



## NEWS FOR PROFESSIONALS



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*Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury.  
Play is a necessity.  
- Kay Redfield Jamison*

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# A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



One of the things we focus on at Playgroup Victoria is inclusion. We want playgroup to be accessible, allowing all families and children to participate. For this to happen, playgroups must meet the needs of the community and reflect the community. As you will see in this issue, a variety of playgroups are meeting the needs and reflect the diversity in the community. While there are some terrific examples of inclusivity, I think we can be doing more.

I have had a focus on Dads Playgroups in recent times, the subject of which was highlighted in the media via Me and My Dad Playgroup in Ballarat, see the story below. It has always troubled me as a parent and a father that in society's eyes, staying home in a primary caring role was different and even 'special' just because I am a man. We need to change the paradigm so the role of men staying home is seen and valued as normal.

Should this happen I believe we could begin decreasing the risk and incidence of depression which spikes in men in the first 12 months after a baby is born. That is, if staying at home is the norm, automatically men have permission to parent. I have seen young fathers by themselves with their child for the first time at 6-8 months at a playgroup. They are not valued equally in these circumstances as a parent.

Bonding and improved outcomes for child development occur at playgroup. Supporting men at a time when we are at a substantially increased risk of experiencing psychological distress, must be a policy imperative for government.

Finally, please take some time to have a look at our ARC Linkage Project with ACU, A best Practice Framework for Playgroups in Schools. This is an excellent example of a project that is building the foundations for an evidence base that will support future policy agendas.

Warm regards,

*Danny Schwarz*

*[Find out more information on  
Fatherhood and Mental Illness  
from the Australian Institute  
for Family Studies \[HERE\]\(#\)](#)*

# PLAYGROUPS IN THE NEWS

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***Men-only playgroup pushes  
aside gender stereotypes to  
provide support for dads***

PHOTO SOURCE: Dominic Cansdale, ABC Ballarat



*"This is the first dads' playgroup I've seen. I've seen the odd Dad join a playgroup and I know first-hand they can feel a bit outside."*



**If you are a Dad wanting to find a playgroup, or know of someone that would like to be part of a Dads group, visit:**

<http://www.playgroup.org.au/FindaPlaygroup/Playgroup-Results.aspx?category1=Dads&pgs=1>

For a long time, playgroup has been a sanctuary for mothers. In addition to the history of women staying at home and child rearing, the natural progression from mothers groups to playgroups has contributed to the large number of women involved with playgroup. We are in a time of change and that is no longer the norm. As an increasing number of women return to the workforce after having their child, Dads and grandparents are often the primary care giver. Many Dads choose to stay home and enjoy time spent with their children. Dads groups have sprouted up and one caught our attention and that of the media. In Ballarat a group of Dads gather and bond. There is a relaxed atmosphere and part of this is due to the shared interests of the Fathers.

[Read full article By Dominic Cansdale, ABC Ballarat  
HERE](#)

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE](#)

*Early connections form in the great outdoors*

# BUSH PLAY

It is a relaxed atmosphere on this autumn day in Melbourne. Sun drapes across the grassy embankment, drawing dappled shade beneath the tall trees. Children point and gesture, grasping at their parents' hands, leading them down to a muggy bog. The children find this of great interest. They squish their feet in, they squelch, they grab leaves and paint upon the dry ground. They could be artist Gauguin or Picasso for the morning. Or they could simply be a young child revelling in the shapes and expression; the cause and effect. Sticks are at once oars beside their canoes, wands in their magical world and tools of explorers. Before they know it, playgroup is over for the week. So quickly time flies when these kids are outdoors, imagining, having fun.

The Merri Creek Bush Playgroup gathers twice a week, three if there is enough interest. The locations range around the gumtree laden Northcote area. Merri Park is one of their favourite places to settle. It is on Wurundjeri land. What was once a non-descript dirt expanse is now a carefully crafted landmark. It does not appear landscaped and that is part of its charm. The playgroup meets in what appears to be an old camping area affectionately named the 'The Magical Circle' with logs and a handmade cubby nook. Rocks and logs have been strategically placed for play. Learning is occurring in every moment.



There is something about being in the sunshine, in the fresh air, in the rain, on the grass, by the river- it is freeing. All preconceived worries seem smaller in comparison to the tall trees, the big clouds and the space. There is space to breathe, to spread out, and most importantly, to relax and play.

"Even if everyone comes from different horizons- different country of origin, different life, different parenting experience- we find that most families are sharing enough common values to create a nice and comfortable spirit for the group. These values being respect for the environment and a desire to share it with our children, as well as respect for people, a willingness to let our children play freely in nature, take risks and get dirty."

[Excerpt from Bush Play article.](#)

[Read full article HERE](#)

*"I have created so many memories at Merri Creek Bush Playgroup. I know I will look back on this time with fond memories!"*

- Sophie Audren





*“Even if everyone comes from different horizons – different country of origin, different life, different parenting experience – we find that most families are sharing enough common values to create a nice and comfortable spirit for the group. These values being respect for the environment and a desire to share it with our children, as well as respect for people, a willingness to let our children play freely in nature, take risks and get dirty.”*



# NAIDOC WEEK

8-15 JULY 2018

Learn about the significance of NAIDOC week and celebrate indigenous culture at an event near you.

To find out more head to: [www.naidoc.org.au](http://www.naidoc.org.au)



*“This years theme celebrates the essential role that women have played – and continue to play – as active and significant role models at the community, local, state and national levels.”*



# RESEARCH NEWS WITH DR JOANNE TARASUIK

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## Addressing disadvantage to optimize children's development in Australia

The Royal Children's Hospital's Centre for Community Child Health have created a Research Snapshot which summarizes the Changing Children's Chances project. It identified patterns in children's experiences of disadvantage over time, and quantified the long-lasting impacts.



## NEW EVIDENCE REPORT

### Risk and protective factors in early childhood: An ecological perspective

CoLab's latest evidence report presents an ecological perspective of early childhood development, discussing the impact of different environment, positive and negative experiences, public health initiatives, and the resulting implications for children's developmental trajectories.

## Social and emotional skills for student success and well-being

There is now a conceptual framework for the OECD study on social and emotional skills which recognizes the importance of social and emotional skills; as we know there are opportunities for these to be developed at playgroup.



## NEW RESOURCES:

### Developmental differences in children who have experienced adversity

A suite of practical guides now available for professionals supporting families of children with developmental difficulties. Developed Australian Institute of Family Studies' (AIFS) Child Family Community Australia information exchange, the resources address emotional dysregulation, diminished social reward, difficulty with executive functioning and threat bias. A supplementary outlines relevant emerging evidence.

# PLAY CONNECT

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PlayConnect provides facilitated playgroups for children with Autism or Autism-like characteristics. This means that anyone who may be exhibiting signs or behavioural problems are welcome. As too are siblings, grandparents and carers.

[Learn more about PlayConnect on our blog](#)



*“There is no other program quite like it that provides intentional support not only to the children attending the groups but also to the parents”*

- Playgroup Victoria PlayConnect Manager Isabella Rosinsky.

**[Find a PlayConnect Playgroup HERE](#)**

# PLAYGROUPS IN SCHOOLS

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT  
chealy@playgroup.org.au

This project aims to build and strengthen relationships between schools and their co-located community playgroups. Capitalising on these relationships this project will create a Best Practice Framework for playgroups-in-schools. The Best Practice Framework will inform the provision of playgroups-in-schools Victoria wide as an innovative form of early childhood integrated service delivery.

Eight school communities gathered recently in Horsham and Ballarat to participate in 'Shared Learning Sessions'. The purpose of this gathering was to connect playgroup families with school-based leaders and teaching staff to generate place-based approaches to better connect playgroup into the school community.

Families from Caledonian Primary School Playgroup shared their experience of being involved in the playgroups-in-schools project in the latest [Brown Hill Community Newsletter](#). [Read more HERE](#)

## **Ideas brainstormed during the session included;**

*Invite playgroup families to assemblies and other special school events*

*Connect families to school social media platform*

*Timetable for school teaching staff to visit playgroup to eg, read a story, introduce play-based activities*

*Allow time to build relationships so that connections between school staff and playgroup families is meaningful*

We look forward to following the journey of each school community as they collaborate on strategies to enhance connections between playgroup families and schools, which will inform the development of the Best Practice Framework for Playgroups-in-Schools.

[Find out more about this project HERE](#)







*Playgroup Development Coordinator - South Eastern Region*

## LEANNE DHAMI

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**How long have you worked at Playgroup Victoria?**

Five years

**What does your role involve?**

There are many different aspects to my role: I work on the ground with playgroups, everything from assisting to start new groups, to everyday support for groups to run. We work with local professionals and sit on many Early Years partnerships to advocate for playgroups and linking professional support with community playgroups. I also facilitate and support the DETsupported playgroup Facilitators through Communities of Practice.

**Where have you been based at your time at PG Vic?**

At the moment I have an office space in an amazing neighbourhood house at Selandra Community Hub. Most of the week involves being on the road visiting playgroups and professionals anywhere from Melbourne to Mornington to Mallacoota and everywhere in between.

**What first drew you to the job?**

I have always had the passion for playgroups and how important they are to children, families and communities. This job allowed me to share that passion across a huge area and make a real difference to so many communities.

**How have you seen things change positively over the years?**

I think playgroups are being recognised for what they are now - they support and nurture families and build stronger communities. Playgroups seem to have more of a place in the Early Years and that is awesome to see and be part of.

**What do you enjoy most about your role?**

Every day is different. I love that I get to visit playgroups, have fun meeting parents and children and seeing how much playgroup means to them, then being part of professional meetings and sharing that passion and enthusiasm for playgroups. I get the best of both worlds and can make a real difference.

**Why do you think playgroup is important?**

Playgroups gives children the opportunity to play, learn, grow and socialise. For the parents, playgroup gives them an opportunity to have fun playing with their children but to also spend time supporting other parents, building friendships and learning from each other. Sharing the joys of parenting but also being there for each other during the challenging times.



*Playgroup Development Coordinator – South Eastern Region*

**NAOMI  
TWIGG**

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#### How long have you worked at Playgroup Victoria?

I have worked with Playgroup Victoria in various roles for the past seven years but have only recently started working full time hours.

#### What does your role involve?

Alongside Leanne Dhami, I work across the south east DET region with 16 municipalities. We establish partnerships with councils and networks to best support and advocate for all playgroup and work on strengthening relationships with maternal Health Nurses. We co-ordinate the community of practices for the Department of education, supporting playgroup facilitators. I also facilitate a MyTime group in Ferntree Gully.

#### Where have you been based at your time at PG Vic?

I have worked with playgroup Victoria in various roles over seven years now. In the past I facilitated My Time groups and then earlier this year added the PDC role to my schedule. I have been working with playgroups for 18 years in different organisations.

#### Why did this role appeal to you?

Playgroup has always been my passion, both personally and professionally.

#### How have you seen things change positively over the years?

I have always believed in the theory that it takes a village to raise a child. Having personally been brought up in this environment, I know firsthand the benefits of this thinking. I see playgroup, in a way, as a village. Playgroup is the life line to the community. A soft entry point that links families in and connects them to each other, to professionals and the support they need.

#### What do you enjoy most about your role?

My role to advocate for playgroups and its so important as families in Australia are isolated and in great need. We have disconnected from our extended families and our wider community and by supporting playgroups I feel like I'm bringing people together and building bridges that will hopefully support parents, bring families and the community together and in the long term we will see positive outcomes in our future generations.



*Playgroup Development Consultants – South-West Region*

## LOUISE BUCKLE-SMITH MAUREEN HATCHER

### How long have you worked at Playgroup Victoria?

Maureen: I started in October 2016 as a Playgroup facilitator for the Connecting Schools & Communities project.

Louise: I worked for two years on a project (2015-2016) and returned in October 2017

### What does your role involve?

Our role involves supporting Playgroup facilitators, and working with families, other early childhood services and agencies to highlight the benefits of Playgroup.

### Where have you been based at your time at PG Vic?

We have both been based in Ballarat since we started, and now have an office at the Sebastopol Primary School.

### Why did this role appeal to you?

The variety of the role appealed. There is a great mix of networking with industry, interacting with families and reaching out to more remote areas in the area. The role is always evolving, providing new challenges and interest.

### What do you enjoy most about your role?

We both enjoy getting to know families as well as forming partnerships with organisations to support other opportunities. We love getting out into the community visiting playgroups and being a part of special events. There are some great things happening out there! This morning we participated in an intergenerational music session. It's always worth seeing happy faces (young and old) enjoying play!

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

There are so many benefits to Playgroup. The main one is families getting together. That socialisation is so important for mental health, child development, vulnerable families, and creating long lasting friendships. Also Playgroups are generally free or low cost, so it's do-able for most families.

### What have been some highlights of the job so far?

There have been many. We have done a number of pop up Playgroups in different towns across the region and we have visited some innovative playgroups. Other highlights include being involved in local and regional events such as *Food Is Free Green Space* launch with Costa Georgiadis, and Warrnambool Family Services' Play Day. We also recently had *Weekend Sunrise* filming the "Me and My Dad playgroup" at the school and that was a fun day!

### What are you working on at the moment?

We are working in partnership with Ballarat Toy Library to reach out and support the rural Playgroups. We have started conversations with a national child safe organisation, and a major Art project. We are also working on an intergenerational community playgroup. Watch this space!

### What positive change have you seen take place?

One of the biggest positives has been a part of creating an Early Years Hub at the primary school. There are now five playgroups a week including supported playgroups, community playgroups and the Me and My Dad playgroups. Being a part of a school community has created a supportive environment.



# RESTORING THE HUMAN CONNECTION

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Whittlesea playgroup are building relationships between young and old in their community. They have made great efforts to include grandparents, dads, carers and local groups, visiting the library and aged care facility on a regular basis. It is wonderful to see the camaraderie and learning that comes from the varied interactions at a local level- and the joy it brings is worth its weight in gold.



*"I recall one resident who seemed to be quite incapacitated, he was wheel chair bound and had not said a single word the entire time we were there. When the children started to sing row row row your boat something lit up inside him and he sang this song at the top of his lungs with a big smile on his face. He enjoyed it so much we did an encore performance just for him."*

- Karen Smith

**[Read full article about Whittlesea Playgroup HERE](#)**



*“Play is the highest form of research.”  
– Albert Einstein*

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