



Playgroup
Victoria

Playgroup Victoria

2021 - 2022 Annual Report

2021/22

Year at a Glance

1st July 2021 - 30th June 2022

MEMBERSHIP

8,073 

Family Members

1,162

Registered Playgroups

577

Professional Affiliates

PLAYGROUP DEVELOPMENT

522 

Partnerships with Local Professionals

40 **A WEEK AVERAGE**

Connections with Local Community Playgroups



32

Local Early Years/
Professional Networks

24

Local Community
Playgroup Networks

ONLINE CONNECTIONS

29,184

EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS

24,579

FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS

24,278

FACEBOOK PAGE LIKES

8,118

FACEBOOK GROUP MEMBERS

4,486

INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS

17K

BLOG PAGEVIEWS



478,030

WEBSITE PAGEVIEWS

Pageviews are the total number of pages viewed. Repeated views of a single page are counted.

137,604

WEBSITE SESSIONS

A session is the period of time a user is actively engaged with the website.

90,220

WEBSITE USERS

Users are those who have initiated at least one session during the period.

61,730

FIND A PLAYGROUP SEARCHES





Playgroup
Victoria

Playgroup Victoria
Annual Report 2021/22

About Playgroup Victoria

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 a support base for communities and families wanting to start and successfully run a playgroup.

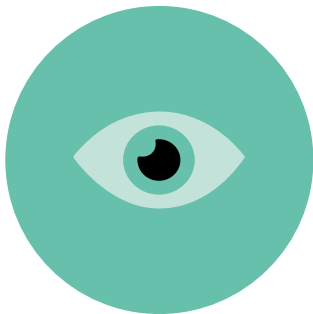
During the late 1960s and early 1970s, there were hundreds of playgroups running throughout Melbourne and country Victoria. There became a need for some cohesion and networking between these groups and parents wanting to start and join playgroups.

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 to fulfill the need for workshops, lectures and discussions related to parenthood and life with children. Furthermore, the association began to liaise with local state and federal governments in support of playgroup.

48 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. Over the last year, more than 2,500 playgroup sessions have been run across Victoria.

Funding from the Commonwealth and State Governments has enabled Playgroup Victoria to utilise 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 From the Chair and CEO



Playgroup Victoria CEO
Danny Schwarz



Chair of the Board
Felicity Dunn

It gives us great pleasure to be writing this year's Annual Report for Playgroup Victoria. The challenges we have all faced over the last two years continue to keep us alert, but it is wonderful to finally have a sense of normality creeping back. This includes re-energising our vision: *"All Victorians value and benefit from playgroup,"* which, from feedback through our annual survey of Family Members has reinforced the importance families place on access to and participation in playgroup. We can see that families are embracing the return to in-person playgroup sessions. Comments from parents include that the best parts of playgroup for them is the peer support aspect and the friendships that develop through catching up with fellow parents face-to-face.

In February this year we were delighted to receive formal endorsement by Reconciliation Australia for our inaugural Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). We are joining over 1,000 Victorian organisations making a formal commitment to reconciliation. While this is the start of our journey, we now have as a foundation of what and how we do what we do, learning from First Nations cultures. With Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, our aim is to share this with the broader Victorian playgroup community, so they too can learn and benefit from tens of thousands of First Nations histories, cultures, beliefs and knowledge.

The past year has seen the continuation of Playgroup at Home Live which has now had more than 40,000 children and parents participate since July 2020. We have been overwhelmed with the feedback we have

received from playgroup leaders for our online workshops. The workshop series has run online each term with topics including: *Starting Your Playgroup, Inclusive Environments at Playgroup* and *Supporting Leadership Roles*. With an average of 25 people per session, we have seen over 500 people attend during the year.

We have also had fantastic feedback from parents involved in our Play and Learn Together Supported (PALS) playgroups. These playgroups, funded by the Federal Government, are for children of all abilities, together with their care-givers, to learn and play together with sport, art and recreational activities, as a focus. With eight groups now operating including in partnership with St Kilda Football Club, The Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden at the Royal Botanical Gardens and Bam Arts, families have said they are excited by this inclusive model.

This year has also seen a big change at Playgroup Victoria. For over 10 years we have delivered *MyTime*. This was a peer support program for parents who have children with a disability. Following a re-tender process in which we were not successful, we finished delivering *MyTime* at the end of Term two. While this was a significant program for us, given its broader focus on school-age children, it was also not completely aligned with our purpose and strategic plan, which has the first five years of life as the primary focus. This will enable us to ensure we do focus our attention and efforts on our core business. This did mean we said thank you and goodbye to a number of staff who have worked for Playgroup Victoria for many years, some for up to 14 years. We wish them well knowing they have had a significant positive impact on many families and children over the years.

The cessation of *MyTime* was unplanned and along with the impact of the lockdowns in 2021, our financial position was significantly impacted. The full details are included in the Treasurer's Report. As a result, management and the Board have developed a conservative budget for the coming financial year. The focus and key strategies include: increasing income through the delivery of the Peep Learning Together Program training, applications for philanthropic grants, including an increased number of applications where Playgroup Victoria had been invited to apply. Furthermore, we have had an ongoing focus on increasing paid Playgroup Registrations. In addition, the Board has completed a targeted recruitment process, bringing several new skilled and experienced people to the Board.

Finally, we are working with the State Government on a Machinery of Government change, which would create the opportunity

for State Government Funding in support of universal community playgroups. This important shift will support our vision that all Victorian families and children benefit from playgroup. There is unprecedented focus on the importance of the early years by all levels of government and we will continue to strive to ensure that playgroups, which deliver so many benefits for children's learning and parent wellbeing and capacity – receive well-deserved focus, too.

We would like to say thank you to all our Board members who volunteer their time and expertise. They have ensured that we have a Strategic Plan that is fit for purpose, measurable outcomes that have seen an increase in engagement with families, playgroups and organisational support for playgroups across the state. We would like to say a particular thank you to our outgoing Treasurer, Joanne Clark. Joanne is stepping down from the Board after four years. Joanne has led our Audit and Risk Committee and been integral in ensuring our financial policies and processes continue to meet and exceed our Directors Fiduciary requirements and obligations.

Lastly, we would like to thank our extraordinary staff. Your continued and professional service has enabled Playgroup Victoria to come out the other side of these extraordinary times, more connected to more playgroups, families, and organisations than we have in the past. The future is ours to embrace, which we look forward to doing with everyone in the Playgroup World, laying the developmental foundations for all children to grasp every opportunity that presents itself on their journey.

Treasurer's Report

The budget the Board approved for this financial year included a deficit of \$81,000. This was to allow Playgroup Victoria to rebuild following the financial impact of the pandemic. While we did benefit from Government pandemic grants including Job Keeper, income was reduced. Impacts were felt from playgroups not operating, not being able to deliver the Peep Learning Together Program training as efficiently, and not benefiting from the change in playgroup registrations after the prior year's decision to change the billing model from individual subscriptions.

The changing nature of the pandemic lead to another significant lock-down between 5 August and 21 October 2021. In effect with the lingering restrictions, playgroups did not begin considering returning until the beginning of 2022. The anticipated transition in revenue from family memberships to playgroup registrations which was to have been supported by an extensive Marketing and Communications strategy could not commence until families and playgroups had confidence they could return to in-person activity. The Board is reassured with Playgroup registrations increasing steadily compared to pre pandemic rates in the last quarter of 2022.

One of the organisation's Strategic Goals is to increase the awareness of the value and benefits of playgroup. A key objective included developing research and practice informed programs. This supports the government's funding agenda to increase the use of evidenced based programs. This led the Board to invest in the Australian License for the Peep Learning Together Program (PeepLTP) which commenced in February 2021. As the peak body for playgroups in Victoria, we place

significant value in underpinning our guidance and advice of all stakeholders with programs that are underpinned by research.

To this end, PeepLTP is now listed on the Australian Communities for Children guide of evidence-based programmes and on the Victorian School Readiness Funding Menu. These programs require organisations that receive government funding to choose programs from these lists. The organisation's strategy with the PeepLTP is to develop capacity within the early childhood sector through training. This will enable scaling up of the program with an increase in people having access to and using the program. Initially indications in the last quarter of the 2020-2021 financial year, were promising with revenue achieved as expected. Again, the lock-downs in the July to December 2021 period significantly impact revenue against budgeted projections. While the Face-to-face training was modified to be done online, this in of itself did not enable us to achieve our revenue expectations. The first six months of the current financial are promising with the first six-month revenue projections on target.



In February of 2022, we were informed unexpectedly, that the MyTime program, which we have been delivering for more than 10 years, would be released in an open tender, with the new contract commencing in July 2022. Averaging approximately 15% of turnover over the last three years, this represented a significant part of Playgroup Victoria's direct program delivery. Having delivered 28 groups, making up 50% of the total groups state-wide, we had known for some time that other providers were paying their staff at a lower rate. This peer support program for parents with children with a disability, required skilled and experienced staff to be able to engage with and provide guidance and advice to parents when at their most vulnerable. Despite an exceptional program offering acknowledged by the funder, our submission was not successful as we were not able to match the difference in recognition and value of staff. With many staff having worked with us for over 10 years, accrued entitlements and redundancy payments impacted the salaries expense by more than \$100,000 over budget expectations. This was a one-off cost in FY 2022.

As a result, this year's deficit has reached \$251,188. Playgroup Victoria's vision that all Victorian's value and benefit from playgroup is central to the

Board's planning and focus of operation. While this year's results are extremely disappointing, the Board is satisfied that the uncertain and changing circumstances within which management worked, strongly supported the Vision and resulted in higher than predicted engagement from all stakeholders.

The Board and management have, as a result, developed a conservative budget for the current financial year with training and philanthropic income already achieving projected targets for the current FY. It should also be noted that the State Government has provided an additional \$150,000 this FY to support the development the transition from First Time Parent to Baby Playgroups initiative.

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 2022 and that there are reasonable grounds to believe that Playgroup Victoria Incorporated can continue to pay its debts as and when they fall due.

ANTONY ELLIOT
Treasurer

Risk and Audit Committee

Financials

Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income for the Period ended 30 June 2022			
Income			
	Note	2022 (\$)	2021 (\$)
Revenue	3	2,430,870	2,358,698
Other income	3	88,415	686,066
Expenses			
Employee benefits expenses		(2,182,226)	(2,143,104)
Client support expenses		(185,855)	(243,122)
Computer expenses		(123,614)	(110,179)
Insurance expenses		(48,884)	(51,865)
Utilities expenses		(33,746)	(36,562)
Occupancy costs		(39,738)	(25,311)
Membership fees paid		(15,326)	(20,698)
Marketing expenses		(10,891)	(19,865)
Vehicle expenses		(7,064)	(15,248)
Bank charges		(1,891)	(2,241)
Depreciation expenses		(55,017)	(53,678)
Other expenses		(66,221)	(74,904)
Surplus before income tax		(251,188)	247,987
Income tax expense	2(b)	-	-
Net surplus for the year		(251,188)	247,987
Other comprehensive surplus for the year, net of tax		-	-
Total comprehensive surplus for the year		(251,188)	247,987

Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2022

Current Assets

	Note	2022 (\$)	2021(\$)
Cash and cash equivalents	5	146,595	350,450
Trade & other receivables	6	6,110	5,570
Other financial assests	7	850,241	800,000
Other assets	8	47,728	35,249
Total Current Assets		1,050,674	1,191,269

Non-Current Assets

Property, plant and equipment	11	55,438	59,668
Intangible assets	12	40,541	71,571
Total Non - Current Assets		131,239	131,239
Total Assets		1,146,653	1,322,508

Current Liabilities

Trade and other payables	9	205,181	159,777
Employee benefits	13	282,611	278,216
Other financial liabilities	10	89,797	63,840
Total Current Liabilities		577,589	501,833

Non-Current Liabilities

Employee benefits	13	19,474	19,897
Total Non- Current Liabilities		19,474	19,897
Total Liabilities		597,063	521,730
Net Assets		549,590	800,778

Equity

Reserves		4,643	4,643
Accumulated funds		544,947	796,135
Total Equity		549,590	800,778

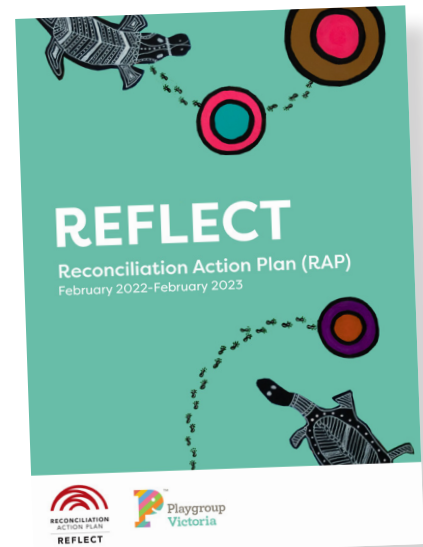
Reconciliation

As an inclusive, community minded and culturally led organisation, we are committed to creating awareness of the value of what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples bring to our life and culture. Playgroup Victoria is committed to forming meaningful, authentic, equal and trusted partnerships with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Victoria. We commit to walk hand-in-hand with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, ensuring the voices of First Nations peoples are respected, valued, heard and influential throughout the work that we do.

Reconciliation Action Plan

In March 2022, we launched our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

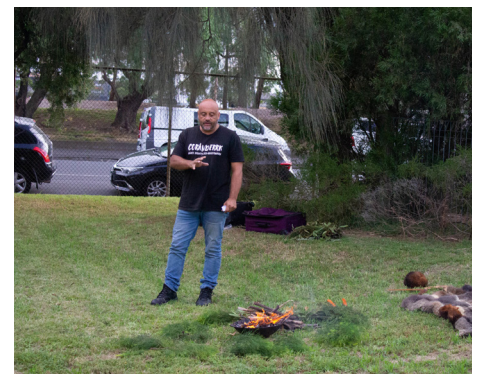
The Playgroup Victoria Reconciliation Action Plan recognises the important relationships Playgroup Victoria has with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and pay respect to Elders past, present and future. Reconciliation is an important part of our history. First Nations peoples and cultures 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. The important relationships Playgroup Victoria has with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and pays 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.



[READ OUR RAP HERE](#)

Playgroup Victoria Reconciliation Ceremony – March 2022

Thursday the 17th of March 2022 was a momentous day. We launched our Reconciliation Action Plan. Not only that, it was the first time that the Playgroup Victoria staff had been together as a group for well over a year as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Alongside visitors and First Nations guests, we gathered on the front lawn of the Playgroup Victoria office, on Woiworung Country. Beneath the tall gumtree, Uncle Bill Nicholson shared the history and stories of the Wurundjeri people of the area. He talked about his ancestors, the seasons and the meaning of words. We learnt more about language, a profound link between us – to the land, plants, animals and seasons. We listened. We looked up to the wide sky carrying sparse clouds through the blue and we looked to the birds fluttering through the upper branches shifting in the breeze. We watched on as Uncle Bill conducted a very moving smoking ceremony for our office and all attending. [READ MORE HERE](#)



^ Pictured: Uncle Bill and Playgroup Victoria staff at the smoking ceremony.



Playgroup Participation and The Impact of the Ongoing Pandemic

The final chapters of 2021 were hopeful, as Covid-19 restrictions began to lift. Families began to meet in person and some playgroups gathered. Covid cases and surrounding uncertainty still prevailed nevertheless and Playgroup at Home Live enabled continued connection and stability.

Familiar faces and new friendships, shared experiences and understanding. These were the beginnings of Victorians reuniting, after a long spell of physical separation during the pandemic. While the uncertainty was still present, the need for togetherness triumphed and Playgroup at Home Live continued to provide opportunities for families to meet each week.

2021-2022 was an adjustment period. As Melbourne was one of the longest locked-down cities in the world at the height of the pandemic, there were

ongoing ramifications. The health and wellbeing of all families was front of mind. Playgroup Victoria continued to update families with relevant resources and support those who were ready to attend in-person playgroup sessions again. During this time growth occurred in subtle and profound ways. Babies quickly grew into talking toddlers and many became parents for the first time, their newborn yet to meet others. Playgroup at Home Live enabled families to participate in playgroup from wherever they were. Play, laughter, conversation and connection were all part of the playgroup sessions. They continued to bring a rhythm and routine to the week, along with a sense of belonging. Opportunities to forge friendships, learn through play and create meaningful connections were all part of the positive offshoots of playgroup days.

Playgroup at Home LIVE

Online Playgroup Platform

“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”.

The quote was captured in 2020, the year that Playgroup at Home Live was launched. It is true to say that this project has been the gift that keeps on giving.

Many staff from across the organisation continued to be involved, bringing playgroup to life on Zoom.

Key aspects of playgroup, including play (with other children and caregiver), support, socialisation (at playgroup and beyond playgroup) and routine (meeting up each week at the same time) were not always possible in-person, yet the playgroup online platform enabled these connections to be made.

The need to create protective factors to buffer the stress of the pandemic were also a vital part of the online sessions.

Our response needed to be available no matter the level of restrictions. The new online playgroup platform continued to evolve with the times.

In 2021, Playgroup Victoria provided weekly online Baby Playgroup and Playgroup at Home LIVE sessions to role model and engage our audience in playgroup. We hosted a range of special guests during our sessions.

As 2022 began, many families enjoyed a blend of online and in-person playgroup experiences as we made the transition out of restrictions. Playgroup Victoria also played a supporting role with Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative – Milla Milla Playgroup in presenting and co-hosting their own Playgroup at Home Live sessions for their community.

Supporting research on children’s experience of shared virtual space/virtual presence provided efficacy to the idea, and further 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.)

Online Playgroup Snapshot

1st July 2021 - 30th June 2022

173

Number of Online Playgroup Sessions

12,801

Overall Number of Participants

5,856

Adults

6,945

Children



Attendee Location Profile

84.8%

Located in Metro Melbourne

10.7%

Located in Regional Victoria

4.5%

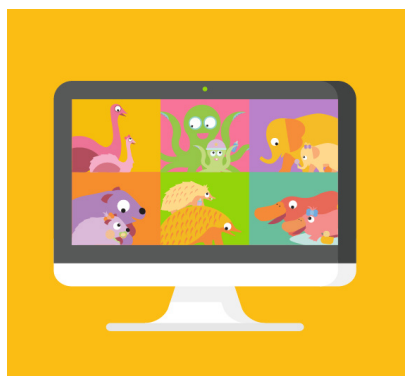
Located Outside of Victoria

Our Online Playgroup Sessions Are Back!



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.

Regular Online Sessions for Parents/Carers and Playgroup Leaders July 2021 - June 2022



The Dad's Toolbox

We created new opportunities for dads and father figures to meet, relax, catch up, have some laughs and get some really great parenting tips along the way. The online events ran in collaboration with several different people and organisations, including Relationships Australia, Playgroup Victoria CEO Danny Schwarz and Australian Footballer Rodney Eade.

98 tickets were booked in total across all three sessions.



Getting Back To Playgroup Q & A Sessions

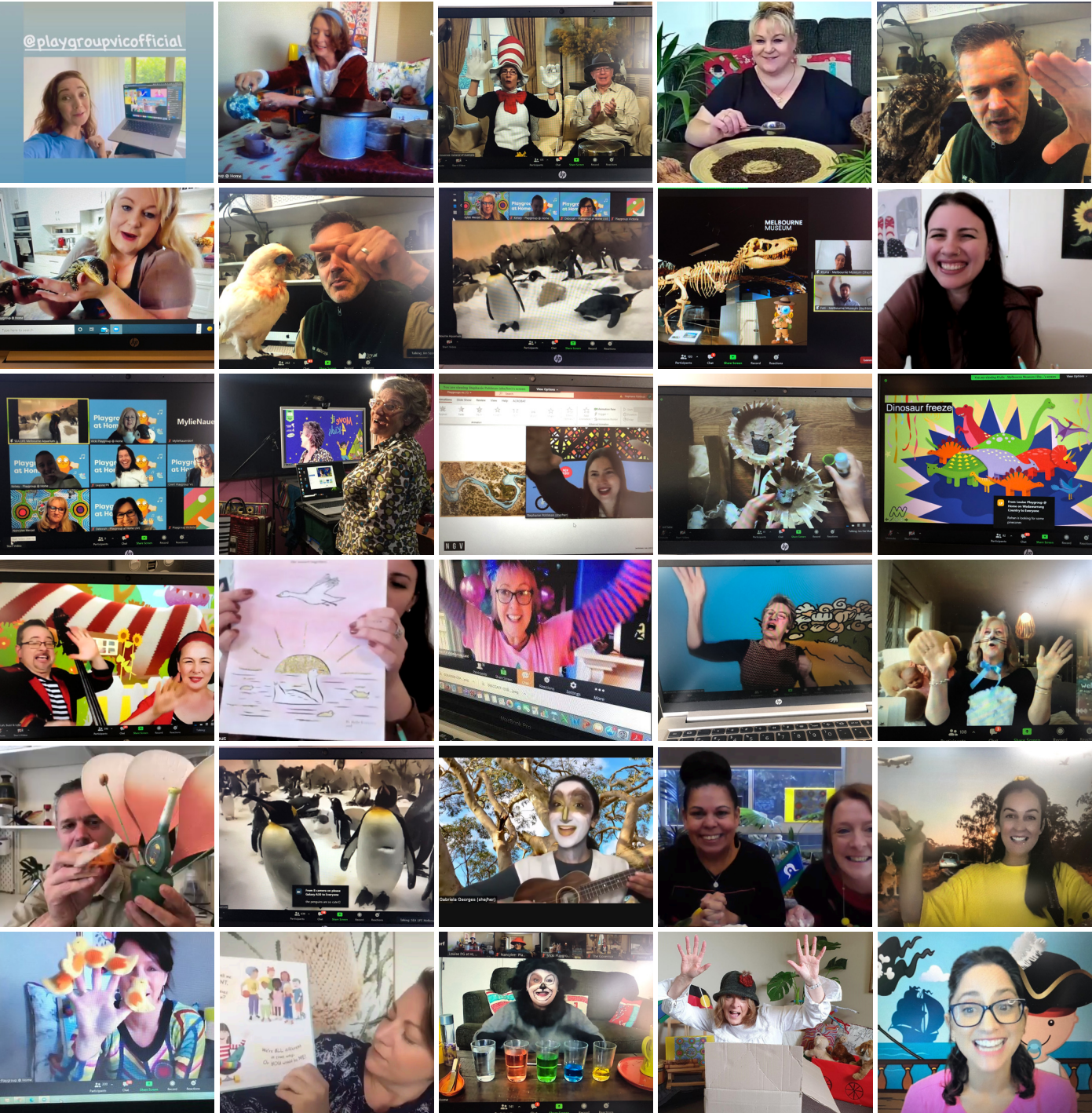
24 FEBRUARY 2022, 3 MARCH 2022

We created opportunities for early years professionals and families to ask questions about playgroup. During these online interactive sessions we were available with guidance and support for the year at playgroup. People were invited to submit a question of their own, or come along and take part. It was during the sessions that conversations about things like Covid safe settings, ways to start your playgroup, ideas for how to run your playgroup- and any further questions were addressed.

30 tickets were booked in total across the two sessions.



Special guests including authors and musicians joined the our online 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.





Storytime with Nelly Thomas

13 AUGUST 2021

Author Nelly Thomas joined us for a special story time session, sharing her book *Some Brains- a Book Celebrating Neurodiversity*. Nelly's books encourage children to embrace the unique aspects of who they are, strengthening kind self-talk in childhood, with hope that this positivity will be carried long into adulthood.

153 tickets were booked for this session.



Sharing Stories with Baba Anna

25 AUGUST 2021

Baba Anna shared stories from when she was a little girl growing up in a village in Macedonia (with wolves and bears!) before moving to Melbourne. Baba Anna also shared a special Macedonian fairy-tale with the attendees.

160 tickets were booked for this session.



Storytime with the Governor-General of Australia

27 AUGUST 2021

We welcomed Their Excellencies the Governor-General of Australia David Hurley and his wife Linda Hurley to our Playgroup at Home Live session. As it was Children's Book Council of Australia Book Week, we invited attendees to dress-up as their favourite book or storybook character for our online event. Mr and Mrs Hurley read *Bertie and the Bear* by Pamela Allen.

252 tickets were booked for this session.

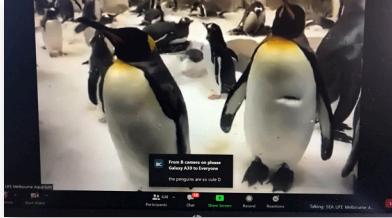


Ranger Jim

1 SEPTEMBER, 15 SEPTEMBER, 27 OCTOBER, 1 DECEMBER 2021

Ranger Jim from City of Melbourne joined us for multiple online adventures, as we learnt more about, birds, bugs, beetles and the natural world at these sessions.

1,204 tickets were booked in total across all four sessions.



SEALIFE Online Penguin Playgroup

8 SEPTEMBER 2021

Education Manager Olivia Hill invited us to SEALIFE Melbourne Aquarium. We learnt about penguin play and the mischief they get up to! We also learnt more about what it is like to work at sea life with the many different sea creatures. Olivia shared facts about the sea life, as attendees watched the penguins.

1,050 tickets were booked for this session.



Lah-Lah's Music at Home Online Concert

22 SEPTEMBER 2021

Lah-Lah and Buzz joined us for a fun, interactive online musical playgroup session.

721 tickets were booked for this session.



Playgroup at Home LIVE Somalian Storytime

27 SEPTEMBER 2021

Hafsa joined the Playgroup at Home LIVE team during the Monday session for a special Somalian storytime.

191 tickets were booked for this session.

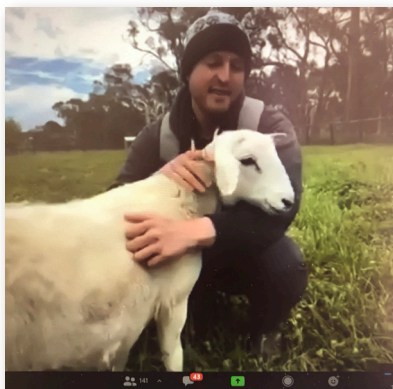


NGV KIDS: Art and Environment Online Playgroup

20 OCTOBER 2021

Stephanie Pohlman from the National Gallery of Victoria guided us through some listening and looking activities and told us about the artist Alexandra Kehayoglou.

238 tickets were booked for this session.



Edgars Mission Virtual Farm Visit

28 OCTOBER 2021

Attendees joined Kyle from Edgars Mission Farm Sanctuary for a virtual farm tour to meet the special farm animals and to hear their stories.

399 tickets were booked for this session.



artsbus Online Art Session

10 NOVEMBER 2021

Multidisciplinary artist and artsbus volunteer, Belle Formica ran a special online art session. Belle shared *Today* — a story about a nice day she had in her garden.

54 tickets were booked for this session.



Dinosaurs and Fossils with Melbourne Museum

17 NOVEMBER 2021

The energetic programs team from Melbourne Museum guided little ones through the wonders of the ancient world. Through stories and real-world examples, attendees marveled at how fossils are made and the history of the world.

208 tickets were booked for this session.



ArtPlay - I Am Nature Online Sessions

19 NOVEMBER, 26 NOVEMBER 2021

I Am Nature was an online series of interactive workshops that connected children to the natural world through movement, music, and making activities. At each session, the artists explored a different local animal. Adults were encouraged to play with their children, and to support them in the activities as attendees learn how to make the animal together.

99 tickets were booked in total across the two sessions offered.

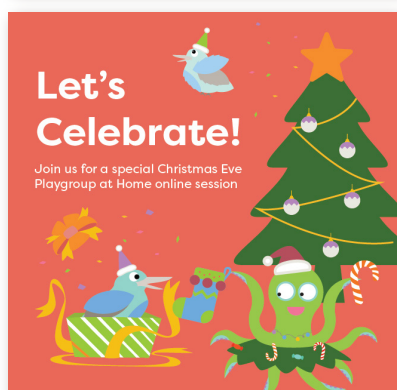


All Come Out To Play! Interactive Music Session

8 DECEMBER 2021

Amanda Testro from *Hullabaloo Music for All* presented a live and interactive music session full of humour, stories, dancing and fun! The *ALL Come Out to Play!* program that helps children learn about respectful relationships and gender equality.

92 tickets were booked for this session.



Playgroup at Home LIVE Christmas Eve Special

24 DECEMBER 2021

The Playgroup at Home Live team held a special session to celebrate the end of the year. There was singing, dancing, art and special guests.

101 tickets were booked for this session.



Online Sovereign Hill Playgroup Sessions

16 FEBRUARY 2022, 15 JUNE 2022

Two special online sessions were held in collaboration with Sovereign Hill. During one session we visited the confectionery shop. The participants learnt about shapes, colours and history of how lollies are made. During the second session we visited the Sovereign Hill cottage to find out what life at home on the goldfields was like. The participants went for a virtual tour of the house, shared a share a story and explored some children's toys.

93 tickets were booked in total across the two sessions offered.

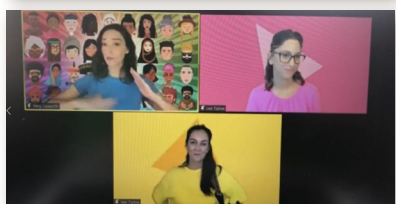


Tiptoe Giants Online Playgroup Concert

22 MARCH 2022

In collaboration with ARIA nominated Australian Indie-kindie band Tiptoe Giants, we celebrated National Playgroup Week with a fun and vibrant online concert. There was dancing, learning and play, as everyone sung about the big and small things in life.

100 tickets were booked for this session.



Online Playgroup Experiences

Participant Feedback

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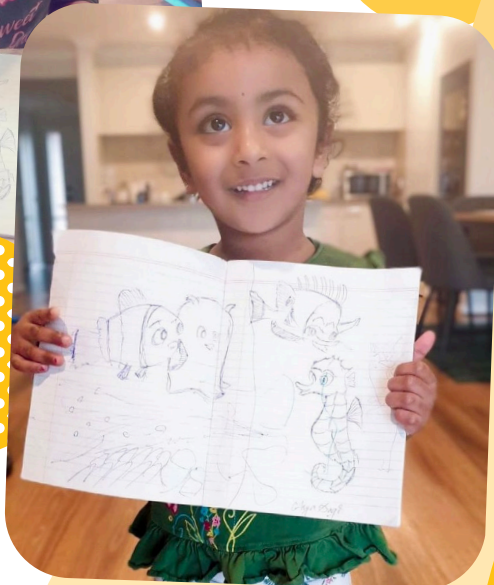
“Ranger Jim is engaging and informative. My toddler has only just turned 2 and he held her attention for the whole session. The info is presented in an interesting and funny way - hope to see him again soon!”

“My son totally loved the online playgroup! He is 2y 9m and especially during the lock-down with limited places to go and activities to do, it's hard for parents to think about what to do to keep kids entertained. The online playgroups are another tool that can bring kids together to enjoy interactive activities with other people and spend time with their parent. Children's play doesn't need to cost a lot, this is the other way we should have in our society more often - free and fun!”



“I was very impressed and truly grateful to have the online sessions available!”





“The presenters are very interactive and bubbly and somehow managed to keep my son glued to the screen for 30 minutes! He loved it.”

“Weeks later my daughter is still telling me facts about animals that she learned from the Ranger Jim session!”

“My son 3.5 yr old loved the Melbourne Museum online playgroup session. I loved how the Melbourne Museum staff explained complicated concepts and kept the audience engaged. Also, the Playgroup Victoria team members hosting the session were so involved! It was fantastic to see their dedication.”



Development and Support

The Playgroup Victoria Development and Support team aim to improve access to and increase participation in playgroup. They utilise a place-based approach, allowing for a wide-reaching network of community connection. The team works in partnership with local communities and organisations, to support and contribute to the advocacy, promotion and development of playgroups, suited to the needs of the families attending.

As restrictions lifted and Victorian community playgroups began navigating their return to in-person playgroups, staff recognised that many playgroup leaders were exploring ways to restart playgroup. From overcoming challenges and understanding barriers due to the pandemic, to engaging new families in playgroup, local playgroups were eager to re-establish themselves once more. The Development and Support team explored various topics and launched the *Spring into Playgroup* workshop series in September 2021.

Spring into Playgroup focused on a series of short, interactive online workshops open to all playgroup leaders, families and professionals. Facilitated by the development team, the workshops were designed to be a place for participants to learn and share with each other.

This first workshop series had a total of 263 participants attending 10 workshops. Workshop topics included: *Activities Promoting Play, Connecting to Your Local Community, Navigating Challenging Situations, Connecting Your Playgroup – Use of Social Media, Setting up the Playgroup Space and Running Your Playgroup*

Due to the popularity of the workshops and requests for more topics to be delivered, the team have continued to plan and facilitate a range of workshops each term.

Now titled *Connect and Create Workshops for Community Playgroups*, other term topics included:

Playgroup Business, Starting Your Playgroup, Covid Safe Playgroups, Getting Members to Step Up, Intergenerational Playgroup Connections.

Topics also focused on ways to enhance the playgroup experience such as: Sharing stories, Music and Movement, Sensory Play and Using Natural Materials and Outdoor Play. Many more topics and workshops are planned to guide, support and connect with playgroup leaders and families all across the state.



“The content was very relevant to my situation. I’m a student on placement in a playgroup. I love your practical ideas around setting up a playgroup environment. I loved both sessions I attended, the information, resources, and talent of both presenters was outstanding. Congratulations for the webinar sessions, they were so rich. Thank You.”
- Workshop Attendee

Communities Of Practice

A portion of the work that the Development and Support team focus on is supporting the Supported Playgroup Facilitators of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Supported Playgroup (SmallTalk) program. Our team coordinate and facilitate the Communities of Practice which all facilitators are encouraged to attend. These *Communities of Practice* are delivered with our partners *Parenting Research Centre* (PRC).

Over the duration of the year, 40 *Community of Practice* sessions have been held across 10 regions of the state. With almost 200 facilitators employed in the program, the emphasis is on shared learning, peer support and topics to enhance the program and experience for participating families. This year group reflective practice was introduced to each *Community of Practice* to further support facilitators through practice challenges.

This year we have used *Communities of Practice* to explore topics such as:


Engaging Culturally Diverse Families in Supported Playgroups, Transition to Face-To-Face Delivery of Supported Playgroups from Virtual Playgroups, Identifying Practice Strengths in Facilitators and Goal Setting, and Supporting Language Development in a Playgroup Setting

Due to the pandemic restrictions of the last year, three out of the four terms saw the *Communities of Practice* being held online. While challenging in some ways, there have also been many positive outcomes for the facilitators. These outcomes include reduction in barriers such as travel and timing of an in-person groups, flexibility in participating in a session that fits in with playgroup schedule and mostly increased opportunity to network with facilitators from other regions and cohorts.

We look forward to the year ahead, returning to in-person *Communities of Practice* sessions and continuing our support and advocacy for the Supported Playgroup Facilitators



“We all benefit from hearing each others stories. In rural areas it can be a very lonely job so it’s nice to hear that we are not alone in some of the challenges.”



“I really get a lot out of hearing the strategies other facilitators are using and the different ways they deliver SmallTalk. There are some great ideas out there!”



“I have liked all the topics so far and found a way to make them applicable to each playgroup. I do like the chance to chat to other members about common problems, being the only Support Playgroup Facilitator in our shire, its nice to share experiences.”



“I always enjoy attending, I feel valued and included. Thank you to the Playgroup Victoria Development & Support staff for always being ready with ideas, support and being so warm and welcoming.”



^ Pictured: Playgroup Victoria Staff running a training session

“We are pleased to be part of the Barkly Square & Multicultural Playgroup Network. Through this network, we believe that we can have the opportunity to learn from each other and exchange efficient and useful resources to manage our playgroup well. It will also help enhance the social connection of multicultural parents living in Ballarat and develop a more meaningful multicultural playgroup for their children.”

Connecting with Community Playgroups

Professionals have long been using networks and gatherings to maintain connections, share ideas and offer support to each other. Similarly, there is need for community playgroups to have the same opportunities to connect, share and support other playgroups in their local area.

During the pandemic, many professionals were looking for ways to connect with community playgroups. This saw the formation of Community Playgroup Networks in many Local Government Areas (LGA's). Due to restrictions, these forums commenced in online methods, which has continued to meet the needs and reduce barriers for venues, travel and other commitments.

The need was even more prevalent as we started to emerge from lock-downs. With so much information to share with playgroup leaders, local professionals explored ways

to disseminate information and guidance to playgroups. The presence of Playgroup Victoria development advisors provided playgroups and professionals with consistent advice and information and opportunities to enhance the playgroup space. With links to Playgroup Victoria resources, the networks also provide a stream of connections for the organisation to actively identify challenges and needs faced by community playgroups.

Playgroup Development staff actively participate in 15 community playgroup networks across local government areas. Each network is coordinated uniquely due to the needs of the area and the playgroups represented. The team are currently planning and exploring opportunities for every community playgroup across Victoria to have the opportunity to connect with local peers, professionals and Playgroup Victoria.



Practice and Research

The Playgroup Victoria Practice and Research team has continued to develop and deliver a range of programs, develop project concepts, re-imagine playgroup resourcing and re-establish professional links and networks. We have undertaken strategic planning to highlight to key stakeholders the value and benefits of playgroup, our organisation's vision, to support the regeneration of the playgroup platform post-pandemic.



Practice and Research Overview

Through the last financial year, and the unexpected continuation of pandemic conditions into January – June 2022, the Practice and Research team continued their work to increase awareness of the impact on playgroups, and to advocate for increased efforts to aid playgroup recovery across Victoria.

It was generally anticipated that in the second half of the 21/22 reporting period, pandemic restrictions and impact would ease, and our society would quickly return to a sense of normality, with families keen to return to their playgroups, regenerate or establish new ones. This was not the case, resulting in an overall decrease in playgroup numbers. Additionally, feedback from local early years and community development professionals across Victoria was consistent with this observation and resulted in collaborative and ongoing efforts to improving this situation. As such, Playgroup Victoria staff have embraced this opportunity to rebuild the vast professional relationships and links that existed prior to the

pandemic, and to actively develop new ones with staff in local government areas that did not have such strong links with our organisation prior to the pandemic. Given this situation, the Practice and Research team analysed the pandemic impact on playgroup participation, identifying several concerns.

Since the pandemic first led to the closure of playgroups in 2020, two cohorts of children have started school and another three cohorts have been born (2020,2021,2022) but not had the opportunity to connect with a playgroup. The remaining cohorts have missed the best part of two and a half years of playgroup opportunities that they were expecting, on top of the array of other developmentally stimulating opportunities that the pandemic prevented. The impact of the pandemic and mitigating measures will vary across families, however there will be commonalities based on the age of children during 2020 - 2022.

The table below shows, for each cohort, the ages at which playgroup was available, when the pandemic prevented (or highly restricted) playgroup attendance, and when there may not be sufficient playgroups for families to access. It highlights some key opportunities and experiences that playgroup provides at specific ages, that children of each cohort have already or could miss out on.

BIRTH YEAR	PLAYGROUP ATTENDANCE						How the pandemic has/ can impact playgroup access	Key playgroup opportunities / experiences that children missed
	Birth-1 yr	1-2 yrs	2-3 yrs	3-4 yrs	4-5 yrs	5-6 yrs		
2022	?	?	?	?	?	?	Without intervention, there will be insufficient or no playgroups for families to access	All the play and social opportunities for the child, parent, and family in the years prior to school entry
2021	×	?	?	?	?	?	Missed the typical pathway to access playgroup, via first time parents' group	Parents develop peer-support network from others experiencing/have experienced parental challenges
2020	×	×	?	?	?	?		Children reap benefits of playgroup during 1st 1000 days
2019	✓	×	×	?	?	?	Short pre-pandemic playgroup attendance, potentially impacting re-engagement	Child becomes engaged in play and social opportunities
2018	✓	✓	×	×	?	?	Interrupted opportunity for children's playgroup access, in the lead up to starting preschool	Social/emotional and group negotiations Development language comfort
2017	✓	✓	✓	×	×	?	Ceased opportunity for children's playgroup access, in the lead up to starting preschool/school	Building autonomy Confidence and individual identity
2016	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	×		Interactions Taking instructions from adult other than parent

KEY:

✓ Were able to attend playgroup

× Pandemic prevented (highly restricted) playgroup attendance

? Without intervention, there may not be sufficient playgroups for families to access

Through this analysis, Playgroup Victoria was invited to develop and contribute to several key stakeholder action plans to government, requesting increased investment in the recovery and rebuilding of the early years and family services, and community development.

During July 2021 to June 2022, because of the pandemic situation continued with most of the Victorian population either in lock-down or with severe restrictions, Playgroup Victoria continued to deliver the Playgroup at Home LIVE program. Playgroup Victoria only made significant scheduling changes as the end of the financial year approached and the state re-opened from lock-down restrictions. Despite participant numbers decreasing towards June 2022, we remained pleased with the overall level of engagement as families returned to in-person play and social opportunities.

Peep Learning Together Programme

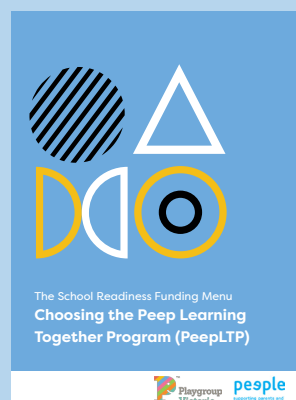
There has been increasing interest in and promising growth of Peep Learning Together Programme (PeepLTP) in Australia. During 2021/2022, PeepLTP training was delivered completely online. Feedback was extremely positive for this format, increasing accessibility to the training. By end of June 2022, a training network had been established by Playgroup South Australia.

PeepLTP continues to be included on the Victorian School Readiness Funding Menu. In January 2022 Playgroup Victoria was pleased to have PeepLTP accepted and listed on the Australian Institute of family studies, Communities for Children Facilitating Partners Evidence-based programme profiles. This will contribute to increasing awareness of the program throughout Australia, and thus building the program by Playgroup Victoria.

Over the last year, many presentations have been delivered to diverse organisations, resulting in positive feedback about the programme from the early years sectors, as well as other sectors that would benefit from PeepLTP, including family services, community hubs, school hubs, libraries, local government staff, playgroup professionals, and Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services.

The PeepLTP team acknowledge the challenges of introducing a new program to the existing suite of parent-focused and early home learning environment programs available to professionals, particularly during a period of pandemic related restrictions and requirements. Building PeepLTP as a recognisable and valued programme in Australia takes time; many organisations have operated in a survival mode facing many challenges, both financially and programmatically. The PeepLTP national manager has continued to focus on promoting and introducing PeepLTP to many different networks and by the end of June 2022, there is evidence of increasing numbers of professionals in the relevant sectors who have heard about PeepLTP and are interested to explore how PeepLTP in their setting can enhance their engagement with parents.

The flexibility of PeepLTP to be embedded in diverse settings has also provided Playgroup Victoria with an opportunity to design and develop specific project ideas for philanthropic grants. As such, the PeepLTP team, with significant partner organisations, has submitted numerous grant applications to enable more practitioners to access Peep practitioner training.





^ ALL Come Out To Play! underwent a branding revision to be more inclusive

All Come Out To Play

Playgroup Victoria in partnership with Drummond Street Services and Hullabaloo Music for All continues to deliver a program committed to harnessing the social structures and influencing the norms and attitudes of parents of young children to improve gender equality into the future through this evidence-based initiative. The sessions are fun and empowering for children of all abilities and cultural backgrounds.

Whilst delivery of the program was impacted by the pandemic, its reach has included rural communities: Sea Lake, Wycheproof, and Swan Hill. During 2020-2021, the partnership has continued to build evidence of the effectiveness of the project and resources to educate and provide tools to embed gender equality and respectful relationships in the early years and commenced a 'deep dive' on the efficacy of the content and resources. This analysis and review will provide the basis for an updated live performance and suite of resources that include an animated digital book, posters and an activity booklet for educators, parents, and children.

Now in the fifth year of a successful partnership, we acknowledge the program's continued and generous funding and support by The Office for the Prevention of Family Violence and Coordination, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.



The last year has seen the development of an animated digital book based on the story of ALL Come Out To Play!



Playgroup
Victoria



Drummond
Street
Services



Playgroup Victoria
Annual Report 2021/22

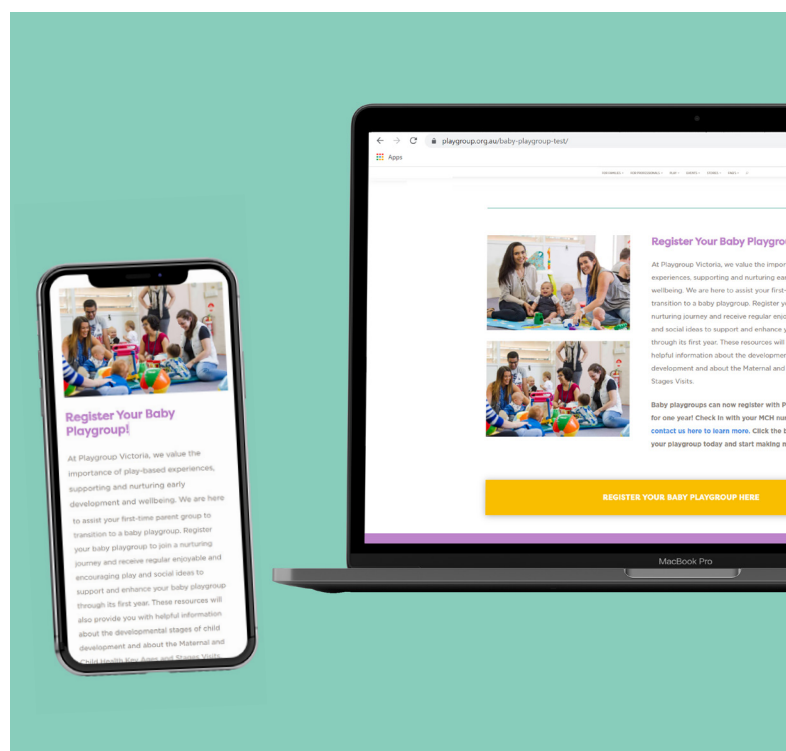
First Time Parent Groups to Baby Playgroup

Digital Nurturing Journey

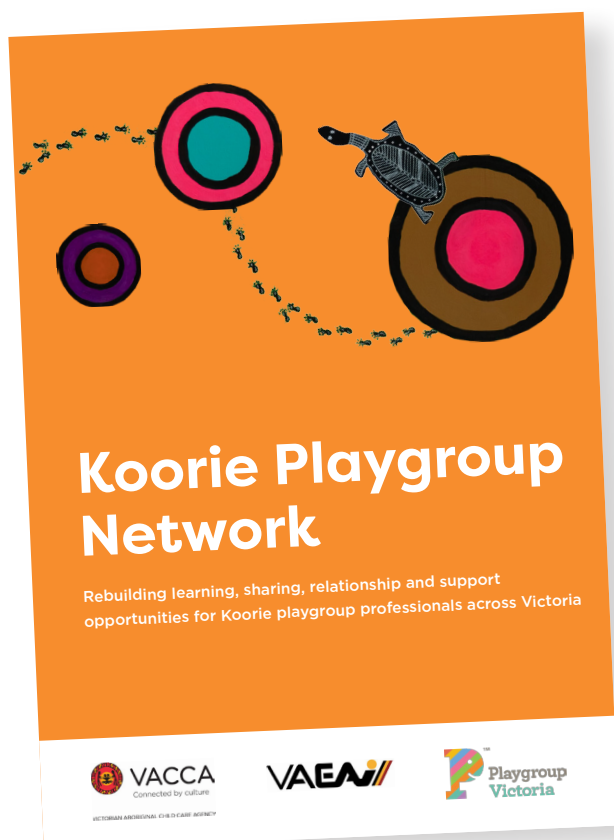
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This project continued to be shaped by the team's experiences, feedback from the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) staff and requirements set by MCH Service department as nurses and new parents grappled with the ongoing impact of the pandemic and access to their services.

Additionally, with the MCH workforce under high demand and stress, our project activities were unable to be fully implemented as intended. The staff involved have used this time to review the suite of resources and digital nurturing journey to ensure they remain relevant and suitable for new parents and enhance the transition process from first time parent group to baby playgroup. This project is expected to be fully underway in January 2023.



^ New parents can join the Baby Playgroup nurturing email journey via our website



Koorie Playgroup Network

Prior to the pandemic, the Koorie Playgroup Network was meeting intermittently, and facing challenges to state-wide participation. In 2021, the Practice and Research team re-established connections with Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI) and Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) to collaborate on a range of projects, leading to discussion about rebuilding the Koorie Playgroup Network, providing learning, sharing, relationship and support opportunities for Koorie playgroup professionals across Victoria. This collaboration has been very successful and has resulted in a state-wide approach to encourage all playgroup facilitators to attend in person or via an online format.

LEARN MORE HERE



Playgroup Resourcing

A new set of monthly activity booklets has been created. These booklets offer a wide arrange of engaging learning opportunities in the main developmental areas: cognitive development, language development, socialisation, gross and fine motor skills.

The activity booklets outline the developmental stages of play and provide information on how to extend children's learning using the ORIM principles, a core part of the Peep Learning Together Programme. ORIM stands for: Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction and Modelling. Activities are based on creative play, language and literacy, music and movement, sensory play and outdoor play.



Playgroup Conference

Playgroup Victoria staff are committed to delivering an annual conference and were very disappointed that this was not able to happen again in 2021-2022. To ensure we have the best chance to deliver this important and only playgroup-centric conference in Australia, a date in mid-2023 has been selected.

During 2021-2022, the Play and Learn Supported (PALS) Playgroup program continued to expand and has been very successful engaging families. PALS is a facilitated playgroup, that brings together children of all abilities, developmental stages, and those with medical issues, aiming to increase confidence of parents with children with disabilities to participate in community and social activities.

Participant feedback confirms parents and carers of children with and without disabilities are extremely keen to participate in a program that promotes inclusion and is welcoming to all. Of note:

- Most programs are running at capacity and have extensive waiting lists.
- Facilitators are sharing some wonderful stories of what they are observing
- Parents of all children are beginning to meet up outside of the playgroup
- Community service providers, such as sport, dance, music, and nature play, have started making significant changes to their programs through the knowledge and skills they have acquired at the PALS playgroups over the last year, with improved engagement of families with children with disabilities.



^ Pictured: Families at the Moorabbin St Kilda Football Club PALS Playgroup.
Photo by OBG Productions



^ Pictured: Families at the Frankston BAM Arts PALS Playgroup.
Photo by OBG Productions





PlayTogether

PlayTogether provides training, mentoring and support to volunteer led community playgroups to be able to welcome all children to their playgroup. This program has had limited success in the first half of 2022 due to playgroups recovering after the lock-downs resulting from COVID. However, many playgroups and community organisations are now reaching out with interest for their playgroups to be inclusive to all children. The training format will be modified in the new reporting period to make it easier for participants to access.



[LEARN MORE HERE](#)

Intergenerational Playgroups

“The rewarding parts are definitely seeing the smiles and connections made. I especially love Show and Tell, a time for families and residents to further get to know each other.”

- Maureen Hatcher, Playgroup Facilitator

Multiple generations came together to have fun, share experiences and play! Aged care facilities were not able to offer in-person formats, which led to Playgroup Victoria developing online intergenerational experiences.

Residents of two aged care facilities joined together to share activities such as show and tell, singing, dancing, dress ups, games and stories. Along the way, the children and older people learnt some Auslan. All sessions finished with a beautiful version of the song, *You Are My Sunshine*. “You’ll never know dear, how much I love you, let’s play another day.”

Across the year, the online sessions have seen an average of 10-15 families and 6-10 residents attend each week.



^ Pictured: Regular playgroupers Handari and Pearl enjoying our online Intergenerational playgroup. Image courtesy of Katy Condliffe.



“Thank you, as not only did my children get a lot out of it, I did too. I think I needed it during COVID. It really brings together two things that are so important! The little ones and the wise ones”
- Brooke, parent



Programs

Playgroup programs create opportunities for children of all abilities and backgrounds to enjoy the experience.

Playgroup is lead by a philosophy of learning through play, where the African proverb 'It takes a village' is brought to life in community settings. The playgroup platform provides opportunities for community participation and support.



MyTime

supporting parents of
children with disabilities



MyTime is a program for parents and carers of children with a disability, developmental delay or chronic medical condition. It's a place for parents and carers to unwind and talk about their experiences, meet others who really understand what it's like to have a child with a disability, and have skilled guidance and help from facilitators.

After 15 years of running the *MyTime* program, this year we said goodbye, not only to the program, but to several staff. It was an emotion-charged year for staff and families who were not sure whether their jobs, or the groups would continue.

We managed to transition two *MyTime* groups into the *PlayConnect* program because they had a high number of children with Autism.

We extend our gratitude to *Down Syndrome Victoria* who was awarded the funding contract and worked tirelessly to facilitate a smooth transition of the program, the staff and all the groups.

PlayConnect is a federally funded program. 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.

Like everyone else, the *PlayConnect* program has been trying to play catch-up following COVID-19 lock-downs. Recruiting new families has been the greatest challenge due to a continuing hesitancy to mix with other people, particularly those families who suffer from low immunity, as is the case for many children with Autism.

We mostly see our families just after their diagnosis and at a time when they are at their most vulnerable state. Our program supports them in a group setting while accommodating the individual family's needs and goals. Our aim is to normalise their feelings of isolation, offer acceptance, empower them with information and resources to help foster their child's development.

In *PlayConnect* playgroups, achievements are incremental. However, over time we see our families become more confident in their parenting, more connected in their community and achieving progress with their children.

Pictured: Families at Thomastown PlayConnect session. Photo by OBG Productions >



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.

Together Again

Intergenerational Play

“One of the things that older people make clear to me is that we don’t stop living as we get older and it is so wonderful to be able to connect with people across all the generations.”

To see younger people come together with middle aged and older adults, right through to people who are in their 90’s and 100. What a wonderful initiative.”

- Gerard Mansour, Commissioner for Senior Australians

If anyone is familiar with the ABC program *Old People’s Home For 4 Year Olds*, intergenerational playgroups bring this concept to life with children, parents, grandparents and older people coming together to play, share and learn. During the pandemic, we have been running online intergenerational sessions on Zoom. There has been a surprising closeness online, stemming from our innate desire to connect and to feel a sense of belonging.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



^ Image courtesy of Mercy Place Ballarat



^Image courtesy of Holly Grose

27 September 2021

Taking It All In

Seedlings Nature Playgroup

“I have loved watching the kids build connections quite quickly and how they notice and enjoy things that don’t usually happen in our ordered world. For example, putting toes in the creek or actually falling in! It is lovely seeing parents and kids exploring together too. I love the creativity that comes with nature play: when you approach a playgroup, a child soon learns that the slide is for going down (not up, under or over, not for tipping water or gumnuts down). Nature play is not prescriptive, and it is nice as adults to try to hold back and see what eventuates.”

- Dr Janie Maxwell, Seedlings Nature Playgroup Founder

Seedlings Nature Playgroup in Melbourne’s inner south-east gathers in local green spaces and beach locations. Together the families explore, learn and play, instilling a love of nature as they connect with the outdoor world and each other. Dr Janie Maxwell, founding member of the playgroup, spoke with us about the importance of creating a sense of community, caring for the environment and the many benefits of being outdoors.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)

9 May 2021

New Growth

Seedlings Playgroup Gather Under the Gumtrees in Wooragee

“We know just how formative and pivotal those years from 0-5 are. Alongside this, we know the extensive research which supports the need and urgency for children to have play, both supported and unstructured play opportunities and time in nature, the opportunity to observe, get dirty, experiment and problem solve.”

- Alicia Odewahn, Wooragee's School Principal

Wooragee playgroup in North-East Victoria have gathered for the first time in over a year. The joyful sound of children chatting and playing fills the air. *“It feels very healing to be out amongst people again,”* said Sophie, playgroup attendee as she looks around at the hive of activity. Held at the local primary school, this playgroup has a focus on nature play, community connection and early years exploration.

It is wonderful to see many local playgroups reconnecting once more! [Read more](#) about Wooragee Seedlings playgroup who gathered for the first time in twelve months, featured as part of our National Playgroup Week celebrations

This regional playgroup is located at Wooragee Primary School in North-East Victoria.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)

Wooragee Seedlings playgroup gathering for the first time in twelve months. Images courtesy of Sinead Halliday >



10 Year Anniversary



^Images courtesy of Elizabeth Vescio



“The most positive impact it has made on my life and of all those that have attended playgroup is the lifelong friendships we have made.”

A decade passes in long and short ways. One remarkable thing through time is the way that people arrive, once strangers, soon becoming deeply interwoven in your life through change and circumstance. This year Grandparents Playgroups in Moonee Valley celebrate their ten-year anniversary. Together they have marked milestones, enjoyed local events, shared life happenings and joys, shared hardships, endured a once in a hundred-year pandemic in one of the most locked-down cities in the world, and- most uniquely and naturally- they have forged relationships of significance. Many new children have been born during this time and the experiences for younger and older have been rewarding.

Based in the inner northwest of Melbourne, the playgroup has welcomed many families, from different walks of life, of varied ages. It is not

unusual to have three or four generations sharing the space. Being a grandparent in the year 2022 does by no means classify the cohort in the category of old. That falls well short of the modern, active, engaged, contributing and tech savvy group who airdrop photos to one another and are well up to speed with their children and grandchildren. The precious thing that the grandparents do bequeath to the next generations is their experience and wisdom and the unique aptitude to slow things down and gift their families with their time, attention and care.

The playgroup fills with life experiences, stories, ideas and conversation. Histories and reminiscences are passed on, as are skills such as cooking, sewing, gardening and the records of long-held traditions.

National Playgroup Week 2022

National Playgroup Week provided us with an opportunity to celebrate and appreciate the many benefits of playgroup. From small rural groups in the bush, to intergenerational groups in the city or those who meet beside the sea- and all the unique playgroups in between- National Playgroup Week is a celebration of all the good playgroups bring. We welcomed all families to enjoy the early years at playgroup. During the week we shared new offers and giveaway opportunities, along with much play inspiration.

National PLAYGROUP Week

21st - 27th March 2022

Together, Each Step of the Way, We Learn, Share and Play.

It's at playgroup that we find a sense of belonging. We are a community, where you can find your village and social support. Friendships form and common interests bloom. This is a place where we can laugh and share, or sometimes, just sit together, listen and be there. Parents, carers, grandparents, aunties, uncles, siblings and friends- you are all welcome at playgroup. Together, each step of the way, we learn, share and play!

www.playgroup.org.au/nationalplaygroupweek



Daily Giveaways and Special Partner Offers

We ran a series of daily giveaways and featured special offers from our valued partners during National Playgroup Week. This was an opportunity to engage with our audience and build a rapport, inspiring community connection and play.

We partnered with THE LUME Melbourne, offering an exclusive discount for playgroup members.

Daily prize giveaways included: a family pass for four to THE LUME Melbourne, three LEGO Duplo prize packs, a double pass to Melbourne Museum and four Crayola playgroup prize packs.

We collaborated with our long-term partners at SEA LIFE Melbourne Aquarium and announced a special upcoming event to be held in April - a Peppa Pig Playgroup at the aquarium. Playgroup members were also offered a special discount for this session

We asked families to share meaningful memories, play inspiration and other such good-natured stories that reflect the joy of the early years.

Amelia Weir

I love seeing how every little one at playgroup puts their own little stamp on the weekly craft. They get a chance to be creative and the mess isn't at my house 🤔👍👍👍

Jo Staggs

Our small rural playgroup may not always have much in the way of supplies compared to bigger playgroups, but my favourite part of arts and crafts is seeing how creative kids can be in using what we have to make marvelous creations. It shows that kids don't need much to be creative and have fun with art.

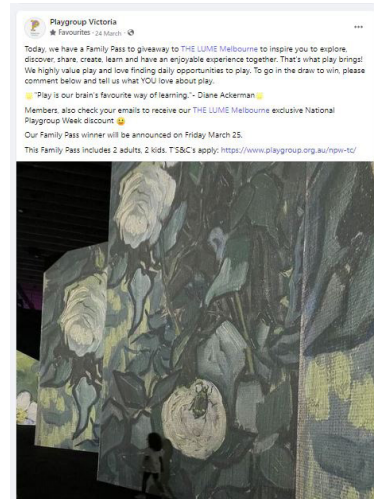
Erin Paxinos

We love how open ended and gender neutral Duplo is. This is something we strive for at our Playgroup.

It's also really good for side along play and fine motor skills. Pro's to Playgroup, no one takes their shoes off (usually) 🤔👍👍👍

Ally Rutherford

I love how Lego transcends all generations- kids and adults love it! Imagination combined with fine motor skills too. And best of all it never gets old and can be passed down so everyone gets to enjoy the fun 🤔👍👍👍 you can never have too much Lego!!!

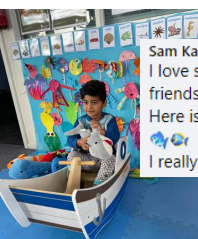


Alli Gregor

Tempy-Patche Playgroup kids and parents would love, love, Love some Lego duplo to get our youngsters fingers moving and imaginations flowing. I love that there are no rules with Lego, giving kids freedom to learn and create in their own way- and hey! That makes it therapeutic for us parents too!

Sandy Claire

Stratford Playgroup Victoria love duplo as it provides open ended play for all ages and supports fine motor skills, concentration and creativity. Duplo can be paired also with animals, cars or people to offer more adventurous ideas of play. Our playgroup would get so much use out of duplo- it would be greatly enjoyed.



Sam Kay

I love seeing the individuality and creativity that comes out in my child and his little friends! Here is mural of all our favourite underwater creatures we did at playgroup! 🐟🐟🐟 I really hope this year we can do a family mural!

Albert Cino

Art and crafts days were our favourite days at playgroup before lockdown! I was a stay-at-home dad and my daughter and I looked forward to Playgroup every week. What I like most about these days was that my daughter could use her creativity to create anything she wanted (and make any kind of mess she wanted to!) 🤔👍👍👍



“We really wanted the funds to go to another group who perhaps didn’t have access to resources or have access to what we had to get something started- or for a playgroup that needs a bit of a refresher, or needs the ability bring some people in from there. We just wanted to make sure that someone else got to enjoy playgroup like we did.”

- Lauren Wilson, playgroup attendee



12-months FREE Playgroup Registration!

Community Spirit – Munchkins Playgroup Donate Remaining Funds

Throughout the pandemic, local communities rallied. The support shown was a reminder of the importance of the village and how it takes one to raise a child- for the wellbeing of parent, carer and child. Munchkins playgroup has naturally drawn to a close this year as most of the children have begun school, yet many of the friendships made during their playgroup days carry on. The group wanted other playgroups to have the opportunity to make these types of friendships and enjoy the early years as much as possible. As such, the playgroup generously donated their remaining funds to Playgroup Victoria.

Thanks to Munchkins playgroup, Playgroup Victoria gave away 20 Playgroup Registrations to local playgroups during National Playgroup Week.



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.



Emily Lang and her children Elsie, Billy, and Billy, 3, attend Coldstream Primary School's education precinct, which has been recognised for increasing access to early education. JOE ARMAO

MARCH 22, 2022

ABC News, ABC Goulburn Murray

“For more than a year, the young children of Wooragee, in north-east Victoria, have been waiting to get together for a play date. Today, after months of pandemic disruption, it’s finally play time.”

READ MORE HERE

NOVEMBER 14, 2021

The Age

Early playtime eases transition to primary school

“Those of us in the sector have known this for years and years, but there’s an increasing understanding and recognition in the community of just how critical those first five years are for children’s learning and development.” - Lead researcher Professor Susan Edwards

READ MORE HERE



OCTOBER 9, 2021

The Courier, Ballarat

“Connection is really the main word for the whole thing.” - Playgroup Facilitator, Maureen Hatcher. Read more about Playgroup Victoria’s joyful online intergenerational playgroup below, featured in *The Courier*.

READ MORE HERE

ABC Radio

Alice Zaslavsky



SEPTEMBER 26, 2021

Sunday Afternoons, ABC Radio

Playgroup facilitator Maureen Hatcher spoke with Alice Zaslavsky on ABC Radio Australia’s Sunday Afternoons program about intergenerational playgroups and the experiences had during Playgroup Victoria’s online sessions. Listen to the full interview below.

LISTEN HERE



SEPTEMBER 18, 2021

[The Courier, Ballarat](#)

“People need people. People, families and children, need that social connection.” - Local playgroup facilitator Louise Buckle-Smith, featured in *The Courier*. Louise shares news and information about Playgroup Victoria’s online playgroup sessions.

[READ MORE HERE](#)


AUGUST 27, 2021

[The Drum, ABC](#)

Their Excellencies the Governor-General Mr David Hurley and his wife Mrs Linda Hurley joined us for Playgroup at Home Live. As it was Children’s Book Council of Australia Book Week, everyone was invited to dress-up as their favourite book or storybook character. Mr and Mrs Hurley read *Bertie and the Bear* by Pamela Allen. The Governor dressed up as Bertie and Mrs Hurley dressed up as The Cat in the Hat.

[WATCH HERE](#)


JULY 22, 2021

[Channel 9 News, Melbourne](#)

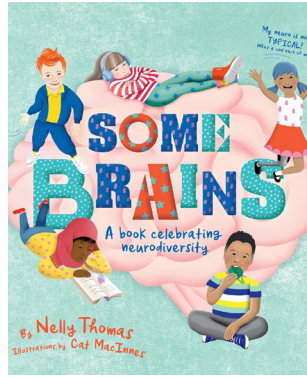
At home activity ideas were shared on 9 News Melbourne for families in lock-down.

[WATCH 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.



^ Images courtesy of Nelly Thomas

July 13, 2021

Nelly Thomas

Children's Book Author

"The best message you get out there is that brains are like fingerprints – uniquely yours. All brains will have strengths and challenges. That diversity is what makes humans wonderful."

Nelly is the mother of two young children and has written a number of children's books that have made a big impact on her young readership- making them feel seen, heard and most importantly of all, like they belong. Nelly's books encourage children to be themselves and be proud of who they are and what they like. In turn, these words, accompanied by the fun and engaging illustrations by Sarah Dunk and Cat MacInnes, have also brought much needed understanding and comfort to parents, carers, teachers and those among us who are wanting a little reassurance, kindness and celebration of individuality- with a sprinkling of humour for good measure.

Nelly's shared more about her latest book, *Some Brains- a Book Celebrating Neurodiversity* with us. Nelly wrote this story for her daughter but for many, it has felt like a story written for them. Nelly's books encourage children to embrace the unique aspects of who they are, strengthening kind self-talk in childhood, with hope that this positivity will be carried long into adulthood.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)

October 11, 2021

Olivia Hill

Education Manager
SEA LIFE Melbourne Aquarium

"There are so many animals we have yet to discover and understand and so much we do not know about these extraordinary marine and freshwater ecosystems. It is up to every single one of us to do what we can to protect and preserve habitats and minimise our impacts however we can."

SEA LIFE Melbourne Aquarium's Education Manager Olivia Hill shares what she loves about the aquarium, the ocean and its animals. The playgroup audience met Olivia during lock-down, when she took us on a tour of the aquarium via Zoom. In this one-on-one interview we learn more about her life work and how families can get involved.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



^ Image courtesy of SEA LIFE Melbourne Aquarium



^ Image courtesy of City of Melbourne

September 10, 2021

Ranger Jim

Park Ranger City of Melbourne

"I'm very privileged to be able to use Melbourne's beautiful parks and gardens as an outdoor classroom to share my enthusiasm for nature. Each season brings its new delights and connecting people with nature is extremely rewarding. The ranger education program takes groups of kids from schools or kindergartens out into the parks to explore, think and wonder."

A childhood abounding with nature and play led Jim Szonyi to a career in the great outdoors- one that allowed him to explore more and share his discoveries with others in his role as Park Ranger.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)

November 25, 2021

artsbus

Artists for Kids Culture

"In our workshops we want to encourage everyone to approach the creative process in their own way. Some children might say, 'Oh, am I doing this right?' or 'Do I have to draw the house? Can I draw a dog instead?' The children can be quite nervous to make their own decision, so creativity, and art in particular, are tools for developing critical thinking, creativity, resilience while supporting connections and community."

The artsbus is a mobile arts studio, theatre and making space cultivating community connection and care through creativity.



^ Image courtesy of artsbus

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



June 29, 2022

Deb Lowah Clark

Deep Connectedness

Finding a Sense of Belonging

"I always think of that connectedness. In my acknowledgements I always talk about being somewhere existing between the air, the sky, the waterways, the ground and the soil beneath us. The knowledge keepers are the elders and I pay my respects to them, from wherever we are."

Deb Lowah Clark believes that opportunities to connect with the natural world and one another, with ourselves and our histories, while a skill, is something available to us all if we seek out the moments.

Speaking from Wadawurrung Country in Victoria's south-west region, the Koorie Education Coordinator joins us to talk about Country, community and the importance of creating welcoming spaces.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



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.





LEGO

LEGO have been a valuable contributor to playgroup, providing inspiration for play, imagination, creativity and connection. Alongside LEGO we were able to talk more about the building blocks of learning and play. LEGO have been part of several giveaways throughout the year, including a big Easter celebration and a digital Easter egg hunt. Winners received LEGO products as a prize. LEGO continues to inspire play and human connect across the ages.



SEALIFE Melbourne Aquarium

So many children are fascinated by the ocean and its creatures- and so are the parents! That is why SEA LIFE is such a fantastic fit for collaboration. Families have relished excursion and event opportunities, learning more about different species, the environment and conservation. We have run giveaways, hosted SEA LIFE's education manager, Olivia Hill, who gave playgroup families a tour on Zoom during Playgroup at Home LIVE. Olivia also shared further insights in an interview. During National Playgroup Week we ran a fun giveaway and promoted a special event that took place the following week- Peppa Pig's Playgroup! There was a line outside the aquarium, such was the enthusiasm for their event.



THE LUME

The beginning of 2022 brought with it a new collaborative partnership with THE LUME Melbourne. Alongside LUME, we invited playgroups and families to reunite in person once more and explore this digital artspace. Social connection is vitally important and having a safe space to go to, that celebrated art, colour and creativity was a good fit for playgroup families. We ran several giveaways and had a bonus member exclusive discount that provided families with the opportunity to see the legendary works of Van Gogh brought to life!

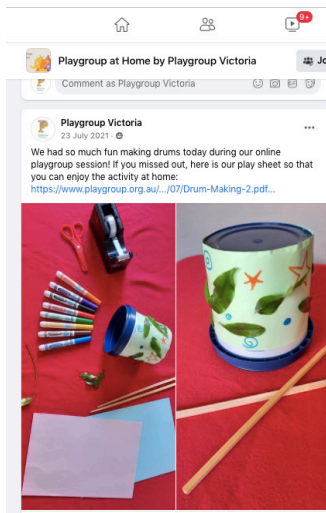
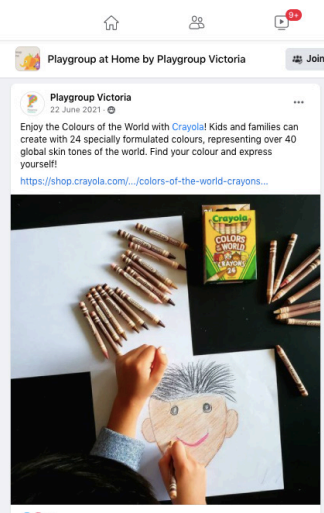
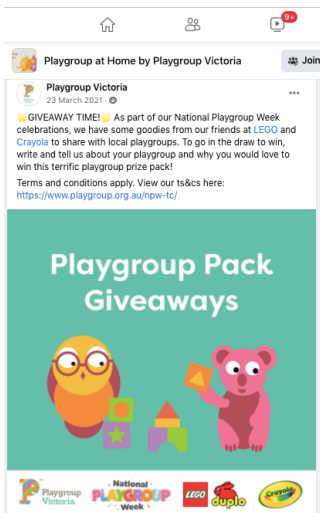


Crayola

Our long-time partners Crayola helped to bring colour and creativity to our everyday. Aligning with our philosophy of learning through play, Crayola inspired our audience with activity ideas and resources.

We featured a Crayola activity each of our monthly newsletters and booklets, exploring the themes: Nature Play, Art Play, Community Connection, Sharing Stories. Crayola activity ideas were regularly shared on our social platforms, inspiring play, imagination and creativity.

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.



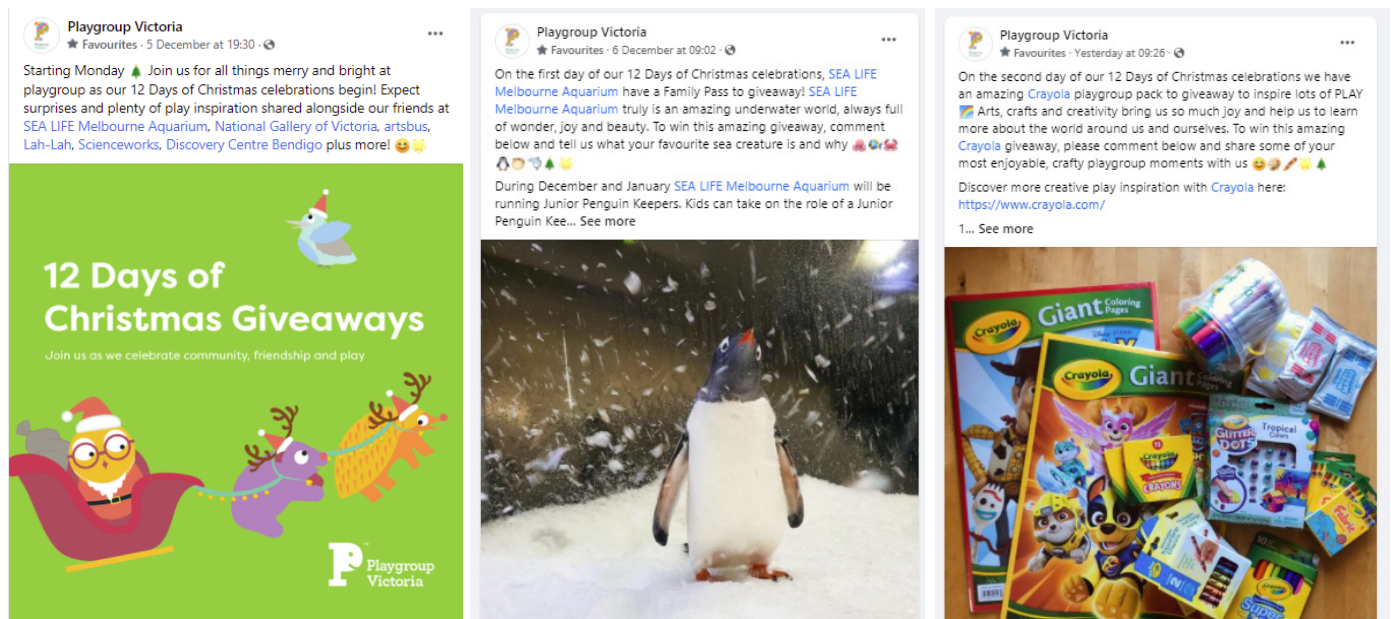
Radini Liyanage
Thank you playgroup Victoria,
LEGO DUPLO and Crayola for this
beautiful gift ❤️ He will have lots of
busy play days with all these
fantastic goodies 😊



Taan Mia Ctl
Mia love and enjoy to paint
colouring always

Each December, we find ourselves with a rich abundance of memories and moments from the year that has been. There is so much to celebrate! Playgroup get-togethers, family get-togethers, our local communities, kindness, friendship, creativity, play!

Together with our valued partners and collaborators, we came together to thank everyone for being part of the playgroup community with lots of merry giveaways. For 12 days leading up to the Christmas break, we had an exciting giveaway to share. There were surprises and plenty of play inspiration from our friends at SEA LIFE, Crayola, The Discovery Centre Bendigo, Tiptoe Giants, LAH LAH, artsbus, Scienceworks, Melbourne Museum, Lego Duplo, Vuly Play and the National Gallery of Victoria.



On social media, families shared their creative playgroup moments and memories with us.



Lucy Côté

Finley had a lovely time recently at playgroup - painting his hands just as much as the paper 🌈 He, and his older brother and sister would have such an excellent time with all the Crayola goodies over the school holidays!



Tamara Lamb

Absolutely loved making stained glass decorations with the kids this year. Using markers and contact the kids absolutely loved transforming their boring back window into a work of art!



Amber Morrison

Isla loved to paint and express her creativity at Playgroup 😊



Eliatha Cyprus

crayola, always fun to create christmas cards and posters... 😊 for fun times with the young family members, to use colours and art style expression, CRAYOLA puts the HEART ❤️ in ART.. 😊🎨🎨🎨🎨



Sarah Witnish

Our most enjoyable playgroup craft was a special Mother's Day keyring that my littlest girl made for me, with the help of our beautiful playgroup facilitator. Something my daughter loved making and something I use every day - every day I have a little reminder of my daughter and the joy we have at playgroup!



Mari Rawan

After we read the rainbow fish, we made our own rainbow fish! 🌈🐟 my son loved it so much, that for the next month we made rainbow fishes every day 😊



Deb David

Painting using cars as the brushes. The tyres make great patterns with the paint

Like Reply Hide 11 w Edited



Joe Chahal

My toddler always me to Draw so many pictures 🎨 He says he just love colouring not drawing 🙄 So we work as a team 🤝 I draw all monster trucks 🚚 (that's what he likes) and he colours them

Like Reply Hide 11 w

We asked: "Comment and share some of your most enjoyable, crafty playgroup moments with us!"



Komal Mahubani

My 2yo just helped me make our Christmas cards this year. We mixed out brown paint and did fingerprint reindeers. She was so happy how her thumbprint turned into a reindeer with eyes and a red nose. She loves any kind of craft and painting and colouring ❤️

Like Reply Hide 11 w



Rachel Horne

My son loves to draw and colour. Especially if it is paw patrol themed 😊 His favourite is to draw fire engines for Marshall. But as he is 2 they are a little hard to see!

Like Reply Hide 11 w



Catherine Niemer

Another fabulous prize!! My son still talks about Playgroup at the museum 2 years ago, where there were loads of crafty stations set up. His favourite was making the "rocket" and painting a pot. 🚀🎨 He also makes his dad's birthday and Christmas cards each year, after making his first one at playgroup when he was 2. Home made ones are so much more special. 🎁🎨

Like Reply Hide 11 w

Social Connections

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

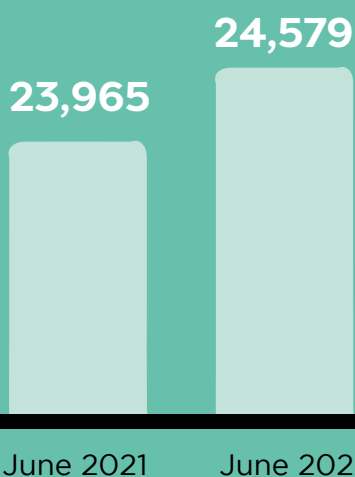
Social media has also allowed us to connect with new families and introduce a wider audience to the concept of playgroup and invite them to join the community. These online connections have allowed us to support more families with instant chat and through engagement via different content.

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

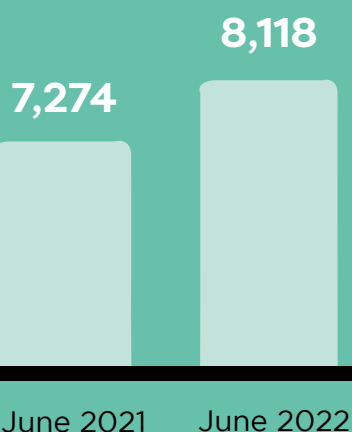
Page Followers:

+614
Increase



Playgroup at Home
Facebook group members:

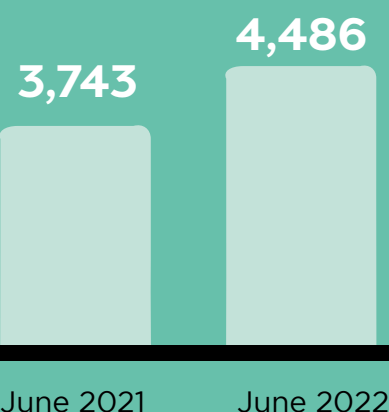
+844
Increase



INSTAGRAM

Followers

+743
Increase



Membership

We are a membership organisation as we are a community organisation. We seek to forge connections and support families and those working in the playgroup field by providing resources, advise, advocacy, assistance, insurance and additional benefits that enable everyone to have a positive, enriching playgroup experience.

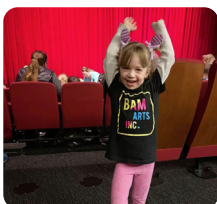
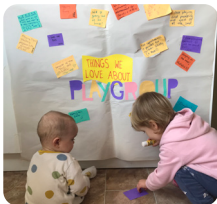


185

New Playgroups Registered 1st July 2021 - 30th June

3,560

New Family Members 1st July 2021 - 30th June



Supporting Our Members

Playgroup Victoria has a wide range of benefits to help get playgroups started and support playgroups along the way. Benefits include advertisement, insurance, resources, activity inspiration, communication tools and access to the Playgroup Learning Portal, with over two hours worth of workshop videos.

Within the member portal, there are more than 20 activity booklets and over 100 play sheets.

Members were encouraged to explore a range of different topics within the playgroup portal. Booklets include: Art Play, Music and Movement, Community Kindness, Messy Play, Health and Wellbeing- and lots more!

Our full collection of play sheets and activity booklets plus a range of resources to support playgroups, including The Playgroup Toolkit which contains templates, posters and much more!



What our members said

Annual Survey Snapshot

93%

Would consider recommending playgroup to other families with young children

88%

Extremely satisfied with the playgroup experience

“My child had gained confidence in playing and interacting with other children. They have also developed their fundamental motor skills by using the equipment and play space available”
- Survey Respondent

PLAYGROUP CONNECTIONS

What is the most beneficial part of attending playgroup?

1. Enable children to have fun – 62.4%
2. Increased child's social skills – 57.6%
3. Support my child's development – 55%



Parents playgroup experience

1. Benefited child's development – 56.8%
2. Increased connection with other parents – 54.2%
3. Increased social support network through developing friendships – 47.4%

“My son has delayed development and the play, interactions and learning he gets each week from playgroup has helped him reach more of his milestones as well as boost his confidence”
- Survey Respondent

“It's not only a great learning tool for my kids but it's a great support for me and I'm always learning new things from other parents” - Survey Respondent

What our playgroup leaders said

Annual Playgroup Leader Survey Snapshot

91.4%

Feel Valued by Playgroup Families

34.3%

Feel Valued by their Community

31.4%

Feel Valued by Family and Friends

“ Our playgroup is mostly able to run independently, but when I have had questions or concerns I have always been able to have them answered in a timely manner which has been wonderful” - Survey Respondent

“ Playgroup Victoria provide great information and resources for leaders and parents as well as activity ideas and important dates coming up” - Survey respondent

What is your the main reason for contacting Playgroup Victoria?

1. Ideas for play – 41.4%
2. Tools for running a playgroup – 28.5%
3. Promotion materials – 22.8%

50%

Have connected with Playgroup Victoria via Email

14.2%

Have connected with Playgroup Victoria via Website

25.7%

Have connected with Playgroup Victoria via Phone

Playgroup Victoria

346 Albert St, Brunswick VIC 3056



playgroup.org.au



1800 171 882



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Playgroup
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