

# Playgroup Victoria

2020/21 Annual Report



Playgroup  
Victoria





# 2020/21

## Year at a Glance

1st July 2020 - 30th June 2021

### MEMBERSHIP

6,484 

Family Members

1,255

Registered Playgroups

556

Professional Affiliates

### PLAYGROUP DEVELOPMENT

147 

Partnerships with Local Professionals

40 A WEEK AVERAGE



Connections with Local Community Playgroups

79

Local Government  
Areas Engaged

36

Local Early Years/  
Professional Networks

21

Local Community  
Playgroup Networks



## ONLINE CONNECTIONS

# 29,184

Subscribers



# 23,965

Facebook Followers

# 3,743



Instagram Followers

# 23,777

Facebook Page Likes

# 15k



Blog Page Views

# 7,274

Facebook Group members

# 434,316

Website Page Views







# Playgroup Victoria

## About

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

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, there were hundreds of playgroups running 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.

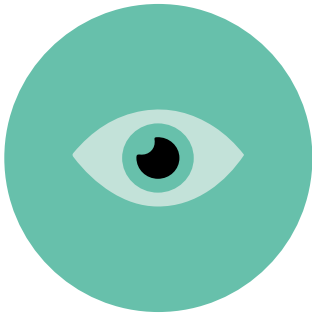
In response to the need, a group of hard-working volunteers came together and invited playgroups and interested people to ring in for advice and support on Monday mornings. The response was so great that in 1974, the *Victorian Playgroup Association* was formed. Its goal was to set up an advisory service, fulfill the need for workshops, lectures and discussions related to parenthood and life with children, and to liaise with local, state and federal governments. 47 years on, Playgroup

Victoria is still working to ensure families have access to and can participate in playgroup. Playgroup has evolved to include a variety of different types of playgroups such as bush playgroups, culturally diverse playgroups, dads playgroups and grandparents playgroups. In 2021 there are more than 2,000 sessions of playgroup running in over 3,000 venues across Victoria.

Funding from the Commonwealth and State Governments has enabled Playgroup Victoria to develop a community development approach to assist and support all playgroups. This place-based approach ensures the needs of the community are better understood, fostering relationships and partnerships within local early childhood and family services.



# Playgroup Victoria Strategic Framework



## VISION

All Victorians value and benefit from playgroup



## PURPOSE

To advocate for playgroup to be recognised as integral to learning, development and wellbeing during the early years.

To support the empowerment of families to create community and nurture their children through relationships and play



## VALUES

- Collaboration and knowledge sharing
- Integrity and ethical practice
- Reconciliation
- Innovation and excellence
- Diversity and inclusion
- Continual learning
- Compassion and empathy

## STRATEGIES

- Increase awareness of the value and benefits of playgroup
- Improve pathways to increase access to the playgroup experience
- Strengthen the playgroup experience and the impact of playgroup
- Grow a (financially) sustainable organisation



# Playgroup Victoria Values Explained

## Collaboration and knowledge sharing

We actively seek out new and innovative practice from each other, stakeholders, and our community to improve our work. Together we focus on creating positive experiences and problem-solving to make this knowledge reusable. We create opportunities to share knowledge with our colleagues and our community. This helps us stimulate innovation and make better decisions faster.

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## Integrity and Ethical Practice

We act with integrity and are committed to upholding our values. We practice, encourage and support open communication. Staff are encouraged to be reflective practitioners who are authentic and transparent. We remain professional while also being personal in our work, building rapport and acknowledging what is important to one another. We respect the opinions of others and stand up for what we believe in, being respectful of each other's choices, rights, beliefs and preferences.

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## Reconciliation

Our organisation will work in a manner that will contribute to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We promote and facilitate respect, trust and positive relationships between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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## Innovation and Excellence

We base our actions on new and emerging research and best practice. We strive for excellence in all our actions. We welcome new ideas, innovation and evolving practices as we continue to develop and change.

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## Diversity and Inclusion

We aim to build a workforce that represents our community in culture, background, ability, skills and experiences. We welcome and embrace difference and aim to reflect this in all our relationships, communications and initiatives. We recognise the learning opportunities of diversity.

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## Continual Learning

We are committed to always improving our work through learning new skills, ideas and concepts drawn from best practice research. We share our learning with colleagues and the professionals and families we support. Through continuous improvement we learn and create innovative programs.

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## Compassion and Empathy

Through an understanding and awareness of our biases towards experiences, feelings and emotions of others, we focus on understanding and responding with support, without trying to solve the pain and issues of others. We demonstrate this through relationship-centered practice. Through reflective practice we can better understand ourselves in order to understand and support others.

# Message

8

## From the Chair and CEO



**Playgroup Victoria CEO**  
Danny Schwarz



**Chair of the Board**  
Felicity Dunn

While it's hard to imagine, and to have foreseen, writing another annual report six weeks into a stage four lockdown, this change in circumstance has brought opportunities to connect with families and playgroups in new ways. Over the past 12 months, the number of families engaged through Playgroup at Home Live (PAHL) has more than tripled to over 36,000. The Helen McPherson Smith Trust support us with a Rapid Response Grant, for which we would like to say thank you. The Playgroup at Home Live initiative has enabled children to socialise with other children with more than 50 per cent of families saying their child enjoyed seeing other children.

Playgroup at Home Live provided opportunities for children and families to interact and see others, as well as providing structure and routine during these uncertain times. We ran a series of special Playgroup at Home sessions which have included: storyteller and proud Gunditjmara/ Wothobaluk woman Nikki Foy, Hullabaloo Music For All, Author Jackie French and Their Excellencies, The Governor General Mr David Hurley and his wife Linda Hurley.

With 75,000 babies born in Victoria each year and approximately 50 per cent of those being a first-born child, we established an online baby playgroup - Baby Playgroup at Home Live. As well as connecting first-time parents with each other, our aim was to provide play ideas and offer support. 96 per cent of participants indicated the sessions fulfilled this aim.

This year we have reviewed and updated our Strategic Plan. Our vision: "All Victorians value and benefit from playgroup."

As we begin to emerge from lockdown across the state, with high levels of vaccination among the adult population, it is our hope that all children aged 0-5 access playgroup - and that they and their parents or caregivers can again connect and learn in-person as much as possible, while ensuring that the safety of all children is protected.

One of our five strategic goals includes the development of an organisational Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). The development of our RAP recognises the important relationships Playgroup Victoria has with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. We are developing our RAP in consultation with Reconciliation Australia, the National body to support all organisations to embed the principles and purpose of reconciliation in the way we operate, engage and interact with our staff, children, families and other organisations. The process involves a number of stages and requires us to reflect



on all aspects of our work, and how our work contributes to Reconciliation, from program delivery to governance. Importantly developing the RAP has enabled us to focus on what it means to be an inclusive organisation. To this end we have continued to develop our relationship with the Victorian Education Aboriginal Education Association Inc- (VAEAI).

In a recent application for funding for PAHL we looked at how telehealth has enabled people to access healthcare from home. PAHL has been able to do the same. To further develop the model, we are partnering with organisations to support them to enhance their reach to clients and therefore their clients access to playgroup. Working with VAEAI, and the Wathaurong Aboriginal Service, we have supported them to develop their own PAHL which they have been facilitating twice a week for six weeks.

In the spirit on inclusion Playgroup Victoria has switched its membership model to offer Free Family Membership – so our community playgroups will need only pay \$50 to register the playgroup itself, and all families will be able to attend, regardless of their individual financial constraints. Playgroup Registration comes with a range of benefits including support for running a playgroup, play ideas, resources, plus public liability insurance.

Playgroup Victoria has become the Australian licence holder for the PEEP Learning Together Programme. The program is available under the DET School Readiness Funding Menu, meaning early education and care services can access the program to strengthen their capacity to build partnerships with families with young children. We are excited by the potential impact of the PEEP Learning Together Programme to

empower parents as children's first and most enduring educators and plan to expand this offering in 2022.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our funders both the State and Federal Government, as well as Gandel Philanthropy and the Helen McPherson Smith Trust. All have shown consideration in the way we need to change and adapt what we are doing, without any impact to what we receive from them.

We would also like to thank our voluntary board members, who have helped ensure our organisation is pursuing its objectives – and the many volunteer parents on the ground who have helped ensure parents and children connect and stay connected and supported. It truly is a most extraordinary time in our history to be caring for babies and young children.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge and thank our extraordinary staff. In the most challenging of times, they have been able to adapt and pivot to working from home, while being more engaged with more people across the state. This has not been without its challenges. Many staff have juggled home schooling amongst the ever increasing and changing range of obstacles the pandemic has thrown our way. It has not been easy, yet there is a sense that we have been able to come through this with a new perspective on what is possible and at the centre, a focus on what is most important.

We are looking forward to a new year of in-person playgroups and interaction, for which we know now more than ever, is what makes all of us tick.

# Treasurer's Report

Despite the ongoing challenges faced as a result of the enduring pandemic, Playgroup Victoria has helped families, in particular children, remain connected and has continued to provide them with the opportunity to come together to learn, share and play during this difficult time.

As a result of the persistent lockdowns, the ability for playgroups to meet in person was drastically reduced by approximately 80 per cent over the past year. Through its key initiative, Playgroup at Home Live, and the introduction of workshops for playgroup leaders, the organisation has continued to provide support to playgroups and families- and has been successful in achieving significant levels of engagement despite the restrictions and inability to gather in-person.

In consideration of their inability to hold traditional playgroup sessions, Playgroup Victoria's Board agreed to waive the playgroup registration fees. Membership fees also ceased in line with the Board's strategic plan to focus on building the number of registered playgroups and playgroup registration fees. Whilst this resulted in significantly lower than expected revenues generated from playgroup registrations, overall, Playgroup Victoria's financial performance was relatively consistent with the prior year primarily due to the Federal Government's continued financial support during the pandemic.

The equity position of the organisation has improved significantly at financial 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 \$800,778 compared to a prior year position of \$552,791. For the financial year ended 30 June 2021, a net surplus of \$247,987 was reported, compared to the prior year's net surplus of \$248,732. Revenues were down slightly for the period, by less than 1 per cent, to \$3,044,764 and there was a corresponding decrease in expenses of less than 1 per cent to \$2,796,777. On behalf of the Board, I confirm the financial statements present a true and fair view of the financial position of Playgroup Victoria Incorporated as at 30 June 2021 and that there are reasonable grounds to believe Playgroup Victoria Incorporated can continue to pay its debts as and when they fall due.

JOANNE CLARK

*Treasurer*







# Risk and Audit Committee

## Financials

| Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the period ended 30 June 2021 |      |                |                |
|--|------|----------------|----------------|
| Income   |      |                |                |
|  | Note | 2021 (\$)      | 2020 (\$)      |
| Revenue  | 3    | 2,358,698      | 2,635,690      |
| Other income   | 3    | 686,066        | 431,655        |
| Expenses   |      |                |                |
| Employee benefits expenses   |      | (2,143,104)    | (2,067,174)    |
| Client support expenses  |      | (243,122)      | (231,965)      |
| Computer expenses  |      | (110,179)      | (102,193)      |
| Insurance expenses   |      | (51,865)       | (56,334)       |
| Utilities expenses   |      | (36,562)       | (48,532)       |
| Occupancy costs  |      | (25,311)       | (34,018)       |
| Membership fees paid   |      | (20,698)       | (29,278)       |
| Marketing expenses   |      | (19,865)       | (41,766)       |
| Vehicle expenses   |      | (15,248)       | (14,612)       |
| Bank charges   |      | (2,241)        | (4,499)        |
| Depreciation expenses  |      | (53,678)       | (41,882)       |
| Other expenses   |      | (74,904)       | (146,360)      |
| <b>Surplus before income tax</b>   |      | <b>247,987</b> | <b>248,732</b> |
| Income tax expense   | 2(b) | -              | -              |
| <b>Net surplus for the year</b>  |      | <b>247,987</b> | <b>248,732</b> |
| <b>Other comprehensive surplus for the year, net of tax</b>                                  |      | <b>-</b>       | <b>-</b>       |
| <b>Total comprehensive surplus for the year</b>  |      | <b>247,987</b> | <b>248,732</b> |

## Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2021

| Current Assets                        |      |                  |                  |
|---------------------------------------|------|------------------|------------------|
|                                       | Note | 2021 (\$)        | 2020(\$)         |
| Cash and cash equivalents             | 5    | 350,450          | 294,249          |
| Trade & other receivables             | 6    | 5,570            | 189,492          |
| Other financial assests               | 7    | 800,000          | 450,000          |
| Other assets                          | 8    | 35,249           | 43,250           |
| <b>Total Current Assets</b>           |      | <b>1,191,269</b> | <b>976,991</b>   |
| Non-Current Assets                    |      |                  |                  |
| Property, plant and equipment         | 11   | 59,668           | 45,023           |
| Intangible assets                     | 12   | 71,571           | 102,581          |
| <b>Total Non - Current Assets</b>     |      | <b>131,239</b>   | <b>147,604</b>   |
| <b>Total Assets</b>                   |      | <b>1,322,508</b> | <b>1,124,595</b> |
| Current Liabilities                   |      |                  |                  |
| Trade and other payables              | 9    | 159,777          | 203,462          |
| Employee benefits                     | 13   | 278,216          | 188,165          |
| Other financial liabilities           | 10   | 63,840           | 154,407          |
| <b>Total Current Liabilities</b>      |      | <b>501,833</b>   | <b>546,034</b>   |
| Non-Current Liabilities               |      |                  |                  |
| Employee benefits                     | 13   | 19,897           | 25,770           |
| <b>Total Non- Current Liabilities</b> |      | <b>19,897</b>    | <b>25,770</b>    |
| <b>Total Liabilities</b>              |      | <b>521,730</b>   | <b>571,804</b>   |
| <b>Net Assets</b>                     |      | <b>800,778</b>   | <b>552,791</b>   |
| Equity                                |      |                  |                  |
| Reserves                              |      | 4,643            | 4,643            |
| Accumulated funds                     |      | 796,135          | 548,148          |
| <b>Total Equity</b>                   |      | <b>800,778</b>   | <b>552,791</b>   |

# Playgroup Victoria's Response to COVID-19

As Melbourne, and indeed Regional Victoria, underwent the longest lockdown period in the world, Playgroup Victoria endeavoured to provide accurate, reassuring and timely updates about restrictions and how the pandemic impacted playgroups.



As the uncertainty of Covid-19 continued on, Playgroup Victoria aimed to support families to be able to continue to play and nurture a sense of wellbeing, from wherever they were.

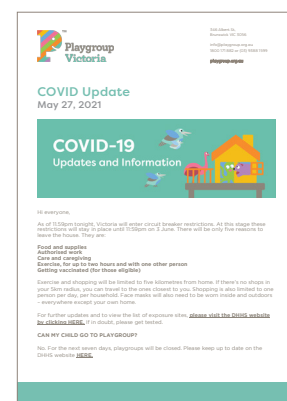
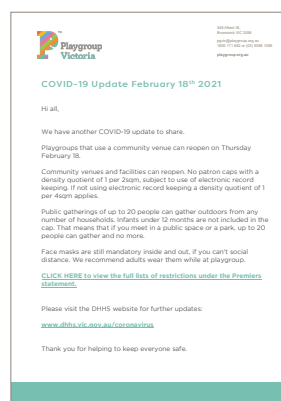
Throughout the year Playgroup Victoria published a series of CEO updates, outlining the government health guidelines, an overview of how the restrictions impacted playgroups and provided links to our online sessions and resources suited to the home environment. During this period, we aimed to be a positive force, sharing ideas, resources tailored to families and opportunities to connect with one another in a safe forum online.

As part of the Playgroup at Home initiative, we created a variety of play sheets to keep families engaged and entertained at home. Playgroup Victoria developed inexpensive or cost-free things for families to do. Play ideas included: homemade instruments, collages, online yoga class, picnic in the back garden, recipes, scavenger hunt, counting games and homemade cubbies.

Along the way we encouraged families to make cards, create artworks or write letters to share with friends, family or those who might have needed an extra dose of kindness during this time.

While we were apart, we remained connected, ensuring people felt that they can reach out and be part of the playgroup community.

Read on to learn more about how we developed the Playgroup at Home experience.



VIEW OUR COVID UPDATES WEB PAGE HERE

“We hope that through these activities, parents and children will be able to create their own world where the things that support relationships to thrive and grow can be enjoyed. Play can be the catalyst which allows us to experience a connection remembered and relived for a lifetime.” - Danny Schwarz, Playgroup Victoria CEO



# Playgroup at Home Live

In last years Annual Report, we noted: *“The considerable effort to develop this emerging project’s 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 rewarding venture, undoubtedly positively impacting our workplace’s connections, relationships and social capital”.*

In July 2020, when *Playgroup at Home Live* was launched, it commenced with a very strong foundation as encapsulated in the quote provided. It is true to say that this project has been the gift that keeps on giving. Many staff from across the organisation continue to be involved bringing much pride and sense of purpose for many.

During 2020 and now, into 2021, playgroups would only been able to meet for 18 percent of their usual number of sessions in-person. The key aspects of playgroup, including play (with other children and caregiver), support and socialisation (at playgroup and beyond playgroup) and routine (meeting up each week at the same time) were no longer possible. And yet, the need for these was even greater; the protective factors to buffer stress were unable to take place.

Already working from home, staff recognised our organisation’s response would necessarily include an online format. This idea would never have been entertained previously with playgroup seen only as an in-person experience shared in a physical space.

Importantly, supporting research on children’s experience of shared virtual space/virtual presence provided efficacy to the idea, and further, contingent online interaction has been part of many children’s lives for more than a decade (*Tarasuik, J. C., Galligan, R., & Kaufman, J. (2011). Almost being there: Video communication with young children. PloS one, 6(2), e17129.*)

Our response needed to be available no matter the level of restrictions, as demonstrated below:

|                        | Stage 4 restrictions | Stage 3 restrictions | Stage 2 restrictions | Stage 1 restrictions | No restrictions |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Playgroup at Home LIVE | ✓                    | ✓                    | ✓                    | ✓                    | ✓               |
| In-person playgroup    | ✗                    | ✗                    | ✗                    | ✓                    | ✓               |



^ Pictured: Playgroup at Home LIVE facilitators, December 2020





^ Pictured: Participant Abbey Kunstler enjoying Playgroup at Home LIVE

*Playgroup at Home Live*, a remotely delivered, interactive playgroup experience, intended to simulate in-person playgroup sessions and to connect families with others through play, from the safety of their homes. Children and their carers would be able to participate in accessible, inclusive activities together, and do so alongside other families.

#### Anticipated benefits to families who participated included;

- enhancing the early home learning environment,
- greater recognition of the importance of play (and thus more play),
- more and enhanced parent-child interaction,
- a sense of socialisation,
- reduce feelings of social isolation
- and normalisation of parenting.

**During the 20/21 year, more than 11,700 parents with over 13,000 children joined over 300 sessions of live and interactive music and playgroup sessions.**

A survey at the three month mark, demonstrated that we had been successful with the only alternative to in-person playgroups. Most significantly, nearly all families (91 percent) said the *Playgroup at Home Live* made them feel less socially isolated during lockdown by either a little (65 percent) or a lot (26 percent).

By providing a semblance of routine and social connection to families, *Playgroup at Home Live* may have mitigated some of the distress of Covid-19 by helping to maintain a routine for many families throughout lockdown and provided activities, ideas, and socialisation for children and adults alike. The survey responses also indicated that the online delivery of playgroup provided some of the benefits known to occur at in-person sessions, most notably, social support and ideas for activities to do with their child.

*Playgroup at Home Live* was born from the upheaval of Covid-19 but will not end with Covid-19. The program's maturity is now evident through its many innovative and exploratory practices and partnerships and we continue to deliver diverse sessions to engage families.



# Online Playgroup Platform

Live and interactive playgroup sessions were brought to life on Zoom in 2020. Playgroup and baby playgroup sessions were regular features of the week, providing families with a source of community, connection, learning and play inspiration. Special guests including authors and musicians joined the sessions along the way and we celebrated significant events on the annual calendar. The online sessions kept families and the wider playgroup community connected during the uncertainty of the pandemic and created further opportunities to find a sense of belonging.



^ Pictured: Participant Abbey Kunstler enjoying Playgroup at Home LIVE



## Playgroup at Home LIVE

Run by playgroup facilitators, these sessions provided plenty of opportunities to connect, learn, share and play. Playgroup Victoria welcomes families to each playgroup session with an Acknowledgement of Country. During the session the group sing songs, share stories, enjoy a play activity and connect online. Playgroup facilitators talk with the families throughout the session and encourage the children to join in at home.



## Baby Playgroup at Home LIVE

This is time for parents and carers with babies to bond and connect with other families going through similar ages and stages. Playgroup staff are there to guide the session, sharing ideas, resources and play ideas. These sessions are for babies 0-12 months, accompanied by a parent and carer.



## PlayConnect at Home LIVE

In September 2020 we began to run PlayConnect sessions on Zoom once a week. These sessions were a free service and benefited families and carers of children 0-6 with Autism Spectrum Disorder, developmental delay or behavioural concerns. The sessions provided activities specifically planned for the developmental needs of the children, that they could follow along with at home.



## MyTime at Home LIVE

In November, MyTime sessions were run online. MyTime at Home LIVE provided an opportunity for families to come together with other parents, support each other and share experiences in a safe, small group setting, which is conducted online.



## All Come Out To Play!

Amanda Testro from **Hullabaloo Music for All** presented live and interactive music sessions full of humour, stories, dancing and fun! The *ALL Come Out to Play!* program that helps children learn about respectful relationships and gender equality. It was funded by Gandel Philanthropy and the Free from Violence Innovation Fund, Office for Women, Dept of Premier and Cabinet. This project is a partnership with drummond street services, Hullabaloo Music for All and Playgroup Victoria.



## Move It 4 Kids

The *Move It 4 Kids* team delivered their action-packed, fun, inclusive music sessions live. *Move It 4 Kids* is a high energy program funded by AUS Sport. The program offered comedy, music and movement to encourage good habits for the whole family. This project is a partnership with drummond street services, Hullabaloo Music for All and Playgroup Victoria.



## Music Time

*Playgroup at Home Live Music Time* sprung to life with host Amanda Testro from Hullabaloo Music For All. Amanda invited families to sing, dance and enjoy a wide range of music and play.



## Auslan Interpreted Session

9 June 2021

*ALL Come Out To Play!* Interactive Auslan Interpreted Session in Partnership with Signee Tots from the John Pierce Centre, Playgroup at Home and Hullabaloo Music. Families joined Amanda Testro from Hullabaloo Music For All and Melissa from Signee Tots playgroup for an action packed session full of dance, songs, stories, movement, fun and play. The session was suitable for Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and Auslan-interested families.



## Special Guest Online Playgroup Sessions July 2020 - June 2021



### Jackie French Storytime

9 July 2020

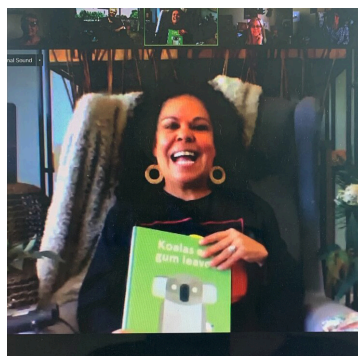
Renowned Australia Author Jackie French joined us for a special reading of *Diary of a Wombat*, followed by questions with the children.



### Their Excellences Join Playgroup at Home LIVE

1 September, 2020

Their Excellences The Governor-General Mr David Hurley and his wife Linda Hurley joined playgroup for a special storytime and shared some songs



### NAIDOC Week Storytime with Nikki Foy

10 November 2020

Nikki Foy joined us from Wadawurrung Country for a special NAIDOC Week playgroup session.



### National Simultaneous Storytime

19 May 2021

CEO Danny Schwarz and Playgroup Facilitator Leanne Dharni hosted a special simultaneous storytime session, reading this year's featured book, *Give Me Some Space* by Philip Bunting.

# Playgroup at Home Experiences



“The world changed enormously in 2020 and with that change, we have adapted, evolved and grown, while working towards new ways of supporting families in our communities. I felt privileged to be invited into the homes of thousands of families from all walks of life.”- Naomi Jeffree, Playgroup Facilitator

“Abby runs around the lounge room getting excited when she sees me bring out the computer. She knows that she’s about to have my full attention for 30 minutes and there’s lots of fun to be had. It’s great for our mother-daughter bonding!”- Brea Kunstler, Playgroup Attendee



“The personal nature of the LIVE sessions increases the depth of the engagement and keeps families coming back. Let’s not forget – It’s super fun!”- Nancylee Merzel, Resources and Projects Coordinator

# Playgroup at Home Experiences



"I am very grateful for the sessions run. Its super helpful with the little one." - Online playgroup attendee

"The sessions are very understated and natural in their message, but they model behaviours and values of respect and equality which are so affirming for my daughter and our family."- Pat McConville, Playgroup Attendee



"You are doing well. I have run playgroups for 40 years and run my own playgroup online as required during each lockdown so as to keep the group feel for our local families. Some of our members also tune into Playgroup Victoria on a different day. I stay in touch and join you occasionally to keep ideas rolling in my head, remember songs, and broaden my experience of people in different suburbs." - Online playgroup attendee

"We seemed to be so far away on zoom, then suddenly we weren't! Never underestimate the power of a story to bring us all together."- Jackie French, Australian Author



# Reconciliation

The Playgroup Victoria Reconciliation Action Plan recognises the important relationships Playgroup Victoria has with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and pay respect to elders past, present and future. Reconciliation is an important part of our history. First Nations peoples and cultures are an indelible part of Australian life, land and national identity. Playgroup Victoria is committed to embedding First Nations peoples' histories, cultures, knowledge and perspectives in our work as an organisation, in our work with stakeholders and with playgroups.



# Reconciliation Action Plan

Playgroup Victoria has embarked on developing our first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). There are four stages in a Reconciliation Action plan:

## 1. Reflect - 2. Innovate - 3. Stretch - 4. Elevate

Despite having done significant work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the past, we made the decision to start at stage 1 – the “Reflect” stage. The key commitments of an organisation for this stage are:

- Establish RAP Working Group with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation
- Scope and reflect on how your workplace can contribute to reconciliation
- Build an understanding of your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and sphere of influence
- Prepare business cases to senior leaders to gain their support for reconciliation initiatives (including staff engagement, cultural learning, employment, and procurement)
- Report annually to Reconciliation Australia

In November 2020 we established a RAP Working Group consisting of representatives from every department within the organisation. We are working to engage an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative to join the Working Group. Our RAP is on track to be completed by December 2021.



< The artwork displayed here was created by a member and volunteer at our Hume Indigenous MyTime group – Sharon Slater, Kamilaroi NSW. This artwork is proudly displayed in our office reception area.

**Entitled: *Our Footprints Our Culture.***

*“This painting represents our Victorian Aboriginal Children’s/Families’ footprints coming together from our meeting places (big circles) around Victoria. Our children follow in their parents’ and elders’ footprints to come together to teach and learn their culture through our land, animals and our stories.” - Sharon Slater, Kamilaroi NSW.*







# Inclusion

The Playgroup Victoria Programs department re-evaluated its identity and has changed its name to the **Inclusion department**. The main aspects of inclusion that we are focusing on are children with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, culturally and linguistically diverse families, and gender diverse families. Our website is being updated to reflect these changes and to provide a range of new resources that will help playgroups become more welcoming and inclusive of diversity.



## Want Support Connecting to your Village?



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.

As a result of Covid-19 and the regular lockdowns, the *PlayConnect* facilitators have been forced to adapt and pivot. Regardless of the disruptions to in-person sessions, facilitators managed to stay connected with families through a combination of online Zoom sessions, video recorded playgroup activities for families to watch at their own leisure, regular email and phone contact to provide information and linkages and Facebook messenger chats. Facilitators who were previously very nervous and hesitant about using technology have since become very confident with using Zoom and video recording programs to engage with their families.

Want Support  
Connecting to your Village?

**Join us for  
PlayConnect  
at Home LIVE  
via Zoom every  
Thursday at  
10.00am**

Supported Playgroups for families with young children aged 0-6 who have Autism Spectrum Disorder, developmental delay or behavioural concerns.

Connect through play [www.playconnect.com.au](http://www.playconnect.com.au)



For a time we trailed *PlayConnect at Home Live*, which was modeled on the very successful online playgroup initiative - *Playgroup at Home Live*. The trial was successful; however, it was determined that it would be much more effective to up skill the *Playgroup at Home LIVE* facilitators to implement a few inclusion strategies, rather than have a separate program.

Despite Covid-19 lockdowns, we continued to receive enquiries and expressions of interest from families who wanted to join a group.

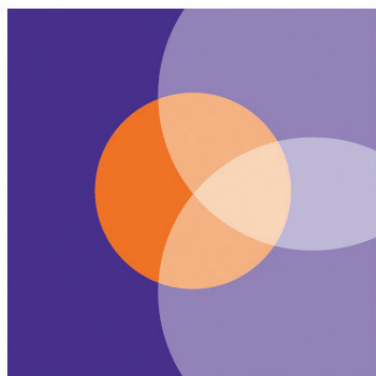
“Playgroup has helped myself and Oliver so much. It has connected me with other families going through similar circumstances and taught me so much about Autism. I don’t know how I would have ever navigated my way through all this without the help of Rose and her wonderful staff.”



Families share their positive  
from PlayConnect experiences

“I wanted to pass on some feedback from Mary – she called me today about Johnny’s autism assessment. She was wild with praise for you and for playgroup, she said she couldn’t speak highly enough about you and the support that you have provided to her. She said Johnny has got so much out of going to PlayConnect.”





# MyTime

*supporting parents of children with disabilities*

Just like the PlayConnect program and all other playgroups, Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns had a major impact on the MyTime program. Most facilitators were successful at running their sessions via Zoom. Others found creative ways of remaining engaged with their families.

Covid-19 provided an opportunity to establish a regular on-going virtual *MyTime* group for families who can not attend face-to-face sessions due to distance, timing or serious illness. The sessions were held in the evening and the group has been very successful, with families from across Victoria joining in.

In the absence of the pamper sessions *MyTime* groups normally provide, and to give families a little pick-me-up during lockdowns, facilitators sent out care packages to their participants which were very gratefully received.



^ Pictured: Facilitators assembled care packages for MyTime families



^ Pictured: Several MyTime groups gathered outdoors for Christmas get-togethers, December 2020



# Playgroup Development

Over the course of the last year, the Playgroup Development team have continued to engage, advocate and support the playgroup platform across the state. While the pandemic has altered how we have engaged with playgroups, the Playgroup Development Consultants (PDC's) have continued to be a point of contact for families, playgroups and professionals alike.

The team have been actively involved in more early years networks, professional playgroup networks and gatherings, local government community playgroup networks. We have actively initiated, supported and engaged playgroups in many different settings including; schools, libraries, neighbourhood houses, parks and outdoor spaces, community hubs and local kindergartens. In each of these settings we were dedicated to helping as many playgroups as possible.

Throughout the year we have used innovation approaches by attending more virtual meetings, virtual training and workshops, offering more support through our online opportunities and sharing more of our digital resources to those who require a helping hand.

The Playgroup Development team look forward to continuing to use innovative methods to assist and support playgroups to be the nurturing backbone of countless communities.



## Playgroup Victoria and Ballarat Regional Multi Cultural Council

*Developing Our Children Together* is a project focused on multicultural communities that provides parenting support through collaborative partnerships between culturally and linguistically diverse community organisations and providers of early childhood services.

*Developing Our Children Together (DOCT)* is a multicultural information and mentoring project designed to support culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) parents to fully appreciate the value of early childhood services directed at education, health, and family wellbeing and finding services based on family needs.

Playgroup Victoria attended the first group, and will continue to support new groups to the program, by presenting information about the importance of playgroup and how to start and operate a playgroup. As a part of the session, Playgroup Development Consultant Louise Buckle-Smith set-up a playgroup with fun and engaging activities, songs and stories for the children and families to participate in. As a part of the partnership, a goal was set to establish a community playgroup once the group completed the program and relationships were established within the group. This has now been achieved, with several families attending from the program as well as the opportunity for the general community to join in.

Working across multiple Local Government Areas (LGA's), the Playgroup Development Consultants (PDC's) were able to gain an understanding of different models of playgroup support and innovative practice demonstrated within LGA's and also using practice wisdom from one LGA to support the challenges faced by others. Over the last year, our PDC's have faced challenges, supporting community playgroups during the pandemic. These challenges were common across many councils resulting in many LGA staff experiencing isolation from others.

Based on the model of an existing network in another region of Victoria, the PDC proposed to initiate a network covering the South East Metro, Bayside and Gippsland regions. A representative from each council was invited to be part of the network, with the intention that this network builds a collective approach to support their local community playgroups. The participants are invited to share ideas and opportunities that support community playgroups, gain support on complex

issues they face, share their practice and eventually work on collaborative projects to enhance the community playgroup platform. Professionals are also invited to present their programs or opportunities relevant to community playgroups and families in this region.

As the network is coming to the end of its inaugural year, the participants have reported their eagerness and commitment to the network moving forward as their connections and collaborative partnerships are firmly founded. It is anticipated that this model of network will support the community playgroups in the region.

This cross LGA approach will foster more awareness of playgroup for families, better connections between playgroups and local professionals and support better access pathways for all families into playgroup. This model has been demonstrated as an effective and productive method of building and enhancing the community playgroup platform on a larger scale.

## Community of Practice Forums For DFFH Supported Playgroup Facilitators

With the pandemic impacting our teams ability to travel to the regions of Victoria, the PDC's have continued to facilitate the **Community of Practice** forums for the Department of Family, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) through facilitating 48 individual online gatherings, for 10 different areas across the state. With just under 198 facilitators now joining the **Community of Practice** sessions each term, the online platform has provided us all with the opportunity to remain connected and continuing to learn and develop new skills as playgroup facilitators.

The **Community of Practice** sessions allow facilitators from each region to gather, explore relevant topics to their practice and enhance their skills. The facilitators share their practice wisdom and experiences which encourages others to

integrate innovative ideas and approaches in their practice to meet the needs of families attending their playgroups. The facilitators are able to come together to access support from their peers to address challenges they face and positively self-reflect on their roles as facilitators.

Over the last year, facilitators have been faced with challenges not encountered before. The **Communities of Practice** have fostered relationships and peer support between facilitators and between LGA's across the state. We continue to plan for future gatherings for **Community of Practice** forums and continue to support the facilitators who actively and with dedication bring supported playgroup platform to so many families.



## Virtual Intergenerational Playgroups

November 2020 marked the first virtual gathering for the Intergenerational Playgroup with Mercy Place residents in Ballarat. Families from around Victoria joined the session from their own homes to play and build connections for the residents at the aged care facility.

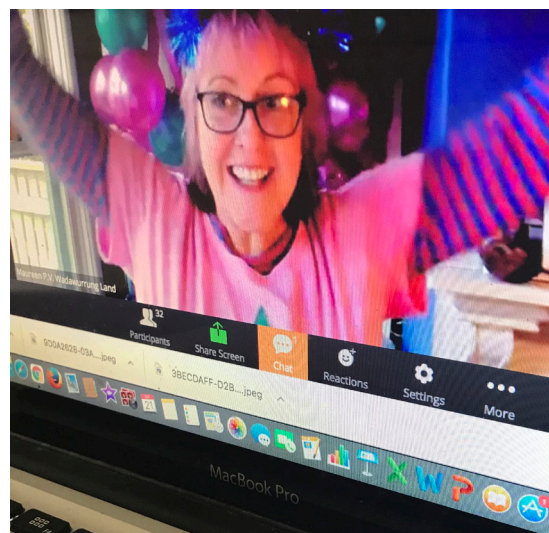
Just before Christmas, Playgroup Victoria Development Consultant Maureen Hatcher visited the facility and lead the playgroup face to face with residents, with families zooming in. A distressed Italian resident was brought into the room and caught glimpse of the babies and little ones on the screen. Her body language instantly reflected the joy and natural love for younger generations, “*Bambini*” she smiled pointing at the screen. In that moment the foundation for a baby specific Intergenerational Playgroup was envisaged and set to flourish into weekly gatherings for the residents to come and join the families in their play.

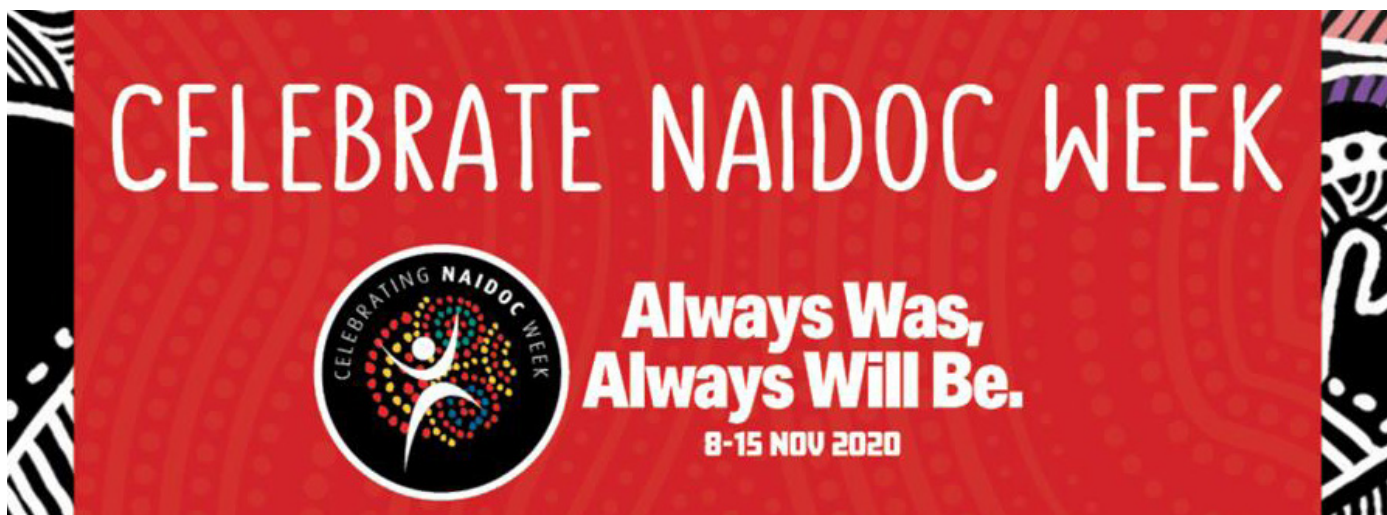
Over the course of the following months, the program grew to larger groups with more residents and families choosing to join. It has recently combined with a second aged care home, *Blue Cross Darnlee* in Toorak. It has also transitioned to children aged 0-5 years due to the interest from families. The families start by saying good morning to each resident by name, then do a show and tell, sharing something that is special to them. The group incorporates learning a new sign in Auslan each week and follows a common theme set by the interests of the group.

Maureen Hatcher facilitates the sessions, bringing her strengths as an early years educator alongside the strong desire of local families, staff and residents to bring their community together. We have witnessed relationships flourish between the residents and the families, with genuine care and compassion to connect with each other.

Through music and song the residents and families dance on the screens in moments of pure and simple joy. Facilitators, families and residents alike look forward to the following week to join and come together. The virtual format has defied all the barriers our community are facing, and we are eager to continue this positive journey with more residential facilities.

Pictured to right: 1. Playgroup Victoria Development Advisor Maureen Hatcher facilitating a session, 2. Marketing material used to promote the sessions. 3. Aged care residents partaking an online session





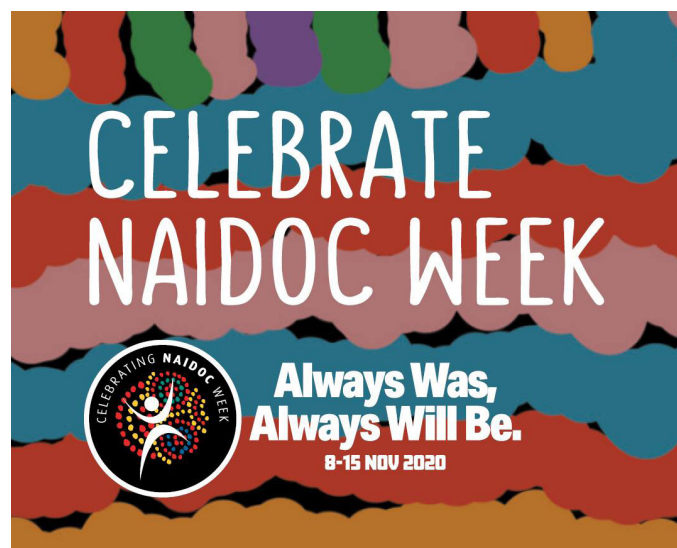
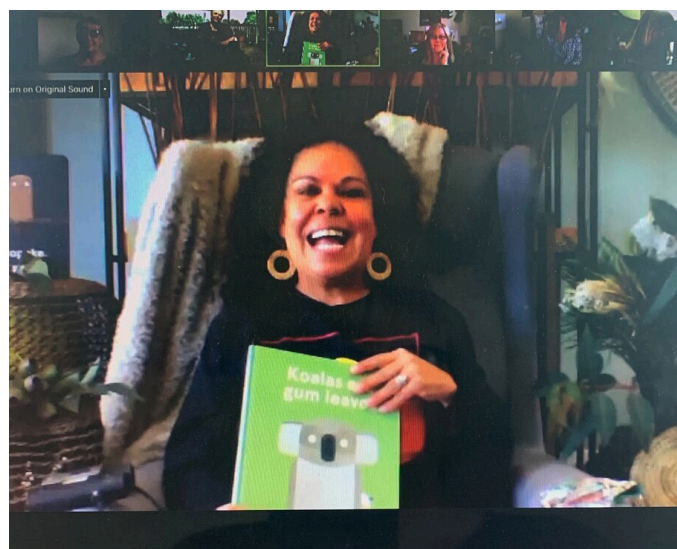
## NAIDOC Week 8th - 15th November 2020

During NAIDOC Week, Playgroup Victoria was privileged to welcome Nikki Foy, a proud Gunditjmara/Wothobaluk woman, to celebrate and provide families the opportunity to learn more about the First Nations Peoples traditions and culture at an online playgroup session.

Alongside our playgroup facilitators, Nikki worked magically with the children and families sharing the book *Koalas Eat Gum Leaves* by Laura and Philip Bunting. Musician Amanda Testro from Hullabaloo Music sang *Goodnight Kakadu* in the afternoon session.

The online playgroup sessions provided opportunities to recognise and respect Aboriginal culture by celebrating their histories and by gaining knowledge to support a positive future in our community.

Pictured: ^ 1. Official NAIDOC Week 2020 Artwork. > 2. Nikki Foy reading a story at an online session during NAIDOC Week 2020









# Practice and Research

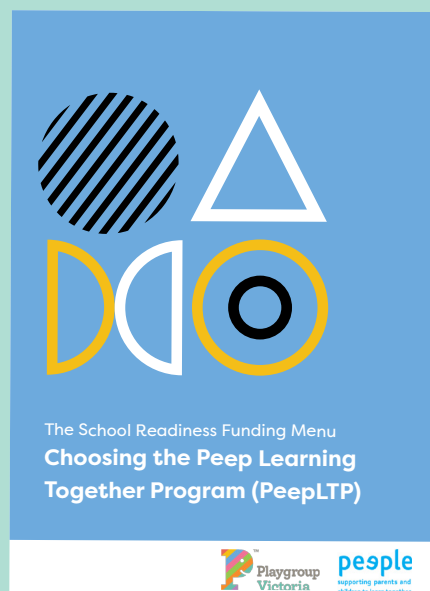
This past year provided the Practice and Research team with opportunities to assist and support playgroups, families and professionals in unexpected ways. 2020/21 required us to innovate and pivot in response to the ever-changing conditions of the pandemic restrictions, and thus develop contemporary solutions to overcome these. These strategies resulted in new levels of engagement we have not experienced before.

## Peep Learning Together Programme

Throughout 2020 Playgroup Victoria regularly met with Dr Sally Smith, CEO of Peeple, UK, to discuss the Australian Licence of Peep Learning Together Programme. Following these negotiations, Playgroup Victoria became the Licence Holder in November 2020, and appointed a National Manager in February 2021, to build the program in Victoria initially, and with plans to extend it nationally. The National Manager is the only person in Australia who has achieved the required status and expertise to lead this program, and thus brings significant standard and quality to this role, ensuring we meet the requirements of our contract with Peeple.

Along with offering training and implementation support from February to June 2021, the National Manager has been developing prospectus for diverse sectors to provide explanation about PeepLTP as well as how the program can be implemented and utilised in their settings.

All Playgroup Victoria staff are invited to undertake the PeepLTP training with some staff also becoming practitioner trainers. Staff capacity building is one of our organisation's objectives and staff have reported that this opportunity brings quality and efficacy to their work with parents and playgroups. Additionally, PeepLTP and its parent resources have been included, and embedded, in the redevelopment of the monthly themed playgroup booklets, providing parents and families with evidence-based information and materials. [Learn more about Peep HERE](#)



Download our Peep prospectus

## The Annual Playgroup Victoria Conference

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The annual *Playgroup Makes a Difference* conference did not take place in 2020, and was planned to be delivered in-person in June, 2021. Due to the pandemic lockdown and restrictions, the conference was cancelled, with new plans to deliver virtually in October 2021. It was unanimously agreed by the conference planning team that the audience for this conference, playgroup professionals state-wide, generally preferred an in-person conference to enjoy the additional benefits of networking. Thus, the virtual conference did not proceed and an in-person conference is planned for the second quarter of 2022.

As a result of this decision, the Practice and Research team are collaborating alongside the Development and Support team to deliver a professional series. Presentations and forums of themes/topics relevant and important to playgroup professionals will be delivered by experts in the field online. Additionally, both teams are working to deliver an innovative learning opportunity for parents of community playgroups to join interactive sessions about enhancing their playgroups. Both will be offered in the first half of 2022.

## RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

### Increasing Awareness of Playgroup and its Benefits

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In June 2021, *Best Practice Framework for Playgroups-in-schools* project was completed. This project was funded by the **Australian Research Council**, a linkage project between Playgroup Victoria and **Australian Catholic University**. The project has resulted in materials about school playgroups for various audiences from policy makers to parents. [Find out more HERE.](#)

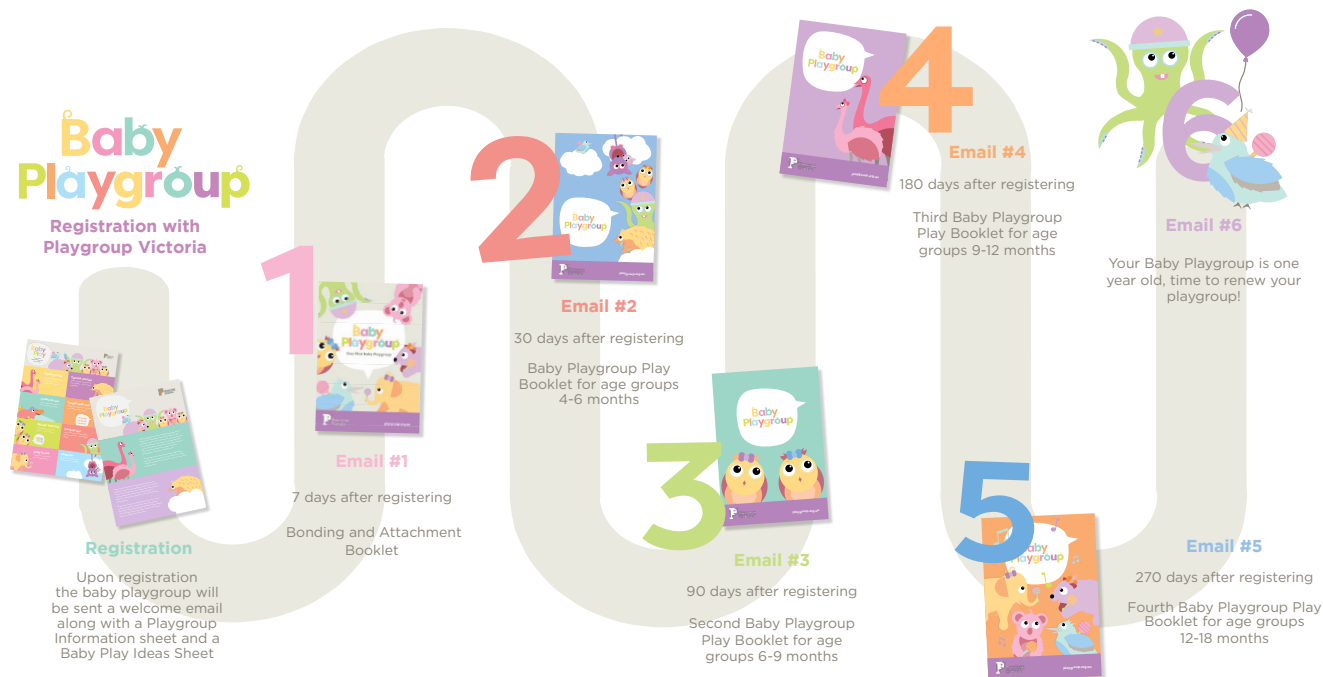
Although many 2021 conferences were cancelled or postponed, the Practice and Research team were able to spread the word about the highly successful *Playgroup at Home Live* initiative, at the **International Conference of Social Pedagogy** and the **Early Childhood Association Conference**, both run online. Additionally, an article about *Playgroup at Home Live* has been accepted as part of the Covid-19 edition of the international research journal, *Children Youth and Environment*.

In our organisation's first academic publication (sans conference proceedings) we share the story of the development, implementation, delivery and evaluation of the online interactive sessions. The reports from families about their *Playgroup at Home Live* experience revealed some of the benefits that are associated with in-person playgroup sessions including: social connections, routine, and play. These may have mitigated some of the negative impacts of Covid-19 restrictions on children and their parents. That edition has yet to be released.

Playgroup Victoria's Research Manager, Dr. Joanne Tarasuik, represented playgroup organisations on the **National Advisory Group**, amongst other experts in the field, playing a key role in the development of the Playgroup Statement. This document brings attention to the efficacy, benefits and value of playgroup, and will assist and support our advocacy work in the future.

Finally, we evaluated the **Playgroup Restart** project funded by *The Ian Potter Foundation* via Playgroup Australia, which examined the role of resources, mentoring, and a subsidy to assist playgroups amid the pandemic. This report will be available in late 2021.





## FIRST TIME PARENT GROUP TRANSITION TO BABY PLAYGROUP

### A continuing project

From 2017- 2019, Playgroup Victoria partnered with the Maternal and Child Health Service (MCH) and the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) to develop strategies to support MCH nurses to enhance the transition of First-Time Parent Groups (FTPG) to become baby playgroups. This project resulted in an engaging suite of resources for nurses to provide to new parents.

Following a few false-starts due to the pandemic, our team designed a comprehensive and contemporary model to engage MCH nurse in Victoria, and allied staff, who work with FTPG. These resources were used to promote playgroup and to assist new parents to convert their group to a baby playgroup, register with Playgroup Victoria and join a nurturing email journey together.

The nurturing journey collateral has been designed and developed to provide messages and information about the benefits of playgroup for parents such as social support, relationships and connections and for babies' learning, development and wellbeing. Additionally, the evidence-based

materials provided to parents will also contain relevant information provided by the MCH Service including key ages and stages visits, kindergarten and health care relevant to each age related resource.

The project had taken some time to progress due to well established protocols and processes when working with the MCH team leaders and nurses. The previous collaborative and respectful partnership developed in the earlier project stood us in good stead to further this project, ensuring we are able to connect with every Local Government Area MCH team in Victoria to assist and support their transition work.

To date, the team has received valuable and exciting feedback from many teams and nurses. We are anticipating that as we enter the new financial year, this project will ramp up significantly as engagement with teams increases and relationships with nurses are developed.

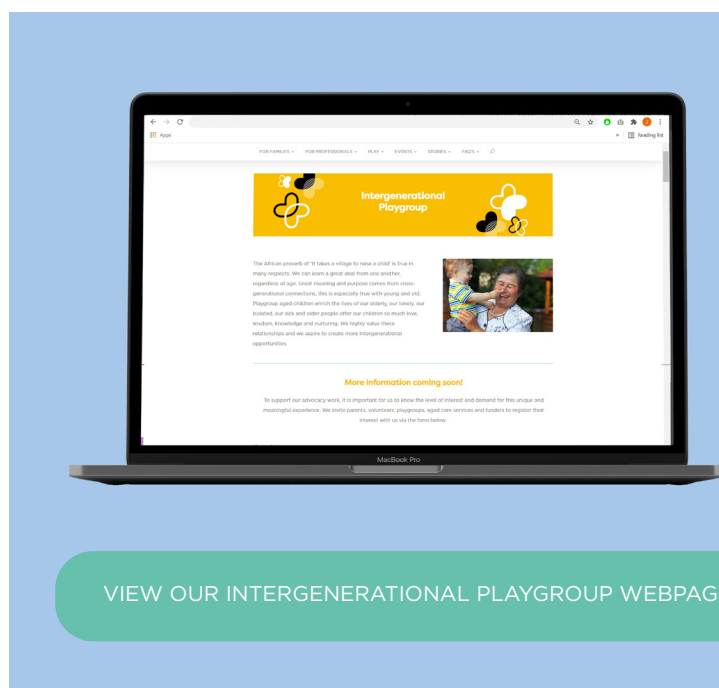
## Intergenerational Playgroups

Throughout 2020-2021, we have continued to dabble with intergenerational playgroups and practice. The Practice and Research team continues to work on the documentation of this unique experience, whilst our Development and Support team gain confidence and expertise delivering online and interactive intergenerational playgroup sessions.

All involved - residents, their families, staff, and playgroup families - all report high satisfaction with this experience and have provided valuable feedback to support our advocacy efforts. We have presented to the Victorian Minister for Ageing and the Commissioner for Senior Victorians. Additionally, we were invited to present at a state-wide Local Government Authority positive ageing professionals conference that has been postponed to March 2022.

Other advocacy work continues through discussions and collaborations with local governments, local Ministers of Parliament, and academics.

It is anticipated the Intergenerational Playgroup Program documentation will be completed in the first half of 2021/22, which includes a rationale paper, development guide, a ToolBox and ToolKit. New branding has also been developed reflecting the soft, warm and welcoming experience.





Playgroups are an ideal setting for primary prevention approaches to reach families with young children, providing an opportunity to introduce early 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 the impact on children directly, and indirectly via parents, by shifting parental knowledge, understanding, opinions, attitudes, and behaviour; building empowerment, not fear.

Throughout 2020/21 our two well-known primary prevention programs, *All Come Out To Play!* (ACOTP!) and *Move It 4 Kids* (MI4K), were able to reach over 4224 parents and 5613 children via the online interactive *Playgroup at Home LIVE*.

Although designed to be delivered face-to-face and in-person, their pivot to online sessions was highly successful and well received, as demonstrated by the numbers of families tuning in and participating in these fun, music and comedy sessions.

Funding for MI4K finished in June, 2021, with efforts to seek additional funding continuing into 2021/2022.

The gender equality program *All Come Out To*

*Play!* was refunded in June 2021 for another two years through the Office for Women.

This new grant will further support the roll-out of the digital book and a range of new resources for playgroups.

We continue to discuss additional project concepts with Gandel Philanthropic Trust to deliver ACOTP! in other early years settings such as childcare, kindergarten, and foundation level at school.

We acknowledge the vibrant, supportive and meaningful partnership between Playgroup Victoria, drummond street services and Hullabaloo Music for All. This partnership continues to thrive and remains a success factor in the delivery of these programs and additional funding received.



## Playgroup Restart – Ian Potter Foundation Grant

The pandemic resulted in changing situations across Australia; playgroups closed and restarted various times. The collaboration between the Ian Potter Foundation with the Playgroup Australia project was designed to examine relaunching playgroup. This would involve activities promoting and supporting playgroup participation amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Designed in mid-2020, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, with the premise that playgroups can and should play a role in assisting individuals and communities to reconnect after social-restrictions, it was anticipated that guidance and assistance may be needed to ensure that playgroups continue. Whilst initially designed to assist playgroups to restart after the Covid-19 disruptions of early 2020, the project would also examine what was already occurring in the State and Territory playgroup organisations providing some insight into playgroups around the country amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Project objectives were to enable playgroup to reset post-COVID-19 restrictions, as a healthy and safe experience, attract new families to playgroups, and have playgroups contribute to families reconnecting with their local community. STO's were involved in various activities to achieve these objectives including;

- developing health and safety playgroup resources
- mentoring for playgroups
- small financial subsidy for playgroups
- consultation with stakeholders and reutilization of playgroup to reconnect to their communities
- marketing campaign to contribute to establishing reconnection (Yet to be released/still in production)

To date, the Playgroup Victoria Research Manager is completing an evaluation report, due for submission in late 2021.

### Playgroup leaders shared their appreciation

Pictured below: Playgroup Coordinator Michelle Plant, St Johns Church in Metung, East Gippsland. Michelle stands with a sign that was purchased with the funds the playgroup received from the grant.



**“It enabled us to purchase the necessary cleaning equipment to maintain a COVID safe environment and to pay for thorough cleaning more consistently.”**  
- Grant recipient

**“With low member numbers we put advertising out that playgroup was back operating in the local papers and shops, we now have sufficient numbers to keep our doors open.”** - Grant recipient

# Celebrating Playgroup

Local playgroup communities throughout Victoria continued to thrive and leave generational legacies as shared experiences brought families together to learn, connect and play.

## Common Ground:

Shared experiences and neighbourly support has helped to forge lifelong friendships at playgroup in Kyneton

“Eight years ago, I moved to Kyneton a country town, with my eight month old. Within a week of moving there I joined the local playgroup. I was lucky enough to meet some lovely people, who I still talk to now. I joined the committee to help get involved. It was wonderful being able to feel useful, not just as a mum. I helped with some big changes like a new playground, fruit time for kids and I created a kids CD inspired by the bunny song! I also loved helping out at the local show with baking yummy things and spreading the word about playgroup. I was able to help some mums who were really struggling with motherhood, making them realise they were not alone, they will make mistakes, and some days you need to sit back and watch the kids play.”

It is the end of an era for Sandra Dykmans, a defining era in her life. Lifelong friendships were forged at her local playgroup in Kyneton.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



## Lasting Connection - Avondale Heights Grandparents Playgroup

“I consider many of these families as my extended family, we are always there to support each other in times of need and hardship. I love seeing the children who began at the very start with us and hearing about them.” - Elizabeth Vescio

Elizabeth Vescio has been part of Avondale Heights Grandparents Playgroup for eight years. She has attended with five grandchildren over the years and looks back on the meaningful connections that have been made. These connections continue to thread through her community, having a positive impact on the young and older alike.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



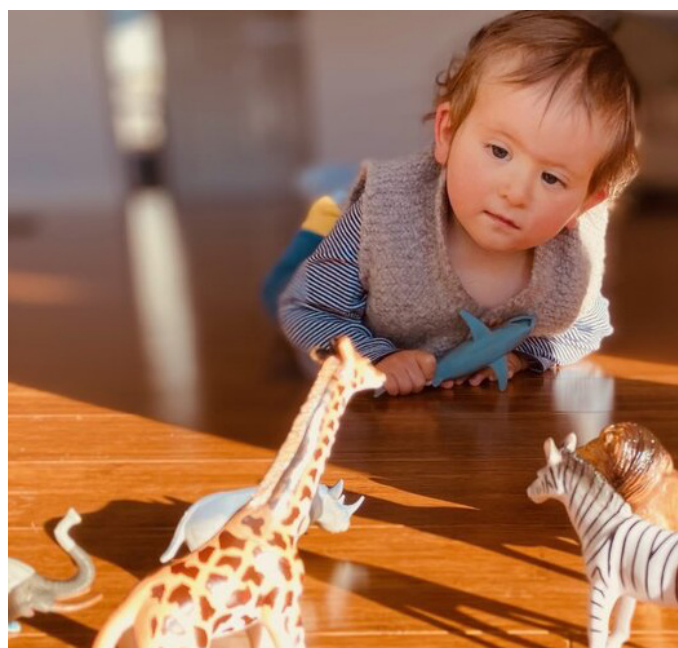


## Playgroup at Home: Strong Connections Even When We're Apart

**“It was a positive light moment in the day and made me feel less alone in raising a baby in isolation.”- Stacey Coyne, Parent and regular Playgroup at Home attendee**

Playgroup at Home LIVE has brought playgroup to life on Zoom. There has been lots of fun and lots of play during our online sessions. Families and playgroup facilitators have forged a community online, a place where friendship and support is found.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



## Playgroup at Home Enriches Family Time in Remote Central Australia

**“I feel honoured to be a part of the Playgroup Victoria family. It makes me feel, for half an hour each time we connect, that I have others out there in the same place.”- Mariana, Playgroup at Home attendee**

Living in Central Australia provides many an adventure and brings with it many rewards, yet it can be an isolated experience living in such a remote location. Things became harder still during a once in a century pandemic.

During their time in Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in South Australia, this young family discovered Playgroup at Home.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



# National Playgroup Week 2021

National Playgroup Week provided us with an opportunity to connect with families and welcome them. Our aim was to support all families to have access to playgroup and opportunities to participate in playgroup.



At playgroup, we believe that it takes a village to raise a child. We believe in the power of shared experiences and learning through play. We believe in the importance of intergenerational relationships and we believe that every child has the right to play. We believe in creating opportunities and supporting local communities. We believe that all children deserve the best start in life and all parents and carers deserve support on their parenting journey. We believe that playgroup is for everyone.

## FREE Family Membership

It is our hope that all families have access to playgroup, and all families have opportunities to participate in playgroup. With that in mind, we launched free Family Membership at the start of National Playgroup Week.

**National Playgroup Week enabled us to showcase what we have to offer families and playgroups.**

We had a calendar of online playgroup sessions running throughout the NPW week. During the sessions we made rock art, an activity inspired by community connection and creativity. We also had special guests from hey dee ho join us for several special live and interactive music session during the week.







Catherine from hey dee ho taught families some Auslan signs. Together families sung and signed some of their favourite songs as we celebrated our time at playgroup.

In celebration of National Playgroup Week, we partnered with our friends at Museums Victoria, creating a special offer for Playgroup Victoria Family Members! Family Members received 15% off Museums Victoria Memberships until 30/04/2021.

We ran a series of giveaways with our partners Crayola and LEGO. One such giveaway invited families to go in the draw to win one of three playgroup packs. Playgroups were encouraged to register or renew to be automatically entered into the draw.



# Playgroup in the Media

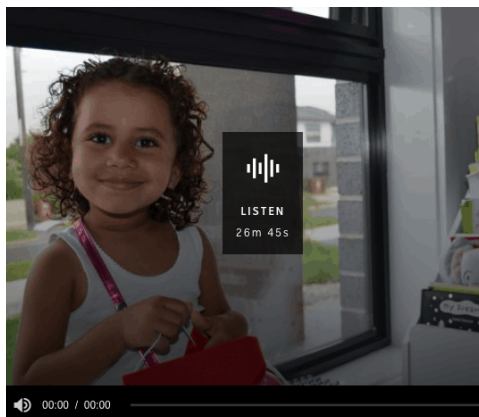
The importance of play, community connectedness and early years experiences was shared and promoted with various media outlets via podcasts, news reports, blogs and newspaper articles.

August 22, 2020

### [ABC, BabyTalk Podcast](#)

Playgroup Victoria's CEO Danny Schwarz, Playgroup Victoria facilitators Louise Buckle-Smith and Naomi Jeffree and mother May Morshedy join BabyTalk host Penny Johnston to share news about Playgroup at Home and the benefits of play and playgroup.

[LISTEN TO THE FULL EPISODE HERE](#)



September 1, 2020

### [9News Melbourne](#)

As many families could not attend in-person playgroup session as a result of the pandemic, Playgroup Victoria is brought playgroup to families - live and interactive on Zoom. To start the spring, families were joined by special guests Their excellences The Governor-General David Hurley and his wife Linda Hurley for storytime. Together with playgroup facilitators, families enjoyed songs, stories and an interactive play activity.

[VIEW MORE HERE](#)



September 1, 2020

### [9News Melbourne](#)

Families joined Playgroup at Home Live on Zoom. Playgroup facilitators welcomed families and shared songs, stories and an interactive play activity. Special guests Their excellences The Governor-General David Hurley and Mrs Linda Hurley read a Mem Fox storybook and sang songs with the families. This initiative has been running since June in order to support families in lockdown as a result of the pandemic.

[VIEW MORE HERE](#)



## VicHealth

### Parenting tips for a Pandemic (from Playgroup Victoria)



This is a guest blog by Joanne Tarasuik and Sinead Halliday at Playgroup Victoria. *“Play leads children to new discoveries, to sharing, to communicating ideas. It creates moments of joy and most profoundly of all, it creates connections.”*

[READ MORE HERE](#)


March 24, 2021

## 9News Melbourne

As part of National Playgroup Week, playgroups are rejoiced as in-person sessions resumed. After a challenging 2020, Playgroup Victoria made Family Membership free to reduce any barriers and increase opportunities for families to connect, learn, share and play.

[VIEW MORE HERE](#)







# Playgroup Interviews

Further insights were shared as early years professionals, researchers, academics, authors, artists and influences with strong ties to playgroup shared their field of expertise - and how this benefits the health, wellbeing, learning and early years experiences of families.





## Jamila Rizvi, Australian Author

### *I'm a Hero Too*

**"I'm a Hero Too very delicately helps little people grieve for the things that have changed in their world before moving them to a place of empowerment, which is so important for kids this age."**

Australian author Jamila Rizvi, author of *The Motherhood*, navigated lockdown in Melbourne, all the while observing how this major event has impacted on her four-year-old son, Rafi.

Jamila was actively seeking resources to support her family during Melbourne's lockdown. While she found a tonne of information about COVID-19, the science aspect, she was not finding the storytelling aspect. Inspired by the moment in time, Jamila wrote a children's book.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



## Dr Sally Smith, PEEPLE CEO

### *Peep Learning Together Programme*

**"The Peep Learning Together Programme aims do two things which we know from research makes a difference to children's outcomes. Those two things are the quality of relationships and the quality of the home learning environment." - Dr. Sally Smith, PEEPLE CEO**

Peep is a UK based charity focused on narrowing the attainment gap by supporting parents and carers to encourage learning through day-to-day activities at home. The evidence-based Peep Learning Together Programme, developed by Peep, values what it is that parents and carers do in the everyday such as sharing stories, singing, reading, conversing and playing. Playgroup Victoria has partnered with Peep, bringing their Peep Learning Together Programme to Australia. We caught up with Peep CEO Dr Sally Smith to learn more.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)

## Dr Catherine Barrett

### *The Kindness Pandemic*

“One of the key mechanisms that draw people in, is that sense of being connected. It’s not just socially connected but being connected to a higher purpose or giving people something that they can do so that they feel that they are making a difference.”

- The Kindness Pandemic Founder, Dr Catherine Barrett

Once the initial shock and gravity that is Covid-19 dulled, many of us wondered what we could do. Dismayed after hearing of an unpleasant incident at a local supermarket during the Covid-19 panic buying, Dr Catherine Barrett started a [Kindness Pandemic Facebook page](#). It quickly skyrocketed and now has some 500,000 followers sharing everyday acts of kindness. Notes of support for health care workers, posties and supermarket workers sprung up like resilient wildflowers toughing it out on the roadside. Toilet paper was shared, food was made and left on doorsteps and people often forgotten were brought to the fore. The ‘Intersectional Kindness’ that Dr Barrett aspired to ducked and weaved around hardship and pushed through.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



## Heather Kennedy, Aboriginal Artist

### *Part of Me, Part of You: The Stories and Connections We Find in Art*

“Depending what I am thinking, butterflies represent a new life, a new beginning. From the cocoon they bloom into butterflies and fly around. In this painting, I see the innocence of the children flying around, not hearing any negativity but are free to play and imagine.”

Heather Kennedy is an artist. She loves the process, the capturing of the feelings, the ideas and the stories. Through her art, she is able to find connections- to people, to the land, to herself. Heather has created the above artwork for PlayConnect playgroups.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)





## Sharon Slater, Aboriginal Artist

### *Our Footprints Our Culture*

“I am a proud Kamilaroi woman from New South Wales by birth but proudly raised on the land of the Kulin people for 50 years of my life. I call Victoria home. What inspires me is being the mother of a child with special needs – it takes me to a calming place to think about her journey and my journey as a mother. It inspires me to create art that I can see and share with others.”- Sharon Slater

Playgroup Victoria recently collaborated with Aboriginal artist Sharon Slater. Sharon said, “This painting represents our Victorian Aboriginal Children/Families foot prints coming together from our meeting places (big Circles) around Victoria.”

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



## Cheri Sterman, Crayola Director of Education

### *Creative Growth*

“It is inherent in human nature, through all times and in all cultures to make a mark. We are hard-wired to create things. In ancient times, children would use a stick to make a mark in the sand. Today, children have many options in how they fulfil his innate human need to show others what we think and feel as we make things with our hands.” - Cheri Sterman, Crayola’s Director of Education

We spoke to Crayola’s Creative Director of Education, Cheri Sterman, about the importance of art and creativity in the early years and beyond.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)





## The Governor-General and Mrs Hurley joined Victorian families for story time on Playgroup at Home LIVE

“Linda and I are excited to join families for a fun story time session. This year has been challenging for our nation and for families, especially in Victoria, and we appreciate the work of Playgroup Victoria to keep people connected. As proud first-time grandparents we know the joy young people bring and how important playtime is (for the children and for the adults!),” the Governor-General said.

To start the spring, we were joined by special guests the Governor-General David Hurley and Mrs Linda Hurley who read an Australian favourite, *Where Is the Green Sheep?* by Mem Fox. Mrs Hurley also sang a song she had written about playgroup. We caught up with the Governor-General and Mrs Hurley to learn more about what they do, what they are passionate about and how much they are enjoying being grandparents for the first-time.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



## Dr. Joanne Tarasuik, Playgroup Victoria Research Manager *Incorporating Play in the Everyday*

“Quality time between children and their parents strengthens bonds. Everyday activities can create opportunities and allows us to appreciate each other and our interests.”- Dr. Joanne Tarasuik, Playgroup Victoria Research Manager

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)







# Social Connections

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

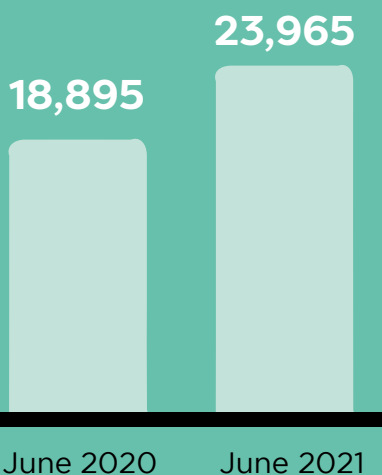
Social media has also allowed us to connect with new families and introduce a wider audience to the concept of playgroup and invite them to join the community. These online connections have allowed us to support more families with instant chat and through engagement via different content.

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

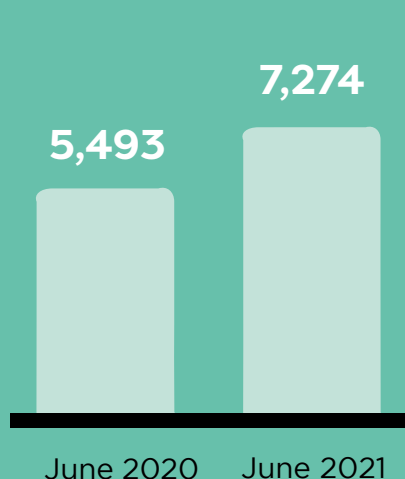
Page Followers:

**+5,071  
Increase**



Playgroup at Home  
Facebook group members:

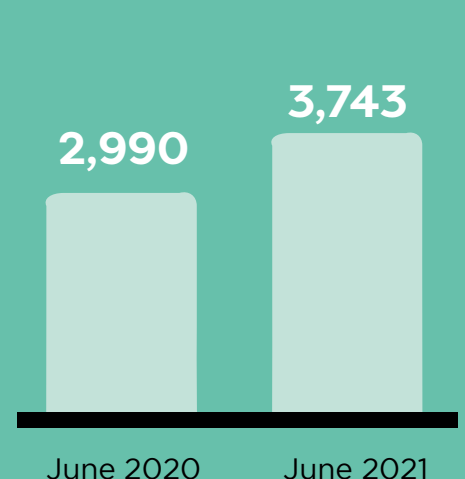
**+1,781  
Increase**



## INSTAGRAM

Followers

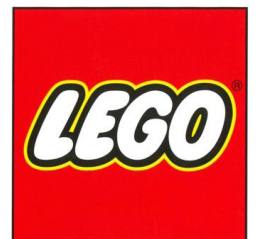
**+753  
Increase**





# Partnerships and Collaborations

Aligning with shared interests and passions, we partnered with local and national organisations to promote play, playgroup, early years education and community spirit.





## Crayola

Our longstanding partnership with Crayola continued throughout the year, with on going collaboration. Crayola regularly submitted content that was featured in our monthly activity booklets and throughout our communications, making them our core partner and staple collaborator. Crayola contributed activity ideas for topics that included Nature Play, Art and Culture Month, Creative Play and Community Kindness, among others. We also used and featured Crayola products as part of *Playgroup at Home Live*.

Crayola gave us the in-kind support of product, which contributed to playgroup giveaways and promotion. These giveaways were particularly beneficial to those families in lockdown.

**duplo** Win 1 of 3 packs!



**NATIONAL GALLERY  
OF VICTORIA NGV**

## LEGO

November 2020

We ran a big giveaway in partnership with LEGO Duplo and featured LEGO within our communications.

## National Gallery Of Victoria

The NGV contributed activity ideas that were shared with our audience. These activity ideas were also housed on our website, within the Playgroup Portal and on socials. The NGV were also part of our 12 Days of Christmas Giveaways.



## 12 Days of Christmas Giveaways

In celebration of our valued partnerships and the year that had been, we ran a summertime campaign called 12 Days of Christmas Giveaways. Each day we featured a special giveaway and asked playgroups and families to share stories about play, community, kindness and the year that had been. Participants included SEA LIFE Melbourne Aquarium, Melbourne Museum, the National Gallery of Victoria, Scienceworks, Legoland, My Little Tribe, Tiptoe Giants, The Beanies and LAH LAH.



**SEA LIFE**  
Melbourne

**LEGOLAND**  
DISCOVERY CENTRE

the  
**Beanies**

**NATIONAL GALLERY  
OF VICTORIA NGV**

**TIPTOE  
GIANTS**

**SCIENCEWORKS**



**Lah-Lah**





# What our members said

## Annual Survey Snapshot

67.2% 94.7%

Are aged between 30-40 years

Identify as Female

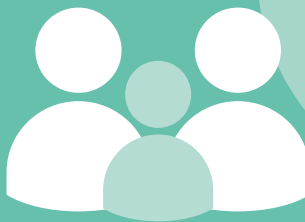
67% 32%

Live in Metro Melbourne

Live in Regional/Rural Victoria

14.9%

Identify as culturally and linguistically diverse



"We moved to Melbourne in March 2020, and then covid hit. If not for playgroups we would not have made friends and I would have been super depressed and lonely and not able to be a good mom. Playgroup saved my sanity and has been a lot of fun for Mum and Bub" - Survey Respondent

"We just moved to regional Victoria and playgroup has been a great way to socialise with other parents and for my kids to play and have fun with other kids." - Survey Respondent

## PLAYGROUP CONNECTIONS

61.9%

Had attended a physical playgroup session since the start of July 2020

33%

Had attended an online playgroup session run by Playgroup Victoria

What is the most beneficial part of attending playgroup?

1. Support child development - 60.6%
2. Learning through play - 49.7%
3. Strong social connections - 44.0%

What are the main reasons you have connected with a local playgroup?

1. Support child development
2. Enhance social connections
3. Learn through play

# What our playgroup leaders said

Annual Playgroup Leader Survey Snapshot

## 80.3%

Feel Valued by Playgroup Families

## 69%

Feel Valued by their Community

## 57.7%

Feel Valued by Family and Friends

“Access to Playgroup at Home has given families the ability to connect with others while face to face playgroup has not been available. Covid updates in relation to playgroups and reopening information has been very useful.” - Survey Respondent

“Playgroup Victoria has given us the confidence to reopen our playgroups safely by providing us with accurate information.”  
- Survey respondent

## 94.5%

Are registered with Playgroup Victoria

## 65.8%

Have connected with Playgroup Victoria via Email

## 53%

Have connected with Playgroup Victoria via Website





## 46%

Have connected with Playgroup Victoria via Phone



## Playgroup Victoria

346 Albert St, Brunswick VIC 3056

-  [playgroup.org.au](https://playgroup.org.au)
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-  @playgroupvicofficial
-  /playgroupvic