



2020

Annual Report

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



Chair Report

Playgroup Tasmania has a proud history of bringing children and families together, and this year has definitely reminded us of how important playgroup is for supporting family connections, strengthening communities and fostering learning through play.

For us, like most organisations and individuals, 2019/20 has been a year of two immensely different periods. In 2019 and early 2020, before the Coronavirus Outbreak, we continued to provide our usual amazing face-to-face opportunities for connection and capacity building at Playgroups across the state. While since March Coronavirus has required Playgroup Tasmania to show our characteristic resilience and adaptability in order to pivot quickly to providing support and connection to families remotely.

I know we are hearing it hundreds of times per day, but these truly are unprecedented times that have created challenges for all of us in our personal, professional and volunteering roles. The Coronavirus Pandemic is creating monumental and potentially long-lasting impacts on the way we live and interact, and Playgroup Tasmania, our playgroups and families are definitely not immune from these changes. During the period when face-to-face playgroups were not operating, the Board, staff and the playgroup community had the opportunity to reflect on the important role that playgroups play in supporting parents, fostering community and on building social capital. We know that so many of Tasmanian families have felt and continue to feel the pressure of COVID-19



“ we are working to make all playgroups more accessible for children and families experiencing disability.

and we know this is having impacts on their health and well-being. Fortunately we know that our playgroups both virtual and face-to-face have been and are in the future an important part of the solution.

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, we have continued to work towards our Strategic Plan 2018-2021 and in support of our vision that all Tasmanians value playgroup throughout the year. We have continued to **promote and grow participation in playgroup** including garnering significant attention on the value of intergenerational playgroups. Playgroup Tasmania along with the other state and territory playgroup associations and Playgroup Australia joined the ABC as the community impact partner for the “Old People’s Homes for 4 Year Olds”. This program generated considerable interest in expanding our intergenerational playgroup offerings. Unfortunately COVID impacted on our ability to fully capitalise on this, but we are confident that 2021 will allow us to reinvigorate these connections and **broaden access to playgroups** especially for our children, families and senior citizens who have been isolated during COVID-19.

We continue to make inroads in positioning the organisation as a recognised **leader and expert**. Jacinda and the Playgroup Tasmania team have shown leadership in the sector in quickly responded to the changed environment imposed by Coronavirus by providing our virtual “Playgroup at Home” program, supporting our playgroup leaders



to take their groups virtually, and in making it easier for volunteer playgroup coordinators to develop COVID-safe plans. We have also made headway on reinvigorating our Holbrook Street site as part of our master plan to create a “Centre of Excellence” where volunteers, service providers and other stakeholders can grow their capacity to support families based on the principles of playgroup – peer support, role modelling and capacity building.

Playgroup Tasmania would sincerely like to thank the Tasmanian Community Fund, the WP Booth Charitable Trust and Rotary Club of Central Launceston for funding the redevelopment of our outdoor play space.

Finally I would like to acknowledge our dedicated staff and volunteers. 2020 has been a year like no other and I truly appreciate the efforts of all our volunteer playgroup coordinators, our staff, Jacinda, Bec, Nicki, Felicity, Alison, Alana and the Playgroup Tasmania Board. We are sad to say goodbye to three of our board members, Michelle Strickland, Bronwyn Tamplin and Alison Wood at the Annual General Meeting. These three amazingly intelligent and capable women will be missed by the board but we know they will continue to champion the work of Playgroup Tasmania long into the future. I am confident that 2020/21 will see Playgroup Tasmania leverage the groundswell of support there is for our work, and look forward to the important outcomes we will be able to achieve through our collaborative efforts.

Kathryn Fordyce
CHAIR PLAYGROUP TASMANIA





CEO Report

This 2019/20 Annual Report is my 5th as CEO of Playgroup Tasmania. Developing these reports is always an interesting exercise in reflection, none more so than this year!

If the year had ended the way it began, our annual reflection would be full of the outcomes of plans we had in place.

We were gaining momentum with intergenerational programs following the success of the ABC's "Old People's Homes for 4 Year Olds" and ended the calendar year with 8 registered intergenerational playgroups and many more discussions occurring. We partnered with Department of Communities Tasmania to deliver a review of Children's Week and supplied showbags to the 3 Teddy Bear's Picnic events. We launched digital membership capability. We established partnerships with DoE/ AEDC and Salvation Army - Communities for Children (SE Tas) reaching areas of unmet need, including the Gagebrook Community Playgroup project in partnership with the Gagebrook Community Centre. We continued to strengthen our inclusive playgroup strategies. PlayConnect keeps going from strength to strength, I am proud of the work achieved by the team creating trusting relationships with families and strong partnerships with referral partners - this is a true strength of the organisation. The PlayTogether pilot, although cut short, designed and tested inclusive playgroup training to 7 groups.

The feedback from the pilot participants has been positive and we are very keen to continue with the roll out over the 20/21.

Additionally, let's not forget the new play space at Holbrook Street, what an amazing transformation this has been. Made possible by funding from TCF and the generosity of Rotary Central Launceston and WD Booth, a fully accessible and engaging space is now being enjoyed by many playgroup families.

However, I think we can all agree that the start of 2020 wasn't what any of us expected!

Every organisation, every playgroup, every family and every one of the Playgroup Tasmania team faced challenges we never anticipated. Nobody will argue that it was tough at the start, we were constantly monitoring government advice and speaking with partner organisations about how we navigate the escalating situation.

On 16th March we ceased delivery of PlayConnect and on the 17th made the call to all our member playgroups that it was time to close the doors until further notice. It was a hard decision to make, knowing the impact this decision would have on families.

However, I can honestly say, when the communication went out, it felt like a massive weight had been lifted from my shoulders. We could shift our focus to supporting families in new ways.

I want to thank the dedicated Playgroup Superhero team, Alison, Bec, Felicity, Nicki and Alana who showed, strength, resilience and their adaptability to change. We all had our own, and our families, emotional wellbeing to also consider during this time and it wasn't always smooth sailing. However, we learned a lot about ourselves as individuals, as a team and as an organisation that we can take with us into the future.

Also, a sincere thank you to the Playgroup Tasmania Board who, through their prudent guidance and unwavering support, helped to steer the organisation (and their often teary CEO) through unprecedented challenges. I value your confidence in me and your passion for the work of the organisation.

I also need to take a moment to thank our playgroup leaders and volunteers. I know you believe in the value of playgroup as much as we do, and you demonstrate that commitment week in and week out supporting local families at your local playgroup. Just as each playgroup is different, each one of you brings different skills, knowledge and experience. Without you the community playgroup model would not be possible.

We decided to take a different approach to the annual report this year. We are showcasing the stories of playgroup families and volunteers, describing the positive impact playgroup has had on their lives. The stories are what tell us we are on the right track, that our work matters. We are also telling the story of how, as an organisation, we continue to adapt to the needs of our community and continue to provide support, connection and play in different ways.

Jacinda Armstrong
CEO PLAYGROUP TASMANIA



2019/20

Our year at a glance

Playgroup Sites
in Tasmania



68

Total Number
of Playgroups

35

Community
Playgroups

22

Events

12

South

5

North

5

North
West

25

Organisational
Playgroups

8

Intergenerational
Playgroups



2400

Total Playgroup Sessions
(Community and Organisational)



432

Playgroup
Family Members

Social Media Following



7278



248



PlayConnect – Supported Playgroups

PlayConnect Playgroups are designed for families with children aged 0–6years 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.



3

PlayConnect

43

PlayConnect
Families

PLAYGROUP TASMANIA

Strategic Objectives.

OBJECTIVE ONE

To be recognised as a leader and expert in our field

Playgroup Tasmania is an active contributor to national research and policy conversations through our work with Playgroup Australia and its member organisations.

This year has included:

- » PlayConnect Evaluation – ARACY
- » Cost Benefit Analysis of Community Playgroup – University of Canberra
- » The reach of playgroups and their benefit for children across Australia: A comparison of 2012, 2015, and 2018 AEDC data – Telethon Kids Institute
- » Ageless Play – The Playgroup Federation was the promotional partner for the ABC's hugely successful "Old Peoples Home for 4 Year Olds" television program.

Locally, we continue to focus on working closely with partner organisations to ensure we are best supporting Tasmanian families to access and participate in quality, inclusive playgroup experiences, as well as ensuring playgroups and families are connected to other programs and services in their community. Some of our partners include:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| » BapCare | » Child and Family Centres |
| » Mission Australia | » ECIS |
| » StGiles | » Autism Tasmania |
| » CHAT | » Goodstart Early Learning |
| » Neighbourhood & Community Houses | » CHaPs |

Our advocacy work is centred on ensuring the whole community understands the benefits the playgroup model and playgroup participation can have for all families. The voices of real families and playgroup participants are an integral part of that work.

- » Early Learning Initiatives Steering Committee – Dept Education
- » Health and Mental Health Roundtable – Tasmanian Labor Party
- » East Tamar Local Enabling Group (Child and Family Learning Centre) – Dept of Education
- » Meetings with members of Local, State and Federal Government
- » Playgroup sector representative, Communities for Children Council – Launceston Tamar



Every dollar invested in Community Playgroups across Australia delivers \$3.60 in benefits.*

Cost Benefit Analysis of Community Playgroup
playgroupaustralia.com.au

As a team, we have been reflecting on how to better tell the story of playgroups and the support we provide. We commissioned TasCOSS (Tasmanian Council of Social Service) to work with us to develop an Outcomes Framework to strengthen our own evidence base and provide a deeper understanding of the impact of our work. We look forward to implementing this across all work areas in 20-21.

“

The Swanston Street Children's Centre building and garden is such a super special and beautiful place that I think that everyone falls in love with it, as I did when I first attended Playgroup!

We all feel so lucky to spend time at such a special place- a welcome getaway from the rest of our busy lives where children can play freely and feel happy, which in turn makes all the parents, grandparents and carers/ guardians feel happy even if it can be really busy as a Playgroup leader especially! Personally, I get a lot of joy from seeing so many grandmothers playing with their grandchildren- both so happy and relaxed and I think how special it would be if my own mother was still alive to see her grandchildren grow up. Playgroup is a unique place where the joys of childhood can truly be treasured and celebrated.

I will look back on this time with fondness and gratitude.

Alice, Swanston St Playgroup Leader

STORIES FROM MEMBERS

OBJECTIVE TWO

To promote and grow active participation

Each year we ask ourselves and our members how we are doing. Are we doing enough to enable playgroups to best support their community? Are we doing enough to ensure we are attracting and retaining member playgroups and families?

This year saw the launch of online membership forms, reducing the requirement for playgroups and families to fill out hardcopy memberships. We recognize that not every family has access to the internet, so we are still happy to receive calls from people wanting to join up with us on the phone and at face-to-face events.

In order to grow active participation, we are always looking for ways to expand the variety of playgroups that are available. We want to ensure that all families can find a playgroup where they feel comfortable. These playgroups include Multiples Playgroups, Baby Playgroups, multicultural playgroups and nature-based playgroups.

Another way we are looking at supporting playgroups is through attracting more volunteers to support playgroups.

Volunteers are able to take the pressure of families by being an extra pair of helping hands, making cups of tea and being a listening ear. We know that different playgroups have different needs and not all playgroups will benefit from a volunteer.

It is just another way that we are looking to support all families to have access to play opportunities.

PLAYGROUP LEADER SURVEY 2020

68.7% of volunteer playgroup leaders (PLG) responded

95.0% of PGL very or extremely satisfied with Playgroup Tasmania

HOW THEY WERE CONTACTED:

100% contacted via email

95.0% contacted in person

95.0% contacted by phone

RECORDED SUPPORT:

86.0% through tools for running a Playgroup

77.0% for venue related issues

86.0% through promotional materials

82.0% through ideas for play

68.0% through ideas for Playgroup structure

77.0% through information for parents

55.0% with grant applications

95.0% rated the support they recorded as very or extremely helpful

95.0% report they feel valued by Playgroup Tasmania

THEY ALSO FEEL VALUED BY:

82.0% Playgroup Families

55.0% Their Community

“

I just wanted to say a huge thank you for recommending play group on a post I had. I plucked up the courage (PTSD and high anxiety in social situations here!), went along and now look forwards to it each week. So, thank you-for being receptive, seeing my need a few weeks back and giving me the info that has potentially saved my sanity. I have also complimented the leader as she makes **everyone** so included and welcomed.

LINDISFARNE PLAYGROUP MUM



PLAYGROUP IS FOR BABIES

Ash Midson

mum to Laken (7 months)
attends Baby Playgroup

What does playgroup mean to you?

Playgroup gives me a good excuse to get out of the house and meet other mums.

What would you be doing without playgroup?

If I didn't have playgroup to look forward to I would most likely be at home.

How does playgroup help you connect with other services?

Other mums are always sharing advice, tips and tricks.



PLAYGROUP IS FOR VOLUNTEERS

Nelleka & Lorraine

Latrobe Playgroup Vounteers

What does playgroup mean to you?

A chance to support young mums in the Latrobe Community. The mums need somewhere to go and if we can help them to get out of the house, then it makes it all worth it. The mums are starting to get to know us, and we can have good chats and watch the children playing. We have the time and energy to do little things to help the families. It's easy for us to make cups of tea and organise the toys.

What would you be doing without playgroup?

Spending more time at home. I don't think I would feel as connected to the Latrobe community.

How does playgroup help you connect with other services?

Playgroup helps us connect with young families, and young children. Watching the delight on their faces as they play is very precious. We have someone come and read a story to the children each week, such as the library and the local school, and it is a nice way to connect with those places.



GRANDPARENTS ARE WELCOME AT PLAYGROUP TOO!

Suzanne Hudson

granny of Jack (4.5 years)
attends Dilston Playgroup

What does playgroup mean to you?

It's an incredible opportunity. It gives Jack the chance to play with other children his age and here at playgroup he has made some really good friends. He talks about playgroup all week between each session and the vegetable patch has been one of Jacks highlight.

What would you be doing without playgroup?

At home we have swings in the garden but at playgroup it's great because Jack gets to have interaction with other children and playgroup helps get him ready for school. Dilston Playgroup has so many amazing things on offer for Jack to do.

How does playgroup help you connect with other services?

I haven't had to connect with other services but I know if I did I would get the help I need here. I have heard other mums talk about sleepless nights and breastfeeding and all the parents and carers are so supportive of each other and always sharing information.



OBJECTIVE THREE

To broaden access to playgroups

We strongly believe that all families should be able to have a quality playgroup experience. Playgroup Tasmania continues to increase our focus on inclusive programs for families who experience barriers to participation, and who live in rural and remote communities. We are constantly evolving our programs and redesign our services to strengthen our own inclusive practices and those of our member playgroups. The PlayTogether program continued to flourish in its second year, while Covid19 impacted the delivery, we are excited to expand this program in 20/21.

Three years ago, we made a decision to deliver a third PlayConnect site on the NW. This year, we finally received funding for this site, this is recognition of the enduring advocacy work of the team to tell the story of PlayConnect, the benefits for families and why it should be funded. The PlayConnect program continues to grow, we are seeing increased participation and the development of strong, trusting relationships with families. We can also attribute this growth to the strength in our relationships with referral partners including St Giles, BaptCare, Mission, ECIS, CHaPs and Autism Tasmania. We know that success in the program can only be achieved through building reciprocal relationships.

Playgroup Tasmania supported the Moveit4kids Program in partnership with Playgroup Victoria – a physical activity awareness program in Rocherlea, Ravenswood, Burnie, Gagebrook, Bridgewater and Clarendon Vale.

Through partnerships with Salvation Army Communities for Children (SE Tas) and DoE AEDC, we have been able to work in new communities, in particular Gagebrook/Herdsman's Cove and the Southern and Central Highlands areas.

Though conversations with families, we found that while the Herdsmans Cove/ Bridgewater area has access to 3 Launch into Learning programs and the Child and Family Centre at tagari liahi. This area experiences significant barriers to participation due to a high reliance on an inadequate public transport system and many families not engaging with traditional government services. We received a grant to enable the creation of a new community playgroup, currently facilitated by Alana and working with the Gagebrook Community Centre. This community playgroup provided an alternative avenue for families to connect and engage with each other and continues to grow each session.

PlayTogether pilot

"Parents have become more supportive towards other parents that are struggling with the behaviours of their children"

"Everyone is always welcoming and friendly"

"Families are more open to giving offers of encouragement or reassurance to other parents that they are not alone, and they understand how hard parenting can be"

"Families are realising how tough it can be supporting children with high needs"

"I have seen more patience, more getting on the level of the child and inclusive play"

"I have found the PlayTogether program to be very supportive and provides lots of ideas and things to think about when running playgroups"

"Our families have been very accepting of all children/adults"

Playgroup Tasmania looks forward to continuing to build awareness of inclusion across all playgroups in 2021.

Playgroup Tasmania undertook trial delivery of the PlayTogether Inclusive Playgroups program in 7 pilot sites between November 2019 and March 2020. PlayTogether is a program that supports playgroups to be a welcoming and safe place for families with a child or adult with a disability or developmental delay.

The PlayTogether pilot consisted of providing training and support to playgroup leaders and members of the playgroup to increase their understanding of inclusive practices at playgroup. Each group was provided with a PlayTogether guide booklet including ideas to support inclusion in group routines as well as examples of visual supports, resources and activities to enable participation by all children. Playgroup were provided with mentoring and support as well as a resource pack with a range of books, song sheets, activity ideas booklet and musical instruments.

Feedback from the pilot groups was overwhelmingly positive. The leaders were

appreciative of the support, information and ideas. Participants of the groups also felt that their awareness of inclusion was increased.

Following this rollout, the next phase of PlayTogether was the promotion of the seven PlayTogether playgroups as warm and welcoming inclusive playgroups. Information on PlayTogether and the PlayTogether groups was included on Playgroup Tasmania's website and on Facebook. It was at this point, March 2020, that face to face playgroups ceased operation due to COVID-19 meaning that further roll out and promotion was not possible.



Simone Fifita

mum to Rocco (4 years old)
attends PlayConnect

What does playgroup mean to you?

It means a sense of community, safe haven, and a place where my son and I feel like we belong and matter in the community

What would you be doing without playgroup?

I'm scared to think how our life would be without PlayConnect. It has supported us to build friendships, community and Bec has helped us with outreach assistance.

How does playgroup help you connect with other services?

If it wasn't for Bec we would feel lost. This is our Hub where we can connect with outreach services.

PLAYCONNECT IS OUR COMMUNITY

PLAYGROUP TASMANIA ANNUAL MEMBERS SURVEY 2020

RESPONDENTS AGREED THAT PLAYGROUP:

81.0%
increased their connection with other parents.

79.0%
increased their social support network through developing friendships with other parents/caregivers.

77.0%
increased their connection with people and services within their community.

89.0%
provided opportunities for new friendships.

98.0%
has supported their child's development.

98.0%
has supported their child's social skills.

95.0%
has enabled them and their child to have fun.

85.0%
increased ideas for play and activities at home.



CONNECTIONS THROUGH COVID-19

Playgroup Tasmania created a virtual “playgroup at home” for Tasmanian families. It was envisioned that this would be a place to connect and interact and to get ideas for activities to do at home. Playgroup Tasmania staff, working from home, created content aimed at empowering parents as their child’s first teacher and promoting self-care. Reassuring families that simple activities at home were enough, and that young children don’t care how good your art skills are. We saw a huge amount of connection throughout the intense lockdown period with over 800 people joining the group.

Playgroup Tasmania staff also worked diligently to ensure that PlayConnect families were supported through the Covid-19 Lockdown and while waiting for face-to-face sessions to resume. All families connected in the way that suited them most. Families received weekly phone calls, texts and emails, and were part of a private PlayConnect specific Facebook group. Families were connected into online training such as the Autism Tas Early Days Training as well as virtual playgroups. Funded by Variety Tasmania, an online music group run by a trained music therapist met each week to connect families with each other, get ideas of things to do at home, sing some fun songs, and brighten up the long weeks at home alone. It was well loved by attendees.

Our partnership with the Salvation Army – Communities for Children (SE Tas) continued and we worked together to deliver 100 Playgroup Packs to families in Bothwell, Ouse, Kempton, Westerway and Ellendale. The packs were a great way to connect with families in these isolated rural areas, all of which have limited opportunities and services for young children.

Although this was a period of great stress and adversity, it was also an opportunity for staff to take advantage of the absence of face-to-face services to increase their capacity, knowledge and skills across a broad range of topics. Many organizations nationally pivoted to delivering excellent online professional development opportunities. These included Key Word Sign Language, Understanding Your Child’s Difficult Behaviour, Managing Interagency Connections, Managing Volunteers, Child Safety and Bringing Up Great Kids. These unexpected professional development opportunities have increased the capabilities of the organisation and will have far reaching effects into the future.

NATIONAL CHILDREN’S WEEK 2019

Children’s Week 2019 was celebrated from 19–27 October with a focus on Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: “Children have the right to be healthy, safe and happy”. As the Tasmanian representative on the National Children’s Week Council of Australia, Playgroup Tasmania facilitated regional working groups in the North, South and North West of Tasmania each of whom organised a Teddy Bears Picnic event for their region. These Picnic events were held in Devonport, Launceston and Hobart and attracted approximately 3,900 participants. 75 community organisations provided a range of fun and engaging activities that contributed to the success of each of the events. Participants said they had fun together, linked in with others for peer support, and were

able to access information about services and activities that might help them be stronger families (without the formality of a referral or appointment).

Additionally, a Children’s Week Calendar of events was created and distributed through social media and stakeholder networks. The Calendar was hosted online by the Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS). Other networks and organisations were actively encouraged to add their free Children’s Week events.

In 2019 Playgroup Tasmania obtained a grant from the Department of Communities Tasmania to employ a part-time project officer. This position enabled support in the organisation of Children’s Week events as well an opportunity to work with the Department to develop and produce communication resources to hand out to families in Children’s Week. These resources had a focus on child wellbeing and included a calico show bag containing a growth chart and crayons.

Leanne McLean, the Tasmanian Commissioner for Children and Young People, attended and officially opened the Hobart event whilst Sarah Courtney, MP, opened the Launceston event and Roger Jaensch MP attended East Devonport. Joan Rylah, MP, made a speech in Parliament acknowledging the value of Children’s Week in Tasmania.

Following the 2019 Teddy Bears Picnics, Playgroup Tasmania conducted an evaluation of Children’s Week in Tasmania. The findings included that “Playgroup Tasmania and the network of organisations and individuals that participate in Children’s Week in Tasmania want to see future growth to ensure that the messages of Children’s Week are celebrated across Tasmania.”

This would ideally involve Children’s Week growing and strengthening; broadening its reach geographically to families across Tasmania, to a broader age range of children and young people as well as an increase in the participation of agencies and organisations that support the wellbeing of children and families.



Jacinda Armstrong, CEO of Playgroup Tasmania with Roger Jaensch MP, Member for Braddon.



What does playgroup mean to you?

A nice chance to meet other mums.

What would you be doing without playgroup?

If it wasn't for playgroup, I wouldn't know how to connect with other mums.

How does playgroup help you connect with other services?

Other mums are always offering advice and ideas for services that are available to me.



Steph Forrester
mum to two
(5.5 months & 2.5 years)
attends Baby Playgroup

Christina Jennings

mother of baby Callie.
(3.5 months)
Baby PlayGroup Leader

What does playgroup mean to you?

Great way to connect with other mums and babies.

What would you be doing without playgroup?

Probably housework haha.

How does playgroup help you connect with other services?

Other parents recommend services, and it can be really helpful.

CHRISTINA IS ONE OF THE
NEW 2020 (POST COVID) MUMS



Kiara Phair

mother of Phoebe (4),
Trixie (3) and Lexie (1)
attends PlayConnect

What does playgroup mean to you?

It's a safe place to come and not feel judged.

What would you be doing without playgroup?

At home with the kids driving me insane.

How does playgroup help you connect with other services?

More so catching up with other families going through similar situations.





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Tasmania

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