



Helping hand: FLAG is building a network for Victorian playgroups.

Photograph supplied

A FLAG for local playgroups

By KATRINA BRANDON

PLAYGROUP Victoria has started a Latrobe playgroup network with help from federal government funding that will boost playgroups until mid-2026.

The project, 'Helping Families Learn and Grow Through Playgroup' (FLAG) aims to create a sustainable future for playgroups by creating a playgroup platform.

According to Playgroup Victoria FLAG Officer, Shascha Reese-Sharam and Development and Support Manager, Leanne Dhami, there are close to 40 playgroups in the Latrobe Valley region.

Playgroups are purely run by volunteers. Playgroup Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation, an advocacy agency behind playgroups in Victoria.

"Playgroup is to get together to socialise so that it increases social and mental wellbeing for both the child and the parent," Ms Dhami said.

"We know that connected parents and connected families mean that we have better outcomes. Playgroup Victoria is the supported advocacy agency behind playgroups. We are working with professionals to ensure they are connected to playgroups, and it's all good and happening out there."

Last month, Ms Dhami and Ms Reese-Sharam invited representatives from each playgroup to a network meeting. There were 14 people present from playgroups in Hazelwood North, Moe, Morwell, Churchill, and Traralgon.

"This will be the start of many network meetings and opportunities. At the end of the project, we hope to see all the playgroups support each other and collaborate for all Latrobe families moving forward," Ms Dhami said.

"This network is an opportunity for playgroups

to share their struggles, work together to find collaborative approaches to solving those problems and connect and share," Ms Reese-Sharam added.

"As a part of this platform, the main focus is around the sustainability of these workshops, and this playgroup network will be an integral part of pulling it all together."

Another aim of the playgroup network is to make it easier for families to place or find a playgroup. According to Ms Reese-Sharam, not all playgroups are suited for all families and vice versa. She told the *Express* it is about finding a group where families can connect.

During the networking event, Ms Reese-Sharam and Ms Dhami discussed opportunities for playgroups to collaborate, as well as Latrobe playgroup opportunities, such as the Latrobe City Children's Expo. The group is also having a 'Teddy Bear Picnic,' at Newman Park, Traralgon.

Ms Reese-Sharam and Ms Dhami also found that one of the most common problems in playgroups is finding volunteers, numbers, and being "aged out." According to Ms Reese-Sharam, playgroups are often "aged out" within four years.

Playgroups have low-and no-cost groups. They aim to charge families just enough to keep the doors open and pay for things such as rent and venues, replacing equipment, getting equipment in the first place, and the consumables that would happen.

With 2026 creeping up quickly, Playgroup Victoria aims to see the networks continue the project and keep the connections they make before the period ends. They would also like to empower playgroup leaders with that information so that if a family is in need, they have that information at hand so people can access the service.



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Leanne Dhami - Development & Support Manager
Playgroup Victoria FLAG Officer