



TM

**ACT**  
Playgroups



# ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022



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## Acknowledgment of Country.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the ACT, the Ngunnawal people. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of Canberra and the region.





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**My daughter has been able to participate and watch activities which builds her skills and capabilities. It has provided her with opportunity.**

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*Parent feedback on their child's development at Playgroup.*

”



# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

It has been a year of steady growth and innovation for ACT Playgroups. As the community adjusts to life getting back to a new kind of normal, we have seen an increase in attendance at many of our playgroups.

The ACT region is growing, and ACT Playgroups services have been expanding with it – we have playgroups getting together in Canberra's newest communities, and we continue to expand our reach into new suburbs and help local families connect and grow together.

Living through COVID and the varying restrictions on movement within the community over the past two years has given us opportunities to find new ways of connecting, and after a trying and disruptive period, it is great to see our families out and about, enjoying each others company and the magic of play.

On behalf of the Board, I thank Carley and the staff team for their hard work and the particularly innovative approach they have taken this year to ensure playgroups continue and grow as we emerged from COVID.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the many parent and carer volunteers, who organise and run our Community Playgroups – we are grateful for your time and effort in support of our families. I would also like to thank our voluntary Board members, who generously give their time to ensure ACT Playgroups can achieve its objectives in providing a safe and supportive environment for young children and their carers to connect, play and have fun.

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

Kate Sowerby  
*President*



# ACTING EXECUTIVE OFFICER REPORT

As we slowly emerge into a world of 'new normal', Community Playgroups continue to be at the forefront of social connection for families with young children. After months of uncertainty and lockdowns to close out 2021, the New Year saw families cautiously start to return to face to face playgroups. It is now, as we emerge, that ACT Playgroups understands the critical importance of supporting families and children to reconnect, grow and develop again through social connection and play.

In August 2021, as part of the Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods' COVID-19 Impact Monitoring Survey Program, parents/carers of children aged 2 and over reported the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their child's mental health: 61% experienced a negative impact, 35% experienced no impact and 5.0% experienced a positive impact (Biddle et al. 2021).

## Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children with disability

A review of the existing research released between March 2020 and June 2021 suggests the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing problems with support for children with disability including:

- Access to inclusive information
- Access to health and social opportunities, including medical services
- Issues with the flexibility of systems to adjust to the additional needs and complexity of children with disability's lives (Renshaw and Goodhue 2021)

It is these emerging statistics which is driving ACT Playgroups activities to raise the benefits of attending playgroup, and adaption of programs to suit the needs of families during these uncertain and changing times. It is interesting to reflect as we approach our 50th Birthday, the importance of connections that Playgroups still create today.

During this period, ACT Playgroups continued to work hard at keeping connections to local communities and families strong during lockdowns, with digital solutions and at home resource packs.

ACT Playgroups staff attended the AIFS conference in 2022 and were alarmed to learn of the statistics regarding the impact of COVID-19 on families. The team have been busy planning programs to address the changing needs of playgroup families for 2022 and 2023.

I again extend my gratitude and thanks to the staff team that is the backbone of ACT Playgroups. The team has remained committed and passionate about supporting families, building local communities, and providing quality play experiences.

Thanks, and gratitude must also be extended to the Board of Management, who continue to volunteer their time to steer the ACT Playgroups Ship.

Standby for 50th Birthday celebrations in 2023.



Carley Jones

*Acting Executive Officer*



“

**I initially joined for social interaction with other parents, but the social benefits for my son have been obvious.**

*Parent feedback on what they have got out of playgroup.*

”



# COMMUNITY PLAYGROUPS

## 2021-2022

Now more than ever, our team is seeing the benefits Community Playgroups offer families who attend playgroup, week in-week out. The social connections we continue to witness at playgroups across the ACT has driven us to seek out and support families who may not know about Community Playgroups, due to the pandemic or other reasons, and to join one to find their village.

The Community Playgroup team has ventured out into the community, attending local family events and play spaces. This has enabled us to connect face-to-face with families, learn firsthand what they need, and connect them to a playgroup that suits their families interests and circumstances.

We continue to build rapport and support for our Community Playgroups by providing tailored assistance, as we recognise that each playgroup is wonderfully unique in their makeup. We have enjoyed the different ways in which we have been able to connect with our Community Playgroups, whether it be through a playgroup visit, a phone call to check in, or linking the playgroup to other ACT services to enhance their playgroup experience.

While winter has seen fluctuations in numbers of families able to attend playgroup (especially in covid times), we know by speaking with families that having a playgroup to attend each week positively impacts them, Playgroup has given them a sense of purpose, belonging and a regular routine.

In this coming year, the Community Playgroups Team look forward finding new and innovative ways to support playgroups to thrive and find connection through play.





# NEW PARENT GROUPS

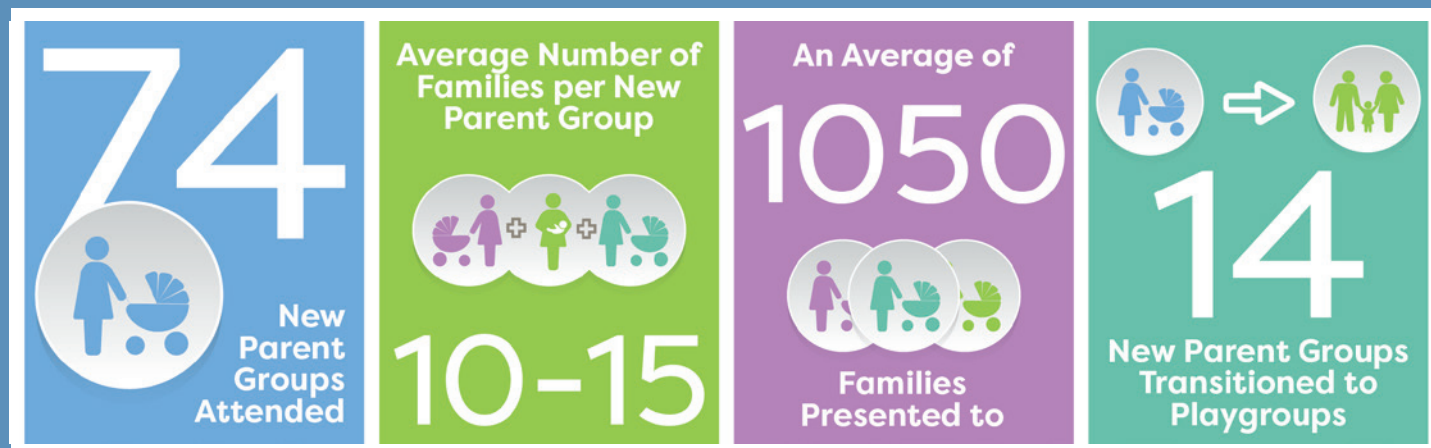
## 2021-2022

New Parent Group presentations continue to be a powerful way for our team to reach new families. Attending New Parent Group sessions allows our staff to provide support to help new parents thrive in what can be an amazing but isolating journey with their new baby.

Our observations have been that new parents are eager to find ways to connect with other families in their community. Through this need, we have been able to support New Parent Groups to form into playgroups that have continued to meet once their facilitated New Parent Group has ended. This year we partnered with local organisations to provide low cost or free venue hire for new playgroups to meet in. Having accessible venues available, greatly assisted the groups to transition to a playgroup.

We regularly received positive feedback from both the Maternal Health Nurses and new parents, following our presentations. Being able to provide practical advice about the benefits of play, singing and story time has also been a highlight. Witnessing new parents feeling empowered with skills learnt during our sessions has been rewarding and encouraging.

## OVER THE PERIOD OF 2021 - 2022



# PAINT & PLAY PLAYGROUPS

“

Encouraging a child to go outside in all weather builds resilience, but more importantly it saves them from spending their life merely tolerating the ‘bad’ days in favour of a handful of ‘good’ ones—a life of endless expectations and conditions where happiness hinges on sunshine.

”

*Nicolette Sowder*

At the core of our Paint and Play Playgroups is demonstrating to families and children that you can play in all types of weather.

ACT Playgroups delivers five (5) outdoor sessions of Paint and Play Playgroups across the Australian Capital Territory each day of the week during school terms. Paint and Play Playgroups provide a vital junction for local families to meet, children to learn through play and where local services can interact with families and raise awareness of support services.

Paint and Play Playgroups proved to be the service of choice for families upon the easing of restrictions and playgroups meeting in person again. The outdoor facilities provided families the opportunities to engage and connect in a socially distanced manner.



Thank you to the services and sites which continue to support the Paint and Play Playgroups. A thank you also to ACT Libraries and EACH, for their continued support of not only ACT Playgroups, but more importantly, the families attending.

During this year, we continued to develop a program of play-based activities, with the introduction of information cards for parents/carers at programmed activities, outlining the aim of each activity and how it supported child development and aligned with the learning outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework. This proved to be a great conversation starter with families!



## PAINT & PLAY PLAYGROUPS MET AT THE FOLLOWING SITES





# PLAY AND LEARN SUPPORTED PLAYGROUPS

Our playgroups under this program continued to flourish following the removal of restrictions due to the pandemic.

These Supported Playgroups have focused on ensuring playgroups are a welcoming space for all abilities and a chance for children with challenges to experience the same mainstream programs as their peers.

The focus of these groups has been Nature Play and Music and Movement. ACT Playgroup staff strive to create a dynamic, engaging, and inclusive program and environment, with adaptations and adjustments to ensure all our included. Future PALS groups will provide inclusive opportunities for Intergenerational Play, and Baby Play.



## MUSIC AND MOVEMENT

This inclusive program offers a range of different facilitated music and movement activities for children and families to participate in, such as action songs, dancing, musical instruments, games, yoga, parachute, ribbon sticks and bubbles. Children also enjoy taking a break from the planned program to engage in free play, explore the outdoor area, or have a snack. As the weather is warming up, we have also been following the children's lead to do some of our program in the yard.



“

**Hearing different languages and seeing how different children are developing and playing, and copying and learning from them.**

*Parent feedback on their child's development at Playgroup.*

”



“

**Engaging in activities with my daughter that  
we couldn't do at home.**

*Parent feedback on what parents have got out of Playgroup.*

”





# NATURE PLAYGROUPS

Our Nature Playgroups are drop-in style playgroups that run at Wildbark, Throsby. We provide a variety of different activities for children to explore, such as craft, construction, reading, imaginative play, puzzles, and playdough. Children and families are also encouraged to discover the nature playground, meet some of the resident lizards and turtles, and engage in nature play activities.

ACT Playgroups also facilitates another Nature Playgroup at the Evatt Primary School. All activities are nature based and are aimed at exploring the natural world.



# EARLY SUPPORT PLAYGROUPS

Our Early Support Playgroups provide vital connections for families or children who may have developmental concerns, additional needs, or a disability, with no diagnosis required to attend.

Our Early Support Playgroups are comprised of MyTime and PlayConnect programs, along with our partnership with Marymead, for Boundless Buddies.

The focus of Early Support is to provide a safe and welcoming space for all families to make connections with other families and build a peer support network. It is also a space for children to participate in activities tailored to their needs, where they can explore and learn in their own way, and importantly, Early Support playgroups also connect families with other service providers.

Early Support also moved to a digital platform with the Covid-19 lockdown. This enabled ACT Playgroups staff to remain connected to families and families to remain connected to each other. We also were able to provide info on playing at home ideas, link into live playgroup sessions and provide info on what services were available during the pandemic and lockdowns.



# DIGITAL & PRINT MEDIA

ACT Playgroups Invested in an external review of our social media presence, with the aim of streamlining the platforms used, and growing our audience and reach. White Echo was engaged for the process and a review conducted, and a strategy for moving forward was developed. White Echo was able to streamline our social media, give an audience overview and demonstrate some advertising gains.



ACT Playgroups saw an opportunity to reach a different audience in the May edition of Canberra Weekly. We were offered advertising space, at a reduced rate, as well as a brief write up about what ACT Playgroups has to offer. Canberra Weekly has an audience reach of approximately 227,000 local Canberrans.

With a strong readership of approximately 87K. We converted one of our social media strategies "Come and Try Playgroups" to print, directing our message to new parents. Once the publication was made available, we noticed an increase in traffic to our website and a significant amount of interest via our phone line.



“

**The connection my child has with others and  
my connection with other parents.**

*Parent feedback on what parents have got out of Playgroup.*

”



# COMMUNITY PLAYGROUPS

OVER THE 12 MONTH PERIOD





**ATTENDED  
PAINT & PLAY PLAYGROUPS  
OVER AN INTERRUPTED YEAR**



“

**Playgroup has enabled my kids to become more social and it also increases their confidence.**

*Parent feedback on their child's development at Playgroup.*

”



A photograph of four children playing in a park. From left to right: a boy in a green shirt with black stars, a boy in a white shirt, a girl in a red and white striped shirt, and a girl in a white polka-dot dress. They are all smiling and looking upwards. A large teal semi-circle is overlaid on the top left of the image.

**A THANK YOU TO ALL STAFF  
FOR WORKING ACROSS ALL  
PROGRAMS WHEN REQUIRED.**

## **THE TEAM**

### **Acting Executive Officer**

Carley Jones

### **Finance Management**

Foundation Bookkeeping Services

### **Administration Support**

Meryn Kennedy

### **Team Leader, Community Playgroups**

Cate Cool

### **Community Playgroup Support and Development**

Chandani Ramsundara

### **Playgroup Support and Development**

Kara Hilly

### **Team Leader, Paint and Play Playgroups**

Stefanie Funnell

### **Paint and Play Support and Development**

Georgina Quinn

Esther Colmer

### **Early Support Playgroup Support and Development**

Rabi Munkayilar

Aisling Skilton



## OUR BOARD

### President

Kate Sowerby

### Vice President

Gary Davis

### Acting Executive Officer

Carley Jones

### Treasurer

Amanda Walsh

### Board Member

Eliza Allen

