



**ACT**  
Playgroups

# 2022 - 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



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**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*

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



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## Acknowledgment of Country



We wish to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and recognise other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be in the ACT.

*We stand united with the Uluru statement from the heart movement, as we look forward to a better and brighter future.*

# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Another big year has passed for ACT Playgroups – and this year we celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. Whilst Playgroups in the 1970s looked very different to what we have today, the purpose remains the same. We are a community organisation, with volunteers making a significant contribution to our services, providing psychosocial health benefits for children, parents and families.



The national conversation about the importance of supporting children and families in the first five years has seen greater prominence this year, with the federal government's development of an Early Years Strategy, and the publication of the National Playgroup Statement – both of which recognise the vast benefits of learning and growing through play.



This year we have increased our efforts in providing access to early intervention through supported playgroups. There are many benefits in these playgroup sessions, as they provide parents and carers with information, connection with relevant health services, and peer support.

We continue to broaden our reach in the region, and have fostered valuable partnerships with other community organisations across the ACT, to ensure the services we deliver have the greatest accessibility for local families – this has included targeted efforts to establish playgroups in Canberra's newest suburbs in 2023.



I would like to acknowledge and thank Carley and our staff team, our wonderful playgroup volunteers and our Board for the commitment and passion in staying aligned with our vision – to empower families to thrive, and support quality interactions through playgroup.



KATE SOWERBY  
President



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**The quality of a child's early experiences makes a critical difference as their brains develop, providing either strong or weak foundations for learning, health and behaviour throughout life.**

- UNICEF

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# ACTING EO REPORT

The last year has been an exciting year for ACT Playgroups. ACT Playgroups reached our 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday/Years of operation in 2023, which is a truly remarkable achievement. I can only hope that our founding members are proud of the longevity of the Organisation and the services provided to families in the modern era. The past year has also marked a period of substantial growth and new playgroup activity.



It has also been an exciting year with increased opportunities for input into the Federal Government's Early Years Strategy. ACT Playgroups, through Playgroup Australia has played a pivotal role in engaging families with the Early Years Strategy, including hosting a Playgroup event at Parliament House. Playgroup Parent Melanie Smith, was also an invited guest to the Early Years Strategy Roundtable, which was also hosted at Parliament House.

ACT Playgroups also welcomed the announcement by the Federal Government of further investment into Playgroups. We look forward to increased funding to support Intergenerational Playgroups, and capacity to increase access to Playgroups across the ACT.



The team at ACT Playgroups undertook The Common Approach training during the year. This was a valuable learning experience for the team, and another step in our progress as an Organisation to incorporate well-being into our programs and culture. The Common Approach is a highly evidenced, best practice approach to child and youth wellbeing.

ACT Playgroup staff also attended Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve to participate in a guided Ranger activity to learn more about the history of First Nations People in the ACT region. This was an engaging and wonderful experience.

ACT Playgroups staff participated in these following conferences to enhance their knowledge and network with industry professionals:

- Mental Health
- 6th National Child Protection Forum







ACT Playgroups has continued to focus on growing and expanding our partnerships and stakeholder engagement. This has included, but was not limited to:

- Continued our work supporting “It takes a Village-collective impact”, through membership of the Leadership group and working groups of various projects. The “It takes a Village” Project is a collective impact project, focused on ensuring the children and families in the Belconnen region have the opportunities to have the best start in life. Australian Early Development Census tells us that the children in Belconnen are presenting with increasing development vulnerabilities. ACT Playgroups is proud to continue to play a role in this project.
- Good start in Life Advisory group membership and participation and other related activities.
- CYFSP (Child, Youth and Family Services Program) advisory group.
- Commenced the development of a partnership with Yerrabi Yurwang Aboriginal Corporation.
- Southern Initiative and establishing services to support their activities.



ACT Playgroups has also been supporting the Playgroups in Schools initiative with the Education Directorate. This included the development of a set of guidelines in partnership for the establishment of playgroups in schools.

**CARLEY JONES**  
Acting Executive Officer



# COMMUNITY PLAYGROUPS 2022-2023

Community Playgroups are led by volunteer parents and carers, representing the largest group of playgroups in Canberra. The beauty of Canberra's Community Playgroups is that no playgroup is the same. Each group is wonderfully unique, tailoring their sessions to meet the diverse social and emotional needs of the community in which they meet.

The Community Playgroup Team connected with many playgroups over the year, through support visits, along with phone and email support. This tailored approach ensured playgroups have the resources and support needed to create a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment, where families can build positive social connections all whilst having fun at playgroup.



Over the last year, ACT Playgroups supported the setup of 50 new playgroups, which saw over 700 new parents, carers and children attending a Community Playgroup. We continued to present the benefits of playgroup to 71 New Parent Groups, which empowered new Mums and Dads to forge connections in their community by either starting their own playgroup or joining established ones.

Our Team fostered a number of positive partnerships with local Community Organisations. This saw the Community Playgroups Team attend community events, outreach programs and forums.

Through this community outreach, we were able to connect with families who may not have heard about playgroups and support them to connect to a playgroup in their community.

We received feedback from families that they felt less isolated and happy to have found a playgroup where they felt welcomed. The Community Playgroup team will remain dedicated to exploring new ways to ensure playgroup remains an affordable and welcoming space for all Canberra families.



# PAINT AND PLAY PLAYGROUPS



ACT Playgroups delivers five (5) outdoor sessions of Paint and Play Playgroups across the Australian Capital Territory each 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.

As usual, the warmer months see higher attendance and the freezing Canberra winter, with the sicknesses it brings, keep some families at home.

This year Paint and Play has made a huge effort to make our Playgroups more sustainable. Our art activities are now largely made from recycled materials, we have incorporated more

loose parts play which is comprised mainly of recycled materials, as a result, we now have a monthly thrift shop outing to purchase items and we are slowly moving towards all wooden toys instead of plastic. We have also introduced a space for the children to sign in and provide their feedback on paint and play.



Every Paint and Play site have had multiple visits from EACH this year. Families have commented that they find these visits very useful and informative, and they feel it is a safe space to ask developmental questions about their children.

Last year we introduced EYLF learning outcomes to go with our activities, and they continue to be popular points of discussion with the families.



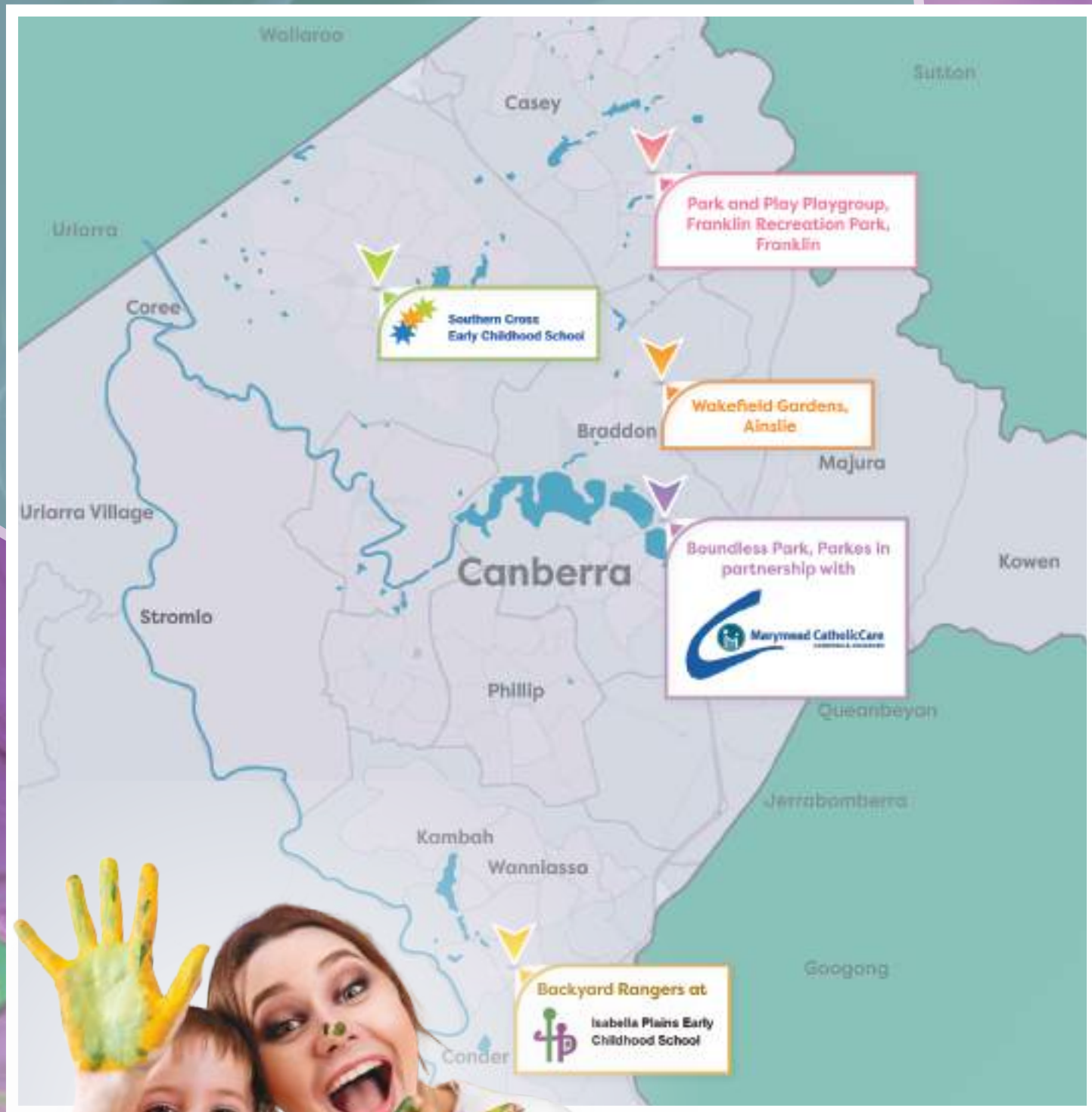
source: [evidenceforlearning.org.au](https://evidenceforlearning.org.au)



Paint and Play Playgroups continue to have a strong relationship with Marymead Catholic Care, Southern Cross Early Childhood School, Franklin Early Childhood School and Isabella Plains Early Childhood School and we look forward to fostering those relationships more in the future.



# PAINT AND PLAY PLAYGROUPS MET AT THE FOLLOWING SITES





# NEW PARENT GROUP

## New Parent Group Information



**71** New Parent Groups attended

**625** Parents reached

### PLAYGROUPS REGISTERED WITH ACT PLAYGROUPS

**9** New Parent Groups have gone on to form a Playgroup registered with ACT Playgroups

ACT Playgroups assisted **72** parents to find their local playgroup

## PLAY AND LEARN SUPPORTED PLAYGROUPS

Our Playgroups under this program continued to flourish and be enjoyed by the families who attend.

The PALS Supported Playgroups have focussed on ensuring they are an inclusive, and 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 are included.

# 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.

A big thank you to Joe from the Deaf Resource Centre for his support.



# NATURE PLAYGROUPS

Our inclusive Nature Playgroups shifted locations in 2023 to the Castle Playroom to make use of the wonderful outdoor space and to Kambah Adventure Park to make use of the inclusive play space and service a different region of the ACT.

# EARLY SUPPORT PLAYGROUPS

Our Early Support Playgroups provide vital connections for families or children who may have developmental concerns, additional needs, or a disability. However, no diagnosis is required to attend. Our programs under this banner evolved during this period, with PlayConnect becoming PlayConnect+ in partnership with Autism Queensland.





PlayConnect+ Playgroups welcome all children with a disability and/or developmental concerns aged 0-8 years, their families, carers, and siblings. A diagnosis is not required.

Our Early Support Playgroups are comprised of MyTime and PlayConnect programs, along with our partnership with Marymead Catholic Care, for Boundless Buddies. However, ACT Playgroups made the tough decision to cease the delivery of My Time from 30th of June 2023.

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.

## Our Early Support Locations were:



## ACT Playgroups attended or hosted the following events:

- Growing up in Bean event
- Questacon Little Explorers
- PlayFest 2022



A photograph of three young children wearing red baseball caps, cheering with their arms raised in the air. The child on the left is a boy with a wide-open mouth, the middle child is a girl with a smile, and the child on the right is a boy also cheering. They are outdoors with green foliage in the background. A large white semi-circle with a red border is overlaid on the bottom left of the image, containing the text.

# ACT Playgroups Board Members 2022-2023

**President:** *Kate Sowerby*

**Vice President:** *Gary Davis*

**Treasurer:** *Amanda Walsh/Linda Xia*

**Board Member:** *Eliza Allen*

**Board Member:** *Clare Smith*

**Board Member:** *Rosemary Wyber*

**Board Member:** *Brendon Le Lievre*

**Acting Executive Officer:** *Carley Jones*





# ACT Playgroups Staff Team 2022-2023

**Acting Executive Officer:** *Carley Jones*

**Finance Function:** *Foundation Bookkeeping Services*

**Administration:** *Meryn Kennedy*

**Team Leader, Community Playgroups:** *Cate Cool*

**Development and Support:** *Chandani Ramasundara*

**Team Leader, Paint and Play:** *Stefanie Sullivan*

**Early Support Program Support:** *Rabiatu Munkayilar*

**Early Support Program Support:** *Aisling Skilton*

**PALS Support and Development Program:** *Kara Hilly*

**Playgroup Support and Development:** *Alethea White*

**Playgroup Support and Development:** *Garmisch Riley*

**Playgroup Support and Development:** *Georgina Quinn*

**Design:** *Dawn Pyke*

