

# Lakemba: School As Community Centre (SaCC) Case Study Example



## Community context / background

Families in Lakemba are predominantly recently arrived migrant families with several young children who live in units. Many have poor English and most have low incomes. AEDC (2018) data shows that 63.5% of children have a language background other than English (LBOTE). They tend to be low users of child care (only 35.7% used an ECE centre based service). Over 10% of the population is aged 0-4 years.

There are some very vulnerable families from refugee backgrounds and others with stressful family circumstances. However, many come with previously positive educational and family characteristics and adapt readily to their new environment. Families have high aspirations for their children but struggle because of social isolation and no extended family support.

The School as Community Centre (SaCC) is well established and attracts large numbers to programs such as playgroups.

## Child Developmental Outcomes – AEDC measures

Lakemba's 2009 and 2012 AEDC outcomes showed that a quarter of children starting school at Lakemba were assessed as developmentally at risk or vulnerable on one or more domains. Domain specific outcomes at Lakemba showed that the level of vulnerabilities in social competence, as well as communication skills and cognitive competence were more than NSW's state average.

Because of limited access to a formal early childhood education, children have less exposure to experiences such as listening in a group, following instructions and relating to adults outside their immediate family – all important opportunities for the development of social skills. Parents also tend to emphasise academic skills and not the areas of cooperation, taking turns and asking for help; social skills which help a child make a smooth transition to school.

## Initiative/program

Lakemba SaCC adapted the PALS social skills program to be delivered as a group program for families with children in the year before school. The Lakemba SaCC program concentrated on five areas from the original PALS format; greeting others, listening, taking turns, sharing and asking for help.

Program adaptation and delivery was in collaboration with staff from Canterbury Community Health and a teacher's aide. Lakemba SaCC recruited families who had children starting school the next year who needed improved social skills and ran these modified PALS group sessions over several years. In 2016, a music therapist was employed to add songs and music to the program. This was particularly helpful for children with lower language skills or additional needs. Feedback from parents in the groups was positive with over 80% reporting observing improvements in their children's skills after attending the program.

## Outcomes and future plans

AEDC 2018 results showed that there has been a decrease in the level of vulnerability for children starting school in Lakemba in the social competence domain.

The SaCCs facilitator at Lakemba intends to continue with activities that enhance the development of social competence in collaboration with community partners. Lakemba's AEDC 2018 outcomes showed an increase in vulnerability in the physical health and wellbeing domain so new strategies are being trialled to address this emerging area of concern in the local population.