

SafeStart: A Community Partnerships Model for the targeted reduction of child injuries

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Unintentional injuries are a leading cause of death for children and are a major reason for hospital admissions and emergency department presentations in Victoria. In Victoria an average of 126 children per day present to an emergency department due to injury.

The most common location for injury is the home. These injuries vary greatly and can occur in a variety of circumstances, including fire, burns and scalds, poisoning, falls, as a result of poorly designed products/play equipment, drowning, cutting and piercing and choking/aspiration. However, many of these unintentional injuries are preventable.

SafeStart was a Victorian State Government initiative funded by the Department of Human Services (DHS). It focused on the prevention of unintentional injury in children through working with local governments and communities. The program aimed to explore ways to achieve uptake and support for proven or promising interventions in a small number of specific child injury areas. As a way to build long-term local government and community level commitment and capacity to respond to unintentional injury issues, the program tested the approach of involving local communities in the management and implementation of proven interventions.

One of the aims of the initiative was to develop a flexible model that could accommodate variable and diverse needs of different local government areas.

The SafeStart objectives included:

- Improve local knowledge of risks, barriers and facilitators, and enhance local capacity to respond to injury issues.
- Test specific interventions at local community level with focus on disadvantaged groups.
- Build injury prevention into existing programs or plans as key areas for attention eg. local government public health plans or community health plans.

The SafeStart initiative focused on the 0-8 year old age group in the priority settings of home and play.

Three local government demonstration sites were established for this initiative: Shire of Yarra Ranges, City of Ballarat and City of Greater Dandenong.

Key Achievements

City of Ballarat

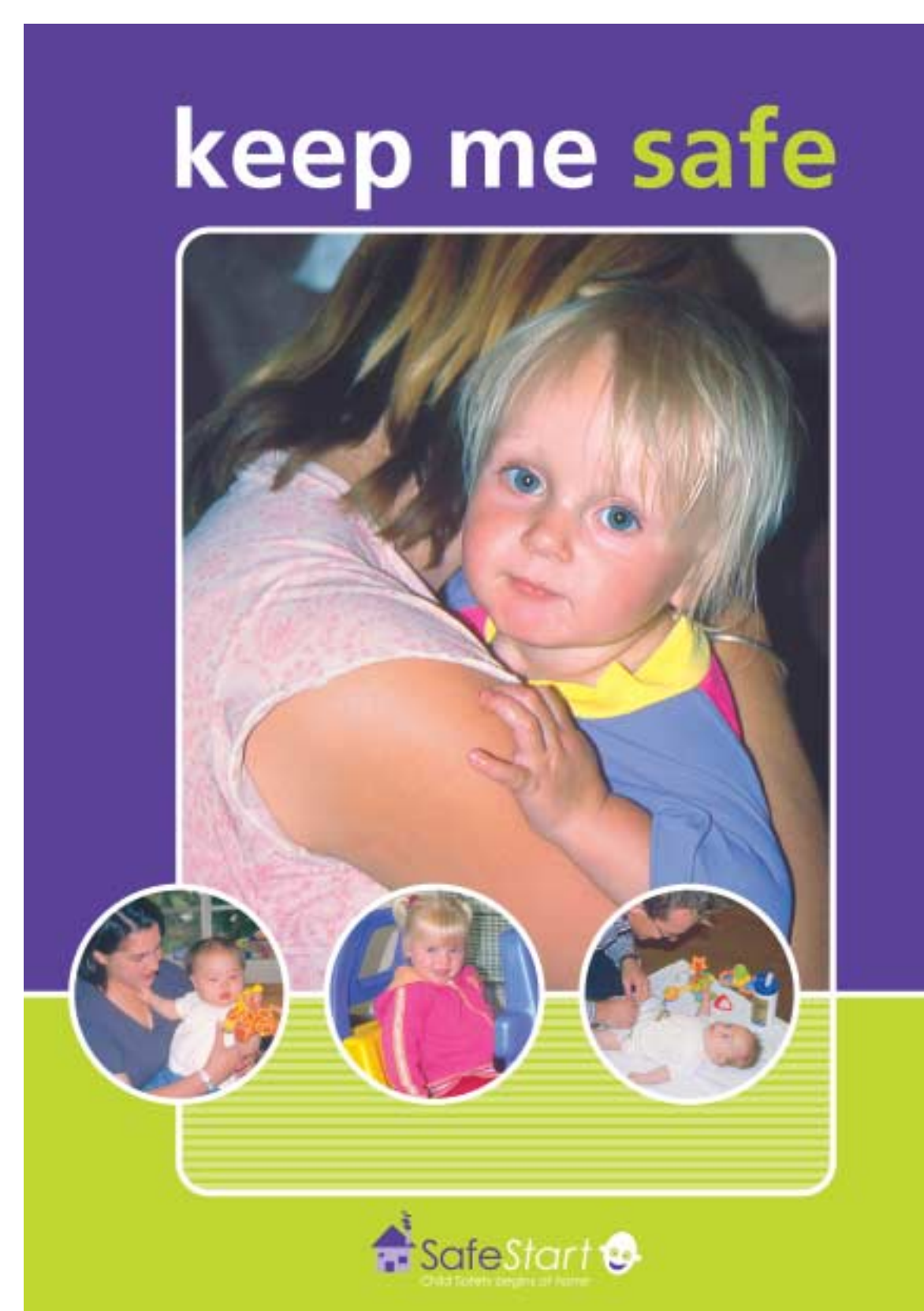
The municipal district of the City of Ballarat is part of an area of land under the traditional custodianship of the Wathaurong people and comprises the city of Ballarat, and the townships of Learmonth, Buninyong, Miners Rest and Cardigan Village. In total the City of Ballarat covers an area of 740 square kilometres.

The percentage of the population under 40 years of age is 57.2% which is similar to the state average, and over the next 10 years, an increasing proportion of the population will be aged between 45 and 75 years. Although the number of 0-8 year olds is predicted to fall over the next 10 years, it is difficult to validate this given Ballarat's current healthy growth rate, which includes an increase in the number of families with young children relocating to Ballarat.

The Socio-Economic Disadvantage Index rates Ballarat at a higher disadvantage than Victoria as a whole. The City of Ballarat has a high incidence of unintentional injury in children aged 0-8 years, with one in ten children sustaining an injury requiring hospital treatment every year.

Key highlights and achievements of the Ballarat project include:

- Incorporation of child injury prevention into the Best Start Action Plan, ensuring ongoing emphasis on child safety within the Local Government Areas and providing a mechanism for the achievements of the SafeStart project to continue to benefit the children and families of Ballarat.



- The development, piloting and independent evaluation of an innovative child safety education program that was successfully able to target vulnerable and at risk families and demonstrate lasting changes in knowledge and behaviour.
- An ability to respond to local community needs by facilitating the development of an innovative child safety resource for use with the growing number of parents within the LGA who have an intellectual disability.
- Exploration of the benefits of innovative partnerships with organisations including The Ballarat and District Pharmacy Alliance and the Office of Housing, to trial new ways of delivering strategies to reduce childhood injury by awareness raising, community education and environmental change.
- Formation of a number of partnerships which assisted to progress the work of the project, facilitated greater awareness of child injury amongst service providers and lead to the development of stronger working relationships between staff from agencies within the LGA.

(D. Greenslade "Report of Ballarat SafeStart Demonstration Project" 2004)

City of Yarra Ranges

The Shire of Yarra Ranges is located in the Outer Eastern Metropolitan Region in Melbourne's fringe and has a population of approximately 140,000 people. The population is expected to remain constant in the foreseeable future. With an area of almost 2,500 square kilometres, the Shire is the largest of any metropolitan or fringe council in the State. Based upon ABS projections the approximate number of children aged 0-8 residing in Shire of Yarra Ranges between 1999-2001 is 16,000 with 55.5% of all households occupied by families with children (45.5% two parents; 10.1% single parent).

The Shire balances a mixture of urban and rural communities. Approximately 70% of the Shire's population lives in the 10% of the Shire that is classed as urban, while the remaining rural population occupies 35% of the area. Residents live in 50 townships and small communities unevenly dispersed within the Shire.

During July 2000 and June 2001, 1608 (approximately 10%) of children aged 0-8 years who resided in the Shire of Yarra Ranges were treated at a hospital emergency department for an unintentional injury (VEMD). Of these 1608, 1131 occurred within their home environment (house/property).

The focus of the SafeStart project, in the Shire of Yarra Ranges, was to develop sustainable strategies to reduce the incidence of unintentional childhood injury specifically in the home environment. It was understood that skilling of peer educators would deliver sustainable outcomes—to maintain and promote injury prevention in the long term. An integrated approach was initiated that included educational, environmental and behavioural changes within a community development framework.

This SafeStart demonstration project was titled Safe at Home: A Child Injury Prevention Demonstration Project.

The project aimed to provide a comprehensive and community wide approach to address safety issues in the home for 0-8 year old children. It used a range of strategies to prevent unintentional childhood injury.

These strategies were developed with key partners to meet the specific needs of individual areas and groups.

The Shire of Yarra Ranges SafeStart Project focused on:

- increasing the community's awareness of the causes of unintentional childhood injuries
- preventing and reducing the likelihood of unintentional childhood injuries in the home environment within the Shire and
- developing sustainable practise.

An outcome-based approach was used with three distinct phases: planning, implementation and consolidation. Community Development principles and techniques were implemented in this approach which included:

- participation
- networking
- resource sharing
- community education
- community awareness raising
- advocacy
- empowerment and ownership.

It was envisaged that working groups would influence the actions they wanted to take in their own community.

There were many activities, resources and learnings from the Shire of Yarra Ranges SafeStart Project. Some of the key outcomes include:

- Child injury prevention being incorporated into the Shire of Yarra Ranges' Community Wellbeing Plan, Community Safety Plan and Early Years Plan.



- Effective partnerships being established with some key service providers and groups in the community to sustain the work effort in minimising unintentional childhood injuries.
- First Aid trainers incorporated an unintentional childhood injury component to their Child Safety courses for the first time. This was an unanticipated and sustainable strategy to prevent Unintentional Injury in children.
- Development or adaptation of a significant number of resources and kits that can be used by a broad range of individuals—from professionals in the children's services field to parents at home.
- Introduction of a Child Safety Kitchen in the Chirnside Park Community Centre to encourage use of safety products.
- An Early Years Wallet Card which maximises the opportunity for parents to carry information about children's services with them at all times in a practical and accessible form. This will be updated bi-annually.

(C. Emanuel "Report: SafeStart Project (Prevention of Unintentional Childhood Injuries)" 2004)

City of Greater Dandenong

The City of Greater Dandenong (CGD) is one of the most culturally diverse and socio economically disadvantaged communities in Australia. It has a population of approximately 130,000 with 54% of residents being overseas born, from 151 countries of birth. Over 55% of residents speak languages other than English at home and 30% of residents possess the lowest level of English literacy. The unemployment rate is 9.6% compared to 6.1% for metropolitan Melbourne. CGD was ranked the 2nd most socially and financially disadvantaged area for the proportion of residents on low incomes in metropolitan Melbourne in 2001. (ABS: 2001 Census).

The target group for the SafeStart project was children aged 0-5 years. There are 9,970 children aged 0-5 years residing in Greater Dandenong. (ABS: 2001 Census).

The CGD developed and implemented a project that targeted parents and carers of children aged 0-5 years. It also targeted the Arabic, Cantonese, Khmer and Vietnamese speaking communities, of which after English, are the highest number of languages spoken by families with children aged 0-5 years, in CGD.

The project supports a community development, participatory action model, with strategies focusing on the following criteria:

- resource development and use
- building partnerships
- awareness raising activities
- training and education
- risk reduction measures
- supportive policies
- rules, systems and practice changes
- injury data.

Key highlights and achievements of the project:

- Provision of and access to child safety resources in English, Vietnamese, Chinese, Khmer and Arabic languages was maximised through extensive sourcing of available child safety information and development of a new pictorial 'Safe Smart Homes' booklet, translated in Arabic, Chinese, Khmer and Vietnamese.



- Peer educator's journal entries and evaluation form feedback indicated that child safety education and training activities had raised community awareness and knowledge of child injury prevention.
- Use of safety products in the community was increased through free safety product giveaways and in-kind support received from businesses.
- Child injury prevention and child injury data was integrated into the City of Greater Dandenong, 2003-2006 Municipal Public Health Plan and City of Greater Dandenong, 2003 Health Status report to ensure a mechanism for continued monitoring of the projects impact was sustained.
- Fruitful partnerships were formed with a number of key service providers and groups in the community.
- The culturally and linguistically diverse peer educators will continue to be supported to provide child safety activities to their communities beyond the life of the project.
- A greater understanding of the relationship between culture and child injury was established through piloting a peer educator model and evaluating the mix of strategies implemented to educate culturally and linguistically diverse communities about child safety.

(K. Mildren "Report on SafeStart Child Injury Prevention Project" 2004)