



Playgroup  
Tasmania

2021

# Annual Report



To support family connections,  
strengthen communities and foster  
learning through play for all children.



## Chair Report

We know that what happens to and around children in their first 1,000 days influences the way that their bodies, brains and emotions develop. As at 30 June 2021, it had been 522 days since the first case of COVID-19 in Australia. Given the first 1,000 days are critical for setting the foundations of optimal health, growth and development across the lifespan, it is staggering to think that for many of our youngest playgroup participants a good proportion of their first 1,000 days have been affected by the pandemic.



“My mum often says that “Playgroup was a lifeline” and I know that playgroup has been the same for so many other families especially during COVID”

Even though Tasmania has managed to have weathered 2020/21 much better than others on the mainland and internationally, the COVID-19 pandemic has required us all to live differently. Our day-to-day interactions are different. Maintaining our usual social connections is difficult. We are separated from family and friends. The fear and anxiety of our borders opening and of another outbreak has dominated the thoughts of many. It has been a challenge for everyone to remain both physically and psychologically well. For many families, COVID has created additional pressures on the already challenging task of raising young children. Now more than ever playgroups play a critical role in building community connectedness and supporting the wellbeing of children and families.

As my term as Playgroup Tasmania Chair comes to an end, I have reflected on the important role that playgroups have had in my life and have contemplated what it would have been like for me and my parents if we had lived through a pandemic in my early years.

I was a playgroup kid from before I could walk. My Mum moved from a small town in Western NSW to the big smoke in Brisbane in the late 70s to be with my Dad. She knew no-one except my Dad's extended family so playgroup was a godsend. We went to “Mundi Group” (the nickname given by the members because playgroup happened on Monday) for years.





Eventually when we all started school, the group morphed into the “Tennis Group”, and then into a shopping and coffee group as there hasn’t been much tennis happening for more than 25 years. Mum still talks multiple time per day to the ladies from the Mundi Group, and my Dad regularly catches up with the “nine-ole-codgers” (their newest nickname!). The families we met at playgroup are our family’s lifelong friends. My mum often says that “Playgroup was a lifeline” and I know that playgroup has been the same for so many other families especially during COVID.

It has been amazing to watch the commitment, persistence and resilience of our playgroup children, families, volunteers and staff during 2020/21. I would like to express my gratitude to our CEO, Jacinda Armstrong for her relentless commitment to Playgroup Tasmania. Her intelligence, grit and determination has seen Playgroup Tasmania go from strength to strength despite the challenges of COVID. We have seen growth in community and supported playgroups, a new playground at Holbrook Street, new programs and partnerships, and increasing influence with Tasmanian Government stakeholders. Jacinda has also taken a leading role in supporting the review of the Playgroup Federation and strengthening how we work together to deliver playgroups across the nation. Special thanks also go to our Playgroup Tasmania Staff – Bec, Felicity, Nicki, Alison and Robert and Alana.

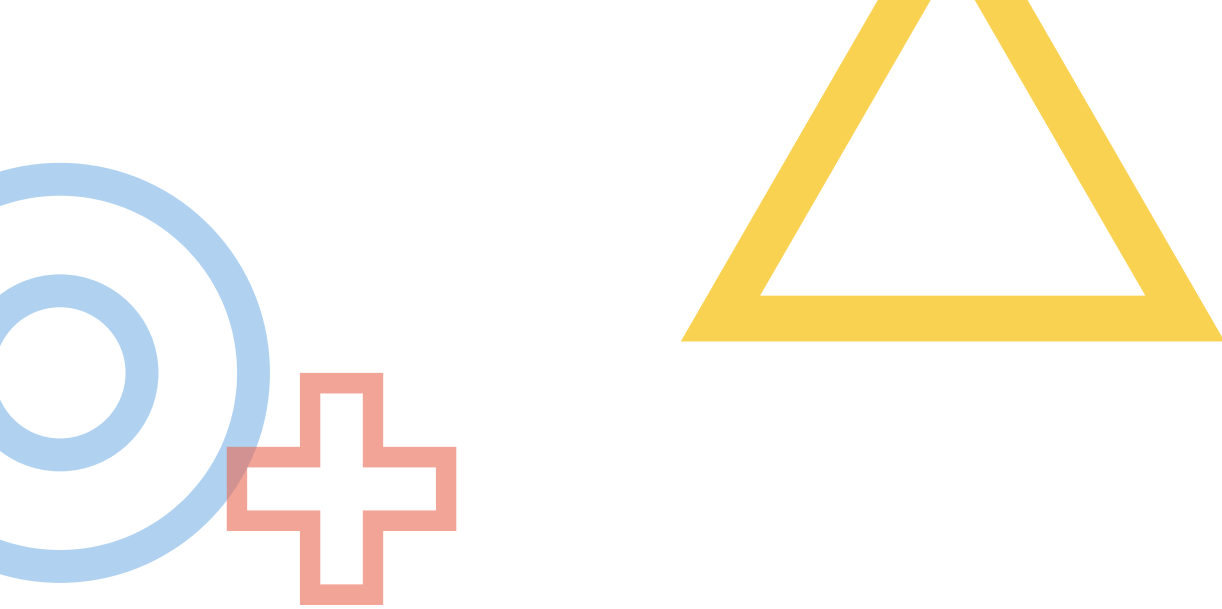
I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the Playgroup Tasmania Board. They are an amazing group of committed, capable and humble people who have all chipped in to help, guide and challenge me during this year and during my time as Chair. I would like to acknowledge Anna Dryburgh who will not be restanding at the AGM. It has been terrific to have Anna’s insights and focus around the board table and we will miss her.

**Playgroup Tasmania has a very bright future and I look forward to continuing to be part of the adventures in 2021/22.**

**Kathryn Fordyce**  
**CHAIR** PLAYGROUP TASMANIA







# CEO Report

This year my annual reflection is dedicated to the amazing playgroup volunteers who dedicate their time, their energy and their passion to providing rich environments for families to come together each week in their local community.

**Volunteers are the backbone of community playgroups and we couldn't achieve the outcomes for families and children without them.**

The enduring purpose of Playgroup Tasmania is to support family connections, strengthen communities and foster learning through play for all children. Its simple really, we empower groups of families with young children to meet regularly to socialise together and play in their local community. Simple, but the flow on benefits are very powerful. Families who go to playgroup grow confidence in their parenting, make new friends and increase play opportunities with their children. They are more likely to access services appropriate to their needs and feel more connected to their local communities. We've always believed in the power of playgroup, and the Covid19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on the powerful contribution of playgroups to family wellbeing and community resilience.

As a community we have experienced extraordinary challenges and change, however due partly to our fortunate geographic position - unlike some of our interstate friends - Tasmanian playgroups gradually resumed meeting from July 2020 following a 4 month pause. I want to acknowledge and thank the Playgroup Tasmania team for their work supporting playgroups to relaunch. From reassuring volunteers to negotiating fee reductions with venue owners, developing covid safe plans and supporting volunteers to understand the requirements of their specific venues - social distancing and venue density were uncharted territory for us all. Like everyone, we really did have to learn on the fly and I was grateful to access a sector support network through TasCOSS which provided access to key people and information to support us with our compliance requirements and decision making.

I am happy to say that playgroups have thrived and we are seeing continued growth in the number of families participating. Playgroups have also demonstrated their resilience, they have adapted to this "new normal" we find ourselves in - an example, of this is Lindisfarne Playgroup who were unable to resume their playgroup in their regular space due to venue density restrictions. Well now they are the Lindisfarne Outdoor Playgroup, meeting every week in a local park! We were also able to support them with a subsidy to purchase waterproof suits so the kids can play in all weather.

In addition to relaunching playgroups, we have continued to increase access and participation for those families who may experience barriers. We heard from families with new babies who said they would like a playgroup which is specifically for families with pre walking babies - PlayBaby is a new community playgroup initiative, led by amazing volunteers, which meets this need. We have partnered with other organisations to reach into communities with pop up events. Through Communities for Children Anglicare funding we have delivered an additional PlayConnect site in George Town. We received additional funding to continue to roll out PlayTogether, an inclusion education program, to playgroups across the state. We also delivered a pilot of the SMS4Dads program in the Burnie area, funded by Communities for Children CatholicCare.

We were proud to be approached to be a consultation partner in the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Consultation, it's a recognition of the value placed on the role of playgroups in supporting the health and wellbeing of children and families and the importance of the voices of families who attend them. The "It takes a Tasmanian village" strategy has a strong focus on the first 1000 days and we are excited to play a continued role through the Community Consultative Committee.

And how is it that we are able to achieve all of this? Through an awesome team of people! We have nurtured a strong and cohesive group of people who continue to impress me with their enthusiasm and "outside the square" thinking - thank you to the wonder team of Bec, Alison, Felicity, Nicki as well as Robert and Alana who jump in when needed. Thanks also to the Playgroup Tasmania Board, very much part of this team who also jump in when required, and who importantly keep the direction clear. Thanks also to outgoing Board member Anna Dryburgh for her rational and considered contributions and wish her well for future endeavours.

One very important thank you also goes to outgoing Chair Kathryn Fordyce. Kathryn has served her two terms as Chair with dynamism and dedication. At first Kathryn wasn't sure if she was the right person for Chair role, I was pretty certain she was. I was right. An articulate, strategic thinker, I am glad that Kathryn remains on the board as a Director where I am sure she will continue to contribute - both locally and nationally - with the same level of enthusiasm.

With so much already in the pipeline - including the renovation of the Playgroup Hall and Head Office in Invermay, \$350k commitment by Sarah Courtney MP and the Liberal Government secured through the state election campaign... I am looking forward to the next 12 months.

**Jacinda Armstrong**  
CEO PLAYGROUP TASMANIA





# 2020/21

## Our year at a glance

Playgroup Sites  
in Tasmania



38

Community  
Playgroups

22

Organisational  
Playgroups



626

Playgroup  
Family Members

2400

Total Playgroup Sessions  
(Community and Organisational)

Social Media Following



7625



324

### PlayConnect – Supported Playgroups



4

PlayConnect  
Sites

43

PlayConnect  
Families

160

PlayConnect  
Sessions

PlayConnect Playgroups are designed for families with children aged 0–6 years who have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder or those who have developmental delays in communications, behaviour or social skills. Children do not require a formal diagnosis or referral to attend a PlayConnect Playgroup.





## PLAYGROUP TASMANIA

# Strategic Objectives

“It is so great having things to take kids to, so glad most things have restarted post-Covid, as I really missed that and so did my kids. I noticed a big difference in emotional and physical changes when we started engaging in programs again, for the better.”

### OBJECTIVE ONE

## To be recognised as a leader and expert in our field

### Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Consultation

Playgroup Tasmania was proud to be a consultation partner to the Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Consultation.

The voices of over 150 playgroup families contributed their voice to the Strategy. They shared their parenting experiences, their hopes and dreams for their children and what they need for their families to live a good life.

Playgroup Tasmania staff facilitated discussions and craft activities at King Island, Dilston, Jetsonville and South Hobart Playgroups, as well as our PlayConnect playgroups, to ensure we captured a range of families. Playgroup children contributed over 50 art submissions to the “Get Creative” consultation portal. The Holbrook St venue in Invermay was also set up to encourage conversations with all the users of the space.

In addition we also provided our own organisational submission to the strategy consultation. We conducted an online survey and facilitated in playgroup focus groups to ensure the voices of our members shaped our position. As the peak body for playgroups in Tasmania, we were pleased to contribute to the conversation and to clearly communicate the value and importance of the playgroup experience. Our knowledge and expertise, along with the voices of our playgroup families contributed a strong and coherent message about the needs and wants of Tasmanian parents and their children.

“Thank you for offering the opportunity for us to come together and learn from each other.”

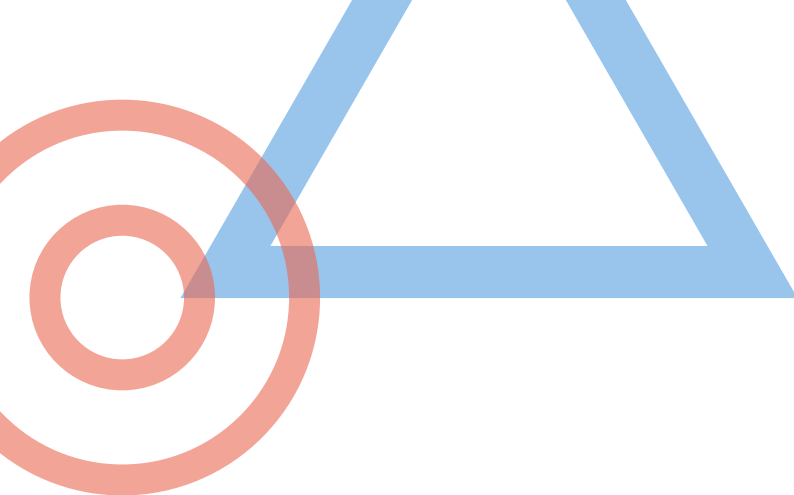
### Community of Practice

Playgroup Tasmania supported the work of organisational playgroup leaders across Tasmania through developing and implementing a statewide Community of Practice.

The intent of this group is to enable these leaders to connect and support each other in their professional roles with a flow on effect of enabling them to be better able to provide resources, support and links to the families who participate in their playgroups. The group met three times on an online platform and have continued to maintain contact via emails and a closed Facebook group. Topics of focus included: supporting mental health and wellbeing (including postnatal anxiety and depression), inclusion and access, and top tips for running a playgroup. The feedback from participants is the experience of being able to come together to connect and share is valuable.







## OBJECTIVE TWO

# To promote and grow active participation

### Supporting Community Playgroups

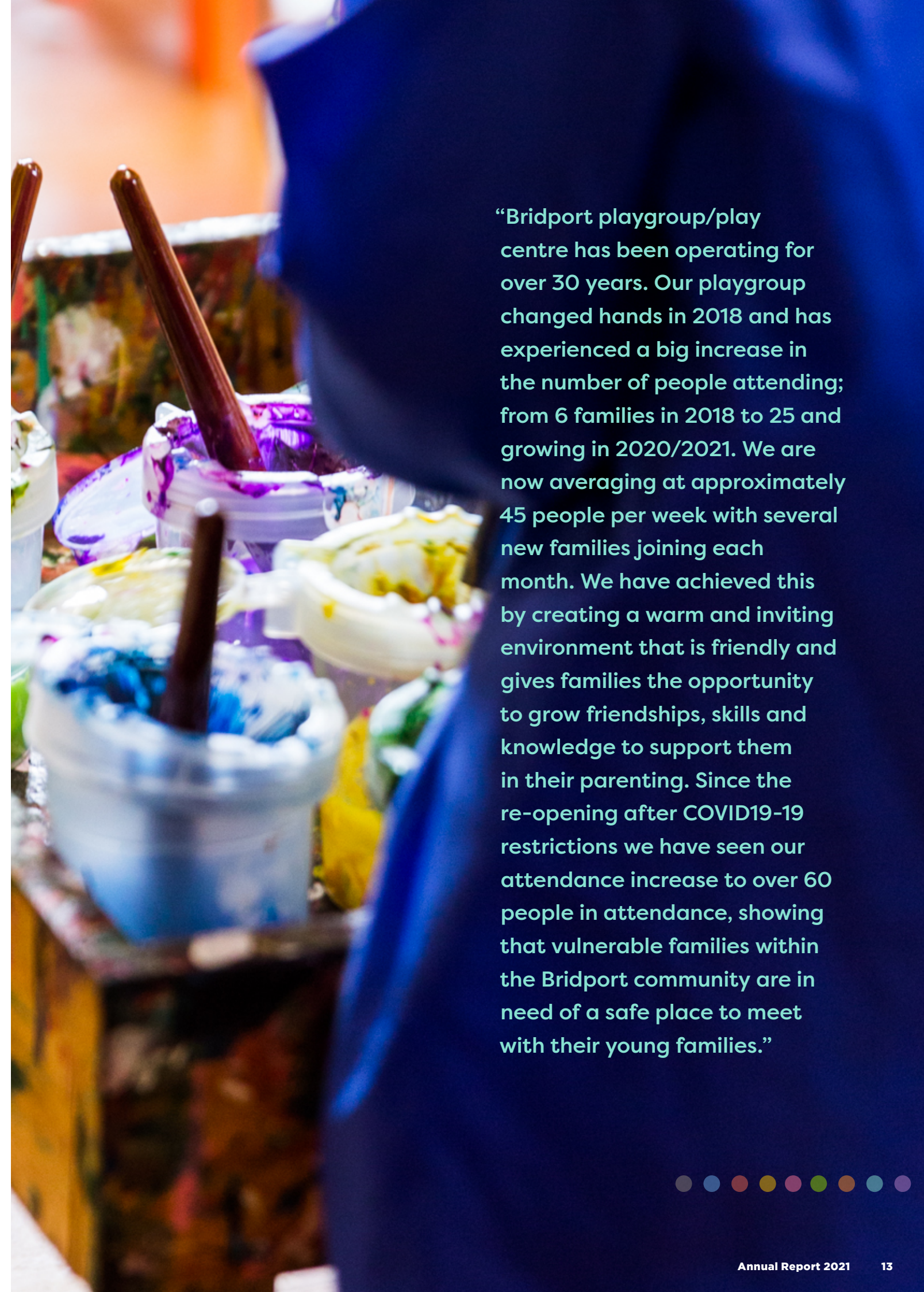
Core to the work of Playgroup Tasmania is supporting parent led, community playgroups. At their heart, community playgroups are groups of parents, caregivers and extended family who come together with their babies and young children to learn together through play.

The focus of playgroup is strengthening social connections for families, peer support and role modelling positive parenting practices and empowering parents. Playgroups rely on the energy, capacity and goodwill of the parents and volunteers. They also are often supported by their local community in many ways, providing venue support, donations, advertising and word of mouth referrals into the playgroup.

Relaunching playgroups after COVID19 lock down saw many playgroups faced with unprecedented challenges, including:

- » venue managers requiring additional COVID19 safe information,
- » venue density requirements meaning there were limits on the number of families who could attend,
- » additional voluntary hours put into marketing of COVID19 safe practices at playgroup,
- » an increase in fees to cover cleaning, and,
- » many hours of additional work outside of playgroup for our volunteers in ensuring they met all the COVID19 safe policies around cleaning, setting up and packing up etc.


“Earlier this year a new playgroup began in Launceston, called the Cub’s Club. This playgroup stemmed from a small mum’s group who met regularly for catch ups in local parks. Over the months the playgroup has linked in with many services to provide families with local and relevant information. Kidsafe, Physio Fit, a speech therapist from St Giles, Mission Australia just to name a few. Each week the playgroup has between 30-35 families attending. From playgroup visits and regular conversations with families it is evident that these families attending have found their village.”



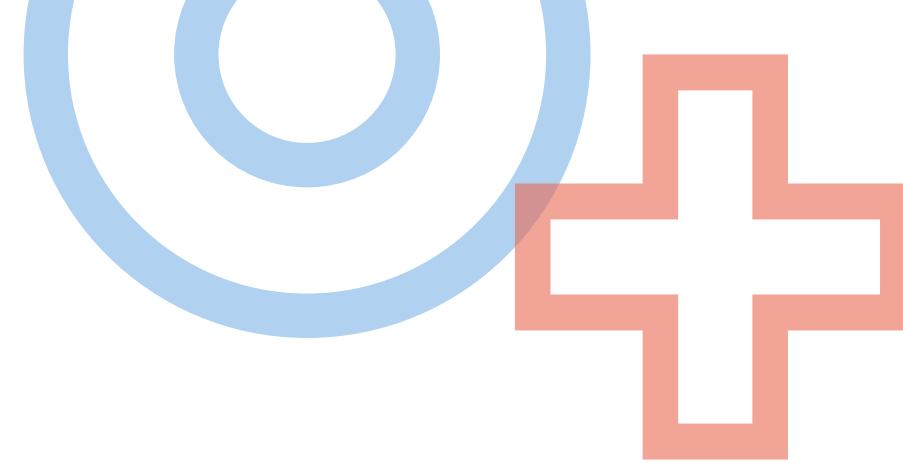
“Bridport playgroup/play centre has been operating for over 30 years. Our playgroup changed hands in 2018 and has experienced a big increase in the number of people attending; from 6 families in 2018 to 25 and growing in 2020/2021. We are now averaging at approximately 45 people per week with several new families joining each month. We have achieved this by creating a warm and inviting environment that is friendly and gives families the opportunity to grow friendships, skills and knowledge to support them in their parenting. Since the re-opening after COVID19-19 restrictions we have seen our attendance increase to over 60 people in attendance, showing that vulnerable families within the Bridport community are in need of a safe place to meet with their young families.”







“At Penguin Playgroup we’ve seen an increase in new mums and small babies since reopening which is really encouraging, and we would like to keep encouraging this. The current committee is also nearing retirement at the end of this year, so we want to encourage a new team, make sure they don’t feel overwhelmed or burdened, and make the space inviting and fun, with everything ticking over smoothly.”



These were really challenging times for our volunteer playgroup leaders and some were concerned they may not be able to return or simply just wanting to put it in the too hard basket. Through this period Playgroup Tasmania provided support by liaising with venue managers, offering all playgroups reimbursements for hygiene supplies and supporting playgroups to complete a ‘Return to playgroup COVID19 Management Plan’.

It was an incredibly busy period for staff supporting the playgroups to resume service delivery. However once compliance was met playgroups returned and families were able to connect and play face to face in their community again, and we saw a huge increase in families joining playgroups.

As part of a National Playgroup Relaunch Campaign and thanks to a grant from the Ian Potter Foundation, our member community playgroups were able to apply to receive a subsidy towards starting their playgroup again post COVID19 lockdown. Lots of playgroups focused on refreshing their space, purchasing new cups and cushions, as well as new toys and craft materials, and others used their subsidy to go towards venue fees. We are delighted to see how these subsidies are supporting playgroups to continue to connect with local families.

Community Playgroups are a vital part of many small communities however there can be challenges ensuring they can continue to operate including increasing venue related costs and fees. An important part of Playgroup Tasmania support is venue advocacy for playgroups, ensuring groups do not need to close their doors due to financial barriers. Norwood Newstead Playgroup at St Catherines Hall is just one example, successfully operating for over 40 years but due to council policy they were seeing their venue fees increase significantly each year, putting their future at risk. By working closely with the playgroup and the City of Launceston we have been able to achieve policy change at council which now sees not-for-profit groups receiving a 50% reduction in the commercial venue hire rate. This is an incredibly pleasing outcome that was also made possible through support from longtime playgroup supporter, Rosemary Armitage MLC.



## Volunteering with Playgroup Tasmania

Playgroup Tasmania provides support to many volunteers in their valuable work in community playgroups across the state. We acknowledge the wonderful work that these volunteers have done in the past and continue to do. Without these fantastic volunteers many playgroups would not exist.

Traditionally most volunteer playgroup leaders are parents or caregivers with their own children who come along to playgroup. However, being able to recruit parent volunteers is becoming increasingly difficult. To address this we have begun to formalise and promote a volunteer program for playgroup leaders or play helpers to assist playgroups without having their own children as participants. These volunteers will be able to support existing groups as well as taking the lead in establishing new groups, particularly PlayBaby groups.

The organisation has joined Volunteering Tasmania which has provided much needed guidance and support as we have developed our more formal volunteering recruitment, selection and induction processes. We have promoted our volunteering vacancies via online platforms such as Seek and Go Volunteer and have processed around 65 enquiries over the four months of promotion.

Volunteering with playgroups provides many benefits for both the group and the volunteer. As Codie Baylis from The Cub's Club says:

**“I love leading our playgroup because I get to meet new families, build Friendships with them, and help others do the same. Building a community through motherhood is so important. I also love building a supportive environment where everyone feels safe and comfortable. And at our Playgroup we love to introduce all the mothers and fathers to each other and create fun activities for each age group. I also like to have parent self-care activities.”**

## SMS4Dads Pilot

Funded to June 30, 2021, by CatholicCare Communities for Children, SMS4dads provided new fathers with information and connections to online services through their mobile phones.

The text messages with tips, information and links to other services aimed to help fathers understand and connect with their baby and support their partner. It is an ongoing challenge finding ways to connect with fathers, and Playgroup Tasmania was keen to support a new and innovate way of promoting participation in this cohort. The pilot was run in the Burnie community and involved webinars, weekend playgroups, and promotion of the SMS service. The pilot identified both strengths and weaknesses in the program. One positive outcome was that the activities carried out by the project officer have raised awareness amongst professionals and thereby has increased the father-inclusive capacity of local services within the Burnie area.







## OBJECTIVE TWO

# To broaden access to playgroups

### PlayConnect

**PlayConnect provides a fun, safe, supportive and inclusive playgroup for families to come together each week and share their stories, challenges and feel accepted in a supportive environment.**

PlayConnect Playgroups are for families with children aged 0-6 years who have needs associated with having an Autism Spectrum Disorder or developmental delays in communication, behaviour or social skills. PlayConnect is an early intervention strategy funded through the Australian Government and children do not require a formal diagnosis or referral to attend a PlayConnect Playgroup.

The program is incredibly valuable to families, and we are provided a great deal of positive feedback from families who benefit immensely from the sessions.

In 2020/21 Playgroup Tasmania delivered four PlayConnect Playgroups around Tasmania.

- » Invermay
- » George Town (funded by Anglicare Communities for Children)
- » Devonport
- » Goodwood



PlayConnect playgroups encourage parents to connect with each other and provide opportunities for families to engage with local service providers relevant to their needs. In 2020/2021 PlayConnect facilitators engaged with many stakeholder organisations to provide resources, advocacy, guest speakers and support for their playgroup families, including: NDIS ECEI (Baptcare Mission), Disability Support Agency (St Giles), Autism Tas, Oral Health, Carer's Tas, Autism Specific Early Learning Centre (ASELC), Tasmanian Autism Diagnostic Service (TADS), Tasmanian Health Service: Child Health and Parenting Service (CHaPS), Child Health Association Tasmania (CHAT), Local Allied Health Professionals, Local Education and Care Services, Child Development unit, Aboriginal Health Service (No 34), Family Based Care, Anglicare, Health Promotion Team DHHS, Parenting Centre, Tasmanian Education Department Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS), Tasmanian Education Department (Child and Family Centres), Tasmanian Education Department (Working Together program), Neighbourhood Houses, Migrant Resource Centre, Education and Care Inclusion Agency (Gowrie Tasmania)

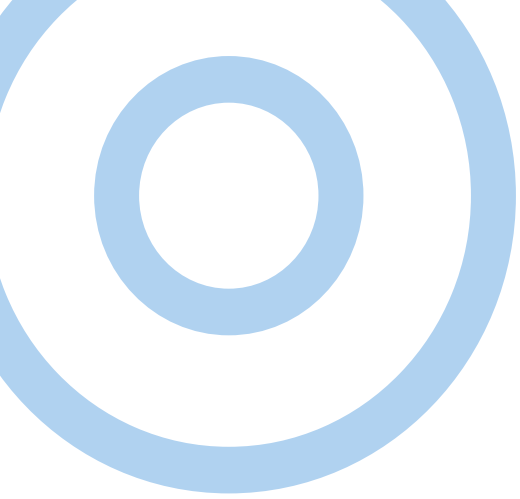
This extensive engagement and connection with service providers demonstrates the value of PlayConnect in being able to provide a safe space for families who are navigating the stress of a new diagnosis and provide a link between families and broader therapy services.

**“We love Playconnect. I wish we could attend more than once a week. It’s been so great for children with needs and delays to just be accepted, and parents to be heard and understood. It’s the best.”**

PLAYCONNECT CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEY 2021







### PlayBaby

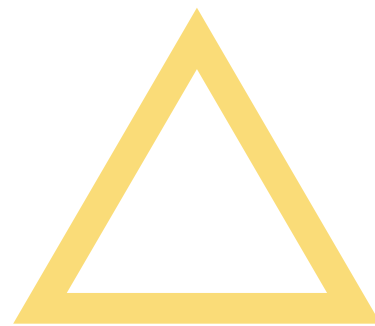
**Playgroup Tasmania continues to support playgroups to be welcoming and inclusive and to broaden access and participation at playgroup.**

Listening to parents in our community, we heard that some new parents were not comfortable bringing their new baby to an all-ages playgroup. They were looking for a group that was specifically for first time parents with a new baby. PlayBaby is a unique playgroup that relies on volunteers to connect new parents and support environments that provide social and emotional support.

Predominantly a volunteer model, PlayBaby allows parents to spend time getting to know each other. This informal, peer-to-peer connection is an effective way of providing support to new families. Playgroups have been established at Howrah and Lenah Valley in Hobart, with over 50 families attending the first session! An Online PlayBaby group was also set up for families who were unable or unwilling to meet in person, and to mitigate any potential further COVID19 lockdowns.

The overwhelming feedback from PlayBaby families is that they value having a safe space for their babies to be able to be on the floor; they need to be able to talk to and connect with other parents going through similar stages in their journey; and that these groups are so important in helping them find new friends and reduce their isolation, especially with Covid affecting their ability to have extended family support. We have multiple parents attending both PlayBaby groups and many parents travelling extended distances to attend a group.

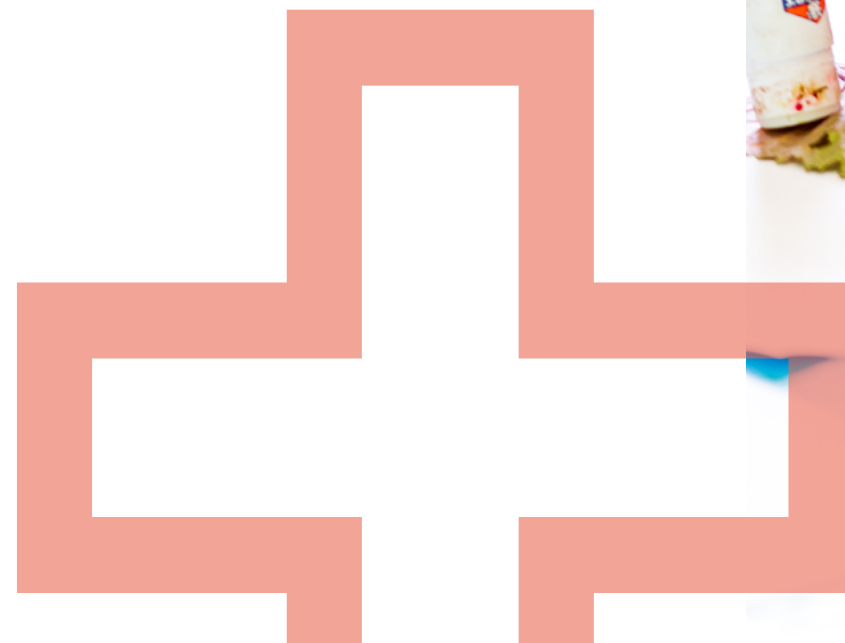
**“I think having an organised parent group for those with a new baby is really important especially for those parents who don’t have established social groups or a social group with children of the same age. I was really disappointed when I had my son that the Child Health run/ organised parent groups had stopped as I had no other social group with kids of similar ages. It was only by coincidence that I found a group set-up by some parents. Having others to talk to who are also going through a similar situation is invaluable. “**



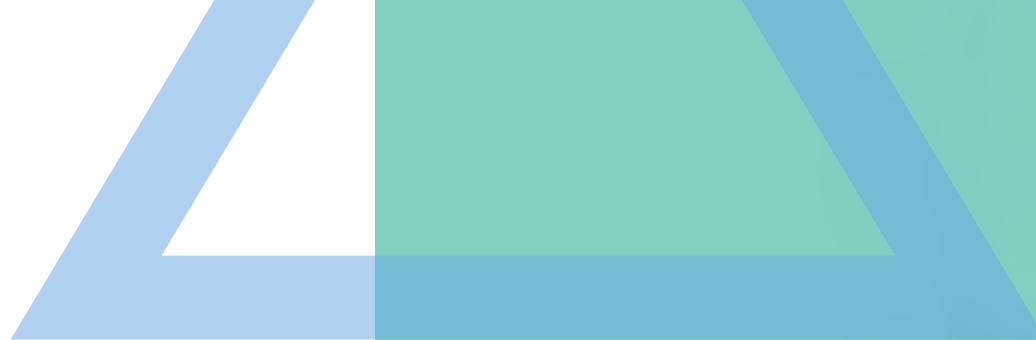
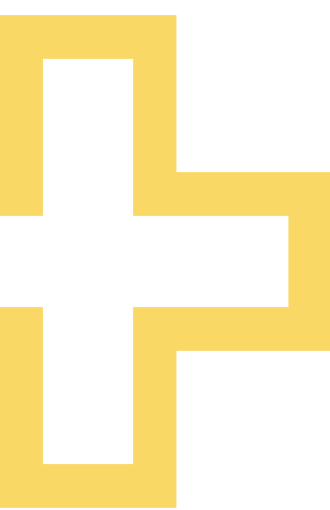
### PlayTogether

**Playgroup Tasmania is pleased to be able to consolidate and grow the work begun in the PlayTogether Inclusive Playgroups pilot (which commenced in 2019/2020).**

The organisation acknowledges there are barriers to participation in playgroups for some children and families; to address this the PlayTogether program will enable staff to work with playgroup leaders and families to support groups to be even more warm and welcoming to all participants. The Project Officer- Inclusion Programs has joined a national working group with a focus on developing an online training package. In 2022, the PlayTogether program will be rolled out across Tasmania with all community playgroups encouraged to be involved; the online training will be offered in conjunction with support and mentoring from Playgroup Tasmania staff.







## National Children's Week

**Historically Playgroup Tasmania has promoted and celebrated Children's Week in Tasmania by hosting large scale Teddy Bear Picnic events in 3 key locations.**

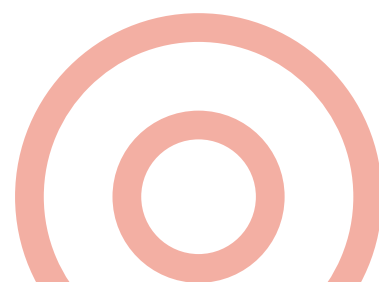
In 2020, following the establishment of regional working groups, and in a new COVID environment, a decision was made to focus on smaller, local community-based activities and, importantly, to offer online opportunities as an alternative to face to face options.

Made possible with funding from Housing Choices Tasmania, the working groups developed and promoted a Children's Week Tasmania Activity Guide. Community groups and organisations across the state were encouraged to plan and organise their own smaller scale activities (online and in person) based on the Children's Week theme for 2020. These activities were collated and promoted to the wider community via the Activity Guide. Pleasingly the guide included over 56 activities across the state. Not only did this provide opportunity for more children and families to become involved than would be able to attend a one-off event, but the guide also provided opportunities for older children and families from more remote areas to be involved.

Sponsorship funds from the Australian Government were used to provide financial support to community playgroups who ran activities across Children's Week with 16 groups benefitting from the funding. An average of just over 21 people attended each sponsored activity.

Although the annual Teddy Bear's Picnic could not be continued, we wanted to maintain the 40 plus year relationship with the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens in Hobart. The picnic was re-imagined into a Teddy Bear Hunt – a self-guided activity that remained open for families at the Gardens for the entire 7 days of Children's Week. Children got to explore the Gardens, looking for posters of 26 bears. With close to 1,000 families participating over the week it was a huge success. The RTBG were particularly happy with the event indicating how it encouraged families to get out in the Gardens that wouldn't normally have done this. The gardens also reported enormous positive feedback from families participating.

Feedback from Children's Week activity organisers was that the activities were a success. Most playgroups hosted smaller and more intimate Teddy Bears' Picnics, whilst other groups arranged alternate activities such as nature play day, Be your own superhero, Mad Hatter's Tea Party, crafty kids morning and a music and movement focus. Many playgroup leaders reported that new families attended the playgroup during Children's Week.



Here are some of their comments:

**At Jetsonville we set up a variety of smaller nature based activities allowing the children to interact with each other at their leisure. We had rock stepping stones that were then turned into a big nest, a river in our sandpit, sensory bags for our little ones, leaf drawings, dinosaur sensory play and the favourite was the nature soup.**

Jetsonville Playgroup

**Saturday playgroup friends had a wonderful time dressing up as superheroes, sharing a yummy morning tea and creating a shared artwork using a large piece of paper spread across the table. Everyone had a great time being a hero!!!**

Saturday Playgroup

**We had a lovely afternoon at playgroup spent doing some craft for National Children's Week. The babies had their hands and footprints doing with coloured paint of choice. Trying to get a good print of their hands proved to be tricky for some of us and paint went everywhere but the final results were oh so cute!**

2020 Baby Playgroup

**We had so much fun. We painted and giggle and listen to nursery rhymes. The weather ended up being lush that the activities continued outside which was nice in the fresh air. It was a total success.**

Port Sorell Playgroup





Playgroup  
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