

# The greatest gift you can give a child is a good beginning...



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## Good Beginnings Australia

Not all Australian children benefit from a good beginning. Despite decades of economic prosperity, many Australian children suffer 'bad beginnings' because their families are in distress. As Australians, we all share the consequences.

Good Beginnings recognises the value of strengthening communities and the positive impact strong communities have on children's wellbeing. We support ARACY's drive to create a community committed to the wellbeing of children and young people, we can support individuals, families, organisations and communities to:

- help children and young people to optimise their potential
- protect children and young people from harm
- be more effective in meeting children and young people's needs and prevent problems

Everyone knows that prevention is the most cost effective solution to future problems. In the words of Nobel Prize winner for Economics; James Heckman "Once a child falls behind, he or she is likely to remain behind...Impoverished [Early Childhood] environments are powerful predictors of adult failure on a number of social and economic dimensions".



Good Beginnings programs and services are aimed at families with young children living in municipalities characterised by low levels of social services, socio-economic disadvantage and isolation.

With programs in every state and territory, one program in South Australia is typical of the communities where we work.

The council area of Playford in Northern Adelaide is the most disadvantaged community in South Australia<sup>1</sup>. The Playford area has low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment, jobs in unskilled occupations and other variables that reflect disadvantage such as substance abuse, child abuse, single parent families, teenage pregnancies, crime, domestic violence, low school retention rates and transience, and poor mental and physical health outcomes.

Due to multiple layers of social and economic disadvantage, many students going to school who have poor attendance, do not engage with school activities and have significant health and behavioural issues.

There has been increasing recognition the need to provide suitable support services that can be easily accessed by parents. The intergenerational nature of social disadvantage in the Playford area has meant that many families can be difficult to reach or engage.

### Aims and objectives

Until December 2009 Good Beginnings delivered family support services to 4 schools in Northern Adelaide. Working from a community development model, the service engages with local communities in order to deliver programs that best reflect the needs of that community.

Good Beginnings' philosophy of 'think child think family' has been able to demonstrate long term outcomes for children in a range of locations across Australia.

The program developed a range of programs including the Dads Are Doing Stuff (DADS) group that met on weekends to share alcohol free and violence free family days and end of year Women's Pamper Days teaching relaxation methods, reducing isolation and raising awareness of services for women in the community and prevents child abuse.

### The benefits

A 2009 evaluation of the program found that it had:

- o developed the school as the central resource point for children and families experiencing difficulties;
- o enabled children and families to empower themselves;
- o developed the capacity to link children and families to formal and informal support networks by offering services through community partners;
- o promoted the participation and empowerment of the most disenfranchised and isolated members of the community;
- o enhanced social inclusion in the long-term as well as the short-term.

The funding for these programs was withdrawn December 2009 and in the 8 months since the closure of the programs the stats speak for themselves:

- o 400% increase in Exclusions (removed from the school for ten weeks due to a series of violent incidents)
- o 330% increase in Suspensions (sent home for two or three days due to violent behaviour)
- o 493% increase in Take homes (sent home for the remainder of the day with school work due to unacceptable behaviour)

A decrease in children's self esteem has also become apparent, demonstrated by

children becoming disengaged from the schools, unable to make friends and self harming - all lead indicators for absenteeism at school.

More details can be found on [www.abc.net.au/stateline](http://www.abc.net.au/stateline) for Friday 18th June 2010 - "Not Good Enough" and "What's wrong with our Society".



### Further information

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### To Contribute

Visit [www.goodbeginnings.org.au](http://www.goodbeginnings.org.au)

call (02) 9211 6767 (bh)

send donations to Good Beginnings Australia, PO Box K969, Haymarket NSW 1240.

All donations \$2 and above are tax- deductible.



<sup>i</sup> (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001, Socio - Economic Indexes for Areas, Cat no. 2039.0).