

RESTACKING THE ODDS

RSTO CASE STUDY

Using a continuous improvement approach to improve participation in early childhood education and care



Participation in high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) boosts children's health, development and wellbeing. While all children can benefit from ECEC, children experiencing disadvantage stand to benefit the most. Children and families need to attend at the right dosage for the benefits of ECEC to be realised. Research shows children and families experiencing disadvantage are more likely to miss out.

There is limited national ECEC participation data collected in Australia. The available data is enrolment data (e.g. the proportion of children enrolled in a preschool program) and doesn't provide sufficient information about the dosage of ECEC participation. Without this data, it is challenging for services and communities to identify issues with ECEC participation and, importantly, to identify how to make changes that improve participation and children's developmental outcomes.

Restacking the Odds (RSTO) is a program that aims to develop the knowledge and skills of early years service providers to collect, understand and use evidence-based lead indicators to enhance service quality, quantity and participation.

CASE STUDY

RSTO is partnering with Gowrie Victoria to help identify opportunities for improving early childhood education and care participation rates at Gowrie sites in Victoria.

Service focus:

Early Childhood Education and Care

RSTO indicator focus:

Quality, quantity and **participation**

Gowrie Victoria

For over 80 years, Gowrie Victoria has been at the forefront of high-quality early learning. As a purpose-driven, not-for-profit organisation they have a reputation for high-quality ECEC and focus on empowering children and connecting and supporting families. Gowrie Victoria deliver long day care services, sessional kindergarten and training and consultancy in early childhood education across six sites in Melbourne, serving over 1700 children and 1450 families.

The opportunity

Gowrie Victoria's vision is ensuring all children can participate in high-quality early childhood education and care to achieve the best outcomes. To deliver on their vision, Gowrie wanted to better understand if children enrolled in their services were participating in early education at the right dose for the benefits of ECEC to be realised. And if not, how they could improve participation.

The organisation collects data on participation, however, this information sits across different systems and requires a lot of manual effort to aggregate and analyse. The data was mostly being used for reports to the Gowrie leadership team and Board and wasn't being harnessed to drive action that could benefit children and families.

There was an opportunity for RSTO to help Gowrie use their data more effectively to ensure children were getting the most from ECEC.

The RSTO approach

Forming a partnership

RSTO first engaged with Susan Anderson, Gowrie CEO, in mid-2022 to discuss the opportunity to partner. The team at RSTO had always been impressed with Gowrie's focus on quality and continuous improvement and saw them as an ideal lead partner to inform and support the development and roll out of RSTO. A suite of early-stage prototypes were co-designed to help services consistently collect and make better use of data for decision-making, including a data dashboard and a continuous improvement training program. RSTO data dashboards make it easier to act on data by presenting data in a visual way and showing patterns and trends. The continuous improvement training program supports practitioners to understand what actions to take and how to monitor impact.

A number of meetings took place in mid-2022 with the Gowrie leadership team and RSTO. The primary focus of these conversations was to understand what the partners were aiming to achieve and how to work collaboratively.

'We were motivated to partner with RSTO to help us make better sense of where to focus our efforts to improve participation. Helping us to take action immediately and strengthen a culture of continuous improvement.'

Susan Anderson, CEO, Gowrie.



Collecting data

To inform the development of the prototypes, RTSO interviewed 10 staff across different Gowrie centres and roles to better understand the barriers and enablers to collecting and using

data (see Table 1). This information was used to start developing a minimum viable prototype that could support Gowrie Victoria with data-informed decision-making.

Table 1: Barriers and enablers to collecting and using data at Gowrie Victoria

BEHAVIOUR CHANGE FACTORS	BARRIERS	ENABLERS
Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> knowledge of what data to collect capability to interpret and use data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> data literacy quality improvement support data systems
Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> low data quality low data availability data systems and processes limited resources to support data collection and use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increased resources to support data collection and use increased funding improved data systems and processes
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pressure on staff resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reinforcement professional role

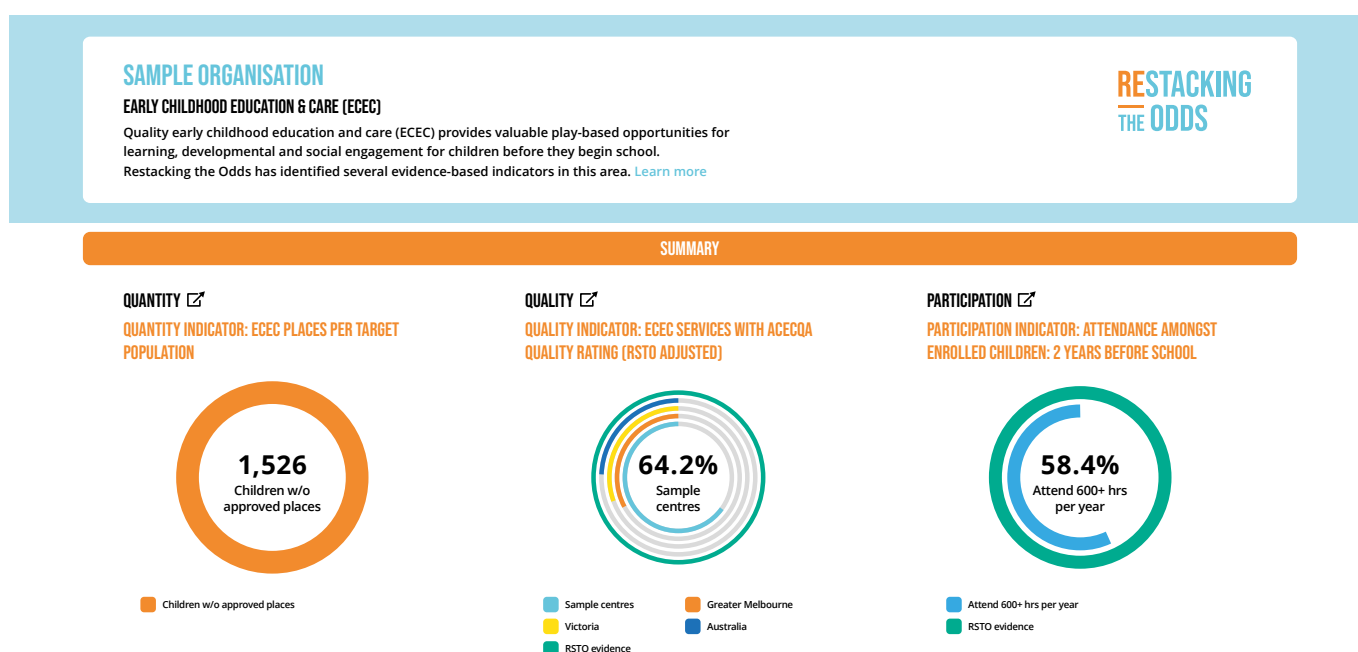
Developing a data dashboard

From July 2022 through to November 2022, RSTO and its technology partners worked with key staff at Gowrie to develop the first component of a minimum viable prototype – a technology platform that would calculate indicators and then publish the results in an easy-to-use dashboard. The indicators needed to enable Gowrie staff to quickly and easily identify how many children were attending Gowrie sites, and how often, so that Gowrie could action strategies to

enhance participation. See Figure 1 for an example mock-up of how summary data related to ECEC participation can be presented in a data dashboard.

This process involved understanding Gowrie's systems, how data was collected and where it was stored. It also involved understanding how and where to access population level data required to calculate certain RSTO indicators. For example, identifying whether there are enough ECEC sites available in sufficient quantity in the areas Gowrie is located.

Figure 1: Sample RSTO data dashboard



A critical goal of the prototype was to develop a process to extract data from relevant systems automatically and de-identify all family and child level data on entry to the platform. This was achieved by developing service reporting templates that could be easily uploaded to the platform.

To ensure the data was easy to understand, the RSTO team worked with Gowrie through a series of short meetings, to co-design dashboards that could provide meaningful data. This involved understanding how to present the data at a summary and centre level; how to explain the data in terms that were most relevant to users and how to benchmark data to enable better tracking over time. See Figure 2 for an example of summary ECEC participation data presented in the data dashboard.

Supporting the use of the data dashboard

Once the dashboards were developed, RSTO worked to design a program to support staff to understand and use the data to improve service performance – a continuous improvement program. The need for this program came from research RSTO had conducted to identify the barriers to data-informed decision-making.

Before rolling this program out across all centres, Gowrie nominated two centres, Broadmeadows

and Docklands, to work closely with RSTO to test the data dashboard and program to support staff. Both Centres were performing well on quality but wanted to understand and improve participation.

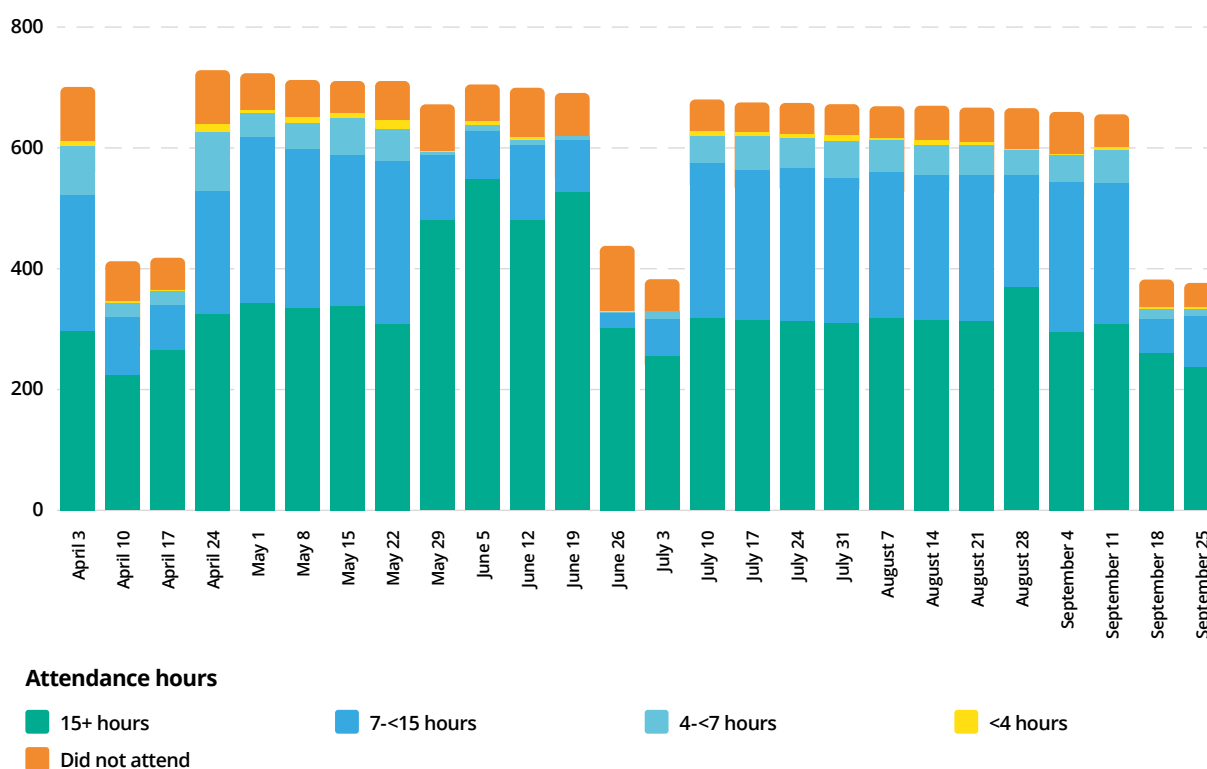
Implementing coaching sessions

Drawing on the foundations of quality improvement and plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycles, the RSTO team met with Gowrie to develop an informal approach to implementing a monthly coaching session with key room leaders and management.

These sessions were an opportunity for the teams to review the monthly data from the data dashboard and identify actions that they could implement with little effort and funding – to increase ECEC participation.

To support the team to identify potential solutions, the RSTO team provided Gowrie with several resources, including published literature on the main barriers to participation in ECEC and issue tree diagrams that help to solve an overall problem. This activity helped staff walk away with a clear actions to address the barriers to participation. Specifically, it helped them create a plan that outlined what they will do, when and who will be responsible.

Figure 2: Sample graph from RSTO data dashboard: Number of children attending ECEC two years before starting school



Learnings to date and implications

The Gowrie team have enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to improve their understanding of how they are tracking against the RSTO lead indicators, and importantly, experiment with activities to improve their services performance.

Some of the activities implemented to improve participation include:

1. raising families awareness of the importance of early learning and consistent ECEC attendance
2. developing a campaign to improve families knowledge of what play-based learning is and how it can help their child achieve positive outcomes through consistent attendance
3. changing where the Gowrie sign-in facility is to ensure families can easily see it and access it as they arrive
4. supporting transport for families who have difficulty attending due to transport issues.

The team can use the lead indicator data presented through their own dashboard as well as other data they may collect to monitor the impact of these activities.

'This is the first time we have been able to see our data at such a granular level and so clearly.'

Team Member, Gowrie Victoria.

'I am starting to like data now that I can see how it supports my work.'

Team Member, Gowrie Victoria.

While it is early days, the team are now able to see some key themes that are driving participation and how they share ideas with other Gowrie centres.

'The opportunity to come together as a group monthly and have someone guide us to reflect on what we're doing and how we might improve, has been invaluable.'

Team Member, Gowrie Victoria.

Looking ahead

With the early success of the trials in both Docklands and Broadmeadows, the RSTO team will start working with the Gowrie Service at the Carlton Learning Precinct in early 2024.

Over the course of the next year, the RSTO team's goals are to continue to refine the data dashboard and supporting resources (RSTO prototypes), support consistent use of the data and continue to support Gowrie to learn and improve. The ultimate goal will be a shift in participation data and improved outcomes for children and families.

Interested in partnering with RSTO?

Learn about opportunities to engage with the project at www.rsto.org.au/partnering-with-rsto/

RESTACKING THE ODDS

RSTO is a collaboration between the Centre for Community Child Health at Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Bain & Company, and Social Ventures Australia.

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We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging.