

SEPTEMBER 2018

ISSUE 03

#PLAYGROUPVIC

PLAYGROUP NEWS

for professionals



Playgroup
Victoria



Inside this issue

- + We explore the world of disability, talk health and well-being
- + Examine the benefits of play and what purpose it has in our lives
- + Hear insights from Dr Sandro Demaio, Professor Karen Stagnitti, MyTime facilitators, playgroupers and local staff
- + Find out about the wonderful events coming up during Children's Week
 - + Celebrate the community spirit of playgroup

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A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

We have exciting news to share about Playgroup Victoria's Membership. Over the last 12 months we have conducted a Membership and Engagement Strategic Review. Playgroup Victoria has been operating as the peak body for playgroups for over 40 years. Over this time our membership model has evolved. We are making some changes to better suit our community and stakeholders to enable participation.

We have developed a model that promotes and supports access and participation. As the peak body we must be able to measure and understand the outcomes of participation. To this end I am pleased to announce that we will be introducing a new model of engagement.

This will include:

Free subscription to our monthly newsletter

Free Professional Affiliation which will include:

- Access to our revamped Playgroup Toolkit
- Professional resources and training (Please see the Sing&Grow professional development opportunity on page 16)
- Playgroup development support and advocacy

A reduced cost to Playgroup Victoria registration which will include playgroups having access to:

- A new online portal to manage their playgroups including the ability to create and delete sessions
- A comprehensive and updated Tool Kit of evidence based activities and programs
- Public Liability and Property Insurance coverage

We want to engage with our playgroup community, creating an environment where families, children, professionals and organisations can see value in the relationship. This includes our Playgroup Development Model provided by our Playgroup Development Consultants. Our Consultants will add value to your existing place-based approaches to playgroup development, offering ongoing professional support and engagement including the Communities of Practice for DET funded Supported Playgroup Facilitators. I am also pleased to announce the introduction of the following initiatives launching later this year.

Free Playgroup Victoria registration for all first-time parent groups that continue as a Baby Playgroup

Free Playgroup Victoria registration for all Supported Playgroups

(including the first year they transition into a Community Playgroup)

We look forward to inviting you to join us when we launch our new model and system later this year.

Amidst this transitional change, we have decided not to proceed with our Playgroup Awards for 2018. We value your input and feedback, so together we can support children and families to access and participate in playgroup.

Warm regards,

Danny Schwarz



LIBRARY WEEK

20 - 24 August 2018

It was a joy to hear Mandarin, Dutch, Arabic, Italian, French, Spanish, Polish, Japanese, Urdu and English float through our local libraries as we shared various languages, songs and art for Library Week.

Melissa Thompson from Signee Tots Playgroup signed Auslan for the children at the North Fitzroy Library and together they did a unique rendition of *The Rainbow Song*, which beautifully tied in with our featured picture book this year, *The Rainbow Fish*, by Swiss author Marcus Pfister.

[Head to our Facebook to watch the bilingual storytimes](#)



Library Week took place at various libraries including: Weribee, Bendigo, Doncaster, Coburg and North Fitzroy



PLAYGROUP VICTORIA CONFERENCE

THURSDAY 28 MARCH 2019

We have looked far and wide, gathering many experts and professionals in a range of fields. This will not be your average conference. You are invited to hear from the leading thinkers in Australia. We are promoting well-being and as such, we are welcoming an assembly of interesting academics, teachers, visionaries and those who know children best- Mums and Dads!

This conference will focus on new discoveries and uncover old gems. It will encourage you to think outside of the box. It will encourage you to compare and contrast.
It will encourage you to explore innovative thinking.

Our key note speaker for this year will be Professor Dorothy Scott, an honorary professorial fellow in social work at the University of Melbourne and an adjunct professor at the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia. Dorothy, who is Playgroup Victoria's Patron, has worked in the field of mental health, and child and family services.

The conference will take place on Thursday the 28th of March at the Novotel on Collins Street. On Friday we will be holding a meeting for playgroup professionals who participate in Communities of Practice. Communities of Practice is provided by Playgroup Victoria for Department of Education and Training who fund Supported Playgroup Facilitators across Victoria.

SOUTH EAST METRO NEWS

Playgroup Development Consultant Leanne Dhami shares the latest news from the playgroups community in the South East Metro region





Play in the Park photography courtesy of Rachel Bell and Gina Callendar

Play in the Park

Words by Leanne Dharmi

On the last Tuesday of each month we travel down to picturesque East Gippsland to facilitate activities for “Play in the Park”. In partnership with East Gippsland’s *Save the Children*, we run free two hour outdoor playgroup session. Local families are invited to join in, making the most of the amazing outdoor space at Bairnsdale All Abilities playground. Local early years professionals are there to make families feel welcome, and share information about local supported and community playgroups, parenting and family programs and services. September “Play in the Park” will be hosted by East Bairnsdale Community Hub on the 25th September. Everyone is welcome to join in the fun.



Communities of Practice

DET Supported Playgroup Facilitators will get together as part of Communities of Practice. This term we will be facilitating the sessions in Leongatha for Outer Gippsland, Hastings for Bayside and Berwick for South East Metro. A range of guest speakers will inspire new ideas and discussion. The sessions are always dynamic, providing a chance to build better practice and challenge ideas within the supported playgroups. We look forward to seeing all the facilitators again and planning for term 4.

Training for Community Playgroup Leaders

Nestled in the new housing estate in Clyde North is Selandra Community Hub. Selandra has become the meeting place for many local families. With multiple playgroup sessions now running out of the Hub, we have begun to offer community playgroup leader training to support and mentor local families. Once a term, we host basic training covering a range of topics from *The importance of play* to *How to be a welcoming playgroup*. We are looking forward to meeting many new people who are keen to learn more about community playgroups. Anyone is welcome!

Please contact me for details of up coming training: LDHAMI@playgroup.org.au

Boisdale Community Playgroup

Boisdale Consolidated Primary school has been home to a community playgroup since 2014. The playgroup started off as a small group in a disused classroom, but it has grown to include three sessions a week. The playgroup leader, Elizabeth Kovco, winner of Playgroup Victoria's *Community Playgroup Leader of the Year* in 2016, continues to advocate for playgroups in the Wellington Shire. Elizabeth and the playgroup, along with support from the school, have been applying for grants and raising funds to create an outdoor area for the playgroup. We are looking forward to seeing children play here for many years to come.





Boisdale Community Playgroup

WHAT'S ON?



CHILDREN'S WEEK

FRIDAY 19 – SUNDAY 28 OCTOBER 2018

Children's Week celebrates the right of children to enjoy childhood. It is also a time for children to demonstrate their talents, skills and abilities. Thousands of children and their families around the country are involved in activities and events during the week through the participation of schools, playgroups, childcare, kindergartens, cultural groups, libraries, departments and community groups.

To find out more head to: www.childrenswEEK.org.au

Romp and Stomp

Celebrate Children's Week at Melbourne Museum for our annual Romp and Stomp fun day!

This event is designed for children between the ages of 0 and 5 years, to experience fun play-based activities which highlight the value of education, experiences and diversity in early childhood.

Featuring live exhibits, craft activities, special performances by renowned storytellers, performers, musicians plus so much more. The museum itself is home to an array of wonderful exhibits. This is an event not to be missed

Date: Wednesday 24 October

Time: 10am -2pm

Address: Melbourne Museum 11 Nicholson st, Carlton

FIND MORE INFO ABOUT THIS EVENT HERE



Glen Eira Pop-Up Playgroup

As part of the Glen Eira Seniors Festival and Children's Week, Playgroup Victoria will host an intergenerational Pop-Up Playgroup in Glen Eira. Join us for a morning of fun and games, with a range of activities for the young and young at heart.

The Pop-Up Playgroup will celebrate the shared connection between generations. All ages welcome.

Date: Tuesday 23 October

Time: 9.30am-11.30am

Address: 118 Leila Road, Carnegie

This is a free event, no bookings required.



Tiptoe Giants children's music show

Saturday 20 October 2018
Performances at 9.30am and 11am
Glen Eira Town Hall — Theatrette
Corner Glen Eira and Hawthorn Roads
Caulfield

Tickets are \$10. To book, contact 9524 3333
or visit www.gleneira.vic.gov.au/tiptoe

Come stomp, dance, and tiptoe with indie-kindie band *Tiptoe Giants* — creating original family music about the small and big things in life. Their live and dynamic shows incorporate high-energy dancing, charming harmonies and live instrumentals to captivate and inspire the **little giant in each of us!** *Tiptoe Giants'* fun, contemporary and wholesome music **empowers** children to **think, feel** and **grow** as individuals and within communities.

Please note: children must be accompanied by an adult, no food is permitted in the Theatrette and pram storage will not be available at the event.

BENTLEIGH BENTLEIGH EAST BRIGHTON EAST CARNEGIE
CAULFIELD ELSTERNWICK GARDENVALE GLEN HUNTLY
MCKINNON MURRUMBEENA ORMOND ST KILDA EAST

DO YOU HAVE
YOUR FEET
READY?



GLEN EIRA
CITY COUNCIL

What is Music Therapy?

Music therapy is a research-based practice and profession in which music is used to actively support people as they strive to improve their health and wellbeing

(Australian Music Therapy Association Inc)

For more information head to the Australian Music Therapy Association website:

www.austmta.org.au



SING & GROW

Professional Development Opportunity

Sing&Grow has developed a two hour experiential Music Tools Workshop for staff working in Healthcare or Community settings, with children aged 0-5 years. The workshop provides practical strategies and tools for incorporating music into everyday work with children to support learning, transitions, behaviour management, creativity and fun.

The sessions will help to inspire participants with new ideas and activities that can be immediately applied in the workplace. Some of the topics covered in the workshop include:

- + *Finding your voice - demystifying singing*
- + *Encouraging little voices - ways to encourage children to sing*
- + *Transitions - how to use music to transition children between tasks/activities*
- + *The value of spontaneous songs - music can be used flexibly in a multitude of situations!*
- + *Cultural considerations*

WHEN?

Two free workshops are being offered to early childhood workers and supported playgroup facilitators on:

Thursday 18th October 10am-12pm

Tuesday 30th October 10am-12pm

WHERE?

Playgroup Victoria Head Office in Brunswick.

Refreshments will be provided. Spaces are limited to 10 participants per workshop. Click link below to register.

Workshops will be delivered by Registered Music Therapist and Sing&Grow VIC/TAS Manager Meredith Drinkell.

[click here to register](#)



Sing&Grow is an evidence based national music therapy program working to reduce the impact of adversity experienced by some of Australia's most marginalised families with children aged 0-5 years. By building the capacity of caregivers, children's well-being and resilience is supported in an ongoing way.

Sing&Grow works in partnership with existing family support organisations to engage families in flexible music-sharing opportunities to encourage caregiver-child interactions, build caregiver confidence and knowledge, and enhance social connectedness by connecting caregivers and children to other families and community services.

[Learn more about Sing&Grow HERE](#)

EXPLORING GENDER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS

Girls 'n' boys come out to play



Monday 29th October

10:00am until 2:30pm

Training 10 – 1, Catered Lunch 1 – 1:30,
“Girls ‘n’ Boys Come Out to Play show
1:30 – 2:30

At 100 Drummond Street, CARLTON
(12 min walk from Parliament station)

Bookings at sinem.celep@ds.org.au

- » Understanding family violence in Australia
- » Impact on early years sector
- » Why does it happen?
- » How big an issue is it?
- » How do we prevent it?
- » The link with Playgroups – you can make a difference
- » How to manage disclosures
- » Using music and fun to promote gender equality

THE PURPOSE OF PLAY

We chat with play expert Professor Karen Stagnitti from Deakin University





Image courtesy of Deakin University

Professor Karen Stagnitti studies

THE PURPOSE OF PLAY

Play takes on many guises. Depending on your perspective it ranges in importance. Seldom do people realise that play has an important role in adulthood. It keeps our brains in shape and functioning at its best capacity. Things such as cooking, sport, art activities, puzzles and creative activities are all types of play. For children, play is a vital building block. The first 1000 days of a child's life are cited as a profound period of learning, laying the foundations for future years to come. Play aids a child's development in crucial ways. While at play the body is intricately joining neurons, configuring the brain, creating fine and gross motor skills, interpreting emotions and connecting human life to meaning. Play is purposeful. Play is also a wonderful source of joy. Play is part of who we are as a species.

Professor Karen Stagnitti has dedicated nearly 40 years of her career to working and studying the many types of play within 'play'. Read on as we explore and dissect what play means and how it impacts our growth.

Professor Karen Stagnitti is featured on our blog. Read the full play article [HERE](#).

"It is essential emotionally for children because it is their language. Children can play out things they can't use language for."

Professor Karen Stagnitti





“As long as we are human, we need to play.”

Professor Karen Stagnitti

Great Start Grants

The \$50,000 Great Start Community Playgroup Grant Fund has been provided by the Minister for Families and Children, Minister for Early Childhood Education – The Honorable Jenny Mikakos.

Earlier in the year, newly established community playgroups were invited to make an application to Playgroup Victoria for a grant to support their playgroup to get off to a great start.

In 2018 priority was given to new community playgroups being set up by parents who are transitioning from first-time parents groups, promoted via the Maternal and Child Health state-wide workforce.

Successful applicants will receive:

- Mentoring from the Playgroup Victoria team
- A \$650 voucher to purchase equipment from Modern Teaching Aids
- Registration with Playgroup Victoria
- Access to Playgroup Victoria online resources

50 new community playgroups have now received their letter from the minister's office to inform them of their successful application under the Great Start Grant.

Mentoring from a member of the Playgroup Victoria team will commence over the coming weeks. Playgroup staff will support these groups in the critical early stages of set-up. Parent run community playgroups provide a playgroup experience that benefits children and families.

CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM THIS YEAR'S GREAT START GRANT ROUND.



Maternal & Child Health Service in partnership with Playgroup Victoria

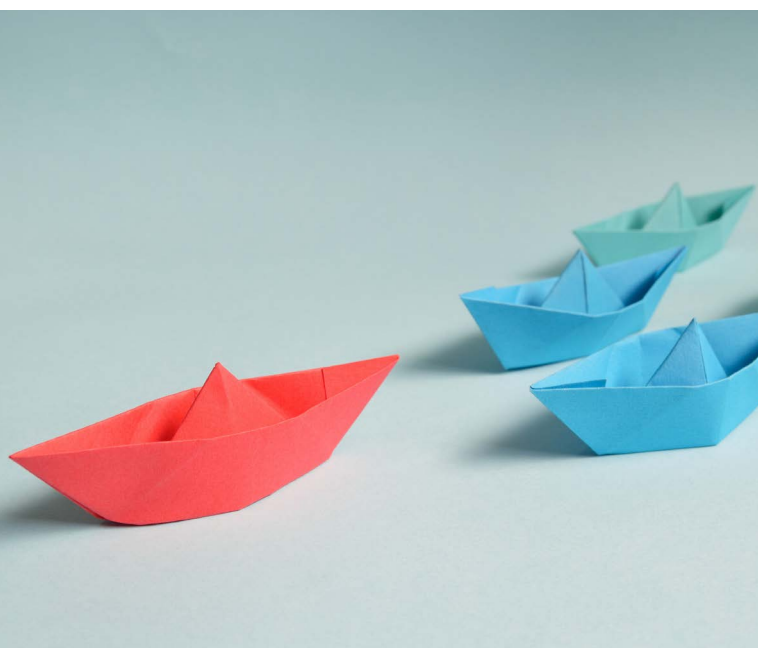
Playgroup Victoria has partnered with the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Victorian Maternal and Child Health Service for an exciting project. Together they will support first-time parent groups to transition into community playgroups. Eight Local Government Areas (LGA's) were selected to participate in a consultation process. Over 30 nurses from the eight sites have been interviewed. There were several key findings. These insights will guide the project as we move forward. The project covers two areas:

DEVELOPING TOOLS AND RESOURCES FOR NURSES

Through consultation with the MCH work force and their allied health colleagues, our collective aim is to provide a range of tools and resources that communicate key messaging about the importance of developing a support system for both parent and child. The project is now exploring what those messages are, what they look like and how they will be delivered to families. The eight LGA sites will later participate in the pilot, trialling the new tools and resources. From there, we will be able to determine how effective these transitional tools have been.

INTEGRATION WITH THE MCH APP

We are also developing ways to integrate this messaging into the existing MCH mobile application. The App, which was launched earlier this year by the Department of Education and Training, is targeted at new parents and provides information about the different stages of their child's development. The App currently provides information about play and playgroup. We are exploring ways to ensure the messaging in the App is aligned with our strategic objective of introducing baby playgroup as the first immediate transition from the first-time parent group.



Restoring the balance with

DR SANDRO DEMAIO



Image courtesy of Gareth Sobey: www.garethsobey.com

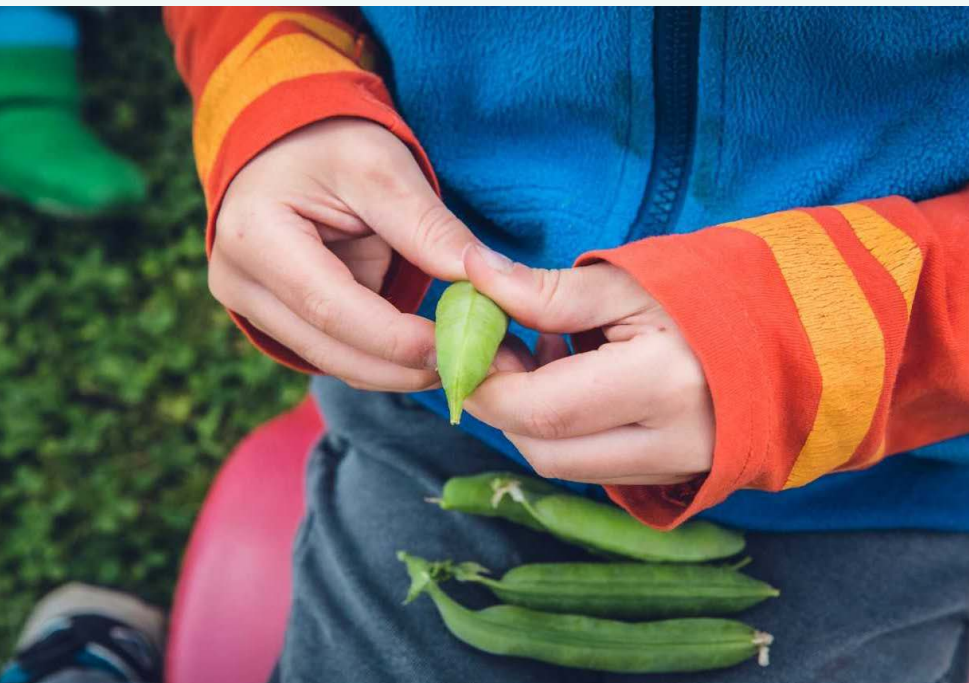
“Our food systems have shifted from a focus on seasonal, fresh and staple foods with minimal processing or meat, to an environment where junk foods and processed foods are ubiquitous, heavily advertised, hugely profitable and, for many communities, the only feasible ‘choice’.”

Dr Sandro Demaio CEO of the EAT Foundation in Oslo, Norway

You may recognise Dr Sandro Demaio from such things as the ABC's *Ask the Doctor*, or from his book, *The Doctors Diet*, yet his talents and impact extend far beyond this. Not only is he a trained doctor, beginning his career at The Alfred Hospital in Melbourne, he is a global health expert. He completed a PhD with the University of Copenhagen, focusing on non-communicable diseases and was the Medical Officer for non-communicable conditions and nutrition with the Department of Nutrition for Health and Development at the global headquarters of the World Health Organization. He also held a Postdoctoral Fellowship at Harvard Medical School from 2013 to 2015. These are only a few mere listings on his resume, but what is more, is he is a crusader for the health of our children, and the future health of their planet. Earlier this year he appeared alongside Jamie Oliver at the 2018 Business for Peace Summit tackling the issue of obesity. He is a voice of reason, with the experience and academic backing to hold him in good stead.

Dr Sandro joined us to discuss food, health and well-being. Read the full article [HERE](#).

Early childhood experiences profoundly shape a child's understanding of the world around them. What we teach children about food and the environment forms a big part of this. A child's lunchbox is a tell-tale sign of what their future food habits will look like.



We must hold onto our human connect to nature.

Excerpt from Restoring the Balance

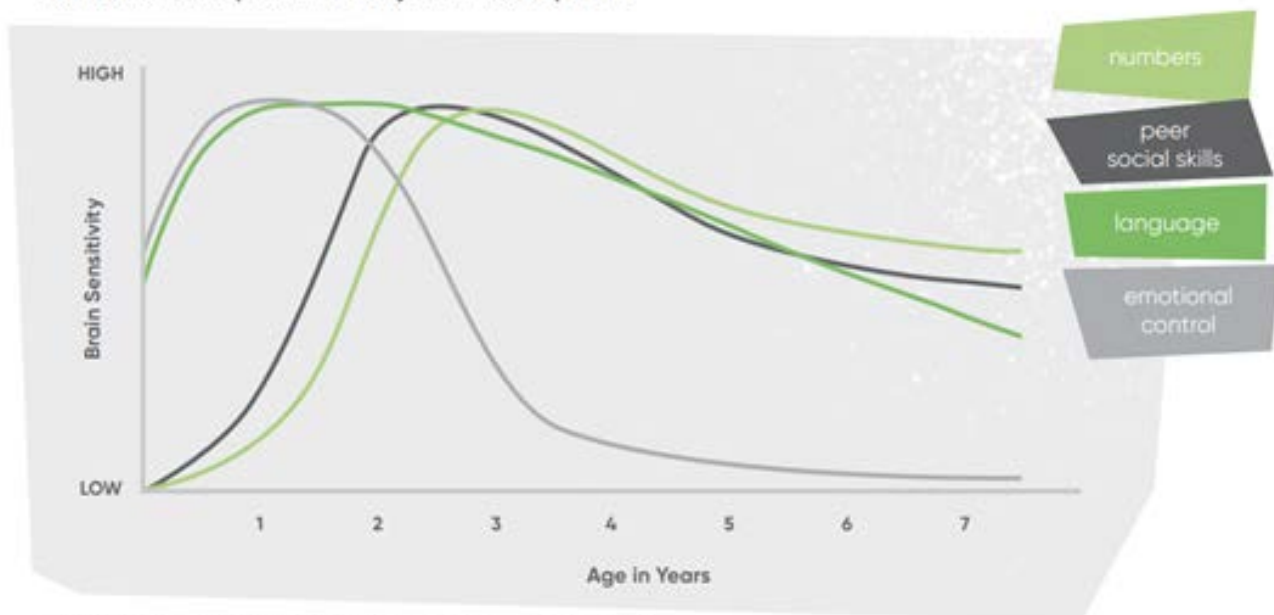


RESEARCH NEWS WITH DR JOANNE TARASUIK

PLAYGROUP: A TIMELY EXPERIENCE

Sensitive periods of early brain development occur in the years prior to formal schooling. Changes in brain development associated with learning numbers, peer social skills, language and emotional control are most sensitive before the age of 3yrs.

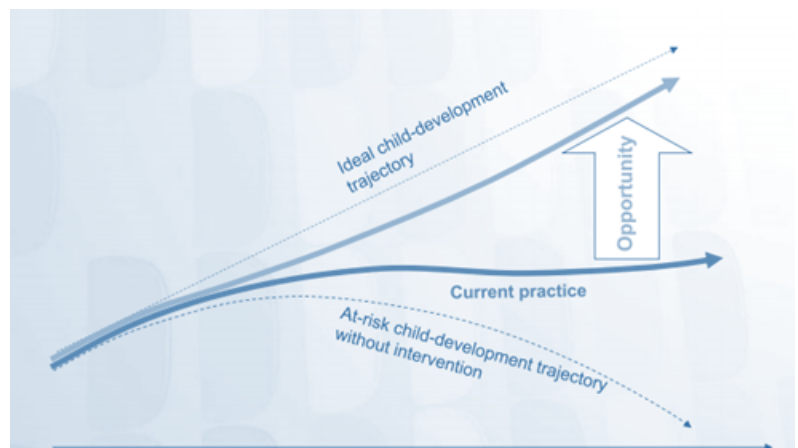
Chart 1: Sensitive periods in early brain development



(Susan Pascoe & Deborah Brennan, 2017)

CREATING A STRONG FOUNDATION

Before the age of 5, it takes less time, intensity and repetition to organize the developing neural systems than it does to reorganize already-developed neural systems. The environment that a young child experiences sculpts the brain; this establishes the trajectory for long term cognitive and social-emotional outcomes.



Source: Okerklaide 2015. Critical development occurs from conception to 2nd birthday; the first 1,000 days. (Centre for Community Child Health, 2018)



The first 1,000 days of life is a period of time that has the greatest and most profound impact on brain development, due to:

- Brain plasticity: this decreases with age as brain circuits stabilise; to change earlier in life.
- Brain architecture and skills: strong foundations are important because higher level circuit and skills are built on lower level circuits.
- Synaptic pruning: pathways that aren't used are 'pruned', making the brain more efficient.

INVESTMENT IN THE EARLY YEARS

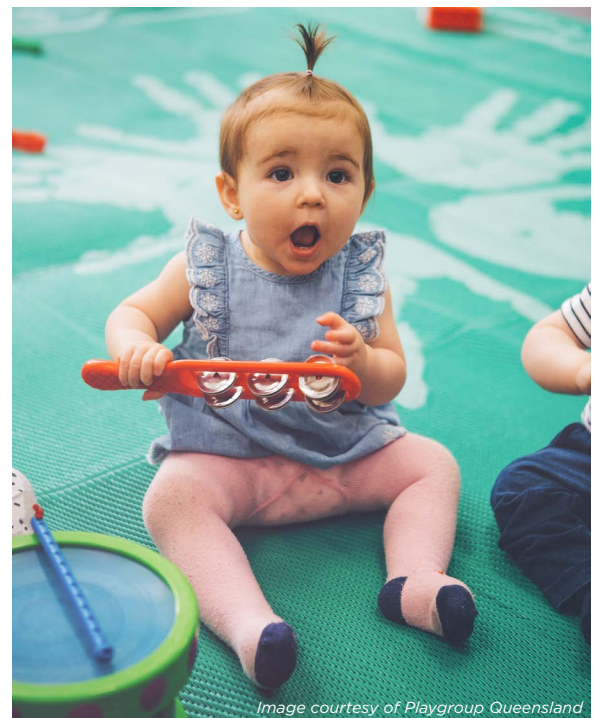
"Investments that occur early in a child's life have the potential not only to increase health, happiness and wellbeing in the here and now but also to offset future costs associated with remediating potential negative impacts." (pp19, Susan Pascoe & Deborah Brennan, 2017)

In this body of work, most commonly cited James Heckman, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in the year 2000. He wrote:

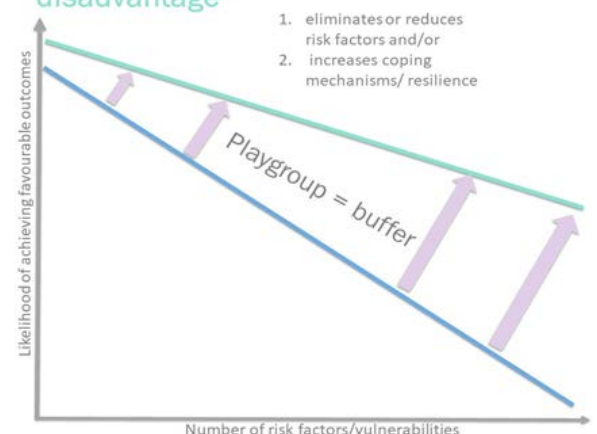
"A large body of research in social science, psychology and neuroscience shows that skill begets skill; that learning begets learning. **The earlier the seed is planted and watered, the faster and larger it grows.** There is substantial evidence of critical or sensitive periods in the lives of young children. Environments that do not stimulate the young and fail to cultivate both cognitive and non-cognitive skills place children at an early disadvantage." ("Investing In Disadvantaged Young Children is An Economically Efficient Policy," n.d.)

Changing the trajectory for children can occur at any time in life, but it is most efficient to do so in the first years of life; these years are also 'the playgroup years'.

Playgroup can play a part in this through the experiences that are provided to children, parents and families when attending playgroup. Learning through play, socialising with other children and families can all contribute to positive experiences, learning and development and increased wellbeing.



Playgroups; disrupting the cycle of disadvantage





Playgroup Development Consultant – CBD/Metro Region

BELINDA DAVIES

How long have you worked at Playgroup Victoria?

I have just passed the one-month mark. So officially I have been at Playgroup Victoria for one month and one day!

What is your background?

I trained in early childhood education, but I have diversified my interests, working with disadvantaged families. I have worked in early parenting centres, family services, as a Playgroup coordinator and a neighbourhood house group work facilitator. I really enjoy facilitating group work programs and have an Advanced Diploma in Group Work Facilitation.

What does your new role at Playgroup Victoria involve?

My role has various elements to it. I facilitate the Communities of Practice for DET funded supported playgroup facilitators.

I am also a mentor for the Great Start Grant funding recipients. I set up Pop-Up Playgroups and support playgroups in the Metro area.

What region will be your primary focus?

I'm responsible for South West, North West and North East metro areas. Quite a few LGA's – 21 in fact. They keep me busy.

Why did this role appeal to you?

I'm quite a social person at work and enjoy meeting and finding out about people's interests and the places they live in. I am passionate about children's development and how it all relates to play and builds on their relationships with their parents, carers, families, peers and their community.

What do you enjoy most about your role?

Getting out of the 'log cabin' here in Brunswick and meeting the families and supporting the playgroups.

Why do you think playgroup is important? What are the benefits of playgroup?

Playgroups offer many great things. I think the most important benefit it brings to people is breaking down the isolation factor. Sharing ideas, laughter, fun, stimulating environments for children and their carers is a big win for all. I've seen the building of wonderful friendships between the old and the young. I remember over 21 years ago my eldest son and I attended our very first playgroup and we have still maintained our solid friendships with those families. We enjoyed lots of play-dates, camping trips and mother's nights out. We still do!

What are you working on at the moment?

I'm working on introducing myself to the various groups and networks in the Metro region through the Community of Practice groups.

What positive change have you seen take place?

There are many exciting things that are on the verge of being announced at Playgroup Victoria. It's been the right time to start the job. The new membership model is a great change and I look forward to that rolling out over the next few months.

A WORLD OF THEIR OWN

The resilience and endurance of this small group of parents is astounding. The circumstances they find themselves in render them without choice. They have grown a thick skin, like leather. Sometimes they barely sleep for days. They have encountered confronting diagnosis, and some are placed in a category of 'unknown'. Diagnosis or no diagnosis, the unpredictability of daily life changes here like the weather during the wet season in the north part of Australia: it can be hot, humid and suffocating with unforeseen downpours of heavy rain, floods, spectacular electrical storms, followed by cold nights. There are also moments of sheer beauty and unconditional love. This is the life of a parent who has a child with a disability. While the range of disabilities distinctly vary, the peaks of each child brings bouts of joy and troughs of hard times. Everyone has their own unique story. On a cool winters morning, we hear only parts of the story. Judith calls it "disability world" and for these parents it is 24 hours, around the clock care.



"When you come here it is like it's almost freeing a little bit.

Everyone understands"

[READ FULL ARTICLE ABOUT MYTIME FERNTREE GULLY HERE](#)

"Play is the beginning of knowledge"

George Dorsey



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