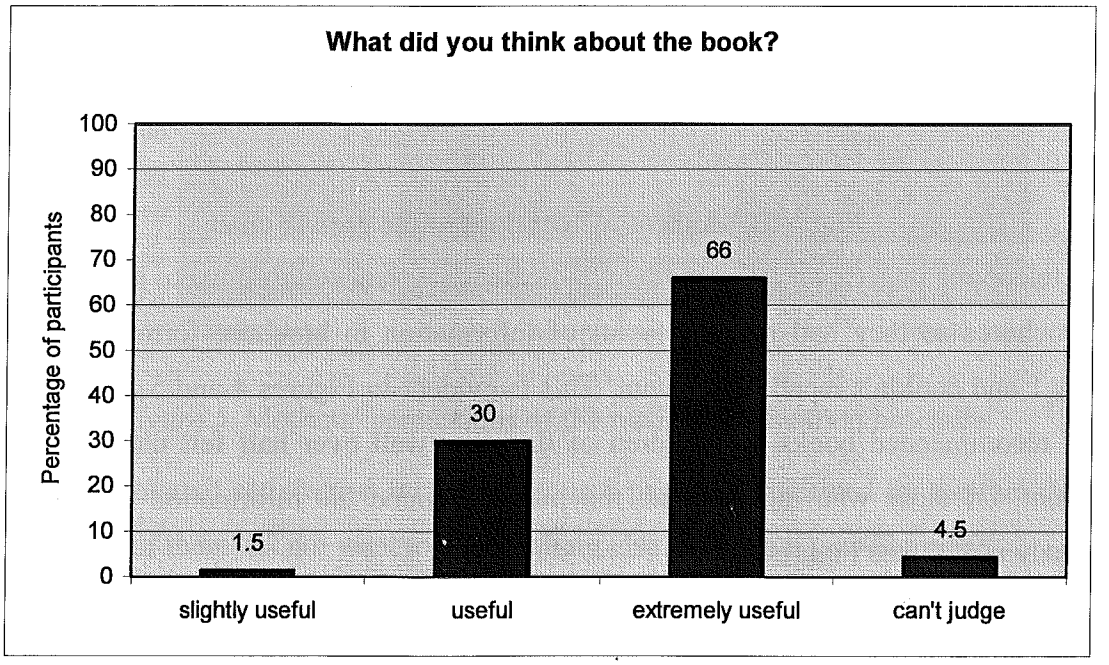


Figure 2. Mothers' perceptions of the book

The other elements of the resource pack were not as well received and fewer mothers felt able to make judgments. For the growth chart, over one third felt unable to comment (see Figure 3). In telephone interviews some suggested that it should be laminated for durability and others said that they didn't feel their baby was old enough to be measured in this way. Nevertheless, of those who did feel able to comment most indicated that it was useful or extremely useful.

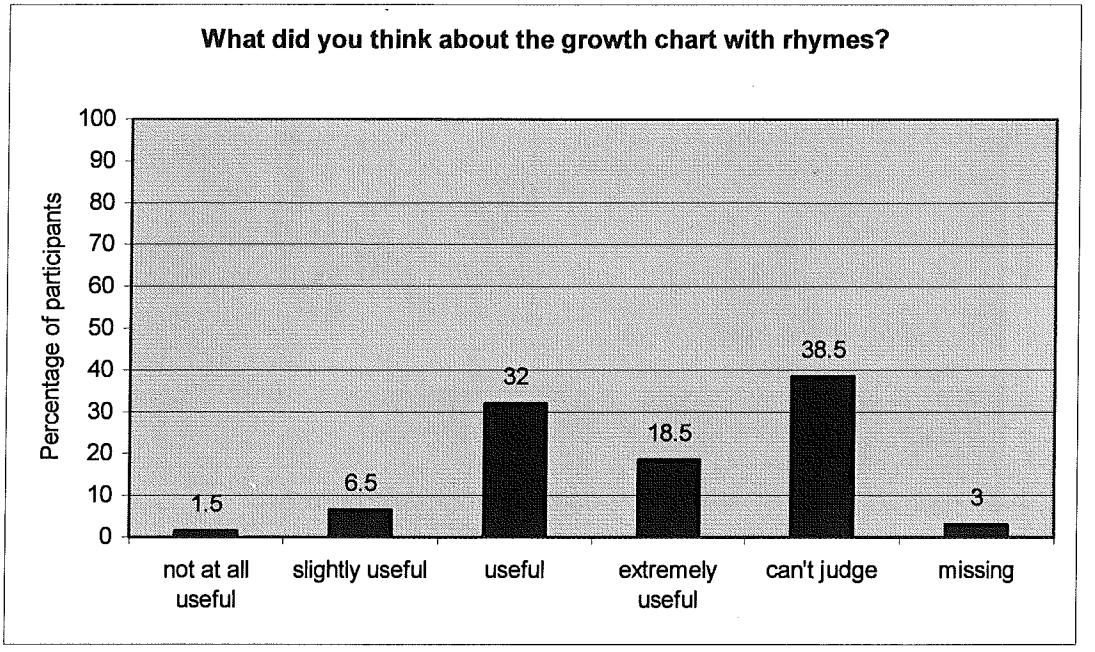


Figure 3. Mothers' perceptions of the growth chart

In the telephone interviews many mothers indicated that they couldn't make judgments about the brochures as they had received a lot of information in brochure form at the time of Survey 1 and couldn't recall the content. This is evident in Figures 4 and 5. In terms of the list of recommended books for children of this age, well over half felt unable to make a judgment. Of those who did respond, the majority found the information to be useful or extremely useful (see Figure 4).

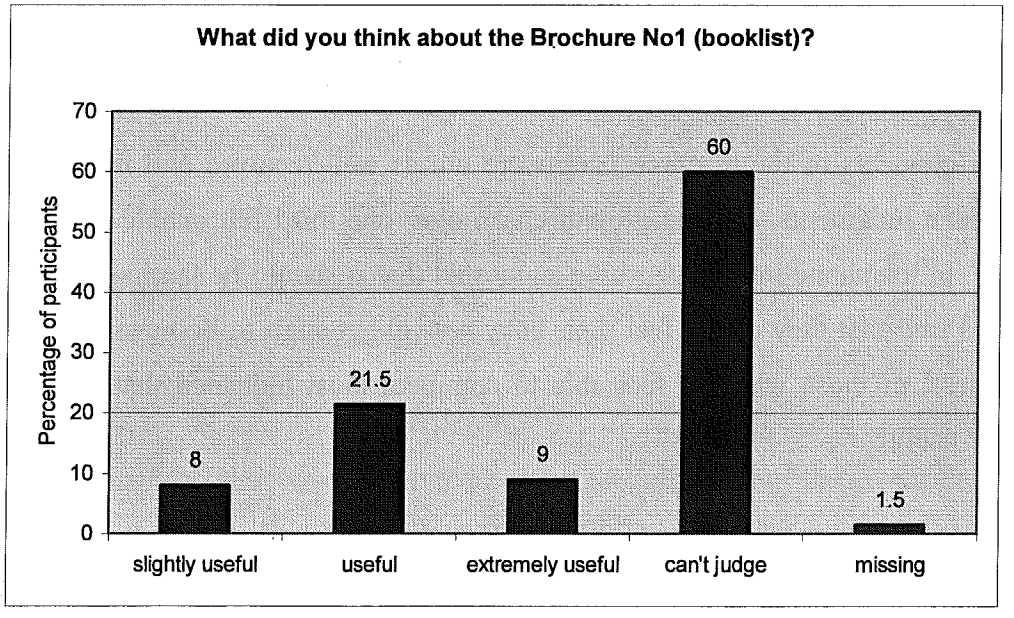


Figure 4. Mothers' perceptions of the booklist brochure

More than two thirds of the mothers felt able to make a judgment about the brochure that provided ideas for parents on reading-related activities and on how to read to children. Almost all of those who made judgments indicated that they found this information to be useful or extremely useful (see Figure 5).

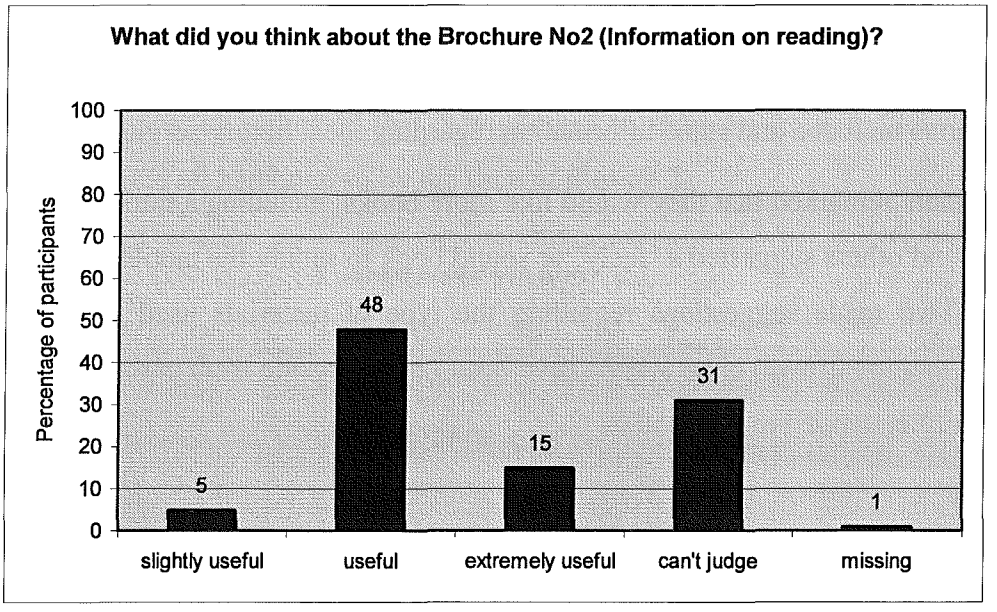


Figure 5. Mothers' perceptions of the reading information brochure

The mothers' overall satisfaction with the resource pack was indicated by the fact that over three quarters of them did not want to see anything else added to it (see Figure 6).

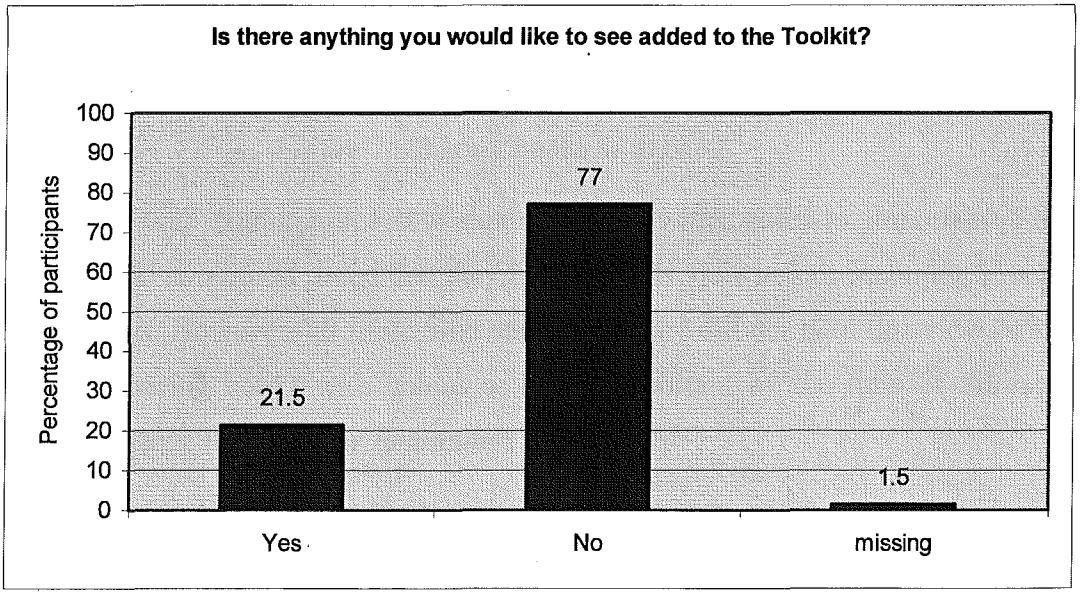


Figure 6. Mothers' perceptions of the adequacy of the resource pack

All of the participants who indicated that they would like to see other materials added to the resource pack made suggestions about the changes or additions they would like to see.

Several wanted more information about books that appeal to young children and information about the literacy development of infants. One mother suggested the inclusion of information about spoken language and literacy development appropriate to different ages, in addition to some research to support this information. Four mothers suggested there should be a list of local libraries included and some information regarding local library services.

Some mothers remarked that they would like more books, including a nursery rhyme book in the packs and others suggested a 'feely' or sound book to satisfy the tactile interest of smaller children. Two made suggestions regarding the type of materials used in the pack. They suggested that the growth chart would have been better if made from cardboard or laminated as their children tended to chew on it.

Sharing books with babies

Almost all mothers (97%) reported sharing books with their babies after receiving the *Better Beginnings* resource pack. Figure 7 compares the responses about book sharing behaviours from Surveys 1 and 2 for each community. Whilst just under two thirds (62.5%) of mothers from Sherwood had shared books with their baby at the time of Survey 1, almost all (95%) indicated that they had shared books with their babies by the time of Survey 2. The results for Bura show that almost all indicated that they planned to share books with their baby at the time of Survey 1, and all had done so by the time of Survey 2.

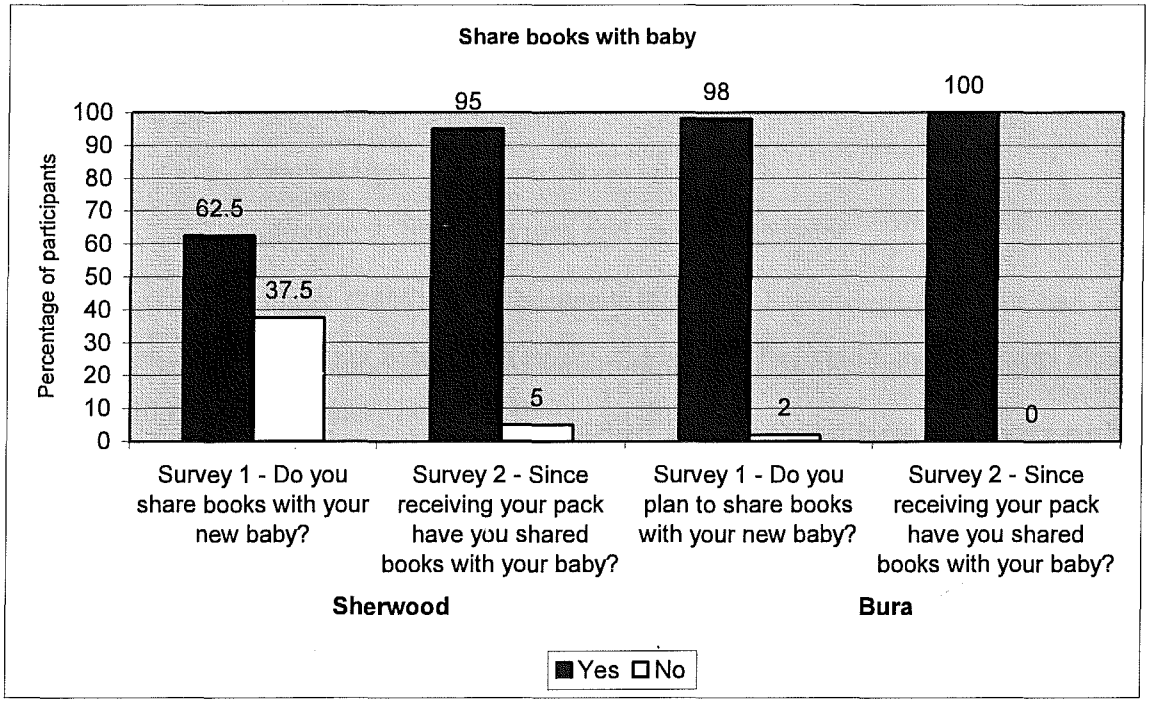


Figure 7: Sharing books with baby

The mothers in both communities saw sharing books with babies as important. Figure 8 shows that around two thirds stated that they had held this view before becoming involved in *Better Beginnings*. However, all those who stated that they did not hold this view before the program, saw sharing books with babies as being important by the time of Survey 2and attributed this change to the *Better Beginnings* program.

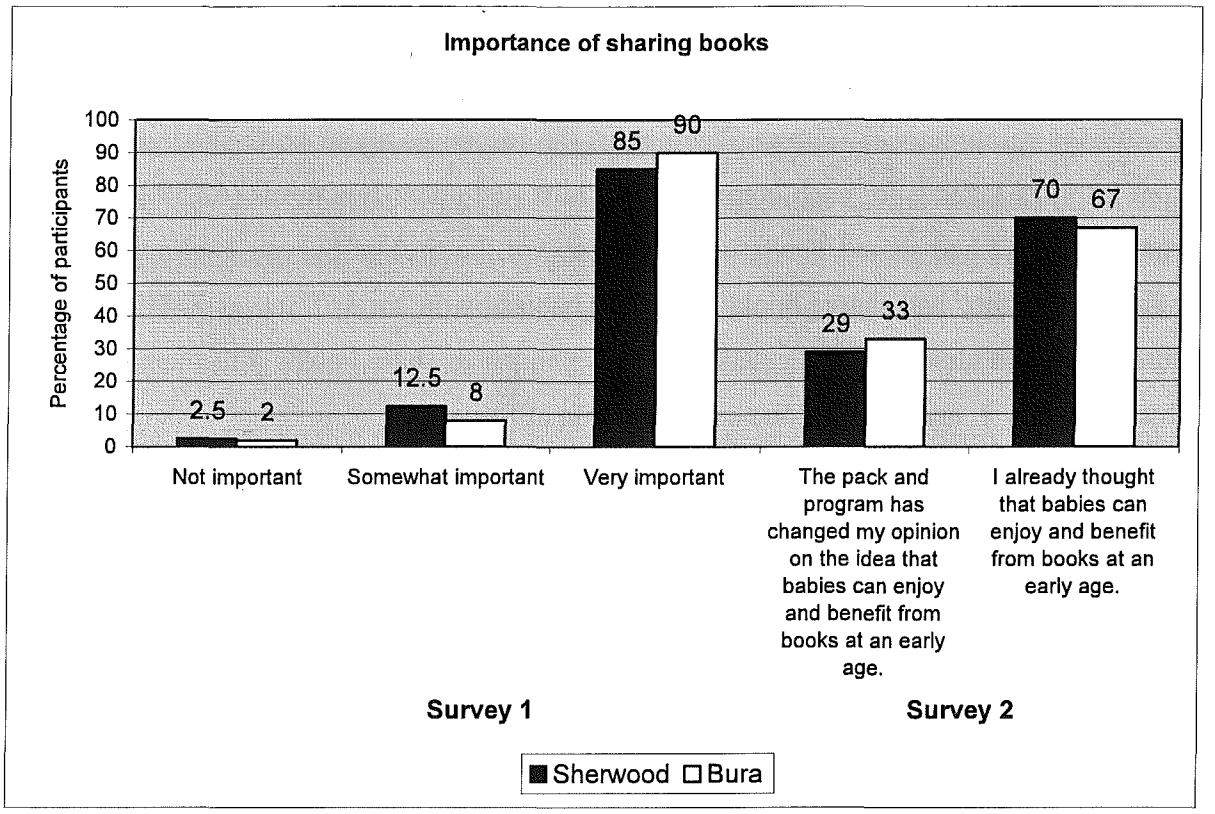


Figure 8. Perceptions of the importance of sharing books with babies

Sharing rhymes and songs with babies

Very few mothers reported that they had not shared rhymes and songs with their babies at the time of Survey 2. Figure 9 shows that most of the mothers from Sherwood who reported sharing rhymes and songs with their new baby at the time of Survey 1, continued to do so after receiving the pack (Survey 2). Likewise, the mothers from Bura who indicated their intention to share rhymes and songs with their baby actually did so after receiving the pack (Survey 2).

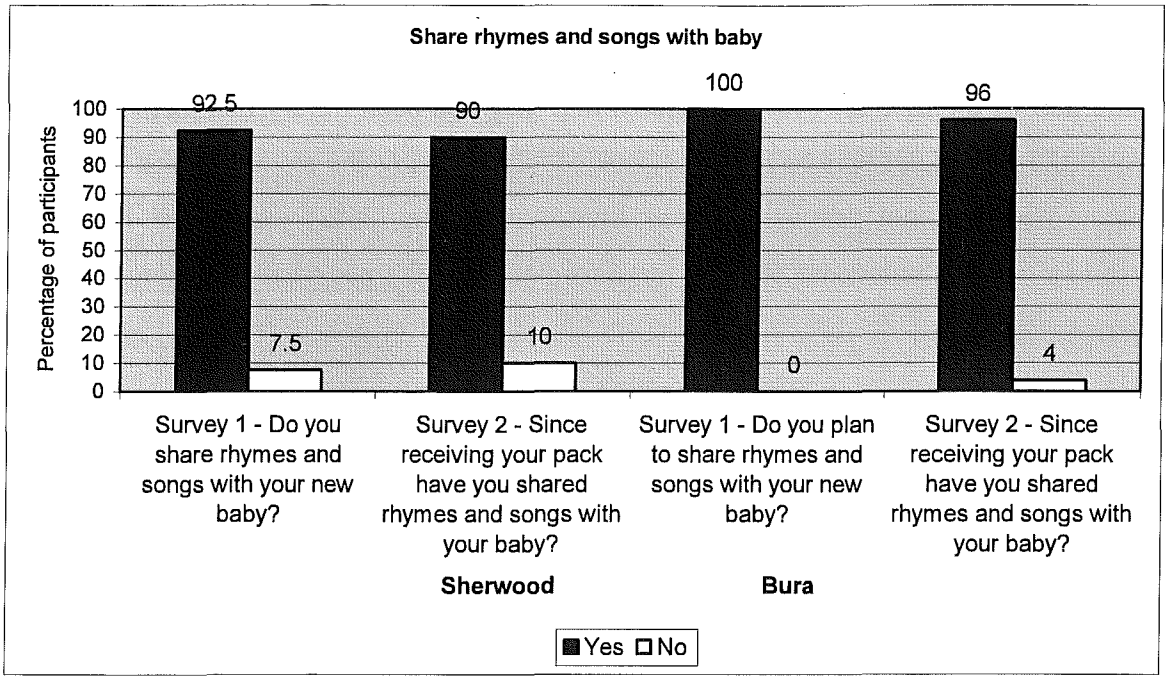


Figure 9: Share rhymes and songs with baby

One third of the mothers (34%) reported that the *Better Beginnings* program had changed their opinion on the idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from rhymes and songs at an early age. Two thirds (66%) already believed this to be the case.

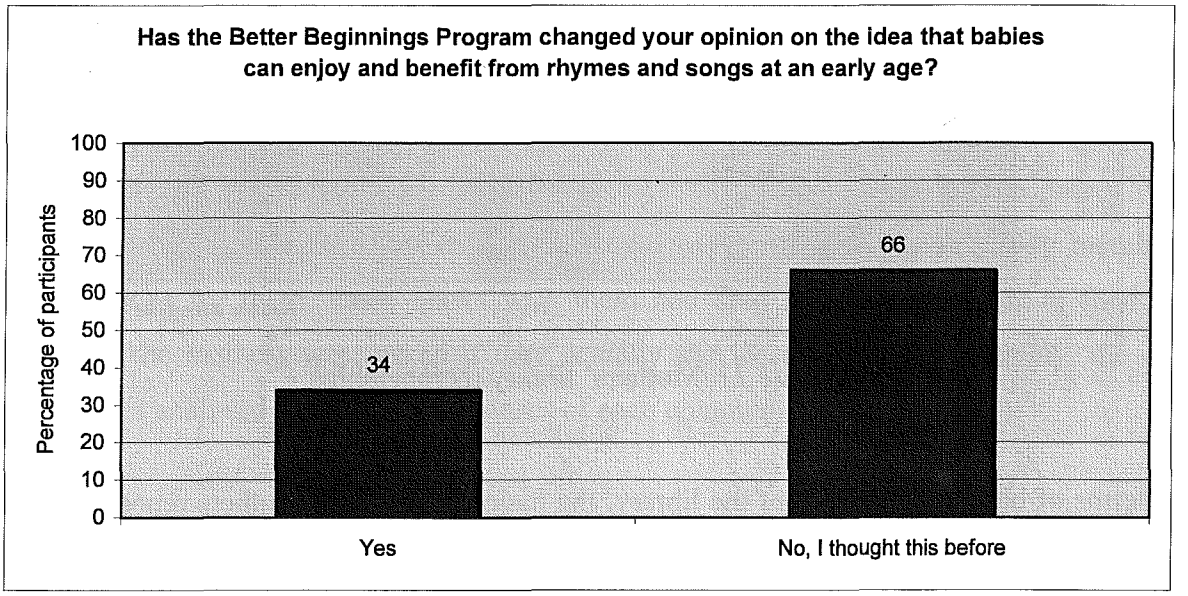


Figure 10. Benefiting from rhymes and songs

Library membership

Around half of the mothers (46%) indicated that they had been library members before they received the *Better Beginnings* resource pack. After receiving the resource pack almost half of those who had not previously been library members (26%) joined the library (see Figure 11). Some commented on how the information in the pack had led them to join the library:

> *Gave a start. Before I didn't have a library membership*
> *Good to encourage people to come to the library*
> *Good, nice. Handed on the library info to another family*
> *Great whole idea, especially for the rural areas to know about the library and other services around.*

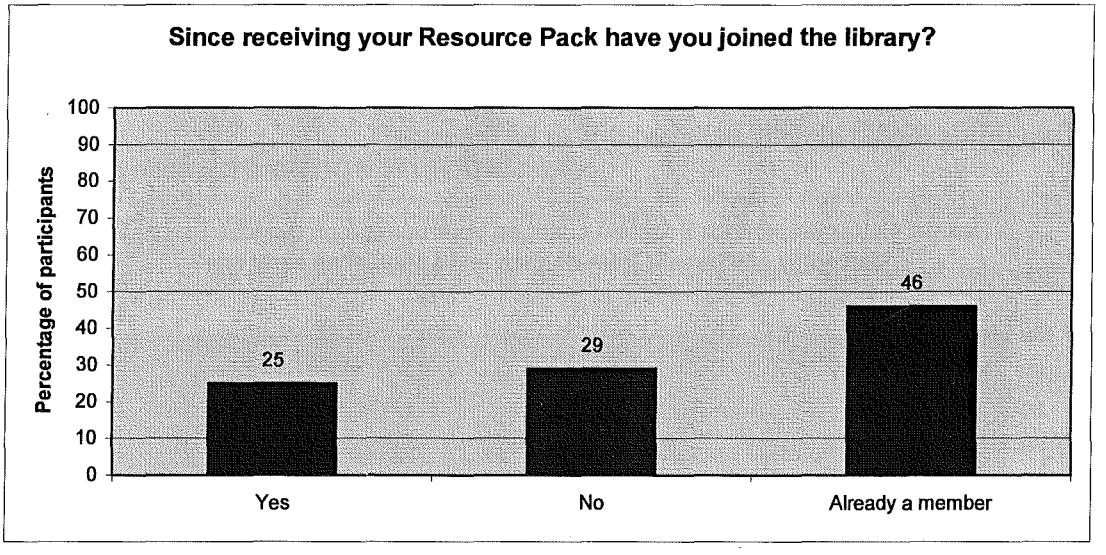


Figure 11. Mothers' library memberships

In terms of baby membership of the library, the majority (65%) of mothers reported that the *Better Beginnings* resource pack and/or associated activities had changed their opinion on the idea that babies could join the library at any age (see Figure 12).

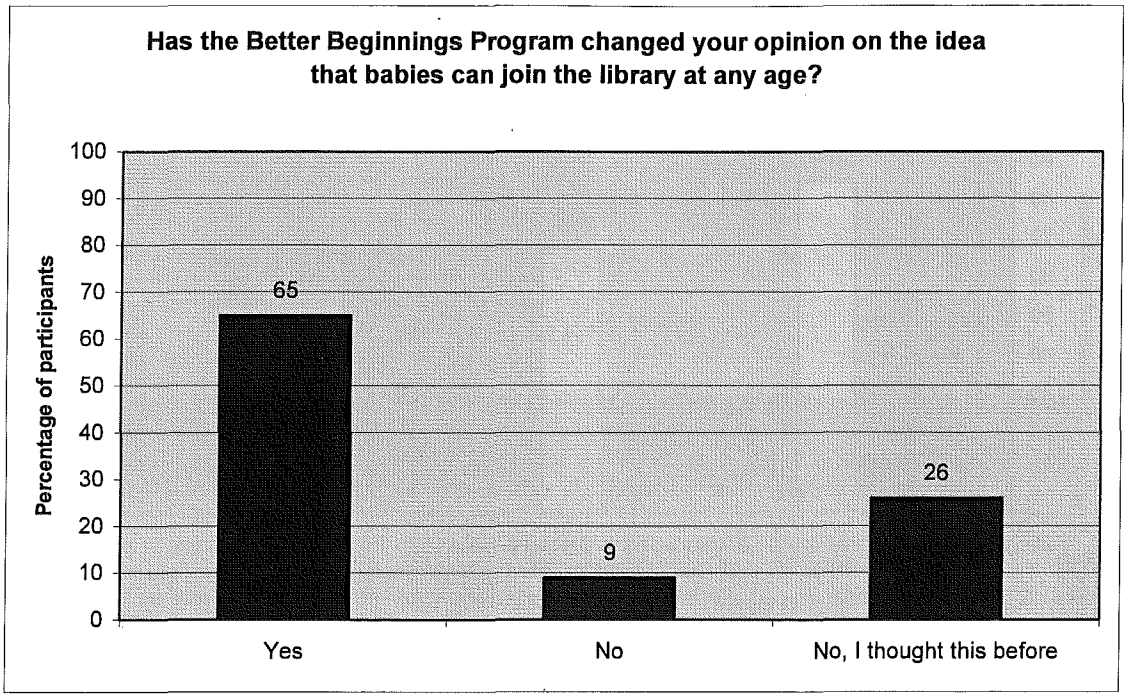


Figure 12. Idea that baby can join the library

Many of the mothers reported that they had put into practice their changed opinions on baby library membership. Since receiving the *Better Beginnings* Resource Pack more than one third (37%) of mothers reported that they had taken out a library membership for their baby. On the other hand some mothers reported that they did not feel it necessary to enrol their babies as they themselves had joined and borrowed books for their babies through their own library membership. It has been explained that in Survey 1 the mothers in the two communities were asked slightly different questions. Mothers in Bura, whose babies were only a few days old, were asked if they *intended* to enrol their babies as library members, borrow books for them, share books with them and sing songs and rhymes to them. In Sherwood the mothers were asked if they actually *did* these things. Accordingly, the data were further analysed to show the responses of each community (see Figure 13).

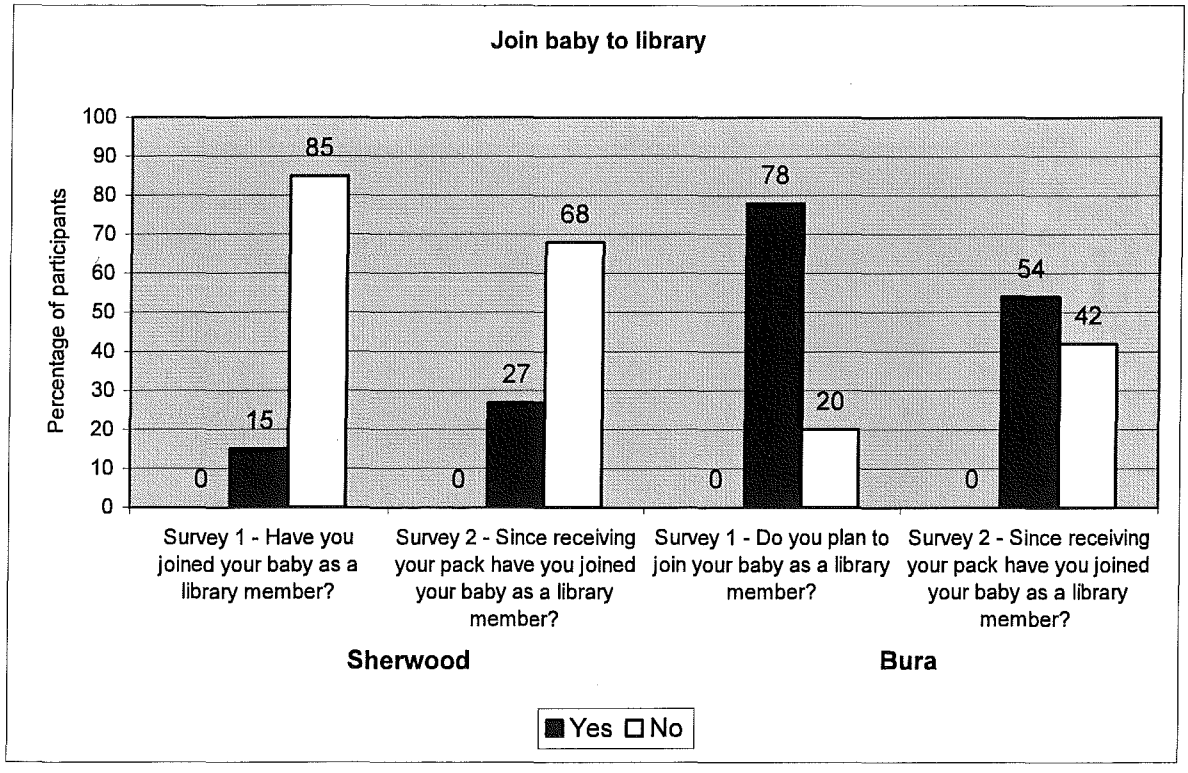


Figure 13: Join baby to library

There was a slight increase over time in mothers taking out library membership for their baby in Sherwood. On the other hand, a higher proportion of mothers from Bura who reported that they *planned* to join their babies as library members at the time of Survey 1, by the time of Survey 2 actually had joined their babies as library members. This difference between communities may have been due to the wording of the survey question, but was most likely due to the variation in methodology employed by each district. The mothers from Bura had more direct contact with the local librarian throughout the survey period and she delivered library resources to these mothers.

Library use: Visiting the library

Visits to the library by mothers decreased slightly during the time of the evaluation (see Figure 14). At the time of Survey 1 just under half (43%) of the mothers reported that they never visited the library and at the time of Survey 2 this had increased slightly to just over half (54%). There are several plausible reasons for this decline. It is possible that the mothers had less time to visit the library as their babies grew older and became more demanding.

Other possible reasons for Bura mothers not visiting the library could have been due to the location of the library at the edge of the town, and as already discussed the librarian at Bura visited many of the mothers in their homes and brought requested library resources to them so that they did not need to visit the library.

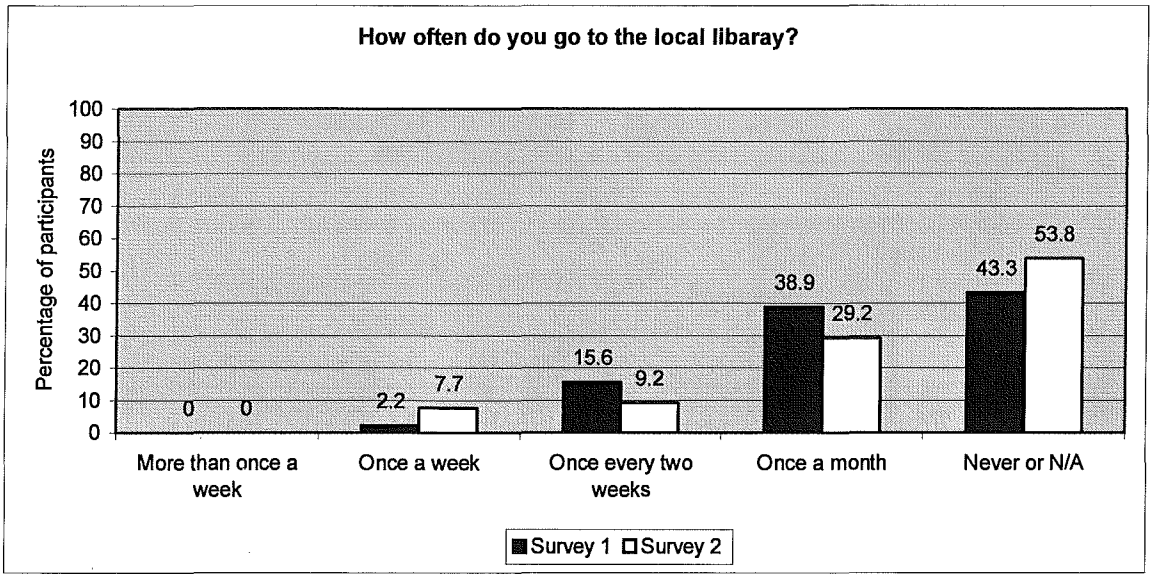


Figure 14. Visiting the library – Sherwood & Bura

Library use: borrowing from the library

Of those mothers who reported visiting the library, more than half (60%) reported that they used the library for borrowing books for themselves. Most of these mothers (87%) reported that they also used the library for borrowing books for their babies. Figure 15 shows that there was a large increase in mothers borrowing books for their babies by those Sherwood mothers who were library members, after they had received the *Better Beginnings* resource pack. Similarly, most of the mothers from Bura who reported that they planned to borrow books for their baby at the time of Survey 1, actually did borrow books for them after receiving the pack.

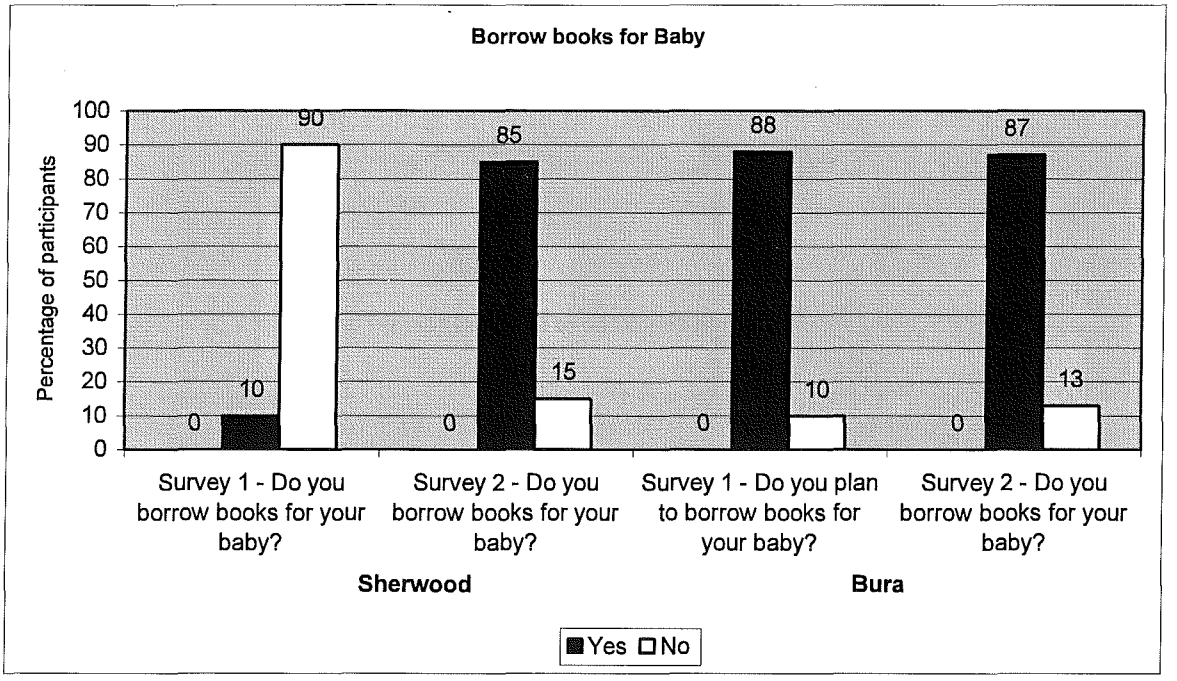


Figure 15. Borrowing books for baby – Sherwood & Bura

Whilst more than half of the mothers who were library members borrowed books for themselves, fewer (23%) reported that they used internet services, newspapers and magazines at the library (see Figure 16).

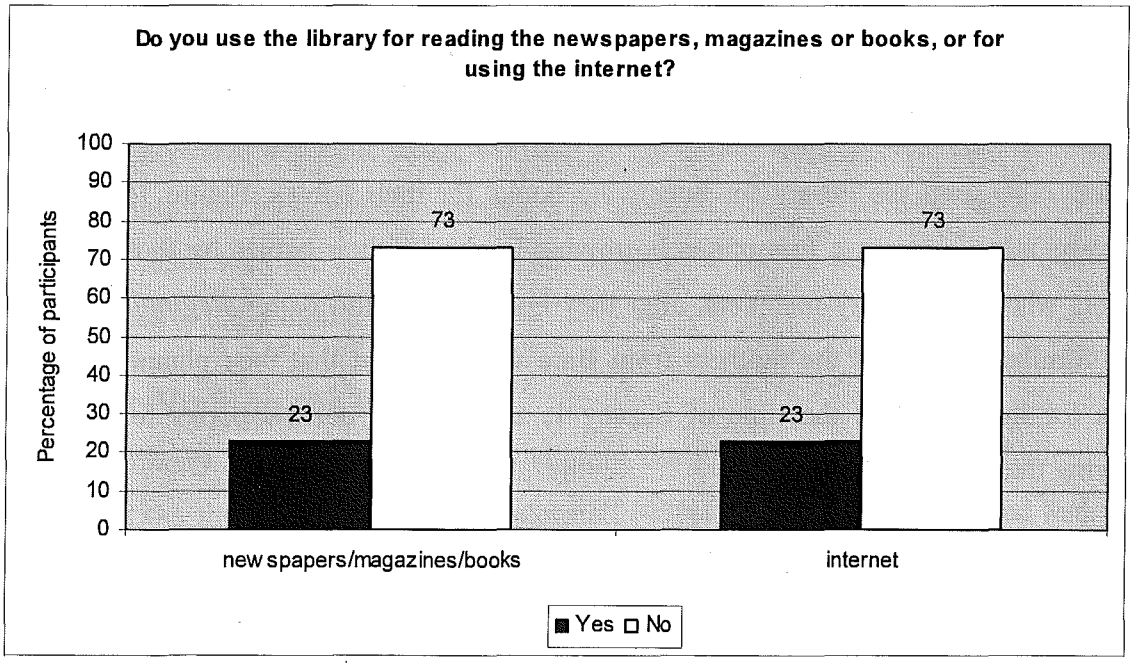


Figure 16. Use of library resources – Sherwood & Bura

Around one quarter of these mothers (23%) reported that they used the library for borrowing videos, DVDs or CDs for themselves, whereas nearly half (47%) reported that they borrowed videos, DVDs or CDs for their babies (see Figure 17).

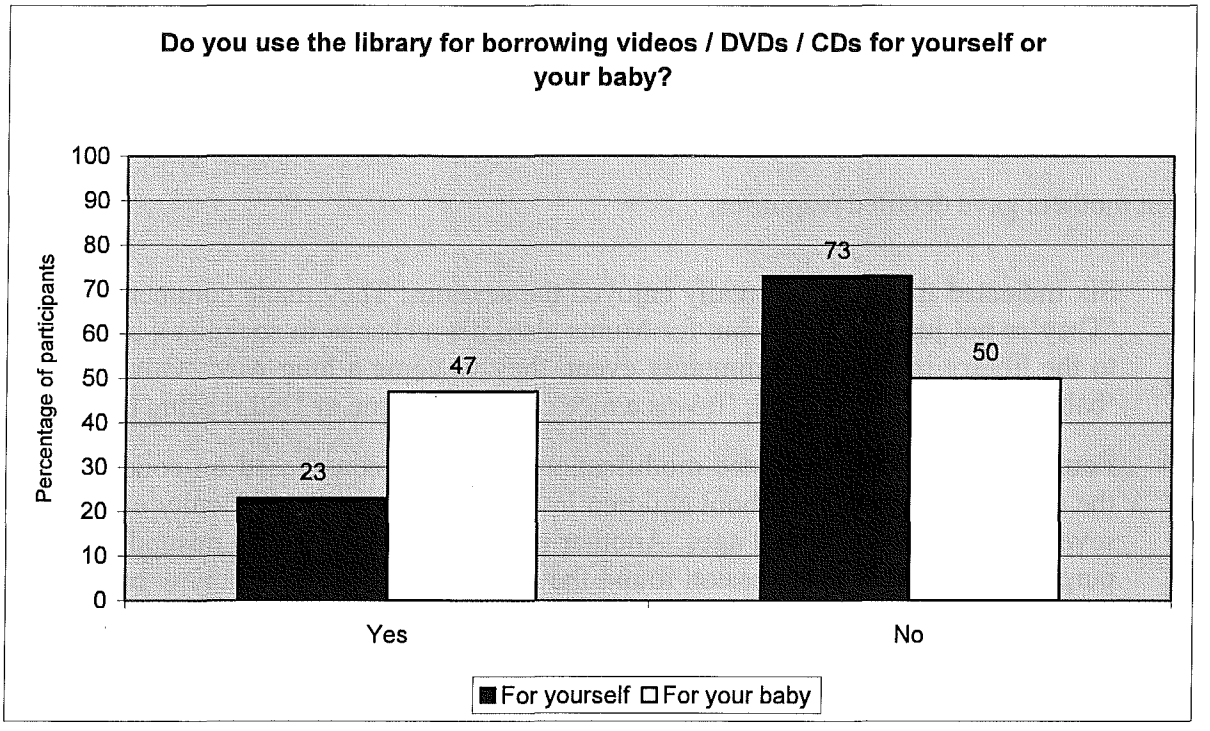


Figure 17. Borrowing videos, CDs or DVDs

Using the library: Better Beginnings *activities*

Approximately one third (30%) of mothers who visited the library reported taking part in baby story-time sessions there. Few (10%) had taken part in library initiated parent child workshops. The activities that targeted parents/mothers and babies were just being developed at the time of Survey 2, so not all parents were aware of them, as was apparent from the responses of the mothers who gave open-ended comments about these library initiatives.

Some reported that, as far as they knew, the sessions had not begun at their library but they planned to go when the sessions did begin. Others commented that they planned to go to the sessions when their babies were older and some indicated that they attended library story-time sessions with their older pre-school children. One of these mothers reported that the local library advertisements about the story-time sessions recommended the baby be 'over

6 months of age'. Other mothers commented on the difficulties of finding the time and energy to attend the sessions, particularly with more than one child. Some mothers had attended one session and planned to go again. One reported that, 'Baby went one night with Dad'.

Most of the 13 mothers who had been to either the library baby story-time sessions or the parent child workshops linked to *Better Beginnings* found these activities to be useful (8 extremely useful, 4 useful and 1 slightly useful).

Ten mothers gave detailed responses:

- Six indicated that they had really enjoyed the sessions. They made comments such as, 'They're not just for babies but for Mums also, it's a chance to socialise', and, 'Going to the library is a social/community event, they've come a long way'. Others said the 'baby really enjoyed it', and, 'It was a nice change from me or Dad reading to her'.
- Four of the mothers suggested modifications to the sessions based on concerns about the mix of babies and preschool children in the sessions and the difficulty of managing several children of different ages. Another mother who appeared to misunderstand the purpose of the story-time session found the activities difficult with a new baby as 'she didn't sit and listen'.

Parental awareness of early literacy practices and development

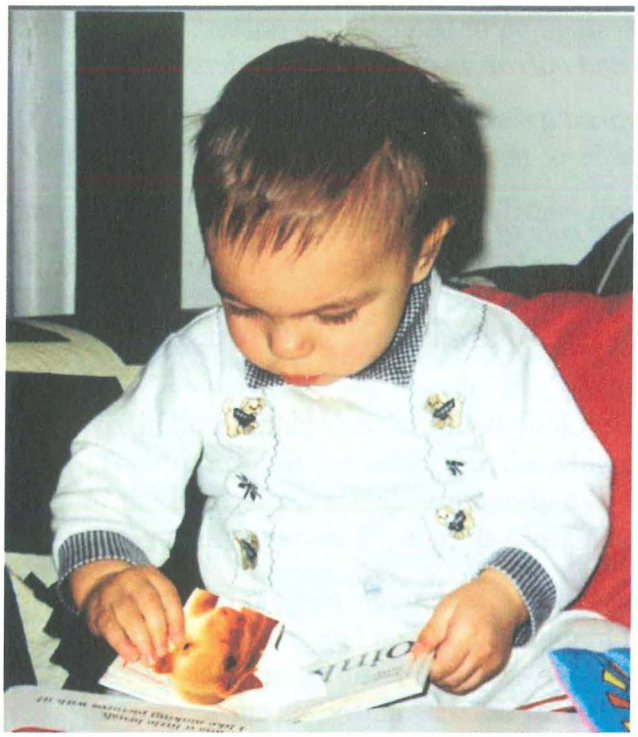
In terms of knowledge and attitudes about reading to children half (53%) of the respondents were able to name the title of at least one favourite children's book, the most popular being 'Dr Seuss' and 'Little Golden Books'. Several mothers made comments that gave some insight into their views of early literacy that ranged from surprise to positive endorsements of early literacy:

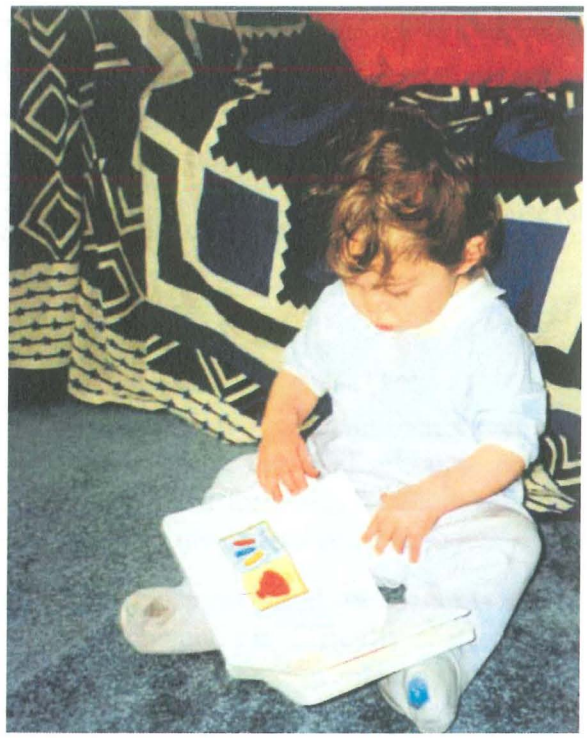
> *Flabbergasted at start - didn't think you could read to a baby - now reading regularly*
> *It's something special for the child - gives a head start*
> *A very good idea to encourage reading.*

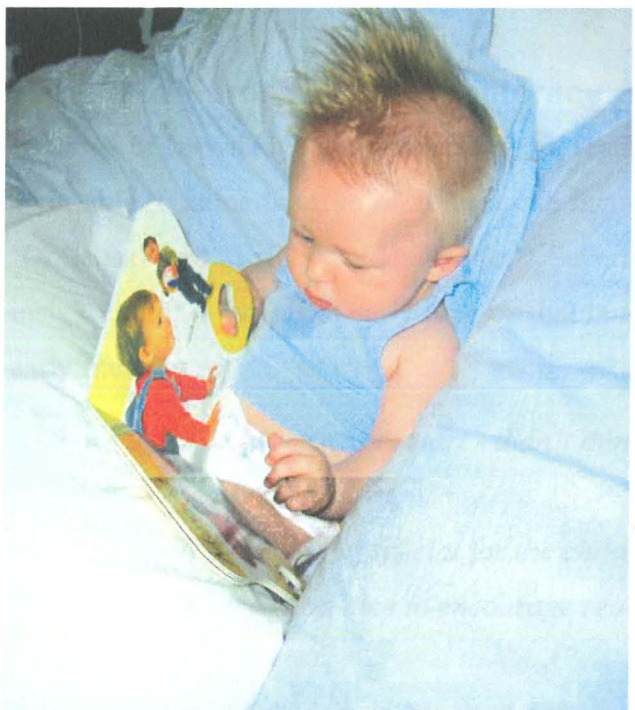
Several commented on the ways in which using the resource pack had helped them reflect on early literacy development:

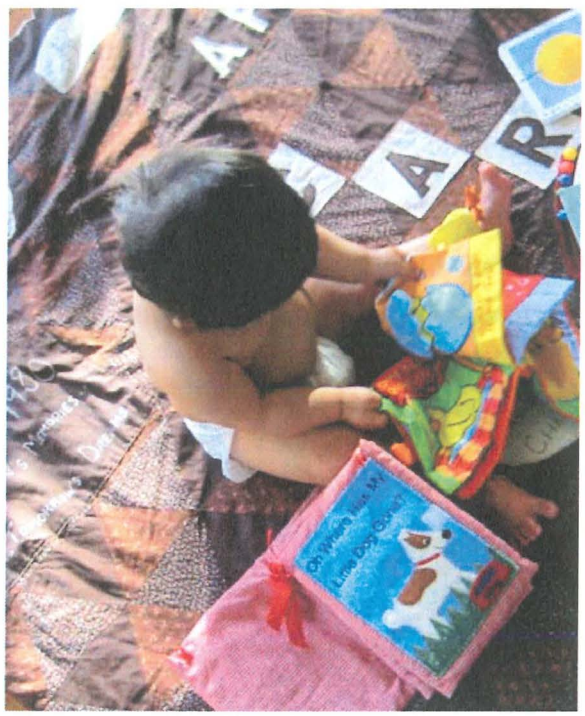
> *Loved the book (had blonde boy and mirror on cover) but wondered if all the babies were boys - provoked a discussion among friends.*

> *Good. Like the fact it reinforces the role of parents in promoting literacy.*









The mothers' perspectives on the program: Results of the case study interviews

In order to further examine the mothers' perceptions of the *Better Beginnings* program as reported in the surveys, interviews were held in the homes of a sub-sample of 11 mothers. These mothers represented a range of ages and educational levels. A majority were in the 19-24 age group and their levels of education ranged from completion of lower secondary to postgraduate, as did the educational levels of their partners. Most had more than 50 books in their homes and English was the main language spoken by all of them, two were bilingual, and one identified herself as of Aboriginal descent. For most, the baby was the first child in the family. (See Table 1 for more details.) Pseudonyms have been used to protect confidentiality.

Table 1. *Background information about interviewees*

Place of residence	Mining Town	6
	Outer Metro	5
Age Group	19-24	6
	25-34	3
	35-44	2
Mother's level of education	Year 8-9	1
	Year 10	1
	Year 11-12	5
	TAFE	2
	University Undergraduate	1
	Postgraduate	1
Partner's level of education	Years 8-9	1
	Year 10	3
	Year 11/12	2
	TAFE	2
	University undergraduate	1
	Postgraduate	1
	Not stated	1
Main language spoken	English	11
Number of children	1	7
	2	3
	3	1
Number of books in house	1-5	1
	11-50	2
	50+	8

General feedback from the interviewees

All of the mothers interviewed were generally positive about the *Better Beginnings* initiative and indicated that it had been useful to them in one way or another. Perceived benefits of the program were that it was informational, motivational, reassuring and supportive.

The presentation of the resource pack

The pack was presented in different ways in Sherwood and Bura, with Sherwood using the Community Health Nurses for this purpose while the Bura librarian distributed the toolkits in the maternity hospital and then provided a follow-up service. The Bura service included a librarian delivering suitable books to new mothers every three weeks and spending time discussing with them the benefits of reading to babies and young children. Although there were differences in the presentation, all mothers felt either that the pack had been adequately explained to them, or that the contents were self-explanatory. Two mothers thought that the timing of the presentation could have been delayed so that it did not add to the 'information overload' or overabundance of leaflets presented to new mothers.

The gift book in the resource pack

All of the mothers had been delighted to receive a free book and had read it several times to their baby. For some, it had become a favourite book that was read again and again. Several indicated that, if given a choice, they would have preferred a book with more story, rhyme and rhythm as the board books in the *Better Beginnings* resource packs generally had fragmented text. These mothers did, however, point out that this type of book was useful for helping children learn new vocabulary and concepts in that it was often used as a context for talking about everyday objects, but suggested that other types of books were more suitable for helping their babies learn to understand and love stories, literature and connected language. A few of these new mothers explained that whilst their baby enjoyed the book they themselves were not motivated to use it repeatedly because they did not find it stimulating. Another comment by several mothers was that they thought the book was not 'baby-proof' enough and thus they did not allow their babies access to it in case the book got 'wrecked' or 'eaten'. Most of the mothers liked the pictures, themes and interactive features of the books, such as the mirrors and cut-outs.

The information brochure

The mothers indicated that they liked the colourfulness and conciseness of the brochure. However, because of the small format, many had lost it. They indicated that they would have preferred a poster format because they would have been more likely to hang it up and refer to it. As they felt that the Community Health Nurses and the librarians concerned had done a thorough job of explaining the contents of the brochure, most of the mothers had not felt it necessary to read it for themselves. Because of this, most of them had merely 'skimmed' the brochure and had not read it in detail. Only three of the mothers volunteered information about it and said that it was useful to them.

The booklist brochure

Only five mothers remembered receiving the booklist brochure and only two people indicated that they had used it to help them choose books. Others said that they had relied on the librarian to recommend appropriate books. This was especially the case in Bura, where the librarian chose and delivered books to homes in the first few months of babies' lives. They felt that this personal service was much more useful to them than information on a brochure.

The growth chart

Some of the mothers had used the growth chart to refresh their memory of nursery rhymes and a few had hung it up in their child's bedroom, although not at or near ground level as recommended, in case it got pulled down or damaged by the child. None had in fact used it for measuring their baby's height because the babies were too small and some of them could not stand up at the time of the interview. Others had put the chart away for later use.

The library story-time sessions

Most of the mothers had been to story-time sessions at the library at the time of the interviews, which was later than the time of the surveys. Whilst many had found them enjoyable there was some mixed feedback. The main difficulty experienced was that the timeslots of the sessions were not convenient. For example, the 6.00pm and 10.00am timeslots coincided with babies' bed and nap times. A common suggestion was for a reduction in the size of the groups for the sessions and a reduction in age ranges, although one mother found the variation in age groups beneficial as she saw the older children as

positive role models for the younger ones. Another suggestion was that the librarians should not give parents information during the story-time sessions as they felt that their children's attention drifted very quickly when the librarian began to speak to parents instead of the children.

Some of the mothers deemed the books used in the library story-time sessions as too small and they would have preferred larger books so that their children could use the pictures to enhance their enjoyment and comprehension of the stories. The mothers liked the finger puppets and felt board activities when used and wanted to see more of these.

The library home visits (Bura)

The mothers at Bura were overwhelmingly positive about the 'home visits' service offered by the local library. They reported that this had motivated them to read books to their babies from an early age and that they would have had neither the time nor the energy to visit the library within the first few weeks of the baby's life. They were also impressed that the librarian had chosen highly appropriate books and given them advice on the procedures and benefits of reading to babies.

The parent-child workshops

Only two mothers had attended the workshops. Some reported that they did not know about them and others that they thought that the leaflets and the presenters of the resource pack had given them enough information, whilst others indicated that they did not have time to go.

How *Better Beginnings* had changed the mothers' opinions

Many of the mothers said that they would never have considered reading to babies and very young children if they had not been given the resource pack. Others said that whilst they had previously believed that reading to babies was important this opinion had been 'refreshed' or 'consolidated' by *Better Beginnings*. Mothers of more than one child mostly felt that they had already learnt a lot through experience with their first children. Some said that they wished they had been given the resource pack for their first baby as they had done things differently with their new baby as a result of *Better Beginnings*.

Library attendance

The *Better Beginnings* innovation had encouraged about half of the mothers interviewed to visit the library to get books out for their babies. Others indicated that they did not have the time to go and many from Bura would have liked to see the home visits service extended. Some felt that they had enough books at home for their baby but intended to start attending the library when the babies became 'bored' with these.

Observations of mothers reading to their babies and young children

Most of the mothers read to their babies during the researcher's visit. Others were not able to do so because their babies were sleeping at the time. The mothers who did read to their children at this time were observed to read in ways that were consistent with the advice that was given in the *Better Beginnings* brochure called *Better Beginnings: Enjoy reading with your baby.*

Most settled into a comfortable and quiet armchair to read to their young children, although a few sat on the floor with the child on their lap or between their legs, and one sat on a kitchen chair with the child on her lap. They all read with expression, in warm, excited tones. (Some of them indicated to the researcher that it had taken them a while to get used to using 'funny voices'.) Furthermore, they often used body language, such as exaggerated facial expressions. Only one mother did not appear comfortable reading expressively, although she did attempt to do so. She read to her young daughter in a quiet, whispery voice, and often nudged her and giggled with her.

All of the mothers pointed to the pictures as they read out loud, often pausing to discuss the pictures and relate them to the child's experiences and prior knowledge. For example:

> ***Cassie***:
>
> *Look Brady, there's a truck. Can you see the big green truck? Look over here ... And what's on the next page? Look at that, there's another red truck and a blue truck! Yes, they're big trucks. That's called a cement mixer ... Look, your Dad drives a big fire truck, doesn't he?*

Many of the mothers asked questions about the texts, but because the children were as yet non-verbal, mothers often answered the questions themselves. Another piece of advice given in the *Better Beginnings* brochure is to encourage the child to handle the book and help turn the pages. This was observed several times during the interview. In all cases, the child and the mother appeared to have fun during the reading, as evidenced by children smiling, gurgling, kicking their legs and paying great attention to the pictures in the books and to their mother's voice.

Many of the mothers commented that the information they had received either from *Better Beginnings* personnel or the resource pack had given them good ideas about how to read to their young children. And as can be seen, they in fact did read to their babies in ways that were recommended by these *Better Beginnings* resources.

Conclusion

For the mothers who were interviewed, the most useful aspect of the program seemed to be the verbal explanations of the resource pack given by librarians and Community Health Nurses. They also greatly appreciated the free gift book included in the resource pack as this had encouraged them to 'get started' in reading to their babies. Most of the mothers had attended some of the story-time sessions at the library and had seen this as beneficial for their babies, although they had various suggestions for the running of these. Some had also enjoyed the social aspects of the story-time sessions and had started to lend baby books to each other. Almost half of the mothers interviewed had been to the library to borrow books for their babies as a result of participating in the *Better Beginnings* program; others had them delivered to their homes by the librarian.

Key findings from the evaluation of the pilot project

The mothers' views about the Better Beginnings *program*

The resource pack

- The mothers were overwhelmingly positive about the pack as a whole
- Almost every mother found the book to be useful or very useful
- Not all felt able to make comments about the other elements of the pack, but of those who did make a comment most found them to be useful or very useful
- Most did not want anything else added to the pack but some asked for modifications that concerned durability of the materials or additional information on literacy

Better Beginnings activities

- At the time of the evaluation the *Better Beginnings* activities were in the early stages of development and not all mothers were aware of them
- One third of the mothers took part in the baby story-time sessions and a few parents took part in parent-child workshops at the library
- On the whole these parents found the activities to be very useful and some suggested modifications for future sessions

Changes reported in the mothers' perceptions and practices

Sharing books, rhymes and songs with babies

- Almost all mothers shared books with their babies after being involved in the *Better Beginnings* program
- A majority of mothers saw sharing books with babies as important before being involved in *Better Beginnings* activities
- Those who did not see sharing books with babies as important before *Better Beginnings* saw it as important once involved
- Almost all mothers shared rhymes and songs with their babies after being involved in the *Better Beginnings* program
- Most saw singing songs and rhymes as being important before being involved in the *Better Beginnings* program
- One third of mothers indicated that *Better Beginnings* had changed/reinforced their opinion that babies can benefit from rhymes and songs
- The case study mothers felt that the resource pack had been well explained to them by *Better Beginnings* personnel and they were observed to be following the strategies recommended in *Better Beginnings* resources when reading to their babies.

Library membership and use

- After being involved in *Better Beginnings*, half of those mothers who had not previously been library members joined the library
- A majority of mothers reported that *Better Beginnings* had changed their opinion that babies could have library membership and one third had taken out library membership for their babies
- As their babies became older and more active, there was no increase in visits to the library by mothers, which is partly explained by the fact that at one library the librarian brought library resources to the mothers in their homes
- The majority of mothers who were library members borrowed books for themselves and their babies after being involved in *Better Beginnings*
- Half of these mothers reported borrowing videos, CDs and DVDs for their babies

Elements that seemed to facilitate the implementation

Coordination of the program

- The appointment of a State Library-based project co-ordinator with responsibility for the design, training and implementation of the program meant that it was co-ordinated consistently across the communities
- The project co-ordinator coordinated collaboration with partner agencies at a central and community level, thus ensuring that the program was inclusive in terms of the professionals involved.
- This collaboration, particularly in the development and distribution of the resource pack ensured that stakeholders' voices were heard and that modifications could be made where indicated
- The project co-ordinator was able to respond quickly to community feedback about the program elements
- The project co-ordinator facilitated meetings between the librarians involved, in order to monitor and support the program in their communities
- Because she had an overview of the whole project, the project co-ordinator was able to ensure that the program was flexible in terms of meeting the needs of different communities

Inter-agency collaboration

- Collaboration between health and library personnel at State and local levels was important for the effective distribution of the resource packs and information about health and library resources
- The understanding of the Community Health Nurses that *Better Beginnings* complemented their work with families enabled them to communicate more directly the value of sharing books with babies

- The commitment, enthusiasm and shared goals of Community Health Nurses and librarians helped them work towards the aims of *Better Beginnings*
- The flexibility of the program allowed for different ways of inter-agency collaboration and delivery of the *Better Beginnings* program within each community
- Inter-agency collaboration between different professionals enabled the *Better Beginnings* program to be extended throughout a range of community groups
- Information about the local library included in the resource pack gave the Community Health Nurses the opportunity to talk about joining the library at an early age and were able to re-assure mothers that children of all ages were welcome at the library
- As part of the inter-agency collaboration the Community Health Nurses and librarians were able to involve other professionals who had additional expertise in early language and literacy and in turn they had been invited to promote the program in other community groups

Resource pack

- The attractiveness and informative nature of the free gift resource pack meant that it was well received by the mothers at a time when they were particularly receptive to new information that they could put into practice.

Issues identified in the implementation

- The extra time and work that *Better Beginnings* entailed for the Community Health Nurses and librarians was problematic in that these enthusiastic and passionate people were involved in developing and implementing activities that were beyond their job descriptions
- The uncertain nature of funding during the pilot project made it difficult for the personnel involved to plan in the long-term
- Some of the professionals involved indicated that they had little training in early years literacy learning and activities and, whilst during the course of the program they had acquired new learning and skills, there was a need for targeted professional development
- Establishing a partnership with other agencies was identified as a challenge in that some initial contacts were problematic
- The limited availability of suitable books within a large diverse state with a relatively small population was an issue that affected the composition of the resource packs
- The lack of representation of different ethnic groups in materials was seen as a factor that needed to be addressed on inclusivity grounds
- There was some evidence that more durable materials could have been more widely used

- The presentation of information in a brochure did not appear to be the most effective format for reaching new parents in the two communities
- Communication about the library initiated activities apparently did not reach all participants
- Relatively low attendance rates at the library initiated activities was identified as an issue of concern
- Perceived lack of timely communication about library initiated activities could have compromised attendance at these events, which were newly developed

What appeared to be the greatest strengths of the Better Beginnings pilot program?

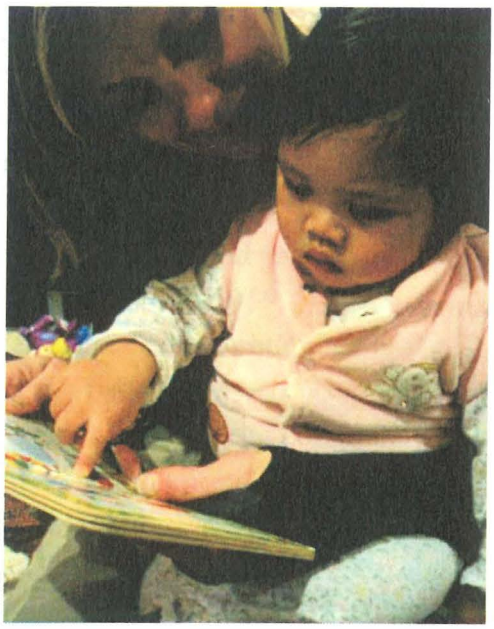
- The initiation and coordination of *Better Beginnings* by the State Library that has the potential for long term follow-up activities (not an element of some similar programs in other parts of the world)
- The collaboration of the State Library and public libraries, that is, State and local government collaboration
- The alignment of *Better Beginnings* with the State Government's Early Years Strategy that has ensured it has a high profile and potential for further development and collaboration across other government and non-government agencies
- The commitment and passion of the project co-ordinator, the librarians and Community Health Nurses involved
- Inter-agency collaboration
- The flexibility of *Better Beginnings* that enabled the program to be implemented and developed in a range of community contexts
- A high quality resource pack

Conclusion

This evaluation of the *Better Beginnings* pilot project shows that overall the program was well-designed, carefully coordinated and extremely well received by parents. There is evidence that parents made use of the items in the resource pack in ways that had the potential to support early literacy learning. Specifically, they used the growth/nursery rhyme chart and gift book with their babies and other children in ways that were in accordance with the information on parent-child interaction around texts provided in the brochure. Many parents also borrowed books for their babies and took out library memberships for them. In addition some of the parents took part in *Better Beginnings* activities at their local library. At the time of the pilot project these activities were in the early stages of development.

Several issues concerning the ongoing success of *Better Beginnings* were identified. The most important of these appeared to be the involvement of non-traditional library users and the sustainability of the program within the family over time as the babies reach the preschool and early school years. The questions for agencies implementing the program are firstly, how to involve families who are non-traditional library users and secondly how to sustain parent involvement in early literacy.









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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Survey 1

Appendix 1. Survey 1



Department of Culture and the Arts
Government of Western Australia
State Library of Western Australia



Better Beginnings Survey 1

Congratulations on the birth of your new baby! This survey will help us get information about Better Beginnings. Please tick a box to indicate your answer. Thank you for your help.

Date: / /2004

1. **When was your baby born?** **Day** _____ **Month** _____ **Year** _____

2. **How many brothers/sisters does your baby have?**

   0 ❑ 1 ❑ 2 ❑ 3 ❑ 4 ❑ 5 ❑ More that 5 ❑

3. **How many days each week is your baby cared for by others:**

   in child care or day care?

   Less than ½ a day ❑ ½ a day ❑ 1–2 days ❑ 3–4 days ❑ 5 days or more ❑

   by babysitter?

   Less than ½ a day ❑ ½ a day ❑ 1–2 days ❑ 3–4 days ❑ 5 days or more ❑

   in other care settings? Please specify: _____

   Less than ½ a day ❑ ½ a day ❑ 1–2 days ❑ 3–4 days ❑ 5 days or more ❑

4. **What is your age group?**

   under 18 ❑ 19-25 ❑ 26-34 ❑ 35-44 ❑ 45+ ❑

5. **What is the highest educational level that you completed?**

   Mum

   N/A ❑ Primary/Years 8 or 9 ❑ Year 10 ❑ Year 11/12 ❑

   TAFE ❑ University (undergraduate) ❑ University (post graduate) ❑

Dad/Partner

N/A ❑ Primary/Years 8 or 9 ❑ Year 10 ❑ Year 11/12 ❑

TAFE ❑ University (undergraduate) ❑ University (post graduate) ❑

6. **Is English the main language you speak at home?** **Yes** ❑ **No** ❑

If no, please tell us what language you speak. _____

7. **Do you identify yourself as being of Aboriginal or Torres Straight Islander descent?**

Yes, Aboriginal ❑ Yes, Torres Straight Islander ❑

8. **Are you a member of the library?** **Yes** ❑ **No** ❑

9. **Have you joined your baby as a member of the library?** **Yes** ❑ **No** ❑

10. **How often do you go to the local library?**

More than once a week ❑ Once a week ❑ Once every two weeks ❑

Once a month ❑ Never ❑

11. **About how many books do you have in your home?**

0 ❑ 1-5 ❑ 6-10 ❑ 11-50 ❑ More than 50 ❑

12. **If you have other children, how often do you share books with them?**

N/A ❑ Never ❑ Less that once a week ❑ Most days ❑

13. **Do you share books with your new baby?** **Yes** ❑ **No** ❑

14. **Do you share rhymes and songs with your new baby?** **Yes** ❑ **No** ❑

15. **How important do you think it is to share books with babies?**

Not important ❑ Somewhat important ❑ Very important ❑

16. **Do you have any books at home to share with your baby?** **Yes** ❑ **No** ❑

15. **If you've looked at your Better Beginnings toolkit, would you like to make any comments about it?**

Thank you for your help.

We hope you enjoy using the Better Beginnings Toolkit with your baby.

Appendix 2 Survey 2

Appendix 2. Survey 2



Department of Culture and the Arts
Government of Western Australia
State Library of Western Australia



Survey 2: About the Better Beginnings Toolkit

1. Who gave you your Better Beginnings Toolkit?

Community Health Nurse ❑ Librarian ❑ Other (please specify) _____

About the Better Beginnings Toolkit – Now I'm going to ask you about 5 items that were in the toolkit, think about how useful you found them, whether they were 'not at all useful' 'slightly useful' 'useful' or 'extremely useful'

2. What did you think about the:

a. Toolkit in general?

Not at all useful ❑ Slightly Useful ❑ Useful ❑ Extremely Useful ❑ Can't Judge/Doesn't Apply ❑

Other comments

_____

b. Book?

Not at all useful ❑ Slightly Useful ❑ Useful ❑ Extremely Useful ❑ Can't Judge/Doesn't Apply ❑

Other comments

_____

c. Growth Chart with rhymes?

Not at all useful ❑ Slightly Useful ❑ Useful ❑ Extremely Useful ❑ Can't Judge/Doesn't Apply ❑

Other comments

_____

d. Brochure

Not at all useful ❑ Slightly Useful ❑ Useful ❑ Extremely Useful ❑ Can't Judge/Doesn't Apply ❑

Other comments

_____

e. Brochure no. 2 (Information on reading)?

Not at all useful ❑ Slightly Useful ❑ Useful ❑ Extremely Useful ❑ Can't Judge/Doesn't Apply ❑

Other comments

_____

Now, is there anything you would like to see added to the Toolkit, or left out of the Toolkit?

3. **Added?** **Yes** ❑ **No** ❑

   If 'Yes', please specify: _____

4. **Left out?** **Yes** ❑ **No** ❑

   If 'Yes', please specify: _____

5. **Do you have any other comments about the Better Beginnings Toolkit in general.**

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

6. **Since receiving your Better Beginnings Toolkit, have you:**

   a. **shared books with your baby?** **Yes** ❑ **No** ❑

b. **shared rhymes and songs with your baby?** **Yes** ❑ **No** ❑

7. **Has the Better Beginnings Toolkit/ Program changed your opinion on any of these ideas:**

a. **The idea that, babies can enjoy and benefit from rhymes and songs at an early age?** **Yes** ❑ **No** ❑ **N/A - I thought this before** ❑

b. **The idea that, babies can benefit from rhymes at an early age?** **Yes** ❑ **No** ❑ **N/A - I thought this before** ❑

c. **The idea that, babies can join the library at any age?** **Yes** ❑ **No** ❑ **N/A - I thought this before** ❑

Has the tookkit changed your opinion in any other ways?

_____

8. **Since receiving your Toolkit, have you or your baby joined the library?**

You **Yes** ❑ **No** ❑ **I was already a library member** ❑

Baby **Yes** ❑ **No** ❑

9. **How often do you go to the local library?**

More than once a week ❑ Once a week ❑ Once every two weeks ❑

Once a month ❑ Never ❑

Other, Please specify: _____

****If the answer is never, go to question 11**

10. **Which of the following library facilities do you use? (please tick all that are applicable)**

borrowing books for:	**Yourself**	**Yes**	❑	**No**	❑
	Your Baby	**Yes**	❑	**No**	❑
borrowing videos/DVDs/CDs for:	**Yourself**	**Yes**	❑	**No**	❑
	Your Baby	**Yes**	❑	**No**	❑

using the internet ❑ **reading the newspapers, magazines, books** ❑

11. **Have you taken part in any activities linked to Better Beginnings, for example:**

Baby story-time sessions	**Yes**	❑	**No**	❑
Parent/Child workshops	**Yes**	❑	**No**	❑

Other, Please specify: _____

****If the answer is no, go to question 13**

12 **If you answered 'Yes' to question 12, were these activities:**

Not at all useful ❑ Slightly Useful ❑ Useful ❑ Extremely Useful ❑ Can't Judge/Doesn't Apply ❑

Please add any other comments about the activities.

_____

_____

Thank you very much for your help.

Separate additional question

Would you be willing to take part in a short interview at your convenience to help us gather some more detailed information about the Better Beginnings Toolkit and activities? Could you please tell me your contact details? (Please print)

Name: _____ **Contact Phone Number:** _____

Appendix 3 Case studies

Appendix 3. Case studies *(In each interview the resource pack is referred to as a "toolkit").*

Maria

OVERVIEW *Questionnaire/Survey Background Information*		
Place of residence:	Mining Town	
Age group:	25-35	
Level of education:	Year 11/12	
Level of education (partner):	Not stated	
Main language spoken:	English	
Children:	Joshua	Christina
Ages:	11 months	2 ½ years
Gender:	Male	Female
Number of books in house:	50+	

Who gave you your *Better Beginnings* toolkit?	Librarian
What do you think about the: a) Toolkit in general b) Book c) Growth chart with rhymes d) Booklist e) Information on reading (brochure)	 Useful Extremely useful Extremely useful Can't judge Can't judge
Is there anything you would like to see added to the toolkit, or left out of the toolkit?	No
Since receiving your Better Beginnings toolkit have you: a) Shared books with your baby b) Shared rhymes and song with your baby?	 Yes Yes
Has the *Better Beginnings* Toolkit/Program changed your opinion on: a) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from books at an early age b) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from rhymes and songs form an early age c) The idea that babies can join the library at any age	 Thought this before Thought this before Thought this before
Since receiving your toolkit have you or your baby joined the library? a) You b) Baby	 Already a member Yes
How often do you go to the library?	Monthly
Which library facilities do you use?	Borrowing books for self and baby
Have you taken part in any of the activities linked to *Better Beginnings*, for example: a) Baby story-time sessions b) Parent/Child workshops c) Other How useful were these activities?	 Yes No N/A Useful

The Family context

Maria's second child, Joshua, was 11 months old at the time of the interview. She also had a daughter, Christina, who was two and a half and suffered from a speech delay, which necessitated weekly speech therapy. Maria had started reading to Joshua at birth, because she was reading to Christina almost every day, so she would often have Joshua there too. The children's father, Graham, also read to them occasionally.

There were numerous books in Maria's house, and she would often buy children's books at garage sales. Graham had many cartoon books on the shelf and Maria had a number of nursing textbooks (she was a School Health Nurse), as well as novels, cookbooks and craft books. However, Maria did not read much "just for the sake of it" and tended only to read when she needed information. Graham read a lot of fiction for pleasure, which Maria considered to be good role modelling for the children, especially for Joshua.

Joshua enjoyed being read to and watching TV. Maria described him as a "TV addict" who loved such programmes as Playschool, The Fimbles and The Bear in the Big Blue House. Maria also sang songs and rhymes to him and talked to him a lot, "about what's going on, what you're doing, what's going on outside, explaining things."

Maria's opinions about the *Better Beginnings* Program

Maria was extremely positive about the *Better Beginnings* program, especially the book, the growth chart and the story sessions. She could not remember how it had been presented to her by the librarian, but had found the leaflets in the resource pack self explanatory and easy to understand.

The book

Maria thought that the book provided in the toolkit was age appropriate and extremely useful. She particularly liked the mirror, the photographs and the cut-out hand grips, which enabled the baby to hold the book. Of the book, she said:

> *Yes great, love it. I mean they're great little books ...it's got nice pictures, like proper things, like photos of the real thing, which is really nice.*

The children's favourite book, however, was Old MacDonald's farm, which Maria would sing. They also loved pop-up books and "anything that moves". Also, rhyming books and "touchy feely" ones were popular. The *Better Beginnings* book was read about once a fortnight.

How Maria used books with her baby

Maria would sit Joshua either on her lap, on the sofa or in his highchair when she read to him, and reading time was usually in the morning. Maria worked two days a week so, on those days, would read to the children in the evening, but not at bedtime.

With Joshua, Maria often used books as a context for talk, and did not read the text. The book provided by *Better Beginnings* was a good book for pointing at the photos and naming them because it did not really have a story.

But you can use it for all sort of things, you know, you can use it for colours ... as well as individual bits of clothing and, "What's the boy doing?" You'd go like "Oh, what's he doing? Look he's got a sock!"

With her older daughter, Maria would *ask* questions about the photos, such as, "What are these?" She also used reading to Joshua as a motivator for Christina, who was not as interested in books, possibly because of her language difficulties. When Maria read to Joshua, Christina would not want to be left out and would come and join in.

Maria thought that many of the benefits of reading to babies and very young children often would not become apparent until later on. However, she thought that the enjoyment and the positive attitudes towards books and learning could be seen earlier. She said:

But it's nice for them just to sit and have a quiet time and to concentrate you know like it builds their attention span and that sort of thing and listening which is all skills they're going to need for school and what not. Like the earlier you can start building that I think the better.

The Nursery Rhyme growth chart

Maria had used the growth chart, mainly with Christina. The chart was hanging on the children's bedroom door and Christina would regularly ask to be measured. Joshua would also "have a try".

The information leaflet

Maria said that the information leaflet was "bright and cheery" but its contents were not new to her, although they would have been if Joshua had been her first child. She had learnt a lot about reading to young children through "trial and error" with Christina and through reading books, as well as through speech therapy sessions which Christina had been doing since the age of ten months.

The booklist

Maria had no recollection of the booklist but stated that the librarian had dropped off highly appropriate books for the first five months of Joshua's life.

How the kit Changed Maria's opinion about reading to babies

Maria said that *Better Beginnings* had not changed her opinions and practices regarding reading to babies and very young children, but that it would have been very informative had she been a first time mother. However, she thought that it might have reinforced what she already knew:

Maria:

I think it's probably reinforced it, you know, because it was there and because they [the librarians] were coming in those early days, I think it reinforced it and it was something that I was thinking, "I'll just have to keep that going now," because, how long is it to form a habit? You know, you do something for a month or something to form a habit, so the fact that they were coming for five months [was good].

The library services

Home visits

Maria was extremely positive about the home visits, which had continued for five months: "These were great!" She thought that they had motivated her to read more books. She indicated that she would not have been able to attend the library herself because she had been ill.

Story session for babies

Maria had been able to attend five or six sessions at the library and had found them useful. However, she thought that some of the activities on offer were not age appropriate for the 0-2 age group: "The craft activity was a bit of a drag because it like usually entailed scissors and what not, so it meant that, you know, you were trying to cut stuff out and having a toddler around the library – so that was a bit hard sometimes."

However, she had heard from a friend that the format had recently been changed so that a story or two was read, and then the babies and toddlers would have a short playtime. Maria approved of the rhymes and stories selected to read to the babies and toddlers and liked the fact that the sessions were always "cheery". However, she found it difficult, having a child from a different age group, because the older child would not sit still and listen to the baby books.

Workshops/parent information sessions

Maria was not aware of any parent workshops/information sessions being held in Mining Town.

Library attendance

Maria attended the library once every three weeks to exchange books and videos for the children and books for herself (if she was researching something). She usually went in the evenings when her children were in bed. She had no plans to attend the library more frequently as she felt that getting six to ten books out every three weeks was sufficient.

Suggestions for Improvements

Maria had no suggestions for improvements.

Shelley

OVERVIEW *Questionnaire/Survey Background Information*	
Place of residence:	Outer Metropolitan
Age group:	19-25
Level of education:	Year 10
Level of education (partner):	Year 10
Main language spoken:	English
Children:	Lisa
Ages:	12 months
Gender:	Female
Number of books in house:	1-5

Who gave you your *Better Beginnings* toolkit?	Community Health Nurse
What do you think about the: a) Toolkit in general b) Book c) Growth chart with rhymes d) Booklist e) Information on reading (brochure)	 Useful Extremely useful Useful Can't judge Can't judge
Is there anything you would like to see added to the toolkit, or left out of the toolkit?	No
Since receiving your Better Beginnings toolkit have you: a) Shared books with your baby b) Shared rhymes and song with your baby?	 No Yes
Has the *Better Beginnings* Toolkit/Program changed your opinion on: a) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from books at an early age b) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from rhymes and songs form an early age c) The idea that babies can join the library at any age	 Thought this before Thought this before Yes
Since receiving your toolkit have you or your baby joined the library? a) You b) Baby	 No No
How often do you go to the library?	Never
Which library facilities do you use?	N/A
Have you taken part in any of the activities linked to *Better Beginnings*, for example: a) Baby story-time sessions b) Parent/Child workshops c) Other How useful were these activities?	 No No N/A N/A

The Family context

Shelley did not have many books in the house (1-5) and did not do a lot of reading because she did not enjoy it. Lisa, who was 12 months old at the time of the interview, was her first child and enjoyed being read to, although Shelley did not allow her to hold books because she had a habit of chewing and "wrecking" them. Shelley had started reading to her at the age of approximately six months, but no longer read to her every day. Lisa's maternal grandmother had read to her "once or twice" but her father had not. Lisa enjoyed singing, clapping, dancing to music and watching a small amount of TV.

Shelley's Opinions about the *Better Beginnings* Program

Shelley thought that the *Better Beginnings* programme was "good" and had found the leaflets easy to understand, although she indicated that the librarian who presented it had not explained it much.

The book

In the resource pack Shelley had received a board book with a mirror and thought that this was highly appropriate and useful. However, it had not become a favourite. Lisa's favourite was a Pooh Bear book. Lisa thought that this was because Lisa liked the Pooh Bear character, but this book also involved the mother tickling, bouncing and touching the child, which may help explain its popularity with Lisa. Shelley read the Pooh Bear book to Lisa during the interview, much to the baby's delight.

How Shelley used books with her baby

As noted above, all books were put out of Lisa's reach because she had a tendency to chew them. When Shelley read to her, she would always have her on her lap so that both could see and touch the book. There was no routine or preferred time of the day for reading, "just whenever". She had been reading, sporadically, to Lisa for approximately six months.

Shelley hadn't started reading to Lisa any younger because she didn't think it would be beneficial. However, she was keen to instil in her a love of reading, which she herself had never had. Despite this, Shelley did not read to Lisa on a daily basis as she still thought that Lisa was somewhat young to benefit. Also, she was short of time:

> *I've found that I don't really have a lot of time to sit down and read. Like, I suppose as she gets a bit older reading will become a bed time thing, before bed, but at the moment she's not like – I think when she goes to bed, she goes to bed to go to sleep. If I sat in there and read she'd want to stay up.*

Because Shelley did not have many books in the house, she would read the same three or four books to Lisa again and again. She reported that she might have bought more board books but had not been able to find them in the shops.

The Nursery Rhyme growth chart

Although she had indicated in the telephone survey that she had found the growth chart useful, Shelley stated during the interview that she had not, in fact, used it. "I've got it but I haven't really looked at it." She already knew a few nursery rhymes and sang them to Lisa anyway.

The information leaflet

Shelley had not used the information leaflet and said: "I think most of it is just common sense, really."

The booklist

Shelley said that she could not really remember reading the booklist, probably because she was so busy. She indicated that she may have looked at it more if it were in a poster format, hanging on the wall. This applies to the information leaflet, also.

I don't think I had a good look at most of the pamphlets. I might have had a quick look or browse at one but that was probably about it.

How the Kit Changed Shelley's Opinion about Reading to Babies

The kit had not changed Shelley's opinions about reading to babies and young children. She thought that reading to children was important but that reading to young babies was not particularly beneficial. She had tried reading to Lisa at the age of six months or so but had virtually stopped doing it as she thought she was not getting "much out of it".

The Library Services

Story session for babies

Shelley had not attended any sessions because of a lack of time. "I wanted to but, no, I haven't."

Workshops/parent information sessions

Shelley had not been able to attend due to a lack of time.

Library attendance

Shelley was not a member of the library and neither was her baby. They never attended the library even though it was (according to Shelley) only five or ten minutes away by car. She reported that this was due to a lack of time and because "I don't really need anything there."

Suggestions for Improvements

Shelley had no suggestions for improvements.

Jenny

OVERVIEW *Questionnaire/Survey Background Information*			
Place of residence:	Mining Town		
Age group:	35-44		
Level of education:	Year 11/12		
Level of education (partner):	TAFE		
Main language spoken:	English		
Children:	Sam	Troy	Nathan
Ages:	9 months	7 years	9 years
Gender:	Male	Male	Male
Number of books in house:	50+		

Who gave you your *Better Beginnings* toolkit?	Librarian
What do you think about the: a) Toolkit in general b) Book c) Growth chart with rhymes d) Booklist e) Information on reading (brochure)	 Extremely useful Extremely useful Extremely useful Useful Extremely useful
Is there anything you would like to see added to the toolkit, or left out of the toolkit?	No
Since receiving your Better Beginnings toolkit have you: a) Shared books with your baby b) Shared rhymes and song with your baby?	 Yes Yes
Has the *Better Beginnings* Toolkit/Program changed your opinion on: a) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from books at an early age b) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from rhymes and songs form an early age c) The idea that babies can join the library at any age	 Thought this before Yes Yes
Since receiving your toolkit have you or your baby joined the library? a) You b) Baby	 Already a member Yes
How often do you go to the library?	Monthly
Which library facilities do you use?	Borrowing books, DVDs, CDs for self, baby and other children.
Have you taken part in any of the activities linked to *Better Beginnings*, for example: a) Baby story-time sessions b) Parent/Child workshops c) Other How useful were these activities?	 No No No N/A

The Family Context

Jenny was a mother of three sons and worked part time. Her youngest son, Sam, was 9 months old at the time of the interview. He enjoyed some TV programmes, especially those with music, but he especially liked to "chase his brothers".

There were many books in the household, from cook books, art books, history books, magazines and children's books. The older boys liked books about wizards and dragons. Jenny also spent time singing songs and rhymes and playing games such as peek-a-boo with Sam, which he enjoyed. They also enjoyed making up "silly nonsense rhymes". She had been sharing books with Sam since he was two weeks old, and read to him every day. His father also read to him when he had time, as did the two older boys.

Jenny's Opinions about the *Better Beginnings* Program

Jenny was extremely positive about the initiative and indicated that she found the toolkit extremely useful, except for the booklist, which she had not used:

> *It was good. I think because when the other two boys were first born, even though the library was available, you didn't have people that would come around and, you know, explain to you that there were groups, like, you could go and take your baby and they were having baby reading sessions.*

She had found the toolkit easy to understand and had been happy with the way it had been presented to her at the hospital, by a librarian.

The book

Jenny had been pleased with the book:

> *I thought it was great, you know, nice and bright and pictures of babies, which other babies seem to love looking at. Look Brady, there's a truck. Can you see the big green truck? Look over here ... And what's on the next page? Look at that, there's another red truck and a blue truck! Yes, they're big trucks. That's called a cement mixer ... Look, your Dad drives a big fire truck, doesn't he?*

However, Sam's favourite book was a cloth book about a pig, which said "oink" when its nose was pressed.

How Jenny used books with her baby

Jenny had started to share the *Better Beginnings* board book with Sam just two weeks after leaving hospital. She had started by just showing it to him, rather than reading the text.

> *Just showing it to him and faces, because they say that kids can recognise faces much earlier than what they originally thought – so anything to do with pictures.*

Jenny would usually put Sam on her lap or sometimes let him lie on the couch when she read to him. Sometimes her older sons would show him books but they had to hold them back so that Sam didn't chew them. The preferred time for reading was straight after Sam's nap, between eleven and twelve in the morning, when he was at his calmest. She also read to him, sometimes, in the evening when he was winding down. Her older sons usually did not participate when Jenny read to Sam.

Jenny thought that the main benefit of reading to Sam was emotional: "[I]t's nice one on one time and just, I guess, seeing them happy or enjoying it – it's a good bonding time." She read to him during the interview and read to him in a warm, expressive voice. She pointed pictures out to him and named objects as she went:

Oh, what's that? Look at that, a bilby and a gecko!

The Nursery Rhyme growth chart

Jenny had not put the growth chart up, although she had looked at it. She had already known all of the rhymes on it. She intended to hang the chart up when Sam was bigger.

The information leaflet

Jenny had found the information leaflet extremely useful, and it had encouraged her to engage in practices she had not thought of when her older sons were babies. She had found the hints on "calming them down and finding a quiet spot" particularly useful, and had liked the fact that the information leaflet was short and clear, with dot points.

The booklist

Although Jenny had indicated in the telephone interview that she had found the booklist useful, at the interview she said that she could not remember it and did not think she had used it.

How the Kit Changed Jenny's Opinion about Reading to Babies

Jenny had already thought that reading to babies was beneficial, so the *Better Beginnings* initiative had not, she said, changed her opinion, although it had given her some new ideas:

It was something new that I didn't have when the other two were born so it's always good to get more information or ideas and, even if it's not a first child or whatever, to get new ideas or suggestions from other people is always a good thing.

The Library Services

Home visits

Jenny had found the home visits greatly helpful.

Story session for babies

Jenny had not attended any of these due to lack of "time and energy". Furthermore, she was not sure of the timetable.

Workshops/parent information sessions

Jenny had not heard of any workshops.

Library attendance

Jenny said that she would visit the library about once every three weeks. She would get "books, CDs, DVDs, a bit of everything" out for herself and the children, both fiction and non-fiction.

Suggestions for Improvements

Jenny had no suggestions for improving *Better Beginnings*. "I just think it's really good."

Rita

OVERVIEW *Questionnaire/Survey Background Information*	
Place of residence:	Mining Town
Age group:	35-44
Level of education:	Post graduate
Level of education (partner):	Post graduate
Main language spoken:	English
Children:	James
Ages:	8 ½ months
Gender:	Male
Number of books in house:	50+

Who gave you your *Better Beginnings* toolkit?	Librarian
What do you think about the: a) Toolkit in general b) Book c) Growth chart with rhymes d) Booklist e) Information on reading (brochure)	 Useful Useful Already had one Can't judge Can't judge
Is there anything you would like to see added to the toolkit, or left out of the toolkit?	No
Since receiving your Better Beginnings toolkit have you: a) Shared books with your baby b) Shared rhymes and song with your baby?	 Yes Yes
Has the *Better Beginnings* Toolkit/Program changed your opinion on: a) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from books at an early age b) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from rhymes and songs form an early age c) The idea that babies can join the library at any age	 Thought this before Thought this before Thought this before
Since receiving your toolkit have you or your baby joined the library? a) You b) Baby	 Already a member Yes
How often do you go to the library?	Every 6 weeks
Which library facilities do you use?	Borrowing books for self and baby
Have you taken part in any of the activities linked to *Better Beginnings*, for example: a) Baby story-time sessions b) Parent/Child workshops c) Other How useful were these activities?	 Yes No N/A Useful

The Family Context

Rita lived in an older part of Mining Town with her first child, James, and her geologist husband, Kurt. She had another baby on the way. Rita was educated to postgraduate level and, after eighteen years as an early childhood and support teacher, had recently started teaching in the local teacher education program (Early Childhood). She had therefore already been highly knowledgeable about literacy and young children before her contact with the *Better Beginnings* initiative. Despite this, she indicated that she had found the toolkit, especially the board book, useful.

Rita read to James, who was eight and a half months old at the time of the interview, every day. She had been reading to him for four months, and her husband also read to him a few times a week. The child's grandparents occasionally read to him, too. However, "reading" often constituted just talking to James about the pictures in books; Rita said that she would "point and name all the time."

Rita and her family watched very little TV (mainly the News) and only had a small, portable TV. James watched no television whatsoever because Rita did not think that the TV programs available were very good. The family had numerous books in the house, including text books, fiction and children's books and she thought they contained too many "commercial type stereotypes". Most of the books, however, were children's books that Rita had accumulated over the years in her capacity as a teacher.

In terms of language activities carried out with James, Rita said:

> *Yes, well, at the moment it's mainly been oral language, like rhymes ... and large pictures – like we've got pictures of dogs up in his room, and he's got pictures of a baby. I've got a little photo album I'm collecting with a photograph of Mum and Dad and maybe his little sister and his grandparents in it.*

Rita liked reading but had not had time to read a novel for a long time. Recently, she'd read "a couple of pregnancy books." Kurt read a lot of magazines and German language books.

Rita's Opinions about the *Better Beginnings* Program

In general, Rita thought that the *Better Beginnings* program had been useful, especially the book. When asked what she thought about the program in general, she responded:

> *Oh, great! Yes, really good, motivating. Also the book was really appropriate ... so it gave you a start, like, you know, obviously he's been right into mirrors for the last four or five months since we had that book so just the appropriateness of these books. I mean these are great, really, and because I think they had selected such a good book, yes, it motivated me also to visit the library and check out what they've got. And I think it helped people understand that, you know, board books and books that have got tactile things in them are more appropriate for babies.*

Rita read to James every day. He usually sat on her lap or between her legs, so they could both see the book. Often, Rita did not read the text exactly as it appeared on the page, if at all. She concentrated on talking about the pictures. Rita said that if she tried to read the text to James, he would usually lose his concentration.

The kit had been presented to Rita by the librarian. She had been satisfied with the way it had been presented and it all made sense to her. However, she thought that the contents of the kit could be expanded to include two books and, perhaps a story/nursery rhyme tape:

[M]aybe two books rather than one, so maybe increase the quantity. Because it's also given to you as a gift you tend to think, "Oh, wow, this is great!" and you look through it and, you know, what I mean and I think especially for parents that, you, know are maybe a bit illiterate or something like that, you know, giving them actual books that are durable is a really good idea. Maybe there could be other things in it, a tape.

The book

Rita and James liked the book that they had received as part of the *Better Beginnings* toolkit and it (Baby Bedtime) had become a favourite, mainly because of the mirrors and the bright, appropriate pictures.

How Rita used books with her baby

Rita indicated that she had used the book given to her in the *Better Beginnings* toolkit a lot, but she had mainly used the pictures and the mirror. As noted above, she rarely read the text to James. Instead, she would point at the pictures and name the objects or concepts they represented, trying to relate them to James' life. James particularly responded to the colour red, the mirror and the baby faces in the book. Rita reported that he had developed some book handling skills from using the board book, such as picking them up and turning pages.

The type of talk Rita uses when looking at books with James is illustrated below:

I say, "Look at the baby!", rather than reading the words at the moment. I just go, "Here's the little boy and he's sitting in the car," you know, I just do that sort of thing.

She always tried to make sure that she's in a good mood when she read to James because she doesn't want him to see reading time as "just another job". However, she makes an effort to share books with him because she sees it as being advantageous in terms of "cognitive development, language development, social development and emotional development".

The Nursery Rhyme growth chart

Rita already owned a growth chart so did not need the one included in the toolkit. She also had a good knowledge of nursery rhymes from her teaching days.

The information leaflet

In the telephone interview, Rita had said that she could not judge the information leaflet. However, during the personal interview, she said that she hadn't read it properly because she already knew all about reading to babies. However, she thought that it was jargon-free and just "the right size" for parents who did need that information.

The booklist

Despite saying in the telephone survey that she "couldn't judge" the booklist, in the face to face interview, Rita indicated that she had found the booklist useful and relevant. She said it had also motivated her to go to the library to see if they had any of the books on the shelves.

How the Resource Pack Changed Rita's Opinion about Reading to Babies

Rita was already very well informed but applauded the kit and thought it would be highly useful to other mothers.

The Library Services

Home visits

Rita thought that this was a good service.

Story session for babies

Rita had been to one of the sessions but had found it a little disappointing because, she thought, there were children of too many different age groups present. She said that approximately 15 children had been there, making it difficult for the librarian to cater for their needs and interest:

> *It was too large; they had too many developmental stages. If it had been me I would have had like 0-12 months and then maybe, like, 12-18 months, then 18 months to three years or something like that. For the young ones some of the books were just too small. Again it needs to be more interactive, there needs to be more resources, more puppets. More rhymes with more interactivity ... again, probably using puppets and role play, board stories, you know three dimensionals, that sort of thing.*

She thought that there could also have been "maybe a little bit of music", which the children could have participated in by playing instruments such as shakers.

In addition, she had been disappointed to find that: "There were kids whose parents weren't controlling, who were pulling each other and ruining the whole thing." There were two girls fighting in front and nobody tried to stop them. This put Rita off going again, although she would reconsider when James was a little older.

"Their interest wasn't there because it just wasn't dynamic enough" although she did stress that she could only comment on the one session she attended.

Workshops/parent information sessions

Rita had no knowledge of these.

Library attendance

Rita went to the library about once every six weeks to get books out for James, on her own card. She had been pleasantly surprised to find that the books in the library were changed regularly; books were brought in from other libraries. Even so, there was not a big enough supply of board books for babies.

> *[M]ost of the good ones are gone, because it's [the library] actually quite popular so, yes, there is definitely not enough books. When I go there's somewhere between around fifteen to twenty books or something ... I've had to book books week ahead.*

She did not go to the library more frequently because she had such a lot of books at home. She only went to the library when she was "looking at something a bit different". In the future, when she had read all of the books she had at home, she envisaged using the library more often.

She noted that, if the story sessions had been better, she would probably have gone to the library for them and ended up browsing through the books while she was there. "Maybe more stimulating sessions would encourage me to go more."

Suggestions for Improvements

The Resource Pack:

- Two books instead of one.
- A tape (nursery rhymes or story).
- Finger puppets.

The Library:

- Break the story-time up into sessions for different age groups, for example 0-12 months, 12-18 months.
- Limit the size of the group to, perhaps, 10.
- More puppets, rhymes, bigger books, felt boards, 3D aids, music, (eg shakers, sound effects, instruments for children to use).
- More board books needed on the shelves and multiple copies of very popular books.
- Foreign language books for bilingual children (German).
- A list of baby books or having baby books separate at the library to make it easier to find them.
- More books that focus on emotional needs

Vanessa

OVERVIEW
Questionnaire/Survey Background Information

Place of residence:	Mining Town	
Age group:	19-25	
Level of education:	Year 11/12	
Level of education (partner):	Year 10	
Main language spoken:	English	
Children:	Kyle	Charlotte
Ages:	8 ½ months	3 years
Gender:	Male	Female
Number of books in house:	More than 50	

Who gave you your *Better Beginnings* toolkit?	Librarian
What do you think about the: a) Toolkit in general b) Book c) Growth chart with rhymes d) Booklist e) Information on reading (brochure)	 Useful Extremely useful Useful Can't judge Can't judge
Is there anything you would like to see added to the toolkit, or left out of the toolkit?	Locations of local libraries
Since receiving your Better Beginnings toolkit have you: a) Shared books with your baby b) Shared rhymes and song with your baby?	 Yes Yes
Has the *Better Beginnings* Toolkit/Program changed your opinion on: a) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from books at an early age b) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from rhymes and songs form an early age c) The idea that babies can join the library at any age	 Yes Yes Yes
Since receiving your toolkit have you or your baby joined the library? a) You b) Baby	 Already a member Yes
How often do you go to the library?	Never
Which library facilities do you use?	N/A
Have you taken part in any of the activities linked to *Better Beginnings*, for example: a) Baby story-time sessions b) Parent/Child workshops c) Other How useful were these activities?	 Yes Yes No Extremely useful

The Family Context

Vanessa had just moved from Mining Town to Metropolitan, so the interview took place amid piles of packing crates. The questions asked mostly related to Vanessa's experiences in Mining Town, where her husband had worked 16-hour shifts in the mining industry.

Vanessa was an avid reader who often stayed awake all night reading novels, although her husband only ever read *Shooter* magazine (about shooting as a sport). She was concerned that a lot of people, particularly children, didn't seem to spend much time reading and wanted to give her children a love of reading, which she thought her parents passed on to her. She had fond memories of her mother and father reading to her as a child. Vanessa did not permit her children to watch TV, apart from Playschool and Angelina Ballerina.

> *Everyone's got Playstations and TVs and VCRs and no one seems to be reading, and I love reading. I've got novels I go through in, like, a couple of days.*

Vanessa's parents would read to Charlotte (aged three) and Kyle (aged 8½ months) whenever they saw them, including occasional bedtime stories.

Vanessa's Opinions about the *Better Beginnings* Program

Vanessa was extremely positive about the *Better Beginnings* initiative and wished that she had been given a similar toolkit at the time of Charlotte's birth. She indicated that it had definitely changed her opinions about reading to babies. Furthermore, Vanessa was satisfied with the way the kit had been presented to her; it had been left on her bed at the maternity hospital because she had not been in her room at the time of the librarian's visit. The librarian had subsequently fully explained the toolkit and its contents to her, during her first home visit.

The book

Vanessa approved of the book that was in the toolkit, which was a board book with cut-out grips and containing colourful pictures of shapes and babies' smiling faces. She had also been given a second book during a home visit from the librarian. Although both of her children liked these books, the baby's favourite was one that Vanessa had bought at a garage sale with a "rattly little toy on the end of it".

How Vanessa used books with her baby

Vanessa had at least fifty children's books in her house and would often go shopping and come home with four or five children's books. Because she saw books as being so important to her children's development, she had also asked her mother and other family members to buy books as opposed to toys when buying gifts for her children. She said that she had started to read to Kyle before birth (and therefore before receiving the toolkit), as the baby would be listening in when she was reading to Charlotte. She also read to Charlotte before birth.

> *Well [I started to read to him] when he was inside really because I used to read to Charlotte all the time ... every day we read a book.*

Kyle usually participated whenever Vanessa read to her older child, Charlotte, which was at least once a day. She explained: "Whenever I read to her I read to him, so it's like a togetherness thing, a group activity." Vanessa reported that she would often use "funny" voices when reading to the Kyle because he showed no interest in "plain" voices. She would also sometimes tap the page to get his attention if he started to stray. Vanessa also said that Charlotte would often "read" to Kyle, as she knew the words of many books off by heart. Despite all this, Vanessa was still of the opinion that babies did not really benefit fully from being read to until they reached an age of around ten months.

I read to her [Charlotte] more than I read to him [Kyle] because I've found that even when Charlotte was a baby, I used to read when she was in my belly sort of thing, and I found that even though it was good to read to them when they were younger, once they hit, like, you know, ten months, it was a big breaker ... that's when they really started to focus and get into what you were reading.

The Nursery Rhyme growth chart

Vanessa had not used the growth chart as she didn't think children should be too focussed on their height because of her own childhood experiences:

I was paranoid of my height because I've been this height since grade six, sort of thing, and I know I was paranoid every time we did it in class... and I was always the tallest one, the towering one ...

She already knew quite a few nursery rhymes so did not refer to the chart for this purpose either.

The information leaflet

Although Vanessa indicated in the telephone survey that the initiative had changed her opinions about reading to babies, she said that shehad been aware of most of the information contained in the leaflet before.

I remember them [the leaflets] vaguely, about how to do voices and keep them interested and read to them regularly – all that sort of thing. I thought that was really good. Most of it I was kind of doing already ... but I think it was really good for a lot of people that don't know anything.

Vanessa was impressed with the clarity and simplicity of the information leaflet. She liked the fact that it was "quick, light reading" and used dot points:

It was clear and it was simple ... because when you see things that are really hard to read and all the rest of it, you can't be bothered if it's going to be that technical ...

The booklist

Vanessa remembered the booklist and the fact that the librarian had selected a couple of books from the list for Kyle when she first visited. However, she did not use the list much herself because the librarian had always selected books for Kyle, after consultation with Vanessa about his likes and dislikes.

How the Resource Pack Changed Vanessa's Opinion about Reading to Babies

Vanessa indicated in the phone survey that the kit had changed her opinion about reading to babies but yet in the interview she indicated that she had not changed her opinions and practices much. She had learnt through her own experience what her children liked and responded to.

In terms of the benefits of reading to her young children, Vanessa thought that it helped them "get to know" her voice better. In addition to this, she commented that she thinks reading to children early in life as being beneficial to their learning of vocabulary:

> *I think they become ... not smarter ... but they develop quicker if you read to them more, about words and, you know, colours and, like, objects and stuff. [W]e'll read the book through but every page after we've read whatever is on the page I'm, like, "Look for this! Look for the orange ball!" or "Look for the pencils and the backpack!" and stuff. We go through everything in the page and then we turn the page.*

She was determined that her children would not grow up to be people who did not enjoy reading. She referred to her teenage brother who played "video games flat out". She said: "[Y]ou have to *force* kids to read books these days, so I think doing these little, like giving the books when they're first born and that sort of thing encourages the parents not just to say, "Here, go play the video games, off you go!"

The Library Services

Home visits

Vanessa had found the early home visits particularly useful because the baby, Kyle, had been sick and she would not have been able to take him to the library. The librarian had brought several books (about ten) every three or four weeks. The librarian, she said, got better and better at selecting books for Kyle, as she would discuss with Vanessa which of the previous books he had enjoyed/responded to the most.

Story session for babies

Vanessa had been to some of the sessions but thought that the one at six o'clock in the evening was not appropriate for babies as it was bed time. She had been to a ten o'clock one (morning) and commented that her older child, Charlotte, had enjoyed it too. She described one of the sessions:

> *We went to a craft day. I think it was at ten o'clock or something and they did a story, they read, like, you know, a story and they all sit on the mat sort of thing and then, afterwards, you get to make, like, a character or something ... You know, like, it was the three bears and they'd have a paper plate or whatever that you dressed up on and they [the children] drew the face and they made their own bear.*

Vanessa thought that the story sessions could have been improved if the librarian had used books of a larger format:

The little ones are good but I think they're better when there's just a few kids. When you do it in big groups like that, you know, a lot of them, well, they can't see the words and some of them like Charlotte know what some of the words are and they can sort of read along ... some of the little books like they're excellent books but they're, like, only this big.

In short, she thought that large format books should be used to enable children to see the text and also to see the illustrations, as this allowed children to identify with characters.

Workshops/parent information sessions

Vanessa had not been to any parent workshops because: "I read what was in them [the leaflets] and I felt that I already knew enough." She added that she would probably have attended if Kyle had been her first child.

Library attendance

Vanessa did not attend the library because "by the time you load up the kids and then you get there, it always tends to be a rough job, a hassle." She preferred the home delivery service provided by Mining Town library throughout the first few months of her baby's life. Another thing she did not enjoy about Mining Town library was the fact that it was often full of noisy school children, who went there as a class because the school libraries were not, according to Vanessa, adequate. She commented that it would be helpful if the library advertised the times when groups from school were likely to be there so that other people could avoid the library.

Like other mothers interviewed, Vanessa felt that more options regarding when to attend story sessions (more timeslots, or repeated sessions) would be helpful. She thought that in a place like Mining Town, where many people worked shifts, this was especially important.

Suggestions for Improvements

Resource Pack

- Vanessa thought that the books could be improved if they included rattles and more moving parts: "Board books are great but children also love noises and movement."
- Maps and addresses of libraries would be useful, as well as details about opening times. Times that might be noisy because of the presence of large groups of school children could also be advertised.

Library

- Vanessa thought that the *Better Beginnings* initiative could be improved by the provision of more flexible timeslots at the library.

Theresa

OVERVIEW *Questionnaire/Survey Background Information*	
Place of residence:	Outer Metropolitan
Age group:	25-34
Level of education:	TAFE
Level of education (partner):	University (undergraduate)
Main language spoken:	English
Children:	Chloe
Ages:	12 months
Gender:	Female
Number of books in house:	50+

Who gave you your *Better Beginnings* toolkit?	Community Health Nurse
What do you think about the: a) Toolkit in general b) Book c) Growth chart with rhymes d) Booklist e) Information on reading (brochure)	 Extremely useful Extremely useful Extremely useful Useful Extremely useful
Is there anything you would like to see added to the toolkit, or left out of the toolkit?	No
Since receiving your Better Beginnings toolkit have you: a) Shared books with your baby b) Shared rhymes and song with your baby?	 Yes Yes
Has the *Better Beginnings* Toolkit/Program changed your opinion on: a) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from books at an early age b) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from rhymes and songs form an early age c) The idea that babies can join the library at any age	 Yes Yes Yes
Since receiving your toolkit have you or your baby joined the library? a) You b) Baby	 Already a member Yes
How often do you go to the library?	Monthly (as part of mother's group)
Which library facilities do you use?	Borrowing books for baby Reading newspapers/magazines/books
Have you taken part in any of the activities linked to *Better Beginnings*, for example: a) Baby story-time sessions b) Parent/Child workshops c) Other How useful were these activities?	 Yes No N/A Extremely useful

The Family Context

Theresa had been a Medical Receptionist before giving up work to have her first baby, Chloe, who was 12 months old and just beginning to utter her first few words at the time of the interview. Theresa's husband, Rick, was an engineer who was born in the Netherlands and could speak Dutch fluently. Theresa and Rick lived in a nice part of Outer Metro and had spent a lot of time renovating their house. Rick was an avid reader of everything, including novels, Surf magazines and science books. However, Theresa did not have time to read a lot, except parenting books.

Theresa was in a local mother's group, which she saw as being advantageous for her own wellbeing and for Chloe's learning. For example, members of the mothers group had decided to buy only books as gifts (birthdays and Christmas) for each other's children and not toys.

Theresa reported that Chloe loved books and that she enjoyed being read to by her mother or father three or four times a day, and had been read to since the age of three weeks. "She's just really, really interested." Chloe also liked music, rhymes and dancing but did not watch much TV. When she did watch TV she was accompanied by her mother, and they would watch something like Play School or The Bear in the Big Blue House.

> *[W]e'll sit down and watch it together so that I can sort of talk to her and we sing the songs ... I sing the songs and stuff as well. She doesn't really like to sit still long enough to watch TV. She much prefers to be either outside or running around, reading the books. She likes reading books but it only sort of lasts for a few minutes and then she's onto something else, easily distracted.*

Theresa's Opinions about the *Better Beginnings* Program

Theresa found the program extremely useful in many respects and commented that it was good to get a "refresher" in childhood rhymes and songs. Although many of the ideas presented in *Better Beginnings* were, she thought, "common sense", it was still useful to be reminded.

In terms of the presentation of the program, Theresa reported that it had been very thorough and "self explanatory". The librarian had demonstrated how to read to children in addition to outlining and explaining the leaflets.

Theresa was particularly impressed with the information about using finger puppets and felt boards in conjunction with reading, and would not have thought of this herself. She also liked the idea of making up stories to tell her baby. When asked if she and Rick had used any of these ideas when reading to Chloe, she responded:

> *We haven't done finger puppets yet ... we haven't done any finger puppets or anything but we try and make up a little story about what we've done, you know baby's first birthdays and things like that. We're making up stories after big days out, you know, like you try and relax instead of reading her a book before going to bed. We actually make up a story about what we did today and who was there and what games we played and stuff like that.*

The book

Theresa had received the book Let's Get Dressed in her *Better Beginnings* toolkit and said that she liked it and had photos of Chloe at only ten weeks old looking at the book whilst having her nappy changed. She also liked the content of the book because she considered that

getting dressed was highly relevant to small children like Chloe and might help them learn the vocabulary associated with it. The bright pictures in the book were highly appealing to Chloe, especially the child's face. She had read the book to Chloe many times.

How Theresa used books with her baby

When reading, sometimes Theresa and Chloe would sit in an armchair, sometimes on a mat, and sometimes outside, but Chloe would always want to be on Theresa's lap. Theresa used books in various ways with Chloe. Usually she would read them but occasionally she would just talk about the pictures. Of the book provided by *Better Beginnings*, Let's Get Dressed, Theresa said:

> *Sometimes we do different things with it, you know like colours or the clothes and sometimes I read it. I can't get her to really sit long enough to read the whole book. She's got so many books now, too.*

When Theresa read to Chloe during the interview she read expressively with Chloe on her lap. As well as reading the words, she would talk to Chloe and encourage her to interact with the book, for example by getting her to tickle the teddy bear's furry tummy. She also related the book to Chloe's own life, for example: "It's like your teddy bear isn't it? Nice and furry."

Theresa reported that although Rick read to Chloe regularly, "[H]e still feels a bit stupid when he reads to her. I don't know why." Because of this, he did not read to her with much expression. However, he was happy to sing Dutch nursery rhymes to her as the extended family was keen for Chloe to learn her father's language too.

The Nursery Rhyme growth chart

Theresa used the growth chart as a decoration and as a nursery rhymes chart, although she did not use it as a growth chart because if she stuck it low on the wall Chloe would pull it off and carry it around. Theresa had found the chart useful in that it had refreshed her memory of nursery rhymes.

The information leaflet

Theresa had read the information leaflets and kept them on file but could not recall exactly what they said. She felt that new mothers are overloaded with pamphlets and find it difficult to fully make use of them all.

The booklist

Theresa said that she did not receive a booklist.

How the Resource Pack Changed Theresa's Opinion about Reading to Babies

Theresa considered that the *Better Beginnings* kit and program had changed her opinion on the benefits of reading to babies. She commented that she did not feel as educated as she would like to be and thus was not confident that she could help Chloe as much as she would like to, and that the program had given her some valuable information on how to assist her child.

With reference to the presentation of *Better Beginnings*, Theresa was satisfied with all aspects of it, including the timing:

> *In a way it was a bit early but in a way I was glad we were told earlier so that we started reading to her a lot earlier than I would have thought. You know, I probably wouldn't have really read to her until she was – I don't know. You know, when they start interacting back with you ... When they're sort of acknowledging, when they smile and things like that, just acknowledging that you're there.*

Theresa said that Chloe loved being read to. Also, she seemed to have a wider vocabulary (listening and speaking) than children in the mother's group who did not attend the library sessions or have parents who read to them regularly.

The Library Services

Story session for babies

Theresa had attended several story sessions and found them extremely useful. She liked the fact that children from several different age groups attended the sessions. She was of the opinion that the younger children watched the older ones and would "try and copy what they're doing". She thought that the younger children participated "a lot more" when the older ones were there, acting as role models.

She also commented on the librarian's ability to adapt the session to the moods and needs of the children present. For example:

> *It just depends on the day how the kids are being, you know if they're sort of happy and not whinging and crying then, yeah, she does a lot more sort of reading – but if they're starting to get whingy and she can't keep their attention, it's a lot more using puppets and things like that.*

Workshops/parent information sessions

Theresa had not felt it necessary to attend any of the workshops, although the librarian often gave advice to parents during the story time sessions.

Library attendance

Theresa attended the library once a month as part of the mother's group or with a friend. She and Chloe never went there on their own. At the library she would select a few books for Chloe but none for herself or Rick, although before Chloe's arrival she would occasionally borrow a novel. She did not use the Internet at the library because she had access at home.

Suggestions for Improvements

Resource Pack

- Theresa thought that she would have used the information leaflet more if it had been in the form of a poster: "I probably would have hung it in her bedroom because it's bright colours and things like that as well."

Library

- Like several other mothers in Outer Metro, Theresa thought that the time slots for the library session could be varied so that the routines and sleep patterns of very young children could be accommodated. The library sessions were generally at 10.30am, which coincided with the nap times of many of the babies that Theresa knew.
- Also, she would like to see some baby books in Dutch as well as English.

Sally

OVERVIEW *Questionnaire/Survey Background Information*		
Place of residence:	Mining Town	
Age group:	19-25	
Level of education:	Yrs 8/9	
Level of education (partner):	Yrs 8/9	
Main language spoken:	English	
Children:	Richard	Simon
Ages:	8 months	3 years
Gender:	M	M
Number of books in house:	50+	

Answers to questions about *Better Beginnings*	
Who gave you your *Better Beginnings* toolkit?	Librarian
What do you think about the: a) Toolkit in general b) Book c) Growth chart with rhymes d) Booklist e) Information on reading (brochure)	 Useful Extremely useful Useful Can't judge Can't judge
Is there anything you would like to see added to the toolkit, or left out of the toolkit?	No
Since receiving your Better Beginnings toolkit have you: a) Shared books with your baby b) Shared rhymes and song with your baby?	 Yes Yes
Has the *Better Beginnings* Toolkit/Program changed your opinion on: a) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from books at an early age b) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from rhymes and songs form an early age c) The idea that babies can join the library at any age	 Yes Yes Yes
Since receiving your toolkit have you or your baby joined the library? a) You b) Baby	 Yes Yes
How often do you go to the library?	Never
Which library facilities do you use?	N/A
Have you taken part in any of the activities linked to *Better Beginnings*, for example: a) Baby story-time sessions b) Parent/Child workshops c) Other How useful were these activities?	 No No None N/A

The Family Context

Sally lived in one of the older areas of Mining Town, where she had lived all of her life. She invited me into the kitchen and we sat at the kitchen table. Her husband, who worked shifts in the mining industry, stayed in the living room and watched movie, and did not participate in the interview. Their three-year-old son, Simon, came with us into the kitchen and chatted happily throughout. He chose two books from the selection of board books that I had taken and spent some time looking at them. Richard, the baby, woke up from his nap halfway through the interview and sat on Sally's lap.

Sally's Opinions about the *Better Beginnings* Program

Sally was generally positive about the *Better Beginnings* program, although she had not been to any sessions at the library at the time of the interview. Neither had she used the booklist, the information pamphlet or the height chart.

She was satisfied with the way the toolkit had been presented to her by a librarian, even though it had been in the corridor of the hospital, just as she was leaving with her new baby. The kit had been quickly explained to her and she had filled in a form to get home library care. All of this had taken approximately five minutes.

The book

Sally especially liked the fact that the book provided in the *Better Beginnings* resource pack was a sturdy board book and had tactile, interactive elements such as a mirror and cut-out grips.

> *Yeah, like the book's just always kept him quiet. I haven't actually used the height chart yet. I haven't put it up yet. It's still in there. The book I just really liked the most. These kind of books are good because ... he can't sort of have any other ones because he rips them.*

How Sally used books with her baby

Sally reported that she had often given Richard the book she had received in the *Better Beginnings* toolkit to play with before he was old enough to crawl because he had found the mirror and pictures entertaining. She would sometimes stand him in his walker and let him hold the book, although she did not read it to him very often because he always wanted to be "on the go".

I asked Sally if she would like to read to Richard so that I could see how he responded to one of the two new books (given at the beginning at the interview). Sally put him on her lap at the kitchen table and read expressively, pointing at words and pictures as she went. She named a lot of objects (pictures) and tried to relate them to Richard's life. Richard was extremely excited, kicking his legs and laughing.

> *Ball. Is that a ball? Come and sit over here. Riding on the bike. You're looking at your brother, look, look, look, there's a little boy. What's that? Oh you're getting all excited, look, look you know this, a bottle. Look, yum ... bottle, apple, orange!*

Sally said that she usually read to Richard "a couple of times a week", either before bed or when Simon, her older son, brought a book to her. Favourite family books were Disney books and other books that had TV programs or movies linked to them, because both of the children enjoyed watching TV.

Sally was convinced that Richard was learning "a lot of words" (vocabulary) from books because of her practice of pointing at pictures and naming objects. She had done this with her older child, although not at such a young age.

> *They're good these kind of books with the pictures. That's how he [Simon, the older child] learnt all his words with the pictures and the words and that. I mean he can't read but you know sort of ... you'd start off with a couple and then he could say everything in the book.*

The growth chart

Sally had not used the growth chart because she already had one for her three-year-old child. However, that had recently 'died' so she planned to start using the *Better Beginnings* chart soon. However, she already knew some nursery rhymes and often sang and recited them to her children.

The information leaflet

Sally did not remember paying much attention to the *Better Beginnins* information leaflet because the librarian who presented the toolkit had already given her some information orally; she thus hadn't felt it necessary to read the leaflet. She also said that there was a poster in Simon's day care centre that listed the benefits of reading to children, which she had looked at several times before giving up her part time job to have Richard.

The booklist

Sally had not used the booklist at all at the time of the interview, largely because the librarian had home delivered appropriate books. However, she had kept the list for future reference.

How the Resource Pack Changed Sally's Opinion about Reading to Babies

Sally said that the kit had certainly changed her opinion about reading to babies:

> *I never would have thought about it, like, babies! Yeah, like with him [Simon, 3] I hardly ever read books to him until he got older and would, sort of, understand, like, what I was sort of saying.*

She thought that reading to Richard would help make him "clever" and also improve his language learning.

The Library Services

Home visits

Sally was particularly impressed with the service from the library, which had ceased by the time of the interview. She had found it useful that the librarian had chosen appropriate books for her and delivered them to her home. The librarian had usually chosen board books with rhymes.

> *Yes, she came four times at three week intervals, so yeah, and brought me books and picked them up and then of course it stopped, which I didn't mind. We haven't sort of been to the library since. He's still got books that he hasn't read here [at home] yet and I just bought him [Simon] some Mr Men books.*

Story session for babies

Sally had not attended any of the story-time sessions at the library, primarily because they were held at 6.00pm, which was the baby's bedtime. The library had written and suggested that children be taken to the library in their pyjamas, but it was still too late for Sally to go, although she indicated that she might go along when Richard was a little older.

Workshops/parent information sessions

Sally had not attended any workshops/parent information sessions because she could not remember being informed about them.

Library attendance

Sally had joined the library after receiving the *Better Beginnings* resource pack but had not been there at the time of the interview, although she intended to go. She reported that Simon had loved going there as a child. She said that she would start attending the library when the children started "bugging" her to go. Having small children, she found, made it difficult to go to the library.

> *And if I do just want to go and get books and then go, it's hard to get him out because he'll want to play and it will turn into a tantrum so I'd drag him out screaming.*

Suggestions for Improvements

Resource Pack

- Sally mentioned that she preferred cloth books because they were more durable than board books.

Library

- Sally thought that a change in/more flexible timeslots for the library sessions would be beneficial.

Paula

OVERVIEW *Questionnaire/Survey Background Information*	
Place of residence:	Outer Metropolitan
Age group:	19-25
Level of education:	TAFE
Level of education (partner):	Year 10
Main language spoken:	English
Children:	Tahlia
Ages:	9 months
Gender:	Female
Number of books in house:	11-50

Who gave you your *Better Beginnings* toolkit?	Community Health Nurse
What do you think about the: a) Toolkit in general b) Book c) Growth chart with rhymes d) Booklist e) Information on reading (brochure)	 Useful Useful Useful Can't judge Can't judge
Is there anything you would like to see added to the toolkit, or left out of the toolkit?	No
Since receiving your Better Beginnings toolkit have you: a) Shared books with your baby b) Shared rhymes and song with your baby?	 Yes Yes
Has the *Better Beginnings* Toolkit/Program changed your opinion on: a) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from books at an early age b) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from rhymes and songs form an early age c) The idea that babies can join the library at any age	 Yes Thought this before Yes
Since receiving your toolkit have you or your baby joined the library? a) You b) Baby	 Already a member Yes
How often do you go to the library?	Monthly
Which library facilities do you use?	Borrowing books for baby
Have you taken part in any of the activities linked to *Better Beginnings*, for example: a) Baby story-time sessions b) Parent/Child workshops c) Other How useful were these activities?	 Yes No N/A Useful

The Family Context

Paula had a childcare background and felt that she was well informed about child development. Her first child, Tahlia, was nine months old at the time of the interview and, according to her mother, loved books, although she did not enjoy TV much. Either Paula or her husband, Pete, would read to Tahlia two or three times a day. They would usually read baby books but occasionally they would share other texts with her, such as cook books (especially if there were photos in them) or junk mail, such as toy catalogues or fruit and vegetable advertisements from supermarkets.

Paula and her husband read a lot of cook books, gardening books and magazines but did not have time to read novels. Pete usually read Tahlia a bedtime story as he didn't get much quality time with her due to his relatively long working day. Sometimes Paula's mother would read to Tahlia too.

When asked what kinds of literacy activities they engaged in with their child, Paula responded that they engage in a wide variety of practices, including singing, reading and talking about sounds and letters:

> *I sing to her all the time, so she's kind of used to it. It doesn't really thrill her but she's got a couple of favourites that she loves, favourite songs and rhymes. She loves books ... she loves anything with letters on it. She'll look at anything. I've just pulled down, actually yesterday, we've got an alphabet puzzle and I've just pulled that down and gone through it. She loves that Leap Frog [Leap Pad Learning System][2] over there with the alphabet on it ... She's saying a lot of different syllables now and a lot of different sounds so I'll clarify it like if she just sort of makes a sound like she was going 'fff' and I'll say 'f' or a 'b' like try and say it clearly*

Paula's Opinions about the *Better Beginnings* Program

Paula was generally positive about the *Better Beginnings* program and found most items in the toolkit useful. She found the information on the benefits of reading to young babies particularly useful.

Paula was satisfied with the way in which the Community Health Nurse presented the kit to her. The nurse had presented the information twice, once shortly after the baby's birth and again at a mother's group meeting. Paula seemed to find this repetition beneficial:

> *Yes, well, she explained it when she gave it to us and explained the importance of, you know, reading from basically day one, you know by the time they're twelve months they can hold it up the right way, turn the pages, do all that! And we went through it again at a mother's group a few weeks later when all the other mothers were there too, the young mothers in the area, and she spoke about it and then we got the second kit at a library.*

The book

Paula had received "just a normal" board book in her *Better Beginnings* kit, both times. These did not include a mirror or rattles. Nevertheless, these two books had become Tahlia's favourites.

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[2] Leap Pad Learning Systems are books that talk, sing and /or sound out letters when activated with a special pen.

It was really simple. It was nice – bright, big and colourful, clear pictures, not too many ... not too many things to look at on the one page. Nice and big and colourful and very good for her. She loves them!

How Paula used books with her baby

When Paula read to Tahlia, she would usually sit her on her lap and read the book before relating it to Tahlia's world. Sometimes she would read the book twice in a single sitting. Tahlia had several favourite books which were read repeatedly from day to day:

We probably read it a couple of days in a row and she usually grabs the same one at this age, now. When she was younger I'd read it a couple of times one after the other because once is not enough. Now that she's older as well, like, I was reading it in reference to other things, like we've got one book, I think, it's friends or things that we do – so we've got toys on one page, faces on another and that and she loves that! And I'll pull faces like the pictures and stuff like that. The other book is colours, so we've sat there and looked, okay, that's the red page and all these red things and I'll point the red things out in the room ...

When Paula read to Tahlia she read with great expression and exaggerated intonation. She pointed at objects in the pictures, named them and described their attributes and purposes:

And it's got the same pages that are in your other book too. I can count bricks in the trolley, one, two, three! Where are the bricks? Look, the three bricks to make a tower! One, two, three! The ball is very bouncy. It's time to play on my bike. What game shall I play? Look! Here's a car, brmm, brmm, I've got a big blue car. There's my ducks. This toy makes lots of noises. Here's the drum, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, rattle and shake, this is fun, oh a rattle. Do you want to look at it?

Paula or Pete would read to Tahlia daily, and had a fairly stable routine. Paula read to her once in the morning and once in the afternoon, and Pete read the bedtime story.

The Nursery Rhyme growth chart

Paula had used the growth chart purely as a nursery rhymes chart and had not positioned it so that it could be used as a growth chart:

But, yes, it's stuck on the wall and I read the rhymes and we look at the pictures.

The information leaflet

Paula did not remember being given an information leaflet, although she recalled the Community Health Nurse "going through" one with her:

Well, I think the Child Health Nurse pretty much went through just about exactly what was in the pamphlet. It was pretty much, like, she read it and then told us information from that as well and what she already knew.

The booklist

Paula could not clearly remember the booklist.

How the Resource Pack Changed Paula's Opinion about Reading to Babies

Paula reported that the kit and the program had definitely changed her opinions and practices with regards to reading to babies, despite the fact that she had worked with babies and toddlers in a childcare context:

> *I didn't even think about, you know, reading to them from birth ... like even when they're still in the stomach! Yes, I mean, I've worked in a baby's room in day care and we read books but we sort of read them to the toddlers and the babies just sort of watched, so it wasn't really aimed at the babies. But, yes, I've been reading books since the week she was born and just showing her things and she loves it! Most of the time she's already keeping them [books] up the right way. She knows how to turn pages. She'll sit by herself. I've just a couple of weeks ago bought her little books like this, at her level, so she can get to them when she wants and she'll go and pull them down and turn the pages and look through them.*

Apart from Tahlia's obvious enjoyment of books, Paula also thought that reading to her was accelerating her speech development. In addition, she thought that Tahlia's ability to concentrate had been enhanced. Tahlia had also developed book handling skills, such as holding books (usually the right way round) and turning pages. With reference to emotional benefits, Paula said that books tended to "calm" Tahlia.

The Library Services

Story session for babies

Paula had been to all three story sessions for babies at the library and said that the first two were "really good". However, she hadn't really enjoyed the third session because there were different age groups present and the older children, she thought, created a distraction or "running amock".

Paula also thought that the librarian seemed to lose the babies' interest when talking to parents about reading to children and the benefits of doing so.

> *It's now changed to a story time. The Better Beginnings, the first couple, they were really good. We got the Better Beginnings pack again the first time and she [the librarian] explained how to read and how to do different things as well, like, the other Mums at my playgroup that went were just amazed at all the different things you can do with stories, you know like finger puppets and bits and pieces like that to bring stories to life, which I mean I'd seen everything before being in child care but they were all just going, "Wow, this is really great!"*

Paula had on one occasion borrowed a *Better Beginnings* Big Box from the library. This box had contained finger puppets, big books, "heaps of books", and leaflets about reading to different age groups. She had found this box highly useful and exciting.

Workshops/parent information sessions

Paula had attended the parent workshop sessions and had found them very useful and educational. The librarian also built parent information into the story time sessions and gave parents information packs, for example on rhymes to say to children when bouncing them on your knee. Although this information was useful, Paula did not think it was optimal for the librarian to present it in between the babies' stories and rhymes and they tended to lose their focus and be difficult to refocus.

Library attendance

Paula would attend the library once a month and borrow books for Tahlia but not for herself or her husband.

Suggestions for Improvements

Resource Pack

- Paula suggested that the *Better Beginnings* program could list some good suppliers of board books as they were difficult to find in the shops.

Library

- Paula suggested that some board books could be kept in a separate location in the library (not mixed up with older children's books) so that busy mothers could go in and find them quickly.
- Paula found that the presence of multiple age groups at the same story sessions was unsatisfactory because the older children tended to be noisy. She would like to see separate sessions for the younger babies and toddlers.

Elaine

OVERVIEW *Questionnaire/Survey Background Information*	
Place of residence:	Outer Metropolitan
Age group:	19-25
Level of education:	Year 11/12
Level of education (partner):	Year 11/12
Main language spoken:	English
Children:	Wendy
Ages:	9 months
Gender:	Female
Number of books in house:	50+

Who gave you your *Better Beginnings* toolkit?	Community Health Nurse
What do you think about the: a) Toolkit in general b) Book c) Growth chart with rhymes d) Booklist e) Information on reading (brochure)	 Useful Extremely useful Can't judge Can't judge Can't judge
Is there anything you would like to see added to the toolkit, or left out of the toolkit?	More books would be useful
Since receiving your Better Beginnings toolkit have you: a) Shared books with your baby b) Shared rhymes and song with your baby?	 Yes Yes
Has the *Better Beginnings* Toolkit/Program changed your opinion on: a) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from books at an early age b) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from rhymes and songs form an early age c) The idea that babies can join the library at any age	 Yes Yes Yes
Since receiving your toolkit have you or your baby joined the library? a) You b) Baby	 No No
How often do you go to the library?	Never
Which library facilities do you use?	N/A
Have you taken part in any of the activities linked to *Better Beginnings*, for example: a) Baby story-time sessions b) Parent/Child workshops c) Other How useful were these activities?	 No No No N/A

The Family Context

Elaine identified herself as Aboriginal and lived in Outer Metropolitan with her husband Leon, who was a vocalist and performed in a local band. Their first child, Wendy, was nine months old at the time of the interview.

The Community Health Nurse was present at this interview because she had just completed her regular visit to check that Elaine and Wendy were doing well. She asked if she could sit in the interview and Elaine agreed that this was alright.

When asked what kinds of literacy activities she and her husband did with Wendy, Elaine responded:

> *We sing nursery rhymes; we watch Playschool together in the morning or Bananas [in Pyjamas] if that's on. Yes, reading the books that she can hold, which she loves ... and she bites them too, yes all of that ... Well, her Dad does music. When he's writing music and stuff she does sit with him. I don't really know that he reads with her. I really don't know if anyone reads to her but I know I do.*

Elaine reported that Wendy had at least twenty or thirty books of her own, many of which Elaine had kept from her own childhood. However, only three or four of these were "worth reading" or appropriate for Wendy's age group.

Other books in the household were novels and reference books, including books about music. Elaine liked reading but did not have much spare time; she had been trying to read a novel for five months but was making slow progress. In his leisure time, her husband read a lot of books and magazines and wrote songs.

Elaine's Opinions about the *Better Beginnings* Program

Elaine was extremely positive about the *Better Beginnings* program and indicated that it had changed her opinions and her practices with regards to reading to her baby.

> *Oh it was awesome, just having been given a book free! I love free things and being given a book was just awesome and, you know, when we go to my mum's she [Wendy, the baby] takes the book. She's always got the book. She loves it! She really does. It's good, it's a good program.*

The book

Elaine and her baby loved the book entitled Baby Friends provided by *Better Beginnings* and said that she read it every day or two because Wendy liked it so much. Elaine approved of the book because of its thick pages and durability; Wendy was in the habit of biting and chewing books. In addition, Elaine liked the content and physical design of the book, especially the cut-out hand grips:

> *It's got everything, pretty much, associated with a baby ... and the fact that they've got a grip on it is even better because she [Wendy] can hold the book ... She holds it and I'll flip the pages and she'll hold it again and look at it and I'll flip the pages.*

How Elaine used books with her baby

Elaine said that she didn't read to Wendy every single day, but perhaps every two or three days. She would usually put Wendy on her lap to read to her, and had no preferred time of day to do so. Elaine and Wendy had three or four favourite books that Elaine would read time and time again. A lot of her reading to Wendy involved naming the objects illustrated by the pictures.

Elaine:

Yes, she's usually on my lap and I just hold the book in front of us and we just look, read, point, whatever.

Interviewer

And do you use lots of funny voices and stuff like that?

Elaine:

Not yet, no. I guess I will – but not yet. Most of the books that she's got are picture books so I guess I'm saying the pictures and talking about the pictures.

The Nursery Rhyme growth chart

Elaine had not used the growth chart from *Better Beginnings* at all at the time of the interview and had no plans to do so because the Community Health Nurse was still weighing and measuring Wendy on a regular basis. Furthermore, she did not use the rhymes on the growth chart because her mother had bought her a CD called A Hundred Nursery Rhymes, which she (and Wendy) preferred.

The information leaflet

Elaine could not remember the information leaflet, although she said that she had possibly read it. She commented that the Community Health Nurse gave her so many pamphlets that she didn't get a chance to read them all, although she had kept them all on file. Despite having no memory of the information leaflet, Elaine seemed to have retained and valued a lot of ideas about reading to babies from the information given to her orally by the Community Health Nurse.

The booklist

Elaine could not remember the booklist.

How the Resource Pack Changed Elaine's Opinion about Reading to Babies

Elaine said that the kit had definitely changed her opinion on reading to babies: "I never really thought, a *baby*!" She would never have considered reading to Wendy as a baby if she had not been part of the *Better Beginnings* program.

Elaine perceived the benefits of reading to Wendy as:

> *Well ... she's being introduced to books, I guess, as a whole. Because, you know, if she likes books then, I guess, she'll want to read and want to look at pictures and want to learn more, ask questions and all that sort of stuff.*

Elaine expressed surprise at how much attention Wendy, who was still only nine months old, paid to books. "She takes everything in and she just *really* looks. When I'm reading the book or talking about the pictures she just really stares at it and takes it all in."

The Library Services

Story session for babies

At the time of the interview, Elaine had not attended a session at the library, although she indicated that she might go to the next one. She had received a pamphlet informing her of three different dates and times of the sessions but had not attended any so far because the dates and times had been inconvenient for her.

Workshops/parent information sessions

Elaine had not heard of these.

Library attendance

Elaine had not attended the library to borrow books for either Wendy or herself but said that she would probably join when she went to the story-reading session.

Suggestions for Improvements

- Elaine could not think of many ways in which the *Better Beginnings* program could be improved. She stated: "It was as good as it gets, I guess," and, "It was a good start-up."

Resource Pack

- A CD with nursery rhymes might be a useful addition. "Maybe a CD. Yes, that would be nice!"

Library

- Elaine mentioned that the time slots of the library sessions had not been convenient for her as there had not been a large choice.

Marianne

OVERVIEW *Questionnaire/Survey Background Information*	
Place of residence:	Outer Metropolitan
Age group:	25-34
Level of education:	University (undergraduate)
Level of education (partner):	TAFE
Main language spoken:	English
Children:	Felicity
Ages:	13 months
Gender:	Female
Number of books in house:	50+

Who gave you your *Better Beginnings* toolkit?	Community Health Nurse
What do you think about the: a) Toolkit in general b) Book c) Growth chart with rhymes d) Booklist e) Information on reading (brochure)	 Useful Extremely useful Can't judge Useful Useful
Is there anything you would like to see added to the toolkit, or left out of the toolkit?	No
Since receiving your Better Beginnings toolkit have you: a) Shared books with your baby b) Shared rhymes and song with your baby?	 Yes Yes
Has the *Better Beginnings* Toolkit/Program changed your opinion on: a) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from books at an early age b) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from rhymes and songs form an early age c) The idea that babies can join the library at any age	 Thought this before Thought this before Thought this before
Since receiving your toolkit have you or your baby joined the library? a) You b) Baby	 Already a member Yes
How often do you go to the library?	Monthly
Which library facilities do you use?	Borrow books for self
Have you taken part in any of the activities linked to *Better Beginnings*, for example: a) Baby story-time sessions b) Parent/Child workshops c) Other How useful were these activities?	 No No No N/A

The Family Context

Marianne was from a family of teachers and had been brought up to love reading. She had kept many books from her childhood days and had already read a few of them to her young child at the time of the interview. Marianne was also studying to become a nurse, so read a lot of text books. She would sometimes stay up all night reading novels. Her husband, Brad, was not a big reader. They had a lot of books in the home, including at least 50 children's books.

Their first child, Felicity, was 13 months old at the time of the interview, and Marianne said that she read to her daily. However, Felicity was having her afternoon nap at the time of the interview so it was not possible to see Marianne reading to her.

Felicity's father, Brad, sometimes read to her, after work, depending on what sort of day he'd had. Also, Marianne's mother would do so occasionally. Marianne was a member of a mother's group, which was another source of reading, books, and information about parenting. The mothers met regularly and bought books for each other's children at birthdays and Christmas. They would also swap books and toys with each other, as well as recommend books to each other.

Felicity liked watching TV and was particularly enthralled by advertisements. "She loves the ads!" She enjoyed being read to and would also lie on the floor and "just thumb through her books, backwards and forwards, like, in no particular order" independently. Felicity liked looking at Marianne's magazines, too. In addition to this, Marianne saw Felicity's swimming lessons as an additional source of language/literacy learning:

> *One of the best things I think we do is use swimming lessons, which I know initially doesn't sound like it's helping with her language, but it's nursery rhymes, the whole thing is nursery rhymes and we sing her nursery rhymes the whole time.*

Another thing Marianne often did was to point out street signs and logos to Felicity when out in the car. This was something she remembered her grandparents doing when she was a child:

> *[W]e used to go driving and they'd point out street signs and I've just started this last month, doing that with her, and pointing out signs and stuff because that's how I learnt to talk, by, "Oh look, that's the BP sign!" or, "That's the Shell sign, that's the McDonalds sign, that's the Red Rooster sign!"*

Felicity also owned a few alphabet puzzles and blocks, which Marianne used to tell her about letter names, shapes and sounds.

Marianne's Opinions about the *Better Beginnings* Program

Marianne thought that the *Better Beginnings* initiative was "a really great idea" and said that she had found it "educational", even though she had indicated in the telephone interview that she "knew before" about the benefits of reading to young babies, the possibility of them joining libraries from birth, and the benefits of using rhymes and songs. *Better Beginnings* seemed to have reinforced and clarified this existing knowledge: "[I]t was good to know [learn] how important it was, and the stages where they learn, and how you can start reading to them when they're born, pretty much."

Marianne had not realised that it was important to read to babies at such an *early* age. In fact, she indicated that this knowledge was now a source of guilt and stress:

> *[W]hat struck me the most was that it was so important to start so early and then you feel a bit guilty that you haven't. You go, "Oh, I'm not reading them so many books, this amount of books a day!"*

In terms of the presentation of the *Better Beginnings* toolkit, Marianne was satisfied. Although she had received the kit initially from the Community Health Nurse, who had explained it briefly, the librarian at Outer Metro had re-presented the kit and demonstrated some of the suggestions: "[W]e sat in the library and the librarian showed us some books and one of the babies was two weeks old and we were sitting there going, "What's she going on about? These babies are, like, asleep! What do you read to them for? But it made more sense as we went along with it."

> *She was pleased that there was not a lot of "overwhelming" information in it. "[A]s a new mum you're, like, you're so frantic anyway, you're sleep deprived and ... all you want to do is read something quickly and go, "Yes, that's fine, no worries," and put it to the side. If it was big and bulky you'd be wading through stuff and you'd go, "I can't be bothered!" and you wouldn't even bother to read it – but the kit was great."*

The book

Marianne found the book in the toolkit "extremely useful". She had received a board book called Baby Get Dressed, which she liked because it was "nice and simple and bright". Felicity still liked to "eat" books so sturdiness and durability were essential.

How Marianne used books with her baby

Not only did she read the book to Felicity given to Felicity by *Better Beginnings* on a regular basis, but she would let Felicity browse though it on her own.

Marianne indicated that that she usually read to Felicity twice a day, once at bedtime in Felicity's bedroom and once in the mornings in the living room. When in the living room, she always sat in the same armchair and made sure that the room was quiet and free from distractions, following advice from the *Better Beginnings* leaflet.

Marianne said that she liked to read to Felicity with plenty of expression and "tone":

> *I come from a family of teachers and most of them are primary school teachers, so they read with the tone. My granddad used to read to me like that and he'd tell me stories and off we'd go so I read in that same sort of way, because that's how I was read to.*

Marianne indicated that reading was sometimes used as a means of "winding down", either before bed or when Felicity was feeling unsettled. She would read to Felicity just before bed (they would both sit in an armchair) and "sometimes" they would read on and off through the day.

> *Whenever we find time to do reading or she's having a bit of a tantrum, I'll sit her down and we'll read a book and that usually calms her down a bit but, yes, no set time and it's good sometimes in the car. If she'll be a bit noisy or whatever I'll pass her a book and that amuses her for a little while.*

Although the two books provided by *Better Beginnings* were popular with Felicity and Marianne, their favourite was *Where is the Green Sheep?* by Mem Fox, although Marianne had "no idea" why.

Marianne thought that reading to Felicity from a very young age had resulted in a higher level of understanding of the world and a better receptive and spoken vocabulary. Felicity was speaking a few words and singing along with nursery rhymes and favourite songs by the time she was 13 months old. She also thought that reading helped improve Felicity's attention span: "[S]he'll sit and she concentrates like you wouldn't believe, really concentrates hard."

The Nursery Rhyme growth chart

Marianne had not used the growth chart at the time of the interview. She had put it away until Felicity was a bit "taller" and intended to look for it some time in the future. She had not referred to it to look at the nursery rhymes because she already knew a lot. She had also learnt some new rhymes and songs at Felicity's swimming lessons.

The information leaflet

Marianne said that she found the information leaflet "informative" and she had acted on some of the ideas, even though she felt a bit "silly" at times:

> *"[Y]ou feel, being a first time Mum, you feel a bit silly doing some of the things because you think, "Hang on, this is just a baby, there's no way they can understand what I'm talking about!" But now that she's thirteen months old, you kind of start to think, "Oh, she's getting that and she understands now why I was doing that."*"

The booklist

Marianne found the booklist useful and found that it refreshed her memory about books that she had known and loved as a child.

How the Resources Pack Changed Marianne's Opinion about Reading to Babies

Marianne had said during the telephone survey that she had always considered reading to babies to be important. However, during the interview she elaborated on this and said that she had never realised that reading to such *young* babies was recommended.

The Library Services

Story session for babies

Marianne had not attended any of these due to a lack of time, although she had the dates on her calendar and hoped to attend some in the future.

Workshops/parent information sessions

Marianne had not attended a workshop at the library, but the librarian had run a special one for the mother's group.

Library attendance

When Marianne attended the library, which was usually about once a month, she went straight to the children's section to look for books for Felicity. She usually bought novels for herself and didn't borrow from the library. She indicated that she would go to the library more if she had "all the time in the world".

Suggestions for Improvements

Marianne had no suggestions for improvements.

Cassie

OVERVIEW *Questionnaire/Survey Background Information*	
Place of residence:	Mining Town
Age group:	19-25
Level of education:	Year 11/12
Level of education (partner):	Year 11/12
Main language spoken:	English
Children:	Brady
Ages:	9 months
Gender:	Male
Number of books in house:	11-50

Who gave you your *Better Beginnings* toolkit?	Librarian
What do you think about the: a) Toolkit in general b) Book c) Growth chart with rhymes d) Booklist e) Information on reading (brochure)	 Extremely useful Extremely useful Can't judge Extremely useful Extremely useful
Is there anything you would like to see added to the toolkit, or left out of the toolkit?	No
Since receiving your Better Beginnings toolkit have you: a) Shared books with your baby b) Shared rhymes and song with your baby?	 Yes Yes
Has the *Better Beginnings* Toolkit/Program changed your opinion on: a) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from books at an early age b) The idea that babies can enjoy and benefit from rhymes and songs form an early age c) The idea that babies can join the library at any age	 Thought this before Thought this before Yes
Since receiving your toolkit have you or your baby joined the library? a) You b) Baby	 Yes Yes
How often do you go to the library?	Monthly
Which library facilities do you use?	Borrowing books for self and baby
Have you taken part in any of the activities linked to *Better Beginnings*, for example: a) Baby story-time sessions b) Parent/Child workshops c) Other How useful were these activities?	 No No N/A N/A

The Family Context

After seven years in Bura, where her husband worked as a fireman, Cassie and her family were packing up, ready to move. Although she had enjoyed her time in Bura, she indicated that she had felt somewhat isolated there without her extended family.

Cassie did not read a lot due to lack of time, although she used non-fiction books such as recipe books and books about DIY. She had not been read to very often as a child but wanted to read to her own child regularly to help him learn to love books. Her husband was an avid reader of novels. Cassie believed that there was a national problem with literacy, which led to children having short attention spans, among other things.

Her first baby, Brady, was nine months old at the time of the interview. He liked looking at and listening to books about animals, particularly dogs. Cassie said that he still chewed them a lot, although this did not mean that she kept them out of his reach. She tried to read to him every day and would also watch TV programmes such as Playschool with him. In addition, she would sing songs and recite rhymes to him. Brady also had some alphabet blocks to play with and Cassie sometimes told him the names of the letters on the blocks.

> *I'll just have Play School on in the background like I did before, but it's more for me as well as him because it teaches me new songs and new things and just to see what he responds to. Yes I guess he's got his favourite little nursery rhymes like Hey Diddle Diddle and the five little ducks went out one day, those ones, and Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. I guess with Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, occasionally he'll put his hands up as I put my hands up to do the actions – but only on the odd occasion. He's starting to mimic now.*

Cassie had been reading to Brady for approximately three months (since he was six months old). In the early days, she would just turn the pages and look at and talk about the pictures with him. Although she read to him during the earlier months, she said she did not read "consistently".

Cassie's Opinions about the *Better Beginnings* Program

Cassie thought that *Better Beginnings* was "an excellent idea" and, although it hadn't changed her opinions on reading to babies, she felt that she had benefited in that she had been motivated to join the library and because she felt that in many ways it was a community-building initiative because it encouraged new mothers to go to the library and get to know each other.

> *It inspired me to go to the library. Well I have been in this area for seven years and the first time I went was the beginning of this year. I guess because I always bought my own books or whatever rather than ... and you kind of forget what a good resource the library is.*

The book

Cassie liked the book that she had been given as part of the *Better Beginnings* toolkit, particularly the fact that it was a board book that contained smiling faces and a mirror that Brady liked to look in. As for the text, she would have preferred some rhyme and rhythm, rather than the short sentences that the book contained. She also preferred books with only a few words on each page:

> *And just with a few words on a page because they will follow you as you read it but if it's got too many you know their attention span is only about three or four words and after that they're kind of looking somewhere else.*

Although she had used the book regularly, she had other books that she used more often because they had rhyme, rhythm and so on. In some ways, she seemed to have used the *Better Beginnings* book as more of a toy than a book: "That book is actually a book that stays in his cot so when he wakes up because it's got the mirror in it, he can blow raspberries on it and do things and stuff like that, so it's something that he can look at when he's going to sleep or whatever, and that's because of the mirror and the face – the little child's face on the front."

How Cassie used books with her baby

When Cassie read to Brady she would put him on her lap and read to him in a warm, expressive voice, pointing at objects in the book and relating the book to Brady's existing knowledge and experience. Sometimes she read the text and sometimes she would just talk about the pictures. She read a board book about trucks to Brady (given to him from *Better Beginnings* at the beginning of the interview):

> *Look Brady, there's a truck. Can you see the big green truck? Look over here ... And what's on the next page? Look at that, there's another red truck and a blue truck! Yes, they're big trucks. That's called a cement mixer ... Look, your Dad drives a big fire truck doesn't he? Yes, look this lady has given you this book to use. Look there it is, yes! Oh there's a big yellow truck, there's a busy truck and you've got a mail truck and a fuel truck. Oh, and look at all these different cars. Remember what you've got in the bath? You've got, like, a blue car in the bath, don't you? That's like that one, and a red one, brmm, brmm. That's what they do, and there's your yellow car! Yes, that's it, yes.*

Cassie indicated that she would read each book repeatedly over the course of a week or so in order that Brady could get to know what was in it, although she was not sure if this was the right thing to do. Sometimes she would read a book through twice in the same sitting, depending on Brady's "attention span or how tired he is, or whatever".

She read to him at least once a day, before bedtime and sometimes through the day as well, particularly if Brady was feeling a bit "tired or cranky". Her husband also read to Brady regularly.

The Nursery Rhyme growth chart

Cassie had not used the growth chart at the time of the interview, even as a reference for nursery rhymes, although she indicated that she might use it in the future. She already knew a few rhymes.

The information leaflet

Cassie indicated that she had found the information extremely useful. However, she thought that a later presentation might be better:

> *I think it might pay to do it, like, a month after a child is born or six weeks, you know – pick a good time because I reckon a lot of people would get it and forget about it because they get so much information while you're there [in hospital]. I mean that's probably part of the reason why I didn't read some of the pamphlets.*

The booklist

In the telephone interview, Cassie indicated that she had found the booklist extremely useful. However, during the interview she said:

> *I've got it and I've looked at it but I haven't really used it, I guess, because, yeah, I was given a heap of books and I pick up books as I go... I'll have a group of four books that I keep trying to rotate rather than heaps of different ones all the time.*

How the Resource Pack Changed Cassie's Opinion about Reading to Babies

Cassie had thought prior to receiving the *Better Beginnings* toolkit that reading to babies, even newborns, was enjoyable and beneficial for them. She did not think that the initiative had influenced her ideas or her practices, apart from the fact that she had joined him at the library.

In her opinion, reading to Brady from such an early age had improved his attention span and having a reading routine had also helped him learn about routines (although Cassie was not as consistent in this as she would have liked). In addition, she perceived that Brady would learn "the basics of literacy" from her reading to him:

> *They'll follow your finger for words so they start recognising words earlier and so it's almost like you hope you try and set them up with a, not innate, but you know what I mean, like a prior learning before they get to school so when they get to school they can recognise something even if they don't know exactly what it is or what it means – they still have that recognition.*

However, she did not want Brady to become too advanced in his literacy in case he became bored at school later on:

> *But then you don't want to push them too hard either. You want them to be able to go [to school] at a good level but I think my husband could read books and long novels quite early and I think he used to get bored at school because of that, so you don't really want to go to that extreme.*

The Library Services

Home visits

Cassie had found this service very useful, not only because it saved her time but because it was: "Great to get interaction with the librarian." Due to tiredness and a shortage of time, she probably would not have visited the library during that first two months.

Story session for babies

Cassie had not at the time of the interview attended any of the story sessions for babies at the local library, mainly because of a shortage of time but also because she was unsure about when they were on.

Workshops/parent information sessions

Cassie had not attended any of these. She had not been aware of them.

Library attendance

Cassie attended the library about one a month to borrow books for herself and Brady. She said she would like to go to the library more often; it was just a matter of getting organised and also being informed of any "activities that are going on" at the library that might encourage her to go. In addition, she sometimes went and didn't find many interesting board books on the shelves:

> *And the other thing is though because there are so many babies in Mining Town and people borrow books ...often you'll go there and there might only be four or five hard books that are relevant, so whether they need to get more copies of the board books ... I guess a few new resources ... either that or they're in the wrong places.*

She wanted the books to be extremely quick and easy to find:

> *[U]nless they're asleep while you're there ...your attention is kind of diverted so you want it to be easy to find.*

Suggestions for Improvements

Resource Pack

- Cassie thought that the presentation of the kit may have been slightly too early and that she would have paid more attention to the information leaflets if they had been presented slightly later.
- In terms of the books provided in the toolkit, Cassie would have preferred a book with more rhyme and rhythm as it would have been more interesting for the baby to listen to. She also suggested that books for babies should be kept very "simple" and have only a few words on each page.

Library

- At the library, she would like it if board books for babies were easier to find (i.e. not mixed in with books for older children).