



# Family Linker Program Evaluation

April 2026

**PLAY9ROU<sup>UP</sup>**  
TASMANIA

## Key Findings

The evaluation found that Playgroup Tasmania's experience implementing the Family Linker role over the past 18 months is consistent with the findings of the Paul Ramsay Foundation's *Understanding Linkers* report, which explores the role across a variety of health and community service settings.

Interviews with families, service providers and Playgroup Tasmania staff confirmed that the model's flexibility enables workers to support families at their own pace and over time, while also building and maintaining strong relationships with families and service providers.

Playgroup Tasmania's Family Linker supervision model included the capacity to provide external supervision for the role as part of the northern pilot.

Interviews strongly reflected the ability of the Family Linker to work alongside families to:

- build confidence, problem-solving capability and independence to overcome barriers and connect them to resources and support
- build trust and connection early in the interactions
- actively reach out to and engage with families who could benefit from additional support, and
- build and maintain relationships with a network of service providers.

The data and interviews collected for this report confirmed that the Family Linker functioned within the program guidelines to elicit family / caregiver priorities and goals and to explore options and opportunities to address needs and goals with a realistic plan.

Interviews demonstrated that the Family Linker worked alongside parents/caregivers to identify their priorities and aspirations. Families consistently reported feeling listened to, involved in decision-making and more confident advocating for their child's needs.

Parents and caregivers who completed the Me as a Parent Scale Short Form (MaPs-SF) before and after engaging with the Family Linker reported an average increase of 10.1 points, indicating improved confidence in their parenting and ability to support their child.

Evaluation data confirmed that the Family Linker worked with families to identify the supports and services they required and supported them along the access pathway. Through this approach, families reported increased confidence, greater independence and improved problem-solving skills.

Evaluation participants consistently identified the Family Linker's knowledge of the service system, communication skills and personal attributes as critical to the success of the role.

Persistence, adaptability, creativity and a strong focus on capacity building and outcomes supported families to navigate the service system, while the ability to coordinate multidisciplinary approaches strengthened transitions between services and engagement with the broader support system.

The knowledge and skills that supported the worker's success in the role included: Community knowledge, curiosity, creativity, persistence, being organised and applying a systematic approach to the work. Attributes cited as required to build the necessary trust and relationships in the role included respect, empathy, capacity to be attentive and flexible and strategic thinking.

Playgroup Tasmania's established reputation, knowledge of and links to universal early support programs provided many referrals and aided the quick relationship and trust building reported by all participants. Parents / caregivers reported that the regular attendance of allied health professionals and key service sector providers at Playgroup Tasmania activities was invaluable, citing the relevant content of what these representatives provided. This included tips and suggestions families can try and the opportunity to learn about what therapists / providers can offer. Families also stated they felt more confident about situations where referrals were required if they had met the worker or been introduced to their service prior to attending.

Participants also identified the Playgroup Tasmania Family Linker's practice always including the parents / caregivers in all communication with other service providers as a strength. They reported that the inclusive approach to communication built trust with families and supported multidisciplinary workers to provide wrap-around support.

Families consistently report that service systems are challenging for people to understand and to access because of the complexities of the systems and processes that families must navigate. The system requires that parents / caregivers have a reasonable level of literacy (reading, digital and health) and the confidence and ability to ask for help to break through these barriers and the many others that arise.

## Challenges to be managed

While the Family Linker role has clearly achieved its aims, there are several areas where adjustments can be made to continue to improve outcomes.

## Workforce Sustainability and Succession Planning

To be effective, the role relies on a deep and extensive knowledge of the service system and how it functions along with each worker's capacity to build and maintain networks.

Consistent with the findings of the Paul Ramsay Foundation's Understanding Linkers report, this evaluation found that the attributes of the Family Linker worker and their ability to build trust and empathy are critical to successfully engaging families.

The evaluation found that strong, trusting relationships are central to the success of the Family Linker model. While this is a key strength, it reinforces the importance of maintaining clear role boundaries, manageable workloads and regular supervision to ensure the role remains sustainable and operates within its intended scope.

### Supporting Family Linker Worker Practice

Consistent supervision and support are required to maintain the Family Linker approach and ensure the role does not shift into casework or case management. Playgroup Tasmania's organisational structure and practice tools provide guidance for workers while allowing the flexibility and time required to build effective relationships with families.

Regular supervision and workload review are important to ensure caseloads remain manageable and the Family Linker's purpose and practice boundaries are maintained.

### Defining the Role Clearly

Across the health and community services sector, a range of similar roles have emerged under titles such as Linkers, Navigators, Connectors and Community Engagement Workers. While the terminology varies across different sectors and service settings, these roles share a common purpose of helping people navigate complex systems, overcome barriers and connect with the supports they need.

The evaluation found that the Playgroup Tasmania Family Linker role aligns strongly with this emerging practice. However, it also highlighted the importance of clearly articulating the purpose of the role, the core attributes required of Family Linker workers and the intended scope of practice. Clearly defining these elements helps distinguish the role from case management and other forms of family support while ensuring families, service providers and funding bodies have a shared understanding of its purpose.

The evaluation also found that the Family Linker achieves its greatest impact through a relationship-based approach that builds trust, strengthens family confidence and capability, and supports access to appropriate services and community connections. Rather than creating dependence, the role works alongside families to build their confidence to navigate increasingly complex service systems.



The growing focus on prevention and early intervention through initiatives such as the Australian Government's Thriving Kids reforms and Tasmania's 20 Year Preventive Health Strategy reinforces the importance of clearly articulating the Family Linker model and the outcomes it is designed to achieve. The evaluation suggests that a clearly defined, relationship-based Family Linker role is well aligned with these emerging policy directions and has the potential to contribute to improved outcomes for children and families.

## Introduction

Playgroup Tasmania has grown to be the state's peak playgroup organisation, delivering evidence informed programs and supporting inclusive, community-led playgroups that foster child and family wellbeing, belonging and confidence. Playgroup Tasmania works collaboratively with children and their families, community organisations and government to create safe, welcoming environments that strengthen relationships and build local capacity across Tasmania.

In 2024, Playgroup Tasmania received Communities for Children (CfC) funding to pilot a Family Linker approach from July 2024–June 2026. The aim of the program pilot was to focus on the Kanamaluka (Launceston and Tamar Valley) CfC geographic area.

The Family Linker role in the north commenced in July 2024. The value of the role was recognised and informed Playgroup Tasmania's decision to expand and pilot the program in the South through federal Children and Parenting Support (CaPS) funding. The Family Linker role in the South commenced in October 2025.

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the implementation and early outcomes of the Playgroup Tasmania Family Linker pilot and to inform refinement of the model within Playgroup Tasmania's suite of universal early support programs.

Specifically, the evaluation sought to understand:

- the effectiveness of the Family Linker model in improving access to services and supports
- the impact of the role on parent/caregiver confidence and capability
- how the role is experienced by families, service providers and Playgroup Tasmania staff
- the features of the model that contribute most strongly to positive outcomes
- opportunities to strengthen the model for future implementation.

## Why Family Linker Roles are Emerging

Complex service systems with barriers to easy access mean those who would benefit most from support frequently miss out.

Many service systems are recognising that there is a need to have designated people in a role to support and facilitate access. There is a variety of titles emerging for such roles – Navigators, Connectors and Engagement Workers are a few of the other job titles that have emerged in addition to Linkers.

## The role

The Family Linker role was designed to build family capability and improve outcomes by anticipating barriers and providing early, relationship-based support before issues escalate. The Family Linker provides episodic support rather than functioning in a casework or case management role.

The Family Linker works to enable each family it works with to build their skills and capacity by linking, connecting, supporting and navigating the breadth of possible services and supports, assisting families to make sense of the service system and access the services and support they need.

The Paul Ramsay Foundation report states “Linkers work around the gaps, limitations and inefficiencies of the service system. They help people access the services and support they need through individualised, relationship-based practices.”

## Playgroup Tasmania Pilot Model

Playgroup Tasmania's pilot model was informed by the Playgroup SA Family Linker pilot and the Paul Ramsay Foundation's Understanding Linkers report. The Playgroup SA model used a social worker and was closely linked to PlayConnect+ supported playgroup. In developing its own model, Playgroup Tasmania explored the potential for a Family Linker role without requiring a social work or allied health qualification.

The *Understanding Linkers* report found that the design of the Family Linker role as well as organisational structures within which the role operates must allow for:

- flexibility within the service model
- capacity to work with families over time and at their pace
- a workload that provides for time and space to create sound relationships with both families and service providers, and
- supportive management in a small team.

The Family Linker needed to be able to work alongside families to:

- connect them to resources and support and build problem solving capability and independence to overcome barriers
- build trust and connection early and maintain clear and respectful relationships

- elicit families' priorities and goals, explore options and opportunities to address needs and goals in a realistic plan
- actively reach out to and engage with families who could benefit from additional support, and
- build and maintain a network and relationships with service providers.

The Family Linker role sits slightly outside the direct service delivery system and works with the parent/caregiver to identify their priorities and aspirations. The focus of the role is on meeting each family's needs. To facilitate this, Family Linkers work alongside families and caregivers, building trusting relationships and strengthening their knowledge and confidence to actively participate in decisions about their child's needs and supports.

The worker's attributes, their knowledge and skills to implement the role within the organisation and across the sector are vital to the role's success. To identify barriers and set goals with families, workers need to take a strengths-based approach, be enablers rather than 'doers' and have excellent communication skills.

## Current Context

Across Tasmania, Playgroup Tasmania is a key provider of universal early years programs. This evaluation of the Family Linker pilot is occurring at a time of significant reform across both the Australian and Tasmanian service systems, with an increasing focus on prevention, early intervention and improving access to coordinated supports for children and families.

At the national level, reforms following the 2023 National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Review have led to the development of the Australian Government's Thriving Kids initiative. The reforms recognise the need for stronger community-based and mainstream supports for children with developmental delay and disability, with an emphasis on early identification, intervention and improved pathways to appropriate services.

At the state level, Tasmania is developing a 20 Year Preventive Health Strategy, which promotes a stronger focus on prevention, early support, community-based approaches and improving equitable access to health and community services systems.

Within this policy context, the Playgroup Tasmania Family Linker is a relationship-based role that supports families to participate in playgroup and community programs while strengthening connections with relevant services and supports. Through a strengths-based approach, the role aims to reduce barriers to participation, build parent and caregiver confidence and capability, and support positive outcomes for children and families.



The evaluation suggests the Family Linker model is well aligned with these emerging policy directions and demonstrates the potential contribution of relationship-based, community-connected approaches to strengthening access to early support and improving outcomes for children and families.

Tasmania presents a unique environment for early intervention, with a widely dispersed population, Australia's highest rate of disability (27% compared with 21% nationally), lower average weekly earnings than the national average and higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage and health literacy challenges. These factors increase the importance of accessible, relationship-based supports that help families navigate complex service systems.

### Playgroup Tasmania Journey to Date

Playgroup Tasmania developed the initial 2024 application for Communities for Children (CfC) funding in response to their parent survey exploring family experiences with pregnancy, birth and child health services.

The key barriers reported by families included

- lack of awareness or confusion about what services are available and the criteria for eligibility
- long waitlists
- inadequate local service provision
- challenges related to digital access and geographic isolation, and
- financial constraints.

The survey's findings revealed widespread parental / caregiver concerns about availability, accessibility and clarity about how to access services and information.

Playgroup Tasmania designed and developed the Family Linker role to provide short term support and early intervention services to families with children who have additional needs or for families that were experiencing stress while attempting to navigate the health and community service system to access the support their family requires.

### Playgroup Tasmania Family Linker Role Design

The design of the Playgroup Tasmania Family Linker role was informed by both the Playgroup SA model and the Paul Ramsay report, *Understanding Linkers*.

Desired worker attributes included the knowledge and skills to implement the role within the organisation and across the sector, an ability to identify barriers and set goals with families, a strengths-based approach, an enabling rather than 'doing' approach and excellent communication skills. The combination of these attributes resulted in Playgroup Tasmania's decision not to require a specific professional qualification.

By basing the Playgroup Tasmania Family Linker role on attributes such as lived experience, service knowledge, skills and ability to connect with people rather than a professional qualification the pilot aimed to achieve meaningful outcomes at a relatively low cost and create a high value addition to the organisation's universal programs.

The Playgroup Tasmania Family Linker role in Tasmania's north is an adjunct that enhances delivery of the PlayConnect+, PALS, and HeartBerries supported playgroup programs. The Family Linker works with families to strengthen their connections to early childhood, disability and community services while also promoting children's development through inclusive, play-based programs. The Family Linker is a single point of contact that guides families through the service system and provides personalised, culturally responsive and trauma-informed support.

In 2025, Playgroup Tasmania allocated a portion of its existing CaPS program funding to test the best approach to applying Family Linker processes in more universally targeted parenting and early learning program settings such as community and Baby Village playgroups in Tasmania's south.

In the southern region pilot, the Playgroup Family Linker focused on assisting families to access community programs and build connections while also promoting early childhood development. The role involved providing family support navigation and fostering community partnerships. It emphasised a strengths-based, relationship-focused approach with the aim of reducing participation barriers and contributing to longer term, strategic goals such as building safe, connected and supported families and communities.

## Family Linker Role Processes

The Family Linker role is not a casework or case management role. Instead, it exists to support families to make sense of the service system and to link, connect, support and ease their navigation of that system so they receive the services and supports they need.

Referrals to the Family Linker were identified by playgroup program workers, received from parents / caregivers or provided by workers from across the service system. A comprehensive set of tools has been developed for the Family Linker role, including

- an intake / referral form
- an attendance form

- a Family Support Plan
- a consent form to allow information sharing
- a Signs of Safety and Planning Template, and
- the Family Linker Role (FLR) Timeline.

Playgroup Tasmania uses the Me as a Parent Scale Short Form (MaaPs-SF), developed by the Parenting Research Centre (PRC), to assess changes in parenting confidence. The validated measure assesses four aspects of parenting self-regulation: self-efficacy, personal agency, self-sufficiency and self-management. It is completed before and after Family Linker involvement as part of the case planning and goal setting process.

The Family Linker focuses on supporting the parent/caregiver to set realistic goals and then achieve those goals within the support period (about 6 months). If the family unit experiences other factors that impact the speed or length of their interaction with the Family Linker, these circumstances can be negotiated and program delivery adapted. Similarly, the program remains flexible so that families can re-engage if a further issue arises post discharge.

Regular external supervision of Family Linker staff focuses on maintaining a manageable workload within the practice scope of the role. Playgroup Tasmania recognises that the nature of the Family Linker's work could easily slip from 'linking' to casework or case management and maintains oversight to prevent this from happening.

The Family Linker role is not a separate program within Playgroup Tasmania. Instead it is designed as an enhancement to work across all program areas. The Family Linker is included in the Playgroup Tasmania's Outcomes Framework which was developed to measure outcomes of all the organisation's activities.

## Family Linker Role Evaluation

Playgroup Tasmania's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and its Statewide Coordinator of Early Support Programs provided the evaluation request and context to the evaluator. Background reading was provided by Playgroup Tasmania and included the funding and service agreement (FASA), documents related to the rationale for a Family Linker approach, quarterly reporting against the FASA, de-identified program data collection and Family Linker intake and assessment forms and tools. In this initial phase, the evaluation was focused on the more evolved program site in the north.

## Methodology

The evaluation methodology included interviews with program staff, families and multidisciplinary stakeholders, together with a review of program documentation and de-identified program data.

It was agreed the evaluation methodology would include interviews with program staff, 3 families and 3 multidisciplinary stakeholders who would be identified by the Playgroup Tasmania Family Linker and Statewide Coordinator of Early Support Programs. Subsequently, the number of family interviews was expanded to 6 to include a dad and a more representative mix of parents. At the request of Early Childhood Inclusion Service (ECIS), additional multidisciplinary workers were also added as was the Family Linker, South, who had recently commenced in the role. No data collection from the southern pilot program has been included as the role was only just commencing during the evaluation period.

In November and December 2025, evaluation interviews were conducted with

- 6 families – 5 mothers and one father
- 5 multidisciplinary service providers – 2 Early Childhood Inclusion Service teachers, one teacher assistant, one St Giles allied health worker and one Glenhaven Family Care Integrated Family Support worker
- 4 Playgroup Tasmania staff members – the Family Linker (North, CfC funded), Family Connector (South, CaPS funded), Statewide Coordinator of Early Support Programs Officer and the Program Impact & Quality Project Officer. In February 2026, the Coordinator, Playgroup Programs also contributed to a group discussion about the Family Linker roles.

## Family / Caregiver Interview Findings

Overwhelmingly, the families interviewed reported that they found the Family Linker role of great benefit. Parents / caregivers said that having someone assist them to identify and access services that may be useful to support their family situation was immensely helpful. They reported that they learned through the support provided in this process. Services accessed by families included therapeutic interventions, social support services and respite services. Parents repeatedly spoke of *'feeling overwhelmed, not knowing where to start, what to do'* before accessing the Family Linker. They reported that accessing support and assistance within the service system was easier when they understood how the services work. This included understanding and awareness of things such as waiting lists and cancellation lists, the range of services that are available to the local area and the criteria required to access specific services. The Family Linker provided all of this for the parents interviewed.



Families also reported that they felt they had gained confidence in their parenting skills as well as trust in themselves to be able to speak up, support and advocate for their child/ren.

*'Without the support ... [of our Family Linker] ... I would have been lost and floundering.'*

Families reported that they appreciated how both children and parents /caregivers are supported by the Family Linker role.

The evaluation confirmed that the Family Linker can develop creative, inexpensive solutions to address delays and gaps in service delivery by identifying themes around issues that families are experiencing.

It also confirmed that the ability of the Family Linker to provide the family's history (with consent) to care team members reduces the need for parent/caregiver's to tell and re-tell their story to multiple service providers.

Parents interviewed also talked about how they appreciated that the Family Linker used email to check in with them, gave encouragement and included them in all communication with other service providers. Parents also spoke about the value of the Family Linker arranging multidisciplinary meetings so that everyone involved with their child's care could meet and discuss the child's needs and progress. Parents reported that they also felt supported to actively participate, and ask questions and that they were listened to in these meetings.

As a child's needs evolved and changed, or new issues emerged, the Family Linker assisted by identifying and redirecting to match what was appropriate for the child's age and stage of development.

It was clear from comments gathered in interviews that the Family Linker's positive attitude made a difference. Comments included:

*'I wouldn't have sought that support for myself – I didn't know it existed.'*

*'The service system is very new to me. It's been comforting to me to have support and someone I trusted and felt understood my situation.'*

The Family Linker connects parents/caregivers with additional supports with the aim of reducing isolation and creating networks that break down isolation. The result of this is that the child is not only being supported through the system but also by the whole family. Parents also reported appreciating being informed about a range of opportunities for social activities and get-togethers.



Families expressed that they learned new skills and behaviour management strategies through the role modelling done by the Family Linker and other service providers at Playgroup Tasmania sessions. They also described how they felt their child/ren were accepted, that there was no judgement and that the approach taken was to do *'anything to make kids and families happy.'*

*'If a child is having a meltdown, they are given space and the parent is supported as well'*

### Multidisciplinary Stakeholder Interviews

Multidisciplinary service providers interviewed as part of this evaluation interacted and worked with the Family Linker and reported that the role provided extremely high value. Their comments centred around the ready accessibility and availability of the Family Linker to families who face long delays accessing allied health professions and intensive support services, especially those families with children with developmental delays and disabilities.

Service providers stated that the process for being referred to a Family Linker was easy and that strong communication practices, with parents' / caregivers' consent, are maintained following referral. They further stated that communication processes used within the Family Linker role connected people, helped build trusting relationships between those involved in each child's care and strengthened the family's capacity to interact with therapists.

Further, the Family Linker created pathways and reduced service system access barriers for parents. Service providers experience families with varying levels of understanding about their child's situation and with different capacities to manage the challenges that may be presented. In relation to this, those interviewed stated the Family Linker supports families working through these challenges and supports them to confront and find manageable ways to get everything to work in a structured way.

There are long waiting lists for allied health services in Northern Tasmania. Service providers reported that connecting with the Family Linker facilitated an increased success placing families on 'short notice' cancellation lists.

Because many families were already regularly attending Playgroup Tasmania programs, the Family Linker was able to quickly notify families when short-notice assessment appointments became available. This enabled families to access services sooner while also helping service providers fill cancelled appointments and make better use of available resources.



Service providers also identified several features of Playgroup Tasmania's broader service model that strengthened the effectiveness of the Family Linker role, including:

- regular supported playgroup sessions for children with disability and developmental differences
- opportunities for parents and caregivers to connect with others experiencing similar challenges
- practical information and support to navigate the service system
- modelling of parenting and behaviour support strategies that build parent confidence
- opportunities for families to meet allied health professionals and other service providers in an informal setting.

Using a coaching approach, the Family Linker role supported parents / caregivers with high needs to access additional services. The Family Linker was also reported as helping parents / caregivers set realistic goals and supporting them on their care journey. Additionally, the Family Linker was credited with strengthening parent/caregiver engagement with the allied health sector and reducing disengagement from intervention services through encouragement, enhanced communication and understanding of the family situation.

In addition to taking referrals from various service providers, the Family Linker was able to identify and refer families / caregivers to the full breadth of services available to support their specific needs. Some of these services were:

- Women's Legal Service Tasmania
- Early Childhood Inclusion Service (ECIS)
- 54 Reasons
- NDIS
- Integrated Family Support Services (IFSS)
- Welcome Cultural Services Northern Tasmania
- Care2Serve
- Speech therapy services
- Occupational therapy services
- Behavioural therapy services
- Plan management services
- Vision Services Tasmania
- Hearing Australia
- Employment services
- CHaPs
- Psychology services
- TAC and Connected Beginnings.

A full list is included as Attachment 8.

Playgroup Tasmania took an attributes-based approach to recruitment for the Family Linker. Feedback received for this evaluation confirms that this was critical to the program's success and that a worker's attributes, skills and knowledge are more critical to the role than a professional qualification.

### Playgroup Tasmania Staff Interviews

Staff interviews for this evaluation included meetings with workers in the Family Linker roles in the north and south, meetings with the Statewide Coordinator of Early Support Programs and a telephone interview with the Program Impact & Quality Project Officer.

A further group discussion was held with the Statewide Coordinator of Early Support Programs, the Program Impact & Quality Project Officer and the Coordinator, Playgroup Programs.

These interviews confirmed that Playgroup Tasmania was committed to extending its activities and providing support to parents / caregivers who were trying to access appropriate support services to meet the needs of their children.

Service systems, whether health, community services or education, can pose challenges for community members. Common parent/caregiver questions include:

- Which service is the most appropriate?
- What are the service's criteria for getting an appointment?
- How will the service work?
- What does the service cost?
- How long will it take to get an appointment?
- How do I get there?

Parents and caregivers face these uncertainties while also managing the everyday demands of parenting, including potentially coming to terms with their child having additional needs or other health and wellbeing challenges within the family.

### Data Findings from the Family Linker Pilot

In the 18 months since receiving the funding, Playgroup Tasmania has exceeded the performance standards.

## Family Linker Summary Data July 2024 – December 2025

|       |                                    |
|-------|------------------------------------|
| 27    | Families supported                 |
| 61    | Total clients                      |
| 165   | Total interactions                 |
| 6.1   | Average interactions               |
| +10.1 | Average increase in MaaPs-SF score |

### Referral Sources

7 Sources



ECIS–Early Childhood Inclusion Service   CHaPS–Child Health and Parenting Service   IFSS Integrated Family Support Service

More than half (14) of the referrals to the Family Linker came from service providers external to Playgroup Tasmania, more than one-third (10) from across Playgroup Tasmania activities and the remainder (3) were self-referrals.

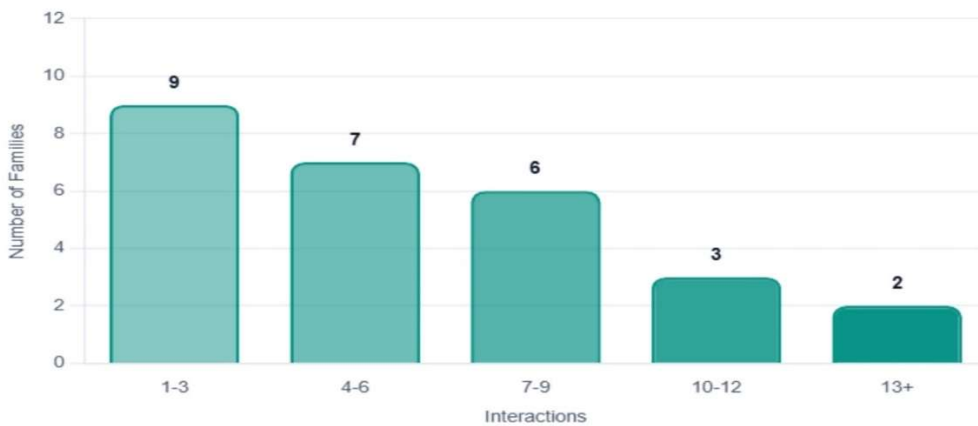
### Support Duration

Length of Time



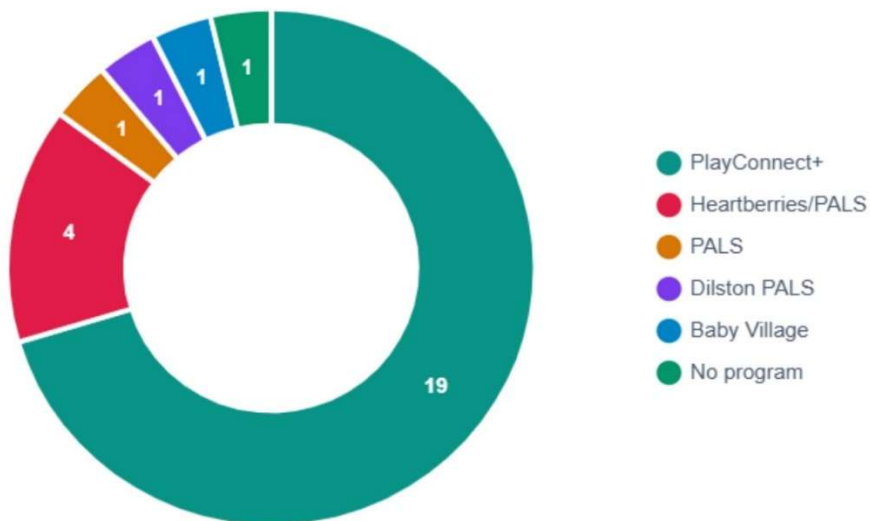
## Interactions per Family

Distribution



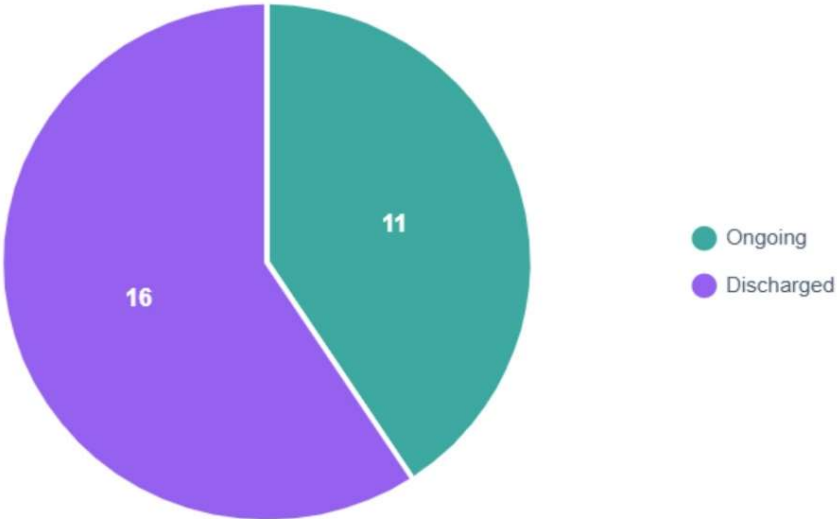
## Families by Program

6 Programs



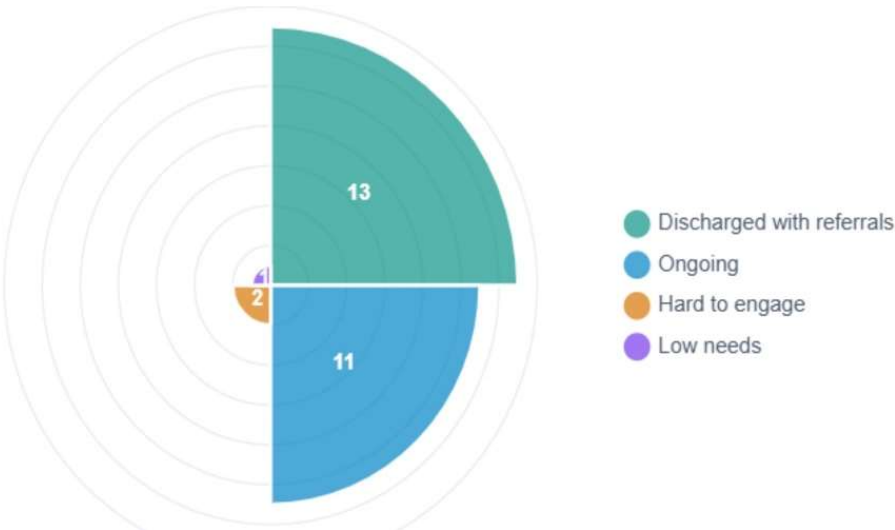
## Family Status

Ongoing vs Discharged



## Family Outcomes

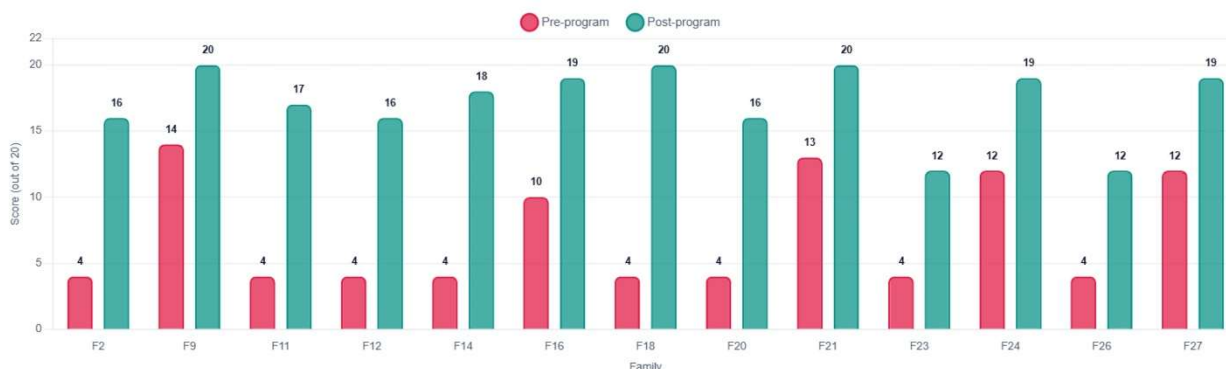
Current Status



**Table: Me as a Parent Scale Short Form (Maaps-SF)**

**Me as a Parent: Pre vs Post Scores**

13 Families with Complete Data



## Case Studies

### Case Study 1

A family attending one of Playgroup Tasmania Early Support programs became lost in the NDIS system because of an administrative error that resulted in their Diagnostic Assessment Team (DAT) referral never being submitted. The caregiver misunderstood the process, believing informal feedback from another service constituted a formal diagnosis and that no further action was needed.

With guidance from the Family Linker, the family was reconnected with the DAT waitlist, supported to access the NDIS and eventually offered a short-notice appointment. Their child's DAT was then completed, resulting in a formal autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnosis.

This child, first flagged for assessment in 2022, finally received a diagnosis in 2024. The outcome has been life-changing and has provided clarity, validation, and practical tools for the family to connect with their child more effectively. The child is now happily attending kindergarten. In the caregiver's own words:

*'He is thriving thanks to the support he was given in the early stages here at playgroup.'*

## Case Study 2

A family recently joined one of Playgroup Tasmania's Early Support & Inclusion programs. At the time, the mother was pregnant and experiencing homelessness, though her son had just received his NDIS plan. After securing stable housing, she was referred to Playgroup Tasmania by her Intensive Family Support Service (IFSS) worker.

Despite the approved plan, the mother hadn't been able to use any of the approved funding or connect with recommended therapists because of the complexity of navigating services and not knowing where to begin. With support from the Family Linker, the child is now accessing therapy and the parents are confidently navigating the NDIS, having built a strong relationship with their plan manager.

Beyond the NDIS, the family has also received support in other areas, including legal aid, mental health and financial assistance.

## Case Study 3

A family with prior experience accessing the NDIS for their eldest child found the process so overwhelming that when they realised they would need to do it all again for their younger child, the caregiver initially pushed aside signs of developmental concern.

Over time, as trust was built between the caregiver and their playgroup facilitator, they felt safe to open up. A pivotal moment occurred during a session with a continence specialist that resonated deeply with the caregiver. Afterwards, the playgroup facilitator gently followed up and the caregiver shared their confusion about NDIS and their fear of re-engaging with the system.

With Family Linker support, the child is now receiving therapy, has a diagnosis and is accessing the NDIS. The caregiver now feels confident and prepared for school next year and has frequently expressed how crucial the Family Linker support has been.

*'I don't believe I would have made it this far without someone walking alongside me on the journey'.*

## Case Study 4

One mother involved in the program was seeking a place to connect with other parents and to provide her very young child, who had been diagnosed with a tumour, with opportunities to socialise.

This mother was the caregiver for all her family members, each of whom had life threatening medical issues of their own at the same time.

Some of the supports that were activated through the Family Linker were completely unknown to the mother despite her describing herself as having a reasonable level of familiarity with the health care system, being very well educated and having good research skills.

*'Without the Family Linker I would have fallen in a heap.*

*'If I'm not on top of things, nothing happens ... [The Family Linker meant] I felt I had someone walking alongside me and sharing the load.*

*'Not having to go and access yet another service took a weight of my shoulders.*

*'[Access to the Family Linker meant] I could focus on my child and the rest of my family and [the worker] was doing the chasing and I didn't have to worry.*

*'I've gained self-confidence through the support given. I can advocate for my child. I know what's possible and that I can speak up ... My child has the opportunity to connect with other children and has grown in confidence in the PlayConnect+ space. That's given us as parents confidence that she will manage going to child care next year.'*

## Conclusion

This evaluation found that the Playgroup Tasmania Family Linker model is achieving its intended purpose of supporting families to navigate complex service systems, access appropriate supports and build confidence and capability.

Families, service providers and Playgroup Tasmania staff consistently identified the relationship-based and flexible nature of the role as central to its effectiveness. The evaluation found that working alongside families at their own pace, building trusted relationships and supporting parents and caregivers to participate actively in decisions contributed to increased confidence, greater independence and stronger engagement with services.



The evaluation also highlighted the importance of the environment in which the Family Linker operates. Playgroup Tasmania's established relationships with families and service providers, connection to universal early years programs and regular engagement with allied health and community services strengthened the role's ability to identify needs early and connect families with appropriate support.

The findings reinforce the importance of maintaining clear role boundaries, manageable workloads, appropriate supervision and a strong focus on the attributes and skills required of Family Linker workers. These will be important considerations in maintaining the integrity and sustainability of the model as it continues to develop.

Overall, the evaluation indicates that the Family Linker model provides a valuable enhancement to universal early years services and has the potential to contribute to broader prevention and early intervention approaches for children and families.

## References

[About the National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention | Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing](#)

Understanding Linkers <https://www.paulramsayfoundation.org.au/news-resources/understanding-linkers-challenges-and-potential>

Thriving Kids Advisory Group Final Report  
<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/thriving-kids-advisory-group-final-report?language=en>

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