

Federal funds to set up playgroups, stock toy libraries

Child's play is just the start

**Susie O'Brien
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Children will have more playgroups and toy libraries thanks to a federal funding boost.

Libraries offering loan play equipment will be given an extra \$150,000 to establish 10 new centres in areas of growth and disadvantage.

And 50 existing toy libraries will be given money for resources and toys for children who need extra support, including those with autism and ADHD.

Other investment nationally has led to the creation of 27 intergenerational playgroups – which bring together kids, parents and grandparents – with funding for 273 more over the next three years.

Social Services Minister Amanda Rishworth said thousands of playgroups and toy libraries across the country “provide welcoming spaces for children and their families to learn to love learning and bond through play”.

Playgroup Australia's Patricia O'Donovan said the measures would “enhance accessibility of playgroups for children and families with multiple and complex needs, First Nations families, and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds”.

Toy Libraries Australia chief executive Debbie Williams said such libraries brought many benefits.

“We look forward to opening more accessible and affordable toy libraries in communities who are the most impacted by cost-of-living pressures,” she said.

Grandmother Tess Galea runs the Arnolds Creek Grandparents Playgroup and said it allowed extended families to come together.

“It's just wonderful,” she said. “We've got about 12 grandparents that come, with 13 grandchildren. There's a lot of playgroups for mums and dads; this one is exclusively for the grandparents. It's just one-on-

one time you don't usually get.” The grandmother of four said she first went to an intergenerational playgroup for something special to do with her now 11-year-old granddaughter, and had since taken each of her other grandkids.

“I'm waiting for my youngest child to have children so I can keep it going,” she said.

toylibraries.org.au/find-a-toy-library

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Fran Lock with granddaughter Freya, 2, at Arnolds Creek Grandparents Playgroup. Picture: David Smith