



Playgroup Australia Limited

# Annual Report 2015



At the heart of the Playgroup movement for over 40 years

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*Playgroup Australia acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures; and to elders both past and present.*

# About Playgroup Australia

Playgroup Australia is a not-for-profit organisation that was established in 1984 as the national representative body for our members, the State and Territory Playgroup Organisations (STOs).

Playgroup has a long and credible history as being one of Australia's largest civil society movements. The playgroup movement has been providing and supporting playgroups for more than 40 years through volunteerism and the outreach work of each STO. STOs are the conduit for ensuring all young children, along with their parents or carers, can access quality playgroups nationwide.

Playgroup Australia plays a strong advocacy role in promoting the values, principles, positions and ethics of the playgroup movement, emphasising its critical role in civil society.

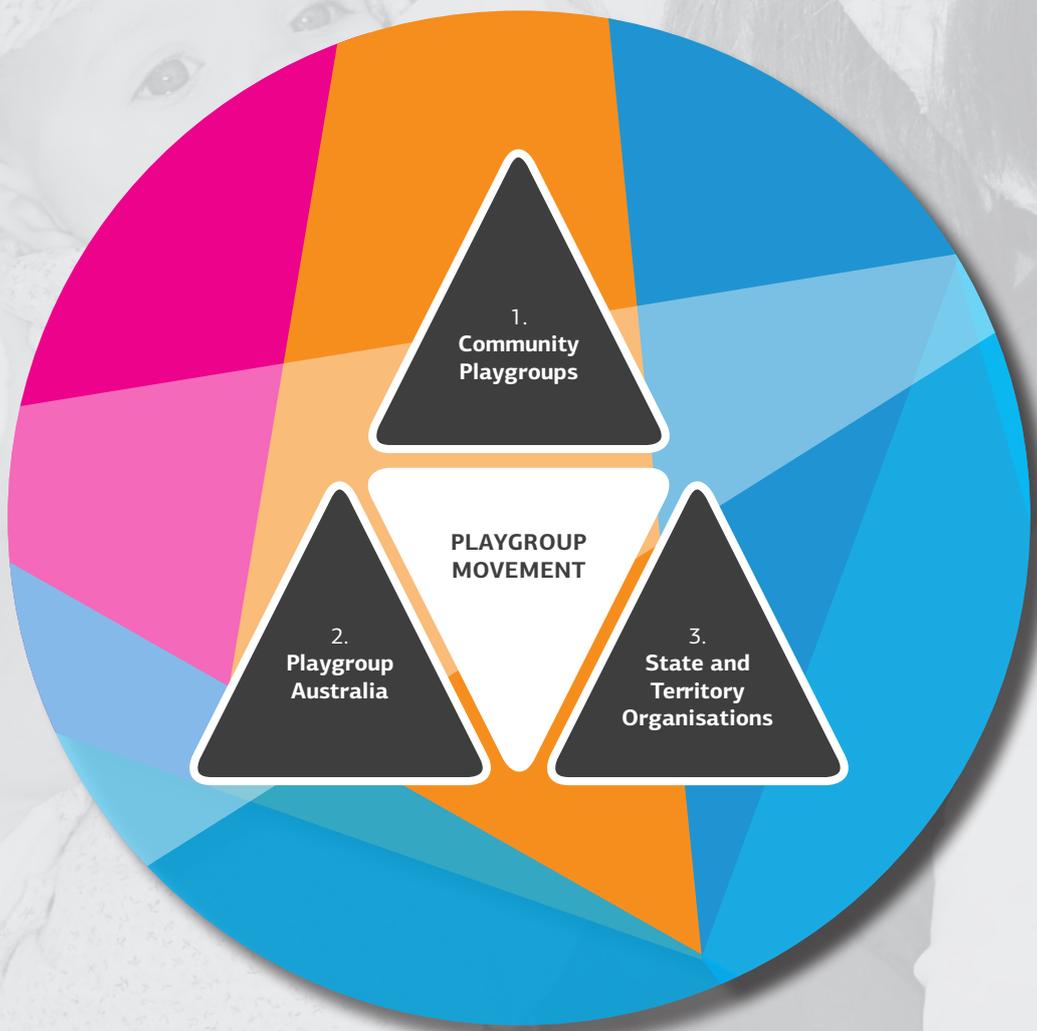
Playgroup Australia is an organisation that leads through its representative and advocacy work. We strive to be informed, articulate and forward thinking in identifying and responding to issues and matters relating to playgroups.

## What we do – a new way of working

Our environment is in a state of continuous change. We need to be agile and responsive to embrace these changes and ensure we continue to represent the interests of parents and carers of young children, and continue to sustain the playgroup movement for many years to come.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) heralded *A new way of working* last year, and as a recipient of DSS funding for parents and children, we are actively adapting to this new way of working – not only with DSS, but with all of our stakeholders and members.

To achieve our vision, we are taking a cohesive approach to strengthening the playgroup movement through our three core elements:



## Our future

We know playgroups are beneficial for children, families and communities. Our 40-plus-year history is embedded in the very fabric of Australia's family and community culture. We need to **remain an integral part in the wellbeing of children by building capacity in families and strengthening communities for years to come.**

Urban, regional and remote communities – along with organisations and government – are adapting to daily changes in technology and communication and we must too.

**Playgroup Australia needs to have a solid foundation of good governance, effective management and the strategic foresight to enable it to be agile and flexible, and ready to embrace these changes to ensure a sustainable future for PA, STOs and the playgroup movement.**

Together we are a strong federation that has the proven capacity and capability to address real threats and challenges to our future role in the lives of children, families and communities throughout Australia.

The strategies outlined in our strategic framework, coupled with the PA and STO strategic and operational plans, will ensure our place as the **lead voice for playgroups** in Australia.

## Acknowledging our primary funder

Our immediate future is in the hands of government, primarily DSS, as we work together for sustainable outcomes for families and children.

We wish to acknowledge the crucial funding we receive from DSS to support the following activities and programs of work:

- **Community Playgroups** – funded until July 2020
- **PlayConnect** – funded until 30 June 2016
- **Better Start: Able to Play** – funded until 30 June 2016
- **One-off projects such as the Venues Project.**

# Our vision, mission and values

We are an organisation driven by our mission and values with a clear vision for a sustainable future.

<b>Mission</b>	<b>Vision</b>	<b>Values</b>
To nurture young children, support and connect families and build stronger communities through high quality playgroups Australia-wide.	All young children in Australia access playgroups, which support the wellbeing of families and strengthen communities.	The rights of children Reconciliation Community Inclusiveness Peer support

## Our primary goals

### **Goal 1. Representation**

Playgroup Australia is highly visible and respected as the lead voice for playgroups in Australia.

### **Goal 2. Organisational Excellence**

Playgroup Australia will support its member organisations to deliver the best possible services to children, families, carers and communities.

### **Goal 3. Governance and Funding**

Playgroup Australia remains a relevant, progressive and sustainable organisation with strategic foresight.



# Report from the Chair

Pam Cahir, Chair, Playgroup Australia

## Leveraging our strengths as a Federation

The fledging Federation that is Playgroup Australia and the state and territory playgroup organisations (STOs) provides a framework for a way of working that has the potential to generate unique advantages for the playgroup movement as a whole, and ultimately for the families, carers, children and communities that are the focus of its work.

As with any new organisation it will take time for the full strengths of the Federation to be realised. The process of moving from eight, independent organisations whose decisions to work together were made on a case by case basis, to a Federation which assumes some agreement about the role of the national organisation, is not straight forward.

Notwithstanding that significant challenges remain, real progress has been made this year toward a functioning Federation. For the first time Playgroup Australia, in collaboration with the STOs, made a submission on behalf of the movement as a whole. This is potentially transformative as it represented a changed relationship not only between the STOs and Playgroup Australia, but also between the Federation and the government. In addition, the working relationship forged between the STO CEOs and Playgroup Australia's CEO for this purpose evolved over the year into a powerhouse for thinking about and driving forward some of the reforms facing the Federation. I would like to acknowledge this work and thank each of the Federation CEOs for this commitment.

This year work has begun on the development of a single Playgroup Australia brand. If this effort is successful, a single brand will build a stronger public perception of the playgroup entity as a whole, while also providing a platform from which to generate sponsorship, further investment by government and other stakeholders and to achieve greater influence when dealing with government/s. Under a unified banner, we would have a unique potential for scale – to grow and enhance our offering based on our existing significant national footprint.

It is this important brand work which underwrites my optimism for the future of the Playgroup Federation.

## Living our values

The key to us going forward is a greater alignment with our values.

During the pressures of day-to-day operations, we must not lose sight of how our values underwrite everything we do. Let's not leave them behind us.

I want us to ask ourselves: Does our work address the rights of children? What are we doing to support reconciliation? How is our work strengthening our communities rather than undermining them? How can our online community support our work on the ground? How can we keep building on inclusion beyond supported playgroups? How are we supporting playgroups to build a sense of community and belonging and build their long-term capacity to strengthen their communities?

In many ways our values are invisible and yet they provide the framework for making judgements about the efficacy of our work.

## We Value

**Rights of children**—we support the UN convention of the rights of children with particular reference to the right of children to play and to live in an environment that is free from violence and the threat of violence and we acknowledge that principled, courageous and value-based leadership is essential to support the rights of children.

**Reconciliation**—we recognise the heritage and history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the need for action which advances reconciliation and justice for Indigenous Australians.

**Community**—we understand that a sense of community plays an important role in the development of children and families sense of connection, belonging and security and we value the strengths that individuals and families contribute to the wellbeing of their community.

**Inclusiveness**—we believe that diversity, including cultural and family diversity, contribute to a rich and vibrant society and so value and promote acceptance of diversity in our work with children and families.

**Peer support**—we believe that peer support is an integral part of the community playgroup experience allowing participants to share experience, learn from each other and feel connected.

## Thank you to the Board and staff

This Annual Report provides an opportunity for me to publicly thank the members of the Board for their commitment to Playgroup Australia and their hard work over the past 12 months. Our Board is diligent and committed, focused on strategy, and fully aware of the challenging environment facing Playgroup Australia. In particular, I want to thank Gillian Groom, Deputy Chair, and Michael O’Hehir, Treasurer, for their efforts during the year.

Leanne Gordon from WA stood down from the Board during the year. Notwithstanding this, I would like to take the opportunity to thank Leanne for her consistent and solid contribution to the work of the PA Board whilst she was a member.

Our CEO, Anne-Marie Mioche, has yet again performed exceptionally throughout the past 12 months. Anne-Marie brings an outstanding capacity for strategic thinking and planning. Her ability to plan for the future is outstanding. She brings to her work a unique blend of vision, learning, experience and instinct.

Sincere thanks also to the small team which is the Playgroup Australia staff – Derek, Susan and Genny. Their diligence and commitment to their work is outstanding.



# Message from the CEO

Anne-Marie Mioche, CEO, Playgroup Australia

This year will be remembered as a year of many challenges and equally great achievements.

First, I would like to personally acknowledge the tremendous support of the Playgroup Australia Board and national office staff, the collaboration and support of our member organisations – especially the CEO Group – who have worked diligently and passionately to help us achieve many of our successful outcomes this year, and the consultation and collaboration with DSS and other community partners. Without this collaboration and support, the Playgroup Federation would not be as strong as it is today.

## Visible and respected

At the start of the financial year we entered into a highly contestable, competitive open tender funding round with DSS. In conjunction with the STOs, we managed to construct a very strong tender for an integrated model for the delivery of playgroups, comprising Community Playgroups, Supported Playgroups and Peer Support. Despite being successful in our tender bid, we only achieved funding for community playgroups and we were defunded for supported playgroups. This was an exceptionally disappointing outcome and made our successful tender bittersweet as we faced another year of significant challenges to remain relevant, progressive and financially sustainable.

In our response to this Children and Parenting Support Funding Round, we priced the delivery of our integrated playgroup model at \$6M. The funding provided by DSS was

\$4.5M. This equates to \$22.50 per participant per year or less than 50 cents per week per participant. This is not a sustainable model, which has driven us to continue our advocacy work in making strong representations to the Minister (Hon Scott Morrison MP for the reporting period) and department heads to seek additional funding.

To kick this off, Playgroup Australia has commissioned an urgent business review and has been active in working with DSS to look at ways to provide these essential services with this level of funding. However, without the restoration of our supported playgroup funding, our ability to meet the needs of vulnerable families will be inadequate.

Playgroup Australia is a vital, relevant and progressive organisation:

- We are the only program in the DSS portfolio that has delivered \$160M worth of services for just \$4.3M (this is the program cost without volunteer contributions).
- We are the largest program in the DSS Children and Parenting Support portfolio in terms of clients. There are over 200,000 families involved in community playgroups in some capacity through approximately 8,000 weekly sessions of playgroup.
- Community playgroups exist in over 80 per cent of all Australian postcodes – in metropolitan, regional, rural and even remote areas.
- In the previous Family Support Program (FSP), we represented 44 per cent of families and 66 per cent of children for just four per cent of the funding pool.
- Only in Australia do parents and carers volunteer to organise, manage and fund their own community playgroups. Parents also 'own' the STOs through their membership structures.
- STOs support volunteers with online resources and training, telephone information, as well as insurance and complaints handling. In the past year we collectively answered close to 50,000 calls on our 1800 line and received 600,000 visitors to our respective websites.



In order to be the lead voice for playgroups in Australia, we have held fast to our strategic goals in collaborating strongly with our members and stakeholders, including submissions to government. We provided a submission to the senate enquiry on *The impact on service quality, efficiency and sustainability of recent Commonwealth Community Service tendering processes by the Department of Social Services (DSS)*. We were happy with the outcome of this – the senators were clearly interested in our experience and we got more than our fair share of air space.

We have maintained our visibility on the radar of senior bureaucrats and politicians wherever possible.

The work of the PA and STO CEO Group has had a profound effect on our future directions. There has been an unprecedented commitment of time and resources to working collaboratively together on matters of national importance such as the subcontracting of the DSS funding agreement to STOs, the national work activity plan for community playgroups, practice and outcomes frameworks, the national digital strategy and exploring common branding and streamlined approaches. As a result of this collaborative process, the CEO Group is strong enough to be able to drive much of the Playgroup Australia reform agenda.

We have held steadfast to our goal of building a strong evidence base that adds weight to our advocacy and representation for playgroups and supports the work we do. Despite our tight budget constraints, we still managed to continue work with the Olga Tennyson Centre for Autism Research at LaTrobe University in relation to pitching for continued PlayConnect funding. We were successful in retaining another 12 months of PlayConnect funding through to 30 June 2016. We will continue to campaign strongly for this funding to continue beyond 2016, despite proposed changes through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

We also commissioned research through Telethon Kids to analyse why families chose to attend or not attend playgroup, and identify membership and demographic trends to determine the relationship between playgroup reach and developmental vulnerability. Results of this work are expected later this year but it is a promising start to building a strong evidence base and to informing a national research agenda for Playgroup Australia and the STOs.

## Organisational Excellence

Playgroup Australia will support its member organisations to deliver the best possible services to children, families, carers and communities.

## Research and support

Organisational excellence is one of our primary goals and one that we have strongly focused on to ensure our members feel fully supported to deliver the best possible services to children, families, carers and communities.

We have achieved, or are on track to achieve, some significant outcomes in this area, most notably, our joint effort to address declining community playgroup membership. Some of the strategies we have adopted include research into development of a national digital strategy, an outreach social media platform and research partnerships to build our

evidence base. The common branding work coupled with a social media presence have great potential to attract additional (family) members, increase public profile and, importantly, additional sources of revenue.

For the first time, Playgroup Australia was able to produce a validated graphical representation to demonstrate the steady decline in community playgroups, the hardest hit areas, and a projected recovery including where this could take place.

Late last year we engaged a branding expert to workshop and advise on best practice value proposition, branding and key messaging. This work continues as we strive to attain a clear and consistent value proposition and raise brand awareness – all of which is critical in supporting our advocacy, representation and sustainability, especially in pursuit of additional funding.

Another project we embarked on in the past year was the Venues Project. We identified through our members that the cost and location of suitable playgroup venues was a major barrier to the sustainability of community playgroups. The Venues Project was, in part, funded by DSS and it provided valuable insights into volunteerism and some of the key challenges facing parent-led, parent-paid community playgroups. In turn, these insights further inform our strategic thinking to reduce barriers to accessibility and participation in playgroups.

## To the future

All in all it has been an incredible roller-coaster of a year, however, I believe we are all more strategically aware, agile and responsive to the contestable and competitive environment we operate in. We are better able to lead strongly through our representative work promoting values, principles, positions and ethics in advocating for playgroups, parents and young children.

Thank you one and all for your tremendous support and generosity of spirit, knowledge and time to ensure we continue to embrace our changing world so we remain a relevant, progressive and sustainable organisation, with strategic foresight for the longevity and benefit of playgroups across Australia.

## Our primary goals and strategic outcomes

### Representation

Playgroup Australia is highly visible and respected as the lead voice for playgroups in Australia.

Leadership informed, articulate and forward thinking

Promote Playgroup values, principles, positions and ethics

Build strategic and collaborative alliances

Utilises evidence and strength-based exercises

Develop strategic relationships to achieve goals

Recognises and strengthens key role of parents and carers in children's lives

Develop principles and standards that underpin best practice Playgroups

### Organisational Excellence

Playgroup Australia will support its member organisations to deliver the best possible services to children, families, carers and communities.

Operate as a united national federation

Support STOs to increase reach and participation in Playgroups

With STOs build capacity in parents/carers to deliver high quality Playgroups

Relationships with government including submissions

### Governance and Funding

Playgroup Australia remains a relevant, progressive and sustainable organisation with strategic foresight.

Independent Business Review to support our strategic direction

Accountable, financially sustainable and secure future

Secure national funding, revenue and sponsorship

High standards of governance management and planning

# Our Board



## **Pam Cahir**

Board Chair (STO linked)

Recognised as one of Australia's leading early childhood experts, Pam led Early Childhood Australia to become a world leader in early childhood information dissemination and advocacy. Pam's contribution leading this work over two decades is widely respected and acknowledged. Pam retired in 2012 and became Chair of Playgroup Australia that year.

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## **Gillian Groom**

Deputy Chair

*Former Consultant Occupational Therapist and Clinical Tutor at La Trope University, Melbourne.*

Extensive experience in governance and Board roles in a broad range of government, community and NFP organisations.

Graduated with a Bachelor of Laws from University of Tasmania in 2013 and admitted to the Bar in 2014. Currently practicing in commercial law firm Groom Kennedy, in Hobart.

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## **Michael O'Hehir**

Company Secretary

*BA (Accounting) CA*

With over 27 years' experience in public practice accounting firms, Michael is currently a Principal at RSM Bird Cameron Canberra. Michael is also the Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee for Playgroup Australia.

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## **Maxine McKew**

Director

*Vice Chancellor's Fellow (Melb)*

Maxine had a 30-year career in broadcast and print media before being elected as a federal Member of Parliament in Bennelong. Currently she is an advisor in relation to education for Social Ventures Australia.



### **Simon Bennett**

Director (STO linked)

*Masters of Business Admin | Bachelor of Psychology |  
Cert IV in Training and Assessment*

Simon has been a Board Director for Playgroup Australia since 2013, and Playgroup Queensland since 2010. He is also a member of the Finance and Audit Committee.

He has over 10 years' experience in recruitment and personnel consulting.

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### **Rebecca Middleton**

Director (STO linked)

*BAppSc | MCom | GAICD*

Qualifications and experience in business management, project management and safety HR systems, Rebecca is currently self-employed as a process improvement and systems implementation consultant.

Previously Rebecca was the director of a HR recruitment consultant company. Rebecca also has experience with other not-for-profit Boards and previously was the Risk and Audit Chair of Playgroup Victoria.

Rebecca works part time as the HR, Safety and Risk Manager for AgCAP Pty Ltd and as a process improvement and systems implementation consultant.

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### **Leanne Gordon**

Director (STO linked) Resigned June 2015

*Bcom(Hons)*

Leanne has over 20 years' experience in senior organisational human resource management roles, and qualifications in strategic management and HR.

For the past seven years, Leanne has been a director of her own boutique management consultant company. Leanne also has previous Board-level experience for advisory, industry and not-for-profits.

Leanne is a member of the Finance and Audit Committee of Playgroup Australia.

# Our members and the CEO Group

Playgroup Australia supports its member organisations (STOs) through collaboration to deliver the best possible services to children, families, carers and communities.

A vital and important part of our work is to drive cohesion within and between PA and the STOs to collectively build our capacity and capability. Over the past year we have tackled major initiatives and issues through the strength of the PA and STO CEO Group. This mechanism has enabled us to debate issues of national importance and also to work together on national initiatives that strengthen and sustain the playgroup movement.

It is important to acknowledge the collective work of the CEO Group in:

- developing, submitting and achieving DSS funding for community playgroups
- developing our quality practice and outcomes frameworks
- collaborating and assisting on research and evaluation work involving LaTrobe University, Telethon Kids and the Venues Project
- working cohesively and with strategic foresight on national initiatives such as the digital strategy, social platforms and branding
- working towards a national research agenda to help build a strong evidence base on the efficacy and social importance of playgroups.

## Our CEO Group

Playgroup Australia	Anne-Marie Mioche
Playgroup Victoria	Vivienne Cunningham Smith
Playgroup NSW	Karen Bevan
Playgroup WA	David Zarb
Playgroup Northern Territory	Susan Welfair
Playgroup South Australia	Carley Jones
Playgroup Tasmania	Karla Hogg (previously Debbie Smith until January 2015)
Playgroup ACT	Kirsten Cross
Playgroup Queensland	Ian Coombe (previously Leonie Wallwork until March 2015)

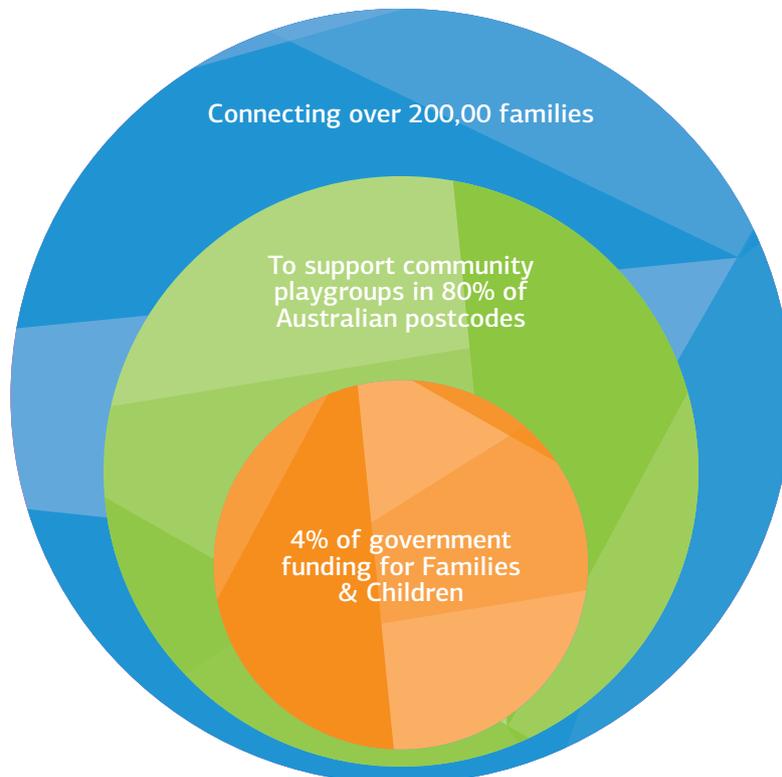
# The playgroup movement

Community playgroups have been operating across Australia for over 40 years and they are highly recognised for the social benefits they provide to parents and carers, and their young children.

The community playgroup is as uniquely Australian as Vegemite, Qantas and lamingtons. After the surf lifesaving movement, playgroup is the second largest civil society movement in Australia.

Community playgroups are, in the main, parent-led, parent-paid and community driven. The playgroup movement is supported by eight state and territory playgroup organisations that provide support, resources and a myriad of membership benefits to families across Australia.

This playgroup support infrastructure is partially funded by DSS, who contracts us as the national representative body for playgroups. Of the total pool of funding attributed to families and children through DSS, Playgroup Australia receives 4 per cent to help fund the STOs. This enables them to support more than 10,000 playgroup sessions and 200,000 families across Australia.



# Our programs and services



## Community playgroups

The Australian model of community playgroups has flourished for at least four decades, but there are concerns over its future viability.

Community playgroups gathered strength during the 1970s, a time of heightened interest in community participation and engagement.

Community strengthening and a vibrant civil society have re-emerged as important policy objectives in recent years. However, a range of social, economic and government changes, including changes in workforce participation, the expansion of early childhood education and care provision, and reform of the local government and not-for-profit sectors, have impacted on the playgroup movement as a whole, and more so in the organisation of community playgroups and the places where they meet (as observed in the Venues Project report).

Although the steady decline in community playgroup membership has continued over the past year, the intrinsic value of the playgroup model – including the importance of recognising parents as first teachers and learning through play – remains steadfast in the minds of families, communities and service providers across the nation.

Playgroup Australia collaborates closely with all STOs and their Boards with a common drive and purpose to sustain the community playgroup model for future generations and to continue to build capacity and strengthen families and communities across Australia.

PA and the STOs have invested heavily in terms of expertise, knowledge-sharing and collective strategic and tactical planning to forge a future that sees the continuation of the community playgroup model.

In conjunction with STOs, one of PA's key strategies over the past year has been the digital strategy. This encompasses adequate technology infrastructure and the development of a social platform that will ensure we keep connected with families and communities in the modern digital world.





**Since 2008, PlayConnect has supported more than 3,000 children and families in over 150 sites throughout Australia.**

*“My son gets so much out of it with learning routines, interacting with other kids his age with ASD (he now walks straight up to other kids and says hello), participating in mat time, snack time, pack up, etc. I am learning so much from this group. It has completely changed my whole outlook to the future and my son’s diagnosis.”*

## What is PlayConnect?

PlayConnect is an invaluable program of facilitated playgroups for families with young children who have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or who present with ASD-like characteristics.

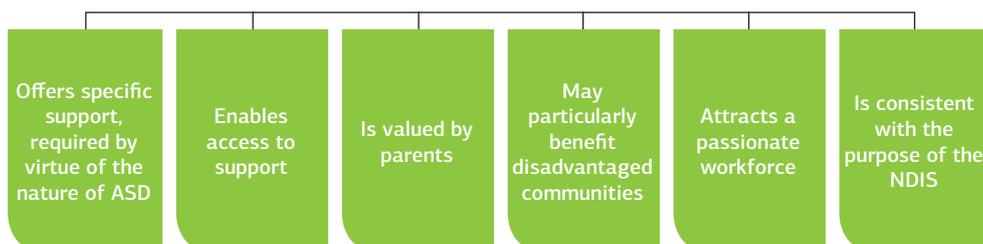
PlayConnect playgroups provide a safe, supportive and friendly environment for these young children to experience rewarding play activities and to learn through play, while the environment caters for the particular developmental needs of children with ASD.

## An independent evaluation

PA, with the support of DSS, commissioned La Trobe University to undertake an independent evaluation in 2014 to:

- document the strengths of the program
- identify areas with improvement potential
- assist DSS understand how well PlayConnect is meeting its objectives
- provide advice to Playgroup Australia as to possible directions under NDIS.

## Strengths of PlayConnect



## Results from the PlayConnect evaluation found:

- 10 of the 11 goals and objectives of the DSS funding agreement were met.
- In relation to the implementation goals, 6 of the 7 goals were met.
- Parents highly valued:
  - access to playgroups
  - interaction experiences with other children with ASD
  - support for parents.
- There was a high degree of parent satisfaction with PlayConnect – 85.7% of respondents agreed with the statements, 'All things considered, I think PlayConnect is a good service in my community' and 'I would recommend PlayConnect to others with young children with ASD'.
- Parents reported satisfaction with:
  - the quality of the program
  - the frequency and duration of sessions
  - being supported to build connections among others in the group
  - the facilitator providing a source of support.
- PlayConnect staff noted their focus is on parent support, with 84% of respondents strongly agreeing that their work was important for parents and families.



## DSS Better Start funding for Able to Play

Playgroup Australia and its STOs held a total of 45 Able to Play events across the country for the period 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015. This was 21 events more than the required 24 events under the deliverables for this period. Twenty-four of these events were in metropolitan areas and 21 in regional/remote areas.

During this period, over 75,000 mums, dads, grandparents, carers, children and babies attended open days, expos, festivals and fun days.

We are delighted that this vital funding has been extended for a further 12 months to 30 June 2016.

### Highlights from events

#### **Luna Park NSW – Have a Better Start at World's Biggest Playgroup Day**

Playgroup NSW had a stall to provide education about the Better Start Program as well as the benefits of playgroups and a craft activity area. Six playgroup staff attended the event to assist the children with activities and craft, while the parents and carers collected information.

This was a free community event for families, with great learning adventures, sensory activities, and a play workshop.

#### **Playgroup WA – SciTech Toddlerfest**

An interactive stall was set up amongst other community organisation stalls to provide activities for families with toddlers. Promotion of Better

Start was on display. The event was well visited by carers and care centres seeking information on inclusive play for children of all abilities. It also attracted a high number of families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

#### Playgroup SA – Mount Gambier

Members of SA's rural playgroups and the general public attended an event for children aged 0-5 years. ASD-specialised playgroups and inclusive playgroups for children with special needs were promoted.

## PA Venues Project (completed in February 2015)

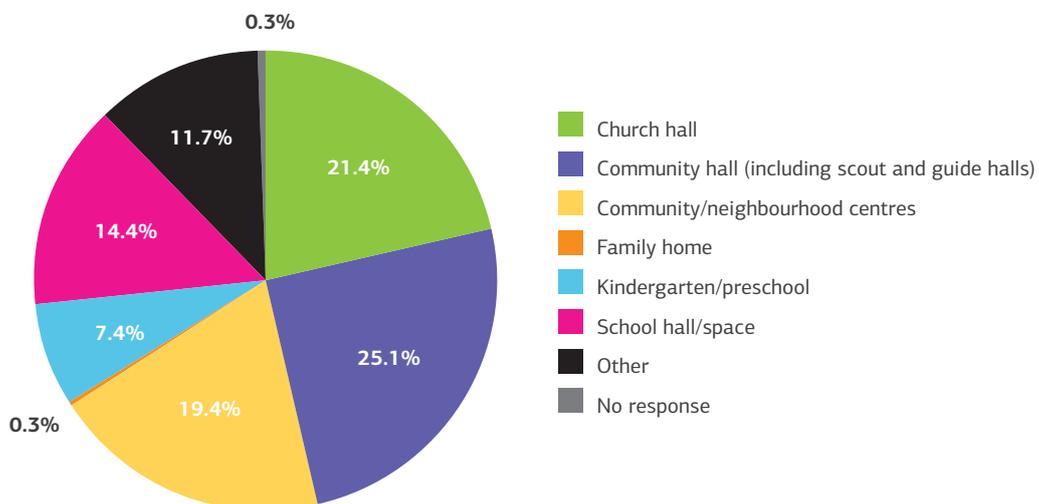
Research for this project was conducted by Dr Ian McShane from RMIT.

The PA Venues Project analysed policy and operational trends related to community facilities and venues that community playgroups typically use, but are finding increasingly difficult to access. Community playgroups, like many other activities of civil society, are highly dependent on community facilities. However, despite the development of a 'community turn' in social policy, community-level infrastructure struggles for visibility and policy attention.

The Venues Project research paper was commissioned by PA and funded through DSS to:

- analyse contextual and causal factors associated with the declining availability of suitable and affordable community facilities to accommodate community playgroups, and
- identify challenges and propose strategies to secure suitable venues, thus contributing to the sustainability and success of community playgroups.

The Venues Project report found that recent trends in venue access, quality and reliability suggest a new way forward in policy development is required for playgroup venues – at both a national and state/territory level.



The project set out to explore alternative partnership arrangements with local governments, schools and developers, along with the importance of working with planners and other community-based organisations with shared venue needs.

The project also suggested that PA should foster links with state and regional planning authorities, to advocate the need for community facility provision and more informal spaces for play. The report observed that partnership arrangements are increasingly common models for infrastructure financing, delivery and management, and for community service provision.

The report discussed new opportunities to build partnerships and secure venues through three Australia-wide developments: the policy focus on school engagement with local communities, the investment conditions of the Federal Government's *Building the Education Revolution* scheme, and new investment in municipal libraries.

It also suggested capitalising on information and communication technology (ICT) opportunities, which also supports PA's national digital strategy.

The findings from Dr McShane's research paper offer a broader academic view of the current challenges facing local playgroup organisers.

On a national level the three most common venues are community halls (including scout and guide halls), church halls and community neighbourhood centres.

The findings discussed in the Venues Project report will further inform discussions and strategic planning activities at member forums and CEO meetings.





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