

**INQUIRY INTO FOUNDATIONAL AND DISABILITY
SUPPORTS AVAILABLE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Playgroup NSW
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Strong Foundations, Bright Futures

Submission to the Select Committee on Foundational and Disability Supports Available for Children and Young People in New South Wales

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**"CHILDREN NEED
THE FREEDOM AND
TIME TO PLAY.
PLAY IS NOT A
LUXURY. PLAY IS A
NECESSITY."**

- Kay Redfield Jamison
Professor of Psychiatry



Introduction

Playgroup NSW welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Foundational Supports. As the peak body for playgroups in NSW, we support over 78,000 families each year across 99% of the state's postcodes. Our delivery model spans universal and supported playgroups, parent peer support programs, and sector capacity-building initiatives across early childhood, disability, health, and community sectors. We directly provide as well as partner with over 50 trusted service delivery and community partners across NSW.

We work with passion and pride to ensure that every child and family has the very best start in life. Thriving children, families and communities are firmly at the centre of all we do. Unstructured, creative play is essential to children's development, especially in the first 2,000 days of their lives.

Playgroups are the foundational support of foundational supports.

Our core message is clear: **foundational supports offer a unique and powerful opportunity to strengthen Australia's early childhood system, but this opportunity must be designed inclusively, resourced adequately, and delivered collaboratively.**

Foundational supports must be more than a fallback for those not in the NDIS. They must stand as a strong, inclusive, preventive system in their own right.

Playgroups sit at the intersection of multiple sectors. We are:

- **Soft entry points** into formal systems, requiring no diagnosis or eligibility to attend
- **Preventive platforms**, identifying early concerns in development, parenting, or safety
- **Navigation hubs**, helping families access services such as ECE, health, allied health, early childhood intervention (ECI), and support coordination
- **Capacity-builders**, supporting parents and caregivers with knowledge, confidence, and skills
- **Community connectors**, strengthening social capital, peer networks, and early identification of vulnerable children

We are uniquely positioned as both a peak body and a direct provider, delivering foundational supports that traverse health, education, disability, early intervention, and community portfolios.

Our service model includes both **community and supported playgroups**, including supported playgroups for specific cohorts such as children with a disability or delay, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, children and families from culturally diverse backgrounds and early learning readiness. So too, community playgroups play a vital—yet often overlooked—role in inclusive early childhood development, parent capacity and community connection, including for children with a disability or delay.

Crucially, playgroups often serve as the first point of connection for families of children with disability or developmental delay.

Our playgroups are increasingly integrating allied health supports, diagnostic referrals, and early developmental monitoring.

They act as soft entry points that are free of eligibility requirements or clinical thresholds. This universal accessibility is critical, especially in a context where mainstream systems may be difficult to navigate or are failing to provide inclusive support.

It is our view that the **co-participatory nature of playgroups**—where both child and caregiver attend together—is distinct from formal early childhood education settings. This model not only supports the child’s development but also builds parent capacity, strengthens community connectedness, and often serves as the earliest intervention available. Parents are frequently the first to identify developmental concerns, and they need trusted environments to seek support.

The current policy architecture lacks clarity in how foundational supports will intersect with both the NDIS and mainstream services. For many families, particularly those not eligible for the NDIS, there is a concerning gap—an “NDIS or nothing” experience.

We urge the Inquiry to consider the **fluidity of children’s and families’ experiences**. A single family may access multiple service types across the spectrum—from peer support groups to community playgroups, from targeted interventions to allied health services. Yet, in the proposed model, it is unclear whether families will face multiple assessments or gatekeeping mechanisms to access different support types.

Our submission highlights the critical need for:

- **A clear, shared definition** of foundational supports, including service types, access points, and interface with the NDIS and mainstream sectors.
- **Clarification of roles and responsibilities** at federal and state levels, and across departments, with streamlined funding pathways.
- **Investment in community-based, volunteer-led, and peer support models**, which are currently under-recognised and under-resourced.
- **A nationally consistent but locally responsive approach**, ensuring that supports are not determined by postcode or state-based service disparity.
- **Data collection and publicly available outcomes reporting**, to inform continuous improvement and build public trust in the foundational support model.
- **Workforce development** that includes volunteers, parents, and people with disability, alongside paid professionals.
- **A genuine voice for families**, embedded through trusted service partners like playgroups, to ensure design and delivery is grounded in lived experience.
- **Recognition of playgroups** as a vital part of the foundational support ecosystem—capable of being scaled up rapidly with adequate investment and infrastructure.

We caution against any model that unintentionally builds silos or excludes families based on rigid eligibility or diagnosis-based thresholds.

Foundational supports must be designed as **inclusive, accessible, preventative and flexible**—able to reach families before crisis, and to work in tandem with families and communities, not in parallel to them.

Playgroup NSW stands ready to scale our work to meet demand.

With adequate and sustained investment, we could **immediately double the reach of our current programs**—particularly in areas supporting children with disability, developmental delay, behavioural concerns, and their families. This includes not only our supported playgroups, community playgroups and peer support initiatives, but also efforts to embed inclusive practice across mainstream and community-based settings, drive sector development, policy and advocacy and enable child and family voice.

We have the **infrastructure, partnerships, workforce pipeline, and community trust** in place to expand rapidly. Our delivery models are tried and tested for over 50 years across urban, regional, and remote communities, in NSW and ACT.

We already operate in 99% of NSW postcodes powered by over 700 staff and volunteers, many of whom are trained in early childhood development, disability inclusion, and trauma-informed practice and bring rich lived experience.

We are not an NDIS provider, with the majority of playgroups free for children and families to attend. This enables us to take a **whole-of-child and whole-of-family lens**, focusing on prevention, inclusion, and wellbeing from the earliest stages—often well before diagnosis or formal referral pathways are activated.

What we lack is not evidence, capacity, capability or passion, but **resourcing**.

Increased investment would enable:

- **Expansion of both community and supported playgroups and peer support groups** in areas of high need, particularly in communities underrepresented in traditional early childhood education (e.g. Aboriginal families, culturally and linguistically diverse families, families experiencing domestic and family violence, and those in regional and remote)
- **Recruitment and training of additional facilitators and peer leaders**, including those with lived experience of disability.
- **Greater integration with allied health and diagnostic services**, enabling playgroups to serve as early identification and referral pathways within a foundational support ecosystem.
- **Enhanced sector capability-building**, including the provision of best-practice frameworks and inclusive practice training to other early childhood services.

- **Strengthening of navigation and community connector roles**, ensuring that families can access the right supports at the right time, regardless of where they start their journey.
- **Improved infrastructure and access**, ensuring that playgroups are delivered in safe, inclusive, culturally appropriate, and universally accessible spaces.

We also believe that investment in playgroup infrastructure and workforce would have **long-term cost-saving impacts** across multiple systems, including health, education, disability and child protection. The research is clear: when children and families are supported early and in the context of their communities, outcomes improve, and downstream costs reduce.

This type of strategic investment would not only **prevent the escalation of needs** but also foster inclusive communities where all children and families can thrive—regardless of their diagnosis, circumstance, or postcode.

We are confident that with sustained investment, sector coordination, and a strong shared vision, the foundational supports system can achieve the intended reform goals—delivering better outcomes for children with disability and developmental delay, and for the families and communities who raise them.

We thank the Inquiry for its consideration of this submission and would welcome further opportunity to contribute our insights and evidence to support the development of a strong, inclusive foundational support system.

We love what we do – with children and families firmly at the centre.

The Foundational Support of Foundational Supports

Why?

Playgroups are:

- Evidence based models delivering value and outcomes
- Place based in local communities
- Soft entry points welcoming all children and families
- One of the very earliest universal touchpoints for babies, children and families
- Both general and targeted foundational supports along the trajectory of community to supported playgroups
- A unique co-participation model where both the child and parent/carers attend and gain benefits
- Building community capacity – both into mainstream services and into disability services
- A non-NDIS service with no eligibility or assessment requirements
- By and large free to attend, supporting cost of living (however some community playgroups run by volunteers charge small fees to cover venue hire, toys etc. We are advocating that all children and all families have universal access to place based, free playgroups in every community)
- Often utilised by children with disability and developmental delay and their families due to exclusion from formal ECEC settings
- A valuable community asset, with over 650 volunteers in our Playgroup NSW

Beyond playgroups, Playgroup NSW wraps around children and families by also providing:

- Peer to Peer Support
- Parent Capacity
- Sector Capacity
- Policy and Advocacy
- Research

Where should foundational supports start?

In playgroups.

Playgroups are: everywhere, early, free, place based and a soft entry point for all.

The Role of Playgroups As Foundational Supports

A Unique Service model: Co-Participation, Early Access and Inclusion

Playgroups offer a model of early childhood support that is distinct, proven, and uniquely aligned with the objectives of foundational supports.

Unlike many formal early childhood services, playgroups operate through a **co-participation model** where both parent and child are present and engaged. This enables:

- Direct modelling of parenting strategies
- Building of peer support networks among parents
- Real-time observation and coaching by facilitators
- Earlier identification of developmental or behavioural concerns
- Natural scaffolding of inclusion in everyday settings

Importantly, playgroups are **accessible from birth**, without the need for assessments, diagnoses, or referrals. This universal access makes them one of the earliest and most inclusive contact points for families, and a vital soft-entry pathway into broader supports.

Playgroups + Peer Support + Parent Capacity

Playgroup NSW delivers a **multifaceted wraparound** model comprising:

- **Supported playgroups** are targeted at families with specific vulnerabilities or needs, including disability, trauma, isolation, or cultural barriers. These are facilitated by trained staff and often include wraparound supports, allied health integration, or therapeutic components.
- **Community playgroups** are volunteer-led and typically universal, offering free or low-cost access in local venues. However, many are organically inclusive and serve children with developmental concerns alongside their peers. Playgroup NSW increasingly supports these groups through sector training, inclusive practice tools, and allied health partnerships.
- **Peer to peer support:** bringing parents of children with a disability together in a safe, evidence based model to provide support, information and connection to services, community and peers.
- **Parent capacity building:** through resources, parent hub, webinars, events we build parent confidence, knowledge and capacity. We bring allied health into playgroups to upskill, we refer out and we provide evidence based resources and navigation support to families.

Together, these models reflect the full continuum of foundational support—from **general** to **targeted**—and demonstrate how inclusion can be embedded **within communities**, not isolated into siloed services.

Bridging Systems: Health, Education, Disability and Community

Playgroups naturally traverse portfolio boundaries. We receive and manage funding across:

- Health (child development, early intervention)
- Education (school readiness, parent engagement)
- Communities (social cohesion, parenting support)
- Disability (inclusion, early identification)
- Aboriginal and CALD initiatives
- Domestic and family violence responses

This cross-cutting role positions us as an effective **conduit between families and systems**, able to:

- Detect early signs of concern before diagnosis
- Refer families to formal pathways, including NDIS and ECI
- Embed allied health and diagnostic outreach in community settings
- Support transitions into ECE, preschool, and school
- Build trust with families who are disengaged or fearful of formal systems

Recognising Volunteers as a Workforce

A key element often overlooked in foundational supports is the **volunteer workforce**.

Playgroup NSW supports over 500 volunteers, many of whom lead local groups and create the relational glue that keeps families engaged.

Volunteers are:

- A community asset that enables scale and sustainability
- Often parents with lived experience
- Embedded in their communities, speaking local languages and understanding cultural norms
- Ideal conduits for peer support, early detection, and inclusion

Foundational support frameworks must include investment in **training, recognition, and sustainability** of this critical workforce.

Place Based, Trusted and Embedded

One of the greatest strengths of the playgroup model is the **trust we have earned**. Families regularly disclose:

- Concerns about child development
- Experiences of domestic or family violence
- Difficulties navigating the NDIS or school systems
- Their sense of isolation or confusion in the early parenting journey

Because playgroups are local, relational, and embedded, they often hear these things **before any other service**. This makes them not only a foundation of support—but a platform for upstream prevention.

Opportunities with Foundational Supports

Prevention, Early Intervention and Timely Support

Foundational supports are uniquely positioned to act **before crises occur, before diagnoses are delayed, and before families disengage** from systems they find confusing or exclusionary.

Playgroup NSW witnesses firsthand the power of **early intervention that starts with inclusion**—where families feel safe enough to express concern, observe others, and ask questions.

In our groups, we regularly identify:

- Children with undiagnosed developmental delay or disability
- Emerging concerns around behaviour or attachment
- Parents needing support with mental health, family safety, or parenting skills

These early observations often result in timely referrals—**not to label or gatekeep**, but to provide access to what the family needs, when they need it. **Foundational supports must be flexible, responsive, and holistic**, offering both targeted intervention and soft support, depending on the family's context and readiness.

Supporting Parents, Carers and Siblings

Children do not exist in isolation.

For young children with disability or delay, outcomes are strongly influenced by the **capacity, wellbeing, and confidence of their parents and carers**. Foundational supports must therefore explicitly support the **entire family unit**, not just the child.

Playgroup NSW delivers:

- Peer support groups for parents (e.g. MyTime)
- Parenting skill-building sessions embedded in playgroups
- Targeted groups for fathers, grandparents, CALD parents, and carers
- A safe, affirming space for **siblings**, including those like the CEO of Playgroup NSW who bring lived family experience of disability

Investing in **parental confidence, connection, and wellbeing** is one of the most cost-effective strategies for lifelong outcomes, yet too often this is under-resourced. We urge the Inquiry to ensure **caregivers are recognised as both beneficiaries and facilitators** of foundational supports.

Equity of Access for Vulnerable Cohorts

We note with concern the underrepresentation of:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- Families from CALD backgrounds
- Children with disability or behavioural concerns

- Families in regional, rural, and remote areas
- Children in out of home care

in formal early childhood education and NDIS pathways.

For many of these families, playgroups are their **only regular contact with early childhood services**. Without ongoing, place-based, inclusive options like these, such families risk remaining invisible.

Foundational supports must be designed to meet families **where they are**—in terms of geography, culture, and developmental journey.

Playgroup NSW already does this, but our reach could be **immediately expanded with the right investment**, which we will address further.

Challenges to Overcome in Foundational Supports

While Playgroup NSW is strongly supportive of foundational supports, we believe that successful implementation will depend on addressing a number of **practical, structural, and systemic risks**. These must be considered upfront if we are to avoid repeating the fragmentation and unintended exclusions experienced during the rollout of the NDIS.

Risk of Becoming NDIS 2.0

A key concern is the possibility that foundational supports could unintentionally become a **second-tier disability system**, accessible only to those who narrowly miss out on the NDIS. This risks:

- Reinforcing the same barriers around eligibility, assessment, and diagnosis
- Focusing too narrowly on disability instead of supporting **all children and families with emerging needs**
- Neglecting the broader purpose of foundational supports: inclusion, prevention, and early assistance

We strongly caution against using foundational supports **only as a buffer or off-ramp for the NDIS**. Instead, foundational supports must be **inclusive of all children** who need assistance—whether due to disability, developmental concerns, trauma, social risk, or systemic exclusion.

Lack of Clarity Around System Boundaries

Currently, there is **insufficient clarity** around:

- Who is “in” or “out” of foundational supports
- How foundational supports intersect with both the NDIS and mainstream systems
- What assessments, eligibility, or intake processes will apply
- How families move fluidly across services and life stages

We need to avoid creating **binary pathways** where families must choose between NDIS, foundational supports, or mainstream—without clarity, overlap, or shared responsibility. For example, a child might:

- Access NDIS-funded therapies
- Attend a targeted playgroup funded through foundational supports
- Join a community playgroup on the weekend
- Participate in a parent support group or receive school transition support

A seamless, flexible system is required—**not one that puts up more administrative walls or requires multiple assessments** just to access the right mix of supports.

Administrative Burden and Service Fragmentation

As a provider that currently holds contracts from **nine different departments across state and federal governments**, we experience the direct impacts of system fragmentation. Each contract brings:

- Different reporting requirements
- Misaligned funding cycles
- Conflicting outcome measures
- Unnecessary duplication of effort

This administrative burden is **inefficient and costly**, and it diverts time and funding away from children and families. If foundational supports are to succeed, they must be:

- **Commissioned holistically**
- Supported by streamlined funding and compliance mechanisms
- Designed for **relational contracting**, not transactional micromanagement
- Built on **trust in quality providers**

Equity Across Geography and Vulnerable Cohorts

If foundational supports are not designed and funded with **equity in mind**, we risk creating a postcode lottery—especially for rural, regional, Aboriginal, and culturally diverse communities. National frameworks must avoid assumptions that a metro-based service system can be replicated across NSW and beyond.

To reach children in **the hardest-to-reach places**, services like playgroups must be:

- **Locally led**
- Properly resourced for outreach and transport
- Culturally safe and accessible
- Supported to partner with Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations and local networks

Solutions for Success

Playgroup NSW is Ready To Scale

Playgroup NSW stands ready to scale our work to meet demand, alongside our valued partners.

We currently operate:

- Over **600 playgroups per week**, reaching **78,000 families annually**
- More than **50 peer support groups** (e.g. MyTime)
- Programs in **domestic and family violence shelters**, schools, community hubs, and health settings
- Services across **99% of postcodes in NSW**, including rural, regional, and remote communities

With increased and streamlined investment, **we could double these numbers almost immediately**. The infrastructure, workforce, systems, and demand are already in place.

We could:

- Expand **supported and inclusive community playgroups** to more vulnerable cohorts and underserved areas
- Increase the reach of **peer support groups** for parents and carers
- Deploy more **connectors, navigators, and linkers** to support families across systems
- Embed more **allied health professionals** into community settings to deliver outreach and capacity building
- Rapidly **upskill the volunteer workforce** and strengthen local inclusive leadership

We could do this **within months—not years**—if we had:

- Longer-term, secure, relational contracting
- A streamlined funding mechanism with **fewer departments and clearer lines of accountability**
- Indexation and funding models that reflect **true service delivery costs and workforce needs**

Streamlining Systems and Relational Commissioning

Right now, Playgroup NSW must navigate:

- State and Commonwealth funding contracts with **misaligned timelines**
- Nine separate departmental relationships, each with their own reporting and contracting expectations
- Conflicting expectations across education, health, disability, and community portfolios

An effective foundational support system must:

- Be governed by a **clear lead department and Minister** (with state and federal coordination)
- Align funding into a **single commissioning platform** for foundational supports
- Enable **multi-year contracts** with flexibility for integrated delivery
- Provide funding portability across systems for providers delivering inclusive and general supports

Doing so would not only cut red tape, but **allow funds to flow where they're needed most**—to families, not admin.

Child and Family Voice Is Paramount

To support an effective, scalable foundational supports system, we recommend the following:

1. **Create a clear, shared vision** for foundational supports that goes beyond disability to embrace inclusion, prevention, and equity for all children and families.
2. **Define what foundational supports are (and are not)**—including types of services, target populations, and how general and targeted supports interact.
3. **Ensure flexibility and fluidity** between foundational supports, the NDIS, and mainstream systems—particularly for children and families who may move between them over time.
4. **Establish a clear governance and commissioning model**—with defined state and federal roles, single-agency contracting where possible, and streamlined processes.
5. **Invest in the volunteer and peer-led workforce**—recognising this as a core component of inclusion and sustainability.
6. **Provide infrastructure funding** for safe, inclusive community venues—particularly in rural, remote, and disadvantaged communities.
7. **Ensure the voice of families and children** is embedded throughout design, delivery, and evaluation—through trusted, community-based services like playgroups.
8. **Support data collection, evaluation, and outcomes measurement**—shared transparently across providers and jurisdictions to track long-term impact.
9. **Ensure no child is left behind**—with equity-focused commissioning that prioritises outreach to Aboriginal communities, CALD families, and those with intersecting vulnerabilities.

Conclusion

Playgroup NSW is proud to be a trusted partner in supporting families across NSW to nurture their children's development, wellbeing, and inclusion from the earliest years.

Our work has shown the profound impact of foundational supports—not only for children with disability but for all families facing challenges or isolation.

The need is clear, and the demand is growing.

With sustained investment, streamlined funding, and system reform, Playgroup NSW can dramatically expand access to high-quality, inclusive early support services—connecting more families, building stronger communities, and reducing future demand on specialist and crisis services.

This is a critical moment to rethink and realign how foundational supports are funded and delivered.

By investing in the foundations, we lay the groundwork for better outcomes for children, families, and society.

We urge government leaders at all levels to:

- Commit to multi-year, sustainable funding
- Simplify commissioning and accountability structures
- Prioritise equity and inclusion for all children and families
- Partner closely with place based, community-led providers like Playgroup NSW

Together, we can build a more inclusive, connected, and supportive NSW where every child can thrive, regardless of their background or ability.

Thank you for considering this submission.

We look forward to the opportunity to continue this important work in partnership with government, families, and communities.

Our Programs

PlayConnect+

PlayConnect+ playgroups welcome all children with disability and/or developmental concerns aged 0-8 years, their families, carers and siblings. A diagnosis or formal assessment is not required and it is free of cost. The program aims to increase individual children's readiness for educational environments and provide opportunities for them to socialise with peers who have disability or developmental concerns and their siblings in a supported, and family-centred environment. Total 17 PlayConnect+ groups are delivered across NSW in metropolitan, regional, rural, and remote locations in collaboration with nine service providers, while PGNSW independently oversees four self-managed groups. Our service delivery partners are:

1. Noah's Inclusion Services
2. Bathurst Early Childhood Intervention Service
3. Orana Early Childhood Intervention
4. Coastwide Child & Family Service
5. Clarence Childhood Services Association
6. Early Links
7. North Ryde Community Pre School
8. Big Fat Smile
9. Kurrajong

Framework Use

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) "Principles for High Quality Playgroups"
<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/principles-high-quality-playgroups>".

Key Stakeholders

Children and families, Autism Queensland, Disability Peak Organisations and providers, Council agencies and venues, Dept. of Social Services, State and territory child development and health agencies, NDIS Early Childhood Partners, Connected Beginnings program, NSW Dept. of Education, CALD and Migrant Support agencies and services, Carer support services, Allied health providers, Raising Children Network, Envisages, Referral Services, Where to Research Institute, Latrobe University, Ask Izzy, Disability Gateway, A-List Hub

PGNSW Role

1. PGNSW recruits, trains, and provides ongoing supervision to PlayConnect+ facilitators, equipping them with specialised skills to support children with ASD.
2. It establishes and monitors robust risk management and quality assurance processes to ensure PlayConnect+ sessions are safe, inclusive, and effective.

3. PGNSW collects data, monitors program delivery, and evaluates outcomes to drive continuous improvement and ensure the program's impact remains meaningful.
4. It develops targeted community engagement and promotion strategies to increase awareness of PlayConnect+ and connect with eligible families.
5. PGNSW manages partnerships and contractual agreements with funding bodies and relevant stakeholders to ensure sustainable program delivery.
6. It provides the necessary administrative and IT infrastructure to support the seamless operation of PlayConnect+ groups across locations.
7. PGNSW actively raises community awareness about PlayConnect+ and its positive impact on families of children with ASD.
8. Facilitate Communities of Practice for Playgroup Educators and Facilitators for connection, knowledge sharing, and peer learning.

Funding Source

PlayConnect+ is delivered as part of a consortium led by Autism Queensland. Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

The 'Why' – Purpose

The PlayConnect+ program exists to meet the growing need among families for a safe, non-judgmental space to discuss disabilities and developmental challenges. It offers parents and carers the opportunity to access expert insights and guidance without the fear of stigma. Led by qualified educators, the program delivers professional support tailored to both children and their families.

Beyond individual support, PlayConnect+ fosters a strong sense of community, enabling families to connect and feel less isolated in their journey. Many families face long delays while waiting for access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) or other vital services. During this time, programs like PlayConnect+ often serve as a lifeline—offering therapeutic value similar to group therapy for children in need at no cost.

According to recent finding, the average cost of NDIS support per child is approximately \$28,000. In contrast, PlayConnect+ delivers comparable early intervention and support services at just \$2,600 per child—making it a highly cost-effective and impactful option for families navigating delays in accessing formal supports.

Benefits and Outcomes

For Children:

1. Early socialization in a supportive, inclusive environment.
2. Opportunities to engage in activities that promote developmental milestones.
3. Preparation for schooling through structured routines, group activities, and skill-building, making the transition to school smoother and more successful.
4. Early intervention by supporting families and identifying developmental concerns that may lead to earlier referrals and assessments.

For Families:

1. A reduction in isolation, offering a community where parents can share experiences and support one another.
2. Increased parenting confidence through access to professional insights and practical tips.
3. Guidance and support in navigating the transition to school, ensuring children and families are ready for the next stage.
4. A soft entry pathway to more formal support services, helping families feel informed, empowered, and less overwhelmed.

For Community:

1. Strengthened local networks, fostering a culture of inclusivity and understanding.
2. Support for early intervention, ensuring developmental concerns are addressed promptly.
3. Creation of a more inclusive environment that benefits children, families, and educators alike.

Impact Statistics

National stats:

Past 18 months: With 1,470+ adults and 1,650+ children attending, and a remarkable 99% overall satisfaction rate, the impact speaks volumes.

- a) 72 remote community and First Nations families—strengthening cultural identity and community ties.
- b) 164 culturally and linguistically diverse families—fostering inclusion and celebrating multilingual voices.
- c) 104 families with a member experiencing disability or illness—ensuring accessibility, empathy, and care.

Source: <https://autismqld.com.au/>

PGNSW stats:

In 2024, 534 playgroup sessions were conducted across 17 sites, with 408 child attendees, including an average of 182 children without Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or characteristics of ASD. Of the total clients, 176 (22%) participated in a satisfaction survey, yielding a remarkable 100% positive satisfaction rate and an average satisfaction score of 4.88 out of 5. This highlights the program's strong quality of service and meaningful impact on families and children, including those with diverse developmental needs.

Impact Story / Testimonial

Partner Statement

"Noah's Inclusion Services: Playgroup NSW-funded programs allow us to work with families who don't have an NDIS plan for their child, opening up new avenues for support and ensuring that fewer children fall through the cracks."

Family Testimonial

"The team has been absolutely fantastic with (Child) and myself. Reassuring me when I have needed support and linking me to services when I felt lost on waitlists. They have given me hope for the future."

"I wasn't sure what to expect on my first playgroup session. My son walked in with his hands over his ears on his first day. The facilitator immediately understood and gave him ear muffs. I was amazed that someone recognized his sensory needs. It was a relief to know that someone understood my son. The facilitator was very observant, making us feel welcome and not judged. Unlike other playgroups where we felt judged, this place gave us peace of mind. My son was in the right and safe environment. I also have a newborn, and he actually felt like he belonged there. Even though he doesn't communicate, I felt he could be himself."

"My son has thoroughly enjoyed the online playgroup. He engages well and enjoys the novelty of it being online. It also helps us as he has a busy week, and he enjoys his downtime at home. The online playgroup is less of a demand for him than face to face activity."

Growth Potential – What More Funding Could Do

Increased funding would not only improve access and reduce delays within the NDIS system, but also extend crucial support to families who often face additional challenges. In regional and remote areas, where transport is a significant barrier, extra funding can support more outreach and mobile services—ensuring no family is left behind. For children and families who are homebound due to health conditions, online programs like PlayConnect+ offer meaningful connection and support from the safety of their homes.

These initiatives also provide valuable opportunities for volunteers and students in social work or community services, giving them real-world experience and deeper insight into the sector. Through hands-on involvement, they gain practical skills and networks while directly supporting family wellbeing and strengthening community resilience. This model also reduces reliance on paid staff, resulting in cost savings and building social capital through shared responsibility and stronger local support networks.

PlayConnect+ is in high demand, with over 10 services prepared to roll out the program across diverse regions within NSW. However, limited funding has restricted expansion. With additional investment, we could greatly increase the program's reach and impact across remote, regional, metro, and other high-need communities.

Funding could also support tailored initiatives for siblings of children with disabilities, who often face unique emotional and social challenges. Dedicated workshops or peer support groups would give them a space to connect, share experiences, and receive age-appropriate information. Similarly, grandparents and extended family members play a vital role in supporting families and would benefit from dedicated resources and networks. Funding could support information sessions, support groups, or tailored resources to acknowledge and assist their contributions.

To ensure continuous improvement and accountability, additional funding should be allocated for data collection and research. This would help identify service gaps, assess impact, and guide future development.

Expanding programs like school holiday workshops would provide consistent, wraparound support for children, strengthen sibling relationships, and ease pressure on parents. Furthermore, funding can support culturally responsive programs for CALD and First Nations families, ensuring they feel safe, welcomed, and included. Prioritising these groups helps build inclusive, supportive communities that leave no one behind.

Strategic Commentary - Alignment with Foundational Supports

Increasing funding not only ensures timely access to NDIS services by reducing waiting lists but also reflects the foundational supports' focus on proactive and inclusive care. By providing group-format interim assistance, this approach addresses immediate needs while building the resilience and capacities of children and families. It aligns strategically with foundational goals, easing systemic pressure, preventing delays in care, and fostering long-term empowerment for families to thrive in a supportive environment.

PALS

Play and Learn Supported Playgroups (PALS) is an inclusive program that welcomes families and children with disabilities, developmental delays, and those developing typically to learn and play together. They are co-designed to create welcoming environments for all children and families. The program partners with community services and places a strong emphasis on Creative Arts, Sports, and Recreation (CASR) activities to encourage social inclusion and community participation. Every element of PALS is thoughtfully designed to foster connection, build awareness, and support the development of inclusive, welcoming communities. Each playgroup is led by a qualified professional facilitator, ensuring a safe and supportive environment for all. In NSW, this program is implemented in collaboration with four service providers i.e. Noah's Inclusion Services, Ability Fit, Phoenix Park Farm and Coastwide Child & Family Service

Program Description

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Framework Use

Codesign Framework

Community Playgroup Disability Information and Referral Framework (CPDIRF)

Key Stakeholders

Children and families, Playgroup Australia, The Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, State and territory child development and health agencies, NDIS Early Childhood Partners, Settlement Services International, Autisim QLD, AlistHub, NSW Dept. of Education, Infoexchange, Allied health providers, Raising Children Network, Envisages, Referral Services, Infoexchange, Ask Izzy, Disability Gateway, A-List Hub

Funding Source

PALS is delivered as part of a consortium led by Playgroup Australia. Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

PGNSW Role

1. Identify, secure, and oversee funding streams to sustain and grow the PALS program.
2. Design and implement resources and strategies to support inclusive, accessible playgroup activities.
3. Deliver tailored training and ongoing support to facilitators, focusing on inclusive practices and responding to diverse needs.
4. Build strong relationships with disability and community services to enhance program delivery and impact.
5. Develop and maintain standards and guidelines that promote inclusive, safe, and welcoming playgroup environments.
6. Increase visibility and understanding of the PALS program through targeted outreach and promotion.
7. Offer continuous advice and support to facilitators and families to ensure effective implementation of inclusive practices.

The ‘Why’ – Purpose

Through PALS, CASR organisations gain the knowledge and confidence to engage children with disability or developmental delays, while families and children build their own confidence by participating in meaningful, inclusive activities. The program brings together staff, parents, and children as equal partners—supporting shared learning, mutual understanding, and stronger community connections. Each playgroup is facilitated by a qualified professional in a safe and welcoming space where everyone can belong.

Benefits and Outcomes

For Children:

1. Improved social and communication skills through inclusive play and peer interaction.
2. Increased confidence and self-esteem by participating in group activities where they feel accepted and supported.
3. Access to developmentally appropriate activities tailored to individual needs, supporting learning and growth.
4. Early exposure to inclusive environments, preparing them for future participation in mainstream services and education.

For Families:

1. Greater confidence in parenting and advocacy, as they learn strategies to support their child's development.
2. Reduced isolation through meaningful peer connections with other families navigating similar experiences.
3. Increased knowledge of local supports and services, including mainstream CASR organisations.
4. Empowerment to engage in their community, knowing their child can participate meaningfully.
5. Support for families waiting for a diagnosis or unsure about their child's development, by providing a soft entry point to observe other children, ask questions, and gain insights into early childhood milestones.

For Community:

1. Increased capacity of mainstream organisations (like arts, sports, and recreation providers) to welcome and include children with disabilities or delays.
2. Strengthened relationships between families and service providers, fostering trust and collaboration.
3. More inclusive communities where diversity is valued and everyone is supported to thrive.
4. Staff training and awareness, leading to more confident and inclusive practices in mainstream programs.

Impact Statistics

In NSW, The PALS program operated across 4 groups, delivering a total of 93 sessions. It engaged 514 children and 401 adults, demonstrating strong community participation and reach in 2024.

Impact Story / Testimonial

Partner Statement

Ability Fit: "Children acquired skills in a small group environment, where they learned to collaborate with peers, take turns, share, and provide mutual encouragement. Within this setting, they also built confidence, enhanced gross motor skills, developed spatial awareness and strengthened their limbs through engaging in active play."

Family Testimonial

"My son and I enjoyed attending PALS playgroup and we can see that this service was really welcomed by families and well attended. It provided a great indoor and outdoor space, a range of activities for different age groups and the opportunity for families to socialise and share their parenting experience. There is not a lot on offer of this kind of activity around."

"Our daughter was not wanting to attend any groups or therapy. We heard about PALS sessions and she started to attend. Over the period of time, she has improved both socially

and with her fine motor skills. She looks forward every week to attending and loves to chat with the Elders and Kayla. Its a god send this program for my child."

Growth Potential – What more funding could do

With additional funding, PALS can establish meaningful partnerships with more mainstream arts, cultural, and sporting organizations. These partnerships will allow the development of inclusive programs that cater to the varied needs of all children. A dedicated PALS Coordinator will play a crucial role in forming and maintaining these relationships, while also creating innovative program models and providing comprehensive training for staff from both PALS and partner organizations.

Increased funding will also enable PALS to adopt thorough reporting methods, capturing detailed insights into the experiences and developmental progress of participants. This will provide valuable evidence of the program's success in fostering social inclusion and can help change societal perceptions of disability.

Moreover, dedicated resources for organizing inclusive CASR festivals will provide highly visible opportunities for children to showcase their talents, bringing attention to their abilities and fostering a sense of pride. These festivals will serve as platforms to challenge exclusionary norms and raise awareness across the community, ultimately strengthening the sense of belonging for all participants.

Strategic Commentary – Alignment with Foundational Supports

PALS provides vital foundational support for children with disabilities, fostering skill development, confidence, and independence through play-based learning. It nurtures meaningful peer and community connections for both children and their families, while linking them to additional services through strong collaborative networks. PALS also serves as a model for mainstream services seeking to strengthen their inclusive practices. Through these partnerships, organisations are given the opportunity to build their confidence, enhance their skillsets, and access the resources needed to better support children with disabilities and their families.

Include 2 Play

Include 2 Play (I2P) is a national capacity-building initiative focused on creating a suite of resources, training, and information to enhance inclusion in early learning environments—particularly playgroups—for children with developmental delay or disability from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and their families or carers.

Playgroup NSW is the national contract holder for the I2P project and leads its delivery in partnership with five state and territory playgroup organisations and the Parenting Research Centre. The Parenting Research Centre ensures that all resources and training are evidence-based and aligned with current best practices in inclusion and engagement with CALD communities.

Framework Use

Codesign Framework

Key Stakeholders

Children and families, Playgroup State and Territory Organisations, Department of Social Services, Parenting Research Centre, Families of children with disability and developmental delay from CALD backgrounds, Kindred, Association for Children with a Disability, Migrant Resource Centre, Settlement Services International, Envisage, Raising Children Network.

PGNSW Role

The project involves comprehensive national coordination, including planning, implementation, monitoring timelines, and reporting across all partner organisations. It also includes managing the national contract and ensuring compliance with funding requirements and reporting obligations.

Financial oversight is a critical element, with Playgroup NSW responsible for managing the overall budget and allocating funds to partner organisations in line with project objectives. A clear communication and collaboration framework is maintained to ensure effective coordination between the national body, state and territory partners, and the Parenting Research Centre.

Playgroup NSW coordinates the development of all program resources to maintain quality, consistency, and alignment with the program's aims. A national training framework is established to guide the development and delivery of training programs, with support provided to state and territory partners as needed.

To ensure broad access and reach, a national dissemination strategy is implemented to distribute resources and information to playgroups and families across Australia. The project also prioritises engagement with national stakeholders and peak bodies to raise awareness of the I2P program and its outcomes.

Evaluation and reporting activities are coordinated nationally to measure the impact of the program and support continuous improvement. Risk management processes are also in place to identify and address potential challenges throughout the project's delivery.

Funding Source

I2P is delivered as part of a consortium led by Playgroup NSW. Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

The 'Why' – purpose

When it comes to engaging culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families in playgroups—particularly those with children who have developmental delay or disability—there remain significant barriers. These include cultural stigma around disability, lack of awareness, language challenges, and a general mistrust of government or mainstream services. As Australia's migrant and humanitarian entrant population continues to grow, it is crucial that our early childhood services, including playgroups, are welcoming, inclusive, and equipped to meet the needs of these families.

The Include2play initiative supports this by developing a suite of co-designed resources, training, and capacity-building support. These tools are being created with families and practitioners—not just for them—ensuring that their voices, experiences, and cultural perspectives are respected and embedded in every stage of development. This co-design

approach fosters a genuine sense of ownership, strengthens trust, and ultimately builds stronger connections between CALD families and early learning environments. By equipping playgroup facilitators and early childhood practitioners with the right skills, knowledge, and culturally appropriate tools, we can bridge gaps, reduce stigma, and create inclusive, supportive spaces for every child and family—regardless of background or ability.

Benefits and Outcomes

For Children:

1. Feel included, welcomed, and safe in playgroup environments.
2. Build early learning, social, and communication skills in a supportive setting.
3. Develop a strong sense of identity and belonging, regardless of ability or cultural background.
4. Benefit from culturally responsive practices that support their holistic development.

For Families:

1. Feel respected, heard, and included in co-designing support and resources.
2. Gain confidence navigating services and advocating for their child's needs.
3. Receive information in their preferred language, making it easier to engage.
4. Build trusting relationships with practitioners and other families.
5. Reduce stigma and isolation through culturally sensitive support networks.

For Community:

1. Create inclusive spaces that reflect Australia's rich cultural diversity.
2. Build a stronger, more connected support system for all families.
3. Reduce barriers to early intervention and increase access to services.
4. Foster understanding, empathy, and collaboration across cultures.
5. Support social cohesion and equity in early childhood development.

Impact Statistics

This program was launched in January 2025, and within just three months, we have successfully consulted over 50 parents and carers across 5 states.

Impact Story / Testimonial

Partner Statement

Not Applicable

Family Testimonial

"My son is accepted as he is in the playgroup. He can be himself, which is quite different from attending therapy sessions. While there is no pressure to perform, he is still benefiting from the experience. This is largely due to the facilitator, who allows the children to lead their own play rather than focusing on structured teaching. The playgroup fosters a culture

shaped by the parents and families. For example, all children say their names upon arrival. One day, when the iPad wasn't working to type his name, he softly said his name instead which was a big thing for him. Everyone cheered for him and celebrated his success."

"Being part of playgroups has been an incredible experience for me. I had the chance to meet Filipino families who share my cultural background—mums, dads, and kids alike. Singing nursery rhymes in Filipino brought a sense of connection to my roots that was truly special. Beyond this, the diversity within the playgroups was heartwarming, with families from Arabic, African, and Indian backgrounds also participating. It made me feel a sense of inclusion and belonging. I love that my kids get to experience different languages in such a fun and engaging way. I speak many languages and I want my kids to learn as many languages as they can too. "

Grown Potential – What More Funding Could Do

Additional funding would significantly boost Include2play's capacity to foster inclusion in early learning for children with disabilities from CALD backgrounds and their families by enabling expanded, culturally responsive training for practitioners, the co-design and translation of resources for families, peer-led learning initiatives, and overall stronger support systems to build confidence, improve service navigation, and cultivate inclusive early learning environments.

Strategic Commentary – Alignment with Foundational Supports

Include2play directly aligns with the principles of Foundational Supports by strengthening the capacity of families and the workforce to support children with disability or developmental delay—particularly those from CALD backgrounds—before they access formal systems like the NDIS. The project builds inclusive community-based settings, such as playgroups, where families receive culturally responsive guidance, early intervention knowledge, and peer support. Through co-designed tools and practitioner training, Include2Play ensures that children are supported early, families are empowered, and communities are equipped to provide inclusive, connected environments—addressing gaps before they become complex challenges.

Sutherland Supported Playgroups

The Sutherland Supported Playgroups (SSPG) program, delivered under the Wellbeing and Safety stream of the TEI framework, provides early support to families and children with the goal of preventing the escalation of vulnerability. Operating across seven weekly playgroups in the Sutherland Shire—strategically located using AEDC data—SSPG creates inclusive, welcoming environments where families engage in structured indoor and outdoor play-based learning tailored to children aged 0–5. Led by experienced early childhood facilitators, the playgroups support holistic child development while strengthening parents' confidence, enhancing home learning practices, and reducing social isolation. All seven supported playgroups are independently managed by Playgroup NSW.

The program also connects families to evidence-based parenting resources, mental health support, and broader community and virtual services, helping to address risk factors and promote overall wellbeing. By offering both general and targeted sessions—including for

first-time parents, fathers, and grandparent carers—SSPG addresses diverse family needs while fostering a sense of belonging and community connection.

Framework Use

Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

Targeted Earlier Intervention (TEI) Framework

NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework

Key Stakeholders

Children and families, Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, Fams, Sutherland Early Years Interagency, Sutherland Child and Family Interagency, Aboriginal Interagency, SGS News, The Benevolent Society, Orana, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD), Sutherland Shire Libraries, Allied Health, NDIS Early Childhood Partner (Lifestart), Ask Izzy, Disability Gateway, A-List Hub

Funding Source

New South Wales Department of Communities and Justice

The 'Why' – purpose

The Sutherland Shire has a high population of families with young children, contributing to a strong demand for early childhood and family support services. Many local families experience challenges such as social isolation, postnatal anxiety, financial hardship, and limited access to culturally inclusive support—particularly for single parents, new migrants, and those affected by domestic violence. In response, the Sutherland Community Strategic Plan prioritises child wellbeing, community connection, and early intervention—areas that align strongly with the objectives of the SSPG program.

Playgroup NSW is uniquely positioned to deliver SSPG through its deep community networks, longstanding expertise in early childhood development, and commitment to inclusive, family-centred practices. With a strong track record of engaging vulnerable families, PGNSW provides tailored, play-based support that builds parenting confidence, strengthens protective factors, and promotes children's development. Its capacity to deliver culturally responsive programs and its focus on continuous improvement ensure that SSPG not only meets immediate community needs but also delivers sustainable, measurable outcomes in line with TEI priorities for wellbeing and safety.

PGNSW Role

1. PGNSW develops evidence-informed playgroup models and ensures delivery aligns with TEI outcomes and best practices.
2. Provides ongoing training in early childhood development, trauma-informed practice, and inclusive family engagement.
3. Supports teams with outcome tracking, data entry (e.g. DEX), and reporting to funding bodies for continuous improvement.
4. Builds relationships with local services, attends interagencies, and strengthens referral pathways for families.

5. Promotes the program through digital and print materials, ensuring engagement with priority communities.
6. Ensures safety, compliance with policies, staff supervision, and safeguarding procedures.
7. Coordinates booking, setup, maintenance, and compliance checks for safe and welcoming playgroup environments.
8. Champions the importance of supported playgroups and contributes to policy and sector conversations through collaboration with peak bodies.

Benefits and Outcomes

For Children:

1. Enhanced early development across all domains.
2. Opportunities for early identification of developmental concerns and timely referrals.
3. Stronger transition to school through alignment with the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

For Families:

1. Strengthened parent-child relationships.
2. Increased knowledge of child development and positive parenting strategies.
3. Targeted support for families facing complex challenges such as domestic violence.
4. Reduced isolation through peer groups for fathers, grandparents, and first-time parents.
5. Greater access to services, information, and community networks.

For Community:

1. Strengthened social connections and capacity-building.
2. Creation of family-oriented, safe, and inclusive community spaces.
3. Early intervention that reduces long-term social and economic costs.
4. Increased community awareness and responsiveness to vulnerable families' needs.

Impact Statistics

In 2024, the SSPG program effectively delivered 261 sessions across 7 groups, engaging 116 children and 106 adults. Feedback from 50% of enrolled clients (111 individuals) reflected a high average satisfaction score of 4.5 out of 5, showcasing strong approval and impact within the community.

Impact Story / Testimonial

Partner Statement

Not applicable

Family Testimonial

Link to SSPG Impact Report.

https://www.playgroupnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/SSPG_Report_Oct24.pdf

"What sets them both apart is their genuine care and understanding of each child's individual needs. They have been instrumental in helping me comprehend my son's developmental milestones and providing guidance on how to best facilitate his needs. Attending Playgroup each Friday was the highlight of our week for over a year. It is not only a chance for my son to engage in meaningful play with other children but also an opportunity for me to connect with other fathers and learn from their experiences. Sandy and Renae's active supervision ensures that the environment remains safe and inclusive for everyone. Thank you, Sandy and Renae, for your exceptional work and unwavering dedication. Your passion for supporting children and fathers shines through in everything you do. I am grateful to have found such a remarkable Playgroup."

Grown Potential – What More Funding Could Do

1. Creation of family-centred community hubs or "one-stop shops" that bring together supported playgroups, parenting programs, child and family support services, mental health support, and early intervention services in one accessible space. Permanent physical infrastructure would ensure program sustainability, provide culturally safe spaces, and reduce the stigma associated with accessing help.
2. More supported playgroups across the region, including in growth corridors and areas with limited service access, ensuring no child or family is left behind. Flexible delivery models, including virtual, afternoon and weekend groups for working parents and carers.
3. School holiday workshops that support continuity for families and provide creative, engaging learning experiences for children. Community events that raise awareness about child development, family wellbeing, and available services.
4. Recruitment and training of additional early childhood educators and family support workers with cultural competence and trauma-informed skills. Professional development opportunities for current staff to ensure evidence-based, high-quality service delivery.
5. Improved data collection systems and impact measurement tools to demonstrate outcomes and inform future service design. Participatory feedback mechanisms involving families in program co-design and evaluation.

Strategic Commentary – Alignment with Foundational Supports

Supported Playgroups (SSPG) provide families with valuable guidance through facilitators, who share advice on child development, parenting strategies, and local resources. Visiting professionals, such as NDIS Early Years specialists and community health nurses, further enhance access to information, offering support on topics like early intervention, health, and nutrition. Additionally, library outreach programs introduce families to literacy resources, while referrals to other services ensure tailored support for families' specific needs. Families also benefit from referral exchanges, enabling access to services like allied health services.

SSPG help parents build their confidence and skills through parenting programs, facilitator-led activities and joint parent-child experiences, which strengthen relationships and promote positive interactions. The playgroups focus on children's social, emotional, and physical development, preparing them for future learning. This supportive environment reduces social isolation and fosters resilience among parents. Informal networks formed

within the playgroups often extend beyond sessions, as families organize playdates, offer mutual support, and strengthen community ties.

In essence, SSPG act as a hub of foundational support by providing families with the knowledge, resources, skills, and social connections necessary to nurture their children's development and thrive as parents. They address fundamental needs and build a strong base for future success.

PEEP-LTP

Playgroup NSW is committed to providing quality services that support families and practitioners in fostering positive child development. One of the key programs in our offering is Peep-LTP (Peep Learning Together Programme), an evidence-based, adult learning initiative that empowers parents, carers, and practitioners to enhance the learning opportunities within everyday life. Through our partnership with Playgroup Victoria, Playgroup NSW is proud to be the sole provider of Peep-LTP training in New South Wales (NSW), enabling us to strengthen families and build the capacity of early childhood practitioners across the state. Peep-LTP is made up of 5 strands of learning and development:

1. Personal, social and emotional development (PSED)
2. Communication and language (CL)
3. Early literacy (EL)
4. Early maths (EM)
5. Health and physical development (HPD).

Framework Use

Peep LTP is a standalone framework that guides early childhood education, with a strong emphasis on parent involvement and play-based learning.

PGNSW Role

1. PGNSW plays a pivotal role in delivering and facilitating the program which includes organizing and overseeing playgroup sessions, ensuring they are accessible to families across different communities, and providing the necessary resources and support for both parents and children.
2. PGNSW is responsible for providing training to facilitators and early childhood educators to ensure they are equipped with the skills and knowledge to implement the PEEP LTP framework effectively. This training ensures the delivery of inclusive, culturally sensitive, and developmentally appropriate programs.
3. PGNSW collaborates with various stakeholders, including local councils, community organizations, and other service providers, to ensure the program reaches a wide audience. These partnerships help increase program accessibility and ensure that families receive holistic support.
4. PGNSW tracks and assesses the impact of the PEEP LTP program, including evaluating outcomes such as increased participation, improved child development, and stronger

community connections. This helps refine strategies and ensure the program is meeting its objectives.

5. Playgroup NSW focuses on strengthening the home learning environment by equipping parents and carers with practical strategies and resources to support their children's development through everyday interactions.

Key Stakeholders

Children and families, Early childhood Facilitators & Educators, Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), Department of Social Services (DSS), Local Councils, State and Local Government Agencies, Educational Institutions (Schools, Childcare Centres, Libraries), Parents and Caregivers, Research Institutions and Universities, Evaluation Experts.

Funding Source

Fee for service

The 'Why' – purpose

The Peep Learning Together Programme (PeepLTP) is an evidence-based adult learning program with a curriculum that supports parents to understand more about how children learn – and to do more of the things at home that make a difference to children's outcomes. Intended for parents of children from birth to school-age, it can be used to communicate concepts and ideas with parents about how to enhance the home learning environment, the parent-child relationship and children's literacy and self-esteem. It can be used with parents in a variety of settings including one on one, parent groups, playgroups, early interventions, kinder and early education settings and anywhere families and children go. The program empowers parents to make the most of everyday learning opportunities including singing, sharing books and stories, and talking about a wide range of ideas, thoughts, and feelings. PeepLTP is a curriculum for parents about the home learning environment, child development and the utilisation of teaching moments in everyday activities.

Playgroup NSW delivers the Peep Learning Together Programme (PeepLTP) to support early childhood development by empowering families—particularly those facing barriers to formal education—with the tools, confidence, and knowledge to create strong home learning environments, fostering lifelong learning and school readiness from the earliest years.

Benefits and Outcomes

For Children:

1. Enhances their home learning environment, giving them a stronger start to their education.
2. Supports children's personal social and emotional development, communication and language, early literacy, early maths, and health and physical development.
3. Encourages readiness for school, ensuring they meet developmental milestones.

For Families:

1. Empowers parents with tools, strategies, and confidence to actively support their children's learning at home.

2. Strengthens the parent-child bond by fostering meaningful interactions around learning activities.

3. Provides a supportive network, connecting families with trained practitioners and resources.

For Community:

1. Builds a culture of lifelong learning, benefiting future generations.

2. Promotes inclusivity and equal opportunities, especially for families facing disadvantage.

3. Strengthens community ties by bringing families together through shared learning experiences.

Impact Statistics

In 2024, Playgroup NSW now has 4 PeepLTP Trainers and trained 35 practitioners. PGNSW has trained an additional 8 practitioners in 2025 with 3 training sessions booked for this year (and capacity to open more training slots as required) We are now operating on a fee for service basis.

Impact Story / Testimonial

Australian Institute of Family Studies. (n.d.). PEEP Learning Together Programme. Retrieved April 11, 2025, from https://aifs.gov.au/research_programs/evidence-and-evaluation-support/cfc-program-profiles/peepltp-peek-learning-together-programme

Playgroup Australia. (n.d.). Peep Learning Together Program Prospectus. Retrieved April 11, 2025, from <https://www.playgroup.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Peep-Propectus-Documnet-5.pdf>

Analysis & Policy Observatory. (n.d.). Toward an Australian culturally responsive pedagogy: A narrative review of the literature. Retrieved April 11, 2025, from <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/apo-nid327887.pdf>

Grown Potential – What More Funding Could Do

With additional investment, PGNSW could train more Peep LTP facilitators and extend the program's reach to educators working in regional, remote, and disadvantaged communities. Making the training and resources more financially accessible would enable a broader and more diverse group of practitioners to engage in evidence-based learning, equipping them to better support families in fostering early learning at home. Importantly, funding would support the development of tailored Peep LTP training materials for practitioners working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families and families of children with disability, ensuring the program remains inclusive, culturally responsive, and effective in addressing a wide range of family contexts.

A key opportunity with additional funding is the establishment of face-to-face Communities of Practice (CoPs) for Peep-trained practitioners. These CoPs would foster peer learning, reflective practice, and shared problem-solving—strengthening delivery quality and professional confidence. They would also create a space to explore innovative approaches to working with families, including those who are home-schooling or supporting learning from home due to personal choice, disability, or lack of access to formal early education. Such in-

person professional networks would enhance collaboration across sectors, build a stronger early childhood ecosystem, and support continuity between educator practice and family learning environments—ultimately leading to better outcomes for children.

Strategic Commentary – Alignment with Foundational Supports

Investing in the expansion of the Peep Learning Together Programme (Peep LTP) aligns directly with the Foundational Support pillar of the Australian Early Years Strategy (2024–2034) by strengthening the capabilities of educators to engage families and improve the quality of home learning environments. Increased funding would support both targeted foundational supports, such as developing culturally responsive and disability-inclusive training resources, and general foundational supports, including broader educator training, face-to-face Communities of Practice (CoPs), and access to high-quality materials. These investments equip educators to work effectively with diverse families—including those in CALD, regional, or home-schooling contexts—ensuring equity, early intervention, and consistent quality across early years settings. By focusing on capacity-building and community-based delivery, this approach enhances the ecosystem of support surrounding children and families, which is central to foundational wellbeing and long-term developmental outcomes.

MyTime

MyTime is a national program open to all parents and carers of children under 18 who require extra support—whether due to a disability, chronic medical condition, developmental delay, or other additional needs. Families in MyTime come from diverse backgrounds, and each child has unique strengths and challenges. MyTime is free to join, and participation does not affect your NDIS funding. A trained facilitator guides each group, offering connection and information about local supports and services. Preschool-aged children are welcome and can enjoy fun, supervised activities nearby with MyTime play leaders while parents/carers relax and connect with others.

MyTime groups are typically led by trained, paid facilitators from Playgroup NSW or partner organizations. While these facilitators guide peer support, discussions, and information sharing, volunteers, Social Work students may also contribute by assisting with activities, childcare, or administrative tasks. To deliver MyTime effectively, Playgroup NSW collaborates with over 25 service providers, including local community organizations, disability services, and health services, who may host or otherwise support the groups:

- Accessible Diversity Services Initiative Limited
- Allallowah Children's Hospital
- Aruma
- Bathurst Early Intervention Services
- Bridges for Learning
- Coastwide Child and Family
- Coastwide Child and Family (Entrance & Erina)
- Early Connections Coffs Coast
- Early Links Inclusion Support Services (Muswellbrook)

- EarlyEd
- Eurobodalla Education T/A Muddy Puddles
- Glen Innes Severn Council
- Interchange Illawarra/Big Fat Smile
- Kindred Community
- Kurrajong Therapy Plus
- Lifetime Connect
- Livable
- Luke Priddis Foundation
- Macarthur Disability Family Support and Care
- Noah's
- Noah's Inclusion Services
- Orana
- Orange District Early Education Programs
- Playgroup ACT
- Plumtree
- Shaping Outcomes
- Thou Walla Family Centre
- Monaro Family Support Services
- Cooma

Framework Use

1. NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework
2. Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)
3. Best Practice in Family Support
4. Human Services Outcomes Framework
5. National Guidelines Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention

Key Stakeholders

Children and families, Australian Government Department of Social Services, local councils, state government departments involved in community services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural groups, disability advocacy groups and networks, schools, childcare centres, libraries, NDIS-related service providers, Carer Gateway, health and allied services, Ask Izzy, Disability Gateway, A-List Hub, advocacy groups promoting social equity and inclusion.

PGNSW Role

1. Playgroup NSW oversees the establishment and ongoing operation of MyTime groups across the NSW/ACT.
2. Playgroup NSW secures and manages funding from the Australian Government (Department of Social Services) to deliver the MyTime program in NSW in collaboration with PRC.
3. Facilitator Recruitment, Training, and Supervision: Playgroup NSW recruits, trains, and provides ongoing supervision and professional development for MyTime facilitators.

4. Playgroup NSW assists with setting up new MyTime groups, including finding suitable venues and supporting initial group development.
6. Playgroup NSW develops and provides resources, information packs, and materials for facilitators and MyTime participants.
7. Playgroup NSW fosters connections between MyTime groups, facilitators, and relevant services and organizations.
8. Playgroup NSW promotes the MyTime program to families of children with disability or chronic medical conditions across NSW.
8. Playgroup NSW collects data on program participation and outcomes to meet funding requirements
9. Playgroup NSW ensures the MyTime program is delivered according to national guidelines and best practice principles for peer support.
10. Playgroup NSW provides the necessary administrative and IT infrastructure to support the MyTime program.

Funding Source

The Parenting Research Centre (PRC) and Playgroup NSW (PGNSW) work together on the MyTime program in NSW and ACT, which is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS).

The ‘Why’ – purpose

A parent peer program like MyTime is vital as it offers a supportive and inclusive space for parents of children with disabilities to connect, share experiences, and build resilience. By fostering emotional wellbeing, strengthening parenting confidence, and reducing isolation, MyTime helps parents feel understood and empowered. It also promotes practical support and a sense of belonging, ultimately benefiting not just the parents but the overall wellbeing of their children and families.

Benefits and Outcomes

For Children:

1. When parents feel supported and emotionally well, it positively influences the parent-child relationship.
2. Parents gain strategies and resources to better support their child's unique needs.
3. Children benefit from being part of a family that feels connected and included in the community.

For Families:

1. Reduces stress, anxiety, and isolation for parents and caregivers.
2. Helps parents feel more capable in managing everyday challenges and advocating for their child.
3. Facilitators and peer sharing provide valuable information on services and supports.

For Community:

1. Builds community connections among families with similar experiences.
2. Encourages understanding and acceptance of disability within the broader community.
3. Helps families navigate and access local services, making support systems more effective and responsive.

Impact Statistics

National stats:

94% of MyTime parents were satisfied with the support they received

94% agreed MyTime helped them care for their child

74% agreed they have someone to turn to for advice.

Source: <https://www.parentingrc.org.au/program/mytime/>

PGNSW stats:

MyTime program engaged 51 groups and delivered 1446 sessions, welcoming 3485 children and 838 unique adults (5292 total attendees), with 9 new playgroups established.

Demographically, 91% of adult attendees were female, with significant representation in the 26-39 (48%) and 40-64 (46%) age brackets, and 6% identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, including one Vietnamese-specific CALD group. Member satisfaction was high, averaging 4.49 overall, with strong agreement on feeling listened to, supported, and helped as parents; 62% reported feeling a sense of community. The program delivered 2648 hours with an average participation length of 543 days.

Impact Story / Testimonial

Partner Statement

Orana Early Childhood Intervention in Dubbo is a proud to partner with Playgroup NSW on funded programs such as PlayConnect + and My Time in our Community. Playgroup NSW is a known brand and professional organisation with organised systems and processes to assist partners to report and deliver the programs. OEI has felt able to communicate with Playgroup NSW about any queries or provide feedback about the programs. We value our partnership with Playgroup NSW and look forward to it continuing. Families value the specialist groups to expand their child's social and play skills within a safe environment, where they have access to information on Early Childhood pathways.

Family Testimonial

"Through these sessions, I have made some wonderful friends. We have laughed, cried, listened and ranted together but have always known that we were in our safe circle and we were supported enough to let some difficult truths out. This isn't something I can easily do with family and other friends. These wonderful people are patient, listen without judgement, offer advice when it is needed or are simply a shoulder to lean on and gain strength from."

"My time has given me hope, a chance to breathe and connect with others who have or about to go through similar journeys. when I first got the diagnosis of autism the feeling of isolation was profound even within the home, being able to go to a parent group with

likeminded people that understood the journey I was about to face. The diagnosis was detrimental to my mental health at the time. My time has given me so much knowledge from the parent room sessions that run to the conversation shared around the table between parents. It's been an absolute God sent to lean on other parents for advice or even just to be able to relate to them without feeling judgement. Originally my time was a place that I could grab a coffee sit down and have 30 mins of uninterrupted peace and quiet from children with some adult interaction. It has become so much more, it's a safe place where I can share my highs and lows, a tool I can use to gain knowledge and inspiration, a family of people I can lean on when I'm down and in a rut, a light hearted room where we can laugh and forget our worries for a couple of minutes. A place to just meet new friends that understand our struggles and are more accepting which allows us to further integrate ourselves into the community together without the feeling of judgement."

My time is our second home where we know if something happens with our child we aren't judged. We are supported and I think that's the biggest thing about My time - the support you feel when you leave the room is paramount. My time helps me be a better mum. I would be lost without it.

Grown Potential – What More Funding Could Do

1. More funding would allow for the establishment of new groups in underserved areas of NSW, including rural and remote communities where access to support services can be limited.
2. Existing groups typically meet weekly or fortnightly for a couple of hours. Additional funding could enable more frequent sessions or longer durations, providing more opportunities for parents to connect and receive support.
3. Funding could be used to enhance the quality of group sessions by providing more resources such as guest speakers (e.g., therapists, specialists, service providers), workshops on relevant topics (e.g., navigating the NDIS, managing challenging behaviours, self-care strategies), and activities that promote relaxation and wellbeing for parents (e.g., mindfulness sessions, art therapy).
4. While play helpers are often present to engage children during sessions, increased funding could allow for more qualified and experienced childcare professionals, ensuring that children of all ages and needs are well-supported. This would enable parents to fully focus on their peer support and self-care without worrying about their children.
5. Facilitators play a crucial role in the effectiveness of MyTime groups. More funding could provide opportunities for more in-depth training, ongoing professional development, and increased support for facilitators, equipping them with the skills and resources to better meet the diverse needs of the parents in their groups.
6. Additional funding could enable the development of specific MyTime groups tailored to the needs of parents of children with particular disabilities or complex needs. This could provide a more focused and relevant support network for parents facing similar challenges. For example, a dedicated group for parents of children with autism spectrum disorder could be established.

7. While online groups exist, more funding could expand these offerings with more interactive features, online workshops, and easily accessible resources, benefiting parents who cannot attend in-person meetings due to geographical limitations or other reasons. This could include creating a members-only online forum for ongoing support and information sharing.

8. Funding could be allocated to establish peer mentoring programs where experienced MYtime members can provide one-on-one support and guidance to new members, helping them navigate their caring role and connect with the broader support network.

Strategic Commentary – Alignment with Foundational Supports

Increased funding for programs like MyTime and PGNSW strongly aligns with the principles of foundational supports—universal, early-intervention services designed to foster inclusion, strengthen family capacity, and prevent escalating needs. MyTime provides essential peer support, information, and connections for parents and carers of children with disabilities, reducing isolation and stress while reinforcing community bonds. By focusing on early intervention, these programs decrease reliance on intensive services and drive better long-term outcomes. Additional funding would broaden access, particularly in regional and remote areas, improve program quality, support targeted groups, and secure sustainability through enhanced outreach and facilitator training. This investment is not only cost-effective but also advances the National Disability Strategy’s objectives, fostering a more inclusive, resilient, and efficient system of disability support.

PlayStrong

The PlayStrong program offers a holistic approach to early childhood education, aiming to educate and empower both children and their parents or carers. The program is committed to making early learning more accessible for vulnerable families and those who may face challenges engaging with traditional early education services. We support the engagement of children aged 0–3 years—too young for preschool—in early years education through culturally and developmentally appropriate activities. These activities promote the importance of early childhood education to parents and communities by providing information and culturally inclusive resources. The goal is to create an inclusive and diverse environment that welcomes families from all backgrounds, supporting every child to have the best possible start in their learning journey. Playgroup NSW, in collaboration with 19 partners, facilitates approximately 50 PlayStrong playgroups. Below are a few of our partners enlisted:

- Albion Park Rail SaCC
- Berkely West SaCC
- Blue Haven SaCC
- Buninyong SaCC
- Farmborough Rd SaCC
- Gorokan SaCC
- Kurri Kurri
- Kurri Multicultural

- Maitland Neighbourhood Centre
- Muloobinba Aboriginal Corporation
- Northlakes SaCC
- Sanctuary Point SaCC
- Woy Woy SaCC
- Wyoming SaCC
- Wyong SaCC

Framework Use

National Quality Framework, Early Years Learning Framework

Key Stakeholders

Children and families, NSW Department of Education, early childhood education services (childcare centres, preschools, and long day care services), local government and councils, families and caregivers, early childhood educators (teachers and facilitators), community organizations, non-government organizations supporting children and families (including those with disabilities), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, private sector providers (for facilities, services, and educational resources), educational institutions, health and allied services, Ask Izzy

PGNSW Role

1. Playgroup NSW creates culturally appropriate and developmentally supportive activities to engage children and promote their growth.
2. Trained facilitators and early childhood educators deliver inclusive programs that meet the diverse needs of families and children.
3. Culturally inclusive resources, including guides and toolkits, are developed and shared to help parents and communities understand the importance of early childhood education.
4. Outreach efforts are organized to educate parents and communities about the value of early childhood education, encouraging participation and fostering a positive attitude toward early learning programs.
5. The impact of early years programs is tracked and assessed to refine strategies and improve access to early childhood education.
6. Partnerships are built with local councils, community organizations, and other service providers to ensure children aged 0-3 receive the appropriate support and culturally relevant programs.
7. Safe, accessible, and welcoming spaces for early learning programs are managed to create environments where families feel comfortable and supported.
8. Advocacy for young children and families is undertaken within the early childhood education sector, aiming to improve policies and practices for children in the crucial 0-3 age range.

Funding Source

NSW Department of Education's Start Strong Pathways Grant

The 'Why' – purpose

Children who enter primary school with readiness to learn have the strongest foundation for success, as early preparation greatly impacts their ability to thrive academically and socially. Research highlights that children who attend a preschool program for only one year are 1.2 times more likely to face developmental vulnerabilities in multiple domains, as per the Australian Early Development Census, compared to those who benefit from two years of preschool education. Preschool programs have proven to be most effective for children who are experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage, ensuring they receive crucial support during early formative years. Moreover, investing in universal preschool attendance yields significant economic benefits, with every dollar spent returning two dollars across a child's lifetime, showcasing both the social and financial advantages of early educational interventions.

Source: https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/current-service-providers/start-strong-funding/Start_Strong_Program_Logic.pdf

Benefits and Outcomes

For Children:

1. Early identification and support for learning needs.
2. Facilitation of developmental progress.
3. Ensuring children are developmentally on track when they start school.
4. High percentages of children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, achieve milestones across the Preschool Reform Agreement's five domains.

For Families:

1. Empowering families with resources and knowledge to support their children's education.
2. Guidance and assistance in addressing learning needs early.
3. Strengthening family involvement and connection to the education system.

For Community:

1. Promoting inclusivity by supporting the development of all children.
2. Building cohesive communities that value equitable educational opportunities.
3. Enhanced quality in formative assessments, improving childcare and educational services.
4. Economic growth through investment in early childhood education.

Impact Statistics

Playgroup NSW stats:

The "Play Strong" program conducted 47 sessions, with a total attendance of 1,789 and a new additional session offered for the Parramatta Play Van. On average, attendance per group was 612, while 512 individuals participated uniquely, reflecting improved data

capture methods introduced in June 2024. Survey results show remarkable impact: 84.6% noticed progress in Early Literacy, 82% in Early Numeracy, and 89% in Social Development. Furthermore, 90% of attendees reported better understanding and confidence in fostering early education at home, while 89.7% felt a stronger connection to their community.

Impact Story / Testimonial

Family Testimonial

"Thank you for providing such a wonderful service. We thoroughly enjoy coming every week. The Educators are always happy and helpful and engage with each and every child, and make them feel special and included. It's always fun and always educational. Thank you."

Grown Potential – What More Funding Could Do

Access to greater funding allows for the design and implementation of individualized support plans that address each child's specific needs. This approach can significantly boost engagement and learning outcomes, while ensuring that all children are supported to participate fully alongside their peers.

Investing in improved infrastructure creates a more inclusive and stimulating environment. This could include accessible classrooms, specialized equipment, and inclusive outdoor play areas, all designed to accommodate a range of abilities. Moreover, adequate funding enables educators to receive specialized training in inclusive practices, understanding various disabilities, and using assistive technologies—empowering them to better support diverse learners. Finally, increased funding supports the purchase of high-quality, inclusive learning materials. These may include adapted textbooks, sensory tools, visual supports, and digital resources, ensuring that children with different learning styles and needs can thrive.

Strategic Commentary – Alignment with Foundational Supports

Targeted foundational supports refer to the specialized resources, strategies, and infrastructure essential for addressing the unique learning and developmental needs of children with disabilities. The recommendation directly supports this by emphasizing tailored interventions such as individualized plans, inclusive and accessible environments—including specialized equipment—and high-quality adapted learning materials like sensory tools and visual aids. While these are not required by all children, they are vital for ensuring equity, access, and full participation for those with diverse learning profiles. Moreover, the emphasis on specialized educator training ensures the workforce is equipped to effectively support these learners.

At the same time, the proposed investments strengthen general foundational supports—the core elements of quality education that benefit all students. Upgraded facilities foster a more engaging and supportive learning environment, while professional development, even when focused on inclusion, enhances the overall quality of teaching. Similarly, investment in rich, inclusive learning materials enhances the curriculum for every learner.

Project Amplify

Playgroup NSW are leading a research project in consortia with Playgroup SA, Playgroup Victoria, Playgroup Tasmania, Playgroup NT and Playgroup Australia that looks to find ways for Playgroup organisations to meet a changing social and economic climate developed in response to the unprecedented setbacks to the Playgroup ecosystem created in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Based on the findings of this research, funded by the Ian Potter Foundation, new options for resources and venues will be designed in close consultation with the community and iteratively rolled out across the network to provide the best opportunity for Playgroups to remain sustainable, grow, and thrive.

Framework Use

Amplify includes research activities that inform implementation projects to future proof playgroups and enhance outcomes for children, families and communities.

Key Stakeholders

The project is funded by The Ian Potter Foundation (IPF).

A consortia of playgroup organisations operates under an MOU to advance the project's activities and implementation (PGNSW, PGVic, PGNT, PGSA, PGTas, Playgroup Australia).

Research partners collaborate on projects (e.g. Telethon Kids Institute, Griffith University)

Aligned external consultants provide deliverables related to some projects (e.g. Social Impact Hub)

Children, families and communities are the key beneficiaries of the project outcomes

PGNSW Role

PGNSW is the Lead for Project Amplify and the contract holder with The Ian Potter Foundation

Funding Source

The Ian Potter Foundation (philanthropy)

The 'Why' – purpose

Playgroups play a critical role in children's development and learning, family connection and wellbeing and community cohesion. The grant supports research and projects to strengthen the playgroup network into the future.

Strategic Commentary – Alignment with Foundational Supports

Project Amplify aims to support the overall ecosystem of playgroups, focussing on supply and demand and barriers and enablers. Sub projects are designed to ensure a stable, quality, responsive system that is equitable and a strong basis for both general and targeted foundational supports through playgroups.

Community Playgroups

Community playgroups, supported by Playgroup NSW (PGNSW), are led by volunteer parents and carers who create inclusive, play-based environments where families connect and children thrive. They help foster social connections, reduce isolation, and support child development through play-based activities. These playgroups are inclusive and accessible, offering opportunities for parents and caregivers to share experiences and build supportive networks within their communities. In addition to parent-led playgroups, Helping Families Learn and Grow with Playgroups (HFLAG) helps increase access to early childhood programs by supporting more Intergenerational Playgroups, which build connections between young children and older adults, and Baby Playgroups, which support early development and bonding between parents and babies. Through training, resources, and community partnerships, PGNSW strengthens the sustainability, accessibility, and impact of all playgroup types across NSW.

Framework Use

Families and Children Activity Outcomes Framework

Key Stakeholders

Children and families, aged care facilities, health professionals, community organizations, local councils, schools and childcare centres, family support services, mental health support services, libraries, NDIS service providers, early childhood education providers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural groups, Ask Izzy, Disability Gateway, volunteer networks.

PGNSW Role

1. Representing the interests of playgroups and families to government and other stakeholders to secure funding and raise awareness of the importance of play.
2. Offering a wide range of resources, including activity ideas, fact sheets on child development, safety guidelines, and templates for administrative tasks.
3. Providing workshops, online modules, and networking opportunities for volunteers and facilitators to enhance their skills and knowledge.
4. Providing guidance and support for playgroups seeking additional funding opportunities.
5. Providing a point of contact for playgroups to ask questions, seek advice, and troubleshoot challenges.
6. Developing and providing essential policies and procedures related to safety, child protection, and operational guidelines.
7. Providing a website and membership system for registration, communication, and access to resources.
8. Assisting new groups with the setup process, including guidance on venue selection, forming a committee, and attracting members.
9. Facilitating connections between playgroups through forums, events, and regional support networks.
10. Offering resources to help playgroups promote themselves within their local communities.

11. Providing public liability insurance to protect playgroups and their volunteers.

Funding Source

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services through the Children and Parenting Support (CAPS) program. Playgroup Australia is the lead contractor nationally (except for WA) with other States and Territories as service delivery partners.

The ‘Why’ – purpose

At PGNSW, we proudly support community playgroups because we believe in the strength and potential of local communities. Our vision is to empower communities to take ownership of these vital spaces, recognizing their crucial role in early childhood development and family well-being. We're committed to nurturing their growth through innovative, sustainable solutions and encouraging both community investment and diverse funding support. Our mission is to support this journey by offering resources, tools, and expertise that help communities flourish and build strong foundations for their youngest members.

Community playgroups also serve as meaningful pathways for parents/carer looking to re-enter the workforce. They offer valuable opportunities to gain hands-on experience and rebuild confidence. Notably, many of our dedicated volunteers have gone on to secure employment within the playgroup sector. For e.g. taking on roles as full-time community coordinators at PGNSW. This underscores the important role playgroups play in creating employment pathways, both within our organization and the broader community.

Benefits and Outcomes

For Children:

Playgroup can help children develop:

1. literacy and numeracy skills
2. social and emotional skills
3. fine and gross motor skills
4. sensory pathways, which are important to all learning
5. cognitive and executive functioning skills
6. dispositions for learning ('habits of mind'), such as cooperation, purposefulness and persistence.

For Families:

1. Gain an understanding of what and how children learn through play and other experiences
2. Receive ideas for activities they can do at home to support their child's learning
3. Develop an increased sense of belonging to the school, preschool, children's centre or community
4. Interact with educators and professionals, breaking down perceived barriers

5. Interact with other parents and carers and share knowledge and experiences
6. Build connections, resilience, peer to peer support
7. Connect and engage with other services and supports in their community
8. Reduce family breakdown and mental health impacts

For Community:

1. Connect parents, caregivers and children to services and experiences within the local community.
2. Earlier access for health or development support for parents and caregivers, that will strengthen children's inclusion and involvement in the community.
3. Support more diverse, thriving, connected and inclusive communities for all.
4. Volunteering in playgroups saves costs and builds social capital by strengthening community ties and reducing reliance on formal services.

Impact Statistics

The Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) report by Playgroup Australia reveals that community playgroups offer substantial economic and social benefits. The analysis estimates that for every dollar invested, there is a return of approximately \$3.60, with a Net Present Value (NPV) of \$584 million over a ten-year period. These benefits arise from various factors, including enhanced educational outcomes, improved health, increased employment opportunities, and reduced demands on government services such as education, health, justice, and child protection systems. The report underscores the effectiveness of playgroups as a cost-efficient strategy for fostering positive long-term outcomes for children, families, and the broader community.

Source:

https://www.playgroupaustralia.org.au/wpcontent/uploads/2019/08/PGA_CostBenefits_Report.pdf

At PGNSW: In 2024, Community Playgroups have made a significant impact by hosting 385 sessions across 303 groups, establishing 36 new playgroups, and engaging 5,005 children alongside 3,850 adults. Families shared overwhelmingly positive feedback, with 88% expressing high satisfaction, 92% recommending the program, and a majority noting benefits such as improved child development (88%), enhanced parenting skills, and stronger connections with other parents (83%).

Impact Story / Testimonial

Partner Statement

Not Applicable

Family Testimonial

"I am honestly so grateful for Playgroup as it has supported my daughter's holistic development, encouraged her to build and nurture new friendships, given me so many new ideas for playtime as well as new foundations for relationships with other parents, and it is an experience my daughter absolutely loves. She gets so very excited every time we pull up

in the car at Mudgee Playgroup, and starts squealing and squirming, trying to get down before we are even inside because she is so excited to play! I absolutely love watching her happy little face as she checks out all the new activities and interacts with her new friends, it's the highlight of my day."

Grown Potential – What More Funding Could Do

Targeted funding can significantly strengthen community playgroups by addressing key areas of need. Support for volunteer coordinators can be enhanced through financial assistance that provides administrative help, training opportunities, and access to essential resources—relieving pressure on volunteer-run groups. Employing more Community Coordinators would help establish, grow, and sustain playgroups at both local and national levels, offering consistent guidance and coordination. Funding can also back community engagement initiatives, raising awareness about playgroups and actively reaching families who may face barriers to participation.

Parenting support can be bolstered through workshops, peer networks, and information sessions, helping reduce social isolation while boosting parenting confidence. Funding can also enable stronger linkages with other services, giving families streamlined access to wider community supports. With adequate resources, playgroups can introduce diverse and enriching activities, such as music and movement, creative workshops, and health-focused visits, creating a more stimulating environment for children and caregivers alike.

Improving venue quality and resources is another key area—additional funding can support safer, more engaging spaces with quality toys, books, and learning materials. Facilitator training and ongoing support, whether for volunteers or paid staff, ensures high-quality playgroup experiences and positive interactions. Finally, by eliminating participation fees, funding can remove financial barriers, making playgroups accessible to a broader range of families, particularly those experiencing economic hardship.

Strategic Commentary – Alignment with Foundational Supports

Foundational support for community playgroups focuses on empowering local communities to take ownership and ensure the sustainability of these spaces. This support helps align playgroups with early childhood development goals and creates an environment where children's developmental needs are met through inclusive and culturally appropriate activities. PGNSW provide the necessary funding, resources, and expertise to foster growth, drive community engagement, and develop innovative solutions to keep playgroups thriving. PGNSW's role includes offering training, guidance, and resources to build long-term sustainability and ensure that the playgroups remain inclusive and developmentally supportive.

Beyond benefiting children, these community playgroups serve as valuable pathways for parents and carers to rebuild confidence, gain new skills, and prepare for potential workforce re-entry. Volunteers involved in community playgroups often transition into paid positions within the sector, highlighting the dual benefit of playgroups in supporting family well-being and creating professional opportunities. By building strong partnerships with local councils, community organizations, and other service providers, PGNSW ensures that families receive not just early childhood education but also family-centered resources that support their overall growth.

Through these foundational supports, PGNSW enhances the accessibility and sustainability of playgroups, ensuring they remain vibrant spaces for connection, learning, and growth for both families and the broader community. Whether it's through parent-run groups, Intergenerational Playgroups, or Baby Playgroups, PGNSW ensures that the foundations of these initiatives are solid, creating environments where families thrive and children develop to their full potential.

Helping Families Learn and Grow with Playgroups (HFLAG), Ropes Crossing Community Hub

The Ropes Crossing Community Hub has been established as a central location for Playgroup NSW activities, complemented by services such as the Maternal Child Health nurse, Anglicare, and various community initiatives. Situated next to a school and an early education and care facility, the hub facilitates referral pathways for families both entering and leaving its programs. Ropes Crossing is located at the heart of suburbs characterized by socioeconomic disadvantage and a diverse range of cultural backgrounds.

The hub hosts two regular groups: one specifically for babies, and another for early years (including babies). Both groups are led by an experienced facilitator and integrate the EYLF framework as well as the PeepLTP parental capacity-building approach, where appropriate.

Framework Use

Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

Peep LTP

Families and Children Activity Outcomes Framework

Key Stakeholders

Children and families, Local council, public housing authorities, schools, preschools, libraries, health clinics, multicultural organizations, Ask Izzy, NDIS service providers, social services, and community organizations.

Funding Source

HFLAG is additional investment in Community Playgroups with Playgroup Australia as the lead contractor. Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

The 'Why' – purpose

Many families—especially those experiencing vulnerability, language barriers, or social isolation—struggle to navigate multiple service systems. A hub offers co-located services, making it easier for families to access support like parenting programs, allied health, early learning, and community support in one place. By encouraging collaboration between service providers, they create more efficient, holistic, and responsive systems that strengthen families and build healthier communities.

Benefits and Outcomes

For Children:

1. Early identification and support for developmental delays, disabilities, or learning needs through on-site allied health services.
2. Access to enriching activities like playgroups, arts, and movement that support social, emotional, and cognitive development.
3. Safe and inclusive environments that foster friendships, confidence, and a sense of belonging.
4. Improved school readiness through early learning opportunities and smoother transitions into education settings.

For Families:

1. Easier access to multiple services in one location, reducing stress and time barriers.
2. Guidance and referral pathways to the right supports at the right time (e.g., parenting support, mental health, NDIS).
3. Culturally safe and welcoming space for CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
4. Opportunities to connect with other families, reducing isolation and building peer support networks.

For Community:

1. Stronger social cohesion through shared spaces and cross-cultural connection.
2. Better service coordination and collaboration, making community support systems more effective.
3. Localised, place-based solutions that respond directly to community needs and strengths.
4. Increased community engagement and participation, empowering residents and creating a stronger voice for families.

Impact Statistics

Average attendance for the baby group is 6 adults and 6 children, and for the early years group it is 12 adults and 13 children.

Impact Story / Testimonial

Family Testimonial

One mother was concerned that her 2-year-old only hears Nepali spoken in their home. As he does not yet attend preschool, she was worried that he will find it hard to settle in there and may be behind with his communication skills. Information was provided about bilingual communication development and this mother said that she had never had a place to ask this question before.

Grown Potential – What More Funding Could Do

Increased funding for the Ropes Crossing Community Hub would significantly enhance its reach and effectiveness, allowing for a broader and more integrated range of services to support families. This could include co-located services such as allied health, mental health

care, adult learning, and financial counselling, building on the strong foundation of existing programs like playgroups. Investment in purpose-built infrastructure—featuring larger, well-equipped spaces, inclusive design, and accessible technology—would help create a welcoming, culturally safe environment for all.

Funding would also enable the recruitment of a skilled and diverse workforce, including a dedicated hub coordinator and bilingual staff, ensuring culturally responsive, well-managed service delivery. Targeted outreach strategies would help engage families who may be isolated or unaware of available support, while transport assistance would reduce barriers to participation for those with limited mobility or access.

Strategic Commentary – Alignment with Foundational Supports

Community hubs play a crucial role in connecting individuals and families to foundational supports by creating accessible pathways to a range of resources. They serve both general and targeted needs, offering comprehensive services that empower communities to thrive. Here's how they effectively connect with foundational supports:

1. Community hubs provide a central point for general community service information and specialized referrals for those in need of targeted support, such as mental health or disability services.
2. By hosting professionals or outreach services, hubs bring services like healthcare, financial counselling, and job support directly to the community, improving accessibility.
3. Hubs foster collaboration with local service providers, ensuring coordinated support and avoiding duplication of efforts. This includes partnerships with libraries, health centres, and other local organizations.
4. Hubs reach out proactively to underserved populations through home visits, school partnerships, and 5. Hubs offer workshops and programs that build essential life skills, such as financial literacy, job readiness, and parenting skills, tailored to the needs of both general and targeted groups.
6. Early Identification and Prevention: Being a trusted presence in the community allows hubs to identify emerging needs early and connect individuals with early intervention or preventative services.

Ngurra Connected Beginnings

The Connected Beginnings program is a national grants initiative that supports improved outcomes for First Nations children and families. The program works in partnership with local communities to strengthen engagement with health, early childhood education, and family support services during their critical early years of a child's life. Connected Beginnings aims to ensure that First Nations children are safe, healthy and developmentally on track to start school by the age of five. It does this by improving access to, and coordination of, existing services, rather than creating new systems.

Framework Use

Ngurra Connected Beginnings does not use any one Framework. Although we do base our activities and support around the AEDC statistics

Key Stakeholders

Children and families, Riverina Medical and Dental Association, Aboriginal Education Consultancy Group, Murrumbidgee Local Health District, Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network, NSW Department of Education, SNAICC - National Voice for Children, KU Preschools

Funding Source

Australian Government Department of Education

The 'Why' – purpose

Ngurra meaning side by side in Wiradjuri language. The Ngurra Connected Beginnings team will work side by side with the Wagga Wagga First Nations community, families, schools and support services. The vision of the Ngurra Connected Beginnings program is to provide all First Nations children aged 0- 5 living within the Wagga Wagga region with a "great start", by improving their wellbeing prior to school, with a specific focus across education, health and family services. Our aim is to support the integration of early childhood education, maternal and child health, and family support services in Wagga Wagga, so that First Nations children are well prepared for school.

Benefits and Outcomes

For Children:

The Connected Beginnings program delivers a range of significant benefits that directly support the health, development and educational outcomes of First Nations children, such as: improved school readiness, better health and development outcomes, stronger cultural identity, safer and more supportive environments, seamless transitions to school and equitable access to services.

For Families:

The Connected Beginnings program not only supports children - it also delivers lasting benefits for families by building stronger connections to services, empowering parents and caregivers, and fostering culturally safe, community-led support systems. Some of the benefits include - Easier access to support services, increased engagement and trust, empowerment through community involvement, improved parenting support, holistic and culturally responsive support, stronger connections to community and long term social and economic benefits.

For Community:

The connected Beginnings program has far-reaching impacts that go beyond individual children and families. By fostering collaboration, cultural leadership, and improved access to services, the program strengthens the social fabric and well-being of entire communities. Some benefits in detail include - Community-Led service delivery and design, stronger more cohesive service networks, preservation and promotion of culture, increased community

engagement and participation, local economic and employment opportunities, improved outcomes across generations and a model for inclusive systems change.

Impact Statistics

Statistics are not openly collected in the program, more so impact on families, children and communities. 50 sites Nationwide: As of January 2025, the program operates in 50 sites across all Australian states and territories, supporting over 24,800 First Nations children. In Wagga Wagga the Connected Beginnings team has supported over 348 First Nations children since forming in 2022. The team in Wagga are still actively working with all these families on a weekly basis.

Impact Story / Testimonial

The report details the Ngurra Hub, a Playgroup NSW initiative on Wiradjuri Country in Wagga Wagga, which serves as a welcoming "home" and "place of belonging" for First Nations children and families. Operating on an integrated model, the hub provides crucial wrap-around support by co-locating early childhood education, health, family support, and community services, all delivered with a community-led and culturally sensitive approach by local First Nations women. By addressing disadvantage and fostering strong community connections, the Ngurra Hub aims to improve school readiness and overall well-being for Aboriginal children and create systemic, sustainable positive change.

<https://www.playgroupnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Our-Ngurra-Integrated-Hub-Supporting-Aboriginal-Children-and-Families-compressed.pdf>

Grown Potential – What More Funding Could Do

The Connected Beginnings program has demonstrated measurable success in improving early childhood outcomes in First Nations communities. With increased and sustained funding, the program could expand both its reach and depth, delivering long-term, transformative outcomes for children, families and First Nations communities across Australia. Increased funding could enhance service integration enabling our site to : Hire more community based staff and knowledge holders, Provide Case Management to families that may be disconnected or facing more complex barriers.

Strategic Commentary – Alignment with Foundational Supports

This hub functions as a central point where key services come together, providing families with easy access to essential supports like Blue Book health checks, dental assessments, nurse visits, NDIS partner consultations, and preschool engagement. By bringing these services into one accessible space, the hub plays a vital role in "connecting the dots" for families seeking foundational support. This integrated model not only simplifies access but also enhances coordination among service providers, ensuring that families receive timely, holistic support. Ultimately, it reinforces the core foundations needed for the health, development, and school readiness of First Nations children.

Yalbilinya Girinya Buwanha (Learn Play Grow)

Yalbilinya Girinya Buwanha (Learn Play Grow in Wiradjuri language) is a playgroup model specific to the Aboriginal families and children living in Wagga Wagga. It currently operates five days a week in a variety of locations engaging families in experiences that promote development, wellbeing and good health. The content of each session is designed around the needs, interest and emerging skills of the children and families attending the playgroup. Experiences are created to be culturally responsive including elements and stories from within nature and the land to increase connection with the unique culture, language and spirituality of the Wiradjuri people. The programs pedagogy and practice is informed by the early years learning framework with a focus towards increasing equality for Aboriginal children and parents pertaining to Closing the Gap Targets. The programs main focus is to have our children ready to transition to school.

Framework Use

Early Years Learning Framework, 8 Aboriginal ways of Learning

Key Stakeholders

Children and families, KU Preschool, Connected Beginnings Wagga, Department of Education, Murrumbidgee Local Health District.

Funding Source

National Indigenous Australian Agency- Federal

The 'Why' – purpose

All our objectives align with the closing the gap targets. 1. Families and children are connected to early education and care providers in community, 2. Children are developmentally on track AEDC outcomes 3. Families are connected with their community and relevant services 4. Families and children have access with Aboriginal health providers 5. Parents and carers have increased knowledge of nutrition and health 6. Children and families feel connected to culture and language. Completing all relevant health checks and referrals give a much better outcome for transitioning to school or preschool. The vision of Yalbilinya is to provide a great start by improving their wellbeing prior to school with a specific focus across education, health and family services.

Benefits and Outcomes

For Children:

Aboriginal supported playgroups deliver a range of significant benefits that directly support the health, development and educational outcomes of First Nations children. Our playgroup sessions a very structured sessions and focus around themes. It is also a positive connection to culture and community. Enhances healthy brain development, allows children to learn and share in culture and dreamtime stories which then helps with cultural identity.

For Families:

Yalbilinya also delivers lasting benefits for families by building stronger connections to services, empowering parents and caregivers, and fostering culturally safe, community led support systems. Some of the benefits include Easier access to services, increased

engagement and trust, empowerment through community involvement, improved parenting support, holistic and culturally responsive support, stronger connections to community and long term social and economic benefits.

For Community:

By fostering collaboration, cultural leadership, and improved access to services, the playgroup strengthens the social fabric and wellbeing of entire communities. Some benefits for community are: Aboriginal lead and designed programs for whole community, stronger and cohesive service networks, preservation and promotion of culture, improved outcomes across generations and a model for inclusive systems change.

Impact Statistics

Aboriginal supported playgroups in Wagga has reached 863 Aboriginal families who have engaged in 2 or more sessions and 1146 children aged 0-5 yrs in a 12 month period. 79% of children are presenting as developmentally competent. 100% of our children are immunised and have blue book checks. 97% of our parents record they have increased confidence in parenting since attending groups. 14 parents have engaged in higher education and 175 referrals out to services for extra supports, 67 Speech pathologist referrals and 37 NDIS referrals

Impact Story / Testimonial

Partner Statement

Kurrajong Therapy Plus- Victoria Mack Manager. I am writing to express my full support and partnership between Playgroup NSW Aboriginal Supported Playgroups and Kurrajong therapy plus at the hub, which was established in March 2023. This collaboration has been instrumental in delivering valuable services to families in the Shmont Tolland and Koorringal areas focusing specifically on children from birth to five years old. Together both organisations have been providing weekly playgroup sessions during school terms, which have greatly benefited families. This partnership has enabled KTP staff to share their knowledge and expertise in child development and emphasize the critical importance of early learning. Additionally it has supported families as they navigate the NDIS referral process, helping them transition to early childhood services and schools with greater ease and confidence. We are committed to continuing this partnership for the duration of its funding period and beyond, subject to funding availability. The partnership has not only met but exceeded the expectations of all parties involved and many families have already benefited from the invaluable support provided through this playgroup.

Family Testimonial

Bringing my daughters to playgroup each week has been the most enjoyable time yet. I have met with so many new mums and have become good friends. I am so happy that my daughters are learning the Wiradjuri language and how to sign. The speech ladies are the most caring and patient people ever. My daughter loves doing the sessions with Katie. We also practice the sounds now at home. I love the SWAY component of group as well. The

girls have also helped me in liking to other services for more supports which I would never have done without their support. They have changed my life and families so much.

Grown Potential – What More Funding Could Do

Yalbilinya Girinya Buwanha has demonstrated measurable success in improving early childhood outcomes in First Nations communities. With increased and sustained funding, the program could expand both its reach and depth, delivering long term, transformative outcomes for children, families and First Nations communities across NSW. Increased funding could enhance our playgroup delivery and be culturally responsive to community. Hire more community-based staff and knowledge holders, provide case management to families that may be disconnected or facing more complex barriers. More funding would also allow for us to expand our delivery around the outskirts of town if we had a mobile play van.

Strategic Commentary – Alignment with Foundational Supports

This hub functions as a central point where key services come together, providing families with easy access to essential supports like Blue Book health checks, dental assessments, nurse visits, NDIS partner consultations, and preschool engagement. By bringing these services into one accessible space, the hub plays a vital role in "connecting the dots" for families seeking foundational support. This integrated model not only simplifies access but also enhances coordination among service providers, ensuring that families receive timely, holistic support. Ultimately, it reinforces the core foundations needed for the health, development, and school readiness of First Nations children.

SWAY Sounds Words Aboriginal language and Yarning

SWAY is an oral language and literacy program based on Aboriginal knowledge, culture and stories. It has been developed by Educators, Aboriginal Education officers and speech pathologist at the Royal Far West School in Manly. SWAY incorporates evidence-based teaching strategies to improve the language and literacy outcomes of preschool and kindergarten children. Participating centres or playgroups engage in 20 targeted sessions delivered by a certified practicing speech pathologist. These sessions are delivered weekly for 1 hour across terms 2-4. These sessions run alongside the 6 units of learning. It is designed to build the capacity of early childhood staff in supporting children's language and literacy development.

Framework Use

SWAY uses its own framework.

Key Stakeholders

Royal Far West School, Murrumbidgee Local health district

Funding Source

Not Applicable

The 'Why' – purpose

To improve the oral language and literacy outcomes of children within rural and remote communities. Support teachers to implement evidence based oral language strategies within the early learning environment. Develop children's knowledge and appreciation of local Aboriginal history and culture through the use of local Aboriginal yarns and language. Support teachers with embedding local Aboriginal perspectives into engaging play-based learning experiences. A key focus of the program is to provide practical training and mentoring to build the capacity of teaching staff. Educators learn how to Embed local Aboriginal language culture and stories within their classroom program. Use evidence-based teaching strategies to develop oral language and early literacy skills.

Benefits and Outcomes

For Children:

Introducing the Wiradjuri language through games and activities provides children with opportunities to connect with their culture heritage. Additionally learning Aslan sign language supports inclusive communication benefiting all children including those with hearing implants. Incorporating dreamtime stories and teachings from local Elders enriches children's understanding of Aboriginal history and culture. This practice supports EYLF outcome 2 which focuses on children connecting with and contributing to their world.

For Families:

Embedding Aboriginal language like Wiradjuri and cultural practices such as yarning circles fosters a strong sense of identity and belonging among children. This approach aligns with the EYLF OUTCOME 1, which emphasizes the importance of children developing a strong sense of identity and connection to their world. The involvement of speech pathologist in assessments and one to one session ensure that children's communication needs are addressed effectively. Early intervention is crucial for supporting language development and addressing any speech or language delays. This in turn is so beneficial for families in getting their child ready for school.

For Community:

This program is crucial for community as it is an early assessment and referral pathway for Aboriginal children and families. Early detection and supports benefit our families and therefore are getting structures in place for an easier transition to school process. This SWAY program is run in community for community and for the benefit of all.

Impact Story / Testimonial

Working with the girls on SWAY has been the highlight of the year for me and my little family. Mikey has been so much more engaged at groups and is loving the one to one with speech. They make it so much fun for him. He loves the stories about fishing and he really loves when the Aunties tell their stories. Rach the speech has also picked up that Mikey needs a little more work and extra sessions which has been a god send. He is talking so much now and so clear. The best choice to attend the Aboriginal supported playgroups with SWAY.

Grown Potential – What More Funding Could Do

The SWAY program has been successful in the Aboriginal supported playgroup sessions that it would be beneficial for SWAY to be implemented into all supported playgroup across NSW. With increased and sustained funding, the program could expand both its reach and depth, delivering long term, transformative outcomes for children, families and communities. Increased funding could enhance service integration enabling us to train more supported playgroups, coordinators and facilitators and knowledge holders and provide disconnected families to connect and seek assessments through this program.

School Holiday Workshops

School Holiday Workshops (SHWs) are strategically delivered during term breaks when regular playgroups are not in session, ensuring continuity of support for families and maintaining meaningful engagement. These workshops serve as a wraparound approach to keep families connected, particularly during periods that may otherwise heighten social isolation. PGNSW funds these workshops, ensuring they are well-organized and facilitated by experienced providers,

Designed to be inclusive and welcoming, SHWs offer relaxed and engaging environments where children of all ages—including siblings—can participate together. This encourages sibling bonding and supports whole-family involvement. The informal, casual setting of these workshops also provides an ideal opportunity for new families to experience the benefits of playgroup-style interaction in a non-committal way, often acting as a soft entry point that encourages future attendance at ongoing playgroups.

Through creative activities, parent-child play, and facilitated interactions, SHWs strengthen community connections, promote children's learning and development, and offer a valuable touchpoint for families who may need additional support or information.

Framework Use

Principles for high quality playgroups - Australian Institute of Family Studies

Key Stakeholders

Children, families and caregivers, siblings, service providers, local councils, schools, early childhood educators and facilitators, volunteer coordinators, healthcare providers, community organizations and support agencies.

PGNSW Role

Playgroup NSW (PGNSW) offers families a valuable opportunity to discover the benefits of playgroups through school holiday workshops. These workshops provide a relaxed, welcoming environment for families to engage and explore how playgroups can support their child's development while helping parents form meaningful connections. PGNSW supports these workshops with funding, guaranteeing they are expertly managed and delivered by qualified facilitators. PGNSW actively promotes these programs to raise awareness, encourage participation and advocates for increased funding to allow these workshops to reach even more families.

Another important role PGNSW plays is ensuring that families stay connected and supported even when workshops are not in session. The organization offers ongoing resources and opportunities for families to remain engaged and receive the support they need. These workshops serve as an excellent introduction for parents to understand how regular playgroups promote their child's learning, social skills, and emotional growth, while also providing opportunities to connect with other parents.

By combining funding, promotion, advocacy, and continued family support, PGNSW delivers impactful holiday programs that serve as a stepping stone for families to experience the lasting benefits of playgroups. Let me know if you need further refinement!

Funding Source

Department of Social Services via PlayConnect+ and PALS funding

The 'Why' – purpose

At Playgroup NSW, we deliver School Holiday Workshops (SHWs) because we recognise that breaks between terms can disrupt family routines, increase social isolation, and reduce access to consistent support—particularly for families with young children. These gaps can be especially challenging for vulnerable families, making it harder to sustain the positive engagement and connections built through regular playgroup participation.

SHWs help bridge this gap by maintaining community connection and offering safe, inclusive spaces for families to engage in enriching, play-based activities. They provide structure and social engagement during the holidays, supporting children's continued development and parents' mental wellbeing. For families not yet engaged in regular playgroups, SHWs offer a soft entry point—a relaxed environment that builds familiarity and encourages future attendance.

Importantly, SHWs also offer a meaningful opportunity for families who have recently exited playgroups due to their child's transition to school. Many of these families return to reconnect with peers, strengthen social bonds, and sustain their sense of community belonging—especially younger siblings or carers who wish to re-engage.

Benefits and Outcomes

For Children:

1. Continued access to play-based learning during school holidays.
2. Maintained routine and structure, reducing stress or behavioural regressions.
3. Opportunities to strengthen sibling bonds through shared experiences.
4. Exposure to new environments, peers, and play opportunities that build confidence.
5. Smooth transition support for children entering or exiting formal schooling.
6. Encouragement to engage in creative, physical, and social activities that support holistic development.

For Families:

1. Reduced social isolation and increased opportunities for connection during holiday breaks.

2. A relaxed, welcoming space to re-engage with playgroup community or explore it for the first time.
3. Emotional and social support for parents and carers, helping them feel less alone.
4. Opportunities for families exiting playgroups (e.g., after school transition) to maintain friendships and routines.
5. Soft entry points for new families who may feel unsure about joining regular playgroups.
6. Exposure to parenting strategies and local resources in a casual, supportive setting.

For Community:

1. Strengthened local networks and social cohesion through inclusive, accessible programming.
2. Increased awareness and access to early intervention and family support services.
3. Enhanced community resilience by offering continuous support year-round, including during non-term periods.
4. Support for families from diverse cultural backgrounds through culturally responsive activities.
5. Opportunities for local collaboration and co-delivery with other services or venues.
6. Building a culture of belonging and shared responsibility for child and family wellbeing.

Impact Statistics

In 2024 at PGNSW combined delivery of PlayConnect+ and PALS School Holiday Workshops (SHWs) highlights a strong demand and positive engagement across diverse communities. With a total of 110 sessions, the programs reached 1,026 children and 282 adults, showcasing the vital role SHWs play in maintaining continuity of support and reducing isolation during school breaks. The high levels of child participation indicate the programs' effectiveness in providing inclusive, developmentally supportive environments, while strong adult attendance reflects deep caregiver involvement and a sense of community connection.

Impact Story / Testimonial

Partner Statement

What a top session today. We were busy with many children and families. It was nice to meet some new friends and to see some old ones. We had splash mountain up which was very popular. Some children are straight in while others take a little while to warm up. We even had 2 police stop in to say hello. There was a sensory piece of foam as well that was wet and had suds in it. Some of the children were fascinated with this and sat there for quite some time. We had talks about being social, rules for safety and how long until we all go to big school. – Clarence Childhood Services

School holiday groups have been super popular to keep the kids entertained and parents connected. Flexibility with siblings attending has been very beneficial. Cost of living crisis means families are increasingly seeking no or low-cost activities. Gives that added chance to work with families we might not otherwise come into contact with. Provides a continuity

throughout the school holidays that has positive outcomes on children and families - Noah's Inclusion Services

Family Testimonial

Thank you so much- We've been finding it hard to find things to do over the holiday break. We've been really looking forward to coming along to playgroup. We love the new "Quiet space" at Noahs- this is really good for Lylah to not get overwhelmed by the bigger play space and other children.

Grown Potential – What More Funding Could Do

1. Staffing shortages during school holidays often lead to service disruptions. Securing ongoing funding would ensure the retention of experienced facilitators year-round, allowing for consistent relationships with children and families, and minimizing disruptions.
2. Additional funding would allow us to incorporate a broader range of enrichment activities in both mainstream and targeted school holiday workshops (SHWs), including music, visual arts, sensory play, storytelling, movement, and culturally safe recreational experiences. These activities support developmental growth and foster inclusive spaces for all families to engage, connect, and thrive.
3. Increased budgets would also ensure access to high-quality art supplies, science equipment, sports gear, and other resources that enhance children's learning and enjoyment.
4. With additional funding, we could organize occasional excursions to local parks, museums, or community centres, or invite special guests, such as artists, performers, and scientists, to provide unique and enriching experiences.
5. Additional funding would enable the rental of suitable venues that are spacious, safe, accessible, and well-equipped for diverse activities. This could include community centres, school halls, or dedicated workshop spaces.
6. For families facing transport challenges, funding could provide limited transportation assistance, making it easier for more children to participate in activities.
7. Increased funding would facilitate partnerships with local businesses or community organizations to offer in-kind support, guest speakers, or unique activity opportunities. It would also enable more effective marketing and promotion to reach a broader audience, ensuring families are aware of the valuable holiday workshops available.

Strategic Commentary – Alignment with Foundational Supports

A stable, trained workforce ensures continuity of care and reduces the stress and disruption often experienced by families during school holidays when regular supports may be less available. For families with children with disabilities, this consistency is crucial for their child's well-being and developmental progress.

Contributes to Individual and Family Capacity Building by providing a reliable support system that allows parents and carers to maintain employment, access respite, and participate in community life, knowing their child is in a stable and supportive environment. It also

indirectly supports Information and Advice by building trust with experienced staff who can provide consistent guidance.

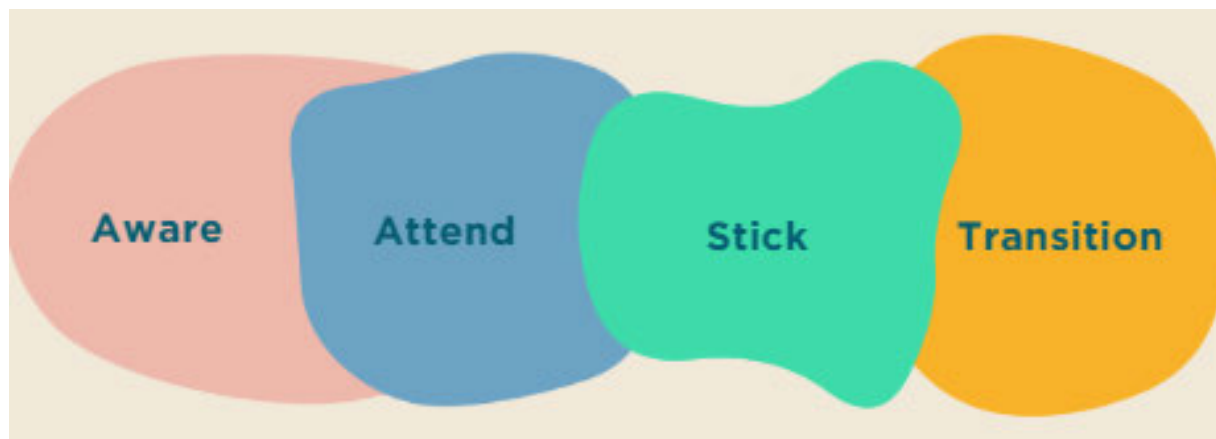
Providing accessible excursions and special experiences directly promotes Community Participation for children with disabilities. These opportunities allow them to engage with the broader community, experience new environments, and build social connections outside of their immediate family and support networks.

Access to spacious, safe, and well-equipped venues is crucial for ensuring the Accessibility of SHWs for all children, including those with mobility challenges or sensory sensitivities. Suitable environments enable full participation and reduce barriers to engagement. It also contributes to Community Capacity Building by demonstrating the importance of accessible infrastructure for inclusive community programs.

More Than Just Playgroups: Our Integrated Approach

Playgroups: A Child and Family Journey

At Playgroup NSW, we simplify the child and family journey along these four key domains:



Benefits to Children

Playgroup can help children develop:

- literacy and numeracy skills
- social and emotional skills
- fine and gross motor skills
- sensory pathways, which are important to all learning
- cognitive and executive functioning skills
- dispositions for learning ('habits of mind'), such as cooperation, purposefulness and persistence.

A child's first 5 years of life is the most important time for laying the foundations for all future health, wellbeing, and learning. Brains are built over time and more complex skills are built on the foundations of basic skills as children engage in relationships and experiences in their earliest years.

The first 3 years, before children even enter formal education are the most critical time in the child's brain development, it's when development happens fastest. Parents are children's first and most important teachers and play a crucial role in helping to achieve the best outcomes for a child, therefore what families do every day with their young children affects how they develop and learn.

Children who attend playgroups during early childhood have significantly better child development when they start school. The benefits of playgroup are seen across all domains of child development: physical, social, emotional, language and cognitive development, and communication. Learning through play is fundamental to the healthy development of children. Learning for young children happens best in the context of warm, loving relationships.

Benefits to Parents

Attending playgroup can help parents and carers:

- gain an understanding of what and how children learn through play and other experiences
- receive ideas for activities they can do at home to support their child's learning
- develop an increased sense of belonging to the school, preschool, children's centre or community
- interact with educators and professionals, breaking down perceived barriers
- interact with other parents and carers and share knowledge and experiences
- build connections, resilience, peer to peer support
- connect and engage with other services and supports in their community
- reduce family breakdown and mental health impacts

When parents thrive – children thrive.

Playgroups show parents and carers how they can support their child's learning through simple things. This may be talking more about what they're doing or seeing, reading regularly to their child or singing familiar songs. This awareness allows them to become a powerful positive influence on their child's learning, health and wellbeing.

Benefits to ECEC and Schools

Playgroups can benefit preschools and schools through opportunities to

- convey early learning messages to families starting the early learning in playgroups
- identify, support and intervene early

Connections with a local playgroup may lead to:

- increased parent involvement in school boards, governing councils and classrooms
- increased enrolments for associated preschools or schools
- improved transitions into the next stage of a child's early learning journey.

Benefits to Community

Playgroups can benefit communities by providing opportunities to:

- connect parents, caregivers and children to services and experiences within the local community.
- earlier access for health or development support for parents and caregivers, that will strengthen children's inclusion and involvement in the community.
- support more diverse, thriving, connected and inclusive communities for all.

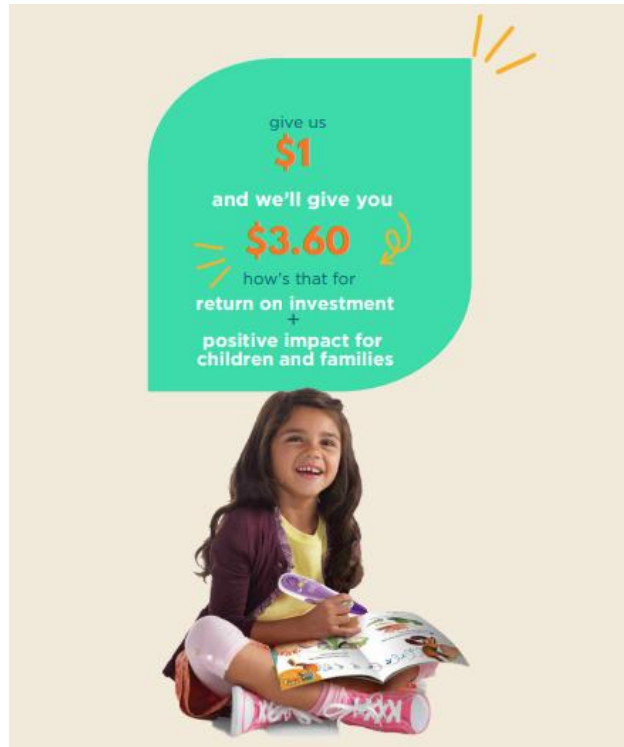
Benefits to Government

Research shows that for every \$1 invested into playgroups, there is a \$3.60 return on investment.

Further, we know that investing in the early years paves the way for better outcomes and cost efficiencies in the short, medium and longer term through the lens of government expenditure.

With over 78,000 members across 99% of postcodes in NSW, our scale is the secret to our success, balanced with ensuring we take a local, place based approach to play – driven by community, for community. Our impact on the first 200 days is multifaceted, extending beyond just playgroups to take a holistic approach to early childhood development:





[Independent cost benefit analysis](#) demonstrates the ROI of playgroups as a lever for early prevention and intervention as they impact both children and parents/carers:

“In cost-benefit terms, there is a \$3.60 return on investment for every \$1.00 spent on community playgroups in Australia, taking into account impacts over the life course in education, employment, health and family wellbeing”

Our Impact: Playgroup NSW



ABOUT PLAYGROUP NSW

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

- 550 playgroups a week
- 26,000 playgroups a year
- 63,868 members
- 546 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in culturally appropriate Playgroups
- 5235 parents attending peer to peer support sessions
- Members in 99% of NSW postcodes, reflecting the incredible reach and diversity of our community
- \$7.2 million annual funding, 30% growth in income over the past year, enhancing our impact
- 50+ years proudly in operation as the peak body with state and national footprint in services and advocacy



Our Vision: Our vision is to ensure every child in NSW has the opportunity to thrive, learn and play.

Our Purpose: Playgroup NSW is a not-for-profit organisation that provides support, information and advocacy for parents and carers of children under five years of age.

Our Values: Act with integrity, be inclusive and respectful of the needs of all, be transparent and accountable, and be a positive role model for others. We are committed to the values of honesty, integrity, respect, and inclusion. We are also committed to the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Our Programs: We deliver our programs through our Playgroup program areas:

- Parental Capacity Building
- Playgroup (for-fee) - 0-5 years
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- Universal & Community Led
- Playgroup (for-fee) - 0-5 years and mental health
- Disability & Inclusion
- Transition Play: Intergenerational
- Culture & Linguistically Diverse
- Rural & Remote

Our Priorities:

- Our priority is to ensure every child in NSW has the opportunity to thrive, learn and play.**
 - 1. Strengthen parent and carer capacity and support through resources, targeted and generalised services.
 - 2. Facilitate parent and carer development, capacity, and support for the education, health and wellbeing of children in early learning.
 - 3. Create equal opportunities for all children and families to access playgroup services, including those who are disadvantaged or at risk of disadvantage.
 - 4. Build capacity for the future by developing and using digital literacy, cultural and language skills, and skills in the workplace.
 - 5. Create environments and services that are inclusive, accessible, and safe for all children and families.
- Our priority is to ensure every parent and carer in NSW has the opportunity to thrive, learn and play.**
 - 1. Be a leading voice and contributor to the development of the early years system.
 - 2. Represent the needs of parents and carers in the community by government and other non-government organisations.
 - 3. Advocate for and facilitate services that address the needs of parents and carers, of all parents.
 - 4. Deliver culturally appropriate services with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations.
 - 5. Support all Australian children to thrive in their early years.
- Our priority is to ensure every parent and carer in NSW has the opportunity to thrive, learn and play.**
 - 1. Ensure children's safety, health and inclusion in playgroup.
 - 2. Connect families, communities, organisations and networks.
 - 3. Provide opportunities for intergenerational, intersectoral and multidisciplinary collaboration.
 - 4. Be open to new ideas and innovation.
 - 5. Deliver on our commitment to transparency, integrity and inclusion in all our programs.

Our strategy is underpinned by a continued focus on our foundational capabilities:

1. Building community capacity and support
2. Quality assurance and research excellence
3. Financial and business sustainability
4. Digital engagement and data literacy

OUR STRATEGIC PLAN



OUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



Kellie Murray, Chief First Nations Officer
 Steve Moore, Chief Operating Officer
 Emily Caska, Chief Executive Officer
 Jennifer Kemp, Chief Social Impact Officer

OUR GROWING IMPACT



"Getting a reason to leave the house rather than being stuck indoors with no social interaction has helped my mental health and my children love somewhere new to play and socialise."



"My Playgroup experience has been overwhelmingly positive. The environment is nurturing and inclusive, fostering a sense of community among the children and parents. The activities are well-organised and engaging, promoting both fun and learning. Overall, it's been a wonderful opportunity for my child to socialise and develop new skills in a safe and friendly setting."

"Playgroup has made me a better parent."

"I experienced the Playgroups as very healthy for me to enjoy every single moment of playing with my daughter that's taken me out of my depression. Also it's very healthy for her to discover new places, new friends, and new things."

"I am honestly so grateful for Playgroup as it has supported my daughter's holistic development, encouraged her to build and nurture new friendships, given me so many new ideas for playtime as well as new foundations for relationships with other parents, and it is an experience my daughter absolutely loves. I absolutely love watching her happy little face as she cracks out of the new activities and interacts with her new friends. It's the highlight of my day."

"Playgroup has only just started back up locally after 2 years, and it's been a great experience. My daughter really enjoys going, and hoping to be able to take both my girls regularly."

"Moving to a new state with my daughter then having her daughter with special needs and being seen as a single parent was very hard but having the one day a week to get out of the house and out of the stress and share a coffee and a laugh with the girls in both states left my spirit as they were always keen to chat or share thoughts or experiences without judgement and we usually always find out something new together about the girls or how to help them."

"Playgroup is a great place for adults and children to come together socially to learn and have fun. I have made friends with other parents and my son has friends he will have for years to come."

"Playgroup has been an excellent experience for myself and my child, returning with other local families is a fantastic part of our week."

"Playgroups have helped me to not feel isolated, it has allowed me to celebrate my daughter with her development and make me feel supported by the community when sharing the difficulties of parenting. It has stimulated my daughter with activities I never had time to do and it also gives her the opportunity to socialise, share and see how others (adults) treat each other."

"Without the interactions of the local (Parents of friends and parents themselves already connected new parents) and local services from the area (Museum, Library and Playgroup) visiting the Playgroup, the entire life and parenting experience would be extremely difficult to navigate in a very lonely relationship and with the knowledge and support gained through Playgroup I was able to find the community and begin networking."

550+

Playgroups a week

26,000

Playgroups a year

642

Volunteers

711

Communities, Supported and Organisational Playgroups

49

Innovative In-Centre Playgroups in Partnership with Westfield

38

Pop-Up Playgroups

48

New Community Playgroups Started

1446

MyTime Parent Peer Support Sessions

542

Play Van Sessions

7

New International Playgroups

1

Stakes International Playgroup in Wagon

24

Community Events connecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families in Wagon

11

Corporate Partners

63,868

Members

Playgroups across of NSW Postcodes

44%

99%

Members across of NSW Postcodes

1163

LinkedIn Followers

546

Total number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in culturally appropriate programs

5235

Parents Attending MyTime Peer Support Sessions

67,288

Unique Website Visitors

15

Capacity Building Workshops Held

31,000

Facebook Followers

11,300

Instagram Followers

40

Resources, Publications or Activity Sheets Shared

TOTAL INCOME
\$7,209,391

UP 30%
Year on Year

52,000

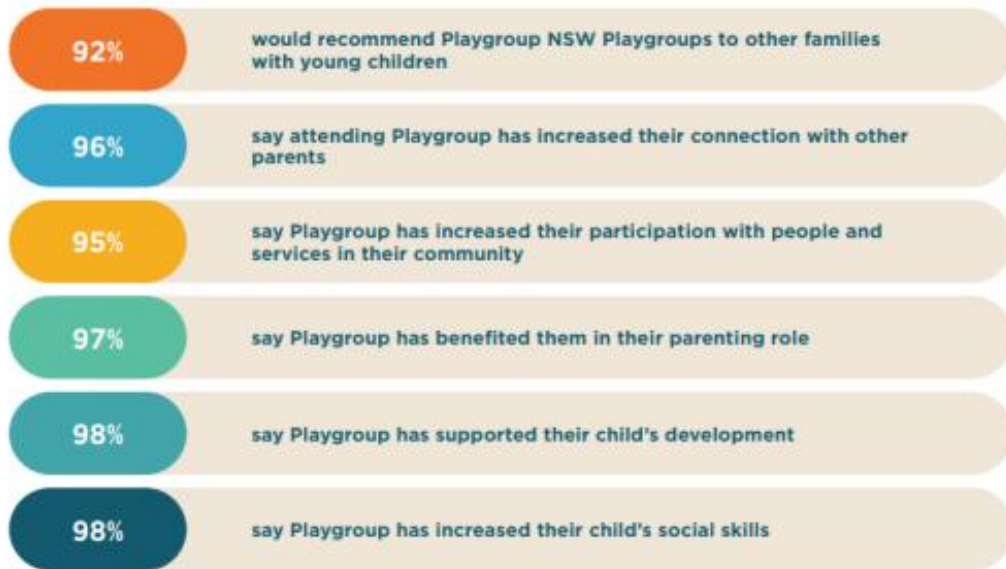
Newsletter Subscribers

71

Team Members



OUR EVIDENCE BASED PROGRAMS





OUR KEY MESSAGES



Play is critical to the first 2000 days of a child's life

Playgroups are a unique soft entry point that are local, place based, early intervention and prevention model

Playgroups are unique - both children and parents benefit

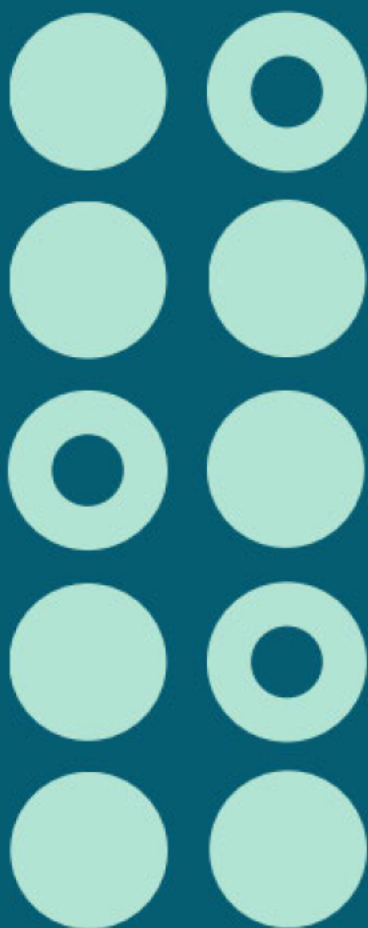
Playgroup NSW is leading the future of playgroups, innovative in our approaches across community and supported groups to reach dads, multicultural families, vulnerable cohorts, remote communities, Aboriginal families and children in non-traditional settings such as out of home care and adoptive families

Playgroups are a key foundational support, navigation, connector and referral point in the critical early years

Peer to peer support is a key component of playgroups in building capacity, nurturing connection and resilience



SEE WHAT ALL THE FUN IS ABOUT



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We work with passion and pride to ensure that every child and family has the very best start in life.

Working together across government, philanthropy, early childhood, health, community, research and corporate sectors enables us to grow our reach and impact to those who need it most across our community, disability, First Nations, multicultural and intergenerational offerings.

We are so much more than just playgroups - from play to peer to peer support to community development, health, early intervention, prevention, evidence based research and evaluation, we are proud to firmly place children and families at the centre of all we do

”



Emily Caska
CEO, Playgroup NSW

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Chief Executive Officer



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