Community playgroups
Connecting rural families locally pilot project

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Acknowledgements

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Suggested citation
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Executive summary

Introduction

This report evaluates the role of Playgroup Development Consultants (PDCs) in a new initiative called the Community Playgroups: Connecting Rural Families Locally Pilot project. The project is conducted under the leadership of Playgroup Victoria (PV) in cooperation with the Early Learning Association of Australia (ELAA) and Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET). The project is based on the philosophical premise that young children’s learning is best enabled in supportive and well-connected communities. The project embeds a PDC in one of three rural Victorian communities: (1) Ballarat and Region; (2) Wimmera; and (3) Gippsland. The PDC role is to connect local early childhood services to increase the promotion of, and participation in, community playgroups by families with young children living in rural communities.

Two policy initiatives speak to the outcomes of Community Playgroups: Connecting Rural Families Locally Pilot project. These are the Early Years Strategic Plan, 2014-2020 (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development [DEECD], 2014); and the revised Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework or ‘VEYLDF’ (Department of Education and Training [DET], 2016).

The Community Playgroups: Connecting Rural Families Locally Pilot project was initially designed to align with the Victorian Early Years Strategic Plan, 2014-2020 (DEECD, 2014). The Early Years Strategic Plan is based on three Key Initiatives:
1. Supporting parents and communities to give children a great start
2. Early and sustained support for those who need it most
3. All children benefitting from high-quality learning

Key Initiatives are intended to support outcomes for children as defined in the Early Years Outcomes Framework presented in the Early Years Strategic Plan (DEECD, 2014). The Early Years Outcomes Framework comprises four domains that are similarly aligned with the five Learning Outcomes in the VEYLDF (DET, 2016) (Table 1).

Table 1: Early Years Outcomes Framework domains and the VEYLDF Learning Outcomes

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<tbody>
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<td>Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Healthy</td>
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<td>Building Wellbeing</td>
<td>Learning Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and Developing</td>
<td>Learning Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators</td>
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</table>

Community playgroups are service types indicated in both the Early Years Strategic Plan (DEECD, 2014) and the VEYLDF (DET, 2016). There are three main service types in the Early Years Strategic Plan. These are:

2. Early Childhood Education and Care: Long Day Care, Kindergarten, Family Day Care, Outside School Hours Care and Occasional Care

3. Family, Aboriginal and Disability Support Services: Early Childhood Intervention Services, Aboriginal Early Years Support and Playgroups

There are six main service types in the VEYLDF (DET, 2016). These are:

3. Universal Services: Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority, Early Childhood Education and Care Services, Early Childhood Education and Care Services - Kindergarten Programs, Maternal and Child Health Service, Parenting Support Services, Playgroups Victoria, Supported Playgroups and Primary School Nursing Program
4. Cultural Organisations: Zoos Victoria, Museums Victoria, National Gallery of Victoria, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Public Libraries Victoria and State Library Victoria
5. Health for families: KidsMatter
6. Local Government: Municipalities

In the Early Years Strategic Plan (DEECD, 2014) playgroups are located under ‘Family, Aboriginal and Disability Support Services’ and in the VELDF (DET, 2016) under ‘Universal Services’.

Aims and scope

Community playgroups are uniquely positioned to realise the Key Initiatives of the Early Years Strategic Plan (DEECD, 2014) and young children’s engagement with the five Learning Outcomes of the VEYLDF (DET, 2016). This is because community playgroups are relatively inexpensive to operate and are potentially mobile in their location (see Appendix Two and Three). Attending to the learning and developmental needs of children and families in rural communities is made possible through increased family access to community playgroups.

This evaluation considered three main aims in relation to PDC’s in rural communities:

1. To identify the connections PDCs establish in local rural communities in terms of support from local service types (e.g. Maternal and Child Health, Local Council and Kindergartens) for promoting community playgroups to families;

2. To review the existing strategies for promoting and increasing community playgroup participation by local service types in rural communities, and the extent to which PDCs value-add to the existing strategies; and

3. To build the evidence base regarding service type and family identified benefits of continued playgroup participation by parents and young children in rural communities.
Methodology

This project deployed a mixed-methods research approach to address the three aims. Interviews were held with PDCs and early childhood services. An online survey was conducted with participating service types. A social media platform - Edmodo was deployed to document parents and children’s views about the benefits of playgroup participation. The project was informed by a social capital theoretical perspective. Social capital theory argues that strong communities are characterised by opportunities for people to connect with other people and a range of support services (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Social capital is characterised by two types of relationships or connections that people develop with each other. Bonding relationships are developed between like groups and services (Gittell & Videl, 1998). These connections are considered ‘horizontal’. Bridging relationships are described as ‘vertical’. Vertical connections are where people connect with people or services outside of their normal range of relationships (Gittell & Videl, 1998; Putnam, 1993). Communities are strengthened by the presence of both bonding and bridging relationships.

This evaluation deployed deductive analysis of interview data with PDCs and service types to identify the range of connections made by PDCs. It also deployed inductive data analysis to identify the range of strategies used by service types to promote playgroups and the role of PDCs in adding to existing strategies. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the survey data. Deductive analysis was conducted to identify the benefits of continued playgroup participation for parents and children by families and service types. This analysis was framed using the Early Years Outcomes Framework domains for service types and families (DEECD, 2014).

Findings

This project established three main findings pertaining to the PDC initiative in rural communities. These were:

1. Connections: PDCs establish primary and secondary bonding connections in their local communities with service types, including MCHN, Kindergartens and Aboriginal Services.

2. Strategies: PDCs value-add to the existing strategies used by service types to promote and increase playgroup participation by families. Promotional strategic behaviours used by PDCs include: 1) Relationship building; 2) Networking; 3) Visible presence; 4) Knowledge building; and 5) Advocacy of playgroups

3. Benefits: Families and service types identify benefits in continued playgroup participation by parents and children that align with the Early Years Outcomes Framework domains (DEECD, 2014) and the VEYLFDF (DET, 2016). These include:
   a) Encourages learning
   b) Supports early childhood development
   c) Promotes social connectedness amongst parents
   d) Develops children’s communication skills
   e) Develops parents and children’s confidence
   f) Supports young families
Conclusion

The evaluation of the Community Playgroups: Connecting Rural Families Locally Pilot project suggests social capital benefit in the PDC role in rural communities. PDCs build professional networks in the local community characterised by primary and secondary bonding connections with existing early childhood service types. PDCs value-add to existing service strategies for promoting community playgroups in rural communities. These strategies increase awareness of playgroups in the early childhood service types and the general community. Service types and families identified a range of benefits associated with continued playgroup participation by parents and families. Benefits identified by service types and families aligned with the Key Initiatives and the Early Years Outcome Framework domains as per the DEECD Early Years Strategic Plan (2014-2020) (DEECD, 2014) and the five Learning Outcomes in the VEYLDF (DET, 2016).
**Introduction**

This report evaluates the role of Playgroup Development Consultants (PDCs) in a new initiative called the *Community Playgroups: Connecting Rural Families Locally Pilot* project. The project is conducted under the leadership of Playgroup Victoria (PV) in cooperation with the Early Learning Association of Australia (ELAA) and Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET). The project is based on the philosophical premise that young children’s learning is best enabled in supportive and well-connected communities. The project embeds a PDC in one of three rural Victorian communities: (1) Ballarat and District; (2) Wimmera; and (3) Gippsland. The PDC role is to connect local early childhood services to increase the promotion of, and participation in, community playgroups by families with young children living in rural communities.

**Community playgroups in Australia**

Community playgroups are parent-operated groups attended voluntarily by families with children aged 0-4 years. Typically, a community operated playgroup will run from a local community-based site, such as a town hall, school general purpose room or local council facility (McShane, Cook, Sinclair, Kean, & Fry, 2016; Playgroup Australia, 2015; Playgroup Victoria, 2016). Families usually attend a community playgroup once a week, for approximately two hours per week. During this time parents implement play-based activities with their children, share a snack together, and/or complete group time activities such as shared reading and singing. Research consistently shows that participating in a community playgroup benefits both parents and children (ARTD Consultants, 2008; McShane et al., 2016; Plowman, 2002). Parents enjoy increased social connections and reduced levels of social isolation (ARTD, 2008; McShane et al., 2016; Strange, Fisher, Hawat & Wood, 2014). Children show increased performance on developmental measures associated with social-emotional development, and in their later school years, in literacy and mathematics (Gregory, Harman-Smith, Sincovich, Wilson, & Brinkman, 2016; Hancock et al., 2012).

Knowledge of community playgroups is not always high in rural communities, particularly amongst parents and children who are most likely to benefit. This is because these communities are open to experiencing negative socio-economic and geographic issues, such as an overrepresentation of socio-economic disadvantage; lower household income and levels of education; and limited access to services and resources than families in metropolitan areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2000; Australian Government Department of Health, 2008; Baxter, Hayes, & Gray, 2011). These issues can compound parental capacity to identify and access community playgroup opportunities for themselves and their children. Promoting community playgroups in these regions can also be difficult. Existing early childhood and family services may be fragmentated and reaching the target audience made difficult by issues such as distance and/or family social isolation (McShane, 2015). In this project, the role of PDC was to increase connections amongst existing early childhood and family service types to better promote awareness of, and participation in community playgroups by families of young children in rural areas.
Aims

This evaluation focussed specifically on the PDC role in the Community Playgroups: Connecting Rural Families Locally Pilot project. Performance indicators on other aspects of the project, such as increases in the numbers of locally available playgroups were conducted by PV and are reported elsewhere (see Appendix 1). This evaluation canvassed three main aims:

1. To identify the connections PDCs establish in local rural communities in terms of support from local service types (e.g. Maternal and Child Health, Local Council and Kindergartens) for promoting community playgroups to families;

2. To review the existing strategies for promoting and increasing community playgroup participation by local service types in rural communities, and the extent to which PDCs value-add to the existing strategies; and

3. To build the evidence base regarding service type and family identified benefits of continued playgroup participation by parents and young children in rural communities

Policy background

International research has made clear for many years now that the early years are amongst the most significant period of the human life-span for establishing the outcomes and life-trajectories of young children. Frequently cited research attests to the benefits of investing in the early years to reduce later social spending on remediation and to increase children’s engagement and participation in society (Campbell, et al., 2012; Goff, Evangelou & Sylva, 2012, Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004). Governments around the world have responded in multiple ways. For example, in the United Kingdom Every Child Matters (Her Majesty’s Treasury, 2003) aimed to “reduce the numbers of children who experience educational failure, engage in offending or anti-social behaviour, suffer from ill health, or become teenage parents” (p.5). From this Green Paper a key focus has emerged on integrating services to ensure that multiple agencies work together to support children and families (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). Also in the United Kingdom the introduction of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (Department for Education, United Kingdom, 2014) provides standards for all professionals working with children from birth to 5 years old and includes a focus on partnership between professionals and families. Better access to high quality pre-school provision is also identified in the Every Student Succeeds Act (United States Government, 2015) in the United States where expanding State funded preschool in areas of community need is a priority (Office of the Press Secretary, United States Government, 2015).

In Victoria, Australia the former Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) released a strategic plan in 2014 to guide the delivery and design of early childhood services in realising maximum developmental and learning impact for young children (DEECD, 2014). Based on ‘strong scientific, economic and social evidence for change’ (p. 2), the DEECD Early Years Strategic Plan 2014-2020 has a clear focus on enabling early childhood services to foster strong learning communities for the betterment of young children’s growth and development.
The Early Years Strategic Plan (DEECD, 2014) contains three main elements relevant to the evaluation presented in this report. These are: (1) Key Initiatives; (2) an Early Years Outcomes Framework; and (3) Service type providers. Table 2 summarises each element of the Early Years Strategic Plan (DEECD, 2014).

Table 2: Three main elements of the Early Years Strategic Plan (DEECD, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key Initiatives</td>
<td>There are three main Key Initiatives of the Early Years Strategic Plan:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Supporting parents and communities to give children a great start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Early and sustained support for those who need it most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. All children benefitting from high-quality learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Years Outcomes Framework</td>
<td>There are four main outcomes for children according to the Early Years Strategic Plan. These are listed in the Early Years Outcomes Framework as:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Being Healthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Building Wellbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Learning and Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Staying Safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Type Providers</td>
<td>There are three service type providers listed in the Early Years Strategic Plan. These are:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Early Childhood Education and Care: Long Day Care, Kindergarten, Family Day Care, Outside School Hours Care and Occasional Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Family, Aboriginal and Disability Support Services: Early Childhood Intervention Services, Aboriginal Early Years Support and Playgroups</td>
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In 2016, the Department of Education and Training released the revised Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VELDF). With an emphasis also on fostering the learning and developmental achievement of young children and supporting families through integrated service provision the VELDF contains two main elements relevant to this evaluation. These are the five Learning Outcomes and the description of service types. Table 3 summarises the five Learning Outcomes and description of service types in the VEYLDF (DET, 2016).

Table 3: Summary of Learning Outcomes and description of service types in the VEYLDF (DET, 2016).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Outcomes</td>
<td>1. Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Learning Outcome 2: Children are connected and contribute to their world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Learning Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Learning Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Learning Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Type Providers</td>
<td>1. Aboriginal Services: Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc., In-home Support Initiative, Home-based Learning Program and Victorian Aboriginal Child care Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Early Intervention services: Early Childhood Intervention Services, The National Disability Insurance Scheme and Kindergarten Inclusion Support Packages Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Universal Services: Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority, Early Childhood Education and Care Services, Early Childhood Education and Care Services - Kindergarten Programs, Maternal and Child Health Service, Parenting Support Services, Playgroups Victoria, Supported Playgroups and Primary School Nursing Program</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Cultural Organisations: Zoos Victoria, Museums Victoria, National Gallery of Victoria, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Public Libraries Victoria and State Library Victoria</td>
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<td>5. Health for families: KidsMatter</td>
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<td>6. Local Government: Municipalities</td>
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This evaluation of the PDCs’ role in the Community Playgroups: Connecting Rural Families Locally Pilot project connects with both the Early Years Strategic Plan (DEECD, 2014), and the VEYLDF (DET, 2016).
Literature review

Play and learning

Western-European approaches towards early childhood education value the relationship between play and learning. Long-standing philosophical beliefs, such as those derived from the work of Montessori, Dewey and Froebel (Bergen, 2014; Dockett, 2011) inform play-based practices in early childhood education. Developmental theory likewise promotes the idea that young children learn through play (Smith, 2009). In the 1960s the Piagetian notion of constructivism prompted the belief that young children were ‘little scientists’ actively involved in constructing their own understandings of the world through play (Yeu, 2011). Constructivist ideas about play have remained strong in early childhood education for many years. This prevalence of constructivist ideas is described by Edwards (2003):

In more recent times, particularly during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the early childhood curriculum has centred on developmental views that have sought to explain how children develop, how knowledge is acquired, and therefore how early childhood education should most usefully (or perhaps we could say ‘appropriately’?) proceed. During the course of these centuries, the cognitive constructivist view emerging from the work of Piaget and the sociocultural view emerging from Vygotsky’s efforts have presented as the dominant explanations for human development and learning to be utilised in the formation of curriculum approaches for young children. (p.252)

In the later 1990’s to early 2000s a renaissance in play research challenged the dominant constructivist perspective and considered play from multiple standpoints (Blaise, 2014; Kravtsova, 2014; Nolan & Kilderry, 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2014; Wood, 2010). These included sociocultural studies, feminist and post-structuralist ideas. The idea of the little scientist was challenged. Increasingly, researchers considered the enactment of play in cross-cultural settings, and the relationship between play and learning in the family home (Brooker, 2010; Fleer, 2009, 2010a; van Oers, 2014). Research today highlights that play is a highly complex and culturally mediated activity (Gaskins, Haight & Lancy, 2007; Wood, 2009, 2014). Young children’s play is associated with their capacity for making meaning. It is also understood that play and learning occurs through observation and modelling of adult behaviours (Bodrova & Leong, 2011; Wood & Atfield, 2005). Recent research shows that young children’s conceptual learning through play is promoted when adults engage with children during play (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011; Fleer, 2010a; 2010b, 2010c; McLean, Jones & Schaper, 2015; Trawick-Smith, 2008). Wood (2010a) describes an expectation of all practitioners:

- to use different pedagogical approaches, which include adult-led and child-initiated activities, as well as ‘free’ and structured play. Adult-led activities include structured approaches with defined learning intentions that are applicable to the whole class or to groups. (p.16)

When adults engage with children during play this type of engagement is known variously as intentional teaching (Duncan, 2009; Epstein, 2007), conceptual play (Fleer, 2011), sustained shared thinking (Sylva et al., 2004) or purposefully-framed play (Edwards, Cutter-Mackenzie & Hunt, 2010). For many years, it was considered sufficient to provide young children with open-ended play experiences and to allow them to ‘construct’ their own learning from this activity (Edwards, Cutter-Mackenzie & Hunt, 2010).
Increasingly sophisticated play scholarship has established that open-ended play alone is insufficient for promoting learning (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2013; Hatch, 2010; Nolan & Kilderry, 2010). For example, in their research, Edwards and Cutter-Mackenzie (2013) describe how “teachers are more likely to identify detailed concepts and pedagogical strategies for modelled and purposefully framed play than they are for open ended play alone” (p. 343). Play-based learning that promotes a balance of open-ended play with intentional teaching is considered more appropriate for realising young children’s conceptual learning and acquisition of content knowledge (Wood, 2010b). In Australia, this position is represented in the Early Years Learning Framework (Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009) and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (DET, 2016), both of which make explicit reference to value of open-ended play and intentional teaching for young children’s learning.

In the VEYLDF (DET, 2016) it is noted that “combined or integrated child-directed play and learning, guided play and learning, and adult-led learning are effective in advancing children’s knowledge” (p. 14). More specifically, the value of open-ended play is described in **Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners** where “periods of uninterrupted play give children time to invent, investigate and discover, using a rich variety of open-ended materials and resources” (p.21). An integrated approach is highlighted further through descriptions of intentional teaching such as in **Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators** where it is noted that “as children learn and develop, access to print-rich environments, and contact with adults who model and respond to children’s oral and written messages, continue to strengthen the progression of learning” (p.22).

Contemporary perspectives on play in early childhood education draw significantly on the work of Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky’s works provide a theoretical foundation for understanding the socio-cultural basis of all human development. Central to Vygotsky’s explanation for human development is the notion of tool mediation. Tool mediation refers to the way in which people use tools that are either physical or conceptual to achieve or ‘mediate’ the object of their activity (Bodrova & Leong, 2010). For example, a young child desires a piece of fruit as her ‘object of activity’. She uses language as a tool to ‘mediate’ or achieve this activity saying ‘more’ and pointing a banana in a fruit bowl. Her caregiver asks her ‘do you want the banana?’ Vygotsky (1978) understood that the acquisition of tools, particularly language, connected children with their host culture. Learning or acquiring tools could occur through play. Vygotsky argued that through play children learned to separate meaning from object (Bodrova & Leong, 2010). He talked about a child playing with a stick and using the stick to represent a horse. The stick is separated from its meaning as a ‘stick’ and instead used as a horse (Vygotsky, 1978, p.95). The separation of meaning from object is critical for young children because it supports language, literacy and mathematical learning. One thing can stand for another, just as a word or symbol can stand for a thought or number of objects.

Vygotsky (1987) also valued the role of imagination in play. He argued that children would draw on their cultural reality to inform their play. In imagination children transform what they are able to access from their realities to create new ideas and representations. For example, an old blanket becomes a cave. Vygotsky’s ideas about the relationship between children’s realities and their imagination are important for early childhood education (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). This is because Vygotsky argued that the richer a child’s reality, the richer their imagination (Vygotsky, 2004). Rich realities comprise opportunities to engage with older peers and adults, access information about the

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world and observe others at work and play. Rich imagination enables highly engaging play that contributes to the learning and development of young children.

Play and learning in the home

The experience of play in the home is associated with increased learning outcomes for young children. A body of research now shows that the home learning environment influences young children’s performance on multiple developmental measures (Anders et al., 2012; Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003; Goff, Evangelou & Sylva, 2012; Pungello, Iruka, Dotterer, Mills-Koonce, & Reznick, 2009; Rodriguez, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2011; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart, 2004). In the context of Vygotsky’s ideas this refers to the ‘richness’ of young children’s ‘realities’ – that is the opportunities they have for engaging with others and accessing information about the world around them. Rich home learning experiences for children have been described as those comprising opportunities for shared reading, playing games, observational learning and participation in daily activities (Sylva et al., 2004). Research from the United Kingdom by Sylva et al. (2004) suggests that rich home learning environments are not dependent on socio-economic status. Further research reported by Evangelou, Sylva, Edwards and Smith (2008) describing a parental education initiative designed to support parents also found improvements in the learning environment and parents’ relationships with children. The research in this area indicates that rich home learning environments are a function of children’s relationships with significant people in their lives.

Understanding the role of home learning environments has led to a body of research focussed on educating parents about the value of play for children’s learning. Internationally, approaches such as HIPPY (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) and Abecedarian (Frank Porter Graham [FPG] Child Development Institute, 2014) have engaged parents in learning programs that support parents to play with their children at home. The HIPPY program maintains a focus on providing support to families through home visits and modelling engagement strategies. The Abecedarian project provides families with educational activities designed to meet the needs of the participating children and families. These programs have shown that gains in children’s learning outcomes can be maintained over time as result of increased parental participation in play at home.

Recently, attention has turned to the capacity of playgroups to operate as sites for parental education about children’s play (McLean, Edwards, Evangelou et al., 2015). In the UK the Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) using the Room to Play’ model project invited parents to attend an informal play session with facilitators (Evanglou, Smith & Sylva, 2006). A recent meta-analysis of research into supported playgroups in Australia also indicated that playgroups offer significant opportunities for connecting with parents and fostering parental knowledge about play (Williams, Berthelsen, Nicholson & Viviana, 2015). Currently, further research is required to develop the evidence base regarding parental education about play in playgroups and the most appropriate form of parental education in these sites (McLean, Edwards, Evangelou et al., 2015).

Playgroups in Australia

Playgroups have been active in Australian communities for over forty years (Playgroup Australia, 2015). They began in the 1970s with parents coming together on a regular basis and volunteering to

Community playgroups Connecting rural families locally pilot

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lead small groups of parents and children in their local communities. The majority of these families included children not yet old enough for school. Parents provided games and activities to engage their children in opportunities for play, and for increased peer socialisation. Internationally, playgroups are similarly described through a focus on families coming together to socialise, and for children to play and engage in creative activities. In England, these groups focus on parents playing with their child and are often called ‘stay and play’ groups (Needham & Jackson, 2012).

Australian families currently access a range of playgroups. Playgroup types include, supported, transition and community. Supported playgroups are playgroups that are facilitated by a paid coordinator and usually have a focus on engaging families with particular vulnerabilities (Commerford & Robinson, 2016; Jackson, 2013; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, et al., 2015). Transition playgroups are playgroups that are transitioning from a supported playgroup to a community playgroup. In this model support by a playgroup facilitator is gradually withdrawn from the group until the group can run independently (Commerford & Robinson, 2016). Community playgroups are playgroups that are self-managed and unfunded. These playgroups involve families gathering together regularly each week to socialise and engage in unstructured play activities with their children (Gregory, Harman-Smith, Sinovich, Wilson & Brinkman, 2016; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, et al., 2015). Different playgroup types attend to the various needs of children and families including providing social networks for families, opportunities for play and access to information and services (ARTD Consultants, 2008, Commerford & Robinson, 2016).

Current estimates suggest that over 200,000 families attend a community playgroup in Australia in a given week (Commerford & Robinson, 2016; Gregory et al., 2016). Typically, community playgroups are clustered in metropolitan regions (Gregory et al., 2016). This is because playgroups are easier to establish and maintain in these areas (McShane, 2015). Establishing and maintaining a community playgroup relies on access to community support services, promotion of the group for sustained recruitment and access to venues for hosting the group. Rural regions can be disadvantaged in the necessary requirements to sustain community playgroups because professional support and interconnected services are not always available in these communities (Evans, 2006; Girio-Herrera, Owens & Langberg, 2013).

**Outcomes for families and children**

Research suggests positive outcomes for families and children following participation in community and supported playgroups. However, playgroups have been largely under-examined in the research literature (see Appendix 2). This situation is highlighted in two recent large scale analyses of the existing evidence base for the benefits or otherwise of community and supported playgroup participation for young children and their families (Commerford & Robinson, 2016; Williams et al., 2015). Each of these analyses suggests that further attention should be paid to the conduct of large scale, randomised or quasi-experimental research to establish a firm evidence base for how and why playgroup participation promotes particular outcomes for families and children.

Of the existing research, a focus on smaller-scale studies and mixture of research designs suggests that playgroup participation of any type has largely positive outcomes for families and children. For families, outcomes include a reduction in social isolation (Gibson, Harman & Guilfoyle, 2015; Jackson,
2011), increased feelings of social connectedness within the local community (McLean, Edwards, Colliver & Schaper, 2014; Strange, Fisher, Howat & Wood, 2014), learning and leadership opportunities for parents through playgroup management (Gibson et al., 2015; Lee & Thompson, 2007), access to advice about parenting from other parents (ARTD Consultants, 2008; Warr, Mann, Forbes & Turner, 2013) and parental awareness of children’s play-based learning using technologies (McLean & Edwards, 2016). For example, small scale studies such as that reported by Jackson, (2011) describes parents’ experiences of support from participation in three supported playgroups in Western Sydney and identifies eight categories of support including social, emotional, friendship, peer, multidisciplinary, relational, parenting, information and care. Similar findings are reported by McLean et al. (2014) in research that examined caregiver perspectives of participation in supported playgroups in schools. This research was conducted in five supported playgroups in schools and identified outcomes associated with feelings of belonging and increased social connections in the community. Benefits associated with families’ feelings of social connectedness are further reported in other studies that focus on the benefits of playgroup participation (see Berthelsen, Williams, Abad, Vogel, & Nicholson, 2012; Grealy et al., 2012; Hancock, Cunningham, Lawrence, Zarb, & Zubrick, 2015; McShane et al., 2016; Oke, Stanley, & Theobald, 2007).

For children, outcomes of playgroup participation include increased opportunities for social interaction with other children (Grealy et al., 2012; Hancock et al., 2012) improvements in speech (Grealy et al., 2012) and well-being (ARTD Consultants, 2008). A significant finding from an analysis of data from Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (Hancock, et al., 2012) showed that playgroup participation by children from disadvantaged communities significantly improved children’s performance on tests of learning competence and social function. In this study, learning competence included: numeracy, language and literacy. Social function included: peer relationships, pro-social behaviour and hyper-activity. Quantitative findings reported by Gregory et al. (2016) from the 2012 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) also support this claim with improvement across the five AEDC domains of physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills and communication skills described in the analysis of data from children who did and did not attend playgroup.

**Barriers to playgroup participation in community playgroups**

Barriers to playgroup participation include access to suitable venues, geographical isolation and infrastructure to support ongoing participation (McShane, 2015). Although research by Gregory et al. (2016) using Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data shows that playgroup participation is higher in rural and regional communities than in major Australian cities, these communities usually have less access to services and programs due to geographical isolation. This makes the role of playgroups in rural and regional communities particularly important in bringing families and communities together. Access to suitable venues for hosting playgroups is also identified as a barrier to playgroup participation (McShane, 2015). A lack of suitable venues is linked to changes in regional and metropolitan infrastructure which in turn, affects availability and/or access to community facilities appropriate for hosting very young children. In his report on venues McShane (2015) further identifies changes to the working life of families as contributing to a national reduction in families attending community playgroups and regulatory changes and reforms to early childhood education and care as challenges linked to continued playgroup participation.
Other reported barriers to playgroup participation include families’ lack of trust of services (Warr et al., 2013) and cohesiveness within playgroups (Gibson, et al., 2015). Warr et al. 2013 describe reluctance by migrant families to participate in supported playgroups because of concerns that playgroup participation would lead to surveillance by other services or agencies. Cohesion was identified by Gibson et al. (2015) as a barrier to community playgroup participation due to non-inclusive practices within groups, such as parental cliques and negative group dynamics. These findings are congruent with findings from other studies internationally where playgroup politics and social exclusion affected engagement of families in playgroup (Mulcahy, Parry & Glover, 2010). In the absence of a trained playgroup facilitator playing an intermediary role in community playgroups it is likely that issues relating to cohesiveness and trust will continue to influence participation in community playgroups by families.

**Connections between community playgroups and service types**

Research showing how parents access and use information has potential to inform how connections between community playgroup families and existing service types can be promoted (see Appendix Three). Against the backdrop of an increasing range, type and sociopolitical interest in parenting information Walker (2012) reports on a UK study that examined the practices used by 33 parents for accessing and using various forms of information such as internet, resources and people. The report identified five categories for describing how parents used information including a) being a parent; b) connectivity; c) trust; d) picture of self; and e) weighing. The category of connectivity is of interest because it describes the way that parents in the study connected through social and formalised networks. Formalised networks included external agencies such as doctors and social services. The research highlighted the important role that Parent Support Advisors (PSA) in schools have in providing information to parents. It found that PSAs with strong relationships and established roles contributed to connectivity between help systems, services and families. Parents in lower socioeconomic groups were more “willing to seek and accept information” from a trusted PSA than staff in formalised networks such as social services. Similar findings are reported in research undertaken in supported playgroups in Australia which suggests that relationships between playgroup families and services are more successful when these relationships are facilitated (Jackson, 2011, Warr et al., 2013) by an advisor or PDC. For example, Warr et al. (2013) point to the playgroup facilitator role in supported playgroups as critical in linking parents to a range of service types, enacted through arranging guest speakers, sharing information with families, exchanging knowledge and referring families to services (Warr et al., 2013). For community playgroups to mirror similar successes it is suggested that consideration be given to a paid facilitation role to mediate these important relationships amongst families and service providers (Gibson et al., 2015).

Strong and positive relationships within the playgroup are also identified as contributing to connections between playgroups and service types. Strange et al. (2014) found from their research across 13 supported playgroups that community connectedness is advanced through strong relationships within the playgroup including friendships, supportive networks and learning about parenting. It was reported that when families experience a delay in finding information or receiving support from service types this contributed to feelings of isolation. However, in this research it was found that playgroup families’ participation in playgroup augmented supportive community
connections. These findings suggest value in strong bonding relationships within the playgroup for enabling external bridging relationships with family support services. A key recommendation for service types from the Strange et al. (2014) study was to work on the development of an infrastructure where professionals across services that are largely under resourced (in this case child health nurses and allied professionals) are able to realise the benefits of playgroups for fostering supportive community connections. This structure is intended to respond to changing social practices that push families away from traditional support modes (such as inter-generational family care). Similar findings are also reported by Robinson, Scott, Meredith, Nair, and Higgins (2012) in an analysis of documentation to identify exemplar practices “for service delivery to vulnerable families” (p.1). In this report Robinson et al (2012) identify a need for services to balance service delivery options within limited resources and to maintain strong relationships with other service providers. It may be that the role of the PDC could fulfil this need in communities where isolation is not only an issue for playgroup families but also for service types.

The idea that playgroups are to some extent information hubs for families is described by Jackson (2011). Jackson identifies eight categories of parental support for families in supported playgroups including friendship, relational, information, circle of care, peer, emotional, parenting and multidisciplinary support. Jackson reports that supports associated with bridging connections such as information and resources, parenting and multidisciplinary were developed in partnership with the playgroup facilitator. In community playgroups consideration needs to be given to how strong bridging relationships can be brokered in the absence of a paid facilitator at each playgroup.

Connecting communities, services and playgroups

The overarching aim for supported playgroups is to transition to community playgroups. There is limited research in community playgroups that shows how strong connections between service types and community playgroups can be established and maintained. However, research conducted in supported playgroups provides important insights to inform strategies that may be applied to the community playgroup model. Supported playgroups have been described as soft entry points (Commerford & Robinson, 2016; Jackson, 2011) connecting service stakeholders with families through visits, information sharing and referrals. Findings from the Supported Playgroups and Parent Initiative (SPPI) (Grealy et al., 2012) did not find a significant difference in parental use of early childhood services through participation in playgroups. Difficulties associated with accessing services were raised in this report, but there was also evidence through qualitative data that connections brokered by the facilitator may have ameliorated the need for access to some service types. This suggests that for strong connections between service types and community playgroups to be established an overarching support role such as a Playgroup Development Consultant may be required in order to facilitate connections across different playgroups and service types using multidisciplinary informed approaches such as those described in the VEYLDF (DET, 2016, p.36).

Multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary approaches to connecting service types and playgroups are also described in the literature. The use of transdisciplinary connections to connect services with families in a supported playgroup is reported by Cumming and Wong (2012). This study is of interest because it examines a model of inter-professional teamwork for engaging sensitively and in a non-stigmatising way with families attending a supported playgroup. However, the research identified several barriers
to the ongoing sustainability of a model for inter-professional teamwork in playgroups. These barriers were largely associated with differing philosophies and approaches of the organisations that were working together and concerns about trusting strategies used when working with families that were specific to particular professional areas of focus. Other areas of concern included varying perspectives of the value and purpose of play across the professional teams and perceived hierarchical structures within the inter-professional team. These findings are mirrored in Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford’s (2009) research review in the United Kingdom where the integration of early years services as a means of improving outcomes for children and families includes multidisciplinary teamwork (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). This report highlights a process of cooperation, coordination and collaboration in successful multidisciplinary approaches and draws attention to the need for “shared goals and values, integrated thinking and good leadership” (p.43). The work in this area points to a need to bring professionals and/or service types together in ways that enable connections that are collegial and collaborative. This is even more important for community playgroup model where consideration given to the role of a person who understands the needs of playgroup families and the agendas and priorities of different service types may be critical in bringing families and services together.

Research in supported playgroups has further identified issues associated with establishing and maintaining strong connections between service types and playgroups. Lee and Thompson (2007) report on working productively in a Best Start Playgroup in an Indigenous community in Western Australia. In this report Lee and Thompson (2007) describe how a culturally inclusive approach empowered families to take ownership as their children’s first educators and actively engage in playgroup. A key message from this report for service types aiming to establish strong connections in these communities is described in terms of a willingness to “reciprocally recognize” (p.37) differences and embrace commonalities. This key message presents a challenge for service types aiming to make connections with community playgroups as facilitators in community playgroups are generally volunteers untrained in strategies to actively promote and connect the community playgroup with existing service types.

The complex nature of staff roles working in organisations with priorities and interests in connecting with families in community playgroups may also inhibit strong connections. For example, a study reported by Borrow, Munns and Henderson (2011) examined current practices of 60 community-based child health nurses. This study found that the community nursing role had evolved to an extent that community-based child health nurses are now required to engage in developing community capacity and to facilitate collaborations and multidisciplinary partnerships with diverse client populations. The findings raised concerns about the resources, workloads and capacity of community nursing staff to carry out complex roles. It is against this backdrop that service types seek to engage with community playgroup families. These findings would suggest potential benefits of an intermediary staff role, such as a PDC who negotiates complex relationships between service type staff for the benefits of families.

In a further report from Australia, Capire Consulting Group (2016) describe a consultation process involving early childhood service types that was prepared for the current Labour government. This large scale consultation process considered service type and community engagement for the benefit of families and children. Five themes for community engagement in early childhood were identified in this report. These were: earlier engagement in learning, boost to educational quality, more support
for parents, more support for vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families, and better connection between services. In this report playgroups are “recognised as an important component of early childhood education” (p. 10). Findings indicated that service types need to respond sensitively and inclusively to the needs of families through strategies aimed at supporting positive parenting. It was further recommended to consider integrated service options such as “welcoming and inclusive service hubs” (p. 27) including the co-location of services within these hubs. Finding suitable venues for community playgroups is of ongoing concern (McShane, 2015) particularly in rural areas, and it may be that the PDC role needs consideration within the context of increasing interest in integrated models of service delivery.
Theoretical framework

This evaluation was framed using social capital theory. Derived from the work of Hanifan (1916) that described the influence of interactions within the family unit on students’ performance at school, social capital theory is used to explain how joint activities and interactions contribute to the achievement of useable knowledge by people. The concept of social capital is defined by Woolcock and Narayan (2000) as the “norms and networks that enable people to act collectively” (p. 226). This concept has been examined and expanded upon in various ways by other researchers including Coleman (1988), Putnam (1993) and Bourdieu (1986). Social capital theory is used in this evaluation of the PDC role in rural community playgroups because it is an established theoretical framework in the field of education related to civic and community participation by people (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). Further, social capital theory provides a framework for understanding the different resources that people draw upon, including family, friends and community members to support and enable their learning and advancement.

Putnam’s (1993) work provides a particularly strong theoretical lens for examining how community playgroups can contribute to social capital. This is because Putnam’s (1993, 2000) work has a focus on how strong community ties established through participation in community groups such as sports groups, school and church groups can contribute to building social capital. Further, Putnam (1993) considers the role that norms play in building social capital where trust is established among participants. In the community playgroup context strong community ties can be identified through relationships established by families with other families through regular playgroup participation.

Woolcock and Narayan (2000) describe four types of social capital including communitarian, institutional, synergy and networks. It is the networks view that is used in this evaluation. The networks view describes the role of horizontal and vertical relationships that contribute to the achievement of social capital by people. For Putnam (1993) the term ‘horizontal relationships’ is used to describe relationships between ‘like’ members of a group and the term ‘vertical relationships’ is used to describe relationships that extend beyond the group. The terms ‘bonding relationships’ and ‘bridging relationships’ have been adopted by Gittell and Videl (1998) to reference Putnam’s description of horizontal and vertical relationships. Gittell and Videl (1998) refer to bonding relationships as ‘like’ relationships with similar people within a group and bridging relationships as relationships with people outside of the group. In the community playgroup context bonding relationships are referred to as those relationships between individuals within the playgroup (e.g. parent to parent) and bridging relationships refer to those relationships that extend beyond the playgroup such as relationships between families and service types (e.g. parent to health nurse).

The evaluation presented in this report investigated the extent to which rural communities are likely to benefit from hosting PDCs to actively promote and connect community playgroups and early years services. Using social capital theory, the project was orientated towards identifying the bonding and bridging relationships that PDCs utilise in the active promotion of community playgroups for families in rural communities. In this evaluation we were primarily concerned with identifying bonding relationships between PDCs and service types. This is because bonding relationships have previously been found to be significant for building social capital (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000).
Methodology

Design

The project used a mixed-methods design for data collection and analysis. Mixed-method design is a form of research combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The goal of mixed-method design is the application of data collection techniques from each method that most appropriately achieves the research goal (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This project used four techniques within the qualitative method and one technique from within the quantitative method. Qualitative methods included: semi-structured individual interviews, focus group interviews (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009), social media documentation (Poynter, 2010), and parent-child dyad interviews (Eisikovits, & Koren, 2010). The quantitative method was an online survey (Mertens, 2005). Table 4 illustrates the use of method and technique according to project aim.

Table 4: Data collection method and technique according to project aim

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METHOD</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aim 1:</strong> To identify the connections PDCs establish in local rural</td>
<td>Semi-structured individual interviews with PDCs</td>
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<tr>
<td>communities in terms of support from local services (e.g. Maternal and</td>
<td></td>
<td>Online survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Health, Local Council and Kindergartens) for promoting</td>
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<td>community playgroups to families</td>
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<td><strong>Aim 2:</strong> To review the existing strategies for promoting and</td>
<td>Semi-structured individual interviews with key</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>increasing community playgroup participation by local services in</td>
<td>service types</td>
<td>Online survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>rural communities, and the extent to which PDCs value-add to the</td>
<td>Focus group interviews with PDCs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>existing strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Aim 3:</strong> To build the evidence base regarding service and family</td>
<td>Social media documentation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>identified benefits of continued playgroup participation by parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>Online survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>and young children in rural communities</td>
<td>Parent-child dyad interviews</td>
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Ethical considerations

This project was conducted with ethical approval from the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee. The project was approved on 30 July 2015 (ID: 2015-150H). All participants in this project were provided with explanatory statements and completed consent documentation. Child participation in parent-child dyad interviews included parental consent and child assent. Child assent was sought at the time of interview (Roth-Cline, & Nelson, 2013). All participants were provided the opportunity to use a pseudonym to protect identity at the individual and service type level.

Sampling and participants

This project used non-probability sampling (Walliman, 2011). There were three main groups of participants. PDCs, service types and parent-child dyads. For PDC participants we used "expert
sampling’. Expert sampling is used in situations when the specific views of experts in the field are required. Given this project attended to the community connections and strategies established and used by PDCs to promote playgroup participation in rural communities, expert sampling was a necessary strategy to identify PDCs working in rural regions. Currently, there are only three PDCs working in rural communities in Victoria, Australia. PDCs in this project were identified in consultation with Playgroup Victoria and provided with appropriate ethics documentation prior to confirming their participation. One PDC was located in each of the three rural regions comprising this project: including Ballarat, Gippsland and Wimmera.

For service types ‘snowball sampling’ was used. Snowball sampling is appropriate in situations where participants may be otherwise inaccessible or unknown to researchers (Valente, 2010). PDCs in each districted nominated potential service types with whom they had had previous contact. In this way, service types otherwise unknown to the research team were identified. Nominated service types were contacted by the project team and invited to participate in the project. Participating service types indicated further potential participants in each of their regions (thus continuing to ‘snowball’ the sample). All such service types were then contacted by the research team.

Parent-child dyads were selected using operational construct sampling. Operational construct sampling is used in situations where field experts are the best placed to identify participants most closely aligned with the aims of the research (Patton, 1990, p.177). In this project, PDCs working as the ‘field-experts’ in each of their regions introduced ethics documentation into local community playgroups, including explanatory statements detailing the conduct of the evaluation. In this way, parents were invited to participate in the project. Parent-child dyads expressing interest in project participation to their local PDCs were then contacted by the research team. Table 5 provides a summary of participant type and participant numbers per district.

Table 5: Summary of participant type and number of participants per district

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PDCs</th>
<th>Service types</th>
<th>Parent-child dyads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballarat and district</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gippsland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wimmera</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
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**Data collection techniques**

Semi-structured individual interviews with PDCs: were conducted by phone by a member of the research team. The interviews were completed in August 2015. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed by a professional transcription company. The interview schedule contained a list of ten qualitative items focussed on identifying the connections PDC’s established with service types in their rural communities. Interview questions were derived from the literature regarding the benefits of community playgroup participation for children and families (e.g. frequency of contact with PDC and playgroup families, types of contact with PDC and playgroup families), and intended to elicit information necessary for completing a relationship map. Interview questions were trialled for clarity within the research team prior to use with PDCs. Sample questions included: ‘Who are the key service types you liaise with in your role as a PDC?’ and ‘How often do you engage with key service types in your role as a PDC?’ (Appendix Four)
Semi-structured interviews with service types: were conducted using a combination of phone and on-site individual interviews. The interviews were completed in December 2015 and January 2016. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed by a professional transcription company. The interview schedule contained a list of nine qualitative items focused on reviewing the existing strategies used by service types to promote and increase community playgroup participation in rural communities. Interview questions were derived from consideration of an existing range of promotion strategies identified through an online Google search using the terms ‘community playgroups’; ‘playgroups’ and ‘going to playgroup’. Interview questions were trialled for clarity within the research team prior to use with service types. Sample questions included: ‘What strategies do you use to promote community playgroups to families in your region?’ and ‘What if any, are the constraints that may influence the establishment of strong connections between your service and community playgroups?’ (Appendix Five)

Focus group interview with PDCs: was conducted face-to-face with all three PDCs and a member of the research team. The interview was completed in February, 2016. The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription company. The focus group interview schedule contained a total of 23 questions. Interview questions considered PDCs strategies for promoting and increasing community playgroup participation in their communities according to their relationships with service types. Interview questions were derived from a thematic analysis of the PDCs individual interviews and semi-structured interviews with service types. The focus group interview schedule was trialled for clarity within the research team prior to use with PDCs. Sample questions included: ‘What do you think are the most important and effective strategies you use with service types to promote and increase community playgroup participation?’ and ‘What strategies do you use to address some of the barriers to promoting and increasing community playgroup participation? (Appendix Six)

Online survey with service types: was administered to service types between 10 May 2016 and 10 June 2016. The online survey was conducted using Survey Monkey. An email containing a link to the survey was sent to all participating service types. A reminder email was sent one week later. The completion rate for the survey was 88% (15/17 services). The survey was designed to review existing strategies used by service types to promote community playgroups in their regions and to build the evidence base of benefits of continued participation by families in community playgroups. The survey contained Likert, ranking and open-ended items (Mertens, 2005). Likert and ranking items were derived from inductive analysis of the individual service types interview, including strategies used to promote community playgroups and perceived benefit of community playgroups for families. The survey was trialled for ease of use and clarity within the project team prior to use by service types (Appendix Seven).

Social media documentation with parent-child dyads: was conducted with families from participating community playgroups between 10 April 2016 and 20 May 2016. The social media documentation capitalised on the idea of photo-diaries as previously used in research with young children (Burke, 2008). Photo diaries invite children to take photographs of activities and experiences considered of value in their learning experiences. Photo diaries are considered an appropriate means of inviting children’s contribution to research (Burke, 2008). In this project, we established the social media platform Edmodo in each of the participating playgroups. Edmodo operates in a similar manner to Facebook, but is a closed social media site typically used in schools. Parents posted images and
comments of their own and their child’s participation to Edmodo. Children were invited to contribute to postings that might be made. PDC’s in each playgroup responded to parental postings. PDC’s responses highlighted children’s learning through play and provided suggestions for further activities to engage children in learning and/or alternative sites of information. The use of Edmodo as a form of social media documentation in this project was the first of its kind in community playgroup research.

Parent-child dyad interviews: were conducted on-site with families from participating community playgroups four weeks after the completion of social media documentation. Parent-child dyad interviews used social media documentation about family playgroup participation on Edmodo as the stimulus prompt. Stimulus prompts are used in situations where participants are being invited to reflect on their own experiences (Harper, 2002). Parents and children were invited to scroll through Edmodo using tablet or mobile phone and to talk about their postings, experiences and interests during community playgroup participation. Each interview was approximately ten to twenty minutes in length depending on the concentration span and interest of the participating children. Interviews were conducted at the community playgroup of the participating dyads. All parent-child dyad interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed by a professional transcription company.

Analysis

This evaluation deployed deductive analysis of interview data with PDCs and service types to identify the range of connections made by PDCs. It also used inductive data analysis to identify the range of strategies used by service types to promote playgroups and the role of PDCs in adding to existing strategies. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the survey data. Deductive analysis was conducted to identify the benefits of continued playgroup participation for parents and children by families and services. This analysis was framed using the Early Years Outcomes Framework domains (DEECD, 2014), and the Learning Outcomes from the VEYLDF (DET, 2016).

Qualitative data analysis for Aim 1

All interview data were analysed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) five phases of qualitative data analysis. These are 1) familiarisation with the data; 2) initial coding; 3) identifying themes; 4) review of the themes; and 5) defining themes. Semi-structured individual interviews with PDCs were deductively analysed to identify the connections PDCs established with service types in their communities according to the types listed in the Early Years Strategic Plan (DEECD, 2014). These were: Child Health and Wellbeing, Early Childhood Education and Care and Family, Aboriginal and Disability Support Services (these service types are also evident in the VEYLDF [DET, 2016]). Phase one and two involved two of the researchers familiarising themselves with the data (phase one) and identifying connections between PDCs and service types (phase two). For example, each researcher created a list of service types identified in each interview according to those indicated in the Early Years Strategic Plan (DEECD, 2014). Researchers then compared lists to check confirmability (Mays & Pope, 1995). Phases three to five involved the researchers in mapping the confirmed service types to each of the three early childhood service types identified in the Early Years Strategic Plan (DEECD, 2014). These were 1) Child health and wellbeing; 2) Early childhood education and care; and 3) Family, Aboriginal and disability support services (phase 3). The data were analysed using the service types listed in the Early Years Strategic Plan (DEECD, 2014) because better support and connections
with service types in the three regions comprising this evaluation were indicated in the plan (p. 15). During phases four and five these service types were further analysed to identify sub-groups within each main type in the early years strategic plan (DEECD, 2014). At the end of phase five the two researchers from the research team once again compared analysis for confirmability.

**Qualitative data analysis for Aim 2**

Transcripts from the semi-structured interviews with service types were inductively analysed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) five phases of qualitative data analysis. In this analysis phases one to five followed the same process as that described above for Aim 1. This data was then revisited and analysed alongside PDC focus group interview transcripts. Using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) five phases the data were inductively analysed to review the strategies used by PDCs and service types to promote and increase community playgroup participation in rural communities. Table 6 shows how data were analysed in each of the five phases. This process identified five promotional behaviours used by PDCs to promote and increase community playgroup participation in rural communities. The five promotional behaviours were: 1) Relationship building; 2) Networking; 3) Visible presence; 4) Knowledge building; and 5) Advocacy.

**Table 6: Inductive analysis of review of strategies used to promote and increase community playgroup participation.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases of thematic analysis (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2006, p.87)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Familiarising yourself with your data</td>
<td>Reading each transcript and noting any strategies (e.g. face to face contact, incidental meetings).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generating initial codes</td>
<td>Coding each strategy to identify the range of strategies used to promote and increase playgroup participation (e.g. pop-up playgroups, network meetings, sharing information).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Searching for themes</td>
<td>Identification of themes in coded data and collation of coded data into themes (e.g. Visible presence, Relationship building, Networking, Knowledge building).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reviewing themes</td>
<td>Review of coded data and identified themes including renaming, refining or adding themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Defining and names themes</td>
<td>Themes clearly named with defined examples. (e.g. Knowledge building – An example of knowledge building is providing up to date information and resources for inclusion on early years service types websites, newsletters and directories).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Qualitative data analysis for Aim 3**

Social media documentation with parent-child dyads and parent-child dyad interviews were also deductively analysed using five phases of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) qualitative analysis. Family identified benefits for children of participation in a community playgroup were analysed using the Learning Outcomes from the VEYLDF (DET, 2016) as the deductive framework. Family identified benefits for families of participation in a community playgroup were analysed using the Victorian Early Years Outcomes Framework domains (DEECD, 2014). Qualitative data from the service types survey were deductively analysed using the Early Years Strategic Plan Key Initiatives (DEECD, 2014) to identify benefits of continued participation for parents and children.
Findings

This project established three main findings pertaining to the PDC initiative in rural communities. These were:

1. **Connections**: PDCs establish a range of connections in their local communities with service types
2. **Strategies**: PDCs value-add to the existing strategies used by service types to promote and increase playgroup participation by families
3. **Benefits**: Families and service types identify benefits in continued playgroup participation by parents and children

**Connections**

This finding addresses Aim 1: To identify the connections PDCs establish in local rural communities in terms of support from local service types (e.g. Maternal and Child Health, Local Council and Kindergartens) for promoting community playgroups to families.

PDCs establish a network of relationships with multiple service types in their rural communities. PDCs’ networks are characterised by primary and secondary bonding connections with multiple services in each rural area. Primary connections were those PDCs immediately established with core service types in their communities. Secondary connections were those enabled by established primary connections. PDCs in rural communities created primary bonding connections with the three main service types listed in the Early Years Strategic Plan, including: Child Health and Wellbeing; Early Childhood Education and Care; and Family, Aboriginal and Disability Support services. Aligned services indicated in the VELYDF (DET, 2016) include Aboriginal Services, Early Intervention Services, Universal Services, Cultural Organisations, Health for Families and Local Government (pp. 1-12).

The establishment of primary bonding connections allowed PDCs to create secondary bonding connections within their primary network. Secondary bonding connections were made with alternative early childhood education, health and wellbeing services to those listed in the Early Years Strategic Plan. These included other local councils, speech pathologists, organisations such as Centacare, and additional local networks such as the Better Outcomes for Kids network.
Primary bonding connections between PDCs and DET appeared to be the most significant connection. It was noted across all three regions that a strong bonding connection with a DET representative assisted in strengthening communication with service types in all three rural communities by raising awareness of the PDC role among the services:

The key person that’s from DET ... She has been instrumental in getting playgroups on her agenda because she meets quarterly with all of those councils to talk about their Supported Playgroups and Parents Groups Initiative (SPPI) funding, to talk about maternal and child health and kindergartens. Because of that connect, she actually has an understanding of what playgroups do, the various models and she has it on her agenda each time. So she's getting an update of what's happening. She's getting to hear from them what work we're doing in those Local Government Areas (LGAs) as well...by always talking about playgroups and mentioning our [PDC] name, she's reinforcing and strengthening what our roles are in the community (Playgroup Development Consultant).

Strong primary bonding connections with Local Councils, Best Start, Maternal Child and Health and Supported Playgroups and Parents Groups Initiative (SPPI) were also described by PDCs as important enablers for connections to other services. It was through key contact staff in these service types that PDCs could network with other early years services to promote playgroups and connect these service types with playgroup families:
Local council have the early years team...they [Council] are my port to get information. They're where I find out what’s happening in the area and in different networks. They are the people that I can send information to and I know that it will be spread far and wide (Playgroup Development Consultant).

Primary bonding connections with the service types also promoted reciprocal relationships. For example, primary bonding connections with Maternal and Child Health (MCH) staff were identified by all three PDCs. One PDC noted that “playgroup can be a really good feeder for Maternal Child Health and vice versa”. This view was mirrored by the other PDCs who also noted that in some more remote geographical regions where birth rates were low families experienced reduced access to mother’s groups and other forms of support that are usually facilitated by MCH staff.

PDCs also described examples of secondary bonding connections that stemmed from primary bonding connections within and across the service types. For example, one PDC described a secondary bonding connection with an Indigenous network that was established through the primary bonding connection with Best Start in the region. Through secondary bonding connections the PDC was invited to meetings chaired by the Aboriginal Cooperative, which ensured that “playgroup is part of the conversations”. In a further example, a primary bonding connection with the local council facilitated a secondary bonding connection with Centacare who had established a playgroup in the region for migrant families.

Over time it is possible that the secondary bonding connections described by PDCs are likely to become primary bonding connections. The primary and secondary connections PDCs established in local rural communities are an important realisation of the PDC role. The organic nature of these relationships suggests that the primary bonding connections with service types continue to expand and are strengthened as secondary relationships mature. The contribution by PDCs in immediately establishing primary bonding connections and creating secondary bonding connections is indicative of community capacity building. Here service types are brought together through “shared goals and values, integrated thinking and good leadership” (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2009, p. 43). In this way, playgroups are increasingly connected within and across service types, therefore increasing the promotion of playgroup participation for families.

Strategies

This finding addresses Aim 2: To review the existing strategies for promoting and increasing community playgroup participation by local service types in rural communities, and the extent to which PDCs value-add to the existing strategies.

Existing strategies for promoting and increasing community playgroups by service types were largely traditional. PDCs value-add to existing strategies using five main promotional strategies, including: Relationship building, Networking, Visible presence, Knowledge building and Playgroup advocacy. Within and across their regions PDC’s faced barriers and enablers in implementing their promotional strategies.
Existing strategies for promoting and increasing community playgroup participation in rural communities were identified from service types. Of the seventeen participating service types fifteen completed the survey (Appendix Eight). Fourteen ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement: ‘This organisation has a strategic approach to the promotion of playgroups to local families’. Again of the fifteen participating services, fourteen ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement: ‘This organisation deploys a variety of strategies in promoting playgroups to families and children across local family and children’s services’ (Appendix Eight). Strategies for promoting playgroups to families, and/or the cross promotion of playgroups across local service types, ranged from deliberate and planned contact to informal engagement with parents and alternative service types. In priority order, existing strategies used by service types to promote community playgroups to parents were:

1. Through a professional relationship with a strong contact person
2. Face to face contact
3. Connecting with playgroups and other networks
4. Knowledge building about playgroups
5. Email/phone
6. Displaying sensitivity to needs
7. Talking about playgroups and sharing information
8. Advocating for playgroups
9. Focussed conversation with service types or parents
10. Meetings by invitation
11. Incidental meetings and visits to playgroups
12. Other

Strategies used by service types for the cross-promotion of playgroups across local service types were also prioritised. In priority order these were:

1. Through a professional relationship with a strong contact person
2. Connecting with other networks
3. Face to face
4. Talking about playgroups and sharing information
5. Advocating for playgroup
6. Email/phone
7. Knowledge building about playgroups
8. Focussed conversation with service types or parents
9. Meetings by invitation
10. Displaying sensitivity to needs
11. Incidental meetings
12. Other
Service types identified their interaction with PDCs as directly contributing to their capacity and behaviour in their work:

I think since [PDC] has been on board I feel a lot more supportive and I've been a lot more active in my promotion of playgroups and I really feel that people are becoming a lot more connected with them (Service stakeholder, Ballarat and district).

I do feel that I've been effective in raising awareness of playgroups through my work with PDC in her role (Service stakeholder, Gippsland).

I think ... if you don't have someone like [PDC] advocating for playgroups people either don't see it as their role or don’t know that that’s what they should be doing. Whereas if you've got a [PDC] that can support and get you excited then you just want to promote [playgroups] because you've got someone there that has shown you the way (Service stakeholder, Wimmera).

This seemed to be a mutually beneficial process as PDCs also recognised the importance of partnership in promoting playgroups to families and connecting service types to playgroups. These mutually beneficial partnerships were particularly important in geographically isolated communities:

In some areas, ...there are so few services actually located ... . They're all satellite services. There’s actually not much there. So it means that playgroup is a really good way in to supporting families where there aren’t necessarily other supports available. So that relationship with Maternal and Child Health is even more important. Now the library have come in as well. So it’s this real team effort to try and support all families...by working together, we can try and get something as close to a facilitated group as we can. (Playgroup Development Consultant).

The findings indicate that the strategies used by service types to promote playgroup participation by families were strengthened through the connections with the PDC. The identified strategies employed by these service types seemed to be underpinned by strong inter-professional working relationships (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2009) between PDCs and these service types.

**PDC strategies for promoting playgroups in cooperation with services**

PDCs provided a significant value-add to existing strategies for promoting playgroups by services. Of the participating seventeen services fifteen completed the survey and 100% ‘agreed’ with the statement ‘This organisation has drawn on the resources of a PDC to promote playgroups to families’. 100% of service types also ‘agreed’, or ‘strongly agreed’, with the statements ‘PDCs promote the availability of local playgroups amongst the community’; and ‘PDCs connect community playgroups across local and family children’s services’. These results suggest the PDCs were able to capitalise on in-place strategies by service types to increasingly knit stronger bonding connections between and across services. Increased bonding connections amongst services increased the overall visibility of playgroups to families within the community. One service provider described this situation as:

The PDC provides a reach into the playgroup community ... She has been a really strong supporter and resourceful person, especially around the playgroups that my Aboriginal [service type] program is involved with. The PDC is someone to bounce ideas off, but really helps us best support our programs with things like our committee (Service stakeholder, Wimmera).

Importantly, PDCs formalised the process of strategic promotion of playgroups within the community. Transcript data from the PDC interview, focus group interview and service types interviews indicates five main categories of promotional behaviour engaged by PDCs. Each promotional behaviour included example activities that were in addition to the existing prioritised strategies in current use by service types (Table 7).
Table 7: PDCs value-add to existing service strategies using five promotional behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promotional behaviour</th>
<th>Example activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Relationship building | - PDCs organise and conduct planned meetings between themselves and services  
- PDCs create deliberate relationships with a key contact person at each service |
| 2. Networking | - PDCs engage with multiple service types  
- PDCs update individual service types about events occurring in alternate services  
- PDCs collaborate with multiple service types to achieve service goals via community playgroups |
| 3. Visible presence | - PDCs create visible presence for community playgroups in the region (e.g. Playgroup Van at local events)  
- PDCs organise pop-up playgroups in low income areas (e.g. playgroup in the shopping centre)  
- PDCs cooperate with service types to hold playgroups at alternative settings (e.g. playgroup in the local library)  
- PDCs and service types collaborate on the design and dissemination of promotional material in the community (e.g. posters on display at the MCHN)  
- PDCs support local community playgroups to develop a social media presence to drive increased enrolments |
| 4. Knowledge building | - PDCs inform service types about playgroups and playgroup resource needs  
- PDCs actively build information about playgroups into service websites, newsletters and directories  
- PDCs create a web of cross-referenced details about local playgroups throughout service types that ‘wrap’ families in information about playgroups and the benefits of playgroup participation for children’s learning |
| 5. Advocacy | - PDCs consistently promote the role of playgroups in fostering young children’s learning at key community events, community groups and within service types  
- PDCs ensure their conversations with service types remain focussed on community playgroups and the development of strong promotional and practical connections between service types  
- PDCs actively mentor and support playgroup facilitators to lead their local community playgroups  
- PDCs collaborate with service types to establish new playgroups in communities without ready access to formalised early childhood education and care services  
- PDCs represent playgroups at strategic planning meetings with multiple service types |

Relationship building

The first type of promotional behaviour described was *relationship building*. Interview data from service types individual interviews and PDC individual and focus group interviews identified that strong relationships with service types and playgroups were essential for building social connections. Relationship building involved PDCs being willing to spend time to learn about the needs and organisational dynamics of the different services and then working with these service types to build understanding of playgroups. At times this involved working with both playgroup facilitators and service types to alleviate any misconceptions between these groups about playgroups and their role in communities. Key activities for engaging in relationship building included having a key contact person at each service type and then working collaboratively with these services to plan events and connect services with existing playgroups in the community. This involved for example, a PDC driving a staff member from one of the service types to a remote playgroup to connect with playgroup families. In further examples, PDCs were invited to promote playgroup participation by attending groups that individual service types worked with within the local community. These activities built relationships through a mutual respect for the “practice, skills and expertise” (DET, 2016, p. 16) of Community playgroups Connecting rural families locally pilot
other professionals. The importance of relationship building in developing strong connections with service types was further captured in the following statement by a service stakeholder:

The PDC gives us a person in the community who is interfacing with the playgroups ... she’s got that relationship building happening in her role and I can tap into that, I can plug into her work and pass on the relevant [information] to her. (Service stakeholder, Wimmera)

### Relationship building

“Professionals can’t just go into every community playgroup to make those links, especially while they are running their own services. So it’s good to be able to do that for them and just be that contact and that middle person to make those connections.” (Playgroup Development Consultant)

### Networking

Networking was identified as a promotional behaviour used by PDCs to value-add to existing service type strategies. Networking in rural communities was a powerful means of promoting playgroup participation and connecting playgroups with service types. Integrated community networks brought together people from different service types and provided a strong platform for PDCs to deliver consistent messages about playgroups and to link into other networks. Key networking activities included membership of integrated community networks where there was potential to reach into other networks linked to the services in these groups. The use of this promotional behaviour promoted connections in the broader community but required PDCs to be aware and up-to-date with the community needs and priorities of these networks. The value-add to existing strategies used by service types was noted by the following service stakeholder:

I can, in my role link the [PDC] into my network. So by having a person on the ground [the PDC] becomes like the face of playgroup in our areas (Service stakeholder, Ballarat and district).

The VEYLDF (DET, 2016) also recognises the importance of networking for effective partnerships with professionals through an emphasis on working “in partnership to develop and promote collaborative partnerships in early years networks” (p. 16). Service types recognised benefits of working with PDCs in this way, particularly when working on planning documents such as the Municipal Early Years Plan. The value added component of PDCs working collaboratively across early years networks was captured in the following comment by a service stakeholder:

The PDC is working with us and with the library resources centre manager on education around playgroup. And in the early years plan ... [which involved] playgroup and maternal child health, family day care ... in the whole early years plan for the region (Service stakeholder, Ballarat and district).

PDCs also identified this value-added component of their role which was captured by one PDC in relation to conversations held about transition with service types:

The transition conversation is only focussing on the transition between kindergarten to school. Part of my attendance at those forums has been trying to make sure that the transition conversation is a
bit broader and includes playgroups and maternal health as well (Playgroup Development Consultant).

Visible presence

A visible presence contributed to establishing and maintaining professional trust within and across playgroups and service types. This required PDCs to use strategic behaviours such as regular visits to playgroups, attending local events and promoting playgroups using the Playgroup Van, sharing playgroup resources and running pop-up playgroups and activities at community events to promote playgroup participation. PDCs also facilitated an online presence for community playgroups supporting the establishment and maintenance of individual Facebook sites. It was noted that playgroup posters placed by PDCs in prominent positions in offices/buildings frequented by families, such as Maternal Child and Health Services, were also effective in promoting playgroup participation.

It’s really important we partner with the PDC in lots of different activities - Children’s Week being one of them and anything else where playgroup might fit the PDC will always be there (Service stakeholder, Gippsland).

Knowledge building

Knowledge building as a promotional behaviour involved the navigation of various relationships with service types to build strong partnerships. The VEYLD (DET, 2016) describes partnerships with professionals as working to “research, share information and plan together to ensure holistic approaches to children’s learning and development” (p.16). Professional partnerships were
evidenced in the knowledge building promotional behaviours used by PDCs. For example, in communities where playgroups did not operate, PDCs drew on local partners to access community knowledge required to ensure that new playgroups would contribute to identifiable community needs. Where strong relationships and networks already existed, knowledge building largely took the form of information and resources that were distributed through networks, including: newsletters, fliers and directories. It was important that the information that was being disseminated in these ways was current and this responsibility tended to fall back on to the PDCs. Service types recognised that PDCs played a critical role in knowledge building across different service types and in the community. This was because PDCs strong primary bonding connections contributed to bridging gaps in the integration and collaboration of service types throughout the regions that they worked in:

The benefit is that PDCs are aware of all the diverse things going on with the different playgroups and so they can share this. It’s such a scattered area and there are small towns doing big things big towns doing small things and certainly [it’s a benefit] to have someone who's able to bring people together for something that’s happening no matter how big or small it is... [PDCs get] all the different agencies or different services aware of what’s happening (Service stakeholder, Gippsland).

**Playgroup advocacy**

Playgroup advocacy involved PDCs using consistent and clear communication strategies to actively advocate for playgroup participation with families and service types. Activities included PDCs working with playgroup families on processes for organising and running playgroups and working with service types to ensure a designated time at integrated community network meetings to promote and talk about playgroups. Targeted conversations at these meetings provided PDCs with opportunities to make clear connections between playgroups and community priorities of these networks such as enhancing outcomes for particular groups in the community (such as marginalised or vulnerable groups). The value-add of these promotional behaviours appeared to contribute to alleviating concerns regarding participant-cohesion in community playgroups (Gibson et al., 2015) - and was aptly captured in this comment by on service stakeholder:

I think it’s very beneficial [having PDC’s], because the community playgroups need some guidance on what to do, where to go, how to form a group, how to form a structure, what the importance is of a playgroup socially for parents and for themselves and for the children (Service stakeholder, Gippsland).

Playgroup advocacy as a promotional behaviour was described by another service stakeholder as value-adding to existing strategies because the presence of the PDCs at meetings attended by a range of service types ensured that playgroup discussions were framed around shared goals:

A lot of the time we do talk about the municipality’s plan and how important that is to bring all the key players in early years together... PDCs active involvement on municipal early years and early year’s network meetings they’re good (Service stakeholder, Ballarat and district).

PDCs advocacy of playgroups realised the VEYLDF vision, that professionals “foster engagement in early years learning communities where individuals mentor, coach and learn from each other” (EYLDF, 2016, p.16). This contribution by PDCs is recognised in the comment from the following service stakeholder in relation to working with the PDC to promote playgroup participation:

PDC is always sharing knowledge about things that are available for families, like the raising children network and things like that. Whenever we get together ... [we talk] about ways of engaging families and what’s out there for people and just basic play ideas and planning ideas. Like, when we do
Children’s Week the PDC is always involved and helps with ideas ... and [with] the practical things about how to set up playgroups in the community (Service stakeholder, Gippsland).

Working together with PDCs to realise mutual goals in promoting and advocating for playgroup participation in early learning communities was further described by another stakeholder in relation to mother’s groups:

I’ve had four events during the year where I actually have a mothers group and bring together three of our playgroups in the region and PDC comes along to those so that I can introduce her to those new parents, so that they [mothers] get that whole baby awareness of playgroup. Next year I plan to do three [events] a year at three different sites, so that will be nine next year ... We will introduce PDC to the new mums and then introduce the new mums to the playgroup where we are situated at the time (Service stakeholder, Ballarat and District).

**Playgroup advocacy**

“I’ll be contacting services and saying, ‘Do you want me to come out and do what we call the pop-up playgroup?’- So we’ll come and actually run a session to model how you can do a best practice playgroup” (Playgroup Development Consultant)

**PDC barriers and enablers for promoting and increasing community playgroup participation**

PDCs and service types identified barriers and enablers to their capacity to promote and increase community playgroup participation. Barriers and enablers were related to each of the PDCs strategic promotional behaviours (Table 8).

One of the complexities associated with the PDC role was managing and meeting the diverse needs of the various service types within and across the three geographical areas of the project. Tensions associated with competing priorities, interests and approaches of service organisations have previously been reported in a small scale study undertaken in a supported playgroup (Cumming & Wong, 2012). Similar tensions were reported in this research as barriers to the promotion of community playgroups when working with multiple service types. Barriers associated with leadership within organisations, various organisational structures, agendas and internal politics were identified as influencing the extent of engagement with these services. There were also challenges associated with maintaining primary bonding connections with these services when a key contact person within the organisation left for a new role elsewhere. Funding, particularly within service types, and access to facilities within communities to operate playgroups were also identified as key barriers to establishing and maintaining primary connections between playgroups and service types. For example, early childhood services staff reported that funding and the allocation of targeted funds within the various services placed restrictions on how services were able to promote, support and connect with playgroups. Another key barrier was associated with working internal working relationships within different organisations. One service type voiced the concerns of many that so
much of what could be done to promote playgroups for families and maintain connections between
the service types and families was limited by the allocation of funding within services:

Funding is definitely ... the biggest issue. It always is. They [playgroups] want different things and we
would love to be able to provide them with the best possible service, but when it comes down to it
everything comes back to funding (Service stakeholder, Wimmera).

Table 8: PDC barriers and enablers to promoting and increasing community playgroup participation according to
Strategic Promotional Behaviour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Promotional Behaviour</th>
<th>Relationship building</th>
<th>Networking</th>
<th>Visible presence</th>
<th>Knowledge building</th>
<th>Playgroup advocacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BARRIERS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of leadership in organisation or service</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to adequate funding</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel/interpersonal relationships within organisations</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing and overarching strategic directions of services</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational structures within services</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of understanding about community playgroups and the role of PDCs in services</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of and access to local facilities</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust relationships within and between services</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service personnel with an established PDC relationship leaving their employment</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with services spread across geographical areas</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENABLERS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness of services to work in partnership with PDCs</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel interpersonal relationship within organisations</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing and overarching strategic directions of services</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDC knowledge and experience working with playgroups</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to develop relationships between PDCs, services and community playgroups</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated relationships between services</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being respected and known in a community</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open communication between PDCs, services and community playgroups</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Barriers**

“A lot of my areas don’t particularly have great venues for playgroup. A lot of the buildings, the community halls and things, are extremely old and it’s not appropriate or not safe for playgroup, they don’t have outdoor areas, or are quite expensive.” (Playgroup Development Consultant)
A range of enablers for strong connections between PDCs, service types and playgroups were also identified. Personalities within organisations could be seen as either enablers or barriers to strong connections depending on their level of interest and willingness to work with playgroups in ways that contribute to community capacity building. Relationships between early years’ services and PDCs were important in the process of connecting playgroups with existing service types and key enablers in this process included PDCs having the time to develop professional relationships and being respected in the community. Strong communication channels between PDCs, playgroups and service types were also described as enablers where opportunities to exert influence at the planning stage within organisations could be realised. Integrated working parties such as municipal early years groups, were seen as enablers for partnership and promoting community capacity building though playgroups. Specific examples where these enablers were realised included PDCs working with elders in Indigenous communities to advocate for playgroups and working with regional libraries to organise special events around playgroup library week. In a further example, willingness to work in partnership led to the employment of a kindergarten assistant to run a playgroup in a LGA where numbers of children in the community were not high enough to have a kindergarten operating. This best practice approach enabled families in this small community to have access to early childhood services including a maternal child health nurse and an education program for their children.

The PDCs capacity to work across a range of networks and service types was seen to be an enabler for promoting and increasing community playgroup participation and connections with service types and playgroups. This was because in their role PDCs were described as bringing service types, with whom they had established primary bonding connections, together with playgroups and their extended communities to facilitate connections and collaborations in ways that supported service types to carry out their roles. One service stakeholder described the benefits of this facilitation as a soft entry (Jackson, 2011) for enabling the service types to establish rapport needed to build professional trust in communities in ways similar to those described in the facilitator role of a supported playgroup (Warr et al, 2013):

[The PDC] guided me very positively into getting to know the committees of our playgroups across the Shire and getting to know the families and the children...so now I’m in constant contact with all of our playgroups and all of our committees” (Service stakeholder, Wimmera)

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**Enablers**

“Linking with the Regional Library Incorporation. That has been really important for playgroup library week. I’ve linked in this year with seven libraries to do some special events around playgroup library week.” (Playgroup Development Consultant)
Benefits

This finding addresses Aim 3: To build the evidence base regarding service and family identified benefits of continued playgroup participation by parents and young children in rural communities.

Service types

Of the participating service types all were unanimous in their support of playgroup participation by parents and children. One service ‘agreed’, and fourteen services ‘strongly agreed’ with the statements: ‘This organisation believes that participation in playgroup benefits families and children’; and ‘Participating in playgroup benefits families and children and should be promoted across family and children’s services’.

Service types initially identified six main benefits of playgroup participation for parents and children. In order of significance these were that playgroup participation:

1. Encourages learning
2. Supports early childhood development
3. Promotes social connectedness amongst parents
4. Develops children’s communication skills
5. Develops parents and children’s confidence
6. Supports young families

Following an invitation to consider example Edmodo postings by families about playgroup, service types were invited to further identify the benefits they valued for parents and children’s continued playgroup participation. Responding to direct examples of playgroup participation in action as represented by the Edmodo postings prompted additional stated benefits from service types. These benefits are categorised according to the three Key Initiatives of the Early Years Strategic Plan (DEECD, 2014) (Table 9).

Table 9: Service identified benefits of continued playgroup participation for parents and children according to the Early Years Strategic Plan Key Initiatives (DEECD, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Initiative</th>
<th>Benefit of continued playgroup participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Supporting parents and communities to give children a great start | - Safe environment for enhancing children’s developmental potential  
- Increased awareness of alternative early childhood services  
- Positive reinforcement of children’s behaviour by adults  
- Strengthened partnerships and collaboration between parents  
- Increased parental awareness of the importance of the early years |
| Early and sustained support for those who need it most | - Support for parents and families  
- Connecting with and respecting others  
- Unique local environment |
| All children benefitting from high-quality learning | - Numeracy and literacy skills  
- Opportunities for parental and child learning  
- Development of children’s identity |

Families

Participating families indicated multiple benefits of playgroup participation for themselves and for their children. Benefits for children, identified by parents through Edmodo postings and parent-child dyad interviews were thematically mapped to the five Learning Outcomes in the VEYLDF (DET, 2016)
This mapping indicated at least five described benefits of playgroup participation for children according to each of the Learning Outcomes.

**Table 10: Described benefits of playgroup participation for children according to the five VEYLDF Learning Outcomes (DET, 2016)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VEYLDF Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Described benefit</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children have a strong sense of identity</td>
<td>Children develop friendships through participation at playgroup</td>
<td>Playing with other playgroup children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup show an interest in participating with others during activities</td>
<td>Playing in the cubby house Using the hula hoops Sharing in the jumping castle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children feel comfortable in the playgroup environment to join in activities</td>
<td>Joining in story-time Sharing stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup work collaboratively with others</td>
<td>Creating a group mural Sharing toys with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup persist with challenges</td>
<td>Threading activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup approach new situations confidently</td>
<td>Tasting new fruits ‘Goopy slime’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are connected and contribute to their world</td>
<td>Children at playgroup show interest and participate in special ceremonies and days</td>
<td>ANZAC day activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup participate in everyday routines which encourage inclusive approaches to dealing with conflict</td>
<td>Taking turns at snack time Listening to others during story time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup visit outdoor spaces to play and care for the environment</td>
<td>Visiting local parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup use sensory play to explore their environment</td>
<td>Water and sand play Autumn leaf dream catchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup cooperate with other children when they play together</td>
<td>Playing together to create a sandcastle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children have a strong sense of wellbeing</td>
<td>Children at playgroup take responsibility for their own healthy eating</td>
<td>Increased consumption of fruit and vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup take care with hygiene</td>
<td>Washing hands before eating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup enthusiastically engage in physical activities</td>
<td>Outdoor play, climbing and ball activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup manipulate and use tools with increasing confidence</td>
<td>Using scissors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup demonstrate their developing spatial awareness</td>
<td>Climbing over and under and moving around objects safely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VEYLDF Outcome</td>
<td>Learning Description</td>
<td>Described Benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are confident and involved learners</td>
<td>Children at playgroup initiate play connected to their own experiences</td>
<td>Creating a train track like the one near child’s home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Constructing a building site in the sandpit like the one near playgroup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup explore their ideas through imaginary play</td>
<td>Becoming their favourite character from a familiar story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Playing in the home corner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup repeat and practise the actions modelled by others</td>
<td>Copying how other children hold a cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wearing a sunhat after observing other children wearing one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup are curious and show interest in their learning</td>
<td>Making Duplo creations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Playing peekaboo in the outdoor cubby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Exploring how a new toy works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup explore mathematical concepts</td>
<td>Working out how many children will fit inside the cubby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are effective communicators</td>
<td>Children at playgroup show increasing knowledge of conveying meaning</td>
<td>Imaginary play with toy telephones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup listen and respond to stories, rhymes and chants</td>
<td>Listening to stories at story-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Joining in singing rhymes and chants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup express their ideas through craft and creative arts</td>
<td>Making sculptures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Painting a group mural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Drawing using chalk and paint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Drawing on chalkboards and walls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup learn about the alphabet</td>
<td>Playing with magnetic letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Exploring using symbols in writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup communicate their ideas in different ways</td>
<td>Creating art work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Playing with the dolls in the home corner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Making mud pies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children at playgroup listen to and follow instructions</td>
<td>Following instructions to make cookies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Following instructions to make Mother’s day gifts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children’s engagement with each of the five Learning Outcomes in the VEYLDF (DET, 2016) were evidenced in the Edmodo postings made by parents and expanded upon in the parent-child dyad interviews. Families made visible their children’s learning through participation in community playgroups – particularly in the Edmodo postings. Edmodo postings suggested parental awareness of children’s learning through play at playgroup. Parents described connections between activities at playgroup and at home where learning had been extended, repeated or brought back into the playgroup. One parent observed her child who had “taken one of the playgroup dolls to the reading corner, and was reading her a story so she would go to sleep, just like I do to her at home” (Figure 2). In another example a parent described how her child’s interest in learning about ANZAC day was stimulated by ANZAC activities completed at playgroup. Further ANZAC day activities at kindergarten and attending the ceremony led to “a lot of questions about some of the traditions he witnessed and then ... replicating some of the things when we went for a play at the park afterwards, like marching, playing and imaginary trumpet and building a fort” (Figure 3). Parents also appreciated the
opportunities that playgroup provided for their children to develop motor skills. In one example a parent described her child’s experience of threading cereal pieces onto a pipe cleaner as requiring “a lot of concentration” (Figure 4). She acknowledged the effort the child made to complete the activity and appreciated the enjoyment he showed when he discovered it was edible. In this example the parent recognised the learning opportunity as well as the child’s developing sense of wellbeing and identity.

Figure 2: Reading books in the reading corner at playgroup
Figure 3: ANZAC day activities at playgroup

Child was very interested in ANZAC Day this year. It appears this interest was stimulated by the ANZAC activities we completed at playgroup and then again at kindergarten. We attended the ceremony this morning and he was actively involved waving his flag and clapping his hands. He asked a lot of questions about some of the traditions he witnessed and then I noticed he was replicating some of the things when we went for a play at the park afterwards; marching, playing an imaginary ‘trumpet’, and building a fort.

Figure 4: Threading cereal pieces at playgroup

Child enjoyed the fine motor skills activity today. While he had a go at threading the Cheerios into the pipe cleaner he got frustrated quite quickly as it was a bit beyond his skills and required a lot of concentration. He did say “mummy help me” however quickly progressed to eating the Cheerios. He did find playing with them quite fun and was interested in their feel and how they stuck to his hand if he pressed them. Tipping them out of the bowl also proved entertaining. When mum made him a pipe cleaner full of them he quite enjoyed pulling the Cheerios off - and then eating them!
‘Goopy slime’ activities provided similar opportunities for children’s learning (Figure 5). Although postings relating to this activity indicated children’s enjoyment some parents also noted some initial reluctance with the new experience that was overcome with gentle parental encouragement. In this example the parent noted that this would be a good activity to repeat again at home so to enable her child to become more familiar with the different texture of the material.

Figure 5: Sensory activities at playgroup

Parents described how playgroup participation contributed to a sense of wellbeing. This was beneficial for children and their families as parents expressed satisfaction in recognising the development of positive social behaviours in their children. These included helping other children and playing cooperatively with other children. One parent noted how her child played cooperatively with another child in the sandpit and how the two children collaborated so that once the bucket “was full they tipped it over and carefully pulled the bucket off to reveal the castle which only lasted for a second before they both destroyed it. The team work was excellent” (Figure 6).
Parents also recognised the value in solitary time for some children. Playgroup was not always about learning to get along with others. One parent provided a posting that showed how much reading was valued in the home (Figure 7). The parent noted that her child loves reading book and “often reads to our dog at home.” In this posting the parent placed value on the child’s interest in taking time to read alone at playgroup and commented, “I love that the boys love books as much as I do – for now anyway!”

Figure 7: Reading in the new reading corner
Benefits for families identified in Edmodo postings and parent-child dyad interviews were thematically mapped to the four domains of development in the Early Years Outcome Framework (DEECD, 2014) (Table 11). This mapping indicated at least two benefits of participation for families for each of the four domains.

Table 11: Described benefits of playgroup participation for families according to the Early Years Outcome Framework (DEECD, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Years Outcome Framework Domain</th>
<th>Being Healthy</th>
<th>Building wellbeing</th>
<th>Learning and developing</th>
<th>Staying safe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Families</strong></td>
<td>Contact with other parents prompts increased MCHN visits</td>
<td>Extended social connections</td>
<td>Site for learning about children’s play</td>
<td>Safe environment to connect with other families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy snack time practices transferred to home</td>
<td>Opportunity to discuss parenting strategies and challenges</td>
<td>Passport for home learning opportunities – e.g. story time at the local library</td>
<td>Literacy and mathematics activities transferred to home</td>
<td>Weather proof activity connecting families to community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular participation builds strong sense of community</td>
<td>Inclusive of all children and families</td>
<td>Foster parental understanding about children’s development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Benefits of playgroup participation for children and parents are aligned with the strategic directions of the Early Years Strategic Plan (DEECD, 2014) and the Learning Outcomes of the VEYLDF (2016).
Recommendations

This evaluation makes the following recommendations pertaining to the PDC role in connecting local early childhood services to increase the promotion of, and participation in, community playgroups by families with young children living in rural communities:

1. PDCs create primary and secondary bonding connections amongst service types and community playgroups in rural communities. Consideration should be given to continuation of the PDC role in strengthening and integrating early childhood services.

2. PDCs value-add to existing service types provision in rural communities. Consideration should be given to continuation of the PDC role in value-adding to early childhood service provision for children and families.

3. Service types and families identify benefit for parents and children in continued community playgroup participation that align with the Early Years Outcomes Framework (DEECD, 2014) and the VEYLDF (DET, 2016). Consideration should be given to continuation of the PDC role in promoting access to community playgroups for children and families in rural communities.
Community playgroups Connecting rural families locally pilot
Conclusion

Playgroups are an acknowledged provider of early childhood education in the Early Years Strategic Plan (DEECD, 2014) and the VELYDF (DET, 2016). Recognition of playgroups at the policy level in each of these documents attends to the significance research now places on the first three years of life as a period of developmental sensitivity for young children (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Research consistently shows that access to high quality play-based learning opportunities in the home and in community services promotes young children’s developmental outcomes, now and into the future. Participation in community playgroups is a viable means of achieving young children’s access to opportunities for quality play-based learning opportunities (ARTD Consultants, 2008; Gregory et al., 2016; Hancock et al., 2012).

Research shows that connected service provision benefits young children and families by increasing the access parents have to multiple forms of professional support and sources of information about early parenting and early learning. Connected service provision is enabled by increased professional partnerships amongst service providers. Existing research regarding connected service provision with respect to community playgroups in rural communities is very limited.

This report evaluates the role of Playgroup Development Consultants (PDCs) in a new initiative called the Community Playgroups: Connecting Rural Families Locally Pilot project. The evaluation attended to three main aims:

1. To identify the connections PDCs establish in local rural communities in terms of support from local service types (e.g. Maternal and Child Health, Local Council and Kindergartens) for promoting community playgroups to families;
2. To review the existing strategies for promoting and increasing community playgroup participation by local service types in rural communities, and the extent to which PDCs value-add to the existing strategies; and
3. To build the evidence base regarding service type and family identified benefits of continued playgroup participation by parents and young children in rural communities

The evaluation concludes that PDCs promote awareness of community playgroups in their local rural communities for the benefit of children and families. Three main findings are identified:

4. Connections: PDCs establish primary and secondary bonding connections in their local communities with service types, including MCHN, Kindergartens and Aboriginal Services.
5. Strategies: PDCs value-add to the existing strategies used by service types to promote and increase playgroup participation by families. Promotional strategic behaviours used by PDCs include: 1) Relationship building; 2) Networking; 3) Visible presence; 4) Knowledge building; and 5) Advocacy of playgroups
6. Benefits: Families and service types identify benefits in continued playgroup participation by parents and children that align with the Early Years Outcomes Framework domains (DEECD, 2014) and the VEYLF (DET, 2016). These include:
   a) Encourages learning
   b) Supports early childhood development
c) Promotes social connectedness amongst parents  
d) Develops children’s communication skills  
e) Develops parents and children’s confidence  
f) Supports young families
References


Plowman, K. (2002). *Strengthening children, families and communities through playgroups* Paper presented at the Starting strong: Making the most of the first eight years, Melbourne, VIC.


Appendix One

Figure 8: Playgroup Victoria community playgroup data

Community playgroups; Connecting rural families locally
Playgroup Victoria data

 Targets set by key stakeholders were exceeded.

Parents reported being active in their child’s learning

120 New community playgroups

Mentoring provided to
389 playgroups

Parents reported feeling part of their community

Community playgroup participation

255 Partnerships established
## Appendix Two

### Table 12: Literacy summation: playgroup participation in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Data Collection Dates</th>
<th>Type of Playgroup</th>
<th>Method Summary</th>
<th>Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Berthelsen, Williams, Abad, Vogel, and</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Phone Interviews, Journals, and Surveys</td>
<td>18 Queensland Playgroups (128 Parents and 12 Facilitators)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerford and Robinson</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Policy and Organisational Review</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dadich and Spooner</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibson, Harman, and Guilfoyle</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>15 Participants (14 Female and 1 Male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grealy, Jenkins, Holland, Butterfield</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Interviews Survey,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Andrews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hancock, Zarb, Berthelsen, and Nicholson and Zubrich</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Community and Supported</td>
<td>Secondary Data Analysis</td>
<td>Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hancock, Lawrence, and Zarb, Berthelsen</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Secondary Data Analysis</td>
<td>Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Zubrich</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Case Study, Interviews, Observations, Questionnaire</td>
<td>1 Playgroup 5 Adults and 9 Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Case Studies, Observations, Focus Groups, and Interviews</td>
<td>3 Playgroups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnston, Sullivan, Sullivan, and Burnside</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Interviews, Survey, and Focus Groups</td>
<td>12 Playgroups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee and Thompson</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Participant and Professional Video Data, Interviews</td>
<td>Playgroup Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDonald, Turner, and Gray</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McFarland-Piazza, Lord, Smith, and</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Intervention Focus group interviews</td>
<td>7 Preservice Teachers and 33 Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downey</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McLean, Edwards, Colliver, Schaper</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>5 Playgroups 11 Preservice teachers 10 School Staff and 47 Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, Skouteris,</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Community and</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>International Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrison, Hemphill, Sullivan and Lambert</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McLean, Edwards,</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Survey Interviews</td>
<td>5 Playgroups 50 Playgroup Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Data Collection Dates</td>
<td>Type of Playgroup</td>
<td>Method Summary</td>
<td>Sample</td>
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<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McShane, Cook, Sinclair, Keam, and Fry</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>2005-Not Indicated</td>
<td>Community and Supported</td>
<td>Interviews, Questionnaires and Secondary Data Analysis</td>
<td>33 Playgroup participants, Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan and Chodkiewicz</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Three years</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Demographic Observations, Video recordings, Interviews.</td>
<td>Approximately 30 Families, Key Practitioners in Early Childhood Development Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Needham and Jackson</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<td>Supported</td>
<td>Observations and Interviews (from two studies)</td>
<td>Selection of Playgroups in Australia and England</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oke, Stanley, and Theobald</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Interviews and focus group</td>
<td>22 Playgroup Participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Playgroup Australia</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Community and Supported</td>
<td>Policy and Organisational Review and Statistical Data Review</td>
<td>Literature</td>
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<td>Playgroup Australia</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>Community and Supported</td>
<td>Surveys, Discussions, and Literature Review</td>
<td>State and Territory Associations Members and CEOs, and Community Stakeholders</td>
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<td>Plowman</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
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<td>International Literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strange, Fisher, Howat, and Wood</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>Community and Supported</td>
<td>Interviews and Focus Groups</td>
<td>39 Mothers, 3 Child Health Nurses, and 4 Early Childhood Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warr, Mann, Forbes, and Turner</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>14 Facilitators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix Three

### Table 13: Literature summation: connected services provision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Year Published</th>
<th>Data Collection Year</th>
<th>Type of Playgroup</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Method Summary</th>
<th>Sample</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barlow, Kirkpatrick, Stewart-Brown, and Davis</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>19 Female Participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Borrow, Munns, and Henderson</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Work Diaries, Focus Groups, and Demographic Profile</td>
<td>60 Nurses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capire Consulting Group</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Face to face engagement tools Online engagement tools Consultation paper - 2236 downloads, 100 hard copies Email - 55854 recipients Online hub - 6380 visitors Forums - 283 participants Symposium - 107 participants Discussion groups - 90 participants Reference groups - 24 participants One to one meetings - 17 participants Online forum - 50 comments Toolkit - 610 downloads - 88 Submissions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerford and Robinson</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Policy and Organisational Review</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
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<td>Cumming and Wong</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2007</td>
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<td>Australia</td>
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<td>Gibson, Harman, and Guilfoyle</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Not Indicated</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>15 Participants (14 Female and 1 Male)</td>
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<td>Grealy, McArthur, Jenkins, Holland, Butterfield and Andrews</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Interviews and Survey, 61 Parents in Round 1, 42 Parents in Round 2, and 12 Playgroup Facilitators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Year Published/Collection Year</td>
<td>Data Collection Year</td>
<td>Type of Playgroup</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Method Summary</td>
<td>Sample</td>
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<td>Jackson</td>
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<td>Case Studies, Observations, Groups, and Interviews</td>
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<td>Lee and Thompson</td>
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<td>McShane, Cook, Sinclair, Keam, and Fry</td>
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<td>Community and Supported</td>
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<td>Interviews, Questionnaires and Secondary Analysis</td>
<td>33 Playgroup Participants, Study of Longitudinal Australian Children (LSAC)</td>
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<td>Robinson, Scott, Meredith, Nair and Higgins</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<td>2009-2010</td>
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<td>Interviews</td>
<td>14 Facilitators</td>
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Appendix Four

Interview Questions Playgroup Development Consultants

1. What do you think are the benefits of having Playgroup Development Consultants in this area/community?
2. What, if any, are the constraints that may influence the strength of connections between services and community playgroups?
3. Who are the key service types that you liaise with in your role as a Playgroup Development Consultant?
4. How often do you engage with each of these key service types in your role as a Playgroup Development Consultant?
5. What do you talk about with each of these key service types?
6. What strategies do you use to engage with each of these key service types to promote and increase participation in community playgroups?
7. What strategies do each of these key service types use to promote community playgroups to families?
8. How would you describe the effectiveness of these strategies in engaging each of these key service types in promoting playgroups to families?
9. How valuable would you describe the role that each of these key service types play in promoting community playgroups to families?
10. What, if any, issues have arisen in your role of engaging with each of these key service types to promote community playgroups to families?
Appendix Five

Interview Questions Key Services Types

1. What do you think are the benefits of having Playgroup Development Consultants in this area/community?
2. What, if any, are the constraints that may influence strong connections between your services and community playgroups?
3. How often do you engage with the Playgroup Development Consultant about promoting community playgroups to families through your service?
4. What do you talk about with the Playgroup Development Consultants?
5. What strategies do you use to promote community playgroups to families through your service?
6. How would you describe the effectiveness of these strategies for promoting participation by families in community playgroups?
7. How valuable would you describe the role of your service in promoting community playgroups to families?
8. What, if any, issues have arisen when promoting community playgroups to families through your service?
9. Do you have any suggestions for ways that your service might contribute to further improving the promotion of participation by families in community playgroups?
Appendix Six

Schedule for focus group interview with PDCs

1. What do you think are the most important and effective strategies you use with service types to promote and increase community playgroup participation? Please explain.

2. What do you think you need to further assist you in your role of promoting and increasing community playgroup participation in rural communities? Please explain or elaborate on your response. (E.g. smaller region of focus, more funding, better access, more services)

3. What types of additional support do you think would assist you to carry out this role more effectively or to improve outcomes?

4. How do you see your role in bringing these service types together and nurturing relationships between these organisations in ways that lead to promoting and increasing participation in playgroups? What challenges does this present?

5. What strategies do you employ to foster these relationships and partnerships within and across service types?

6. How would you describe the effectiveness of these strategies?

7. What further suggestions do you have to support you to build and maintain the relationships and/or partnerships within and across service types?

8. What strategies or tools do you think could further assist you to engage with these service types in ways that best meet their needs? (E.g. mapping tool to identify the specific needs and foci of each service)

9. What strategies or tools do you think could further assist you to meet the needs of diversity across and within playgroups in your areas?

10. What benefits and constraints would you see with the implementation of a mapping tool that identifies these different needs? (E.g. Councils and NFP groups have very different funding bases and participate with families in very different ways for different reasons)

11. What strategies or tools do you use to address some of these barriers such as playgroups with cliques, those lacking leadership within groups, unclear responsibilities, isolation associated with rural playgroup where there is only one small town, transport, suitable times, venues for the range of participants, and how effective would you describe these tools or strategies?

12. What strategies or tools do you think would offer support to these groups to be more inclusive of new members? Please describe these in detail with a justification for their use.

13. How do you see the role of these organisations in providing support to playgroups and vulnerable families?

14. Is there more that they could do? If so, what recommendations do you have that might improve levels and types of support provided by these organisations?

15. Please provide some feedback on the following suggestions from service types regarding further strategies for promoting playgroup participation for families.
**Suggestion 1**
All playgroups (members and non-members) could be included on the PV website so that PV becomes the unequivocal hub for all playgroups and the first port of call.

**Suggestion 2**
Wider scale implementation of transition back packs, special events days where doctors and other community members engage with playgroups on a needs basis, pop-up playgroups and SMS reminders to families about playgroup.

**Suggestion 3**
A service stakeholder or trusted person attends the first playgroup session with a new family to introduce this family to playgroup families.

**Suggestion 4**
The use of larger networks such as early years networks as a means of reaching more families.

**Suggestion 5**
The introduction of welcome packages for incoming presidents on playgroup committees that includes useful resources such as fact sheets, guidelines for encouraging inclusivity, service type information, and playgroup organisation help sheets.

16. What would you describe as the main benefits for families of regular participation in a community playgroup? Please explain.
Appendix Seven

Service types survey

Community Playgroups-Connecting rural families locally
Key Stakeholder Services Survey

Welcome to Key Stakeholders Survey
Community Playgroups - Connecting Rural Communities Locally

Thank you for participating in our survey. Your feedback is important.

Community Playgroups-Connecting rural families locally
Key Stakeholder Services Survey

Organisation characteristics

The first section will help us learn about the characteristics of your organisation.

1. What is the name of your organisation?

2. What is the primary role of your organisation?

3. What is your role in this organisation?

4. Where is your organisation located?

Community Playgroups-Connecting rural families locally
Key Stakeholder Services Survey

Quantitative items
This organisation and playgroups
In this section we would like to learn more about your organisation’s approach to playgroups.

5. This organisation believes that participation in playgroup benefits families and children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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6. This organisation has a strategic approach to the promotion of playgroups to local families and children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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</table>

7. Identify in order of priority (1-12) the strategies this organisation uses to promote playgroups to families and children.

- Predominantly face to face contact
- Email and/or phone
- Incidental meetings and visits to playgroups
- Meetings by invitation and visits to playgroups
- Through a professional relationship with a strong contact person such as a Playgroup Development Consultant
- Connecting with playgroup and/or family networks and keeping up to date with events and happenings
- Knowledge building about playgroups with other services, families and in the community
- Displaying a sensitivity to different needs of playgroups and families
- Talking about playgroups and sharing information about playgroups with other stakeholder services, families and in the community
- Ensuring conversations with stakeholder services remain focused on promoting community playgroups and developing strong connections between services
- Actively advocating for playgroups at all times with stakeholder services, families and in the community
- Other
8. If your organisation uses other strategies to promote playgroups to families and children please describe these strategies.


Community Playgroups-Connecting rural families locally Key Stakeholder Services Survey

This organisation and other services

In this section we would like to learn more about your organisation’s approach to promoting playgroups to other services.

9. This organisation believes that participation in playgroup benefits families and children and should be promoted across local family and children’s services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

10. This organisation has a strategic approach to promoting playgroups to families and children across local family and children’s services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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</thead>
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</table>

11. This organisation deploys a variety of strategies to promote playgroups to families and children across local family and children’s services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>
12. Identify in order of priority the strategies this organisation uses to promote playgroups for families and children across local family and children’s services (E.g. Maternal and Child Health Services, Library Services, Department of Education and Training, Family Services).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predominantly face to face contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email and/or phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidental meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings by invitation or initiated meetings with other services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through professional relationships with strong contact staff within other services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting with other networks and keeping up to date with events and happenings in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge building about playgroups with other services, families and in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaying a sensitivity to different needs of playgroups and families when working with other services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about playgroups and sharing information about playgroups with other stakeholder services, families and in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring conversations with stakeholder services remain focused on promoting community playgroups and developing strong connections between services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity advocating for playgroups at all times with stakeholder services, families and in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</table>

13. If your organisation uses other strategies to promote playgroups for families and children across local family and children’s services (E.g. Maternal and Child Health Services, Library Services, Department of Education and Training, Family Services) please describe these strategies.
In this section we would like to learn more about your organisation’s approach to working with a Playgroup Development Consultant.

14. This organisation has drawn on the resources of a Playgroup Development Consultant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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</table>

15. Playgroup Development Consultants promote the availability of local playgroups amongst the community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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16. Playgroup Development Consultants connect community playgroups across local family and children’s services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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Community Playgroups-Connecting rural families locally
Key Stakeholder Services Survey

Qualitative items

This final section includes three qualitative items.
EDMODO is a social media platform that was used in this project to capture parent and playgroup development consultant’s engagement around children’s play based learning in community playgroups. The next three questions include screenshots from EDMODO.

17. When you look at the following two screenshots what do you notice about the benefits of localised playgroup access for families and children?
18. When you look at the following three screenshots describe what you see that reflects what your organisation values as outcomes for children and families in your local community.
Community playgroups Connecting rural families locally pilot

Screenshot 1 Question 18

Parent 1 to Playgroup families

Child: absolutely loves having a book read to her and this is no different at playgroup. She loves interacting with the person telling the story and I often have to remind her to stay sitting as she usually gravitates towards the book.

Parent 1: a day ago

POC: It's wonderful how engaged our is in the story time session. I wonder if you've ever seen before copying their reading to others in the style that she's seen at Playgroup?

Parent 2: a day ago

She reads to her dolls and to her brother and herself all the time, but we also do a lot of reading at home!

POC: 9 hours ago

You are helping her develop a love of reading that will follow her all her life!

Screenshot 2 Question 18

Parent 1 to Playgroup families

Child 2: was very interested in ANZAC Day this year. It appears this interest was stimulated by the ANZAC activities we completed at playgroup and then again at kindergarten. We attended the ceremony this morning and he was actively involved waving his flag and clapping his hands. He asked a lot of questions about some of the traditions he witnessed and then I noticed he was replicating some of the things when we went for a play at the park afterwards: marching, playing an imaginary 'trumpet', and building a fort.

Parent 1: Apr 25, 2016

POC: Apr 28, 2016

Love the photo! I noticed that was so interested in the day and was keen to learn about the traditions. It sounds like the playgroup had a great time exploring this with the children.

Parent 1: Apr 30, 2016

POC: Playgroup is so valuable how it introduces and reinforces these different traditions and values!
19. When you look at the following four screenshots what do you think about the benefits of continued participation in playgroups by families and children?
Community playgroups Connecting rural families locally pilot

Screenshot 1 - Question 19

User C9 has a very good imagination and can have very long and very detailed conversations on her toy phones. Most of the time she calls her best friends, but today she was calling her Grandma.

Likes (2) • 2 Replies • Share • Follow

By PDC on Apr 27, 2016

I love to see and hear these conversations that children have over the phone, they are so expressive even if their language is still developing, the hand gestures and body movements and different volumes they use when have their imagined conversations are wonderful.

Screenshot 2 - Question 19

User C9 was busy with the playdoh. He constructed a birds nest with little eggs in it. He then proceeded to hatch the eggs and make little birds. It was quite interesting to watch as while we have discussed what is in an egg, he has never actually role played it before.

Like (1) • 1 Reply • Share • Follow

By PDC a day ago
20. Thank you for your participation in this survey.
If you would like to make any further comments please add these in the text box below.
Appendix Eight

Results of service type survey

Question 1: Information pertaining to Question 1 has been removed to protect anonymity of service type participants.

Question 2: What is the primary role of your organisation?

![Bar chart showing the primary role of the organisation.](chart1)

Question 3: What is your role in this organisation?

![Bar chart showing the role in the organisation.](chart2)
Question 4: Where is your organisation located?

![Bar Chart: Where is your organisation located?]

Central Highlands

Gippsland

Grampians

Loddon Mallee

Wimmera

Question 5: This organisation believes that participation in playgroup benefits families and children.

![Bar Chart: This organisation believes that participation in playgroup benefits families and children]

Agree

Strongly Agree
Question 6: This organisation has a strategic approach to the promotion of playgroups to local families and children.

This organisation has a strategic approach to the promotion of playgroups to local families & children

- not sure
- agree
- strongly agree
Question 7: Identify in order of priority (1-12) the strategies this organisation uses to promote playgroups to families and children.

Answered: 10  Skipped: 0

- Predominantly face to face...
- Email and/or phone
- Incidental meetings and...
- Meetings by invitation...
- Through a professional...
- Connecting with playgro...
- Knowledge building abo...
- Displaying a sensitivity...
- Talking about playgroups a..
- Ensuring conversation...
- Actively advocating f...
- Other

Community playgroups Connecting rural families locally pilot
Question 8: If your organisation uses other strategies to promote playgroups to families and children, please describe these strategies.

![Other strategies used to promote playgroup to families and children](chart)

Question 9: This organisation believes that participation in playgroup benefits families and children and should be promoted across local family and children’s services.

![Participation in playgroup benefits families and children and should be promoted across local family and children’s services](chart)
Question 10: This organisation has a strategic approach to promoting playgroups to families and children across local family and children’s services.

This organisation has a strategic approach in promoting playgroups to family and children across local family and children's services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>strongly agree</th>
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<td>not sure</td>
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</table>

Question 11: This organisation deploys a variety of strategies to promote playgroups to families and children across local family and children’s services.

This organisation deploys a variety of strategies to promote playgroups to families and children across local family and children’s services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>strongly agree</th>
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<td>8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Question 12: Identify in order of priority the strategies this organisation uses to promote playgroups for families and children across local family and children’s services.

**Q12 Identify in order of priority the strategies this organisation uses to promote playgroups for families and children across local family and children’s services (E.g. Maternal and Child Health Services, Library Services, Department of Education and Training, Family Services).**

Answered: 13  Skipped: 3
Question 13: If your organisation uses other strategies to promote playgroups for families and children across local family and children’s services.

**Other strategies used to promote playgroups for families and children across local family and children’s services**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<td>Other contact points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fliers</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newsletter</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special events</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Library</td>
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<td>Expo</td>
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</table>

Question 14: This organisation has drawn on the resources of a Playgroup Development Consultant.

**This organisation has drawn on the resources of a Playgroup Development Consultant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
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</table>
Question 15: Playgroup Development Consultants promote the availability of local playgroups amongst the community.

Question 16: Playgroup Development Consultants connect community playgroups across local family and children’s services.
Question 17: When you look at the following two screenshots what do you notice about the benefits of localised playgroup access for families and children?
The benefits of localised playgroup access for families and children

- **Education**: 44.44%
- **Sharing Information**: 27.78%
- **Engagement/Connectedness**: 27.78%

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Community playgroups Connecting rural families locally pilot
Question 18: When you look at the following three screenshots describe what you see that reflects what your organisation values as outcomes for children and families in your local community.
Question 19: When you look at the following four screenshots what do you think about the benefits of continued participation in playgroups by families and children?

- Parent 5: "Child 5 has a very good imagination and can have very long and very detailed conversations on her toy phones. Most of the time she calls her best friends, but today she was calling her Grandma."

- Parent 6: "Apr 27, 2016
  Child 6 often calls from our place on her mobile :)

- PDC: "9 hours ago
  I love to see and hear these conversations that children have over the phone, they are so expressive even if their language is still developing, the hand gestures and body movements and different volumes they use when have their imagined conversations are wonderful.

- Parent 7: "This morning at playgroup, Child 7 was busy with the playdoh. He constructed a birds nest with little eggs in it. He then proceeded to hatch the eggs and make little birds. It was quite interesting to watch as while we have discussed what is in an egg, he has never actually role played it before."

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a day ago
I took two of my boys to playgroup today, which is always a bit tricky as who is 5 next week, does not enjoy being around so many people.

The boys did enjoy playing play dough and eating fruit [Child 10] likes to use the tongs to serve himself. The boys made a tower together out of the big blocks. [Child 10] wanted to play with a toy car with me in a quiet corner and [Child 11] happily joined in. [Child 11] really liked the activity of threading the Cheerios on to the pip-cleaners. It was lovely to watch him develop his fine motor skills.

Show 3 more attachments...

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[Parent 11] to [Playgroup families]

[Child 11] loved threading the Cheerios onto the pipe cleaners at playgroup today. It was definitely a great activity for developing her fine motor skills and discovering a new found love for Cheerios!! The bracelet she made lasted all of 2mins in the back of the car before it was eaten!
What do you think about the benefits of continued participation in playgroups by families and children?