



Playgroup Victoria

2024 -2025 Annual Report

Chair and CEO Report



Chair of the Board
Matt Ralston



Playgroup Victoria CEO
Danny Schwarz

Throughout 2024-2025, Playgroup Victoria continued to play a central role in the early childhood sector, supporting children’s learning and development across the state and beyond. Our organisation delivered resources and support to thousands of families, all of them aimed at strengthening family wellbeing and building confident communities. Each story we heard, and every conversation we had, reaffirmed our belief in the power of playgroup.

We celebrated our 50th anniversary in the second half of 2024, this gave us the chance to reflect on the profound evolution the organisation has been through—from those first gatherings of families in the early 1970’s, to a statewide network supporting generations. Our celebrations began with a Teddy Bear’s Picnic in the park next to the building the organisation occupied for more than 30 years. To commemorate the milestone, our team digitised our archives. You can view our 50 years of moments and memories on our dedicated [Playgroup History website](#).

A defining moment of this past year was a renewed focus on community, connection and collaboration. Our social media community has

never been more vibrant, sharing stories, tips and everyday moments that remind us of what it means to belong.

This year, Playgroup Victoria hosted the “*Generations of Play: 50 Years of Playgroup Victoria*” Conference in November 2024, bringing together over 450 early years professionals. We are proud to have welcomed leaders of the sector, researchers, funders, partners and parents, through collaborative sessions that explored neurodiversity, inclusion and the importance of evidence-based practice.

Federal funding and continued philanthropic grants have enabled us to expand supported playgroups in Bendigo, Central Goldfields and Latrobe Gippsland. This too has helped us to broaden our evidence-based Peep Learning Together program, driving partnerships interstate. Our engagement data continues to rise, with ‘*Find a Playgroup*’ internet searches and website downloads reaching all-time highs, reflecting families increasing appetite for genuine, inclusive playgroup experiences.

This year, the Board and staff contributed to our ‘*Realising the Potential of Playgroup*’ report. This is our ten-year vision and practical roadmap for playgroup in Victoria. The report highlights the critical role playgroup must have, connecting

families to services, innovating delivery models, increasing volunteer capacity and ensuring access to playgroups for more families. Key opportunities identified include:

- Active partnering with government to address access, quality and inclusion gaps and establish a Victorian Playgroup Strategy.
- Building pathways between first-time parent groups and playgroups, leveraging new promotional campaigns and targeted communications to educate those unfamiliar with playgroup's benefits.
- Investing in volunteer and facilitator skill development, expanding peer mentoring and inclusion training and supporting micro-credential pathways into early childhood careers.
- Unlocking new community spaces for playgroup through strengthened local government and cross-sector partnerships, which includes intergenerational and bush playgroup models for rural communities.

This year we welcomed new Board members whose skills and experience enrich our diverse and collaborative governance. The Board continues to work in close partnership with management for measurable outcomes and strategic impact. We also acknowledge the invaluable contributions of outgoing members including Sarah Cummings who was Chair from 2022-2024.

Our heartfelt thanks go to our extraordinary staff whose energy and professionalism are central to what we have and continue to achieve. Their commitment has allowed us to grow, to learn and to lead the way in creating an inclusive, innovative playgroup movement, where we aim to see playgroup included as an integral part of the universal early years system.

Looking forward, we continue to strive for a future where every family can access a welcoming playgroup, where inclusion, wellbeing and community connection supports children and their families as they take their first steps. Guided by our vision, grounded in evidence and inspired by community voices, we look forward to another year of collaboration, partnership and impact.

The journey continues—together we will ensure Victorian children and families continue to thrive through play. The playgroup community remains at the heart of everything we do.

Danny Schwarz

PLAYGROUP VICTORIA CEO

Matt Ralston

CHAIR OF BOARD

Risk and Audit Committee

Financials

Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income			
For the Period Ended 30 June 2025			
Income			
	Note	2025(\$)	2024(\$)
Revenue	3	3,291,989	2,922,239
Other income	3	224,322	259,664
Expenses			
Employee benefits expenses		-2,650,794	-2,220,048
Client support expenses		-126,925	-185,693
Computer expenses		-148,674	-103,581
Insurance expenses		-54,419	-48,930
Utilities expenses		-43,825	-38,700
Occupancy costs		-	-22,241
Membership fees paid		-43,026	-42,127
Marketing expenses		-12,558	-7,584
Vehicle expenses		-23,395	-16,252
Bank charges		-1,452	-1,785
Depreciation and amortisation expenses		-23,761	-46,881
Other expenses		-356,613	-323,254
Surplus before income tax	4	30,869	124,827
Income tax expense	2(b)	-	-
Net surplus for the year		30,869	124,827
Other comprehensive surplus for the year, net of tax		-	-
Total comprehensive surplus for the year		30,869	124,827

Risk and Audit Committee

Financials

Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2025			
Current Assets			
	Note	2025 (\$)	2024(\$)
Cash and cash equivalents	5	914,253	884,151
Trade and other receivables	6	37,036	45,506
Other financial assets	7	965,000	1,010,000
Other assets	8	81,301	62,723
Total Current Assets		1,997,590	2,002,380
Non-Current Assets			
Property, plants and equipment	11	27,811	41,360
Intangible assets	12	23,095	33,306
Total Non - Current Assets		50,906	74,666
Total Assets		2,048,496	2,077,046
Current Liabilities			
Trade and other payables	9	223,854	204,467
Employee benefits	13	340,201	291,925
Other financial liabilities	10	703,800	813,015
Total Current Liabilities		1,267,855	1,309,407
Non-Current Liabilities			
Employee benefits	13	-	17,867
Total Non- Current Liabilities		-	17,867
Total Liabilities		1,267,855	1,327,274
Net Assets		780,641	749,772
Equity			
Reserves	14	154,643	4,643
Accumulated funds		625,998	745,129
Total Equity		780,641	749,772

Treasurer's Report

The 2024–2025 financial year marked another period of stability and progress for Playgroup Victoria, with the organisation maintaining its strong financial footing while advancing its mission of supporting children, families and communities through inclusive playgroup programs. As a not-for-profit organisation, our focus continues to be on impact and sustainability rather than profit generation. The financial outcomes this year demonstrate responsible stewardship of resources and a commitment to ensuring Playgroup Victoria remains well-positioned to deliver programs that make a tangible difference in the lives of families across Victoria.

The financial statements for the year ended 30 June 2025 have been audited by MVA Bennett, who issued an unqualified audit opinion. This reflects the integrity of our financial management processes and the professionalism of both our management and governance teams. I wish to acknowledge the diligence and collaboration of the Playgroup Victoria team and the Board in supporting a transparent audit process.

Playgroup Victoria ended the 2024–2025 financial year with a surplus of \$30,869 (FY24: \$124,827), broadly consistent with forecasts. Total income for the year was \$3.52 million, representing a modest increase from \$3.18 million in FY24. The main driver of this growth was higher grant income from Playgroup Australia, alongside stronger philanthropic support and increased service income through training delivery.

Grant income remains the backbone of Playgroup Victoria's revenue base. While some program funding, such as the FLAG initiative, was rolled over due to timing of program delivery, other funding streams performed strongly.

Employee expenses, at \$2.65 million, represents 76% of total expenditure and reflects continued investment in staff capability to support Playgroup Victoria's expanding programs.

Other cost categories such as program delivery, marketing and travel remain well controlled and within expected parameters.

At 30 June 2025, Playgroup Victoria held total assets of \$2.05 million and total liabilities of \$1.27 million, resulting in net assets of \$0.78 million (FY24: \$0.75 million). The balance sheet reflects prudent management of resources and a healthy liquidity profile. Cash at bank was \$0.71 million and term deposits was \$1.17 million, underscoring a conservative investment approach that prioritises security and accessibility of funds.

Income in advance of \$0.70 million represents approximately 55% of total liabilities and relates primarily to grants received in FY25 for delivery in the 2025–2026 financial year. These timing effects will contribute positively to cash flows in FY26 as associated activities are undertaken.

The Board-approved reserves—comprising the Great Start Project Reserve (\$150,000) and the Deductible Gift Fund Reserve (\$4,643)—total \$154,643, reflecting the organisation's commitment to sustainability and strategic investment in future initiatives. Working capital coverage continues to represent a comfortable buffer against unforeseen disruptions.

Net operating cash flow for the year was negative \$15,000, primarily due to the timing of grant receipts and supplier payments at year-end. Despite this, Playgroup Victoria remains in a strong liquidity position, with cash and term deposits collectively exceeding total liabilities by a healthy margin. The organisation continues to manage its cash reserves prudently, balancing the need for program delivery with the importance of maintaining operational resilience.

The FY25 financial results reaffirm Playgroup Victoria's financial strength and operational maturity. As we move into FY26, the organisation remains focused on maintaining financial discipline while pursuing opportunities for growth and innovation. Strategic priorities for the coming year include improving impact measurement and reporting, expanding and diversifying partnerships with funding bodies and driving the effectiveness of program delivery and training and development.

With a solid financial foundation and dedicated team, Playgroup Victoria is well placed to continue delivering high-quality services that foster connection, learning and resilience in families and communities across Victoria.

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 2025 and that there are reasonable grounds to believe the Association can continue to meet its obligations as and when they fall due.

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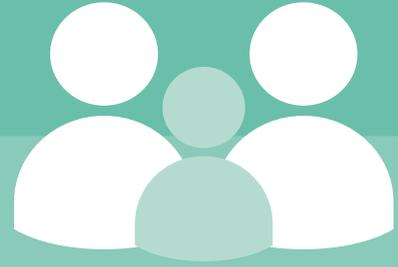
TREASURER



2024/25

Year at a Glance

1st July 2024 - 30th June 2025



MEMBERSHIP

1,152

Registered Playgroups

5099

Family Members

361

Professional Affiliates

17,251

Email Subscribers

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA CONNECTIONS

Networks

South East Playgroup Network **(18 LGA's)**

Playgroup in the North Network **(12 LGA's)**

State LGA Network (est. 2025) **(16 LGA's and growing)**

Community Playgroup Networks: **Melton, Knox, Bendigo and Central Goldfields, Ballarat, Geelong, Latrobe, Casey, Dandenong**

Eaglehawk Early Years Forum

Communities 4 Children (C4C) - Bendigo

Communities 4 Children (C4C) - Central Goldfields

Our Place Morwell Network

Health Assembly Latrobe



DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

Social Media

25,560

Facebook Page Followers

432,230

Facebook Impressions (October to June)

9,569

Wonderful World of Playgroup
Facebook Group Members

5,987

Instagram Followers

47,546

Instagram Impressions (90 day period)

574

LinkedIn Followers



Website

229,800

Find a Playgroup Searches

22,000

File Downloads

Blog

16,000

Page Views

8,400

Unique Visitors

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

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, 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.

The 2024 Playgroup Victoria Conference

Marking Playgroup Victoria's milestone 50th year anniversary, hundreds of early years professionals gathered at the Novotel Preston Melbourne for our annual Conference - our biggest yet.

Generations of Play - Celebrating 50 Years of Playgroup Victoria.

The 2024 Playgroup Conference celebrated and reflected on playgroups rich legacy and ongoing importance for children, families and communities. After decades of connection, learning and support, the sector’s dedication shone through. Opportunities for professionals to reconnect, share knowledge and honour the history of Playgroup Victoria added extra significance to the occasion, especially as archival footage and photos brought the playgroup story to life at our gala dinner. Speakers offered heartfelt recollections and inspiring stories, contributing to an energetic atmosphere abuzz with shared purpose.

Day one keynote speakers, Cat Sewell from Polyglot Theatre and Marc Armitage at PlayWork Consultant, led engaging presentations on the creative power of play, community connections and building resilience through inclusive practice. On day two, we welcomed keynote Dr Prabhat Rai from Monash University, who explored effective early years practice, emphasising the role of facilitators in nurturing children and supporting families to thrive. Prabhat also spoke about the Conceptual PlayWorld.

2024 KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Dr Prabhat Rai

Senior Researcher, Conceptual PlayLab, Monash University

“A Conceptual PlayWorld can be inspired by a children’s book or a fairy tale story. In family home setting the Conceptual PlayWorld model can guide to create an imaginary scenario where young children are invited to go on exploratory journeys. A challenge or problem is introduced that motivates the child to learn STEM concepts – all while playing.”



[READ OUR INTERVIEW WITH DR PRABHAT RAI](#)

Cat Sewell

Artistic Director and Co-CEO, Polyglot Theatre

“The through line, through all these creative experiences, has been play. Play is, at its heart, experimentation and curiosity, which is the tool we use in the arts.”



[READ OUR INTERVIEW WITH CAT SEWELL](#)

Marc Armitage

PlayWork Consultant

“Playing with others not only involves sharing physical materials and space but also sharing what is in our mind.”



[READ OUR INTERVIEW WITH MARC ARMITAGE](#)

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Concurrent sessions covered a wide range of topics, from the importance of inclusive playgroup practices, supporting neurodiverse families and promoting body safety, to strengthening intergenerational relationships, empowering parents, rural and disaster recovery playgroup models and engaging father figures. Masterclasses offered targeted professional development in child mental health, facilitator skills and music in playgroup settings.

Our panel, featuring Kat Fox (Engage Pasefika), Gabriel Carazo (RAD Dads), Fiona Holder (PlayConnect+), and Melissa Carter (Rainbow Playgroup), led engaging discussions about what community means to them and their playgroups. They examined how changing perceptions of community affect connections to family, locality, culture, interests, and identity within playgroups, further emphasising their adaptability and relevance across generations.



[VIEW THE FULL PANEL DISCUSSION ON YOUTUBE](#)



Day Two brought together playgroup facilitators for a community of practice session. These sessions promoted valuable engagement, exchange of experiences and reflective learning, blending professional development with collaborative practice for the sector.

We thank all who attended and contributed to this year's conference. It was a joy to bring together the playgroup and early years community celebrating 50 years of achievements and stories, building new knowledge and strengthening our collective commitment to supporting children, parents and families through playgroup participation.

“The conference highlighted the significance of our shared history—celebrating the work of playgroup professionals in building foundations for children and families, and inspiring future generations to thrive.”

Danny Schwarz, Playgroup Victoria CEO



**3 KEYNOTE
SPEAKERS**



**12
BREAKOUT
PRESENTATIONS**



**4
COMMUNITY
OF PRACTICE
SESSIONS**



**4
MASTER-
CLASSES**



**20
EXHIBITORS**



**430
DELEGATES**



**GALA DINNER
CELEBRATING
50 YEARS OF
PLAYGROUP
VICTORIA**



Playgroup Census Week

2024 marked the launch of the first-ever National Playgroup Census Week, a collaborative initiative between all State and Territory Playgroup Organisations and Playgroup Australia. Census Week data collection has been conducted in September 2024 and May 2025.

Playgroup Census Week

Capturing Real-Time Insights into Playgroup Participation

Playgroup Census Week provided us with an opportunity to demonstrate to government how valuable playgroup is for Australian families and local communities.

During each Census Week, local playgroup leaders were invited to record attendance at their sessions, helping to capture a national snapshot of playgroup participation. Importantly, the census did not collect any personal or demographic information; instead, the focus was on participation - how many people attend playgroups, how many sessions they attend and where those sessions take place. Census questions covered basic session details, including playgroup name, location, day and time, as well as the number of children and adults attending and the type of playgroup. Playgroup Victoria supported this initiative by providing playgroups with a digital resource pack to assist leaders in completing the census. The resulting attendance data has helped to build a clear, accurate picture of playgroup engagement across the country.

UNDERSTANDING AND COMPARING THE DATA

Each round of data collection helps build a picture of playgroup attendance across Victoria. Over time, this enables us to identify trends, patterns and areas needing additional support. While May 2025 recorded slightly lower attendance figures than September 2024, several factors likely contributed:

Targeted Collection Method - In September 2024, both families and playgroup leaders were encouraged to complete the census, which boosted responses but may have introduced inaccuracies (such as duplicate entries). In May 2025, only playgroup leaders submitted data, resulting in fewer but more reliable responses.

Focused Communications - September's promotion included direct phone calls to every playgroup, while May's campaign relied solely on email and social media communication, which may have reduced engagement.

Improved Data Quality Controls - The instructions in May 2025 minimised earlier confusion about counting adults, leading to cleaner data entry.

Seasonal Variation - Attendance typically dips during colder months (May-August) due to illness and reduced travel.

Looking Ahead

The next Census Week, scheduled for November 2025, will add another valuable data point. Collecting attendance information at different times of year will continue to highlight seasonal patterns and inform strategies to strengthen playgroup participation across Victoria.



SNAPSHOT

SEPTEMBER 2024 CENSUS WEEK

- Approx. 650 playgroup sessions ran
- 8,238 children attended
- 6,828 adults attended

Breakdown by type:

- Community playgroups - 32%
- Facilitated playgroups - 25.5%
- Supported playgroups - 34.3%
- Unclear/Don't know - 8.1%

SNAPSHOT

MAY 2025 CENSUS WEEK

- Approx. 650 playgroup sessions ran
- 6,509 children attended
- 5,602 adults attended

Breakdown by type:

- Community playgroups - 27.2%
- Facilitated playgroups - 25.8%
- Supported playgroups - 46.9%

Breakdown by session frequency:

- Weekly - 96.5%
- Fortnightly - 1.7%
- Monthly - 0.3%
- Other - 1.5%



National Playgroup Week 2025

National Playgroup Week was an opportunity for early years communities to get together and celebrate the many wonderful and diverse playgroups we have across the state.

Theme: Belong, Share, Grow – All the Little Things

National Playgroup Week 2025 brought local communities together to celebrate playgroup and encourage more families to get involved. Together, we enjoyed and embraced all things play! This year, our focus was on the little discoveries, adventures and connections that happen at playgroup. We believe these small moments come together to create something significant – a sense of belonging, shared experiences and the support families need to thrive.

Throughout the week, we invited local playgroups to share their events and make use of our National Playgroup Week promotional resources, including social media posts and downloadable flyers.

A key highlight was the launch of *The Great Start Program*, an exciting new initiative designed to support new community playgroups. The program offers mentoring, resources and financial support to help new playgroups establish and grow – increasing the benefits for local families and their communities. Read on to learn more about the program.

Another highlight was our annual *Playgroup Champions* initiative, which invited people to nominate someone in their community who embodies the spirit of playgroup and makes a real difference for families. Read on to learn more about this year's champions.



LOCAL NATIONAL PLAYGROUP WEEK EVENTS

Monday, 17 March 2025

Messy Play MORWELL

Tuesday, 18 March 2025

STEM in the Park TRARALGON

National Playgroup Week Celebrations in HUME

Bangs Street Pop-up Playgroup PRAHRAN

Play in the Garden Day BENDIGO

National Playgroup Week Celebration MARIBYRNONG

Wednesday, 19 March 2025

Kryal Castle Play Day BALLARAT

Merri-Bek City Council Pop-Up Playgroup

Thursday, 20 March 2025

Pop-Up Playgroup MARYBOROUGH

Friday, 21 March 2025

National Playgroup Week in WHITEHORSE

Little Explorers Adventure MOE



Celebrating Local Playgroup Champions

Each year, Playgroup Victoria celebrates the individuals who bring playgroup to life through the Playgroup Champions campaign. People with a link to playgroup are invited to nominate someone who has made a meaningful impact in their playgroup community. Through this initiative, Playgroup Victoria recognises the vital role of local volunteers and leaders - sharing their stories, saying thank you and inspiring others to get involved.

At Playgroup Victoria, we believe the power of playgroup lies in its people. Since its launch in 2023, the Playgroup Champions campaign has shone a spotlight on the generosity, commitment and community spirit that makes playgroup possible. Playgroup is, by nature, a shared experience - built on kindness, connection and the voluntary efforts of local leaders.

In 2025, we received 95 heartfelt nominations from across Victoria. An in-house panel reviewed the submissions to shortlist and select the winners. There after visits and celebrations were organised to honour their incredible contributions. This year's nominations reflected playgroup values, each telling a personal story of someone who had gone above and beyond for their local playgroup. Finalists were selected for their compassion, dedication and positive impact they had within their communities.

To strengthen campaign recognition and reach, an updated visual identity was developed in-house and applied across all communication channels. Aligning promotion with National Playgroup Week further increased engagement and visibility statewide.

The Playgroup Champion initiative reinforces our commitment to recognising the grassroots efforts that sustain playgroups across Victoria. It celebrates the quiet achievers - those who may not even realise the difference they make - and highlights the emotional and practical value of playgroup in building connected, resilient communities.

The initiative will continue to evolve as a permanent fixture in our annual calendar. We have launched a dedicated Playgroup Champions website where you can learn more about champions past and present. www.playgroupchampion.org

2025 PLAYGROUP CHAMPIONS

Champion:

Abbey Ferguson
Violet Town Community Playgroup

Runners-up:

Danni Menzies
Winchelsea Playgroup
Tara Rieniets
Little Treasures Playgroup, Lara

People's Choice:

Kath Barca
St Catherine's PS Playgroup, Moorabbin

Honourable Mentions:

Gwen Rosette
Balla Balla Community Centre
Lily Cerón-Fernandez
Malvern Jack and Jill Playgroup
Brooke Jones
Leopold Playgroup



Introducing The Great Start Program

To ensure playgroup is a mainstay in early years education, Playgroup Victoria have created a perpetual fund to provide an ongoing source of support for new community playgroups. The program has been put in place to assist playgroups to start strong and have longevity.

Supporting Local Playgroups to Grow

Launched in March 2025, Playgroup Victoria's Great Start Program is an initiative designed to empower new, community-led playgroups across Victoria. The program offers a comprehensive support package to help these new groups establish strong, sustainable foundations.

In its inaugural round, 22 diverse playgroups were selected to participate, reflecting a broad cross-section of Victorian communities. Each recipient received a \$500 grant to purchase essential resources like toys, books, and arts and crafts kits for their playgroup. Additionally, they benefited from tailored mentor-ing provided by Playgroup Victoria's Support and Development Team, one-on-one guidance, and access to digital resources through the Playgroup Toolkit. Participants also engaged in online networking opportunities and workshops, fostering a collaborative environment for sharing best practices and building lasting connections.

The program highlights inclusivity, focusing on playgroups that serve underrepresented communities. By offering both financial support and expert guidance, the Great Start Program ensures that these playgroups are well-equipped to nurture family wellbeing and create a sense of belonging from the outset. Through this initiative, we continue our commitment to strengthening communities and enhancing the early childhood experience across Victoria.

Round One Testimonials



- Supporting New Playgroups to Grow
- ### Playgroup Victoria's Great Start Program
- #### ROUND ONE GREAT START PROGRAM RECIPIENTS
- Ballarat North Neighbourhood House Playgroup
 - Burnside Busy Kids
 - Coronet Bay Playgroup
 - Diamond Valley Play Pals
 - Geelong West Neighbourhood House
 - Haddon Playgroup
 - Hope Community Playgroup Huntly
 - Kalkallo Babies Playgroup
 - Kananook Playgroup Seaford
 - Kangaroo Flat Community House Playgroup
 - Little Lions Camberwell
 - Little Wonders Tarneit
 - Mabuhay Southeast Playgroup Clayton
 - Mayta Playgroup Riddells Creek
 - Reina Batata Spanish Playgroup Castlemaine
 - Somerville Community House Playgroup
 - St Albans Community Playgroup
 - St Peter's Playgroup Ballarat
 - Strathbogie Community Playgroup
 - Timboon Tikes Playgroup
 - Westbreen Primary School Playgroup Pascoe Vale
 - Wyndham Mamma's Unite Playgroup



Diamond Valley Play Pals

[READ MORE HERE](#)



Little Lions Camberwell

[READ MORE HERE](#)



Mabuhay Playgroup

[READ MORE HERE](#)



Mayta Playgroup

[READ MORE HERE](#)

Connections

Playgroup Victoria is proud to connect and collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders across the early childhood sector. Through these partnerships, we have contributed to meaningful projects and programs that make a real difference in the lives of families and communities. In this section of the Annual Report, we share some of the initiatives made possible through these valuable connections.

Playgroup Development and Support



Throughout the past year, the Playgroup Development team has steadily broadened its support, fostering innovation, and making playgroups more accessible across Victoria. By partnering with councils, family services, early years professionals and community organisations, the team have helped to grow awareness of playgroup and encouraged participation from a diverse range of families.

Playgroup Victoria has continued to strengthen connections and partnerships across the sector. Attending the *Australian Institute for Intergenerational Practice Playgroup Conference* provided valuable insights and opportunities to connect with Playgroup Tasmania. Discussions are now underway to develop tailored training for playgroup facilitators. Building stronger relationships with local primary schools has also been a key focus for the Development team. We have explored how playgroups can support

children’s transition to school and enhance community connections.

We have engaged with *Rainbow Families Australia* to explore collaborative opportunities, including sharing resources and information to ensure playgroups are welcoming and inclusive of all families. In addition, staff have attended a range of network meetings hosted by local governments across Victoria, providing important platforms to share knowledge, identify emerging needs and promote the benefits of playgroup.

These partnerships and conversations highlight Playgroup Victoria’s ongoing commitment to collaboration and innovation, ensuring playgroups remain responsive, inclusive and connected to their local communities. Read on to discover the initiatives our team has been working on this year.

Open Days and Pop-Up Playgroups

The Development team have been proud to support local community events and open days that showcase opportunities for families in their local community. We have participated in open days and pop-up playgroups throughout Victoria - from the inner suburbs to the regions - to highlight and promote the benefits of playgroup. We have also worked in partnership with early years stakeholders and providers, making sure that families have opportunities to attend free community events to learn about and engage with, their local playgroups and services.



Include2Play

Include2Play is an information, linkages and capacity building project funded by the *Department of Social Services*. The project has been designed to develop a suite of resources, training and capacity building support to improve inclusion in early learning (playgroups) for children with delay/disability from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and their families/carers. The project is a collaboration between New South Wales, Tasmania, Victoria, South Australia and the Northern Territory. It will continue until June 2026.



Barkly Square – 31 March 2025

Playgroup Appreciation Day was born from one dedicated local playgroup leaders desire to honour the tireless work of volunteers in the Ballarat area. The City of Ballarat and Playgroup Victoria embraced the idea and helped co-host the first event.

The inaugural celebration was a morning tea for all local playgroup leaders—an informal but heartfelt occasion to recognise their commitment. The program featured acknowledgement speeches about community building and certificate presentations to each leader. The event was attended by two local MPs.

Attendees responded with gratitude, many saying it was the first time their volunteer work had been formally recognised. The uplifting atmosphere and positive feedback underscored how powerful simple recognition can be. The success of the event has now elevated *Playgroup Appreciation Day* to an annual initiative by Playgroup Victoria, ensuring ongoing recognition for playgroup leaders.



Helping Families Learn and Grow With Playgroups (FLAG)

Funded by the Department of Social Services (DSS), this project has expanded its reach and impact over the past year, delivering meaningful outcomes for families and communities across Victoria. Focused on Greater Bendigo, Central Goldfields, and Latrobe City, it has reinforced the value of playgroups, strengthened local networks and supported more sustainable, inclusive early childhood environments.

Working closely with partners, including councils, health services, primary schools, early years providers, community hubs and neighbourhood houses, the project has increased awareness of playgroups and enhanced the experience for participating families. These collaborations have strengthened community connections, improved resource sharing and ensured playgroups respond to local needs.

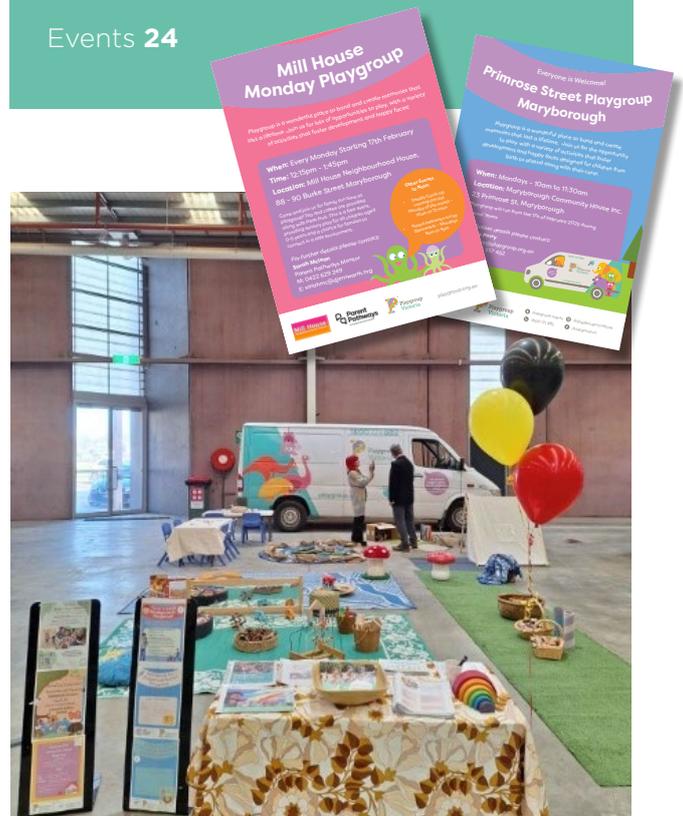
Key Activities and Outcomes Include:

- Establishing new playgroups in under-served areas.
- Expanding opportunities for families to engage in play-based learning and social connection.
- Mentoring for emerging playgroup leaders, equipping them with the skills, confidence and support networks needed to lead thriving groups.
- Facilitating local networks, workshops and knowledge-sharing opportunities enabling leaders and community partners to exchange best practice. Together they problem-solve collaboratively and foster innovation in playgroup delivery.

By building leadership, partnerships, and community engagement, the project is helping playgroups thrive in safe, welcoming and sustainable environments that support family wellbeing, early childhood development and stronger communities.

FLAG PROJECT SNAPSHOT 2024-2025

- Professional Partnerships **59**
- Professional Networks **14**
- Number of Playgroups Visited **74**
- Playgroups Established **31**
- Events **24**



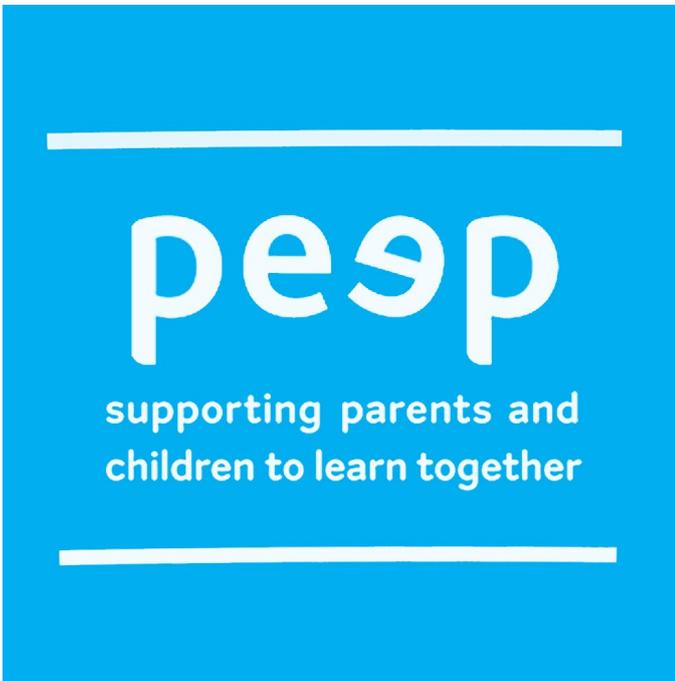
[^]NAIDOC Bendigo July 2025



[^]Toongabbie Playgroup 2025

FLAG Team Activities July 2024 to June 2025





^ Peep Training, March 2025

Peep Learning Together Programme

Playgroup Victoria has continued to grow the Peep Learning Together Programme (PeepLTP) nationally. From July 2024 to June 2025, a total of 192 practitioners participated in Peep training, joining from across five Australian states and territories. Training has been delivered online ensuring accessibility for practitioners regardless of location and face-to-face in regions such as South Australia, Seymour and the City of Hume.

Playgroup Victoria also began delivering the Peep Antenatal Programme and the Peep TALK Programme, expanding the suite of supports available to professionals and families. Peep TALK (Talking and Listening Kit) provides parents with strategies and activities to boost their young children's language and communication during everyday interactions, including support for families waiting to see a speech and language therapist. The Peep Antenatal Programme helps parents connect with their baby during pregnancy and beyond, enhancing bonding and attachment.

The Peep in Practice (PiP) Communities of Practice remain a valuable part of our professional development offering, with 12 sessions held and

around 80 practitioners participating. These sessions provide ongoing opportunities for practitioners to reflect, share, learn and strengthen their delivery of Peep.

We are pleased to have built a strong partnership with *Our Place*, which has enabled more practitioners to be trained in Peep, further embedding the programme into communities where it can have a lasting impact. We have also submitted the Adult Qualification, an important step toward offering parents the opportunity to gain accredited skills in supporting their child's early learning at home and building pathways into further education and employment.

Our relationship with *Peep UK* continues to be strong and essential to Peep's success in Australia, ensuring fidelity to the programme while adapting it to the Australian context. Their expertise and support remain invaluable as we continue to offer the programmes nationally. Peep continues to grow as a highly regarded, evidence-based programme across Australia.

ALL COME OUT TO PLAY!



Funding for ALL come out to Play! (ACOTP!) was renewed by the Office for Prevention of Family Violence and Reform, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to 30 June 2026.

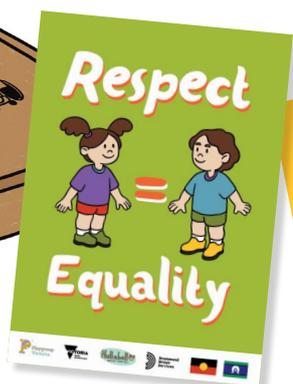
This iteration of the project embedded a range of gender equality resources including posters, booklets, parent webinars and more into early childhood settings such as playgroups, early learning centres, libraries and kindergartens, including those in regional Victoria. The key focus is the sustainability of the ACOTP! Program through project activities that will target a range of professionals and volunteers working in these early childhood settings and organisations.

Key partners *Hullabaloo Music for All*, *Centre for Family Research and Evaluation* and *54Reasons* collaborated to extend the reach and distribution of the ACOTP! training and resources. Professional Development sessions to the abovementioned cohorts were delivered to 1516 participants through 48 workshops from 1 August 2024 to 30 June 2025. ACOTP! also delivered a presentation at the Mallee Early Years Conference and delivered training to Peep staff in Oxford, United Kingdom.



Nancylee and Amanda, ACOTP in Bairnsdale

The workshops were positively received by early childhood professionals. Participants praised the engaging and effective facilitation of the workshops, and the quality of the resources. Almost all were satisfied with the quality of workshop content (92%), found the workshop content and resources relevant (95%), and found the content and resources useful for their professional role (95%).



All Come Out To Play! Continued...

The workshops have demonstrated effectiveness at increasing participant outcomes. Survey findings showed statistically significant increases in participant knowledge and awareness, as well as capacity and confidence to promote gender equality and challenge gender roles and stereotypes.

NancyLee Merzel and ACOTP! were actively involved in informing early years policy and practice around the prevention of gender-based violence. They were actively involved in the *Our Watch* consultation that informed the [policy guide: Prevention of Violence Against Women](#). Their contributions were also referenced in *Our Watch's* resource on Prevention of gender-based violence within [early childhood education university curriculum and teaching practice](#). ACOTP! was further showcased in the [Our Watch "This is Prevention" campaign](#), which highlighted the project and advocated for continued partnerships and collaboration. Additionally, ACOTP! was a finalist in the [Safe and Equal Primary Prevention Pitch event](#), where the project's evidence and call to action were spotlighted as part of the broader effort to extend early years prevention messaging. ACOTP! has received a funding renewal to 30 June 2026.



Communities of Practice DFFH Supported Playgroups

Playgroup Victoria's training team has continued to work closely with facilitators delivering the *Department of Families, Fairness and Housing* (DFFH) Supported Playgroup program. Facilitators represent a broad range of organisations, including local councils and community health services, delivering the program within their local communities.

As content experts, Playgroup Victoria provides formal training for all new facilitators and coordinates ten Communities of Practice sessions each term, ensuring comprehensive support across the state. These sessions offer facilitators valuable opportunities to deepen their professional practice through peer support, topic-based learning and reflective dialogue.

In November 2024, facilitators gathered at a statewide Community of Practice as part of the Playgroup Conference. This event enabled collaboration and knowledge-sharing across regions, reinforcing the vital role playgroups play in supporting families and strengthening community connections. Playgroup Victoria continues its partnership with the *Department of Families, Fairness and Housing* (DFFH) to support the delivery of the Supported Playgroup program throughout 2025.



Programs and Social Impact

The Programs and Social Impact department acts to embed inclusion practices, policies and processes across the playgroup platform.

This department leads Playgroup Victoria's advocacy to support families to access and participate in high-quality playgroup experiences. This year the Programs and Social Impact department has been accountable for the delivery of *The PlayConnect+ Program* and *Play and Learn Supported (PALS) Playgroups*.

PlayConnect+



A space to Find a sense of Belonging and Community

The PlayConnect+ program is open to children with disabilities, developmental concerns and chronic illness aged between zero and six, as well as their families, carers and siblings. The program fosters a sense of belonging by creating a supportive community of like-minded families, each navigating a similar yet uniquely personal journey, in a non-judgmental environment.

This financial year, PlayConnect+ delivered the program to 130 children with disabilities, 32 siblings and a total of 242 individual clients (including parents, carers and children) across 13 playgroups in Victoria: eight in metropolitan areas, three in regional areas and one online. During that period, we have delivered more than 224 sessions, including school holiday programs to children between the ages of five and eight.

The program is delivered by a dedicated and supportive team of professionals who offer a listening ear, guide families towards a range of helpful services, and create play environments that are welcoming, enjoyable and engaging for all members of the family.

“It just gives me such happiness and a sense of a place in the world where I belong,” said Cheryl. “A sense of belonging and being connected to the community like this at these really fragile stages- because I was a mum with a child with a disability.”

- Cheryl



PlayConnect+ Thomastown & Sunbury





Play and Learn Supported (PALS) Playgroup

Play and Learn Supported (PALS) playgroups provide a welcoming space for families to meet and play together. The PALS group foster respectful relationships and increase awareness of the benefits of inclusion. The program brings together children of all abilities and empowers parents of children with disabilities to confidently engage in existing community services.

Over the past 12 months, we have successfully established **two PALS playgroups** in regional Victoria—areas where access to services can often be limited. This year, the program has supported **21 families** across **42 sessions**, including **15 families** with children/parents who have disabilities and/or developmental needs.

In the past, achieving a balanced mix of abilities has been a challenge, with most attendees being neurotypical. However, we have made significant progress by forming strong connections with allied health services and Local Government Areas (LGAs) to identify communities with the greatest need. These partnerships have been instrumental in reaching and supporting families who may not otherwise have access to inclusive play opportunities.

Additionally, we have integrated services such as *Hey Dee Ho* into the daily program, enriching the experience for children and families. This has led to increased enjoyment, meaningful engagement and strengthened support networks for all involved.



Early Years Interviews and Insights

Speaking with those working or connected to the early years field, we gathered great insights about the power of play and the relationships that strengthen because of it. Through research, music, education and community support, the whole family unit and surrounding community has the chance to flourish.



Fiona Holder

In Conversation with PlayConnect+ Facilitator, Fiona Holder

“It has always been so important for me to advocate, assist others to advocate and to give back to families in the early stages of their journey, now that I am much stronger in mine.”

Fiona has lived experience caring for children with additional needs. We caught up with her to learn more about a life-changing early years playgroup program that supports children and families from the beginning.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



Ken Done

Appreciating the Colours of Life

“I’ve often said I can’t paint as well as a five-year-old, but I am still influenced by the same things. The sea, the reef, the beach, the flowers and anything that is beautiful.”

We caught up with Ken Done to capture some artistic inspiration as we launched into our Australian spring, inspiring creativity and the freedom to play!

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



Kat Fox

Shining a Light on Pasefika Culture

“Playgroup enriches our lives and is something we look forward to every week.”

Kat Fox is a volunteer at Pacific Island Playgroup. Kat is passionate about bringing the language and understanding of home, the culture where she hails from, to light. To sing traditional songs, share stories, keep the lineage of her ancestors woven through the generations that follow. Playgroups and libraries greatly help to nurture this sense of cultural identity, belonging and celebration in the early years.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



Gabriel Carazo

In Conversation with RAD Dads Founder Gabriel Carazo

“When dads engage in one-on-one time with their kids, it’s incredible to see the transformation in both the dad and the child.”

Responsive, Active and Dynamic (RAD) Dads- are a country playgroup community that Gabriel began after moving to the Kyneton area from Melbourne with his partner. Together they were seeking a village to connect with. The village has grown, with meaning and purpose.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



Melissa Carter

Rainbow Playgroup Parent

“My favourite thing about playgroup is that we all have very different lived experiences and come from very different backgrounds, but we are connected through this one small thing (being rainbow families), and somehow that makes us like one huge family.”

Melissa shares her personal experience as a rainbow parent and how playgroup supported their family, providing great joy, acceptance and belonging.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



Sue, This Girl Can

Kicking Dreams into Action

“I have made some fantastic friends that I would never have met if not for football. I feel like I am a better parent by doing something that is just for me. Something that makes me happy, so I am a better person to live with.”

Joining a football team was a long-held dream for Sue. Read more of Sue’s story as she attests: “This Girl Can- and did!”

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



Sindi, *This Girl Can*

From Stress to Serenity: Sindi's Journey to Finding Joy in Movement

"I'm inspired to move to release the stress of my everyday. Moving relieves the tightness of things I have to hold onto in my body."

Sindi is an Ambassador for *This Girl Can*, a vibrant campaign inspiring women, including mums, to get moving in their own way. Read more of Sindi's story, as she demonstrates in her everyday life that indeed, This Girl Can.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



Raising Healthy Minds

Along with an app, Raising Children Network have videos, podcasts, webinars, engaging infographics and articles. There is an abundance of easily accessible insights, created to make the lives of parents, carers and early years educators easier.

"It is a free and reliable toolkit for anybody who has a question related to children's development or children's emotions or behaviours."

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



Passing the Joy On: Toy Libraries Australia

Toy Libraries endeavour to extend the lifespan of toys, creating opportunities for more playtime. Families and the environment are cared for in the process.

"Toy libraries are a welcoming place for everybody, no matter what your financial situation and they are truly saving families thousands of dollars a year."

Read more about this powerful community organisation that brings people together.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



A Time to Move and Connect- *This Girl Can*

This Girl Can Week showcased the incredible things that can be achieved when women across Victoria have the support and opportunities to come together and be active.

“Together, We Are Unstoppable.”

From an AFL football debut, to stress reducing activities, a playgroup walk and outdoor play, be inspired to have fun, unwind and connect with others as we celebrate: “This Girl Can!”

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



Maureen Leahy

Caring for Community

“Playgroup is a unique concept. Each playgroup is as different as the community it serves and can be a space that responds and reflects the needs of those attending. The power of playgroup is in the notion that everyone can be involved and contribute to the group’s wellbeing.”

Maureen Leahy has created a place of belonging for children, parents, carers and families in playgroups for 46 years. As Playgroup Victoria reaches its 50-year milestone, and Maureen begins her retirement after nearly five decades of working in the early years space, we walk down memory lane. What her story tells us is that where community grows, so does purpose, hope and kindness.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)

Celebrating Playgroup

We shared a bounty of wholesome playgroup stories this year. We looked back and learned about the very beginnings of the Playgroup Victoria Association as part of the organisation's 50-year anniversary. We visited grandparents playgroups, a Spanish playgroup, nature playgroups, playgroups for children with additional needs and a playgroup run in an aged care village. Along the way, we found playgroup champions and saw first-hand how local playgroups support the community from the roots up.

Showcasing Playgroups

A true highlight of the year has been promoting an array of local playgroups! An important part of Playgroup Victoria’s mission is to help playgroups grow by creating opportunities for participation and contribution. Through our showcasing initiative, we create avenues of connection. Families, facilitators and volunteers can join the playgroup. Local organisations who would like to collaborate can link up and learn more about the unique and beneficial playgroup experiences. View some of our local playgroups highlighted below.



Tiny and Wise Alexandra



Winchelsea Playgroup



CFC Mandarin Playgroup



Diamond Valley Play Pals Playgroup



Violet Town Community Playgroup



Enjoy Playgroup



Imaginarium Project Playgroup



Little Treasures Playgroup, Lara



Little Hands Playgroup, Essendon



Mabuhay Playgroup



St Catherine’s Playgroup



Balla Balla Community Centre Playgroup



In Conversation with Winsome McCaughey

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

- MARGARET MEAD

Margaret Mead, a cultural anthropologist, had a big influence on the women’s movement of the 1960s and 70s in Melbourne and indeed Victoria.

“Mead was an advocate for awareness and action,” said former Melbourne Lord Mayor Winsome McCaughey who was part of the women’s movement in the 1970s and beyond.

Winsome, along with many others, had an instrumental role in revolutionising the early years landscape for parents, carers and families in Australia.

As part of Playgroup Victoria’s 50-year anniversary, we spoke with Winsome to learn more about the women’s movement and the beginning of the Playgroup Victoria Association.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



Enduring Friendships 16 Year On

Felicity Dunn’s playgroup story was as natural and organic as they come- and playgroup is still part of her life, 16 years on.

“We’ve been on camping trips, dinners, excursions and adventures. I made friends. My husband made friends and my kids made friends.”

Felicity’s own playgroup experience has led her to create further opportunities for others.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



A Thread Carried Through Time at Spanish Playgroup

“Having a community- it is more than just the language itself, it is a whole culture.”

Languages, traditions, cultures and relationships provide children with a sense of who they are, where they are safe and what they value. That is why a Spanish playgroup in inner Melbourne means so much to the families who gather here.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



Imaginations Take Flight in Creative Play Space

Larissa Taylor has been running playgroups for 27 years. Over that time, her superpower has been her understanding the needs of families and her unique way of creating spaces that promote connection, freedom and learning through play. One parent said:

“Playgroup with her was the best and I am so glad I, and many others, experienced it.”



[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)

The Making of a Village

The Romsey playgroup has been around since 1987. Families now meet within 'The Hub', a central gathering spot that has been reinvigorated with community spirit and fundraising. This has contributed to the colourful and creative play spaces on offer, all while bringing families together.

"I found my village through playgroup. I really connected with the parents and grandparents I met."- Tamara

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



The Great Capacity for Love in Non-Judgmental Play Space

The families here support their child, and oftentimes, children, with additional needs. Simple gestures, of connection mean a great deal. As does the opportunity to meet with one another at PlayConnect+ playgroup.

"It is safe, there is no judgement about the kids' behaviour so you can all just have a breath and the kids can be themselves."

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)





I Belong, I Can Be Me

“It is kind of feeling less isolated, less alone because you know you can get to feel like you are not the only family that has this life and has some challenges, but also the good things about having neurodiverse children and then when you are in a group like this it’s like, ‘Oh, it’s not just me, there are other people in the world like that’ and communities can be built around that.”

The PlayConnect+ playgroup program allows families to celebrate and commiserate, to share, to heal, to grow, to belong, to be.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



Nature Wonderers at CERES Playgroup

A gentle current of content runs through the CERES nature playgroup. The families are immersed in an outdoor environment that is both native and cultivated. Together, they playgroup explores, making new discoveries each week.

“I think for kids to really get their hands dirty, be in a group, start working on those social skills whilst being outdoors is magic. Magic to watch.”

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)





Enjoying the Early Years Together

It is never too early to bring your baby to playgroup. That is the message passed on at Enjoy Playgroup. Parents and carers benefit just as much:

“I think how much mums want to connect. It does take a village, whether that is someone to hold your baby while you do something else, or someone to talk to whose child is at a similar stage.”

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)

When a Little Goes a Long Way in Intergenerational Play

Playgroup Victoria has enjoyed helping local communities create intergenerational playgroups as part of a pilot program.

“Witnessing the laughter, learning and friendships that have blossomed through this initiative has been truly inspiring.” - Danny, Playgroup Victoria CEO.

Glengollan Village are now running a regular group which the residents and families love.

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



Weekends Made for Fun

Many parents and carers wonder where to connect with other families on the weekend. Montmorency families took action, creating their own community playgroup.

“It gives an opportunity for the kids to meet other kids and to play. It is something that we can do that doesn’t cost a lot of money but gives them the space to use their imagination.”

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)



Neighbourhood Play Spaces that Welcome, Nurture, Inspire and Care

Here at a neighbourhood house playgroup, the children and adults alike develop a feeling of belonging- and most crucially acceptance. It creates opportunities and pathways. Families and community members develop and grow alongside the children that attend. For Gwen, playgroup positively changed her life and her community wants to thank her.

“It’s a sense of belonging and everyone needs a sense of belonging and has a right to that sense of belonging. It’s really important.”

[READ FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)

Playgroup in the News

The importance of play and community connection was highlighted in the media- this year with a strong focus on regional playgroups.

Local playgroups encouraged

COMMUNITY

JONATHAN FOX
Playgroup Victoria is inviting residents to create friendships and memories for kids and carers thanks to the Helping Families Learn and Grow through Playgroup (FLAG) initiative.

Since its formation in 1974, the not-for-profit organisation has advocated for families across the state to have access to the benefits of playgroups.

Playgroup Victoria manager of development and support Leanne Dhami said the FLAG project, funded by the Federal Government's Department of Social Services, aims to create equal opportunities for residents.

"We estimate that around 5000 community playgroups operating every week in Victoria and regional areas have a lot less opportunities than the metro areas," she said.

"The aim is to support and advocate for the playgroup platform in [the shire] — create opportunities for families to meet, support new playgroups and bring together relevant and like-minded professionals and community members to advocate for playgroups long-term."

"This project is driven by the needs and the wants of the local community — setting up these playgroups is about recognising that there is no other community playgroup running in that area which is available at times they are most needed."

Ms Dhami said while playgroups provide vital social, emotional, physical and intellectual development for children before they move into kindergarten and primary school, they can also boost the wellbeing of carers.

"It's a misconception that playgroups only benefit children, they actually benefit parents and caregivers as well in terms of that social support and connection," she said.

"The parenting journey can be quite isolating and challenging at times and so we do know that parents who are socially connected in that time, will be better connected through formal education and have better outcomes for their children."

"There is nowhere else for parents to enjoy that time with their child and other people quite like a playgroup."

Currently seven playgroups are listed on the Playgroup Victoria website in the shire with four supported playgroups hosted by the Central Goldfields Shire Council.

Playgroup Victoria Central Goldfields FLAG site officer Donna Parry said that additional playgroups can be tailored to participants' needs and common interests, with intergenerational,



Playgroup Victoria Central Goldfields FLAG site officer Donna Parry setting up the Parnrose Street Playgroup in Maryborough.

school, maternal and disability playgroups set up across the state.

"Setting up and establishing playgroups, listening to the community about what they want and trialling it to see whether this looks like what they visualise it to be," she said.

"The beauty of this program is that every playgroup is very unique and we strongly encourage that because it's been driven by what those families want."

"Not every playgroup suits everyone — what we want is for everyone to have a choice about where they go and where they engage to find like-minded people who can support them through all people in their lives."

To find your local playgroup, visit www.playgroup.org.au/find or to start a community playgroup, go to www.playgroup.org.au/start-a-playgroup

August 6, 2024

The Maryborough District Advertiser

Playgroup Victoria invited community members to come together as part of the *Helping Families Learn and Grow through Playgroup (FLAG) initiative.*

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READ THE FULL NEWSPAPER STORY

August 13, 2024

The Maryborough District Advertiser

Playgroup Victoria partnered with the Havilah aged care facility to bring multiple generations together to learn, share, connect and play.

"You get to see those smiles, you get to see how people age and how people grow, and it just brings so much joy and engagement from everyone in the community." – Playgroup Victoria Central Goldfields FLAG site officer, Donna Parry

READ THE FULL NEWSPAPER STORY

October 16, 2024

LaTrobe Valley Express

Playgroup Victoria started a Latrobe Playgroup Network with help from federal government funding to 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.

READ THE FULL NEWSPAPER STORY

Playgroup brings old and young together

COMMUNITY

JONATHAN FOX

Playgroup Victoria has been invited to help bring old and young together through playgroups.

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 Shaheela Fouse-Sharom and Development and Support Manager Leanne Dhami, there are now about 40 playgroups in the Latrobe Valley region.

Playgroups are usually run by volunteers. Playgroup Victoria is not for profit organisation, it's a not-for-profit organisation that provides support and resources to playgroups.

"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 Fouse-Sharom invited representatives from each playgroup to a network meeting. There were 14 people present from playgroups in Handwood, North, Moorabool, Sunbury and Traralgon.

"This will be the start of many local 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 these problems and connect and share," Ms Fouse-Sharom added.

"As a part of this platform, the main focus is around the sustainability of these workshops, and that 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 find a playgroup. According to Ms Fouse-Sharom, all playgroups are listed for all families and vice versa. She said the FLAG is a great finding a group where families can connect.

During the networking event, Ms Fouse-Sharom and Ms Dhami discussed opportunities for playgroups to collaborate, as well as Latrobe playgroup opportunities, such as the Latrobe City Children's Dept. The group is also having a 'Tolly Bear' event at Gorman Park, Traralgon.

Ms Fouse-Sharom and Ms Dhami also found that one of the most common problems in playgroups is finding volunteers, numbers, and being 'sped out'.

According to Ms Fouse-Sharom, playgroups are often 'sped 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 women's recharging equipment, getting equipment in the first place, and the consumables that go along with it.

With 2025 creeping up quickly, Playgroup Victoria aims to keep the connections they make before the project ends. They would like to see playgroups work with that information so that if a family is in need they know that information is at hand so people can access the services.



Playgroup Victoria's Donna Parry and Leanne Dhami are working on creating a sustainable future for playgroups by creating a playgroup platform.

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

A FLAG for local playgroups

By KATRINA BRANDON

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Last month, Ms Dhami and Ms Fouse-Sharom invited representatives from each playgroup to a network meeting. There were 14 people present from playgroups in Handwood, North, Moorabool, Sunbury and Traralgon.

"This will be the start of many local 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 these problems and connect and share," Ms Fouse-Sharom added.

"As a part of this platform, the main focus is around the sustainability of these workshops, and that 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 find a playgroup. According to Ms Fouse-Sharom, all playgroups are listed for all families and vice versa. She said the FLAG is a great finding a group where families can connect.

During the networking event, Ms Fouse-Sharom and Ms Dhami discussed opportunities for playgroups to collaborate, as well as Latrobe playgroup opportunities, such as the Latrobe City Children's Dept. The group is also having a 'Tolly Bear' event at Gorman Park, Traralgon.

Ms Fouse-Sharom and Ms Dhami also found that one of the most common problems in playgroups is finding volunteers, numbers, and being 'sped out'.

According to Ms Fouse-Sharom, playgroups are often 'sped 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 women's recharging equipment, getting equipment in the first place, and the consumables that go along with it.

With 2025 creeping up quickly, Playgroup Victoria aims to keep the connections they make before the project ends. They would like to see playgroups work with that information so that if a family is in need they know that information is at hand so people can access the services.

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

Leanne Dhami - Development & Support Manager
Playgroup Victoria FLAG Officer



October 30, 2024

LaTrobe Valley Express

Children's Week Celebration in Newman Park, Traralgon

Over 150 locals celebrated Children's Week with a Teddy Bears Picnic in Newman Park, Traralgon. The picnic was organised by Playgroup Victoria, as we work towards further unity between LaTrobe Valley playgroups.

READ THE FULL NEWSPAPER STORY



March 19, 2025

WIN News Ballarat

National Playgroup Week Play Day at Kryal Castle

In celebration of National Playgroup Week, Playgroup Victoria held a Play Day at Kryal Castle. Activities on the day included a big pop-up playgroup, storytime, dancing and a dragon meet and greet. Throughout the day families explored the dragons labyrinth, knight's tower, wizard's tower, playground and animal pens. Playgroup staff mingled with families, sharing stories and the benefits of playgroup. A fun day was had by all!

WATCH THE FULL STORY



April 2, 2025

The LaTrobe Valley Express

Pop-Up Playgroup, National Playgroup Week

The local playgroup team held several play days in the La Trobe region, welcoming families to celebrate playgroup and all the good it brings! Together the playgroup communities enjoyed Messy Play Monday in Morwell, Little Explorers Adventure Day in Moe and STEM in the Park in Traralgon. The events provided opportunities for families and facilitators to get to know each other and embrace the many benefits of playgroup participation.

READ THE FULL NEWSPAPER STORY



Connections: Playgroup Victoria's Latrobe Officer Sascha Reese-Sharam shared the celebration of National Playgroup Week with Millie (4) and Oliver (11 months). Photograph: Katrina Brandon

Partnerships and Collaborations

Relationships blossomed as Playgroup Victoria partnered with like-minded organisations to create opportunities for families and playgroups.

Partner Promotion and Advertising

Collaborative opportunities flourished throughout 2024-2025. We enjoyed aligning with like-minded organisations to create opportunities for families and playgroups.

We refined our advertising guide this year with the aim of creating more targeted advertising opportunities. As such, we were able to offer packages that better suited each individual request. We carefully chose who we partnered with to ensure that the content and offerings aligned with our values and were relevant to our audience.

We benefited from this additional revenue stream. Partnerships included ABC Reading Eggs, Raising Healthy Minds and Kryal Castle. We maintained long-term relationships with the teams at Museums Victoria, LEGO and SEA LIFE while branching out to reach new audiences. We enjoyed collaborations with Tot Hot or Not and an array of exhibitors as part of the Playgroup Conference.

Key Partnerships and Advertising:



Kryal Castle - Unicorn Festival/Dragon festival Promo
September 2024



This Girl Can Campaign - VicHealth
November 2024



ABC Reading Eggs
February 2025

RART Bronchiolitis Research Project - Murdoch Children's Research Institute
June 2025

Tot Hot or Not - cross promoting seasonal guides
Various dates across the year



LEGO Kits for Playgroups

We continued to build our love of play based learning with our friends at LEGO. This year we partnered with LEGO to roll out resources to registered playgroups. We encouraged playgroup leaders to complete a survey, providing further information about their use of LEGO. The other component of the survey was about resources, asking what playgroups used most or needed at their local groups. We regularly featured, *Learning with Lego* articles in our newsletters, sharing the benefits of a variety of play.

Playgroup Conference Exhibitors

The power of knowledge sharing was in full flight during the Playgroup Victoria conference. A diverse range of stall holders exhibited, highlighting their offerings and insights. Each contributor paved the way for collaboration and connection with a passion for nurturing families and those in the early years. The exhibitor space was abuzz with conversation and connection. The in-person opportunities allowed attendees to learn more about the purpose and values of each organisation. The different offerings were brought to life as people got to know the vendors. There were resources on show and for purchase. Stall holders had lucky dips and lots of joyful interaction. Many attendees walked away inspired, seeking to connect online and share their ideas with others.

“The playgroup conference had a lovely warm atmosphere with all those visiting and presenting passionately invested in the playgroup and wider early childhood space. So many conferences are geared at academics or senior management level. I love that this one really targets and engages the practitioner.”- 2024 Conference Delegate



Achieving Goals Together



JUNE 2024

Annual Playgroup Attendee and Playgroup Leader Satisfaction Surveys - Selection of Coles Myer gift cards on offer for those who submitted responses. 12 gift cards given away in total.

SEPTEMBER 2024

Kryal Castle Unicorn Festival - Playgroup members received an exclusive 10% off admission tickets with code UNICORN10

MikMaks Family Pass - Family pass giveaway to Ballarat show

Lego Kits for Playgroups - Over 130 Lego Kits were sent out to Registers Playgroups

DECEMBER 2024

Five Days of Fun : Christmas Giveaway - Selected prize giveaways from various partners including: Melbourne Museum, Connetix and Puffing Billy Railway

FEBRUARY 2025

Sea Life Giveaway - Five double passes to 'Mini Marine' mornings at Sea Life Melbourne.

Kryal Castle Giveaway - Family Pass giveaway

MARCH 2025

LEGOLAND Discovery Centre Giveaway - Five double passes to the Mini Builder sessions.

Vtech Toys Giveaway - Three playgroup packs from vtech

Melbourne Museum Giveaway - Annual household membership for Melbourne Museum for National Playgroup Week

JUNE 2025

MikMaks Family Pass - Family pass giveaway to Gippsland show



Five Days of FUN: Christmas Giveaway

We invited the playgroup community to jingle all the way and join the fun as part of our *Five Days of Fun* Christmas Giveaways. 2024 overflowed with goodness and we wanted to celebrate every bit of that with our early years community.

For many years we have been running an end of year celebration, bringing together everyone who has been involved in playgroup over the year. Each day we had a new surprise for everyone.

We had a range of play inspiration to share over the course of five days. Each day we had TWO giveaways, one in the morning, one in the afternoon.

Melbourne Museum, Puffing Billy Railway, Scienceworks, Connetix, Kryal Castle and the Mik Maks joined us as we come together to enjoy the early years in the best way we know how- through PLAY!



Events

Live Events Across the Year Included:

CHILDREN'S WEEK 2024 EVENTS

Melbourne Zoo Dream Day Pop-Up
Stonnington Pop-Up Playgroup
Latrobe Teddy Bears Picnic
Intergenerational Playgroup, Ballarat
Botanical Gardens Lake Wendouree
Food Is Free Inc Gardening
Workshop, Sebastopol Library
Ballarat
Pop-Up Playgroup at Winter Street
Latrobe City Children's Expo
Glen Eira Play Spot Pop-Up
Playgroup

NAIDOC WEEK JULY 2024

Maryborough Event
Bendigo Event
Maryborough Community House

NATIONAL PLAYGROUP WEEK MARCH 2025

Messy Play Monday in Morwell
STEM in the Park Traralgon
Little Adventurers in Moe
PlayConnect+ Sunbury Teddy
Bears Picnic
Pahran Pop-Up Playgroup
White Hills Botanic Gardens Pop-Up
Playgroup
Kryal Castle Play Day, Ballarat

POP UP PLAYGROUPS 2025

Moe Apex Park
Morwell Wooden Park
Traralgon Newman Park
Maryborough National Simultaneous
Story Time - The Mil House
Bendigo Play in the Park Term 3
School Holidays Event

Bendigo Library Story Time
St Arnaud Community Event
Amegilla ND Community Hub
Heathcote Pop Up Playgroup
Bendigo Parent Pathways Free
Family Day
Bendigo Parent Pathways Free Meet
and Greet, Eaglehawk North

OTHER EVENTS

September 2024

Maryborough Intergenerational
Presentation

Thursday 17th October 2024

Inclusion Expo

Wednesday 20th - 21st November

Playgroup Conference - Novotel
Preston

Monday 9th December 2024

54 Reasons Holiday Party

Wednesday 18th December 2024

Latrobe Combined Facilitated
Playgroups Christmas Party

Friday 11th April 2025

High Street Hub Twilight Market

Monday 31st March 2025

Ballarat Playgroup Leader
Appreciation Day

Saturday 31st May, 2025

Volunteer Recognition Event with
Dept. Mayor Sharon Gibbson

STEM Conceptual Playworld Pop
Up Playgroups - in partnership with
Monash University 3 sessions run
across various dates during 2024/5





The Latrobe Teddy Bears Picnic hosted and organised by Playgroup Victoria was a successful event, attracting over 150 people who came together to celebrate community spirit and the vital role of local playgroups. The park was bustling with families enjoying a variety of fun activities.

This event was inspired by a desire to promote playgroups while ensuring families had a memorable experience. Playgroup Victoria took the lead as the organiser, with many respected local organizations stepping up to support the picnic, including: 54 Reasons, the Christian Playgroup Network, Traralgon Playgroup Inc., Hippy Playgroup, Parent Zone Playgroup, Manny's Market Traralgon, GippSport's KIDDO, Gippsland Water and Noah's Ark.

Participants were treated to a variety of exciting activities that kept the whole family engaged. Children had a blast getting creative with Play-Doh and splashing around with water play, bubbly fun and much more. They enjoyed refreshing free fruit from Manny's Market Traralgon while exploring sensory play and outside games. The book corners offered delightful reading experiences, and construction activities allowed

little builders to unleash their imaginations. There truly was something for everyone, making the day enjoyable for all.

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive. Emily, a local parent, expressed her enthusiasm: *"This attracted many parents and should be held more often. All the volunteers were friendly and welcoming."* Danielle recognized the thoughtful planning that made the day a success, while Breeannon simply said, *"Thank you for putting this on."* Such comments reflect the community's desire for more events that connect families and support local initiatives.

Beyond the fun, the picnic sparked important conversations about making playgroups more accessible for families and identifying areas for improvement. Community leaders and parents engaged in discussions about how to enhance support for all families in the region, as well as connecting families with playgroups in the area.

The Latrobe Teddy Bears Picnic proved to be more than just an event- it was a celebration of the local community's dedication to play and family connection. We are excited to build on this success with more opportunities to bring families together in the future.



We held a National Playgroup Week play day event at brand new location this year- Kryal Castle. Playgroup staff ran a colourful pop-up playgroup, chatting and playing with families throughout the day. The team at Kryal Castle dressed up in costumes to suit the setting, hosting storytime sessions and dancing. There was a meet and greet with the dragon, much to the amazement of the children.

Throughout the day, families explored the dragons labyrinth, knights tower, wizards tower, playground and animal pens. One of Kryal Castle's squires took the children in to pat the friendly sheep and highland cow! It was a great turnout and allowed us to host an event in a regional location. Several families in the area travelled to attend the event and allowed Playgroup Victoria to forge new connections in a different part of the state.

Win News Ballarat came to the event, highlighting the story on their nightly news bulletin.



[WATCH LOCAL NEWS STORY HERE](#)



What Our Members Said

Annual Survey Snapshot

94%

of respondents strongly agreed that play is a very important part of their child’s learning, development, and wellbeing

72%

of survey respondents said attending playgroup has increased their connection with other parents

68%

of respondents were extremely satisfied with their playgroup experience

“I love seeing the friendships that my child is developing as he practises important skills like sharing and playing together with kindness and empathy. Especially as my child is almost at school, it’s a great place to learn patience with those younger than him. He loves talking to the playgroup leaders and I’ve seen him gain confidence during mat time where they read a story and ask the children questions.”

SURVERY RESPONDENT



What are the best parts about playgroup for you?

“One of the best parts about playgroup for me as a parent is the sense of connection it provides—not just for the children, but for us adults too. It fosters a real sense of community, where we can share experiences, support one another, and build friendships. I also deeply value the opportunity for cultural education at a young age. It’s so special to see our children learning about their heritage in a fun and engaging environment”

“I really do believe playgroup is a safe space to bring the kids and connect with families. Our experiences are similar to others in our group and I hope more people find out about the organisation and can benefit from the services the volunteers provide”

SURVERY RESPONDENT



Playgroup Victoria Staff 2024-2025

CEO Danny Schwarz

Board

Chair - Matt R

Deputy Chairperson - Anne M

Chairperson Risk and Audit Committee - Unal H

Expert Members

Felicity D

Antony Elliott

Dr Despina G

Jessica Luu

Corporate

Research Manager - Joanne T

Organisation Administration Officer - Kelsey C

Corporate Service Coordinator - Mary O

Corporate Operations Coordinator - Vicki R

Development and Support

Development and Support Manager - Leanne D

National Manager PeeP LTP - Claire G

Great Start Program Officer - Liz G

Assistance and Support Officer- Joanne O

Flag Officers

Donna P

Felicity V

Sascha R

Development Advisors

Maureen H

Steven M

Training Coordinators

Nancylee M

Naomi J

Marketing and Membership

Marketing and Membership Manager - Mylie N

Membership Experience Officers

Alyson C

Sheridan M

Communications & Media Coordinator - Sinead H

Content and Resource Officer - Jonathan R

Designer and Marketing Assistant - Jenny A

Programs

Programs and Social Impact Manager - Louise B

Programs Team Leader - Fiona H

Program and Project Administration Officer - Maxie T

PALS Facilitator - Tara D

PlayConnect+ Facilitators

Anne S

Cheryl P

Dianne B

Eva D

Helen P

Lynne B

Michelle S

Rose M

PlayConnect+ Support Workers

Ann LN

Gemma O

Grace R

Beatriz C

Houda M

Johanna B

Kirralee H

Kristy F

Suman C

Susan M



Playgroup Victoria

10 Fletcher Street, Essendon
3040 VIC

 playgroup.org.au

 1800 171 882

 @playgroupvicofficial

 /playgroupvic

