

PLAYGROUPS



A story of families, friendships
and fun

In the beginning.....

Best Start community consultations identified:

- Social isolation an issue for many parents, particularly with young children
- Lack of groups for parents with more than 1 child - excluded from first time parent groups
- Kinder and school transition an issue - some children commencing early education with poor social, literacy skills
- Not a huge number of playgroups given the size of Greater Shepparton

Plan for action

- Identified priority population groups
- Reviewed playgroup models, concentrating on models successful in engaging vulnerable families
- Sustainability a major priority
- Identified key partnerships
- Considered schools the 'hub' of a community



What we did

- All playgroups established were in partnership with at least one other organisation
- Similar model used across all playgroups
 - Facilitator employed
 - Free to attend
 - Morning tea included
- Best Start funds used to purchase playgroup resources and cover 6 months of Playgroup Facilitator's wage
- Value for effort
 - Visiting Maternal and Child Health nurse
 - Open Maternal and Child Health session
 - Immunisation
 - Book borrowing



What we did

- Established the Greater Shepparton Playgroup Network to provide support to Playgroup Facilitators
- Ran two training sessions with Playgroup Victoria
- Regular promotion through:
 - Kindergartens
 - Primary school newsletters
 - Best Start 'ParentIN' newsletter
 - Maternal and Child Health
 - Childcare centres
 - Community Houses
 - Libraries and Toy Libraries
 - Visits to first time parent groups
- Undertook annual evaluation of Best Start playgroups



What we achieved

- A total of 9 playgroups were established under the Best Start banner in partnership with at least one other organisation
- 6 were 'general', 2 were Iraqi and 1 was Koori specific
- Greater Shepparton Playgroup Network meets on a quarterly basis
- Reports of improved kinder and school transition for some children/families
- Increase in number of completed ages and stages checks at some centres
- Improved relationships with a number of other organisations and services

Case Study - Patricia Smith Playgroup

- Established as part of the Breaking Cycles, Building Futures Shepparton project
- Located in a public housing estate
- Playgroup facilitator employed
- Open Maternal and Child Health session operated same time as playgroup and from same venue
- Free to attend, with morning tea included
- Outreach immunisation session introduced after 12 months
- Book borrowing available
- Regular communication between the Playgroup Facilitator, Maternal and Child Health nurse and Kindergarten Teacher
- Guest speakers/visitors attending the playgroup



Patricia Smith Playgroup - Outcomes

- Vulnerable families accessing the playgroup
- Parenting skills improved through role modelling
- Improved kinder enrolment
- Increase in number of completed ages and stages checks and increased use of MCH service
- Increase in number of completed immunisations
- Parents more inclined to participate in other community events
- Education aspect incorporated into the playgroup through guest speakers/visitors
- Better communication and referrals between the Playgroup Facilitator, MCH nurse, Occasional Care Co-ordinator and Kindergarten Teacher

Case Study - St Georges Rd Primary School Iraqi Playgroup

- Initially set up as a 'combined' playgroup - for both Iraqi and English speaking families
- Two Playgroup Facilitators employed - one Iraqi and one Anglo-Saxon (school's OSHC co-ordinator)
- Iraqi Facilitator personally invited a number of Iraqi families to attend the playgroup
- Transport provided
- Free to attend with morning tea included
- Several issues with children's behaviour and parent's understanding about 'what is a playgroup'
- Guest speakers/visitors attending the playgroup

St Georges Rd Primary School

Iraqi Playgroup - Outcomes

- Combined playgroup did not work so 2 playgroups operating from the school - Iraqi specific and 'general'
- Excellent attendance - up to 20 Iraqi children and their parents attending
- Parents interacting with their children during playgroup and participating in some activities with them
- Children responding to structured play and activities
- Improved kinder enrolment and transition
- Role modelling play activities and ideas
- Improved social skills of children
- Attendance decreased when Iraqi facilitator left and transport ceased

What worked for us

- Finding a Playgroup Facilitator with the right skills
- Building the facilitator role into another position (eg. Welfare Officer position)
- Value for effort or incentives to attend
- Morning sessions
- Free to attend with morning tea
- Transport - if it can be sustained
- Working with organisations that have the capacity or are ready to take on a playgroup
- Providing support to Playgroup Facilitators and organisations responsible for the playgroup
- Extensive publicity - promoting playgroups through all media avenues and personally inviting some families



Greater Shepparton Playgroup Network

- Established 2004 with membership from Best Start playgroups
- Membership expanded in 2006 to include Playgroup Facilitators and Leaders from private or non-Best Start playgroups
- Meets quarterly and facilitated by Family & Children's Services representative
- Opportunity for networking, sharing ideas and working through common issues
- Collaborative planning for promotion of playgroups
- Development of annual training calendar

Playgroups and the MEYP

Playgroups have been identified as a priority area for focus in the MEYP, building on the work of Best Start

- Submission due 31st March
- Activities already under way include:
 - o Multicultural playgroup
 - o Playgroup for partners of newly arrived medical professionals
 - o Local training sessions with Playgroup Victoria
 - o Playgroup brochure
- Other possible action areas include:
 - o Mobile playgroup resource
 - o Rotating playgroup for rural primary schools
 - o Schedule for Toddler Storytime at playgroups
 - o Schedule for guest speakers/visitors at playgroups
 - o Book swap boxes at playgroups
 - o Two parent support groups

Partnerships

- Goulburn Valley Health
- Primary schools
- Kindergartens
- Maternal and Child Health service
- GV Regional Library
- Childcare Centres
- Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District
- Council's Health Department
- Cutting Edge Youth Service
- South Shepparton Community House
- Brotherhood of St Lawrence
- Goulburn Valley Community Health Service
- Burri Extended Care and Family Services
- Playgroup Victoria

