



PLAYGROUP STORIES

CAMPAIGN REPORT

playgrouppaustralia.org.au/playgroup-stories/

PROCESS



About

As part of the Declaration on Playgroups, Playgroup Australia set out to gather the voices, stories, pictures and videos from playgroup participants past, present and future. Through engagement with playgroups, organisations, parents, caregivers and children, we campaigned to gather evidence to support and understand the impact and benefit of playgroups across Australia. Through the findings we hope to further improve outcomes and opportunities for creating a village through play.

What we did

Brand Assets

Our design agency Your Creative developed a set of logos, icons and applications for use on website and social media. These were guided by a series of messages targeting each identified survey group. Part Participants, Current Participants, Children and Organisations home to playgroup.

Website

We established a series of landing pages and surveys on the Playgroup Australia website explaining the campaign intent, about the project, what we were looking for, resources for others to support the campaign, and a section featuring what others were saying.

Survey

For each survey group we ask for a name, age of children, where they or their playgroup was located, type of playgroup, a space to share or upload stories, and a prompt to tell us what they loved, what they would change and what impact playgroup has had for them or their community.

E-News

We sent out three email variations inviting known contacts, subscribers and playgroup connections to share their Playgroup Stories during the campaign period. Links to the campaign were included in Playgroup Australia direct email campaigns, as well as some of our State and Territory Playgroup and National Advisory Group members.

Social Media

We engaged a social media agency to boost a series of social media content targeting each of the identified audiences, and retargeting website visitors over the two month campaign period. This was further supported through organic posts, sharing and user engagements, as well as a small additional boost to promote a competition.

Competition

Playgroup Australia introduced four prizes valued between \$500 and \$80 to encourage more engagement with the campaign. Winners were randomly selected and notified via email. Prizes were posted to families in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.



RESULTS

What worked

We were delighted with the quality and diversity of responses, with 62 response received across most states and territories. From the stories we discovered families who attended from childhood right through to becoming grandparents, we heard about the benefits for children, parents, caregivers, grandparents, volunteers and staff. Stories represented families who attended across many different playgroup types, including community playgroups, PlayConnect, baby play, grandparent groups, LGBTIQ groups, nature play, and language specific playgroups. It was wonderful to hear that playgroups had helped these families reconnect or integrate within their neighbourhoods and communities, and for many, these stories highlighted largely positive experiences and meaningful impact across all ages and communities.

What didn't

While promoted content managed to reach a much larger audience than organic content, and there was a clear increase to website traffic and social media engagements, we were hopeful to receive more contributions, especially those that represented the voice of children. In response to the perceived challenges, we adapted the survey and introduced activity sheets to involve children. We established a competition towards the campaign close to increase numbers. This did support an increase in response rates, but did not result in reaching the voice of children.

Other Engagements

We engaged a number of key contacts and campaign partners, as well as State and Territory Playgroup Organisations inviting them to share campaign resources, and contribute their own stories. While we didn't see a large uptake or resources being utilised, we did discover lovely messages across social media in support for playgroups, recognition of staff and volunteer impact, and friendships that have continued to grow beyond playgroups many years later.



ENTRIES

Organisation Stories

ACT **1** NSW **2** NT **0** QLD **1** SA **0** TAS **0** VIC **3** WA **0**

Past Participants

ACT **4** NSW **3** NT **0** QLD **5** SA **0** TAS **2** VIC **4** WA **0**

Current Participants

ACT **3** NSW **9** NT **0** QLD **3** SA **4** TAS **2** VIC **12** WA **4**

Total: 62

Social Media

Paid Reach **83,488**

Impressions **116,312**

Clicks to website **3253**

Newsletter

Targetted 3 groups **1768**

Opened **497**

Clicks to website **88**

Website Visits

Webpage views **2053**

Unique views **1880**



I loved going to playgroup after my baby was old enough to attend, he really loved the activities, especially the active challenges. We formed strong bonds with our regular playgroup people along the way. Then my husband became ill. Despite looking odd because of his condition and only able to sit and watch, he was welcomed to attend without judgement, despite them having no idea what was going on. We were given beautiful comments of support about his upcoming surgery. When my husband died just before my son's second birthday. My playgroup people reached out to me far more than any other organisation, and provided me with details of the best grief counsellor in my state. I still attend counselling with her. I am thankful to the wonderful volunteers that connected us with each other.

If there is one thing I would change, it would be to have a playgroup on the weekends, especially a Paint and Play or Splash and Play. My life has been changed completely, and since being denied life insurance, I have to go to work every day of the week to support the two of us. I feel very sad at the lack of my ability to be able to attend playgroup, but I have to pay the bills. My little one has qualified for NDIS and diagnosed with autistic traits, but even then, I have no playgroup that I can attend anymore due to our situation. :(

We attended playgroups from the time my child was 1, up until 5. Playgroups served as us as educational places but also an entertainment and friendship clubs. My child had experiences riding bikes, playing in the sandpit, learning to share and take turns, listening to stories at group time, enjoying water play in the summer, playing with cars and blocks, playing musical instruments, listening to music, having afternoon tea together and doing art and craft. Mothers met other mothers for a chat, sharing their parenting skills and helping each other out. We really enjoyed having birthday parties at minimal cost at our playgroups. I valued face to face social interactions, friendships with other mums, parenting support, fun and educational experiences for my child. For a child with no siblings and for mums who were feeling alone, isolated or couldn't send their children to daycare, playgroups were a lifeline for connection and support. I wouldn't have changed a thing. Playgroups were a way to see other people and get out of the house. Playgroups provided us with play dates, friendships outside playgroup and links to other useful groups. My child benefited by having a daycare like environment with birthdays celebrated there, and exposure to different people and learning experiences at minimal to no cost.

My friend started a Russian speaking playgroup with just a few families when my son was 1.5 years old. We started going regularly and met many Russian speaking mums, and built friendships and a support network. My son is now 5, and many of his friends he met through playgroup. Playgroup is great for child development as free play is so important for kids under 5. Playgroup brings families with small children together, who go through the same season in life and community is built. We love playgroups and recommend everyone join a local one for the benefit of the carer and the child :-)

Playgroup is a massive reason I've thrived as a parent in a decade of shocks and blessings. I've celebrated birthdays and many good days with playgroup, and I've arrived at my lowest to be supported, and my kids welcomed. When a medical emergency prevented my nurse finishing a 2 hour glucose tolerance test after my second child was born, and when my 6 year old was assessed for autism, playgroup held me up and kept me going to be the best mum I could be. Then with 6 years of parenting under my belt I returned to playgroup with child number 3. I've held others babies while my toddler plays, answered questions, offered advice on Facebook about remote living to people about to move to town, and even dropped a coffee to the medical center when an overwhelmed mum had an appointment. All of these connections in Regional NSW, remote QLD and central NT, as well as so much of my 3 darlings development have been because of playgroup. Thank you for 10 amazing years between baby number 1 and my youngest starting preschool.

I first started attending playgroup when my bub was 6 months old, to meet other mums in the community. Back then, my little one loved to watch the older kids play while I got to chat and have a coffee! Nowadays, my little one is a toddler who loves completing crafts, playing on climbing equipment and playing with the toys. Playgroup is such a great way to get out of the house, socialise and have some fun!

We started attending playgroup last year after I had my second child. We attend at Townsville Central State School and loved both the playgroup and school so much that my first started Prep there! He got to start his Primary School journey with a bunch of his lovely playgroup friends at a familiar school and it made the transition so easy. We still attend playgroup on my day off with little miss, and she is always so excited. Especially when the school includes playgroup in events like book week parade. Thanks to playgroup we were able to connect with other families and the school community. I have loved watching my children thrive surrounded by other children from a wide variety of different cultures and backgrounds. Playgroup made my son's transition to prep comfortable, and helped me feel less isolated by providing a space to connect with other adults (mums, dads, grandparents, school staff) while on maternity leave.

I started my playgroup journey with my Mum's and Bubs group. As my baby got older I found a local playgroup. Attending playgroup I found I was interested in how playgroup was organised. I started helping at the QLD branch in the playgroup shop. I then started on the board, and became State Treasurer. So much fun and memories. The friendships and the learning that I received. Skills I have taken forward with me. Learning to read financial reports. Sitting in at board meetings and expressing my opinion. I'm grateful for the comradery I experienced.

Even today, my kids have friends from that era. Playgroup has been valuable to us all. When my 2nd child was 3 we moved to the ACT. The first thing I did was find a local playgroup and join. These women and men have been an important part of my life here in a new city. They made me welcome and I am still friends with quite a few of them 16 years and another child later.

Playgroup taught me new skills that I have used in my work career. Playgroup is really a valuable place when you feel like you are struggling. There is always someone who has had the same issue you are struggling with and can share helpful suggestions. It is mostly friendly and non judgemental. My life would be very different without my Playgroup friends. It is funny how I have met women from playgroup through other settings in my life and have reconnected with these women through other avenues. Playgroup was the best thing for me. We have family friends I met and playgroup who have been lifelong friends.



PLAYGROUP STORIES

Once having kids, it doesn't take long to feel alone, with some days you go without any real adult interaction. Your life has gone from only you to suddenly this beautiful tiny little human that is 100% dependent on you! I wouldn't change it for the world, I love being a parent, but it's so nice (and healthy!) to have a place to go with other parents and children. For me it was adult conversation, a cup of tea with people you can relate to and ask questions. For the kids, it was a safe place to play, learn and interact with other children their age. I'm very lucky to have lots of family support, but there are parents who's only form of support is playgroup. To know you're not the only one who hasn't brushed your hair in a week, haven't slept for what feels like three days, forever covered in poop and spew, arms are sore from rocking your restless baby, to someone to share the excitement of their first steps, first words and moments of love - playgroup really is like a family

Our favourite part of playgroup is being able to have a range of play activities on offer, watching what takes my little one's interest that day, or even from minute to minute! As soon as she walks into our community playgroup, she is surveying the room deciding what appeals to her, and diving in! She is also looking for her friends, which is lovely to observe. I love that she gets to explore environments and activities that are diverse and different from our home activities. I have watched her interests and realized that she seeks some activities and toys that I hadn't expected, and so it has made me offer these at home. I have enjoyed watching her socialise and learn social skills with her peers in a safe environment, while I have been able to step in and support if needed or if she seeks my support. As an adult, I have appreciated the time to chat with other parents and enjoyed watching their children grow too! My daughter gets to navigate and practice the social aspect of play with other children, and she learns different skills from watching and interacting with her peers. Each week, her confidence increases as she plays with children, sings along and remembers the actions to more of the regular songs, sharing her excitement with me as she tries new things. During the COVID isolation, I began to appreciate the importance of organised activities for my children even more. I value that there is a place I can take my child that offers her experiences outside of the home that are safe, diverse and fun. I particularly appreciate that she gets to paint, and I don't have to set-up and clean up for the one or two minutes that her attention lasts at the task! If I would change anything about playgroup, it would be to address participation barriers for children with special needs in rural areas. Accessible entrances (ramps in place of steps), equipment or strategies to support them to participate in fine motor activities and support communication. When I have seen accommodations made, they have seemed to be made by the parent, and not the playgroup team.

Joining a local community run playgroup was my first point of contact in a new community with a new baby. The friendships I made at that time (and the friendships my daughter made) have continued on over the last 18 years. I loved and valued playgroup so much that it's now my full time job! Playgroup offered me a chance to meet like minded parents and carers who shared in the celebrations, offered great tips and crazy advice and made sure that every week I spoke to adults who 'got' my life. Every parent needs a playgroup in their world. A chance to connect with other parents, and learn from them. Playgroup provided space for my child to make friends which she would take with her to school and beyond. For me, an opportunity to learn more about my community and how it worked. Playgroup changed my life in so many ways! Learning the skills to be a parent, friends, and broaden my social network. Through playgroup, I learnt organisation skills and developed an understanding of children's learning. If I could improve anything, it would have been to try ensure that every parent had more of a voice in what happened at playgroup - sometimes strong characters or vulnerable families were not included as well as they could have been.



PLAYGROUP STORIES

We recently moved to a new area and didn't know anyone. Having my third baby with a large gap between my children, I didn't have a lot of mum friends with small children. I heard about playgroup, and remembered how much I enjoyed it as a small child, so we went along. It was the best decision I ever made. So much fun for my little man and kept him occupied, and I was able to meet a lot of new parents. Through playgroup we're really felt part of the community!

Motherhood was the complete opposite of what I had imagined. When I was pregnant with my first, getting ready to start maternity leave, I envisioned coffee dates with my girlfriends at the local cafe while my baby slept soundly in the pram next to me. I was in for the rudest shock of my life.

My baby was unsettled. She never slept and had terrible reflux.

I slowly sank deeper and deeper into post natal depression, not knowing where to turn. Because my baby was so unsettled, I never turned up to mother's group, and then eventually lost touch with the other mother's altogether. I felt so ALONE. Months later, I was recommended playgroup by a friend. I decided to give it a go even though I was anxious and extremely nervous. On my first day, I met the calmest and warmest lady who was running the structured playgroup. She introduced me to all the mothers who welcomed me with open arms. Even on my first day, the other mothers spoke to me as if we'd been friends for years. The anxiety slowly started to melt away. Week after week, I felt my former self coming back to life. The friendships I've made, the laughs that my kids have had.... I always say to anyone that asks.... Playgroup was my defibrillator that brought me back to life!

The coffee is percolating, playdoh is out on the table and the sound of nursery rhymes fills the playgroup room. I hear the gate opening and small feet running towards the door, "Good morning! Welcome to playgroup today!" The room quickly fills with small children, some head straight to their favourite activities; the play kitchen, dinosaurs or book corner. Others join me at the playdoh table, making worms, eggs, nests or just enjoying the sensory input. Mums chat over tea and coffee, often sharing laughter at children's antics, sympathy in the sleepless nights and teething troubles. Sometimes tears when it all seems too much. Soon it's time for singing and stories on the mat, morning tea together and then more play.

Play, play, play! So important for our children. Learning, exploring, socialising, growing and most of all, having fun. We bond together in this playgroup space, observing the similarities between children and respecting the differences between family units. Mums who have journeyed with us through the preschool years of their first, second and third children, describe to me how much they all look forward to playgroup each week. A place of connection, where routine creates safety. A sanctuary where joy is the highest priority. Playgroup is such a unique and special place that values families. For our organisation, facilitating playgroups, we get to walk alongside families as they travel through the really important early years of childhood. Seeing people make long lasting connections within our community is very encouraging, especially when it's all done through word of mouth, advertising on social media, local noticeboards, through Maternal Child Health Nurses and schools.



PLAYGROUP STORIES

In this very difficult time in Melbourne with lockdown, I looked at different ways I could still stay connected with families. Ringing them to see how they all going. Making arts & craft packs which I delivered to their homes (40 packs). I read stories and sang songs which I uploaded to our playgroups closed Facebook page. We organised a zoom session with doctors talking about child development. Our playgroup brings the community into our school, highlighting the benefits of both children and their parents connecting through playgroup. The regular group setting supports children's social development, eases the transition to school, and improves overall health; while also providing social and health support to parents, knowledge sharing, and learning opportunities. We encourage families to join our playgroup through local kindergartens, maternal & child health centers and welcome new families through word of mouth.

As a child, playgroup is where I formed lasting memories and friendships. At 37 years old, I am proud to say I still have close friends from playgroup that I have known my whole life. Our mothers started a playgroup out of their Mothers Group formed at their local MCHN.

My experience of playgroup informed my belief in the benefits of play based early childhood care and learning and I am now an Early Childhood Teacher myself. Playgroup was a social support system for my mother, and the playgroups I have been involved in with my own 3 children, have had the same role for me. Playgroups are priceless!! Peer support, parenting support, a sense of community and belonging. Playgroup helped my family make friends and settle in to a new community when we moved house. It gave us a sense of belonging, and provided avenues to give back to other families. Playgroup is a space to share parenting ideas and challenges, to support others and feel supported.

In 1978 our Playgroup was formed by the Cheltenham Baby Health Centre Nurse. We were a small group who met weekly at the Centre then branched out to meet in each others' homes. As first time Mums, we had all enjoyed professional work until now, and quickly realised that playgroup was also for Mothers....not only children! Playgroup became our lifeline. Supporting each other through our children's early years, adolescence, young adulthood and even grandchildren. Together, we negotiated the ups and downs of life. Our reward was playgroup weekends away in country Victoria where we had great fun and learned to manage differing personalities in our group of 7. In 2017, the deaths of 2 of our members shattered and bonded us anew. One of our group was killed crossing a local road in a freak accident and another succumbed to cancer. Now we were 5. Six weeks ago we began fortnightly Zoom sessions to keep in touch. However life was about to teach us again of our fragile lives. Our youngest member was rushed to hospital with a stage 4 brain cancer for which there is little effective treatment. We try to cling to hope for Gail. Our unique friendships through playgroup will be able to sustain us throughout further chapters in our lives and those of our beloved children and grandchildren.



OPPORTUNITIES

While mostly positive responses were received, the feedback highlighted that there were areas that playgroups could be improved:

- Improved engagement and structure by playgroup volunteers and facilitators.
- Greater engagement with parents and caregivers to navigate the early years, wellbeing and parental capacity.
- More control regarding number of children and adults at each session.
- More support or guidance for playgroups on managing distressing behaviours of children and/or adults.
- School holiday programs or virtual playgroups.
- Weekend sessions for working families to connect with their community.
- Increased funding on a local level to let other families know where their local playgroups meet.
- Additional support to help transition and engage new volunteers to extend the life of existing playgroups.

