



The Playgroup Framework: A foundation document

..... [Laying the Foundations](#) ! !

Playgroups: learning through play

Foreword

For so many parents facing challenges in life and needing a little help in their parenting role, playgroup provides a lifeline. Whether it be isolation, lack of confidence, disconnection from community, vulnerability or disadvantage, playgroup can foster connection and affirmation. Through the care and guidance of other families and/or a playgroup mentor, there is an opportunity for parents to develop individual strengths, increase parental capacity and find their place in a connected, supportive community.

Playgroup Victoria is committed to supporting families through playgroups. We are working to drive research, draw together evidence and anecdotes and prove to the decision makers in our society that playgroups are an integral part of cohesive and robust communities and deserve to be recognised for the vital role they play in giving children a strong start in life. This has led the Practice and Research team to develop the Playgroup Framework.

Whilst the term parent is used throughout this publication, Playgroup Victoria recognises that children may be taken to playgroup by a diverse range of significant people in their life, including; biological, step, foster or adoptive parents, guardians, carers, single parents, same sex parents, grandparents and other relations, nannies and family day carers.





Help us by re-setting this
for the next group to



SOME IDEAS:

- Pre-historic Dino-world
- Jungle Animals
- Farm Scene
- Paper and Crayon
- Puzzles
- Autumn Leaves

Prepared by:
Deborah Njegac
Manager Supported
Playgroups

Dr Joanne Tarasuik
Research Officer

Janine Regan
Manager Practice and
Research

Suggested Citation
Njegac, D., Tarasuik, J.,
Regan, J. (2016) Laying
the Foundations: The
Playgroup Framework.
Playgroup Victoria.
Melbourne, Australia

Playgroup Victoria Practice and Research Department

Our Practice and Research Department works collaboratively to promote effective translation of research outcomes for the playgroup platform: community, facilitated, roster, supported, intensive supported and program playgroups; and, drive the embedding and implementation of this knowledge and practice into playgroups.

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth [ARACY] identified that parents are the strongest influence in determining their child’s life chances. Parents are the child’s first and most enduring teachers. It is through a parent’s relationship with their child that they learn and grow. Playgroup remains the only forum where families meet with other families in their local community to support each other, strengthen connections and children learn through play.

Playgroups embody all the elements of social capital; trust, shared values, common goals and a sense of community. Families come together in playgroups to build a group based on friendship and trust. Whatever their similarities or differences are, playgroup provides the opportunity for families to create a common bond and build bridges within and to their local neighbourhood thereby reducing social exclusion. Strong, healthy and productive family relationships are at the core of positive and effective social capital and, in turn, children growing up in families and communities with high levels of social capital have greater learning benefits in the early years.

The structure of the Playgroup Framework is presented in Table 1.

Component 1	Playgroup Model a) Playgroup principles b) Evidence base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outlines the evidence base that underpins outcomes for children, parents, families and communities • Connects the evidence base to the value and benefits of playgroup. • Connects the evidence base to knowledge and practice within playgroups to support and harness the protective factors
Component 2	Playgroup Platform a) Playgroup Range and Types b) Playgroup Layers c) Playgroup Platform Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explains the contribution playgroups make to the service system and community
Component 3	Playgroup Learning Framework a) Resources and tools b) Professional development c) Practice support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Components 1 and 2 above influence and inform the design, content and delivery of component 3, the Learning Framework, • Ensures that the knowledge and practice requirements of parents and professionals involved in playgroups are met through a suite of learning opportunities that are robust, reliable and evidence based.

Table 1: Playgroup Framework



.....

The Playgroup Model

1.1 Introduction

.....

Laying strong foundations in the early years increases the probability of positive outcomes for children, families and communities. Visualise planning and building a home: getting things right the first time matters. It's the same with a child's development. This 'construction' project starts before birth and develops optimally within secure, warm relationships created by family.

The Playgroup Model, based upon a house, has been developed to provide a common understanding of the value and benefits of playgroup. It provides a visual and conceptual representation of playgroups: supporting and enhancing outcomes for the child, the parent, the family and the community, achieved through a fusion and merging of knowledge, skill and practice from across the early years, family support and community development fields. The child, at the centre of the Playgroup Model, surrounded by parent, family and community is fundamental to the playgroup platform.

Playgroups are the foundations that provide structural integrity, ensuring a fundamentally sound and enduringly supportive house. Playgroups support strong communities, families, parents and children.



Figure 1: Playgroup Model

The Playgroup Model

1.2 Unpacking the model

The Playgroup Model provides a visual representation of the child as the focus and at the centre of the playgroup experience. The Playgroup Model offers an understanding of how the child's development, wellbeing and learning is supported, promoted and buoyed by the presence and involvement of their parents, family and community. The playgroup is a distinctive and distinguishing platform for children's development as this early years experience brings the child and parent together – this is unique within the early years service system. Additional effect and impact on children's development is gained through the presence of families (both their own and others) and community engagement in the playgroup. A further idiosyncrasy of the playgroup platform is the potential for all types of playgroups to exist in any service system, and at any location and venue. The Playgroup Model also acknowledges that adaptive and apposite playgroup processes used by families in a community playgroup or by the supported playgroup facilitator in supported playgroups, ensure that the playgroup flourishes, resulting in the potential

outcomes for the child, parent, family and community to be realised.

The Playgroup Model is applicable and relevant across the full range and all types of playgroups: the same things 'happen' to the child, parent, family, and community through the playgroup experience, no matter the type of playgroup. In community playgroups, parents create and support their own integration and intersection of these elements to develop their vibrant and thriving playgroup. In supported or intensive supported playgroups, this model is driven and achieved through the knowledge, skill and practice of the supported playgroup facilitator. The facilitator explores and identifies relevant and suitable evidence-based strategies to implement in their playgroup, ensuring that the resulting strategies meet the needs and requirements of the families in their local community. Playgroups create distinctive opportunities for services and practitioners to work holistically with children, parents, families and communities.

Model Element	What does this mean in playgroups
The child	All playgroups put the child at the heart of the home, influenced by the micro and meso systems that surround them (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).
The parent	Supporting parental well-being, building parental capacity, and promoting and improving parent: child attachment, all occur naturally
The family	Encouraging and facilitating families to benefit from their playgroup experience, providing support to families through an appropriate playgroup support approach
The community	Including vulnerable and disadvantaged families in the local community, facilitating and developing social relationships between families in and outside of the playgroup, connecting the playgroup and families to the local community and its resources, and working effectively across diverse groups within communities

Table 2: The Playgroup Model elements



Playgroups: strengthening families

The Playgroup Model

1.3 Playgroup principles

The playgroup principles inform the key communications of the Playgroup Model. Each principle supports and reinforces the connection between the evidence and the key components of the model; child, parents, family and community.

PLAYGROUP PRINCIPLE	CHILD
DEVELOPMENTAL	The years birth to 3 are a critical period in children’s development. Playgroups provide opportunities for children’s cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development, laying pathways for life long learning. Playgroups promote school readiness by providing opportunities for children to develop physically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually (and culturally).
EDUCATIONAL	Play is fundamental. Children learn through play. It is through playing that children experience and process information about themselves and the world around them.
NURTURING AND SUPPORTIVE	Playgroups provide the opportunity for children to grow socially and emotionally, through interaction with parents and peers in a nurturing and safe environment.
CAPACITY BUILDING	In a physically, socially, and emotionally safe environment children will take risks with their learning and exploration. Playgroups prepare children for transitions.
RELATIONAL	Children develop social and emotional skills through their relationships with their parents and caregivers..

Table 3: The playgroup principles

PARENT	FAMILY	COMMUNITY
<p>Playgroups support and facilitate parent-child attachment and bonding. It provides a platform for parents to develop their knowledge, skills and approach to their new parenting role.</p>	<p>Playgroup supports the development of family wellbeing and functioning and the process of transition to parenthood.</p>	<p>Playgroups develop and strengthen communities by facilitating and sustaining trust, norms, networks and reciprocity.</p>
<p>Playgroups support parents as a child's first teacher through supporting play-based opportunities and experiences.</p>	<p>Playgroups promote and develop an increased understanding of the importance of play. Parents learn, share, and transfer play-based activities and experiences to the home environment.</p>	<p>Playgroups help communities to value play as a right of all children and supports communities to promote play as the learning vehicle for children.</p>
<p>Playgroups nurture parental wellbeing, identity and self-care through the mutual, communal and reflective capacities of other parents and the social connections made.</p>	<p>Playgroups nurture and support families through the ups and downs of the family lifecycle. They provide the opportunity for parents and families to connect with each other and build peer support networks through sharing ideas and experiences.</p>	<p>Playgroups are a 'soft entry' point for many services to offer and deliver programs. They provide the opportunity for communities to build, strengthen, and grow by connecting children and families with a wide range of services and other families. These connections increase the capacity of communities to support families in raising happy, healthy children.</p>
<p>Playgroups provide many experiential and learning opportunities to develop parenting knowledge and skills. Supported playgroup facilitators foster and facilitate parenting development through modelling and reflective support work.</p>	<p>Supported playgroups offer intentional and planned opportunities to families who have support needs/issues to attend playgroup and who may not otherwise attend a playgroup. The facilitator is able to assess and plan for supports and services for the child, parent and family.</p>	<p>Playgroups provide a vehicle to develop community and social capital. and have become a fundamental building block in strengthening communities.</p>
<p>Playgroups provide a safe and nurturing environment to enhance parent-child attachment.</p>	<p>Playgroups create interconnections between children, families, and services to better nurture children and support families.</p>	<p>Playgroups assist in building, bonding and bridging social capital. This process starts with children and parents developing social relationships with each other in the playgroup and then transferring these outside the playgroup.</p>

The Playgroup Model

1.4 Evidence Base

Whilst playgroups come in all shapes and sizes, there are three specific playgroup formats that vary in the level of family and services supports. The continuum of playgroup formats- Community, Supported and Intensive - exists so that the level of support can match the needs of the families, in line with Universal proportionalism (Marmot et al., 2010). This approach recognizes that a social gradient is most effectively reduced by developing actions that are universal yet implemented with intensity proportionate to the level of disadvantage.

With so many factors impacting a child's learning and development, many researchers refer to the ecological theory of child development which explains that there is interaction between various influencing systems; the child, the education systems and community factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Similarly, Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence model illustrates the overlapping impact of family, school and community on children's outcomes, with recognition that students learn more and succeed at higher levels when there is collaboration, and they play complimentary roles in supporting learning and development (Epstein, 1987).

The Playgroup Model, like Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence model, includes the family and community, but also draws specific attention to the child and the parent. The model highlights the important role playgroup plays as a foundation for child development. The Centre for Community Child Health has described community playgroups as a three pronged approach; nurturing children, supporting families, and building communities. This sets community playgroups apart from other groups or services.

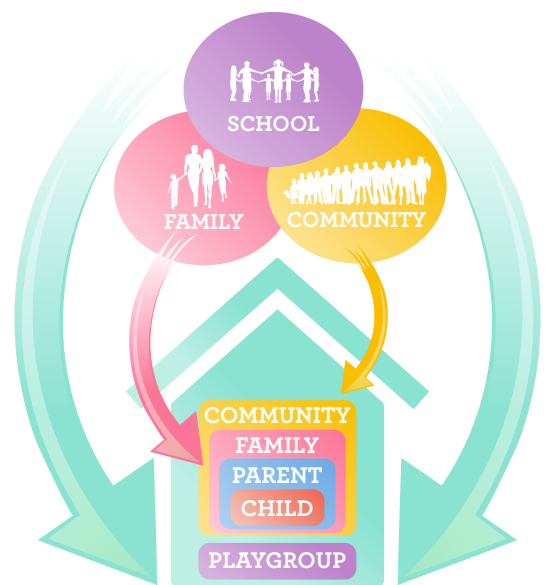


Figure 2:
The parallels between Epstein's and the Playgroup model



Playgroups provide an opportunity for:

- CHILDREN to learn and develop through play activities and social interaction with their parents/caregivers and other children and adults
- PARENTS and caregivers to establish social and support networks to encourage and assist them in their valuable parenting role
- FAMILIES to experience improved family functioning through increased parental well-being and capacity
- COMMUNITY development through enhanced social capital and the potential for networking between families and local businesses and services

The Playgroup Model

1.4.1 The Child

Learning through play

Early childhood is the most important period for child development. Many studies have documented that brain development is particularly sensitive to early experiences, and children's social and cognitive skills are acquired most effectively during early childhood (e.g. Knudsen, Heckman, Cameron, & Shonkoff, 2006; Kuhl, 2004).

The importance of play in a child's development is so significant that it has been recognised by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a basic right of every child (Office of UNHCHR., 1989). Fortunately the significance has also been acknowledged in The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia which has a specific emphasis on learning through play. As Fred Rogers once said "Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children play is serious learning" (Heidi Moore, 2011). Play keeps children engaged and as they play they are concurrently developing an array of different skills, including learning to learn. Learning and play are not mutually exclusive. In fact children learn best when they are engaged and enjoying themselves (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2008).

Parents may not always have developmental benefits in mind when they play with their child; in fact not all parents are aware of the profound importance of play. Play positively influences children's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being (Ginsburg,

2007) and was described by Vygotsky (1978b) almost four decades ago as a leading factor of development. In a physically, socially and emotionally safe environment children will take risks with their learning and exploration (Department of Education, 2009).

Social and emotional development

Playgroup offers a unique opportunity for a young child and his/her parent, to share quality time together, play and socialise. From birth, children's relationships with key people, especially parents, are the most important factors in their development. Companionable learning is an interactive process: two learners with a shared pre-occupation, companionably engaged. It's through these relationships that children learn how to think, understand, communicate, behave, show emotions, and develop social skills (Roberts, 2010).

When a parent and child attend playgroup together, the child feels safe and secure and gains confidence to explore the world, knowing that their loved one is there for them as a safe and reassuring base. They develop and practice social and emotional skills that will stand them in good stead for the years ahead. Extensive literature on attachment has long indicated that children use a parent's physical presence as a secure base for exploration (Ainsworth, D. S., Bell, & Stayton, 1971; Bowlby, 1969).





Key Messages

- Children learn through play. Playgroup is a powerful centre of learning for young children, in partnership with their parent or carer.
- Playgroup supports the development of children's social and emotional skills by providing opportunities for interactions with others. These skills are vital: they form the foundation for children's ongoing development and influence their mental health and wellbeing.
- Through attending playgroup, experiencing early learning activities and playing with others, children are better prepared for the transition to more formal education settings, such as early learning and child care, kindergarten and school.

Unlike other early learning environments, parents and children attend playgroup together, providing the perfect opportunity for children to take tentative steps towards a greater sense of independence. The dyadic interaction; i.e. the interaction between a child and parent, is particularly important during the first years of life. Attachment relationships form the foundation for neural and social development, with the quality of early attachment experiences shaping the child's early development (Moore, 2007). Accordingly the role of the parent-child relationship and the child's development are intertwined. Children's development is also influenced by wider networks of social support such as extended family, friends and the community and cultural groups a child belongs to. These networks, including playgroup, provide opportunities for children to interact with other children and adults, develop their social skills and make sense of their world and their place in it.

Transitions

Through attending playgroup, experiencing early learning activities and playing with others, children are better prepared for the transition to more formal education settings such as early learning and child care, kindergarten and school. A 'Ready Child Equation' has been developed that depicts the interrelated components of children's school readiness (Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook ©, 2005). According to this equation, readiness for school requires an interaction between the readiness of the child, and the readiness of the environments

that surround the child (Kagan & Rigby, 2003). "Ready Children" are those who have been provided with ample opportunities to learn and develop through a variety of experiences. Through playgroup, children have the opportunity to engage in structured and unstructured play activities alone, with other children, and with adults. Parents of Ready Children have allowed their children to engage in self-directed play that enables them to be imaginative and creative in their games, enhancing their creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Children develop social skills such as turn-taking, sharing, and empathy through playing with other children. Their communication skills have flourished through discussions and reading books with other children and adults. Ready Children have been permitted to undertake play activities that involve a degree of risk and adventure so they may learn about their own capabilities and skills. Children provided with these opportunities through playgroup are more likely to be ready for school as they have had the chance to grow and develop in a range of areas (Playgroups Victoria, 2016). The developmental benefits of playgroup has been demonstrated using the Australian Early Developmental Census (AEDC) data; it showed that playgroup attendance halves the risk of children starting school developmentally vulnerable (Gregory, Harman-Smith, Sincovich, Wilson, & Brinkman, 2016).

The Playgroup Model

1.4.2 The Parents



Parents as first teachers

Children learn best through their everyday experiences with the people they love and trust, and through fun play experiences. Most of children's learning takes place during everyday interactions, conversations and life and not in structured, adult-led learning activities.

Engaging in child-driven play is insightful for parents as they can observe the world through the child's eyes, which can assist in understanding the child's needs and perceptions of the world (Ginsburg, 2007). Tuning in to the child's language during such interaction also enhances a parent's ability to communicate with their child. The engagement of parent and child in play together also enhances children's learning through play. "Families are children's first and most influential teachers" (p13, Department of Education, 2009) and all family members can play a role. It is not simply the amount of time, but the quality of time spent together that impacts both the parent-child relationship and the child's development. Playgroups afford parents and children time and space to play together, have fun together and learn together. Parents are the main source of their children's social simulation, and thus consequently have the greatest impact on their language and communication development (Hart & Risley, 2003). Compelling evidence of this was demonstrated by a 2.5-year-long home observation study of infants from 7 months; known as 'The Thirty

Million Word Gap' (Hart & Risley, 2003), 86% to 98% of words used by children were from their own parents' vocabulary. The study also revealed staggering disparity; it was calculated that over the first four years of life children from high income families would have been exposed to 30 million more words than the children from families on welfare. Over time this gap did not dissipate, but was in fact larger when a sub-cohort of the children were assessed at age 10 (Walker, Greenwood, Hart, & Carta, 1994) illustrating the long-term impact of parent-child interactions.

The growing gap reported here is an example of what has become known as the Matthew Effect (Merton, 1968) (or accumulated advantage) phenomenon. Often referred to in the context that "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer", when applied to child development we see the smart get smarter whilst other children fall further and further behind. Early learning is important because when children are equipped with strong foundation skills, they can utilize environmental and educational opportunities. Poor foundational skills impacts a child's learning prospects, as content can be beyond their understanding, resulting in them falling even further behind.



Key Messages

- Playgroups support parents in their role as child's first and most enduring teacher.
- Playgroup supports the early home learning environment. What parents do at home with young children has the greatest impact on the child's social, emotional and intellectual development.
- Positive parental engagement in children's learning has a positive impact on wellbeing, academic achievement and productivity.
- Playgroups increase parental confidence.

Parents often scaffold their child's learning; scaffolded learning involves a novice learner, (in this case the child), being supported or guided by an expert instructor (the parent) to challenge them and extend the learning beyond what they could attempt by themselves. The concept has grown from Vygotsky's (1978a) concept 'the zone of proximal development'; the point between what a learner has mastered and their potential if provided with educational support. Knowing this point enables a teacher (or parent) to modify their guidance to address the learner's (child's) immediate needs to assist their future learning (Vygotsky, 1978a).

The Early Home Learning Environment (EHLE)

For most children, in the first three years of life, the home still exerts the predominant influence on a child's language and cognitive development. Playgroup provides an opportunity to influence parent's

knowledge of the importance of learning through play. There is a growing body of research that indicates that the quality of the home learning environment during a child's first three years of life is associated not only with cognitive development at age 4-5 years but also with educational achievement at school and beyond. The playgroup environment is similar to home; it is a relaxed, informal place for parents and children to read together, play together and learn from others. Through intentional modelling of play by playgroup facilitators and parents informally sharing ideas, parents who lack confidence in engaging with their child are influenced to take home ideas; simple every day play ideas, home-made toys, books, songs and rhymes, all are regularly shared at playgroup.

Playgroups: building communities



Parental engagement

Acknowledging the importance in partnerships in children's development, in 2008 the Australian government invested in The Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau (L. Emerson, J. Fear., Fox.S., & Sanders, 2012) with the purpose to conduct research, disseminate promising practice and provide parents, principals, teachers and other education stakeholders with practical support and advice. From examining the evidence, the Bureau determined that positive parental engagement in their children's learning has a positive impact on wellbeing, academic achievement and productivity and that education reform should accordingly include initiatives to progress parental engagement (L. Emerson et al., 2012).

Considered broadly, parental engagement involves partnerships between families, schools and communities, raising parental awareness about the benefits of becoming engaged in their children's education, and providing them with the skills to do so (Muller, 2009). International research has shown that parental engagement (of various kinds) has a positive impact on many indicators of student achievement and is associated with various indicators of student development. These indicators have relevance to early learning settings:

- Increased social capital
- Better social skills
- Better adaptation to school
- Improved behaviour

Economic modelling of a US longitudinal dataset (NELS:88) demonstrated that the impact of parental effort (different types of engagement) on student achievement is comparable to students' parent completing an additional four to six years of education or an additional \$1,000 per pupil in expenditures (Houtenville & Conway, 2007). The Victorian based Linking Schools and Early Years project recommended playgroup as a family engagement strategy (Eastman, Koop, Newton, & Valentine, 2012) which is a component of the aforementioned parental effort.

Playgroups are an environment that can improve parents' confidence which can enhance parental engagement. They can observe other children and their parents engaging which can also help parents to understand whether their child is developmentally on-track. Talking to other parents can normalise the parenting experience, and they can provide affirmation to each-other. Accordingly attendance at playgroup assists parents which in turn benefits the child.

The Playgroup Model

1.4.3 The Family

Parents, families, teachers and the community all influence a child's learning and influence their developmental trajectories. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory emphasises the many different impacts on the child and the effects of the different environmental systems that the child encounters (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to this model, the child is at the centre of interactive microsystems including family, community, educational settings and activities that the child participates in. This ecological theory underpins research that demonstrates how parenting practices, the quality of education, and the resources of a community all interact and influence the learning outcomes and developmental trajectories of young children from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Ryan, Fauth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2006). The most important microsystem for a young child is the family, with research confirming the influence of family on a child, most predominantly in the early years (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003)

Parental well being

The parent-child relationship and a child's development are intertwined. Parents' mental wellbeing significantly impacts the relationship with their child, and when a parent does not have good mental health, or is suffering from a mental illness, it may diminish their capacity to support a child's development.

In severe cases, there is a connection between parental mental disorder and maltreatment of their children (NSW Department of Community Services, 2008) and children living with a parent with mental illness are generally at heightened risk of adverse outcomes (Farrell, Handley, Hanke, Hazelton, & Josephs, 1999) including adverse developmental outcomes and mental health problems of their own (Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists., 2009).

With consideration of the available literature, researchers have suggested an intergenerational pathway between parental mental health issues and potential adverse impact on children's development (Huntsman, 2008). It suggests that the early influences including the family environment, genetic risk and

the quality of parenting/maternal stress, together with other adversities, can result in maladaptive developmental outcomes. The same researchers also acknowledge that positive experiences and relationships with others can positively impact the child (Huntsman, 2008). Playgroup is an avenue through which positive experiences and relationships with others occur. Children can develop social and emotional connections with both children and adults at playgroup which has been shown to significantly moderate the effects of parental mental disorder (Beardslee, Versage, & Gladstone, 1998). Playgroup attendance can also assist children who have poor coping skills, a vulnerability characteristic for children experiencing parental mental disorder. Engaging with other children and learning coping strategies can assist children to adapt to the stress of parental illness (Langrock, Compas, Keller, Merchant, & Copeland, 2002). Furthermore, by attending playgroup the parent with the mental illness has opportunities to observe other parents and/or a facilitator modelling good parenting practices, and good parenting is predictive of resilience in children (Brennan, Le Brocq, & Hammen, 2003).

The sense of connectedness that can come with attending a playgroup nurtures resilience and is an important influence on the mental wellbeing of parents. Research undertaken by VicHealth (VicHealth, 2015) indicates that a range of factors impact resilience at the individual, family/friends and community/organisations level. The three areas highly overlap with playgroup's three pronged approach to nurturing children (Centre for Community Child Health, 2011) children, parents/family and community. Survey data has demonstrated that mothers who attend a playgroup in their local area have greater social capital, social support and mental wellbeing than mothers of 0-5 year old children who do not (Strange, Bremner, Fisher, Howat, & Wood, 2016). The benefits that playgroup attendance has on parents' wellbeing can secondarily strengthen the functioning of their entire family unit whether it be due to improvement in the parent's health or parenting capacity, or greater social support networks.

A photograph of two young children sitting on the floor and playing with toys. The child in the foreground is a young boy with short brown hair, wearing a grey and blue patterned jacket over a dark shirt and blue jeans. He is focused on a red string toy, holding a red ring and a red string. The child in the background is a young girl with curly blonde hair, wearing a white cable-knit sweater and blue jeans. She is also looking down at the toys. The background is blurred, showing other people and what appears to be an outdoor or play area setting. The image has a teal gradient overlay at the top and bottom.

Key Messages

- Playgroup positively impacts parental well being and in turn, strengthens the functioning of the family unit.



The Playgroup Model

1.4.4 The Community

Playgroups provide an opportunity for community development through enhanced social capital and the potential for networking between families and local businesses and services (Centre for Community Child Health, 2011). Social capital can be conceptualised as the interaction between the type and quantity of resources in a community and the groups communication and thus ability to draw upon such resources (Bourdieu, 1986). Playgroup families themselves can be considered a small community and that small community can create a sense of community within their local neighbourhood; communication within the playgroup can increase awareness and access to services, and being part of the playgroup can create connection and a sense of belonging to the local neighbourhood.

Social capital

Social capital theorist Putnam speaks of community networks, participation in communal processes, having a sense of identity within the community, reciprocal help amongst community members, and trust amongst people with whom we are familiar, and those with whom we are not. He suggests that communities are strengthened by facilitating and sustaining trust, norms, networks and reciprocity (Putnam & Goss, 1993), and community organisations are amongst means of establishing these (Robert D. Putnam, 1995); playgroups can fulfil this role.

Longitudinal research shows that greater levels of participation relates to better social cohesion, general health, mental health and physical functioning (Berry & Jennifer A. Welsh, 2010). Research has also shown that living in a neighbourhood where neighbours talk to each other, care for and help each other, and are expected to engage in matters concerning communal areas, is positively associated with good health amongst women (Eriksson, Ng, Weinehall, & Emmelin, 2011). Economist Glenn Loury considered social capital to be secondary to human capital. He defined it as resources of families and community organisations that

benefit the cognitive or social development of children (Loury, 1977). Research has shown that parenthood increases desire for 'community connectedness' which in turn translates to greater social capital. This is often driven by a greater need for social support, especially by others also transitioning into parenthood, and the increased interest in the local community (Strange, Fisher, Howat, & Wood, 2014a). Survey data has revealed that social capital, neighbourhood cohesion, and community participation is higher amongst families who have dependent children (Wood, Giles-Corti, Zubrick, & Bulsara, 2011). Social capital can positively impact families with children in many ways.

Research examining the impact of social capital on developmental and behavioural outcomes of high-risk preschool children shows that having one social capital indicator made children almost a third (29%) more likely to do well, and having two increased the odds of doing well by two thirds (66%) (Runyan et al., 1998).

Social capital may be most vital for financially disadvantaged families who have less educational resources (Runyan et al., 1998), and establishing social networks within the local community is highly beneficial for families who lose their social support due to relocating (Strange, Fisher, Howat, & Wood, 2014b). In fact all families can benefit from interacting with others who live in their local area and building social support network (Williams & Pocock, 2010) and attending a playgroup is a great way for families with young children to do so. Families benefit from socialising with and becoming embedded in networks in their neighbourhood that have resources (Carpiano & Kimbro, 2012). There are also benefits to practices of reciprocity. Reciprocal child-care arrangements and other reciprocal obligations allow families not to feel uneasy about asking for assistance as they know that they will provide comparable assistance in return when it is needed (Witten, Kearns, McCreanor, Penney,



Key Messages

- Playgroups build social capital.
- Playgroups strengthen communities.
- Playgroups connect parents to community.

& Faalau, 2009). It is also beneficial for families in a community to feel that they can collectively maintain a sense of social order and safety (Carpiano & Kimbro, 2012).

Children's educational success has been linked to social capital via parents having the knowledge of who they can contact for advice, support or information, as well as parental affirmation of school participation and appropriate behaviour (Wood et al., 2011). Research undertaken with primary and secondary school students from disadvantaged communities link the positive relationship between social capital and outcomes to a sense of belonging in the school and community (Benevolent Society, 2011).

Playgroups in schools

Embedding playgroups in schools is a strategic way of building social capital (Playgroup Victoria, 2014) and can help families develop a sense of connection to a school and its community prior to school enrolment. The City of Greater Dandenong's Schools as Banks for Social Capital (SBSC) project (Mission Australia, 2015) utilised the playgroup in school model and the associated relationships between schools and families to link families to a range of child and family services and build capacity through outreach activities. During this project it was notably stated that "While community partnerships exist to serve the local community, in many cases our schools are building the capacity of our local community." (p10, Mission Australia, 2014). Playgroups in schools however do not need to sit within a large community partnership project such as SBSC and both supported and community playgroups can benefit from operating within a school as almost 300 playgroups are currently

doing (Playgroup Victoria, 2014). Evaluation of the Supported Playgroups in Schools (SPinS) project (McLean, Edwards, Colliver, & Schaper, 2014) suggests that there are additional benefits of the school venue over playgroups held elsewhere. Parents/caregivers reported that after attending playgroup at the school location, they felt that they belonged to the school community. In addition to the school enabling social connections, the children become familiar and comfortable with the school which made parents more at ease with the process of transitioning to formal education.

Families who attend a playgroup at a school may develop a greater connection to the school community and when the child enrolls, actively engage in the school life by volunteering. Although many parents who run their local playgroup do not consider themselves as a "volunteer" (Playgroup Victoria, 2012), thousands of parents and carers do exactly that each week, whether through a formal or informal process. There are a varied range of voluntary roles within a playgroup including committee roles, purchasing equipment, mending equipment, preparing morning tea and leading the sing-a-song or story time. Parental involvement in playgroup can lead to other volunteering roles in the community. Furthermore volunteering can involve up-skilling of parents, led to further studies, increased parental confidence and may enhance parents' future employability. Accordingly, volunteering at playgroup not only benefits the children attending community playgroups, but also benefits the volunteers themselves and the overall community.

References

- Ainsworth, M., D. S., Bell, S. M., & Stayton, D. J. (1971). Individual differences in strange- situation behavior of one-year-olds. In H. R. Schaffer (Ed.), *The origins of human social relations*. (pp. 17-58). London and New York: Academic Press.
- Beardslee, W. R., Versage, E. M., & Gladstone, T. R. (1998). Children of affectively ill parents: a review of the past 10 years. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 37(11), 1134-41. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9808924>
- Benevolent Society. (2011). *Social capital among school students in disadvantaged communities. Research & Evaluation snapshot*. Paddington, NSW.
- Berry, H. L., & Jennifer A. Welsh. (2010). Social capital and health in Australia: An overview from the household, income and labour dynamics in Australia survey. *Social Science & Medicine*, 70, 588-596. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Helen_Berry4/publication/40024665_Social_capital_and_health_in_Australia_An_overview_from_the_household_income_and_labour_dynamics_in_Australia_survey/links/0deec51883ce79b5a7000000.pdf
- Blair, C. (2002). School readiness. *American Psychologist*, 57(2), 111-127. Retrieved from https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/uploads/006/743/Blair_-_AmPsych.pdf
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). Bowlby, J. (1969), Attachment and loss, Vol. 1: Attachment. New York: Basic Books.
- Brennan, P. A., Le Brocque, R., & Hammen, C. (2003). Maternal depression, parent-child relationships, and resilient outcomes in adolescence. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 42(12), 1469-77. <http://doi.org/10.1097/00004583-200312000-00014>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1992). *Ecological systems theory*. Saule. Latvia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Retrieved from http://wanda.uef.fi/~uharkone/tuotoksia/Bronfenbrenner_in_English_07_sent.pdf
- Carpiano, R. M., & Kimbro, R. T. (2012). Neighborhood social capital, parenting strain, and personal mastery among female primary caregivers of children. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 53(2), 232-47. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0022146512445899>
- Centre for Community Child Health, T. R. C. H. M. (2011). *Researching Community Playgroups in Australia in the context of child and family services*.
- Cunha, F., Heckman, J. J., Lochner, L., & Masterov, D. V. (2006). Interpreting the Evidence on Life Cycle Skill Formation. In E. A. Hanushek & F. Welch (Eds.), *Handbook of the Economics of Education*, Volume 1 Edited by (pp. 697-812). Elsevier B.V.
- Department of Education, E. and W. R. (2009). BELONGING, BEING & BECOMING. The Early Years Framework. Retrieved December 22, 2015, from http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/National-Quality-Framework-Resources-Kit/belonging_being_and_becoming_the_early_years_learning_framework_for_australia.pdf
- Desforges, C., & Abouchaar, A. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A review of literature*. London.
- Eastman, C., Koop, D., Newton, B. J., & Valentine, K. (2012). *Linking Schools and Early Years Project Evaluation*, (December).
- Epstein, J. L. (1987). *Toward a theory of family-school connections: Teacher practices and parent involvement*. In K. Hurrelman, F. Kaufman, & F. Losel (Eds.), *Social intervention: Potential and constraints*. (pp. 121-136). New York: Walter De Gruyter.
- Eriksson, M., Ng, N., Weinehall, L., & Emmelin, M. (2011). The importance of gender and conceptualization for understanding the association between collective social capital and health: a multilevel analysis from northern Sweden. *Social Science & Medicine* (1982), 73(2), 264-73. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.05.013>
- Farrell, G., Handley, C., Hanke, A., Hazelton, M., & Josephs, A. (1999). *The Tasmanian Children's Project Report: The needs of Children and Adolescents with a Parent- Carer with Mental Illness*.
- Ferrara, K., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Newcombe, N. S., Golinkoff, R. M., & Shallcross, W. (2011). Block Talk: Spatial Language During Block Play. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 5(3), 143-151. <http://doi.org/DOI: 10.1111/j.1751-228X.2011.01122.x>
- Fisher, K. R., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Newcombe, N., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2013). Taking Shape: Supporting Preschoolers' Acquisition of Geometric Knowledge Through Guided Play. *Child Development*, 84(6), 1872-1878. <http://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12091>
- Ginsburg, K. R. (2007). The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds. *Pediatrics*, 119(1), 182-91. <http://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2006-2697>
- Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (2003). *The Early Catastrophe: The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3*. American Educator, Spring, 4-9. Retrieved from <http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/TheEarlyCatastrophe.pdf>
- Heidi Moore. (2011). WHY PLAY IS THE WORK OF CHILDHOOD The Fred Rogers Center. Retrieved January 5, 2016, from <http://www.fredrogerscenter.org/2014/09/23/why-play-is-the-work-of-childhood/>
- Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R. M., & Eyer, D. (2004). Einstein Never Used Flash Cards: How Our Children Really Learn--and Why They Need to Play More and Memorize Less. Rodale. Retrieved from <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=9kP1XjUEa-IC&pgis=1>
- Houtenville, A. J., & Conway, K. S. (2007). *Parental Effort, School Resources and Student Achievement*. Retrieved December 17, 2015, from http://pubpages.unh.edu/~ksconway/Parental_Effort_Feb07.pdf
- Huntsman, L. (2008). *Parents with mental health issues: Consequences for children and effectiveness of interventions designed to assist children and their families*. Literature review. Ashfield NSW. Retrieved from http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/321646/research_parentmentalhealth.pdf
- Kennedy, A., & Stonehouse, A. (2012). *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. Practice Principle Guide Guide 6. Integrated Teaching and Learning Approaches*. Melbourne. Retrieved from <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/practiceguide6.PDF>
- L. Emerson, J. Fear., Fox.S., & Sanders, E. (2012). *Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research*. Retrieved from http://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/77/filename/Parental_engagement_in_learning_and_schooling_Lessons_from_research_BUREAU_ARACY_August_2012.pdf
- Langrock, A. M., Compas, B. E., Keller, G., Merchant, M. J., & Copeland, M. E. (2002). Coping with the stress of parental depression: Parents' reports of children's coping, emotional and behavioural problems., 31(3). http://doi.org/10.1207/S15374424JCCP3103_03
- Loury, G. . (1977). A dynamic theory of racial income differences. In P. . Wallace & A. . Mund (Eds.), *Women, Minorities and Employment*

Discrimination. (pp. 153-186.). Lexington, MA: Heath.

Marcon, R. (2002). ECRP. Vol 4 No 1. Moving up the Grades: Relationship between Preschool Model and Later School Success. *Early Childhood Research and Practice*, 4(1), 517-530. Retrieved from <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v4n1/marcon.html>

Marmot, M., Allen, J., Goldblatt, P., Boyce, T., McNeish, D., Grady, M., & Geddes, I. (2010). 'The Marmot review: Fair society, healthy lives. The Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England Post-2010. Retrieved from <http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/projects/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review>

McLean, K., Edwards, S., Colliver, Y., & Schaper, C. (2014). Supported playgroups in schools: What matters for caregivers and their children? *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 39(4), 73-80. Retrieved from <http://www.scopus.com/inward/record.url?eid=2-s2.0-84922773843&partnerID=tZOtx3y1>

Merton, R. K. (1968). The Matthew Effect in Science. The reward and communication systems of science are considered. *Science*, 159(3810), 56-63. Retrieved from <http://www.garfield.library.upenn.edu/merton/matthew1.pdf>

Mission Australia. (2014). Schools as Banks for Social Capital. Celebrating our impact & securing our future. Dandenong, VIC. Retrieved from <http://www.itsjustapostcode.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Schools-as-Banks-for-Social-Capital-Prospectus-FINAL-web.pdf>

Mission Australia. (2015). Schools as banks for social capital. Sharing the story of two schools building, shaping and enabling a community, one partnership at a time. Dandenong, VIC. Retrieved from <http://www.itsjustapostcode.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Artefact.pdf>

Mize, J., & Pettit, G. S. (2010). The mother-child playgroup as socialisation context: a short term longitudinal study of mother-child-peer relationship dynamics. *Early Child Development and Care*, 180(10), 1271-1284. <http://doi.org/10.1080/03004430902981470>

Moore, T. (2007). The Impact Of Early Child Development And Experience On Later Outcomes. In *Maribyrnong Early Years AEDI Forum*. Melbourne. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242354140_THE_IMPACT_OF_EARLY_CHILD_DEVELOPMENT_AND_EXPERIENCE_ON_LATER_OUTCOMES

Moore, T. G., McDonald, M., & Sanjeevan, S. (2013). Evidence-based service modules for a sustained home visiting program: A literature review. Melbourne. Retrieved from <https://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/140>

Morgan, L., Chodkiewicz, A., & Diaz, C. J. (2013). Developing early literacies in informal settings: Addressing aspects of language and culture in supported playgroups. *International Journal of Early Childhood Learning*, 19(3), 23-34. Retrieved from <http://www.scopus.com/inward/record.url?eid=2-s2.0-84884367098&partnerID=tZOtx3y1>

NSW Department of Community Services. (2008). Parental mental health and its impact on children. Retrieved February 11, 2016, from http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/321631/researchnotes_parental_mentalhealth.pdf

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. General Assembly Resolution 44/25 of 20. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/convention-rights-child>

Playgroup Victoria. (2012). Volunteers and playgroups : strengthening civil society, (December), 1-3.

Playgroup Victoria. (2014). Policy brief 6. Playgroups in schools. Melbourne.

Putnam, R. D., & Goss, K. A. (1993). The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life. *The American Prospect*, 13(Spring), 1-15.

Robert D. Putnam. (1995). Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 65-78. Retrieved from <http://archive.realtor.org/sites/default/files/BowlingAlone.pdf>

Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. (2009). Position Statement 56 Children of parents with a mental illness. Retrieved from [http://www.wpanet.org/uploads/News-Zonal-Representatives/wpa-policy-papers-from-zone-18/Zone-18-\(RANZCP\).ps56-pdf.pdf](http://www.wpanet.org/uploads/News-Zonal-Representatives/wpa-policy-papers-from-zone-18/Zone-18-(RANZCP).ps56-pdf.pdf)

Runyan, D. K., Hunter, W. M., Socolar, R. R., Amaya-Jackson, L., English, D., Landsverk, J., ... Mathew, R. M. (1998). Children who prosper in unfavorable environments: the relationship to social capital. *Pediatrics*, 101(1 Pt 1), 12-8. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9417144>

Strange, C., Bremner, A., Fisher, C., Howat, P., & Wood, L. (2016). Mothers' group participation: associations with social capital, social support and mental well-being. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(1), 85-98. <http://doi.org/10.1111/jan.12809>

Strange, C., Fisher, C., Howat, P., & Wood, L. (2014a). Creating a Village in Modern Suburbia: Parenthood and Social Capital. *Urban Policy and Research*. <http://doi.org/10.1080/08111146.2014.969399>

Strange, C., Fisher, C., Howat, P., & Wood, L. (2014b). Fostering supportive community connections through mothers' groups and playgroups. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 70(12), 2835-46. <http://doi.org/10.1111/jan.12435>

VicHealth. (2015). VICHEALTH MENTAL WELLBEING STRATEGY 2015-2019. Melbourne. Retrieved from [file:///C:/Users/Joanne/Downloads/VicHealth Mental Wellbeing Strategy 2015-2019.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Joanne/Downloads/VicHealth%20Mental%20Wellbeing%20Strategy%202015-2019.pdf)

Victoria State Government. (2013). Your Maternal and Child Health Service Visits'. Retrieved December 18, 2015, from <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/parents/mch/pages/visits.aspx>

Vygotsky, L. . (1978a). Pedagogy and Curriculum. In *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (pp. 88, 89-90, 86). MA: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. . (1978b). The Role of Play in Development. In M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Soubberman. (Eds.), *Mind in Society. The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (pp. 92-104). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Retrieved from http://www.colorado.edu/physics/EducationIssues/T&LPhys/PDFs/vygot_chap7.pdf

Wagner, T. (2012). Watch "Play, passion, purpose: @ " Video at TEDxTalks. New York. Retrieved from <http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/TEDxNYED-April-28-2012-Tony-Wag>

Walker, D., Greenwood, C., Hart, B., & Carta, J. (1994). Prediction of School Outcomes Based on Early Language Production and Socioeconomic Factors. *Child Development*, 65(2), 606-621. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.1994.tb00771.x>

Williams, P., & Pocock, B. (2010). Building "community" for different stages of life: physical and social infrastructure in master planned communities. *Community, Work & Family*, 13(1), 71-87. <http://doi.org/10.1080/13668800902903300>

Witten, K., Kearns, R., McCreanor, T., Penney, L., & Faalau, F. (2009). Connecting place and the everyday practices of parenting: insights from Auckland, New Zealand. *Environment and Planning A*, 41(12), 2893-2910. <http://doi.org/10.1068/a41377>

Wood, L., Giles-Corti, B., Zubrick, S. R., & Bulsara, M. K. (2011). "Through the Kids . . . We Connected With Our Community": Children as Catalysts of Social Capital. *Environment and Behavior*, 45(3), 344-368. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0013916511429329>

