



Australian Early Development Census

Rocklea-Acacia Ridge AEDC Community Story

Taking a collective approach to build trust and provide support to families living with adversity

About the Rocklea-Acacia Ridge community

The Rocklea-Acacia Ridge community is made up of the southern suburbs of Rocklea, Archerfield and Acacia Ridge in Brisbane. The community has a population of 10,295 people as at 2018 (**ABS**), with a high proportion of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families, including refugees and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. A large proportion of the Rocklea-Acacia Ridge community is industrial estate, with the largest proportion of residential area in the suburb of Acacia Ridge.

What did the data show?

The Rocklea-Acacia Ridge community experiences a number of challenges, including high unemployment and poverty rates. Families in the community do not have immediate access to certain services which can provide protective factors to child development, such as a local library. The Rocklea-Acacia Ridge community have worked to address these gaps in services and help alleviate the need to travel to surrounding suburbs in order to access supports. Data from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) shows that the level of developmental vulnerability has decreased consistently since 2009. Rocklea-Acacia Ridge community 2009 AEDC data showed 59.3% of children were developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain, however this figure decreased to 30.6% in 2018, a decrease of almost half across the past decade.

Bringing about change

In 2010, following the release of data from the first national AEDC collection, the Community Hub was established at Acacia Ridge Early Years Centre and Kindergarten. Run by the Benevolent Society, the centre continues to provide Long Day Care with a kindergarten program and a Community Hub, which offers free child health services, playgroups, toy library and parenting support programs. Located on the grounds of Acacia Ridge State School, The Benevolent Society Community Hub is one of the Department of Education's Education Early Years Places (EYP). A child health service is collocated on the site facilitated by Children's Health Queensland.



The partnership model behind the Community Hub brings various services together into a comprehensive service delivery system for families and children. This provides a soft entry approach to support services for parents and carers for accessing health, wellbeing, parenting and early childhood development services. The Community Hub enables access by building connections, engagement and trust with families. Additionally, the strong relationships and connections across all Early Years Place services has allowed for more effective referrals between services and has resulted in the development of various joint initiatives, a shared understanding and common goals.

Providing familiar and constant personnel to work within the Early Years Place and community as a whole, has enabled relationship building with families prior to intervention work, particularly with regards to Child Health Services. Over time, the Community Hub has seen families who would not normally access mainstream health services. Families have accessed the facility for social connection and to take advantage of opportunities for play and interaction for their children. This has allowed various services to support families who may experience access and transport issues, speak a language other than English, and do not want formal child health appointments or to access multiple agencies for support. Anecdotal evidence suggests this has led to families receiving screenings, parenting support, immunisation advice, completion of 4-5 year health checks, and receiving referrals to allied health services in instances where this would not normally have taken place.

Established in 2013 to provide school-based support to families and children, the Circles Of Care program operates in the nearby Inala and Surrounds area and is facilitated by Mission Australia. The focus of the program is on parent and community engagement and partnerships, as well as strengthening children's wellbeing and resilience. There is an emphasis on social and emotional wellbeing, particularly conflict resolution. Prior to the establishment of the Circles Of Care program, Mission Australia's Communities for Children (CfC) Program had supported the area with a significant focus on transition to school and helping facilitate the sharing of resources across early childhood services and schools. The work of both Circles Of Care and CfC has benefited the Rocklea-Acacia Ridge community via connection and collaboration across various community organisations located in these areas. Mission Australia works with schools and the broader community to strengthen relationships, build trust and increase community engagement using collective action and collective impact strategies.



Achievements and partnerships

A young mum with a baby and a toddler attended baby's group. Her husband works long hours and she had no other support. She enjoys it so much she attended the "butterfly wings" program as well. One day she was having difficulties with her toddler and a child health nurse was onsite for ad hoc support during clinic appointments. She was directed back to her nurse at the baby's group and support continued. This mum has engaged in all development checks (both children are on track) and is going strong 12 months later. She is able to more effectively support her toddler. She attends the groups, has made lots of friends and continues to access child health support and advice. – Anne Dawes, Acting Nurse Unit Manager, Browns Plains Child Health.

In reflecting on what has worked to achieve change for children and families in Rocklea-Acacia Ridge, the community has identified the importance of the strong relationships that exist across various community organisations. These relationships help to link various services, schools and early childhood services together to provide more cohesive support to families. The relationships are facilitated by a few key networks and working groups.

One key network facilitated by Circles Of Care, the Watson Road Stakeholder Group, began as a partnership between a school and a non-government organisation, the Watson Road State School and Mission Australia. This group has employed various strategies in order to increase parental engagement by capitalising on the relationship between services and schools, increasing investment in the community and developing innovative engagement events.

Another key network, the AEDC Working Group, operates across the community and has strong connections to Acacia Ridge State School and the Early Years Place. The group utilises AEDC data to target areas for improvement. By working in this way the group has established a number of initiatives focused on connecting with families, including organising professional development for community members, various reading programs and an annual Early Years Expo. The events have been delivered at multiple locations across the community in order to increase access to families and open up opportunities to connect with those experiencing vulnerability.



With a focus on language and literacy, the AEDC Working Group established the Little Free Libraries initiative and its complementary reading program Paint the Ridge REaD. The Little Free Libraries are situated across the community in various locations such as schools, community groups, doctors surgeries and Bendigo Bank.

Beyond these formal partnerships are the education networks that bring together schools and early childhood services in the community. These have a strong focus on supporting families and building their influence beyond the school gate. Acacia Ridge State School has worked with local Early Years Place services to partner with Bendigo Bank as the Community Reading Hub sponsor. This partnership ensures that every child in Prep and Year 1 receives a free book each month and has encouraged other schools to become involved in the reading hub.

Looking ahead

A mum attended child health service drop-in for a weigh-in only to find she had the wrong day. It didn't matter as she was able to be invited to a group that was in progress with a child health nurse in attendance. She first attended when her child was 4-5 weeks old and was experiencing issues with breast feeding and had no social network to support her. Twelve months later she attends weekly, has completed all her baby's health checks, made many friends and has continued to successfully breastfeed her child. – Anne Dawes, Acting Nurse Unit Manager, Browns Plains Child Health.

The Rocklea-Acacia Ridge communities' attitude towards collective action has enabled them to influence positive change for children and families. The community prides itself on prioritising initiatives and investments based on community focus to drive outcomes for all children.

Community members attribute their success in decreasing developmental vulnerability to their 'never give up' attitude and employing a gentle approach. Building strong relationships across agencies, services and organisations has helped to strengthen connections with families experiencing adversity and build rapport and trust enabling them to provide guidance and support where it is needed most.

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