

SCALE & INTEGRATE LINKER ROLES INTO ECEC & COMMUNITY LOCATIONS

“You need help to understand the help”
Bidwill mother

Families face barriers in accessing early education and child health services for their children. The systems are complex and overwhelming, and there is little support available to coordinate the different parts of the system and the steps families must take. Linker roles are proven models to support families along this journey and see positive outcomes for children. These are roles that should be integrated and funded in places where families can access them.



THE PROBLEM

For a child to be enrolled into ECEC, or start school with a diagnosis and allied health supports in place, a family is required to navigate multiple services, each with their own referral processes, forms, costs, and eligibility criteria. Each service is typically disconnected and siloed with no coordination or communication between them.

Families who face complex social challenges or who live in areas of socio-economic disadvantage face additional barriers in accessing health and development or early education services for their children due to a lack of local services in their community, lack of access to technology, transport barriers, financial stressors, not meeting eligibility requirements or overwhelmed with navigating other complex challenges in their family life (Paul Ramsey Foundation 2022).

To enrol in ECEC or obtain a diagnosis and early intervention supports for their child, families must be able to fill out multiple forms, have access to technology and the internet, have identification documents, apply for confusing subsidies and schemes, travel to numerous appointments, pay for expensive assessments, and coordinate numerous steps required from various agencies. These processes can be overwhelming for any family, and there are no in person, holistic supports available to families experiencing additional challenges or living in areas of disadvantage to ensure that their children are connected to the best supports and are not left behind due to a complex, siloed system.

WHAT ARE LINKER ROLES?

Linker roles (or navigator roles) provide practical and emotional supports to support families to navigate complex systems. Linkers provide knowledge and information of services available to families, provide assistance to navigate the systems families require for their children, provide assistance to complete referral forms, provide transport to attend appointments, and coordination throughout the entire journey as well as connecting to other family support services if needed. It is often beneficial when Linkers also have access to brokerage funding to support families where financial barriers present themselves such as for a diagnosis or birth certificate.

Linkers are highly relational and approachable, and work best when they are place-based in the community to be easily accessible for families to access.



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THE HIVE'S LINKER ROLES

The Hive Mt Druitt have an Early Learning Linker (ELL) and a Child Health Linker (CHL) who practically, emotionally and financially support families in Mt Druitt to overcome barriers to access early education and disability early intervention supports for their child.

From 2018 - June 2024 the Early Learning Linker has supported:

- 139 children to enrol in ECEC and 65 to sustain their enrolment
- 61 children to apply for a birth certificate
- 121 children to enrol in ECEC through payment of a bond or enrolment fee totaling \$31,500 of brokerage.

From 2020 - June 2024 the Child Health Linker has supported:

- 261 children to access various early intervention supports
- 63 children to access a diagnosis
- 58 children to obtain an NDIS plan
- 81 children through \$110,000 of brokerage to overcome barriers to accessing sustainable supports such as obtaining a diagnosis or therapeutic assessment.

Across both Linker roles, they have provided:

- 294 families with support through providing information or completing paperwork
- 82 instances of transport support for families to get to necessary appointments related to accessing ECEC or disability supports.

At a local level, The Hive have worked with ECEC services to 'think like a Linker' and broaden the support they offer families in terms of explaining CCS or filling out an NDIS form with a family, however this is an unsustainable practice without additional resourcing due to the current heavy workload of ECEC educators.

THE SOLUTIONS & IMPACT

- **Integrate the role of Linkers into services where families need support** to reduce barriers in accessing early intervention and early education services through practical and tangible support. This could include ECEC services, the NDIS, Community Health or Service NSW.
- **Include funding for Linker roles through ECEC inclusion funding schemes** to accommodate Linker roles in ECEC services within areas of social disadvantage or with high developmental vulnerability.

Linker roles will ensure that vulnerable children receive the supports they need, when they need them, as well as ensuring existing government schemes and funding are reaching the children who need it most.

CONTACT US

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