

Silverlea Early Childhood Service and
Novita Therapy Service
Broken Hill Therapy Pilot Project
Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

In mid-2013, Silverlea Early Childhood Service (SECS) and Novita Children's Services received funding from New South Wales (NSW) Family and Community Services, Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC), Western Region to conduct a therapy pilot project funded under the *Strengthening Children 0-8 Years Strategy*. The SECS/Novita proposal was to work with mainstream early childhood services to support children with developmental delays and disabilities and their families to be included in community services. Two Novita therapists (an Occupational therapist and a Speech Pathologist) visited Broken Hill one day a fortnight to work with individual children and their carers, and to build the capacity of SECS and mainstream preschool early childhood education staff. SECS employed six staff to work in play-based early childhood intervention with 15 children in small group sessions.

The Wobbly Hub and Double Spokes research team at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Sydney, was engaged by ADHC Western Region to evaluate the SECS/Novita model using a formative evaluation approach. Collaboratively, the Wobbly Hub team, SECS, Novita and ADHC Western Region agreed on the best ways to measure the outcomes of the pilot project against the aims. The evaluation involved the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. An aim of the evaluation was to build capacity within the organisation to engage in ongoing service evaluation.

Child demographics

Fourteen children participated in the pilot project. The majority of children were male with a mean age of four years. Autism Spectrum disorder and language delay were the most common diagnosis. Only 1 of the 14 children was of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. Consent to participate in the evaluation was received for six of the 14 children and these children shared the demographic characteristics of the larger group.

Development and assessment of individual child goals

Using a key worker model, SECS staff met with parents to develop an Individual Family Support Plan (IFSP) that included two to three short term individual goals. Novita therapists were not involved in this goal setting. Goals included: development of social skills and peer interactions; specific speech/language skills; toileting; and, following instructions and paying attention. Six monthly review meetings were held with parents to discuss the progress of their child in relation to the goals. SECS staff determined achievement of goals based on observation of the child at the centre and feedback from parents about changes at home and in the community. Goals were amended or changed based on this anecdotal information.

The Novita therapists set two specific therapy goals for each child using the Goal Attainment Scale (GAS) to measure therapy goal progress. Goal domains were similar to

those set in the IFSPs. Due to the slow start of the pilot project, completed GAS data were not available and so outcomes are not reported.

Views of stakeholders

Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 11 key stakeholders including Silverlea and Novita managers, Silverlea educators, Novita therapists, and parents/carers. The results are divided into Greatest Benefits and Biggest Challenges.

Greatest Benefits included: responding to unmet therapy need; therapists providing ideas and strategies to carers, SECS and mainstream early childhood educators; and preparing children for mainstream preschool and school.

Biggest Challenges included: an initial state of confusion; sustainability of the Fly-In-Fly-Out model; Broken Hill community response to children with disability.

Therapy Pilot Project Evaluation Recommendations

The results of the evaluation show that the SECS/Novita therapy pilot project was effective in providing some children with developmental delays and disability and families in Broken Hill access to therapy services they would not otherwise have had. The project also made a start in enhancing the capacity of some early childhood services in Broken Hill to support children aged 0-8 years with developmental delay or disability. The managers of both SECS and Novita identified that achieving this objective requires a longer time frame than possible in a short term pilot.

The evaluation highlighted the benefits of therapists and early childhood educators working together using play-based strategies to address individual child needs and modelling effective strategies for carers.

Based on the data collected during the evaluation there are recommendations for building on the pilot project in three key areas:

1. Developing a sustainable therapy service model in Broken Hill through the appointment, training and support of Therapy Support Workers linking with outreach therapists including through technology;
2. Building capacity in mainstream preschools and schools using a training and mentoring model;
3. Enhancing local agency capacity through service-level development and evaluation supported by ADHC and Early Childhood Intervention Australia (ECIA).