



Playgroup Victoria

2019/20 Annual Report



2019/20

Year at a Glance



Membership

9,636



3,094

Adults

+

6,542

Children

Members

578



Registered Supported Playgroups

1,967



Registered Community Playgroups



Playgroup Development

4,583



Partnerships with local professionals

1,718



Connections with local community playgroups

77

Local Government areas
engaged

178

Playgroup Development
Consultants

37

Local early years networks



Playgroup
Victoria

Playgroup Victoria
Annual Report 2019/20



Subscribers

24,784



Facebook

18,905 

Facebook Followers (June 30, 2020)



Instagram

2,990 

Instagram Followers (June 30, 2020)

18,864 

Facebook Page Likes (June 30, 2020)



Blog

5,493 

Facebook Group Members (June 30, 2020)

17.1k

Page Views



**Playgroup
Victoria**

Playgroup Victoria
Annual Report 2019/20



Purpose

To work with and support communities through local partnerships and relationships that enable access to and participation for children and families in playgroup.

Values

Respect - We value all people and embrace diversity.

Integrity - We are honest and accountable, and we follow through on our commitments.

Openness - We value new ideas, experiences and opportunities.

Vision

Fun, learning and friendship through playgroups.

Strategic Goals

Universal access to playgroups

Awareness of the benefits of playgroups

A strengthened playgroup experience for all

A financially sustainable PGV

Corporate Governance

Playgroup Victoria

About

Playgroup Victoria is a not-for-profit, incorporated association committed to helping all Victorian families discover the benefits of playgroups. We advocate for the benefits of play in a child's early years of learning and act as a support base for communities and families wanting to start and successfully run a playgroup.

During the late 1960s and early '70s, hundreds of playgroups were scattered throughout Melbourne and country Victoria. There became a need for some cohesion and networking between these groups and parents wanting to start and join playgroups. In response to the need, a group of hard-working volunteers came together and invited playgroups and interested people to ring in for advice and support on Monday mornings.

The response was so great that in 1974, the Victorian Playgroup Association was formed. Its goals were to set up an advisory service, fulfill the need for workshops, lectures and discussions

related to parenthood and life with children, and to liaise with local, state and federal governments. 45 years on, Playgroup Victoria is still working to ensure families have access to and can participate in playgroups. It has evolved to include grandparents, bush and dads' Playgroups. Funding from the Commonwealth and State Government has enabled Playgroup Victoria to develop a Community Development model of support. This place-based approach ensures the needs of the community are understood which helps foster relationships within local early childhood services.

Message

From Chair and CEO



Danny Schwarz

Playgroup Victoria CEO



Felicity Dunn

Chair of the Playgroup Victoria Board

As we write this report, Victoria is almost 6 weeks into Stage 4 Lockdown. While that along with all that has taken place since March has meant playgroups have stopped meeting, Playgroup Victoria has never been more connected with families. Since going online with our suite of interactive playgroups in March, over 11,000 families have participated. This demonstrates that a family's need for connection with others is intrinsic and that the power of the internet, to coin a phrase, has been the enabler. Who would or could have guessed?

There are so many phrases that have become synonymous. One is Before Corona (BC). Well, BC for Playgroup Victoria during 2019 and early 2020 has been exciting. In August, families across the country were glued to the TV when Old People's Home for 4-year-olds was screened on the ABC. The response from the community was overwhelming — people wanted to engage and connect with intergenerational Playgroups. In Victoria, we had 1200 parents and 200 individuals

interested in volunteering. 50 Early Learning Centres and a range of small and large Aged Care and Home Care Package Providers also contacted us. We developed an Intergenerational Playgroup Framework and delivered two in early 2020 with our partners, Vasey RSL Care. We will shortly commence a pilot online in Ballarat.

National Children's week in October again was full of activities including the 16th year of Romp

and Stomp at the Melbourne Museum. It was during National Children's week that we joined the National Advisory Group to formulate a Declaration on Playgroup. With a range of factors contributing to added pressure on families, including working parents, digitisation of society and increased social disconnection within local communities, there is the potential for very young children to be at risk of being invisible to the community until they reach school age.

This project is aimed at bridging the gap in general understanding and as evidence for the difference playgroups can make in the lives of parents and children. Through this project we aim to develop a synthesis of existing knowledge that provides evidence for the value of playgroups. It will contribute to a shared understanding of playgroups articulating an evidence-informed practice approach to the spectrum of playgroup models and will valorise the important role of playgroup in contributing to good outcomes for children and their adults.

The National Advisory group comprises academics and early childhood experts from around the country, from organisations such as the University of New South Wales, Australian Catholic University, Early Childhood Australia, Telethon Kids Institute and Murdoch Children's Research Institute. Playgroup Victoria is representing the Playgroup State and Territory Organisations around the nation.

As many of you may remember we were gearing up for our Annual Conference which was due to take place on March 19. As it became clear in the preceding weeks that COVID-19 was about to impact us, we cancelled a week before the borders were closed on March 20. Our first COVID-19 related campaign was our 20 days of Play which comprised a new activity each day for 20

days. Over a short period, the number of families joining our Playgroup at Home Facebook Page increased from 1200 to over 5000. To provide support to families, we introduced free family membership and have been working our way to contact every playgroup registered with us.

With our programs, 'All Come Out to Play' and 'Move it 4 Kids', not being able to be delivered face-to-face, we pivoted to an online format. In response to the hard lockdown in the public housing estates in Flemington and North Melbourne, we organised 'Move it 4 Kids' and a reading of 'Diary of a Wombat' by Australian author, Jackie French. We added Playgroup at Home Live, Baby Playgroup at Home, PlayConnect and MyTime to the suite, reaching nearly 1,000 families each week.

This has all been possible due to an extraordinary team of staff and voluntary Board Members, to whom we would like to say congratulations and thank you. Our funders, including the Federal and State Governments as well as support from some Local Governments, enable us to develop and deliver support to playgroups and families across the state. We would like to especially thank Gandel Philanthropy from whom we were the recipients of two major grants to further develop 'All Come Out To Play'.

We take this opportunity to wish everyone well and to stay safe.

Treasurers Report

During the year, Playgroup Victoria's new membership model was successfully implemented and has been online since the beginning of October 2019. With the establishment of the new membership model, revenue was projected to rise in line with an expected increase in the number of playgroup registrations and family memberships.

In March 2020, the Victorian State Government declared a state of emergency in response to the coronavirus pandemic. As Victoria went into lockdown, families were unable to join or attend their local playgroups. This led to a significant decrease in expected income derived from playgroup registrations and family memberships, the majority of which are typically renewed during the first quarter of the calendar year.

Despite the challenges faced by the ongoing pandemic, Playgroup Victoria remains a viable operating entity and continues to provide support to its playgroups and its families virtually through Playgroup at Home and other virtual playgroup initiatives. The equity position of the organisation has improved significantly at year-end as the Board looks to strengthen its reserves and ensure the ongoing viability of the organisation. The equity position of the organisation at year-end was \$537,393, compared to a prior year position of \$304,059.

For the financial year ended 30 June 2020, a surplus of \$234,338 was recorded, compared to a deficit of \$93,336 for the prior year. Revenues

increased by 15% to \$3,043,347 for the period, whilst expenses also increased by 2.7% to \$2,809,009. The increase in revenues was primarily attributable to the Federal Government's Covid-19 Business Cash Flow Grant and JobKeeper scheme. Additional revenues were also received as part of the NDIS Information, Linkages and Capacity Building program, as well as receipts from Philanthropic Trusts. Federal and State Government grants continue to be the main source of revenue, however due to the extraordinary circumstances of this year, government funding comprised over 85% of total income. Management and the Board maintain focus on developing strategies surrounding revenue diversification to reduce reliance on income received from the Government.

On behalf of the Board, I confirm that the financial statements present a true and fair view of the financial position of Playgroup Victoria Incorporated as at 30 June 2020 and that there are reasonable grounds to believe that Playgroup Victoria Incorporated can continue to pay its debts as and when they fall due.



Risk and Audit Committee Report

Financials

Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income For the Period Ended 30 June 2020

Income			
	Note	2020 (\$)	2019 (\$)
Conference fees		-	42,087
Contributions members		165,556	242,770
DGR revenue		680	0
Fee and charge - Roster Playgroup		-	2,779
Fee and charges - Play Day		2,227	4,936
Fundraising		-	26,369
Government subsidies received (Covid)		412,000	-
Grants - Philanthropic		256,121	146,879
Grants - My Time		425,886	445,177
Grants - Playgroup Australia		1,575,963	1,316,274
Grants - State Operating Cop's		211,218	208,117
Grants - State- Great Start Funding		-	50,320
Grants - State MCH First Time Parents		-	100,000
Interest		8,979	16,943
Other income		7,769	21,466
Sales - Advertising		909	2,327
Sales - Products		39	272
Wage subsidies received		-	12,948
Total Income		\$3,067,347	\$2,639,685
Expenditure			
Depreciation		41,882	57,270
Employment expenses		2,066,184	1,888,749
Insurance		56,333	53,233
Meeting expenses		1,750	3,572
Operating expenses		623,986	687,961
Travel and accommodation		13,869	22,688
Vehicle expenses		14,611	17,927
Impairment expense		-	1,621
Total Expenditure		2,818,615	2,733,021
Surplus (deficit) for the period		\$248,732	-93,336
Other comprehensive income		-	-
Total comprehensive income for the period		\$248,732	-93,336



Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2019

Current Assets			
	Note	2020 (\$)	2019 (\$)
Cash and cash equivalents	2	294,249	426,378
Financial assets	5	450,000	300,000
Trade & other receivables		174,053	126,800
Other current assets	6	43,250	59,283
Total Current Assets		961,552	912,461
Non-Current Assets			
Property, plant and equipment	7	45,022	55,126
Intangible assets	8	102,581	58,483
Total Non - Current Assets		147,603	113,609
Total Assets		1,109,155	1,026,070
Current Liabilities			
Trade and other payables	10	188,022	144,881
Grants and income in advance	10	154,407	337,650
Short term provisions	9	188,165	193,404
Total Current Liabilities		530,594	675,935
Non-Current Liabilities			
Trade and other payables	10	-	-
Long term provisions	9	25,770	46,076
Total Current Liabilities		25,770	46,076
Total Liabilities		556,364	722,011
Net Assets		552,791	304,059
Equity			
Reserves		4,643	70,915
Retained earnings		548,148	233,144
Total Equity		552,791	304,059



Playgroup Development

Throughout the year, the Playgroup Development team have been at the forefront in local communities, advocating for the playgroup platform. The Playgroup Development Consultants have increased their reach and involvement within communities across the state, from schools to community centres and neighbourhood houses, plus more active involvement with local community events targeted to families with young children. 2019-2020 reported more connections with playgroups via face-to-face visits and virtual means. There has also been an increase in the number of professionals we engage with across countless roles and organisations, an increase in the number of professional Early Years networks and forums we are part of, and enhanced relationships with the Supported playgroup sector. All of this leads to greater recognition and value of playgroups, both with families and professionals. The Playgroup Development team continue to exercise innovation and collaboration to maintain and enhance the partnerships we develop.

Communities of Practice: Funded by DHHS

Throughout 2019 -2020 the Playgroup Development team have continued to facilitate the 10 Community of Practice groups across Victoria for the DHHS Supported Playgroup Facilitators. Each term the facilitators look forward to connecting with each other, sharing ideas and practices. The topics of the meetings are shaped by those involved and the peer support component has proven to be incredibly valuable.

The Community of Practice forum provides facilitators with the opportunity to develop and enhance new skills to implement into their supported playgroups. It is also a space to reflect on their work practices and to use peer support to enhance their focus. The involvement of the Parenting Research Centre implantation team; encourages a holistic view on the facilitators practice and support. This collaborative partnership enhances the sessions to be informative and supportive.

Due to the pandemic, the State-wide Community of Practice in Term 1, 2020

was not able to go ahead. The Playgroup Development team took on a new approach for the remainder of 2020 by facilitating the sessions virtually.

Term 2 saw the team facilitate 33 virtual sessions for playgroup facilitators to come together. These sessions provided an opportunity for the playgroup facilitators to share their experiences and ideas during a turbulent time. The strength-based approach to the sessions, inspired and supported the playgroup facilitators to positively self-reflect on the practice.

The virtual model sustained higher participation from the playgroup facilitators throughout the term and established new methods of communication to stay connected with families. We continue to plan and develop virtual Community of Practice sessions for 2020.

Leanne Dhami
Playgroup Development Manager

Stories from the field

Partnerships promoting playgroups

Doveton College: OUR PLACE

Doveton College brings together a holistic approach to supporting families. With Early Learning, Prep to Year 9, family and children's services which includes a variety of different programs; it makes for the perfect community-based partner for Playgroup Victoria.

The PDCs (Playgroup Development Consultants) began communicating with multiple sites of the "Our Place" team across Melbourne. We were able to support them with information, resources and support, helping many parenting and family groups that were considering transitioning to community playgroups. Through this partnership, the PDCs were invited to present and introduce the concept of becoming a community group and to deliver Playgroup Development training to support the formation of a community group. The group participants were in the process of completing their community leadership course, and had identified playgroups as a valuable community service to offer families.

The group successfully formed, with the continued support of the PDCs and the "Our Place" team. The group had been able to translate their learnings from the playgroup training to result in a sustainable community playgroup model.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, the group had to stop meeting in March 2020. The leaders of the group are still in close contact and are keen to start back in Term 1, 2021. They will have the continued support from the PDCs who have maintained contact through this time.

Naomi Jeffree

Playgroup Development Consultant South East Region



Run For A Cause



Playgroup Victoria was chosen to be a charity partner for this year's 'Run for a Cause' in Ballarat. The focus of the fundraising was the Early Years sector and it aimed to supported multiple organisations in the local area including: Ballarat Reads, Eureka Mums, Uniting Ballarat, Ballarat Community Health, Eureka Community Kindergarten Association, the Ballarat Toy Library and our main cause - Sebastopol Primary School Playgroup Hub.

Proceeds raised on the day would go towards the development of an outdoor play area for the school and playgroup community to enjoy. Local Playgroup Development Consultant, Maureen Hatcher, said that it was a great event.

"The biggest thing we got out of the day was greater connection with the other organisations involved. It was fantastic to pool our resources and discuss ideas for future links."

Fellow Playgroup Development Consultant, Maree Ryan, said that it was a really good space they shared outside, near the Toy Library and other early childhood services.

*Maureen Hatcher and Louise Buckle-Smith
Playgroup Development Consultants Ballarat*

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NAIDOC Week

National Aborigines and Islanders Day
Observance Committee: 7-14 July 2019

Playgroups throughout Victoria celebrated the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It was wonderful to see so many playgroups discussing the significance of NAIDOC and what it means. Playgroup families made artwork inspired by the culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and sung an Acknowledgement to Country song. Many playgroups hope to include this song regularly and Playgroup Victoria wants to incorporate it at events.

Celebrating NAIDOC Week at Selandra Community Hub

If we are not making a point of discussing culture and inviting people to share those things, we lose the opportunity to learn about each other.

Dr Joanne Tarasuik, Playgroup Victoria Research Manager



NAIDOC Week 2019 at Selandra Community Hub



Playgroup Victoria staff Leanne Dhami and Dr Joanne Tarasuik singing with local Playgroupers at Selandra Community Hub

Celebrating NAIDOC Week at Yambuk

Playgroup Victoria's Playgroup Development Consultants (PDC) gathered at the Yambuk Community Hall, close to the sacred site of Dean Marr to celebrate NAIDOC with families from the Gunditjmara (Warrnambool), Dhauwurd-Wurrung (Portland), and Winda-Mara (Heywood) playgroups.

Uncle Locky Eccles came with his daughter Mel and presented an interactive language workshop using the Gunditjmara Nations' languages. Playgroup Victoria have been involved in this event for the past two years, providing activities and a story-telling session to families and children. The presence of PDCs mark a valuable connection and indirectly promote playgroups to families. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate the importance of play and connections to the community.

Playgroup Victoria embraces the VEYLDF (The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework) which 'recognises and respects Aboriginal cultures and their unique place in the heritage and future of Victoria. Learning about and valuing the place of Aboriginal people will enhance all Victorian children's sense of place in our community'.

Louise Buckle-Smith

Playgroup Development Consultant Ballarat

Peep LTP pilot project

In September 2019, the Playgroup Development Consultants (PDCs) engaged local primary school playgroups to take part in a pilot project which aimed to trial and embed the Peeps LTP program into their facilitated playgroup setting.

One of these sites was Silverton Primary school in Dandenong. The model of this project required the playgroup to be facilitated as normal with the addition of the PDC facilitating the Peeps LTP “Talk Time” session for the families. This playgroup facilitator was quick to embrace the program and eager to follow through with the planning and support for the PDC. The attending families welcomed the program and participated fully in the sessions. After attending and participating in the playgroup for two terms, the PDC quickly formed relationships with the group and was able to extend and implement the Peep LTP program to the full extent. The “Talk Time” sessions involved delivering the Peep LTP topics, parental discussions relating to the topics, story time and music and movement component.

Through the evaluation of the project in the time that followed, all families expressed the positive impact that the program had on their playgroup experience. The facilitator became so invested in the Peep LTP program, that she undertook the training herself to be able to continue its implementation in the playgroup.

The experience was so positive for all involved that the relationship with the PDC strengthened to continue regular contact once the project had concluded.

Naomi Jeffree

Playgroup Development Consultant South East Region



“To start with parents only really engaged with their child, but now there’s a sense of community; they share about their children. They’re a more engaged community. More families sit together around the group table. I really feel that there are now bonds between families; definitely a sense of engagement and connection.” (Participant)



Little Sprouts Workshop: Children's Week

The Little Sprouts Workshop was organised by Food Is Free Inc. for Children's Week. They are a community led, not-for-profit group benefiting the Ballarat Community, sharing local produce, seeds and gardening knowledge with all local citizens, with a particular focus on helping disadvantaged individuals and groups.

The event was full of enthusiasm, play and education. Children enjoyed the three activities - worm farming, music, and storytelling. Playgroup Victoria's PDCs introduced the families to Basil the Bouncing Ball who took them on a visual journey around the Food is Free Green Space.

Participation in the event has lead to further positive engagements as well as further demonstration that playgroup and its benefits are mirrored through countless other settings.

Maureen Hatcher

Playgroup Development Consultant Ballarat



Practice and Research

During the first two-thirds of the year, the Playgroup Victoria Practice and Research team's activities were focused on completion of large projects, extension of current projects, and the development of new projects. Amongst this varied and enjoyable work, our team presented at various conferences, published two articles, and submitted numerous grant applications.

The Playgroup Conference



Work on the Playgroup Victoria Annual Conference began in earnest in August 2019. The theme, 'Playgroups make a difference'; weaving the tapestry of inclusion, was expected to appeal to all professionals working with children, families and communities. This was indeed an interesting and encompassing theme to many, resulting in the conference being fully booked out. The conference was planned in combination with Playgroup Australia activities on days either side of the conference and the now annual state-wide DHHS supported playgroup facilitators' Community of Practice on the following day. One week prior, it was unfortunately, but sensibly, cancelled due to the pandemic with immediate plans to postpone to the end of 2020 or to the first half of 2021, dependent on restrictions in place.

Professional Newsletter

Our newsletter has developed exponentially over the last few years, originating from a simple EDM to a visually attractive and intellectually appealing magazine. Its format and content brings to the reader a wide array of stories, information and resources. The Professional News utilises the 'professional aesthetic' to subtly strengthen the playgroup principles to the reader and convey to them our respect and regard for what they do. Our team works towards 4 editions each year, usually delivered at the end of each school term, however, we chose not to issue an edition at the end of Term 2, 2020 due to extensive communications and information dissemination about the pandemic and many other items of interest.

[Read October 2019 Newsletter](#)[Read December 2019 Newsletter](#)[Read February 2020 Newsletter](#)

DHHS supported playgroup training

Along with planning, organising and facilitating the Communities of Practice for the state funded DHHS supported playgroup facilitators, our organisation contributes to the training of new facilitators four times a year. This training supports new facilitators in the program to plan and facilitate supported playgroups to ensure families have access to high-quality play-based learning opportunities.

Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds

In August 2019, the ABC aired 'Old Peoples Home for 4-year-olds', resulting in an overwhelming number of parents, volunteers, aged care facilities and early years services expressing their interest in setting up, attending and running intergenerational playgroups.

Preliminary work with aged care facilities to submit a grant application prior to the series had revealed the requisite development efforts for intergenerational playgroups to get off the ground. Therefore, considerable time and resources have gone into producing a guide containing documentation and resources for our staff to assist aged care facilities and home care package providers to work through the process of establishing a sustainable playgroup. During this time, the partnership with the aged care facility strengthened and resulted in a playgroup starting in March 2020 but ceased after the first session due to the pandemic.

Despite this, we continue to work on completing the guide and resources that our experienced staff and the aged care sector can use to build thriving and vibrant intergenerational playgroups for their residents, and for the children and families participating.



IMAGES COURTESY OF Playgroup Australia and ABC TV + iView



IMAGES COURTESY OF Playgroup Australia and ABC TV + IView

Peep Learning Together Programme

This year our staff have made a concerted effort to increase our capacity and capability to practice peep LTP. The peep Learning Together Programme (peepLTP) aims to help parents and carers to value and extend learning opportunities in everyday life, improve the quality of the Home Learning Environment and develop secure attachment relationships with their babies and children. By supporting parents/carers, the programme aims to improve children's personal, social and emotional development, communication and language, early literacy, early numeracy and health and physical development.

To complement this upskilling, relevant staff have also undertaken 'train the trainer', thereby becoming authorised to train other professionals to practice peepLTP, with three staff who are near completion of this process. This increase in expertise and skill supports our approach and efforts to introduce and embed the evidence-based and informed practices and information of peepLTP into Playgroup Victoria programmes and resources. During this time, we have continued to develop the emerging and respectful working relationship and partnership with Peeple (UK organisation), and their CEO, Dr Sally Smith.





Projects

Primary prevention and public health messaging in playgroups

During this year, we have been invited to present at tertiary institutions (Kangan TAFE) and various conferences, published several articles and continue to contribute to various research projects and advocacy groups.



Playgroups are an ideal setting for primary prevention approaches to reach families with young children, providing an opportunity to intervene early with primary prevention content, talk to young children directly, and to parents about messages they give their children, and behaviours they model. A multigeneration approach supports impacting children directly, and indirectly via parents, by shifting parental knowledge, understanding, opinions, attitudes, and behaviour; building empowerment, not fear.

Dissemination of primary prevention messages requires different approaches based upon the target audience. Delivering messages to children ≤ 3 years have shown to be ineffective unless they are undertaken alongside adults. For very young children and parents, music-based primary prevention programs meet their needs. Entertaining and engaging, for both children and parents, they enhance people's awareness of issues with a gentle yet emotive approach and build empowerment, not fear. This innovative

methodology is a fun musical story delivered in the playgroup platform in a multigenerational approach; it has shown much promise in shifting parental knowledge, understanding, opinions, attitudes, and behaviour around the current themes of gender stereotyping and physical literacy, and has the capacity to be extended; replicated with other health promotion themes.

It is with this in mind, and in collaboration with our partners, drummond street services and Hullabaloo Music For All, Playgroup Victoria has worked extensively to establish how to utilise playgroup as a platform for music-based health promotion, primary prevention programs. Two programs have already been developed and delivered. The first is a music session where a story is told through songs, in which the program messages are communicated and modelled. The second, an accompanying book to further spread the key messages, as well as professional development for playgroup facilitators and other professionals.

During this year, we have been invited to present at tertiary institutions (Kangan TAFE) and various conferences, published several articles and continue to contribute to various research projects and advocacy groups.

The ARC Linkage project, Best Practice Framework for Playgroups-in-schools, partnering Playgroup Victoria with Australian Catholic University, is now in its final year. With the research informing the complete framework, drafting of the same is now underway.

Our staff presented at the following conferences with peer-reviewed conference proceedings published;

COLLABORATE SMAG (Victoria)

Tarasuik, J., Trigg, N., Dhami, L. (2019). Our children, our families, our playgroup community. COLLABORATE SMAG conference. September 2019. Cape Schanck Resort, Victoria, Australia.

Family and Relationship Services Australia National Conference (Hunter Valley)

Tarasuik, J., Davies, K., Merzel, N., Njegac, D., Rimington, H., Testro, A. (2019). All Come Out to Play! - Trialling a music-based primary prevention program about gender equality. November 19-22, Hunter Valley, NSW, Australia.

STOP Domestic Violence Conference (Surfers Paradise)

Tarasuik, J., Huber, B., Merzel, L. (2019). Playgroup as a universal, primary prevention platform: Current practices and potential opportunities. STOP Domestic Violence Conference. December 9-11. Surfers Paradise, Queensland, Australia.

Early Childhood National Conference - From Vision to Action (Hobart)

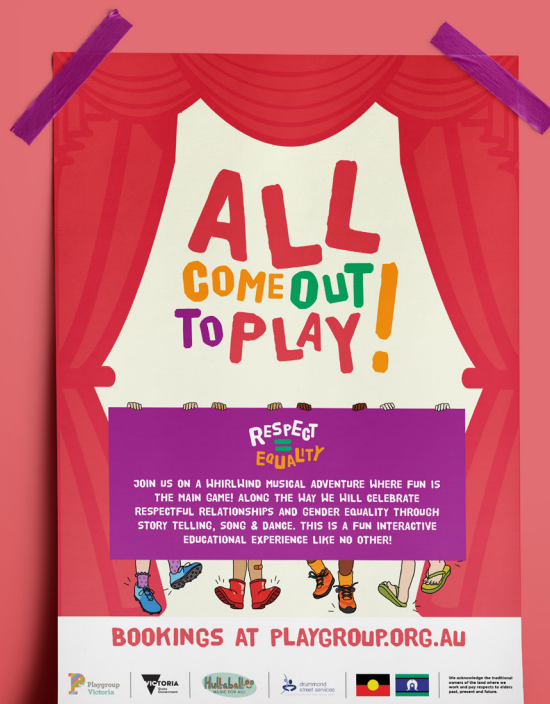
Testro, A., Merzel, N., Rimington, H. (2019) ALL Come Out to Play! Gender equality... is it ever too early? Early Childhood National Conference. September 2019. Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.

Spreading the word about playgroup continued with five of six conference abstracts accepted (2 presentations pending amid COVID-19 rescheduling); Infant mental health conference and AIFS. Our research Manager was also accepted as a Knowledge Translator for the ARACY Early Years Summit held in Melbourne, March 2020.

Significantly, we are representing the state and territory organisations on the national advisory group to create a playgroup declaration.







All Come Out to Play

Playgroup Victoria, with our partners, continue to deliver this program that is committed to harnessing the social structures and influencing the norms and attitudes of parents of young children through this evidence-based initiative to improve gender equality in the future.

These sessions are fun and empowering for children of all abilities and cultural backgrounds.

ACOTP! is now in its third year of various funding sources that includes Premier and Cabinet, Office for Women, Free from Violence Fund and a two-year grant from the Department of Multicultural Affairs to partner with the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association. This was done in order to make this program culturally appropriate and relevant to engage the Vietnamese community, in the primary prevention initiative to prevent violence against women. This includes translation of documentation, including a book on the program into Vietnamese. Multilingual trainers will deliver content to an array of professionals in Vietnamese communities. This project ceases in December 2020.



ACOTP! also received significant funding from Gandel Philanthropy to expand the delivery of the program, resulting in more playgroups being reached across the state and more playgroup facilitators participating in training to integrate both the music and the messages into their playgroup sessions. The Gandel Philanthropic funding was also for the purpose of developing ACOTP! into a book with accompanying resources to assist the program's messages to be spread across all early years' settings. A cultural appraisal process for cultural norms of a cohort for consideration before the delivery of the training session, was also developed.

Post-session surveys from the program's first two years of delivery revealed 80-87% of parents/carers intended to act differently, in line with the key messages of the program, e.g., encourage girls to take risks, boys to express emotions. Most parents agreed that they learnt something (84%) and the session made them think about how they parent their son or daughter (81%). Most parents also indicated they intended to share each of program's key messages (89%-98%), which suggests the impact of the program would be well beyond those who attended the sessions.

ALL Come Out to Play! was presented to over

950 children and 500 adults in this financial year. The sessions were showcased at major events such as Dads Day Out (Mildura) Romp and Stomp at the Melbourne Museum, Little Kids Day In at Scienceworks as well as conferences including the Family and Relationship Services Australia (FRSA) National Conference, Early Childhood Australia National Conference and the Stop the Violence Conference extending the reach even further. 55 early childhood professionals and students were provided training on Respectful Relationships and Gender Equality in the Early Years to support their understanding of the program and provide practical support in their local community and groups.

Face-to-face presentations ceased in February as a result of COVID 19. The creativity and innovative approach developed by the All Come Out To Play! partnership of performing the sessions LIVE to audiences via the Zoom platform was piloted in March and April. The virtual delivery of these sessions has now enabled the project to have a broader reach, increasing access and participation. The professional development training on Gender Equality and the Early Years is also now available via the Playgroup Victoria website for early childhood professionals.



Move it 4 Kids

The successful partnership between Playgroup Victoria, drummond street services and Hullabaloo Music for All received a grant in April 2019 from Sport Australia under the Move it AUS Grant Program to deliver a program that promotes physical activity and a healthy lifestyle using the playgroup platform for delivery.

Comedy meets music, meets movement, describes this wonderful Movelt4Kids program. This session welcomes parents/carers and children aged 0-5 to enjoy an active musical comedy experience via their community playgroups. In this fun session, families are encouraged to establish good habits, in the most fun way possible. Families can expect to be inspired, all while developing fine and gross motor skills, language skills and social skills. Movelt4Kids is a superb combination of movement, dance, self-expression, sport, songs and comedy.

This program rolled out face-to-face sessions within Tasmania, Campbellfield, Geelong, Point Cook and Pakenham. A survey from the participants of MoveIT4Kids revealed most felt the session increased their knowledge about the importance of being an active family (82%) and

intended to use the activities they learnt at the session with their family to promote exercise (92%). Almost half indicated that before the session, they did not know or were not aware of the child physical activity guidelines (43%), and the median number of days parents had been active for 30+ minutes (3), over the past week was less than half the recommended amount.

Sessions in Craigieburn, the Wimmera including Horsham and Ararat were cancelled due to COVID 19. Movelt4Kids commenced virtual sessions in March and was so popular that it continues to be funded by alternative sources to deliver weekly sessions to families online. Movelt4Kids Virtual program has been delivered to 353 children and 216 adults at 30 June 2020. This project's funding ceased in April 2020.

Efforts to receive both government and philanthropic funding to support the delivery of face-to-face sessions, the books and virtual interactive LIVE sessions for these programs continues.

ACOTP! and MI4K digital LIVE success were influential and instrumental in the decision to develop Playgroup at Home LIVE program, expected to commence in July 2020.

Emerging projects

As noted earlier, the pandemic disrupted the Practice and Research department's usual activities for the first quarter of 2020; the annual conference cancelled and postponed.

The sudden yet anticipated impact of this motivated our team to commence a discussion paper about the contribution playgroup could potentially and would eventually make to the road to recovery. To accompany this paper, a project proposal was also developed detailing the organisation's response to assist families during and after the pandemic, detailing a two-pronged approach;

1. Playgroup at Home LIVE, remote delivery of interactive playgroup sessions; to occur during all stages of restrictions, addressing the needs of families during such times, and
2. Platforms Roadmap (CCCH) community development; addressing the aftermath of such restrictions.

This project aims to;

1. Provide a remote adaptation of playgroup providing an opportunity for a child-parent experience and to participate in as part of a group.
2. Influence the recovery of our communities across Victoria, by promoting playgroup and its restorative benefits for children, parents, families and communities at this time.
3. Highlight and promote the playgroup platform as a strong and effective means of providing learning and development opportunities for children, wellbeing experiences for children

and their parents, social engagement opportunities, and creating and building social and community connections, thereby increasing social capital.

4. Work with and within LGAs to enhance the utilisation of the playgroup platform as a community development tool for building strong and healthy communities amid the pandemic and consequential life changes of 2020.

The writing of the discussion paper and the project proposal has continued into the subsequent financial year due to the everchanging situation in Victoria.

It is important to note that the extremely successful delivery of All Come Out To Play! and Move It 4 Kids via an interactive LIVE format during the fourth quarter of the reporting year was the antecedent to Playgroup at Home LIVE. The considerable effort to develop its rationale, programmatic approach and delivery during this preparation phase has resulted in an extremely successful child and parent experience, of which we are very proud. Additionally, this project has uniquely brought many staff across the organisation together to work towards and contribute to an enjoyable and fulfilling experience.

Programs

Playgroups are a tremendous platform for supporting families with children with additional needs. At Playgroup Victoria, we strive to create a playgroup community that is inclusive of all families.

Making playgroups inclusive for all families.

Playgroup Victoria recognises the opportunity that exists in both, supported playgroups and community playgroups, to include children of all abilities and backgrounds in the playgroup experience. Children with a disability [and from different backgrounds] share universal rights with all people and share the additional rights of all children as identified in the UN Convention on the rights of the child (UNICEF, 1990). The specific rights of children with a disability are expressed in the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (UN, 2006). Among other international statements, the UNESCO Salamanca statement (UNESCO, 1994) on inclusive education recognises the importance of inclusion of children with a disability in mainstream education.

Programs offered this year:



Playconnect

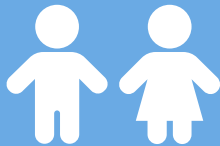
Our year at a glance

440



PlayConnect sessions

180



Children

137



Families

11

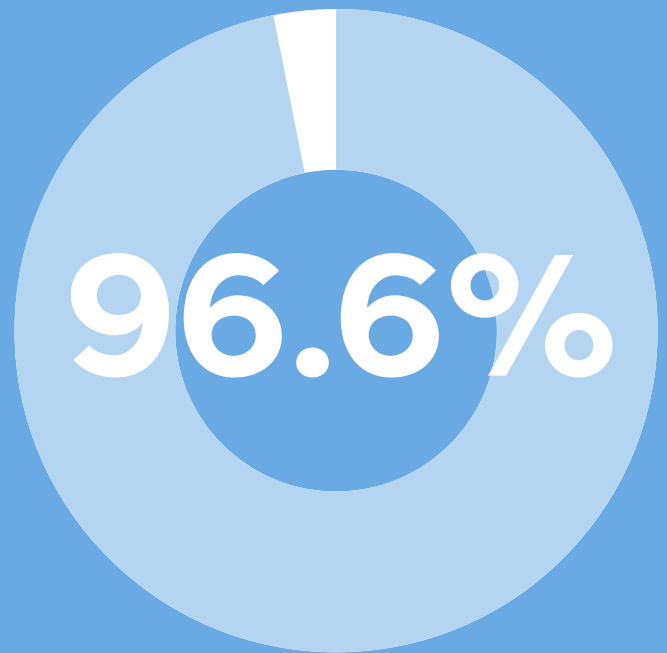


PlayConnect Groups

6



Average Attendance



Overall satisfaction rate

PlayConnect Playgroups

PlayConnect has been running for 11 years. This year our funding was extended for another year but together with Playgroup Australia, we are campaigning for ongoing funding for this much needed service. PlayConnect is a federally funded program that is available in every State and Territory. It is a free, safe and supported playgroup program for children on the Autism Spectrum, or with developmental delays or behavioural concerns, and their families.

ARACY Evaluation Report – March 2020



Executive summary (excerpt)

Our evaluation shows that PlayConnect is highly valued by participants and fills an important service gap for families. Our findings suggest that PlayConnect successfully provides participants with:

- information and referrals (soft-entry into other services)
- better confidence in parenting
- better management of their child's behaviour resulting in increased engagement with their community
- the opportunity for peer engagement with other families
- the opportunity for their child to play and interact with other children
- a safe and non-judgmental space.

PlayConnect provides these benefits despite tight funding and resources, and the program could be made more effective with additional support.

COVID-19

At the end of March 2020, all of our groups had to close and find alternative ways of engaging with families. Facilitators got creative and used a combination of the following strategies:

- Live Zoom sessions
- Recorded videos of activities that were distributed to families – this was the most popular form of engagement for families because of the demands on their time, with home schooling, telehealth appointments, working from home etc.
- Facebook engagement in private groups
- Information sharing via email and Facebook.
- Individual phone contact.

PlayConnect Stories

Bairnsdale

As a result of the ILC work in our region, we have had a family from Orbost attend our Bairnsdale group with five of their children, who are all on the Spectrum. Orbost is an hour away from us and more remote. This family has 10 children and 5 of these children are 6 years and under. Mum was looking for support for her and her children. Orbost had a facilitated playgroup for families of children with disabilities, but it ceased when NDIS came in, so this family didn't have a support group to attend in Orbost. She is happy to travel to Bairnsdale and is bringing a friend from Orbost who also needs support.

Thomastown

Recently on one of our nice days we set up a paint experience. One of our little boys who almost never engages in art decided to participate, he was curious & delighted with the sensory aspect of the activity, playing away for several minutes (a long time for him to engage). We were using our hands to paint on a Perspex vertical board. With much enthusiasm (and at that time out of sight of dad), he proceeded to use his face, ears, arms and legs to paint with! Laughing and smiling he really gave it his all. The following week we decided to use water tinted with colour so he could still enjoy the activity, with a little less cleaning up for dad.

PlayConnect NDIS ILC Project

Playgroup Victoria successfully applied for a National NDIS Information, Linkages and Capacity building grant. In Victoria we used the grant to pilot a cluster model approach of service delivery in four trial sites to deliver the following:

- link our PlayConnect playgroups with local services
- build capacity of community playgroups to be inclusive of children with Autism
- provide Information, Linkages and Referrals to families both within PlayConnect and externally.
- Networking events for families and services at each of the 4 trial sites.

We also developed a PlayConnect Aboriginal Engagement Strategy to increase the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families into the PlayConnect program.

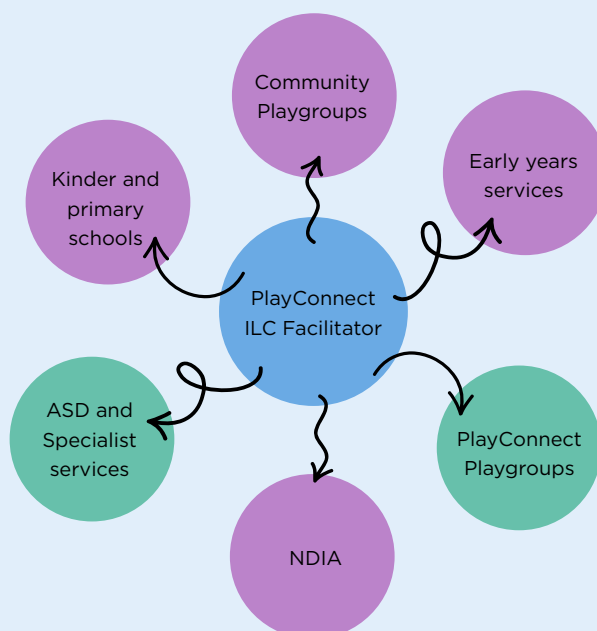
- We consulted with The Long Walk, The Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, Autism Qld – Early Intervention Indigenous Liaison Officer, Cultural Fusion, Yarn Strong Sista and VAEAL.
- Commissioned Aboriginal artwork created for targeted promotional material.
- Participated in cultural awareness training with SNAICC.
- Provided each PlayConnect playgroup with an Aboriginal resource kit.

Across the 4 sites we supported 53 families with Information, Linkages and Referrals; and 8 playgroups with inclusion mentoring.

Playgroup Victoria's Innovation Project

PlaygroupConnect Cluster Model

- Activities PlayConnect Facilitators already do
- New activities for PlayConnect Facilitators





PlayConnect ILC Project Stories

Broadmeadows Playgroup – Inclusion support

A supported playgroup in Broadmeadows requested support to assist a CALD parent and child with inclusion into the playgroup. Despite the playgroup having two skilled facilitators running the group, additional assistance was required to enable the facilitators to support this child. The facilitators needed mentoring support to implement inclusion strategies into the group.

Once a few simple strategies were implemented, the child became more engaged in the playgroup. The facilitators learned some new skills and will be observing the local PlayConnect playgroup to learn more strategies to support this child.

The information the ILC Facilitator was able to provide to the parent enabled her to become linked to services the child was missing out on. They are now linked with Brotherhood of St Lawrence and have received NDIS funding and are also linked in with Scope.

The ILC Facilitator also received an email informing them of some positive outcomes with the little boy within their playgroup and that both the mother and the son are far happier attending the group now.

Bairnsdale – Aboriginal Family

A local case worker contacted the ILC Facilitator to enquire about the PlayConnect playgroup for an Aboriginal parent. The Facilitator met with the parent who was very distressed because the childcare centre had told her that she couldn't bring her son back because his behaviour was too challenging for them to deal with. This was very upsetting for this parent.

The Facilitator suggested a contact at Gippsland Advocacy as a good place to start for dealing with the Childcare Centre and afterwards contacted the Victorian Inclusion Agency for Childcare Centres to see what else was available for this parent. There were supports available for her to turn to, and she felt empowered to write a letter to the Childcare Centre expressing how she felt about her son's expulsion from the Centre.

The Facilitator also discussed respite with the parent and recommended Latrobe Community Health Service, where she was able to access regular weekly respite.

Lastly, they discussed the NDIS and the process to access this service. Following on from this meeting the next few months this parent contacted Gippsland Advocacy, contacted NDIS and has had a NDIS Planning meeting for her son.

The parent indicated that that she did not want to deal with too many services at once. So the Facilitator became the primary source of information for this parent. The parent was quite distraught and defeated at first. It has been small steps with this parent, but in the end she felt empowered.



38

MyTime

Our year at a glance



98%

Overall satisfaction rate

1220



Hours

28



PlayConnect Groups

10



Subcontracted Groups

5



Average Attendance

713

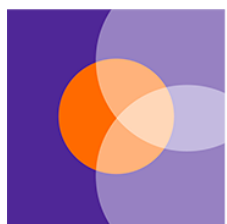


Families

592



Sessions



MyTime

*supporting parents of
children with disabilities*

MyTime is a peer support program for parents and carers of children with a disability, developmental delay or chronic medical condition. It is a federally funded program and Playgroup Victoria is the largest of three providers in Victoria.

COVID-19

MyTime has also had to adapt to the COVID-19 restrictions. Since March we have been delivering MyTime online via Zoom where possible. For those families who have not been able to engage on Zoom, we have had individual contact with them to ensure they have continued support. Some facilitators have also sent out little pamper packs to carers, to bring them a little cheer.

MyTime Stories

Bairnsdale

A parent attended today who hadn't been since last year. She reached the lowest point in her life and attempted suicide in March. The facilitator has kept in contact with this parent and had asked her to come along to this session as it was a pamper session. She said she enjoyed the day saying that she was going to come back next week as she needs the support of this group.

A grandmother turned up today. She had been trying to manage her grandson's NDIS and became very stressed during the week, posting on our page. It was good to see her, and I think she really needed the chat with others, she seemed a lot happier at the end.

Epping

Our first meeting brought together 3 mothers of young children with autism. Not only were they connected in terms of having children on the spectrum, but they connected on another level being from CALD communities, with English as a second language. The women are just starting to learn about what an autism diagnosis means, and they are very keen to learn more about the services and support, as they are quite socially isolated with added complexities. They had never been to a support group before; we had a lovely bicultural support volunteer from BSL also attend which was invaluable in terms of supporting the first group meeting and making them feel welcome.



MyTime Stories

Melton

When families were talking at this session about how to find information about disability in children and autism, one of the parents said, “Before I came to MyTime, I didn’t know anything about disability or autism, and I have learnt heaps from coming here.”

Seaford Gold

The mum whose son passed away last term has come back after being away for a while. She has been struggling and her marriage has fallen apart. One of the mums in the group has offered her a place to stay until she can find a place on her own. It has been great watching friendships grow in this group.

Roxburgh Park

A child who usually sits with her mum started to go off and play by herself. She allowed a play helper in her space and by the end of the session the child was talking and playing with the play helper and allowed another child in her space without running back to mum.

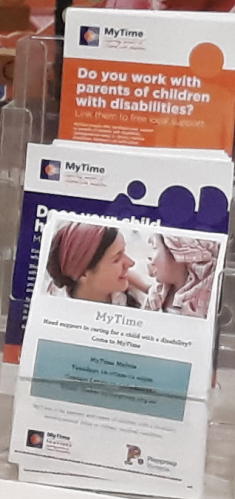
Some mums encouraged dads to attend today. The dads asked a lot of questions and later a mum commented this was the first time she felt he showed any interest in disabilities.



MyTime

*supporting parents of
children with disabilities*

Local support groups for parents and
carers of children with a disability or
chronic medical condition



29

Playgroup
Victoria



Events

Our events

Playgroup Victoria Library Week August 2019



“A child who reads will be an adult who thinks.” - Sasha Salmina

Our bilingual Library Week was an enriching exercise, with people coming from various suburbs and regional areas of Victoria to take part in story time sessions. There were many contributors and local participants. Each story time was unique. Some people made their own storybooks, others shared songs and stories in another language.

Melissa Thompson from Signee Tots Playgroup signed Auslan at two of the events and shared a wonderful song about diversity. Local playgroup parent Adeela shared this year's featured storybook, *We're Going On A Bear Hunt*, in braille. Writer, comedian and ABC Melbourne radio presenter Sami Shah joined us as a special guest at Preston story time. He had the audience enraptured by his entertaining rendition of *We're Going On A Bear Hunt*.

It was a glorious show of community spirit and inclusion. The calibre of the libraries was outstanding and engaged families, sharing resources and events. Many families had their first experience with playgroup and were inspired to start one of their own.





Romp and Stomp October 2019 – 23rd of October 2019

Playgroup Victoria has been running the Romp and Stomp event with Melbourne Museum for over 20 years. The theme for the 2019 event was, 'Looking into Nature'. A connection with nature is rewarding and builds fundamental skills in children. It also continues to build skills throughout life, and it facilitates good mental health for all. In a time of great technological change, it seemed an apt topic for families to explore and enjoy.



Playgroup Victoria and Melbourne Museum invited families to look a little closer at the natural world through art, music, performance, stories, the great outdoors and of course, play! This event was tailored to children aged five years and under, but it was also for the parents, carers, grandparents, siblings and friends. It provided an opportunity to reconnect with one another and the outside world, all while learning valuable things along the way.

The event was action packed and varied. Families could go on a nature treasure hunt in the Forest Gallery or use their creativity to make nature sensory boards. Live music kept the centre stage energised and there were lots of little activities dispersed around the museum to discover.

It was a fantastic early year's amalgamation - music, storytelling, art, nature, sport, performance and play. The event included performances from

The Tip Toe Giants, workshops with Musical Sprouts and interactive Polynesia and Tongan Dance sessions with Nuholani. Families were encouraged to get building with LEGO DUPLO Australia and engage their senses with Incy Wincy Fingers and Mud Kitchen Australia. Families enjoyed giveaways from Tooshies by TOM and received lots of useful information from Road Safety Education.

The Playgroup Victoria installation space was transformed into 'A World of Imagination'

Auslan Stage Left interpreter, Anna, was there on the main stage, making the event inclusive and educational for all who attended.

The Playgroup Victoria space was transformed into A World of Imagination. The Playgroup Victoria team created a land of cardboard cubbies. There was a veggie patch, sensory tunnels, a garden shop and a coffee shop - all handmade.



The Ultimate Duplo Farm Playgroup at Legoland Discovery Center September 2019

The Ultimate DUPLO® Playgroup at LEGOLAND Discovery Centre®

We had a ball at LEGOLAND Discovery Centre for our farm play day!

Families were invited to build and play with us on Wednesday 11 September to celebrate 50 years of DUPLO!

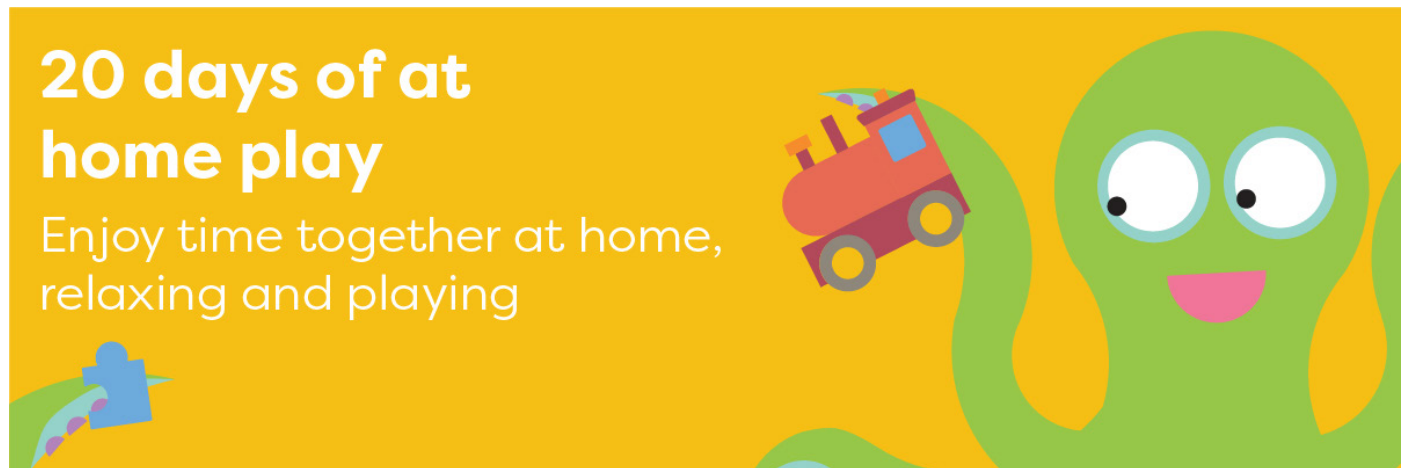
The Ultimate DUPLO Playgroup was held from 8:30am-10am, giving families with kids aged 0-4 the opportunity to enjoy building activities, storytelling, a visit from Emmett from The LEGO Movie and arts and crafts in the centre's new DUPLO Farm Adventure zone at a discounted rate.

Families stayed after the event concluded to explore LEGOLAND!





20 Days of at Home Play - Playgroup at Home (Digital Event) March 2020



In response to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic and statewide lockdown, Playgroup Victoria created an online initiative, 20 Days of Play. For the first 20 days, playgroup inspired at home play with daily play ideas and activities. Shared across Playgroup Victoria's website and social media, this initiative soon evolved into Playgroup at Home, offering activity booklets and an inspirational digital feed.

For 20 days, Playgroup Victoria shared ideas for everyday play that can be done at home, in the garden, or at the local park. Families joined in and shared their play days online with the playgroup community.

As we began to navigate our way through all things COVID-19, Playgroup Victoria wanted to encourage and support families to take this opportunity to play.

Playgroup Victoria created a range of activities and play ideas suited to the home environment. From crafting to cooking, reading or dancing we curated fun and relaxing things to do, both, together and in isolation. Activities included listening to an audio book, making homemade instruments, making collages from old photographs, doing an online

yoga class together, enjoying a picnic in the back garden in some beautiful autumnal weather – there was lots for families to do.

The activities were designed to be done at home, in the garden or in a local green space for the most part. Playgroup Victoria made sure the activities were inexpensive or cost-free things for people to do.

Playgroup Victoria also encouraged families to make cards, create artworks or write letters to share with friends, family or those who might need an extra dose of kindness in such a challenging time. The initiative helped us to extend our online support system and interact with families, sharing information and resources on a daily basis.

This online connection brought the playgroup community together to bond and share stories, for at times like this, as A.A.Milne wrote, "A little consideration, a little thought for others, makes all the difference."

"We want to focus on what we know. We know that play for children and adults has many positive benefits,

from a child's development to an adult's wellbeing. Let's take this opportunity to spend as much time as possible on what we know, because we have little control over what we don't."

Danny Schwarz, Playgroup Victoria CEO



**Playgroup
Victoria**

**Playgroup Victoria
Annual Report 2019/20**

Response to COVID-19

Getting back to playgroup guide

A resource to support recovery after the pandemic

As part of the response to pandemic restrictions beginning to ease in May 2020, it was recognized that the journey to get playgroups restarted would involve many steps and processes. The aim of this booklet is to 'guide' the playgroup leaders to consider a range of changes and requirements for their group to start back, also supporting groups to consider the "group dynamics" aspect and playgroup principles in resuming playgroup, along with practical tips for room and activity set up. Titled "Getting back to playgroup" the booklet was complete with templates, checklists, posters, links, a hand-washing song and suggestions for playgroups to utilise.

It was disseminated to all members, affiliates and local government professionals and available on our website for the general public. The resource

was widely accessed with almost 900 downloads in the first two days of launching.

The creation of "Getting back to playgroup" opened opportunities for PV staff to strengthen partnerships with many councils as well as establish new partnerships. It functioned as a valuable resource and supported clear and concise directives for playgroups within their LGA. This engagement has led to an increase in communication and relationships between the council and the playgroups. In most areas, it has resulted in the establishment of "Community playgroup leader networks" which PV staff will frequent.

We shared this fantastic resource across the playgroup landscape today, just brilliant, congratulations to all at Playgroup Victoria.

The booklet has sparked conversations between playgroups and Playgroup Victoria staff on the Playgroup at Home Facebook group. This is an opportunity to build awareness of PV, build interaction with Playgroup at Home and harnesses a peer support interaction between groups.

This booklet has increased engagement with PV, established new and strengthened connections between Councils and playgroups, and more understanding and cohesion within the playgroups. It has offered support to community playgroups in a time of need. We are using this momentum and connection with playgroups and other stakeholders to promote other resources and opportunities for them.



Celebrating Playgroup

Discover more about our local playgroups.

Belgrave Lake Cottage Park Playgroup



The Power of Shared Experiences

“Playgroup allows and encourages people to be themselves, to feel comfortable and enjoy time with their children.”

Leanne Dhami, Playgroup Development Team Leader

Up along a windy road in the hills you will find a quaint cottage playgroup, nestled among shrubs and low hanging branches from the established oak trees above. Belgrave Lake Park Cottage Playgroup has been up and running since the early 1980s. For some thirty years, young children have found their feet in these nurturing surrounds. Parents too have honed their skills in this environment that lends itself to comfort, creativity, camaraderie and friendship. Above all, there is a generosity of spirit here, and a sense of community.

[Learn more here](#)

“There was a caravan park down at the old playgroup area. They renovated it to become a playgroup. It was the thing to do in the 70s when playgroup was taking off.”

Joh Skelton

St Patricks Gordon Playgroup



Snow, Play and Adventures

About an hour's drive from Melbourne is a quaint little town called Gordon. On the outer edge of town, you will find St Patrick's Primary School. The old brick facade is home to around 40 students, two goats, a variety of chooks, a rooster, a life-size chess board, an undercover basketball court, beautiful scenery and lots of room to play. On the day that we visited, it snowed. A playgroup started up here from term one, and has since blossomed. Discover more about this wonderful community school below on our blog.

"It is a central gathering place for the community." -

Bambi Afford, St Patrick's Principal

[Read full article here](#)







Signee Tots Playgroup

As Unique Individuals, we All Come Out to Play!

“Experiencing music is an important part of what it means to be human, how we communicate and how we pass on cultural knowledge. Deaf people can see how embedded music is in society and need to be given access, to ensure that they are not excluded from something beautiful and powerful.”

Melissa Thompson, Signee Tots Playgroup Coordinator

Playgroup Coordinator, Melissa Thompson, was uncertain at first about playing music at her group, Signee Tots, which runs from the John Pierce Centre. Some of the children are deaf or have deaf parents, carers or family members. Melissa had some trepidation that it would not provide full access to everyone.

“The feedback from my families when I started was overwhelming – they loved the songs and wanted more. The songs and the dance sessions we

have done have been some of the most popular activities this year.” Melissa Thompson, Signee Tots Playgroup Coordinator.

It seemed aptly timed when the team from All Come Out to Play! got in touch, hoping to spend a morning with the Signee Tots playgroup. All Come Out to Play! is a show about diversity, respectful relationships and gender equality, presented through song and story.

“Nothing focuses a group, particularly children, more than music.”

Amanda Testro, All Come Out to Play!

[Read full article here](#)



Wild Things Bush Playgroup- Kiewa and Ovens Valley, North East Victoria

“Wild Things Bush Playgroups are as much about exposing children to nature as they are about reconnecting parents and guardians to nature and each other.”

Jarrold Paine

Nestled in the valley on a bright spring day, the Wild Things Bush Playgroup meet by the roadside in Tawonga South, a small township on the outskirts of Mount Beauty. The location of the playgroup often changes with the seasons and the trajectory of their adventures.

All senses are activated out here as children explore, ask questions, touch different surfaces, smell different fragrances and observe nature. Their play is bountiful and their learning cascades freely, much like the local river after a big deluge of rain. Great bonding between a child and their parent ensues. Friendships blossom. This nature playgroup is one of great enjoyment and contentment.

“It’s the people and our connection with the environment that is the vital ingredient to kids’ positive relationships,” said Wild Things Founder Jarrold Paine.

“The kids get a lot out of it. It is nice to mix up the environments, too. We come here, there’s the river, every now and then they organise a farm visit or something like that. There’s a big mountain bike park where they have some gnomes and things hidden.”

Roslyn, parent at Wild Things

[Read full article here](#)



Come Together One and All - Selandra Community Hub Pop Up Playgroup



This colourful and inviting space in Clyde North quickly fills with chatter and creativity as families wander in for a morning of play. There is a lot to spark their imagination here and the kids are well and truly captivated in the arts corner, on the music mat, in the water trough, during science experiments and throughout their singalong.

“Playgroup allows and encourages people to be themselves, to feel comfortable and enjoy time with their children.”

Leanne Dhami, Playgroup Development Manager



[Read full article here](#)





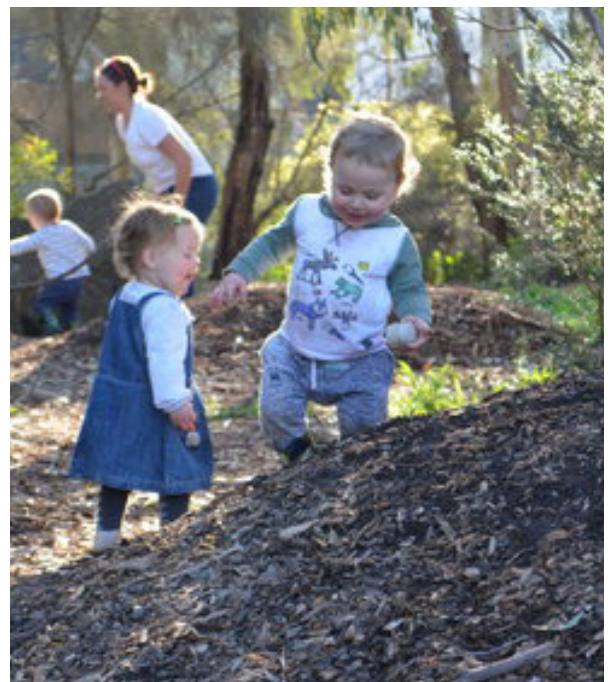
Darebin Creek Bush Playgroup

Reconnecting with the Natural World

Many layers of purpose are at work at Darebin Creek Bush Playgroup. Families from around the Thornbury area venture out along their local nature reserve where they reconnect. At first, many thought it was a good idea to get outside and allow their children to develop more skills - but it grew into something more. It grew into friendship, community and a chance to take stock and engage with the natural world, on which we depend on. Many parents walked away feeling refreshed and calm. The children loved it and it builds their capacities in a range of areas. All in all, it is a wonderful thing.

“When I started running the playgroup I realised the amazing connections you have with parents who come to these things. You see them having them with each other as well because they have so much in common and generally, they are diverse people, but they all have that common love of being outdoors. I just really underestimated the power of that community when I started.”

Victoria Milne, Darebin Creek Bush Playgroup Facilitator



[Read full article here](#)

Communal Growth: Meadows Early Learning Community Hub

Melbourne is home to over 200 languages. At last count, Meadows Early Learning Hub has 30 languages intermingling across the school of 300 children. Over 43 years, Maureen Leahy has been part of this ever-changing landscape. Not one fragment of this community hub in Broadmeadows is standalone, rather, lots of seeds are dispersed and grow together.

“Capturing people’s skills, working from a skill base is really important to me,” said Maureen.

Maureen is the Early Years Coordinator here and has indeed changed lives. Part of the recipe for success has been empowering others, listening and creating opportunities.

“One of the best things that the hub does is, it allows people to grow in the volunteer pathway,” said Maureen.

“Last year we had over 100 people go through the volunteer pathway which in a small school of 300 children, that is quite unique.”

Throughout the volunteer pathway, families are encouraged to use their skills, share and bond. The Cook and Learn program has been a vital link in empowering individuals and as such, the community. Each Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday morning, over 100 children and their parents come to the breakfast club and this is run vastly by volunteers.

“I find that the friendships that we make in the garden are very powerful and when people begin to get comfortable and competent, they then ask if they would like to work with the children in the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden. Some choose to be in the garden with the children and some choose to be in the kitchen.”

Maureen cares deeply about this place and the people that are part of the ripple effect. She has been part of many amazing cultural experiences. She has taken new arrivals to the Peace and Prosperity garden at Government House, she has taken a group of community hub leaders to the Shrine. The Shrine had a travelling exhibition at their Global Learning Centre and two women ended up in tears and when Maureen asked if they were alright, the translator explained that they were from the same village, they had lived only streets away from one another.

“That was just amazing for me because that showed me that sharing stories are important but sharing culture is also important and I think that’s an opportunity,” said Maureen.

“To me that fun, that sense of laughter, the sense of enjoyment is why I’m still doing it. It is what playgroup offers. There are so many magic moments in a playgroup that at the end of the day we come and say, ‘Oh! Did you see that!’ It’s capturing all of that, that’s very important.”

Maureen Leahy

[Read full article here](#)



Early Years Professionals

Promoting Playgroup, Inclusion and Diversity

Professor Emeritus Dorothy Scott
Playgroup Victoria Patron



[Read Interview](#)

Forging pathways for positive change

“What’s special about playgroups is that they are there for everybody. You don’t have to be a client of a service. There’s no eligibility criteria other than that you have a child in the appropriate age range, so they are open, there’s no stigma.” - Professor Emeritus Dorothy Scott

From an early age, Dorothy had a passion to help families. She wanted to make the lives of vulnerable children safe and enriching. She wanted children to play. Read more about her interesting life story on our blog below or listen to our interview with Dorothy on the Playgroup Podcast.

“It isn’t only that deep and long-lasting relationships can be forged through playgroups; I think the fact that people are going through a similar transition in life does give people a common bond.” - Dorothy Scott

Melissa Thompson
Signee Tots Playgroup Coordinator



[Read Interview](#)

Melissa Thompson travels long distances each week, from north-east Melbourne to Prahran in Melbourne's inner south-east. It is here that she patters into a large auditorium-like room with stained glass windows lining the high ceiling perimeter. She is the playgroup coordinator at Signee Tots, a playgroup that turned 20 years old this year. The John Pierce Centre itself has been in operation for 40 years. Melissa is dedicated and cares deeply for the families at her playgroup. We caught up with her to learn more about the deaf community as she inspires us all to embrace diversity

"I think that when hearing people learn Auslan and about the Deaf Community, it serves a number of purposes. It means that they have Deaf access at the front of mind and can ally with the community to ensure full access. Auslan is a beautiful language and it gives access to the beauty that is the Deaf Community." - Melissa Thompson

Alistair Gibbs
Early Learning Manager at Gowrie Victoria



[Read Interview](#)

Alistair is an Early Learning Manager at Gowrie Victoria, a not-for-profit organisation that specialises in championing good early childhood education through their early learning services as well as professional development and accredited training courses to the early childhood and education sector.

"I want to get people thinking about the different ways that you can connect with people and that it doesn't need to be as difficult as sometimes the words make it seem. Like the word inclusion and the word diversity, they are big words, but it doesn't need to have massive big actions to make that difference. So, it's starting to think about the different ways that we can connect with yourself and others on that deeper emotional level." - Alistair Gibbs

Fadzi Whande
Global Diversity and Inclusion Strategist



Fadzi Whande is an award-winning Global Diversity and Inclusion Strategist and Social Justice Advocate with experience working across the not-for-profit, government and business sectors in Africa, Australia, UK and USA. Her work primarily focuses on addressing systemic and institutionalised barriers faced by historically under-represented groups.

“It’s like baking a cake, diversity is all the ingredients you need (eggs, flour, sugar etc.). Inclusion is the mixing and baking process and belonging is the finished product. Verna Myers describes this so well when she says that, diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance.”

- Fadzi Whande

[Read Interview](#)

Assistant Professor Dana Bentley
Wondering, Conversing, Challenging, Creating



“You might say that my entire life is early childhood focused!” exclaims Dana Bentley. Dana’s writing and teaching focuses on social work in the early years, studying children’s emerging political literacies. One thing that captured our attention is Dana’s own pedagogy as an anti-bias educator.

“Creativity and artistic practice are the place where children challenge the status quo, where they problem solve, they wonder, and they imagine what might be.”

- Assistant Professor Dana Bentley, Lesley University

[Read Interview](#)



Playgroup in Media

Media Releases

March 26, 2020

20 Days of at Home Play

Live Interview ABC Mildura-Swan Hill

Playgroup Victoria spoke to Kellie Hollingworth on regional ABC breakfast radio about Playgroup Victoria's initiative, 20 Days of at Home Play in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown in Victoria. The interview was about the range of activities and play ideas to inspire families while at home and the online support available during this challenging time. Playgroup Victoria shared the positives, as families were together at home, bonding and sharing on a daily basis.



March 23, 2020

Herald Sun

Playgroup Victoria invites families to join them for 20 Days of at Home Play



November 4, 2019

The Echo

Beach Baby Bubs Playgroup connect in a calming space.



November 14, 2019

Ballarat Win News

An intergenerational playgroup brings all ages together to play and connect



November 4, 2019

The Courier

Sebastopol Primary School Playgroup Hub are a charity partner for this year's Run For A Cause event in Ballarat.



September 11, 2019

Surf Coast Times

Jan Juc Playgroup has begun the "Wheels for Kids" program, a six-week program about road safety.





September 11, 2019

9 News

Ballarat's Run for a Cause has officially launched, announcing it will be supporting early learning programs for disadvantaged children this year.



September 11, 2019

The Courier

Ballarat's Federation University steps up to boost Ballarat's Run for a Cause.

September 2, 2019

ABC Radio Melbourne

Afternoons with Richelle Hunt

Ageless Play on the ABC 774 The series Old People's Home For 4 Year Olds on ABC + iview has garnered much positive attention, putting the spotlight on our youngest and oldest community members. On Wednesday September 2, Playgroup Victoria CEO Danny Schwarz spoke on Afternoons with Richelle Hunt on ABC Melbourne about intergenerational playgroups and the importance of play through the ages. Listen in at the 31.00 minute mark to hear the full interview.

[See All Media Here](#)

Social Connections

Social media platforms have enabled us to regularly connect with existing playgroup members, sharing news, information and resources in real time.

Social media has also allowed us to connect with new families and introduce a wider audience to the concept of playgroup and invite them to join the community. These online connections have allowed us to support more families with instant chat. Our online content has led to further interactions with families on our website, blog, Facebook, closed Facebook group, email communications and Instagram. Together, these online communications allow us to connect with local communities, and connect people with each other so that they can share experiences, forge friendships, gain support and meet up in real life to play, share and bond.

Facebook

18,905 

Facebook Followers (June 30, 2020)

Instagram

2,900 

Instagram Followers (June 30, 2020)

18,864 

Facebook Page Likes (June 30, 2020)

Blog

5,493 

Facebook Group Members (June 30, 2020)

17.1k

Page Views

5,785

Unique visitors

Email

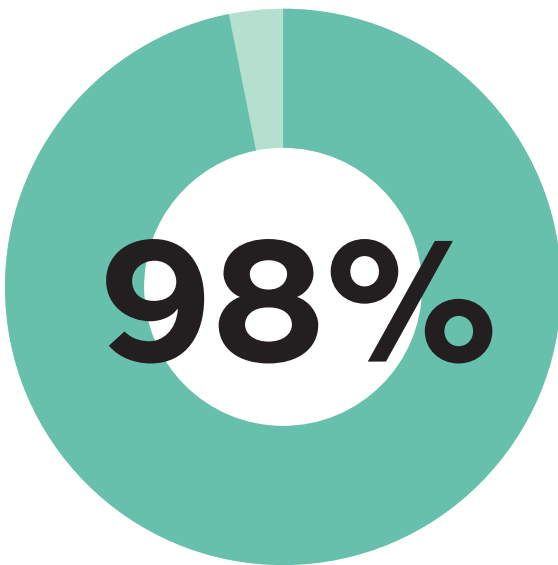
24,784 

Email Subscribers

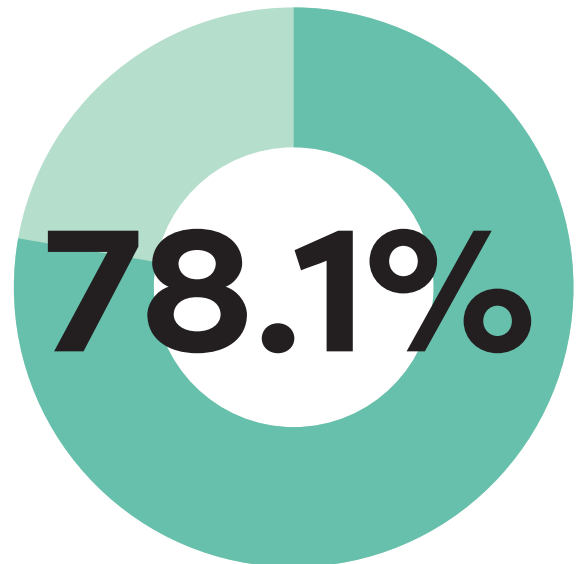
89

Email Campaign Sent

Survey Annual Report



Female



30-40 years old

Primary ways people learn about playgroup:

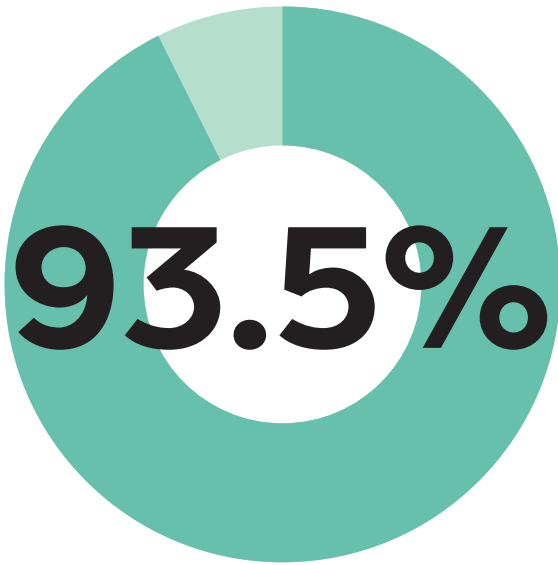
Maternal Child Health Nurse
A friend
Social Media

Primary reason for connecting with local playgroup:

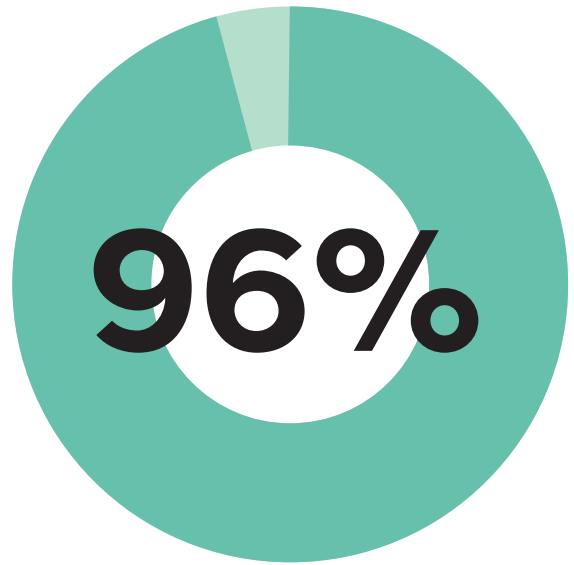
Enhance social connections
Support child development

Most beneficial part of attending playgroup:

Support child development
Strong social connections
Learning through play
78 responses
Connecting with my community



Value playgroup as a key part of the early years learning journey



Of families would recommend playgroup to others



50% attended a Pop-Up Playgroup



46% of people have attended a Move It 4 Kids session



41% attended Library Week



59% have accessed/use a Playgroup Victoria resource



51% attended a Community Playgroup



68% of people have used our activity sheets



29% attended a virtual playgroup



30% activity booklets

Do you feel that you can reach out and seek help from your playgroup or Playgroup Victoria?

“Yes. There are plenty of resources and contacts, I feel confident to reach out.”

“Yes. The lady who runs our playgroup is wonderful.”

“Yes. I can get help any time when needed.”

“Yes, the staff that run our local playgroup are so friendly and inviting. They are great with communicating what is happening.”

Have you enjoyed being a Playgroup Victoria member?

“Yes, tons of resources, activities, discounts, programs - online playgroup, it all been amazing”.

“Yes we enjoy being a member of playgroup. My son enjoys his playgroup sessions where he can play with other friends and we got many friends after joining the playgroup. Thanks playgroup.”

“Yes, I wanted to be a member forever but my kids growing up”

“Absolutely. Best thing I have done with my baby. Especially being my first she has no siblings or cousins.”

“it is a great service, I love the range of options for different ages and types of group.”

Resources

Playgroup Victoria developed a suite of resources for members and professional affiliates that live within their portal. These resources include monthly activity booklets, play sheets, Wild Things Bush-Play Set-Up Guide, and health and safety procedures.



Partnerships

Playgroup Victoria endeavours to closely align with other organisations that hold the same values and vision. Together with other organisations we work to create an opportunity-filled space that supports families with services, resources, events and connections. Below you will find some of our valued partners.





Playgroup Victoria
playgroup.org.au

346 Albert St, Brunswick, 3056
1800 171 882 toll free (within Victoria)
or (03) 9388 1599 (outside Victoria)

9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday