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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

This year has again provided the ACT community with many challenges, which have been felt particularly by our families with young children.

While we were unable to host our key events throughout the year, our playgroups continued to meet in smaller groups regularly, enabling support and friendships to endure. Lockdowns and public health restrictions saw many weeks of playgroups cancelled, and thankfully we were able to maintain connection to each other through online engagement.

The Board's focus this year has been on strengthening our governance, updating our policies, and re-prioritising the strategic goals of the organisation to meet the post-Covid needs of the community. Our vision remains to provide a safe and supportive environment for young children and their carers to connect, play and have fun.

I would like to acknowledge the work of our volunteer Board members for their commitment to the organisation, and on behalf of the Board, express our gratitude to Carley and the staff team for their passion, energy and drive they bring each day to ACT Playgroups.

We are so excited to welcome our families back to playgroups and to connect with new families in our region over the coming year.

Wishing all of our ACT Playgroups families a happy and playful year ahead.



KATE SOWERBY
ACT Playgroups President



“

The building block of
every community is
family.

– PAUL SINGER

”

ACTING EO REPORT

Well, COVID certainly stuck around for the second half of 2020 and 2021. This continued the move to delivering more services digitally. However, I am proud to say the ACT Playgroups team were swift to respond to the challenges of delivering face to face playgroups amongst the challenges of COVID-19. In fact, the team were brilliant in their responses to each challenge the last 12 months has thrown us.

Adaptions were made to our Paint and Play Playgroups to ensure we could safely deliver services to families, resources were developed for Community Playgroups to ensure they were able to operate and meet COVID guidelines, along with adjustments to Early Intervention Playgroups to ensure the safety of all.

The return of Playgroups was vital for families and communities following weeks of lockdown. ACT Playgroups was overwhelmed with demand from families and services, looking towards Playgroup to restore the community connections.

ACT Playgroups, under the Play and Learning Supported Playgroup program, continued to develop our range of inclusive Playgroups. This included an all-abilities Nature Playgroup at Evatt Primary School, and a Music and Movement Playgroup for children and families with a hearing or vision impairment.

ACT Playgroups has continued to advocate and strive to raise awareness of the importance of Playgroup as an important universal service for all families with young children. We are a founding member of the "Good Start in Life" research project through the University of Canberra, and "A Village for Every Child" collective impact project with Kippax Kids.

ACT Playgroups has also continued to partner with our colleagues at every Playgroup Association across Australia, and Playgroup Australia to raise the profile of the importance of Playgroups.

Behind the scenes, the ACT Playgroups team is busy working on exciting new updates for the upcoming year. We have a new website launching shortly, new resources for Playgroups in development and new Playgroup programs coming.

We thank the Board of Management for their ongoing support and commitment to the Playgroup movement in the ACT.

The ACT Playgroups team continues to deliver and support Playgroups with passion, commitment and gusto, and is looking forward to doing so well into the future.



CARLEY JONES
Acting Executive Officer

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carley Jones', written over a light blue circular graphic element.

COMMUNITY PLAYGROUPS TEAM 2021

The Community Playgroups Team experienced a busy and rewarding year, assisting playgroups through support visits, virtual communication, designing and supplying play idea support packs, playgroup advocacy services, and helping to set up over 25 new playgroups across Canberra.

The Community Playgroups Team worked closely with playgroups to re-establish weekly face to face playgroup meetings after the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown and we feel privileged that we were able to see, first-hand the positive and profound impact that returning to playgroup had on the carers and children that attending.

Over the course of the year, we attended many community playgroups and ran music sessions, craft sessions, baby play sessions, sensory sessions,

books and benefits of reading sessions and other tailored sessions that suited the playgroup we were attending.

These sessions were always gratefully received, with all in attendance benefiting from the simple but inspiring play ideas that were passed on. Often at the end of a support visit, Playgroup members would comment that they felt empowered to run similar sessions themselves at future playgroup sessions.

Face to face support visits allowed our team to build relationships with playgroup attendees all over Canberra and allowed playgroup contacts to continue to put their trust in the hands on support that we strive to provide at ACT Playgroups.

New Parent Groups

The Community Playgroups team continued attending Canberra New Parent groups over the course of the year. Our sessions were very well received and would often comprise of a lot of questions from new parents, laughter, play ideas/support, singing and parachute time. Being able to share the benefits of Playgroups and play in general is a real privilege and we are always looking at ways to improve the content of our presentations to best suit the evolving landscape of parenting little ones from 0-5 years in this ever-changing world.

Many new parent groups formed playgroups following our visits and our team were able to support the groups through venue advocacy, support visits to encourage members and answer questions and also be available via email and telephone for any assistance they needed.

It really is a lovely experience to go from presenting at the New Parent Group to seeing the group form into a playgroup where the support and play experiences that we talked about in the initial information session become a reality for the playgroup attendees.



INTERGENERATIONAL PLAYGROUPS



Through 2020, the Intergenerational Playgroups program was gaining recognition from the community due to the publicity generated from the ABC series 'Old Folks Homes for Four Year Old's' and the wider opportunity that we were able to provide for the community to participate through nine (9) Intergenerational Playgroups in the ACT. Our Intergenerational playgroups create the opportunities for children to further develop their skills, parents to create a local peer support network and provide isolated residents and seniors vital community interaction.

The biggest challenge we continued to face during this time was the COVID-19 health pandemic. The Pandemic saw the suspension of all nine Intergenerational playgroups to protect our most vulnerable grand friends. However, we have actively used the 'Digital Intergenerational Playgroup' platform via our 'Intergenerational Playgroups Canberra' Facebook page to keep our community connected and to demonstrate that physical distancing does not mean that community cannot connect.

Through our Digital Intergenerational Playgroup platform, we have digitally shared craft activities, singing circles and weekly story reading by a grand friend.



As the pandemic raged on, and aged care facilities were forced to introduce their own restrictions, we knew we had to produce a unique way to keep our Intergenerational playgroup program active and connected. Enter the 'drive through hello' to support our community to keep their strong connection with grand friends. Our first drive through hello to Weston Intergenerational playgroup grand friends was at Mirinjani Hostel. All the families and children got to wave and talk to their grand friends from a distance while seated in their cars. Most children brought lovely art to show to their grand friends including heart-warming 'miss you' notes through their car windows. After months, it was wonderful to see grand friends shed happy tears to see their friends.

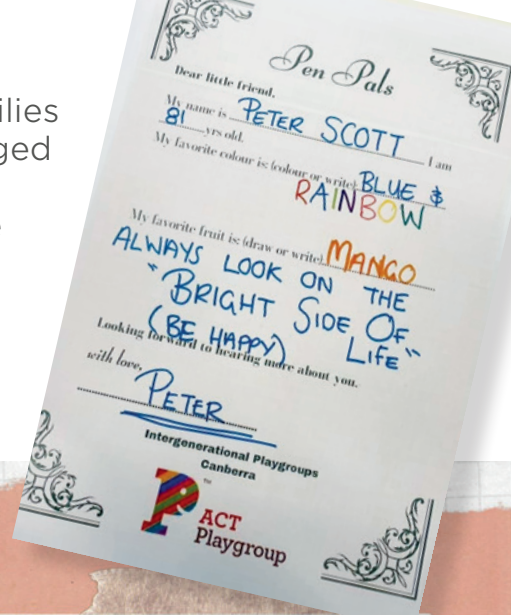


As this 'drive through hello' project was enjoyed by all families and grand friends, we have continued the event in other aged care facilities. The 'drive through hello' events featured on ABC Radio in Canberra. We continued to incorporate drive throughs with our digital intergenerational playgroups.

In February, we have introduced the 'Pen pal project' to further provide opportunities for families and residents to stay in touch. Templates for both little friends and grand friends were provided and encouraged families and grand friends to write or draw each other. This project also helped new families who were waiting to join Intergenerational playgroups to connect with grand friends.

For a brief period during 2020-2021, there were several Intergenerational Playgroups held, Weston Intergenerational playgroup at Mirinjani hostel, Pines living Intergenerational playgroups at Pines living aged care facility at Farrer and Amala Intergenerational playgroup at Gordon opened their doors for Intergenerational playgroups.

ACT Playgroups continued to work with Aged Care Facilities to ensure Playgroups and attendees of Playgroup were able to attend safely and meet COVID-19 Public Health Order Restrictions, and the restrictions introduced by each individual care facility.



Time is precious



ACT Playgroups is looking forward to assisting Intergenerational Playgroups to resume and thrive once COVID no longer poses a risk.



“

Let the child be the scriptwriter,
the director and the actor in his
own play.

- Magda Gerber

”



MUSIC AND MOVEMENT



Music and Movement is a small, all abilities playgroup that was introduced in March 2021. This group is part of the PALS Program (Play and Learning Supported Playgroups) and developed in partnership with Next Sense.



This playgroup focuses on connecting children with their body, teaching them foundation movement skills and encourages exploration of movement through music and fun. More importantly, the program aims to be inclusive of children and their families who are experiencing hearing

impairment or loss. Our staff strive to create an engaging and dynamic program with some site-specific activities such as Parachute Play and Song Cards, but most can easily be done at home. Feedback from families is that Yoga and Movement Cubes are two of the most popular activities at playgroup.

Initially the group took a while to get up and running but then a consistent lot of families were attending until the ACT Covid lockdown.

We have also begun developing a partnership with the ACT Deaf Resource Centre.



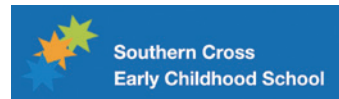
PAINT AND PLAY PLAYGROUPS



ACT Playgroups continues to deliver Paint and Play Playgroups five days a week at different locations across Canberra. All Paint and Play Playgroups are based outside in convenient locations, with the aim of making it easy for families to create local community connections, to demonstrate to families you can make play possible outside in all weather and bring together local services and families.

The last twelve months have been challenging with the ever-changing Covid-19 pandemic. ACT Playgroups has worked hard to continue to provide Paint and Play to the public. The ACT Playgroups Team was able to pivot and adapt to the restrictions to ensure a safe Paint and Play Playgroup environment for all.

In the last twelve months, we found that the site for the Holt Paint and Play Playgroup was no longer suitable. The search for a new site landed us at Southern Cross Early Childhood School. This site allows ACT Playgroups to partner with Anglicare to provide support for families. It also allows for a partnership with the Southern Cross Early Childhood School to support families also. The space at the school is more appropriate and easier to access for attendees, allows ACT Playgroups to create links with other services to support families. Since changing location we have noticed a significant increase in attendance.



During the COVID-19 restrictions, a number of sites were not suitable for Paint and Play Playgroups, so the ACT

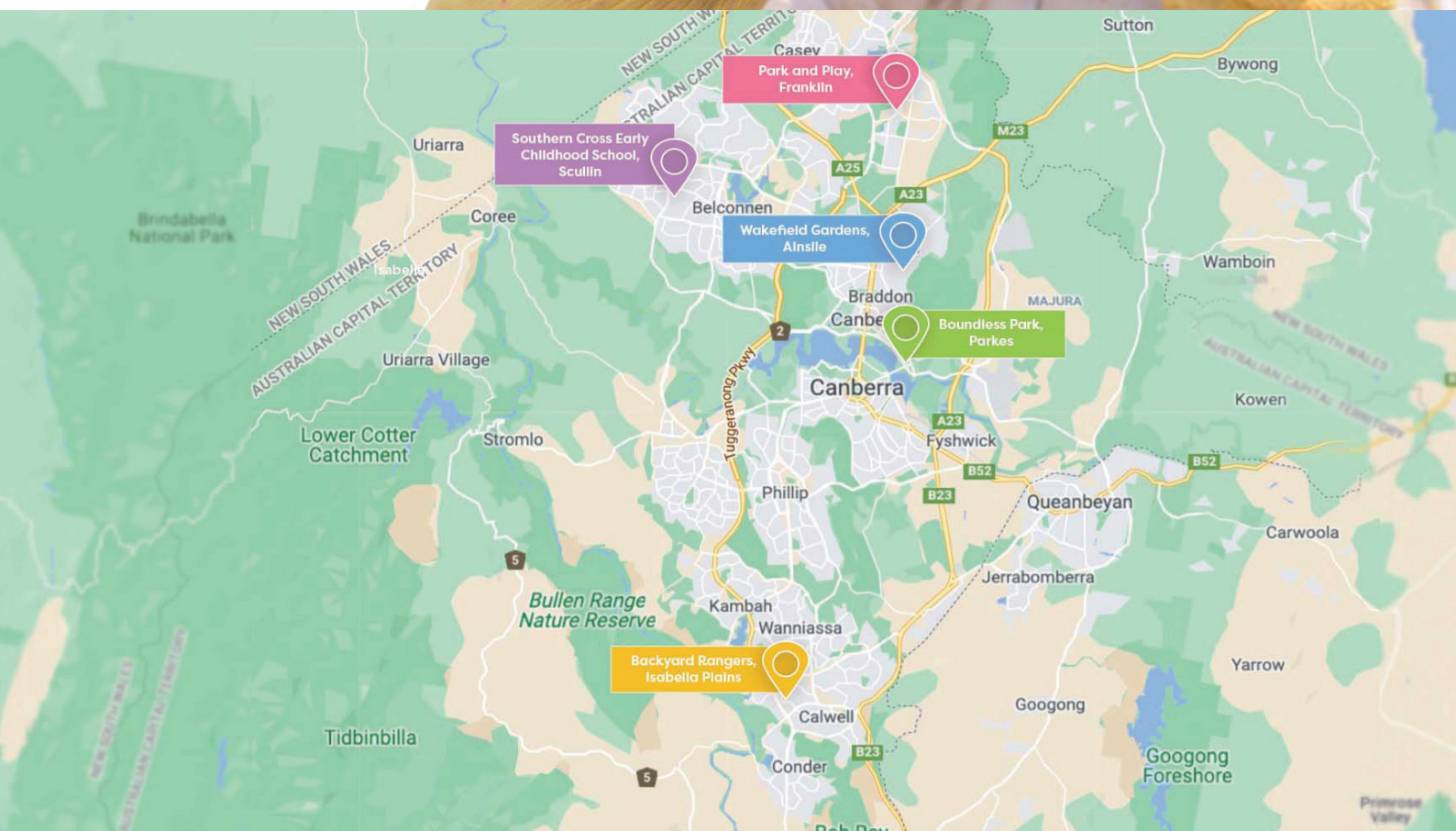
Playgroups team worked with Barnardos to establish a short-term Paint and Play Playgroup in the open spaces of the Gungahlin Town Centre. This Paint and Play Playgroup ran for a period of 9 weeks with the purpose of engaging local families, engaging local services and connecting them to local families, whilst educating local families on what services and Playgroups are available in the Gungahlin area.

Over the last couple of months, we have strived to engage with new community partners to better support families and provide local connections between families and service providers.



In partnership with Anglicare, Marymead and Isabella Plains Early Childhood School we continue to provide Paint and Play Playgroups at the following locations:

- Boundless Park, Parkes
- Southern Cross Early Childhood School, Scullin
- Wakefield Gardens, Ainslie
- Park and Play, Franklin
- Backyard Rangers, Isabella Plains



EARLY INTERVENTION PLAYGROUPS



MyTime

Our regular program continued with two sessions per week. We also delivered our regular school holiday service, with some disruptions to service due to COVID-19 restrictions. We are proud to have continued our partnership with EACH, Canberra's early childhood early intervention partner for the NDIS to provide families with a direct connection to services.



MyTime

*supporting parents of
children with disabilities*

PlayConnect

PlayConnect continued with two weekly Playgroup sessions operating.

As with our MyTime program, our partnership with EACH continued the PlayConnect program. EACH is Canberra's early childhood, early intervention Organisation. This link and opportunity to build relationships has provided Early Intervention families with access to up to date information regarding NDIS and services, information on how to navigate the world of NDIS plans.

Our Early Intervention Team Leader Aisling Skilton delivered a great program for families following the departure of our long time Early Intervention staff member Matthew Armstrong.





PALS

ACT Playgroups was able to participate in a pilot program for an Inclusive Playgroup model titled PALS (Play and Learning Supported Playgroups). The aim of PALS was to create an inclusive environment for families with and without additional needs to interact. The program also aimed to create opportunities for children with additional needs to participate in activities they wouldn't generally be able to access. ACT Playgroups partnered with the University of Canberra to deliver a Nature Play for all abilities Playgroup and with Next Sense for a dance and music Playgroup for children with hearing or vision impairment.



ACT Playgroups thanks our partners, but also staff members Meryn Kennedy and Stefanie Funnell for their delivery of a great pilot program.

GOOD START IN LIFE



A Good Start in Life For Young Children: Reducing Vulnerability And Health Inequity

A large body of research suggests that the early years of a child's life have a significant impact on their lifetime health and wellbeing. Over the past decade there has been a significant increase in the proportion of children classified as 'developmentally vulnerable' and this disparity varies quite markedly geographically across Australian Capital Territory. The Good Start in Life project seeks to change the developmental trajectory of developmentally vulnerable children during early childhood (0 - 5 years) in order to improve health, social integration and resilience for the next generation.

Using data from the Australian Early Development Census the Good Start in Life project will target neighbourhood areas with a high proportion of developmentally vulnerable children. Working with academic disciplines, policy makers, early education, health and support services, the Good Start in Life will provide place-based approaches to supporting children and families through the following programme interventions; place-based playgroups, allied health outreach services; Good Start in Life Active Play; Loose Parts Play pop ups and a Family liaison Coordinator. These activities aim to build capacity in both early childhood professionals, parents and caregivers. Settings targeted will include: early childhood education centres, local play groups, and public places such as playgrounds.

The Good Start in Life approach will evaluate this innovative, integrated preventive public health approach to reduce the proportion of children with developmental vulnerabilities.

The Good Start in Life project is funded by the Medical Research Futures Fund, an Australian Government Initiative.

Medical Research
Future Fund



UNIVERSITY OF
CANBERRA



“

The Play helps build a warm relationship between family members and create a bank of positive feelings and experiences that can be drawn upon in times of conflict. Through play, you can help your children solve problems, test out ideas, and explore their imaginations.

- Carolyn Webster Stratton

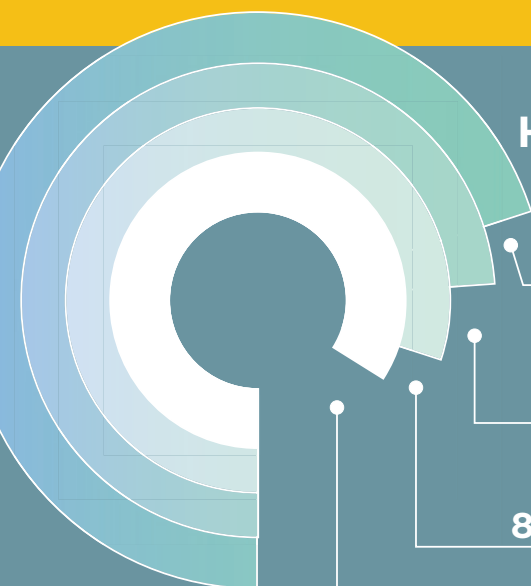
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WHAT PARENTS THINK ABOUT ACT PLAYGROUPS

HERE IS THEIR REPOSENSE TO A 2021 SURVEY



70%



PARTICIPANTS REPORTED PLAYGROUP HAD ASSISTED WITH THEIR PARENTING SKILLS

74%



PARTICIPANTS INDICATED THEY HAD INCREASED KNOWLEDGE OF PLAY IDEAS FOR HOME FROM ATTENDING PLAYGROUP

80%



PARTICIPANTS REPORTED PLAYGROUP HAD INCREASED THEIR PARENTING SKILLS

84%



PARTICIPANTS INDICATED THEY HAD RECEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT THROUGH ATTENDING PLAYGROUP

2930

**PLAYGROUP
SESSIONS IN
2020-2021**



250

PLAYGROUPS

6052

**ENGAGED ON OUR
FACEBOOK PAGE**



9

**INTERGENERATIONAL
PLAYGROUPS**



14

**LANGUAGE BASED
PLAYGROUPS**

Board Members 2020-2021

President: *Kate Sowerby*

Vice President: *Gary Davis*

A/-Executive Officer: *Carley Jones*

Treasurer: *Amanda Walsh*

Board Member: *Rebecca Jeffrey*

Board Member: *Beth Sebesfi*

Board Member: *Rhiannen Sugars*





Staff Team 2020-2021

Program Manager/Acting Executive Officer: *Carley Jones*
Administration Support/PALS Support: *Meryn Kennedy*
Finance: *Genny Newton/Foundation Bookkeeping Services*

Community Playgroups

Community Playgroup Team Leader: *Cate Cool*
Development and Support Worker: *Chandani Ramasundara*

Paint and Play

Team Leader: *Megan Fisher*
Development and Support Worker: *Stefanie Funnell*
Development and Support Worker: *Heather Lehoczky*

Early Intervention

Team Leader: *Aisling Skilton*
Development and Support Worker: *Heather Lehoczky*

