

Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups Initiative



Every
child,
every
opportunity



Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups Initiative

Playgroups and parent groups

Playgroups provide valuable opportunities for children to learn and develop through play. Playgroups foster and develop children's language and motor skills, expose children to sensory experiences and enhance social skills¹. Playgroups and parent groups also create opportunities for parents to meet in a safe and supportive environment and learn new skills, develop social networks and build linkages to other services.

Many Victorian families participate in community playgroups that are self-managed by the parents and caregivers who attend the playgroup. New parents often attend parent groups facilitated by their local maternal and child health service. Many of these parent groups evolve into self-sustaining social networks and/or community playgroups². Disadvantaged and vulnerable families, however, are less likely to participate in such groups³.

Supported playgroups/parent groups

Supported playgroups and parent groups are facilitated or led by an appropriately qualified worker⁴ and are targeted at disadvantaged families who are less likely to attend a community group.

Supported playgroups and parent groups provide parents and caregivers with opportunities to share experiences and develop parenting skills, capacity and confidence. This may be done informally or through more structured activities. Children may be an integral part of these activities, as in the case of some structured parent/child play activities. Alternatively, parents

may meet, for at least part of the session, separately from their children, as in the case of some postnatal depression groups.

Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups Initiative

The Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative is a Victorian government funded program that aims to engage disadvantaged and vulnerable families and provide quality play opportunities for children at a critical time in their development. The initiative builds parents' capacity to support their child's health, development, learning and wellbeing and aims to increase families' participation and linkages with other early years services and supports.

Objectives

The objectives of the Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative are to:

- promote improved health, development and wellbeing outcomes for children,
- build parents' confidence and capacity and support the establishment of social networks
- model and support developmentally appropriate play experiences and parenting practices
- promote and support participation in the maternal and child health service and kindergarten programs and link families to other relevant services and supports.

Target groups

The Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative targets vulnerable and disadvantaged children and their families, who may, for a range of reasons, under-utilise or have difficulties accessing universal early childhood services and supports, including playgroups and parent groups.

The initiative specifically targets four population groups. They are:

- Indigenous children and their families or carers
- Culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families, with a particular focus on recently arrived families
- Disadvantaged families with complex needs
- Children and families affected by disability.

Implementation

The Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups initiative was announced in the Victorian Government's social policy statement, *A Fairer Victoria*, in 2005-06 as part of a four-year package to give children the best start in life. The initiative was initially rolled out to the fourteen municipalities where Best Start⁵ demonstration projects were established in order to consolidate the successful work of Best Start partnerships in building linkages for vulnerable families to the early years service system through playgroups. The 2008/09 Victorian Government budget committed funding for the roll out of the initiative to the remaining municipalities where Best Start sites are located. Funding for sites is allocated on the basis of the number of 0-4 year olds living in the municipality, with a minimal allocation of \$40,000 for municipalities with small numbers of 0-4 year olds.

¹ Playgroup Victoria (2006) *Supported Playgroup Manual*

²Scott, D, Brady, S and Glynn, P (2001) 'New Mother Groups as a Social Network Intervention: Consumer and Maternal and Child Health Nurse Perspectives' *Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing* 18:4, p23-29

³As above.

⁴Occasionally groups are facilitated by a supervised volunteer

⁵For more information on Best Start, refer to the website at www.beststart.vic.gov.au

Sites

Initial sites 2005-06

- Ballarat
- Casey
- Frankston
- Greater Geelong
- Hume
- Maribyrnong
- Greater Shepparton
- Swan Hill
- Wellington
- Whittlesea
- Yarra Ranges

2006-7 sites

- Baw Baw
- Horsham
- Latrobe

2009 sites

- Bass Coast
- Brimbank
- Cardinia
- Campaspe
- Central Goldfields
- Darebin
- East Gippsland
- Greater Dandenong
- Melton
- Mildura
- Moorabool
- Mornington Peninsula
- Nillumbik
- South Gippsland
- Wyndham



Key success features

Collaboration and Partnerships

Early years services, local government and community organisations collaborate in order to ensure that the establishment of supported playgroups and parent groups in the municipality builds on existing plans, initiatives and programs. Partnership approaches to the planning, implementation and evaluation of supported playgroups are more likely to ensure that established groups are sustainable and meet local needs.

An important objective of the initiative is to increase families' participation in maternal and child health, kindergarten and other early years services and supports. Ensuring strong linkages between supported playgroups and parent groups, and other early years and family services in the area is vital. Effective interagency collaboration is also critical as a means of engaging families into supported playgroups and parent groups.

Innovative strategies

All involved in the delivery of supported playgroups and parent groups need to develop successful strategies to:

- Engage vulnerable and disadvantaged families
- Maintain the attendance of participants in the groups
- Improve outcomes for children through the provision of developmentally appropriate play experiences
- Incorporate activities that increase parental confidence, capacity and connectedness to the community.

Flexible models

Supported playgroups and parent groups funded through the initiative can be ongoing or time limited. In the case of ongoing groups, the needs of individual families may be better met through transitioning into a community playgroup or other early childhood service. Funds can be used to assist transition by:

- providing activities that build connections between supported playgroups, community playgroups and other relevant universal services

- training potential community playgroup leaders from existing supported playgroups
- supporting existing playgroups to promote the inclusion of the target group.

Staffing

Staff will have appropriate qualifications, an understanding of the needs of the particular target group and preferably, in the case of supported playgroup facilitators, an approved Children's Services qualification. All personnel involved in supported playgroups and parent groups (including Coordinators, supported playgroup facilitators and volunteers) are required to have a current Working with Children Check.

Initiative Partners

Playgroup Victoria

Playgroup Victoria is funded to support the establishment and implementation of this initiative in the identified municipalities. This support includes:

- compiling the state-wide report;
- inviting new staff to participate in existing playgroup networks;
- providing resources and induction for new playgroup facilitators on request;
- developing resource material for supported parent groups and playgroups as appropriate; and
- providing other relevant training and development opportunities.

For more information about Playgroup Victoria see www.playgroup.org.au or telephone: 1800 171 882

Post and Antenatal Depression Association (PANDA)

PANDA provides confidential information, support and referral to anyone affected by post and antenatal mood disorders, including partners and extended family members. PANDA also produces and distributes accurate information about post and antenatal mood disorders to health professionals and the wider community.

As part of this initiative, PANDA offers additional support to some targeted sites where postnatal depression is identified as an issue.

For more information about PANDA see www.panda.org.au or telephone: 9481 3377 (administration line) and 1300 726 306 (support line)

For further information about the Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups Initiative contact beststart@edumail.vic.gov.au or go to the website www.education.vic.gov.au/ecprofessionals/supportedplaygroups

