



Playgroups

Contributing to the Victorian Community

Playgroup Victoria Annual Report 2011–2012



2011–2012



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Playgroups are platforms for...

**Support, Learning, Community Building, Parenting,
Delivering Services, Connecting, Fun...**



Playgroup Victoria

Playgroup Victoria is a membership association with 25,000 family and playgroup members across the state. 40,000 children a week are growing and learning through playgroups in Victoria. Playgroups are part of a child's early learning and development continuum from birth to kindergarten. They provide platforms for children and parents to learn and grow together especially in the first three years. Playgroups come in many shapes. They can be Community Playgroups

run by parents in their local communities, Supported playgroups or Intensive playgroups which are run by agencies for children and parents who experience various levels of vulnerability or disadvantage.

Playgroup Victoria represents all its members across the three types of playgroups by providing information, resources, training and support to ensure playgroups remain vital and grow within Victorian communities.



Message from the Chair



The Playgroup Victoria Board contributes to the Victorian community by ensuring Playgroup Victoria remains a well governed membership association responsive to the changing nature and needs of its members. In the past year this has been demonstrated by the leadership the Board has taken in the

Membership Review which will significantly improve our services and support of members for at least the next decade.

The Board has also strengthened its governance for members through implementing the Board Committees, *Risk and Audit* and *Strategy and Policy*, which focuses the Board work on our future. The strength of our governance is critical to us being seen as a go to organisation for investment from corporate and other partners and the Board has worked hard on this. Without this, government would not be talking with us about the future development of playgroups in this state. A highlight of the year was our engagement with Minister Lovell on the continuation of SPPI funding which funds supported playgroups

for vulnerable Victorian families. It was a delight to welcome Minister Lovell to our successful Laying the Foundations conference in May 2012 which showcased the depth and talent within playgroups in this state.

The strategic plan priority of powerful pivotal leadership is exemplified in the Board's work in 2011–2012. Without this leadership playgroups in the community no matter what flavour they are – community or supported – could not be strengthened and developed in Victoria. That is a powerful contribution to the Victorian community! I thank my fellow Board members who give of their time and passion for playgroups.

Karen Harvey-Collings
Chair



Playgroups Connecting Communities

Community Playgroups connect families in their local area. Whether children and parents live in growing urban areas or country towns Playgroup Victoria continues to hear their stories of connection and support.

In 2011–2012 there were over 1,200 community playgroups being run by parents for parents across Victoria. These playgroups held over 2,500 individual sessions of playgroup each week. While every family in a playgroup contributes to the group, it is often those who take on leadership roles such as playgroup committee members and play leaders who need support to help their playgroup run smoothly. Playgroup Victoria recognises the many volunteer hours these leaders give and are developing improved membership packages for release in 2013 to better support them.

Playgroup is a vital training ground for parents who later become involved in their kindergarten, school and local sporting club committees.

Community Playgroups provide environments within which children learn and grow with their parents. Playgroup Victoria hears many accounts of young children meeting and forming relationships in playgroup which are sustained through their kindergarten and then school.

These children experience solid and stable relationships from birth within a safe and supportive community. What a start for children!

Playgroup Victoria recognises the achievements of playgroups through Playgroup of the Month awards which started in 2011. Our May 2012 Playgroup of the Month was Warracknabeal and this is their story...

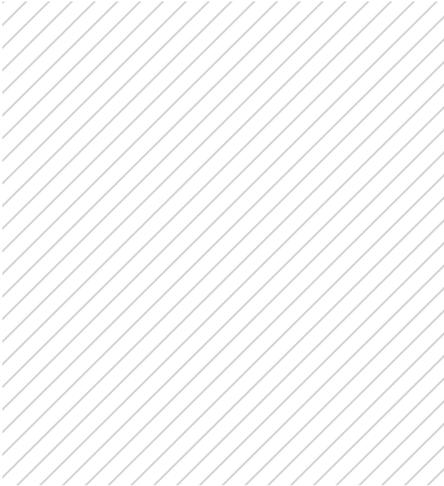
Warracknabeal Playgroup is the only playgroup in town servicing a population of 2,500 and runs in a room under the grandstand at Anzac Park Tuesday to Friday. Members of the playgroup are free to stay as long as they like.

“I’ve made so many friends by being part of this playgroup. When I first arrived from Gippsland six years ago I knew no one,” coordinator Kirsten Zwar said. “It’s a great place to take the load off and catch up with other parents.”

The town of Warracknabeal also shared in the May award for its community spirit and connection. When a new family arrived and was noticed in the local shops with their small children, they were stopped by 16 different local people and told about the playgroup. How more connected can that be?

“I’ve made so many friends by being part of this playgroup. When I first arrived from Gippsland six years ago I knew no one... It’s a great place to take the load off and catch up with other parents.”

Kirsten Zwar, coordinator of Warracknabeal Playgroup



Playgroups Supporting Parents

Playgroups support parents in many different ways. In community playgroups they support parents through friendships, connection to local support services and connection to community. Supported playgroups which employ a paid professional facilitator support families who have a range of complex vulnerabilities or who have children with disabilities. These playgroups provide the platforms for focussing upon child development issues, offering young children environments which assist their development, model parenting practices and assist parents with the things that are impacting upon their parenting such as mental health issues and substance use issues.

Supporting Mums

Many women have talked with Playgroup Victoria about the support playgroups provided to them as they dealt with their post natal depression. A young mum in a regional area was telling our CEO that her family had moved from the city and without her community playgroup she would not have survived the post natal depression she experienced with the birth of her children. Coming along to playgroup and being confident that others would understand her significantly contributed to her recovery. The friendships she made in playgroup

ensured her support in a new community was there at all times.

In 2011 Playgroup Victoria developed a four tiered training framework which acknowledges the differing needs of its members. In 2013, members will be able to access a range of training options to suit their needs from modules that are relevant to the running of community and supported playgroups, to specialised facilitator training with a focus on supporting families. This specialised training will be provided through partner organisations such as PANDA and agencies dealing with mental health, alcohol and other drug issues and family violence. This training will enable leaders in playgroups to continue to provide high quality support for the many issues children and parents experience.

Supporting Dads

Many men are now attending playgroups with their children and benefitting from the relationships they build there. In the past year Playgroup Victoria has assisted a number of Dads Playgroups to develop in parks, community centres, men's sheds and other spaces. We have supported Dads playgroups in Torquay, Bendigo, Glen Waverley, Kennington, Thornbury, Somerville and Narre Warren South.

For working dads some playgroups are held on weekends. Dad's playgroups offer men an opportunity to find other dads within their local community and discuss issues in a non-threatening and non-judgemental environment. They importantly offer dads the capacity to simply be great dads for their children.

Many Dads playgroups have been born out of existing community playgroups with Saturday morning sessions designed for fathers of children who attend the weekly playgroup. In other cases playgroups have formed specifically for stay at home fathers who feel more comfortable attending playgroups with other dads.

'Mark' is a Dad who attends a regular playgroup session with his son each week and while the playgroup has a community hall as their home, they regularly visit the local park, coffee shop and play centre. This creates something new for the children and for the Dad's a chance to talk with other Dad's while engaging in play and activities with their children. "We love going to the park and letting the kids run free and explore the outdoors while we help them on the playground and can talk openly about our own parenting skills and failures at times with other blokes who are going through the same thing."



Playgroups

Bridging the Generations

Many grandparents have the care of their grandchildren whether that be during the week whilst their children work or as kinship carers where they have children permanently. Many grandparents who are in aged care facilities can also experience isolation from their families and grandchildren or just miss the excitement of little children having fun. Playgroup Victoria supports a range of playgroups for grandparents, community playgroups such as the St Peters Barn Playgroup, playgroups in aged care facilities and supported playgroups for grandparents.

Moving across the road from a hall to Bapcare Westhaven Community aged care facility paid unexpected dividends for a Footscray playgroup. Now as well as having a more comfortable meeting place, the playgroup is making connections with the area's older residents.

They initially thought the move would give them the chance to spend time with residents unable to get out and about. "But the reality is, we receive just as much care from the residents who greet us joyfully each week," playgroup coordinator Cathie Staunton said.

Val Meadows, 84, is a resident at the facility and says the playgroup fills a big gap in her life.

"I've got great grandchildren and never see them," she said. "I miss them so much. At the playgroup there's a little

boy called Ollie and he calls me Nan, God love him.

"It takes you back to when your kids were little.

"There are three other residents who come to playgroup. Andrew comes up – he talks the leg off an iron pot. Jean likes to come for about an hour. Hilda loves the children. But more could join in. A lot of them see the kids and mums walking past but they're a bit hesitant to push themselves to be part of it. Hopefully when they hear more about how good it is they will."

Supporting Grandparents

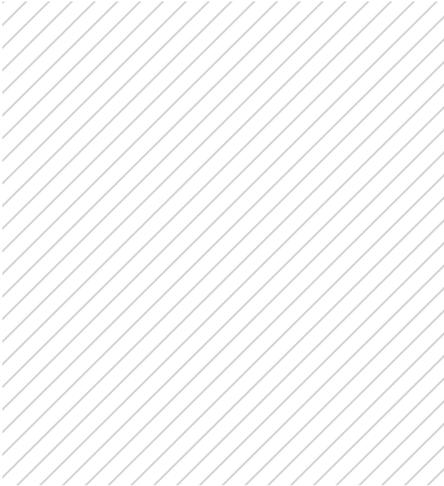
Playgroup Victoria has supported a number of grandparent playgroups and continues to promote the development of these playgroups with Grandparents Victoria.

St Peters Barn Playgroup in Mornington started a session especially for grandparents after noticing the increasing number of grandparents walking around the local shopping centre with their grandchildren. Five grandparents currently attend with their seven grandchildren – two are cousins. All are caring for the children of their daughters one or two days a week.

One grandma commented about the benefits her grandson gets from attending playgroup. "It's good for him, a nice place to go and it lasts for just about the right amount of time. At age three, he's boisterous and being in the house is not enough for him. Going to playgroup now has become part of our routine. It's somewhere he can go to play with other children."

Grandmas in the group noted that: "No one knew each other before we came to the playgroup. We're all very different and come from different backgrounds. But we've all got daughters and it's their children we're all bringing to playgroup.

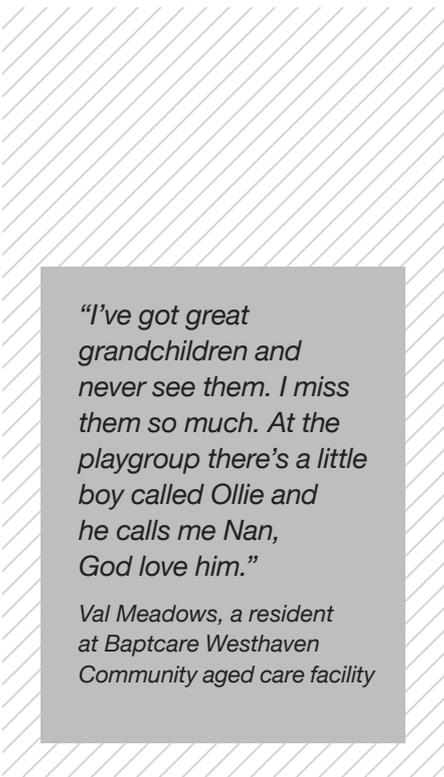
"I'm fairly new to Mornington so coming to the playgroup has been a good way for me to get to know other people. We're all in the same boat. And I'm sure there are loads



Playgroups Supporting Aboriginal Families

of people like me out there looking after their grandchildren.

“The first couple of weeks (at playgroup) were a bit awkward but now that I’ve got to know the other grandmothers more I do look forward to going along. We look out for each others grandchildren but each of us is responsible for our own grandchild.”



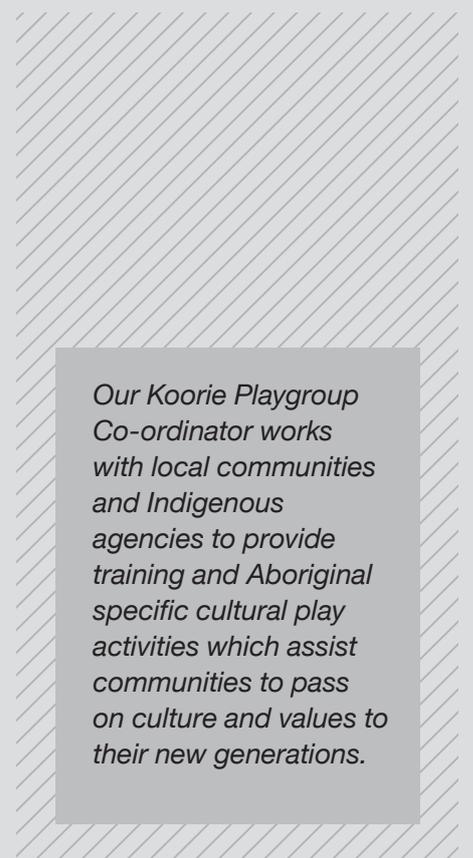
“I’ve got great grandchildren and never see them. I miss them so much. At the playgroup there’s a little boy called Ollie and he calls me Nan, God love him.”

Val Meadows, a resident at Baptcare Westhaven Community aged care facility

Playgroup Victoria has had a Koorie Playgroup program operating for the past few years which has provided support and training to Indigenous playgroups across the state.

In the past year our Koorie Playgroup Co-ordinator has visited communities across the state conducting 12 events to showcase playgroup activities and resources. The Co-ordinator has worked with local communities and Indigenous agencies to provide training and Aboriginal specific cultural play activities which assist communities to pass on culture and values to their new generations. A Playgroup DVD has been produced with supporting posters and resources which we look forward to distributing in 2013. Koorie Playgroup networks now meet regularly to co-ordinate their work. Playgroup Victoria has been central in resourcing these networks.

Playgroup Victoria also works with many Aboriginal agencies to support their work with children in the early years and is committed to supporting Aboriginal controlled organisations to deliver services to their communities.



Our Koorie Playgroup Co-ordinator works with local communities and Indigenous agencies to provide training and Aboriginal specific cultural play activities which assist communities to pass on culture and values to their new generations.



Playgroups

Supporting Children and Parents Experiencing the Impact of Disability

Families and children can feel safe in a PlayConnect playgroup

"I wish I'd known about the program much earlier... I feel really comfortable here and you are very accepting of me and my son... Now I know that we have got a place where I feel that we belong".

Playgroup Victoria manages two programs which support children with autism, PlayConnect and My Time which supports parents of children with a disability. Playgroup Victoria delivers these services directly through running many of the supported playgroups but also funds other agencies within the disability and welfare sector to provide these services.



A PlayConnect mum has said of the playgroup:

“this group is the best thing that has happened to me this year-better than therapy. It is the only place I go where I feel I am understood, and where I can talk about my daughter, and my family without feeling judged. I have learnt so much from the staff and other families. I wish I could keep attending”

Unfortunately the PlayConnect playgroups operate for a maximum of two years only and many parents require more ongoing support. Playgroup Victoria continues to raise this issue with government.

Families and children can feel safe in a PlayConnect playgroup

“I wish I’d known about the program much earlier. I am really happy to have

talked to you. I feel really comfortable here and you are very accepting of me and my son. I am really embarrassed to take him anywhere else because people looked at us like we are different. Now I know that we have got a place where I feel that we belong”.



Playgroups Supporting Vulnerable Families

Playgroup Victoria runs two programs which provide support to vulnerable children and their parents, The Intensive Supported Playgroup (ISP) program in Dandenong and the Supported Playgroup Program (SPG) which provides funding to agencies across Victoria to undertake supported playgroups. Playgroup Victoria directly provides the ISP and some SPG supported playgroups itself.

The ISP program is provided from five sites across the Dandenong LGA:

- **Queen Elizabeth Centre Playgroup** – for families experiencing difficulties with their newborns and young children
- **McFees Road Maternal & Child Health Playgroup** – for many Culturally And Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Families and refugee families
- **Dandenong Plaza Playgroup** – for families who find it difficult

to attend more organised groups. These families are often the most vulnerable families in the community who are transient or have had poor experiences with services

- **Shawlands Caravan Park Playgroup** – for many homeless families who are forced to live in a caravan park
- **Koorie Playgroup** – provided for families attending the Dandenong and District Aboriginal Co-operative's services and Aboriginal families living in Dandenong LGA.

Our Supported Playgroup program funds a range of playgroups for families who experience a lower level of vulnerability and for whom a little support means they can transition to attend their local community playgroups. This program funds playgroups to 12 months only. 14 playgroups were funded in 2011–2012.

“This is a great playgroup; I’m always made to feel welcome here and I’ve made new friends too.”

An ISP playgroup parent.



2011–2012 Snapshot



Playgroup Victoria: Promoting Playgroups in Communities Across Victoria

Playgroup Victoria has a responsibility not only to support its 26,000 member families who are attending playgroups but to promote the benefits of participation in playgroups to new parents or parents who have not yet tuned in to playgroup. The membership review conducted in 2011 showed us that playgroups wanted assistance to promote their own playgroups in their own communities. Playgroup Victoria developed the **I Love Playgroup** campaign in response. The Honourable Wendy Lovell, Minister for Housing and Minister for Children and Early Childhood launched the campaign at the Playgroup Victoria Conference in May 2012. In 2013 this campaign will be extended to a three tiered campaign:

1. What is Playgroup – to speak to parents who do not understand playgroup.

2. Children Learn and Grow through playgroup – to demonstrate why playgroup is good for children.

3. I love Playgroup – to reward and maintain the enthusiasm of those who have got the message of playgroup.

Playgroup Victoria is also delivering its services to regional Victoria through its campaign **Playgroup Victoria is Coming To...** This campaign takes our services out into regional areas for one week to provide workshops, event days, consultations and resources to our members. In 2012 we commenced this strategy in Warrnambool and will roll it out to Shepparton in September 2012 and then across other regions in

2013. We use the Fun4Kids Event in Warrnambool to focus our service provision. Fun4Kids is the largest children's festival in Australia and Playgroup Victoria has its own play pavilion on site for the entire festival. Over 25,000 parents and children attend over an eight day period and the local TAFE Child Care Studies students design and staff the pavilion with enriching activities for all.

During National Playgroup Week Playgroup Victoria took a Roadshow into regions to assist playgroups to promote their benefits within the community. 2,200 people attended our ALDI sponsored 'Roadshow' from Horsham to Echuca, Geelong and Melton.



Playgroup Victoria: Supporting Playgroup’s Leadership Across Victoria



Playgroup Victoria provides a range of training programs and in 2012 has introduced Masterclasses, the first being **Conceptualising the Design and Practice of Playgroups**. These Masterclasses are an opportunity for 10 leaders to hear evidence based content on a range of issues related to playgroup. Two will be held each year. The Membership Review held in 2012 will lead to several strategies being implemented in 2012–2013 including:

- Policy and Research briefs for professional and agency members
- August Showcase for key decision makers in government departments

outlining the contribution playgroups can make to their policy outcomes

- Seminar Series for playgroup leaders
- Regional Platforms – bringing workshops, seminars and resources to regional areas
- Marketing material for community playgroups so they can promote attendance in their own communities
- Media coverage in local newspapers which promote local playgroups to their communities
- Induction programs for new Committee Members and those responsible for organising weekly activities.

Laying the Foundations Conference 2012

Playgroup Victoria provides a range of support for leaders within community and supported playgroups. Our headline support is our annual Conference Playgroups – Laying the Foundations which is held every May. The 2012 Conference attracted over 200 leaders from across the state who benefitted from hearing best practice and emerging practice within playgroups.

89%

of delegates agreed the conference provided new and useful information with opportunities for interaction with other playgroupers

95%

of delegates rated the presentations to be of high quality

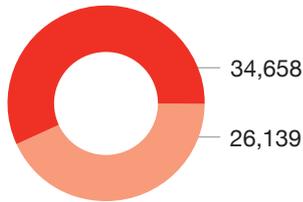
92.3%

of delegates would recommend this conference to their colleagues

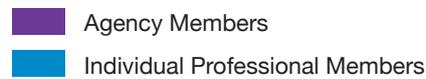
What Playgroup Victoria Did in 2011–2012

Our Members

Community Playgroup Members



Agency and Professional Members



300

new member playgroups started this year with the help of PV Member Consultants

Playgroups funded and delivered by Playgroup Victoria

Playgroup Victoria delivers a range of supported playgroups for children with disabilities, vulnerable children and their families through four programs – 1. PlayConnect Playgroups, 2. Supported Playgroup Program, 3. My Time and 4. Intensive Supported Playgroup Program – Dandenong.

In addition Playgroup Victoria funds a number of agencies in the community to run supported playgroups within each of these programs.

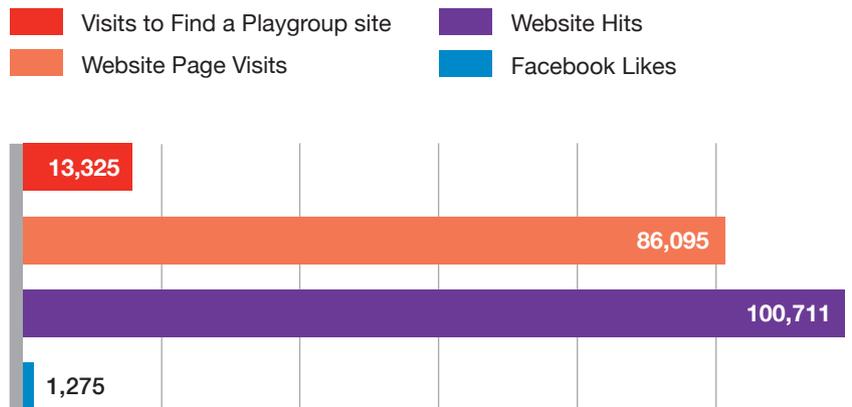
	Playgroups run by PV	Children	Families	Agencies Funded
1. PlayConnect Playgroups	14	271	354	12
2. Supported Playgroup Program	6	204	155	8
3. My Time	9	4,522	n/a	23
4. Intensive Supported Playgroup Program – Dandenong	5	452	307	n/a

13,325

visits to the Find a Playgroup section on our website during the year indicates that families are keenly interested in finding out about playgroups in their community

Communication with Members

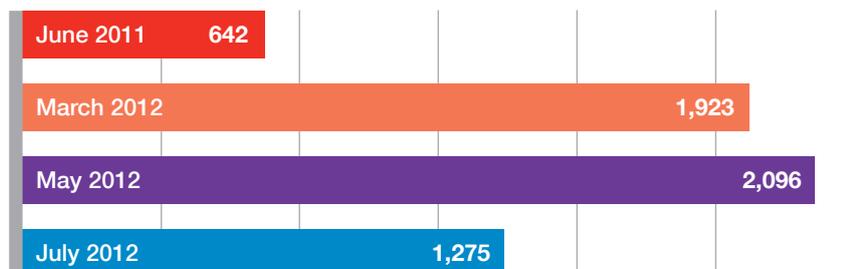
Playgroup Victoria has diversified its communication with our members in the past year using social media and information technology to increase our accessibility. Our Find a Playgroup site on the web remains the most popular with 13,325 visits during the year indicating that families are keenly interested in finding out about playgroups in their community.



Use of Social Media

Playgroup Victoria was recognised in the June 2012 MICENet Australia marketing industry publication for its development of communication with members through social media. We have seen a 100% growth in member communication using Facebook with key peaks after our first enewsletter of the year in March and our highly successful conference in May. Members are using social media to connect with each other and share their playgroup expertise and experiences. We hope to expand this in 2013 with PVTV.

Facebook Usage



100%

growth in member communication using Facebook with key peaks after our first enewsletter of the year in March and our highly successful conference in May

What Playgroup Victoria Did in 2011–2012 *continued*

Events

Playgroup Victoria held 16 events during the year. 69% of these events were for the benefit of Playgroup Victoria members, 19% were to promote the concept of playgroups within the community and 13% were fundraising events one of which directly fundraises for community playgroup members.

Membership

Melbourne Aquarium
Play Day

Playgroup Professionals
Forum

Heide Museum of
Modern Art Play Day

Healesville Sanctuary
Play Day

Romp & Stomp
Fun Day for Children

ALDI Roadshow
(National Playgroup Week)



Melbourne Zoo
Play Day

Werribee Zoo
Playgroup Day

Warrnambool
Playgroup Day

Kidsfest
Shepparton

Laying the Foundations
conference

“Just want to thank you again for a wonderful event. Working together as a team on this project was an enjoyable experience as you were very organised. On the day your team was very efficient with set up and pack down making wonderful use of the space provided.” Werribee Open Range Zoo

Promotional

Pregnancy, Babies
& Children’s Expo

IGA Rhymes Kids
Music Festival

Moomba



Fundraising



Michael Carr-Gregg

Raffle



How Well Did Playgroup Victoria Deliver its Services in 2011–2012?

What Our Members Said

In 2011 Playgroup Victoria undertook an extensive Membership Review with the new CEO talking with members across the state about how Playgroup Victoria could better support them. Our members identified our areas for improvement as:

- Communication especially in regional areas
- More integrated support for them to develop and deliver their playgroups
- More targeted evidence based professional support for agencies delivering supported playgroups.

A new Membership strategy is being introduced in 2013 to address these member recommendations. Playgroup Victoria also surveys its members annually to evaluate its performance.

Advocacy

In 2011 Playgroup Victoria led an advocacy campaign to maintain state

Throughout the year our members have said



I particularly wanted to say how impressed I was with the information kit provided by you. The information is easy to understand and includes lots of wonderful resources...



67%

of parents say playgroups give their children opportunity for physical activity

“The recent ‘Laying the Foundations’ Playgroup conference was just fantastic! Great opportunity to network with other playgroupers and make new friends, as well as hearing presentations by successful and emerging playgroups! Michael Carr-Gregg was inspiring in his delivery of ‘The Importance of Play’; inspiring because it makes you realise just what an important role Playgroups have in the community and what an invaluable organisation Playgroup Victoria is in their role in building more playgroups in the community.”



I just wanted to say a HUGE well done for today’s VEYLDF Playgroup Training at Whittlesea. It was well received, valid, non-threatening, respectful and so importantly hands on...



96%

of parents agreed that attending playgroup has provided them with a sense of friendship, community and/or connectedness



Would just like to thank all for the wonderful day that was organized. (Melbourne Zoo Visit) My son was so excited and still talks about this lovely day we had!



37%

of parents learnt about good businesses in their community through playgroup

Our Team in 2011–2012

Playgroup Victoria Board of Directors for 2011–2012

Chair Karen Harvey-Collings

Deputy Chair Kerry-Anne Hoad (*resigned June 2012*)

Secretary Bronwyn Clarke

Treasurer Rebecca Middleton

Director Rachel Murphy

Director Christine Chew

Director Katherine Cape

Director Rachel Flottman

Director Vacant

Board Committees

Risk and Audit Chair Rebecca Middleton

Nominations Chair Bronwyn Clarke

Performance and Remuneration Chair Karen Harvey-Collings

Strategy and Policy Chair Rachel Flottman

Playgroup Victoria Management Team

EXECUTIVE

Chief Executive Officer Vivienne Cunningham-Smith

General Manager Corporate Operations Jason Doherty

General Manager Practice and Research Janine Regan

CORPORATE OPERATIONS TEAM

Manager Corporate Services Carolyn Eley

Manager Events Jane Bezzina

Manager Training Deb Sedlarevic

Manager Communications Denise Lucey

Manager Member Consultants Nancy-Lee Merzel

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT TEAM

Manager SPPI Cath Healy

Manager PlayConnect/SPG Isabella Rosinsky

Manager My Time Genevieve O'Connor

Co-ordinator KPEP Sharon Hughes

Co-ordinator Bushfire Program Natasha Niemann

And the wonderful staff of Playgroup Victoria

government funding for supported playgroups that work with vulnerable families.

Our work with Minister Lovell was successful when we saw the Supported Playgroups and Parent Initiative (SPPI) refunded not only for one year but recurrently ensuring that the 29 LGA's across Victoria could continue to provide their services with confidence.

46%

of parents learnt about kindergarten, preschool and school through playgroup

95%

said their child's social skills benefit through interaction with other children

"Would just like to thank all for the wonderful day that was organized. (Melbourne Zoo Visit) My son was so excited and still talks about this lovely day we had! In the bit of rain it all worked out well – starting the outing in the lovely white tent that was put up. Most interesting fur toys and activities that was nicely displayed inside. Wow, and touching the real snake – awesome experience! Thank you, to all the organizers!"



Playgroup Victoria

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Email General enquiries: pgvic@playgroup.org.au

www.playgroup.org.au

Thank you to the thousands of people who weekly provide leadership for playgroups and keep them vital in Victorian communities. Thanks to the 26,000 families who continue to support their local playgroups.

