



“Improving our playgroups”

A look at the critical elements of a
successful supported playgroup

Rupert North & Roisin Rizzo – Save the Children Australia

Outline

- Importance of the Early Years
- What is the Mobile Playbus?
- Mobile Playbus: A History
- Mobile Playbus – Objectives
- Mobile Playbus – Activities
- Timeframes/Transition
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Case Studies
- What have we learnt so far?
- Critical Elements of the Mobile Playbus



Importance of the Early Years

The importance of the Early Years has been well documented in Australia

Early childhood development programs give children the best start to life and profoundly impact their health and wellbeing throughout their lifetime.

The **quality of parenting** that a child receives during these early years will have a profound influence on many aspects of the child's current and future life.

Supported Playgroups are one of the Commonwealth and Victorian Government's policy initiatives which aim to bridge the gap between advantage and disadvantage for families.

What is the Mobile Playbus?

- Mobile service that takes playgroups *to* families
- Provides a range of quality activities for children 0-5
- Empowers families to then replicate these activities at home
- Promotes the importance of play in children's development
- Brings socially isolated families together, building their networks

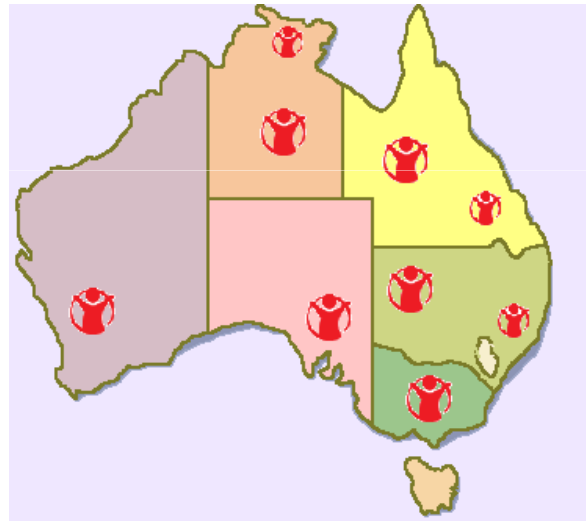
In short, it benefits **children, parents** and the **community**



Mobile Playbus: A History

Save the Children has run Mobile Playbus programs for over 25 years

15 Mobile Playbuses reaching families in over 70 locations in Australia



In 2009, the Mobile Playbus reached **3,890 children** and **2,262 adults** (SC Alliance Total Reach 2009)

Mobile Playbus – Objectives

Purpose: To provide opportunities for children in socially and geographically isolated communities to develop to their fullest potential, within the context of well supported families and cohesive communities.

The **objectives** of the program are about providing quality activities for children (0 – 5), increasing parents' self-esteem and confidence to support their children's development, and connecting families to each other and to their local communities

Mobile Playbus – Activities

- ‘Curriculum’ of culturally and age-appropriate activities
- Parental support throughout each session
- (including English/Lifeskills sessions for parents where applicable)
- Nutritious snack
- Follow up/referrals for specific families
- Risk assessments where appropriate

Children – Parents – Community



Timeframes/Transition

Q. How long should we continue to support families through supported playgroups?

- Transition is not always possible
- Always seems to be a key concern among service providers!
- We use 5* Playgroup Victoria training (where possible)
- Work closely with councils
- Parents themselves often let us know
- Benefit of long-term funding



Monitoring & Evaluation

How do we know we're doing a good job? (Reach vs. Impact)

Current Monitoring – what do we collect (and how)?

- Enrollment / Attendance data (quantitative)
- Observations / Survey data / Case Studies (qualitative)

Evaluation – external vs. internal (highlight QUT review)

Case Studies

Roisin Rizzo,
Team Leader, Mobile Playbus – Western Suburbs



What have we learnt so far?

Queensland University of Technology evaluation

“Playscheme staff use a range of low-key, creative strategies to engage children in a range of program activities”

“Staff work effectively to enhance child and parent self-esteem by providing a safe and relaxed venue...”

“Playscheme has become an effective ‘hub’ for child and family access to a range of outreach services for early learning, early intervention, and parental support”

What have we learnt so far?

STRENGTHS:

- Trust – relationships are growing
- Flexible
- Safe Place for children and parents
- Strengthening relationships with child, family and within the community
- Mobile Bus

What have we learnt so far?

CHALLENGES:

- Need to raise awareness of who we are and what we're trying to achieve
- To be clear on who we are aiming to help
- Greater thought and planning around transitioning families
- Better risk management processes
- Empowering mothers
- Providing greater support to you as Playbus staff

Critical Elements of Mobile Playbus

- Guided by State and National policy
- Evidence-based
- Couched in Child Rights / Child Protection Frameworks
- Clear definition of children, families, communities where we work
- Strong community partnerships – to maximize coverage/support to families
- Engagement of families
- Respect for the children, families and communities
- Building of trust
- Quality – and changing – program of activities
- Qualified and experienced staff
- Flexibility / Mobility
- Monitoring and Evaluation



Thank you

Rupert North
Program Manager, Victoria
rupert.north@savethechildren.org.au

www.savethechildren.org.au

