



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **\$400,000 funding to help Loddon families**

Families in the Loddon Shire will receive direct help to make sure their children are properly prepared to start school under a major new program.

The Strong Families Strong Children Loddon program has received \$400,000 from the William Buckland Foundation and will connect up to 20 families to local education, health and wellbeing support services.

The funding follows the release of statistics showing children in the Loddon Shire are more than twice as likely to arrive at school inappropriately dressed, late, tired or hungry, and the region has higher rates than the Victorian average of families facing disadvantage and children lacking physical independence and motor skills for school.

Over the next four years Strong Families Strong Children Loddon will employ a project facilitator to work directly with families offering individualised support to help them to access appropriate services.

North Central Local Learning and Employment Network (NCLLEN) is leading the Strong Families Strong Children Loddon partnership with support from Loddon Shire, North West Regional Department of Education and Children in Youth Area Partnership.

NCLLEN Executive Officer Jerri Nelson said the project needed a further \$250,000 for a full four-year campaign.

The William Buckland Foundation has fully funded year one and partially funded years two and three but Ms Nelson expected it would take four years to make significant systems change to better support families in Loddon.

Government and philanthropic sources are being approached for more funding. Most of the funding will go towards direct supporting families.

Ms Nelson said the project was significant in that it capitalised on planning by funding “feet on the ground”.

“It will support a nurturing and stimulating family environment and appropriately support parents in their caretaking role to navigate the system and to access resources to build their child’s capacity,” she said.

“Sometimes it’s hard to get the system to work when you’re in rural Victoria but this will help parents to give their children the best possible support, which makes a big difference in ensuring children are ready for learning.”

The program will be place based, co-designed and sustainable. The new project facilitator will connect with families with children 0-8 years to help them to navigate services.

“Some families don’t know how to get to the front of the queue and if children lag behind in their early years they often can’t catch up,” Ms Nelson said.

“The Loddon Shire has a lot of visiting services and this project is like creating a virtual service system. There’s no door to walk through so we’re going to come to families and help them to work out which services they need and then get the services to them.”

Loddon Shire Council Director of Community Wellbeing, Wendy Gladman, said the partnership program would work towards giving every child the best possible start in life.

“Often services or supports are available but families are not accessing them; now we can work with families to help them to make the best use of services and resources,” Ms Gladman said.

“What we do in the early years will result in better outcomes for the children as they grow older.”

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