

NEWS

Families regather to play

BY ERIN WILLIAMS

A NUMBER of the state's playgroups are being revived following a challenging two years of lockdowns and restrictions, which saw face-to-face sessions cancelled.

This year is a vital time for playgroups to re-establish and reform in-person connection, which has been sorely missed, according to Playgroup Victoria.

Playgroup Victoria development consultant Louise Buckle-Smith, of Ballarat, said consultants were currently helping a number of Victorian playgroups to reopen after the COVID-19 impact.

"Regathering again, families have benefited from the social interaction, shared experiences and surrounding support," Ms Buckle-Smith said.

"For children, the play and engagement has benefited their development as they learn through play, sharing and building new skills."

Ms Buckle-Smith said for many families, 2022 had brought the opportunity to attend playgroup, having



CONNECTING: Playgroup Victoria development consultant Louise Buckle-Smith holds online playgroup from her home, which continue to be a popular choice for families during the pandemic. **Picture:** Luke Hemer

had babies at the height of the pandemic.

She said from a recent visit to a playgroup, she had seen families embracing face-to-face connections and supporting each other.

Since restrictions lifted, Ms Buckle-Smith and development consultant Maureen Hatcher - also of Ballarat - have met a number of playgroup leaders, including multicultural playgroups

in Ballarat. "This opened up a discussion and ways of supporting each other and potentially growing a support network again," Ms Buckle-Smith said.

"A large component of

playgroup centres around people feeling a sense of belonging. The health and wellbeing of families and children is at the core of playgroup.

"Forming relationships, creating a social network, finding support services, having regular contact, meeting people who share interests in common - these are all crucial to our health and wellbeing."

While face-to-face playgroups are being held, Playgroup Victoria continues to conduct online sessions, live from Ballarat, to participants across Australia every two weeks.

In the first 18 months it was held, the online playgroup attracted more than 40,000 Australian families.

The free sessions often feature special guests and take families to educational places including Sovereign Hill, Sea Life Aquarium and Melbourne Museum.

The intergeneration playgroup that began during the pandemic at Mercy Place Ballarat continues to be held online.

"Playgroup brings to-

gether multiple generations which is a real benefit to the whole community," Ms Buckle-Smith said.

"Ages 0 to five is a vital period of development and learning. Through a variety of play experiences and positive family engagement, we create an abundance of learning opportunities."

Playgroup Victoria chief executive officer Danny Schwarz said some playgroups that had been going for a long time and stopped during the lockdowns and restrictions, had restarted.

"People are definitely wanting to go and do things face-to-face. There is no question that that's what they want," Mr Schwarz said.

"There are some people who are feeling a little hesitant now about the fact that there is a lot of COVID around."

Mr Schwarz said Playgroup Victoria had everything playgroups needed to feel comfortable to get together safely during the third wave.

Next week, the online playgroup will visit Sovereign Hill. To register, visit <https://www.playgroup.org.au/>

'Illegal' bore delays building proposal

BY MALVIKA HEMANTH

A FAMILY'S bid to create a home in Glenlyon has again been delayed as the Hepburn Shire Council voted to defer making a decision on the matter at Tuesday's meeting.

The initial plan, which put forth a proposal to construct a three bedroom dwelling with a 284 square metres floor area and a vineyard, was first granted a valid planning permit in July 2016.

At the time of advertising, the application received 19 objections due to environmental concerns, the detri-

mental impact the building would have on nearby Kangaroo Creek, over development issues as well as traffic concerns.

Last year the applicant put forth an amended plan to the council in April 2021.

These changes included repositioning the dwelling to east of the approved building location, a reduction in the floor plan to 218 square metres as well as a reduction in the building's height from 4.8 to 4.45 metres from the top of the wall and 3.45m for the roof. However, the application was withdrawn in June

and resubmitted in October.

The outcome of the plan was then further delayed due to the pandemic which resulted in the applicant submitting an appeal to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) due to the council's failure to determine the application within the prescribed time.

While the council is no longer able to make a formal decision on the planning application at it is matter to be heard by VCAT in November, the council is required to inform VCAT of its position prior to the hearing.

A council officer's recommendations said, had the application not been appealed to VCAT the council would have "approved the application to amend the permit for land subject to amended conditions".

These changes included ensuring the building's wastewater disposal area was located at least 100m from Kangaroo Creek and any other waterways.

At the council meeting a vote was carried unanimously to defer making a decision on the amended proposal due to doubts over whether

an illegal bore was present at the site.

"I would have been supportive [of the amended plans] but the location of a bore within a wastewater treatment area seems pretty problematic," Cr Brian Hood said. Cr Jen Bray said she would have supported the proposed plan on the condition there was more clarity on existing native vegetation on the site. Ms Joseph, a Glenlyon resident who opposed the councilor's recommendations, said the property would pose a severe threat to natural flora

and fauna in the area.

"The removal of vegetation for the defensible space will have an adverse impact on the biodiversity in the area," she said.

Town Planning and Urban Design consultant Felicity Brown, who spoke on behalf of the proposed property's owners, said the owners had "suffered" due to the delays.

"The owners James and Kate are keen to build and just want to enjoy a calm, rural lifestyle with their family," Ms Brown said.

Councillors are set to make a decision in September.

Join us as we support local business with  **ClicknConnect**



ACMs digital destination ClicknConnect is helping Australian businesses scale their products and services across the country.

We invite you to be a part of this exciting initiative to help grow your business.

For more information or to advertise please reach out to your local account manager.

JOIN 100+ RETAILERS
clicknconnect.shop

 **ClicknConnect**

Proudly brought to you by **ACM**

ACM is Australia's largest independent media network keeping communities strong, informed and connected. ACM is the proud publisher of this newspaper.