



Lifting Literacy

Lifting Tasmania consultation

Playgroup Tasmania Submission

March 2023

PLAYGROU**UP**
TASMANIA

Acknowledgement of Country

Playgroup Tasmania acknowledges that we live, work and play on aboriginal land, land of the palawa/pakana people of lutruwita (Tasmania). We pay our respects to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, to elders past and present and to all those who continue to caring for country, sharing stories and upholding rights.

About Us

Playgroup Tasmania is a peak body representing volunteer-led and organisational playgroups across Tasmania. For nearly 50 years playgroups have provided children and their families with connection, support and play experiences. Playgroups contribute to a community's resilience by empowering families and leveraging the existing strengths within communities and building social capital through volunteer engagement and capacity building. The playgroup model is a powerful tool to support the wellbeing of communities across Tasmania and to provide information and support to families in their crucial role as their child's first and most significant teachers.

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Playgroup Tasmania welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Literacy Advisory Panel's *Final Consultation Report for the Development of Tasmania's Community-wide Framework consultation (The Report)* and shares the Tasmanian Government's commitment to improving literacy for all Tasmanians.

Context for this submission

As identified in *The Report*, the period of the first 1000 days is the greatest opportunity to build a strong foundation for a child's lifelong health and wellbeing. Playgroup Tasmania prioritises delivering responsive programs for families with young children – with a focus on the first 1,000 days – and the evidence is strong, children who attend playgroup are more likely to be developmentally on track on all five domains of the AEDC [Australian Early Development Census] by the time they commence school¹.

Voices of Families

Playgroup Tasmania listens to the voices of children and their families to ensure programs and services meet their needs. An annual family survey is one of the methods we use to collect this information from our membership, below is a snapshot of the responses:

Playgroup Tasmania Family Survey 2022

Attending Playgroup has:

- Increased my child's language skills: 67.74% agree
- Increased ideas for play activities at home: 82.26%

Could you share any examples of how attending playgroup has benefited your child's development?

- It's been lovely to see her confidence grow. My daughter loves the songs and games and it's been nice to see her enjoy different parts as she gets older.
- Growing and learning getting ready for school
- Learning new skills, how to communicate and share.
- We don't attend day care so playgroup has allowed my child to make friends and build social skills
- Learning how to socialise with other children and hitting milestones on time or early by learning and watching from other children

¹ Sincovich, A., Harman-Smith, Y., & Brinkman, S. (2019). [*The reach of playgroups and their benefit for children across Australia: A comparison of 2012, 2015, and 2018 AEDC data*](#). Telethon Kids Institute, South Australia.

- It has helped his cognitive development through the different resources he is able to access and explore as well as social development of interacting with multiple different children
- Playgroup is very good place for the babies development.
- He has learnt a lot from other children.

Playgroup Tasmania - Early literacy focussed strategies include:

- Playgroup partnerships with local libraries
Playgroup Tasmania supports community playgroups to connect with their local library and share information about programs and events. This has resulted in several Libraries visiting community playgroups to talk about their programs and delivering a Rock and Rhyme session with the families.
- Story time at playgroup
Playgroups are well resourced with a range of books and other resources. Playgroup Volunteers Leaders are provided with information and links to suitable children's books and groups are encouraged to share stories as a regular part of the playgroup routine (often in an informal manner). Playing with words, numbers and patterns are highlighted as a fun way to introduce early literacy and maths concepts to young children, helping them start to recognise and identify symbols and patterns.
- Literacy Awareness and Promotion:
Playgroup Tasmania regularly shares information about the benefits of early literacy with its wider community through strategies including social media campaigns. Recent Facebook posts have included:

1. *Ready for a cuddle? - Tasmania Reads Week (5-11 March) is a time to celebrate all things book and reading related.* There are lots of ways that reading and storytelling is good for children and families. Learn more at the link >

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/.../reading-storytelling>

2. *Reading can relieve stress and help children - and adults - focus and calm themselves.* Tasmania Reads Week is the perfect time to give this centuries old stress remedy a try! [Libraries Tasmania](#) branches around the state have books and much more for everyone from babies to grandparents to enjoy and it's all free of charge.

Supported Programs

In addition to our core work supporting community and organisational playgroups, Playgroup Tasmania also delivers the *smalltalk* evidence based program in a number of communities across Tasmania (see: <https://www.smalltalk.net.au>). *smalltalk* is a 10 week, in-playgroup program that aims to enhance the quality and quantity of parental

communication and interaction with their children; encourage the provision of a stimulating home environment, enhance parental self-care, strengthen parent confidence and build parental connectedness to their community. The core elements of the content are:

- 1) Quality everyday interactions;
- 2) Community and services connectedness;
- 3) Stimulating environments;
- 4) Parental self-care;
- 5) Parenting confidence.

smalltalk aims to increase parents' confidence to do the things we know can have a positive impact on their children's learning. The content focusses on using everyday opportunities and activities that many parents already do in the home to enhance their children's learning and development. These include the way they talk, listen and play with their children, read together and how they engage them in stimulating activities. *smalltalk* also provides ideas to parents about how they can look after themselves and build links with their community and local services.

It's never too early to start getting your child involved with literacy activities. Even babies enjoy listening to stories and being part of conversations. (Raising Children's Network)

RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS:

1. Are there any key themes we have not identified to improve literacy across: The Early Years (0-4 years)?

As discussed throughout *The Report*, the importance of the home environment in enhancing children's learning and development can't be understated.

Playgroup Tasmania champions and celebrates the significance of parents and family as a child's first, and most enduring, teacher. Ensuring programs and services are designed to support families to grow the skills and confidence they need and to strengthen their home learning environment is critical to lifting literacy in Tasmania.

The role of community level interventions such as playgroups in this is two-fold. Firstly, by creating new and stimulating learning environments at playgroup so that young children develop a love of learning; and secondly by providing information, resources and support to parents and families they can incorporate into their daily lives.

2. What are the three main things we should prioritise doing in:

The Early Years (0-4 years)?


1. Additional resources to engage the “harder to engage families” - ensure that families are provided with accessible information and service system stakeholders are working together to recognise service gaps and areas of higher need, including additional options for regional / remote areas
2. Place based programs - avoiding “top down” approaches, working with the community to identify and meet local needs. Potential inclusion of multi-agency programs incorporating programs such as *smalltalk* and Peep Learning Together Program (see: <https://www.playgroup.org.au/for-professionals/peep/>)
3. Consistency in support and referral pathways for families - ensuring a “no wrong door” approach

4. If you are a provider of service, what kinds of guidance would you hope to see in the Community-wide Framework?

Playgroup Tasmania hopes to see a community wide framework that recognises the critical role that parents and families have in supporting their child’s literacy and includes:

- Support to ensure a place based, capacity building approach to supporting families in their local communities
- Guidance which highlights the importance of the home and informal learning environments (e.g., playgroups) in the early years
- Links to resources for families to support learning at home in the early years
- Links to resources to support playgroup leaders and volunteers in their role with families with young children
- Sharing of service mapping and referral pathways for families requiring additional support
- Opportunities for local community service providers to network both formally and informally: avoiding duplication of services, ensuring families don’t “slip through the cracks”

5. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

- There is a critical need for increased focus on early diagnosis / support (intervention) for families with children with disabilities or developmental delay. Currently there are many children in Tasmania who are either awaiting diagnosis (waitlist up to 2 years) or who have been diagnosed and are on waitlists for therapy and other supports. Playgroup Tasmania has also gathered information from families who are
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struggling to understand and navigate the NDIS Early Childhood Approach and the transition of ECIS to an inclusion model.

- Playgroup Tasmania suggests that the increased use of interpreters at all Early Childhood Programs may increase attendance and engagement of families who's first language may not be English.