



ACT  
Playgroup

# 2019/2020 ANNUAL REPORT



Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity.

- Kay Redfield Jamison



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ACT PLAYGROUPS TEAM

# President's Report

In the disruptive year that was 2019/20, we have seen bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic impact on the lives of our Playgroups community.

Our vision to ensure all children, parents and families in our region are empowered to thrive remained our priority, as we found different and innovative approaches for quality interaction.

Our team and playgroup volunteers ensured families were still able to play - indoors during the bushfires and subsequent poor air quality, online through many weeks of 'lock-down', and then returning to a COVID-Safe environment to play together in person.

While our successful program - Paint and Play - ceased for much of 2020, and we missed our big events, the World's Biggest Playgroup and Playfest, we were still able to connect on a smaller scale. In some ways, such as through social media, we are now even more connected.

Our staff have taken the time while families were unable to attend our centres, to give each of our venues a refresh - from a big clean up, to new toys, plants and other fun things. I encourage all of our members to check out the updated playrooms.

On behalf of the ACT Playgroups Board, I would like to thank Carley and the team who have seen us through a challenging year. Their commitment to our members has had a profoundly positive impact on our community's ability to stay connected through play.

My thanks to the Board for their work in 2019/20. The workload increased significantly over this period and I am grateful for their generosity in volunteering so much of their time without hesitation, and with commitment and good humour.

This report reflects on the year that was, and we are excited to continue to adapt to a COVID-safe community in the year ahead. We are particularly excited to welcome those families who have had a baby in 2019/20, to come and try out a playgroup or join us at a Paint and Play.

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



KATE SOWERBY

ACT Playgroups President









# Acting EO Report

The last 12 months has certainly been a challenging time, however, it has been a great opportunity for ACT Playgroups to extend our thinking about how community and family connections and learning through play will evolve into the future.

The arrival of the COVID19 pandemic on the back of months of smoke and bushfires has meant some digital thinking was required to keep families connected, the importance of play and play at home and peer support for families present in the lives of families in the ACT. I am immensely proud of the staff team for their innovative thinking, resourcefulness and commitment to supporting Playgroups and families during these times. The staff team banded together and designed a suite of digital services to maintain our connection to members, families and Playgroups.

The forefront of the benefits of community playgroups are the community connections made, and relationships with peers for support on the ride that is parenting. Along with the documented benefits for children and their development.

The impact of the COVID pandemic has reinvigorated ACT Playgroups' efforts to have Community Playgroups, which are parent/volunteer lead recognised as the valuable vessel they are for family, child and community support. ACT Playgroups will continue to advocate for Community Playgroups to receive the recognition they whole-heartedly deserve.

COVID has also highlighted the lack of affordable venues in the ACT that are suitable or willing to accommodate playgroups. ACT Playgroups will undertake a venue review and work with the sector to create welcoming and safe playgroup spaces across the ACT.

We are looking forward to supporting and driving the Playgroup and family support sector further in 2021 and delivering an ever-greater suite of services to families, Playgroups and communities across the Australian Capital Territory.



CARLEY JONES

Acting Executive Officer



# COMMUNITY PLAYGROUPS

The Community Playgroup team aims to support families in the community by bringing them together through playgroup. By doing this, we aim to reduce isolation and help to support parents and carers through the rewarding but sometimes challenging early years with young children. We strive to provide playgroups with resources and learning experiences that help children to learn, discover and create through play.

We support around 250 playgroups, with 10 language-focused playgroups, and 7 special focus playgroups (Dad's cycling playgroup, singing playgroups, grandparent Playgroups and outdoor playgroups) Please see the following for a more detailed rationale of the type of support we provide to playgroups and member families.



## Playgroup Visits

Our Team visited many playgroups over the year, providing play ideas, routine and roster ideas to help promote 'sharing the load between members', conducted craft activities and facilitated story and song time. These visits created the opportunity to build relationships and rapport with the convenors of the playgroup and the families that attended. It also gave us the opportunity to see firsthand the positive affect that playgroup has on all of those who go along. Families were so encouraged after a support visit from us and were very thankful for the continued support which made them feel more empowered to run their playgroups in a fun, educational and nurturing way going forward.

## Phone Call, Virtual Assistance and Administrative Work

During the Bushfire season and COVID 19, the Community Playgroups team made contact with Playgroup convenors. During these calls, we encouraged groups to maintain a routine of virtually meeting, we offered ideWWas on how to conduct virtual playgroups and directed them to online resources on our website that provided craft ideas and sing-alongs. Many playgroup convenors made a point of saying that they appreciated the human connection and it made them feel less isolated.

We help many people who call or e-mail to find playgroups or even form new ones.



# New Parent Groups

Over the year the community playgroups team have visited new parent's groups, where we talk to new mums and dads about the benefits of playgroup. During these sessions we talk about the different types of playgroups, the benefits for both adults and children of playgroups and we also go through baby play ideas. From these talks, some of the groups have started a playgroup themselves, which we support. Other mums choose to join already formed playgroups, or attend Paint and Plays.



We continued to present to New Parent Groups virtually during the COVID pandemic and encourage families to keep their connections with each other, and provide play at home ideas.

## A DIGITAL RESPONSE TO COVID

During the COVID lockdown period, ACT Playgroups strived to provide families with various platforms in which to still engage in play-based activities, and remain connected. We achieved this by swinging into action and providing the following:

### Live Facebook and Playgroup @ Home

ACT Playgroups, like many other services, was quick to adapt and provide families with online-based services. Each week we provided a short live playgroup session with music, puppets and stories, to engage children with their carers. This provided a routine focus, much like a regular weekly session of playgroup would. It was a chance for carers to engage with their children in a fun activity, and learn new songs and dance moves.

ACT Playgroups also established a closed Facebook group for playgroup families to join. It was here we continued to support the playgroup community by encouraging parents to connect with each other online, share their tips and tricks for engaging young children at home during lockdown, and also a place where ACT Playgroups could share relevant activities and information with families.

Our Early Intervention program also moved to an online platform daily to keep children and families engaged.

# PAINT AND PLAYGROUP

Each week, the ACT Playgroups *Van of Play* arrives at five different locations.

All locations are outside and easily accessible for local communities.



Our partnership continued with Marymead to deliver an inclusive Paint and Play located within the Boundless Playground at Parkes. This program aims to provide children and their families with additional needs a truly inclusive play experience.

ACT Playgroups also continued to deliver Paint and Play at the following locations:

- Holt
- Ainslie
- Franklin
- Isabella Plains

The focus of Paint and Play is to demonstrate that families can enjoy outdoor play in all sorts of weather and locations. Our staff aim to inspire parents to provide a wide range of play activities in the home environment. Paint and Play also aims to connect families to their local

community, including local families, services and other organisations.

We have also worked to increase our range of partners engaged to provide information, advice, resources and support.

Partners engaged include:

- Libraries ACT
- Men's shed, Tuggeranong
- Bunnings, Tuggeranong

We would also like to extend our thanks to Anglicare for supporting Paint and Play Playgroups.



# Intergenerational Playgroup

1/7/2019 - 30/6/2020

Intergenerational Playgroups are a vital opportunity for parents, children and residents in aged care facilities or seniors in the community to engage in childhood activities together, create opportunities for children to further develop their skills, parents to create a local peer support network and provide isolated residents/seniors vital community interaction. Intergenerational Playgroups are fun and open to families with children aged birth to five years old. Intergenerational Playgroups provide mutual and additional benefits to all generations involved, such as encouraging friendship across generations, reduction in the feelings of isolation associated with ageing, foster understanding and build respect between generations and share senior's parenting knowledge and experience with young parents.

In the first quarter of 2019, we have been able to add three more Intergenerational Playgroups (Goodwin in Crace, Pines Living in Farrer, St. Andrew's in Hughes) to existing two Intergenerational playgroups (Lyneham IG & Weston IG) which we have had for the last four years. We have received media recognition by Canberra Times.\*

As we have received much interest from families and aged care facilities for more Intergenerational Playgroups, in the second quarter of 2019, we opened four more Intergenerational Playgroups (Calvary Haydon in Bruce, Amala

in Gordon, RSL LifeCare in Pages, Gungederra in Harrison) providing Intergenerational interaction opportunity to the wider community in ACT. We have established Harrison Intergenerational Playgroup in Gungederra homestead collaborating with CHC to provide the opportunity to seniors in the community and it was very successful.

Families choosing to attend these playgroups are choosing to come along as they have a real desire and wish for themselves and their children to have real and meaningful connections with residents. Many of these families don't have grandparents or other older family members in Canberra and want that connection. All our Intergenerational Playgroups had 5/6 families who were coming regularly. Once again we had media recognition from Canberra Times.\*\*



\* <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/5993729/best-day-of-the-/week-the-playgroup-bringing-children-and-elderly-together/>

\*\* <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6444941/harmony-across-generations-in-unlikely-playgroup/>

In August 2019, the ABC TV team created a little story around Weston Intergenerational Playgroup in Mirinjani hostel which they promoted along with their 'Old People's home for 4-year-old' TV series which attracted 6K views and brought a real awareness and booster to our Intergenerational playgroups.\*

Also with the Ageless Play Campaign by Playgroup Australia, ACT Playgroups have received around 400 emails from individuals, aged care facilities, childcare centres and volunteers interested in joining Intergenerational Playgroups. Most of those inquiries were from school aged children which we couldn't provide any support but we have responded to every email and

provided opportunity for the families with children under 5.

There was a stage that all nine of our Intergenerational playgroups in Canberra were full with the maximum number of children and families. We have maintained waiting lists for the rest of the families.

Gradually some families left as they were picturing the Intergenerational Playgroups to be like the ABC TV series and realised it's not while participating. Placing families in a room for playgroup is just that a playgroup in a space, but for true and meaningful intergenerational connections, everyone has a role to play.



*"Intergenerational Playgroups provide mutual and additional benefits to all generations involved."*

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\* <https://iview.abc.net.au/show/ageless-friendships>



By end of Feb 2020, we have been able to provide opportunity to everyone in the waiting list. We have also opened an Intergenerational Playgroup on Saturdays in Mirinjani nursing home in Weston to provide opportunity to working parents to join playgroups with their under 5.

Although everything was going well, we had to suspend all 9 Intergenerational Playgroups in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 health pandemic to protect our most vulnerable grand friends.

Unfortunately, the aged care facilities lockdown and restrictions on their activities has made them more isolated than ever.

This has lead us to develop the *Digital Intergenerational Playgroup* platform via our 'Intergenerational Playgroups Canberra' Facebook page\* to keep our community connected and send love and hope to our grand friends.



Through our Digital Intergenerational Playgroup platform we have digitally shared craft activities, singing circles and story time to keep everyone connected. We have received media attention for the digital Intergenerational Playgroup by ABC TV.\*\*

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\* <https://www.facebook.com/intergenerationalplaygroupscanberra/>

\*\* <https://iview.abc.net.au/show/ageless-friendships>

# EARLY INTERVENTION PLAYGROUPS

## My Time

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

## PlayConnect

PlayConnect continued with two weekly Playgroup sessions operating.

As with our My Time program, our partnership with *EACH* extended to 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, and information on how to navigate the world of NDIS plans. When COVID hit in March, we switched our service delivery up to a half hour session online of music, singing and interaction. Matthew Armstrong, Early Intervention Support Worker delivered the sessions with guitar in hand and an abundance of energy. Families were able to remain connected via a closed Facebook chat function. The families established a weekly video call via the chat and supported each other through the lock down.



## Build and Play- PlayConnect Innovation

ACT Playgroups was fortunate to receive additional funding to deliver a Dad specific playgroup, which was inclusive for all families.

Build and Play focussed on the provision of activities to directly engage Dads in play with their child. The name of the group references the types of activities we focussed on providing. The group was well received by Dad's and had a steady attendance before COVID.

Some of the wonderful building activities families were engaged with include:

- Building ball runs out of cardboard boxes
- Building with a wide variety of duplo
- The construction of water tunnels
- Construction of Christmas wooden reindeers



The level of engagement from the Fathers' in attendance at the group was exceptional. There was a core group of fathers attending, with such a wide mix of the community and abilities represented. It was encouraging to see the Dads bond together and provide a playgroup with a great atmosphere and a lot of construction. We are also happy to report that a core group of Dads are continuing to meet on a weekend.

## Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Grant Playgroups and Playing Together

ACT Playgroups has been a recipient of two NDIS ILC grants over the last couple of years. These grants have enabled ACT Playgroups to expand the reach of playgroups, and accessibility for all families.

We have increased the accessibility of playgroup through the Playing Together program. This program has enabled ACT Playgroup staff to

work with local communities and playgroups, to ensure Community Playgroups were accessible to all families.

ACT Playgroup staff assisted playgroups to ensure barriers for attendance were removed or reduced, and enabled more families to access playgroup.

As part of the Ready to Play program, we delivered two inclusive playgroups, based on a mainstream activity and inclusion. The two programs were Ready to Move and Ready to Dance. Ready to Move was a gymnastics and foundation movement skills based inclusive program. Ready to Dance was a rhythm and dance program also focussed on inclusion.

Both programs were delivered in a Playgroup format, with a playgroup routine and by playgroup support and development staff, along with a skilled and qualified teacher in the respective fields.

In 2019, the results of the 2018 Australian Early Development Census were released to the Australian Public. These results provided the ACT Government with a need for action to address growing developmental vulnerability across Canberra's young children.

ACT Playgroups participated in a data comparison exercise with the Directorate of Community Services. This exercise compared the data of ACT Playgroup locations and member postcodes, against the postcodes and suburbs of the AEDC.

The results of the data exercise were demonstrated as part the AEDC Road Show in the ACT. The Directorate convened local services and education sites to discuss the results and path forward in each jurisdiction.

ACT Playgroups was fortunate to be active participants in the AEDC road show and developed partnerships with the regional coordinators.



The roadshow consisted of an information evening/afternoon in a zone across the ACT e.g. Gungahlin, Belconnen, Woden and Tuggeranong.

As a result, the following activities were actioned:

## Gungahlin

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A short term Paint and Play info session each week in the central Playground in the town centre. This was delivered in partnership with Barnardos. A series of locally available services were also invited to come along each week and share their info and advice with families. The aim was to engage as many families as possible.

## Tuggeranong

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YWCA implemented a range of measures in the Tuggeranong region to target a number of concerns. ACT Playgroups partnered with two initiatives. One was to work with local CIT Community Development Students to open their minds to the community development opportunities provided through Playgroup.

The second project was to fund an additional staff member at Isabella Plains Backyard Rangers Paint and Play. The role of the additional staff was to work with the attending families to raise awareness of the local services in the Tuggeranong region. It was to also raise the profile of all Playgroups in the Tuggeranong region and ensure they were accessible to all families.

The AEDC will continue to provide direction to the services and activities of ACT Playgroups.





# EVENTS AND COMMUNICATIONS



## Events

ACT Playgroups facilitated or were a part of a number of events, which saw the community playgroups team engaging with many playgroup families. During PlayFEST, we had a chance to network with other services providers, to educate ourselves on services available for young families in Canberra, which in turn helps us to assist families when they have queries. The ACT Playgroups Christmas Party helped facilitate craft activities and were able to provide practical advice to playgroup families on how to replicate the same activities back at their playgroups.

These events also provided opportunities for us to invite families who had not heard of playgroups, along to a playgroup in their local area.

ACT Playgroups received an invitation to provide the Children's Sanctuary at the wildly popular Multicultural Festival. We provided two days of playgroup activities where families could come with their small children for some play and respite. We look forward to being part of this event in the future.

## Communication

ACT Playgroups took the opportunity during the New Year and COVID to complete some analysis of our communication messages, style and delivery method.

## Key Messaging

A new communication strategy was created to stream line all modes of internal communication, marketing communication and public relations. This includes all communication content to follow the Association's branding and image. Our communication goals for the new strategy are outlined below. A subsequent plan was developed to achieve the communication strategy goals.

## Communication Goals

- Boost brand engagement
- Build our community
- Increase brand awareness
- Effective customer service
- Increase community engagement

## Channels

ACT Playgroups aimed to improve our use of digital channels to communicate with our members and the greater public. Some of the topics we covered in our new digital newsletter

- Relevant content
- What's going on
- What happening in the next month?
- Activities for playgroups
- Family activities

Renewal of memberships transitioned to a more efficient digital platform, which has made it easier for members to complete their membership renewal. This has led to a 20% increase of members renewing their membership.

## Website

The ACT Playgroups website was in need of an overhaul, therefore, the COVID period was prime opportunity to complete an update. We have utilised the use of digital newsletters and emails to direct and increase our web traffic. Our longer term goal is to have a new website with great new content for members in 2021.

## Use of hashtags

The COVID period was also a time of learning and development for ACT Playgroup staff. Intense social media training was one area of professional development. As a result of this learning, we have implemented the use of hashtags to our social media channels. Since using hashtags during our social media posts our total search on google has shown the below are the top 3 searched hash tags.

Top 3 hashtags searched

- #actplaygroups
- #playgroups
- #under5activities







3

models of digital  
Playgroup delivered  
during the COVID  
pandemic lock down



4815

children  
attended  
Playgroup



10

Intergenerational  
Playgroups  
supported







**358**

phone calls  
to Playgroups



**237**

volunteers as  
Playgroup  
contacts



**20**

language  
based  
Playgroups







## Staff Team 2019-2020

Executive Officer: *Kirsten Cross*

Program Manager/Acting Executive Officer: *Carley Jones*

Administration Manager: *Robyn Trenton*

Administration Assistant: *Meryn Kennedy*

Finance Manager: *Genny Newton*

### Community Playgroups

Development and Support Worker: *Cate Cool*

Development and Support Worker: *Chandani Ramasundara*

### Paint and Play

Development and Support Worker: *Megan Dwyer*

Development and Support Worker: *Sue Pye*

Development and Support Worker: *Jacinta Froud*

### Early Intervention

Development and Support Worker: *Matthew Armstrong*

Development and Support Worker: *Clare Goodman*

### Ready to Play

Development and Support Worker: *Craig Gibson*

## 2019-2020 Board Members

President: *Kate Sowerby*

Vice President: *Anne Croudace*

Treasurer: *Phillipa Halloran*

Board Member: *Eric Chalmers*

Board Member: *Jenny Mobbs*

Board Member: *Julia O'Brien*

Board Member: *Amanda Walsh*

Board Member: *Gary Davis*

Board Member: *Rebecca Jeffrey*

Board Member: *Rhiannen Sugars*



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