



SUPPORTING COMMUNITY PLAYGROUPS

A Resource for Local Government



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About this resource

What is the purpose of this resource and who is it for?

Local governments have been supporting community playgroups since they commenced in the 1960s. Community playgroups are by their nature place-based and community driven by local families. Often a key factor in their ongoing existence is the partnership they have with their local government.

However, for a variety of reasons, the level of support and engagement can be substantially different from one local authority to another.

Despite these variations, community playgroups are situated across the spectrum of local government areas. In addition, there are an increasing number of supported playgroup models with a focus on vulnerable and isolated families in communities, which can sometimes undermine the local community playgroups if they are established in competition with, rather than to complement, community playgroups.

Irrespective of local government resources and/or priorities, local governments are closely connected with the health of their local playgroup sector. They know their local communities, understand population trends, infrastructure issues and have the strongest interest in building social capital and community capacity. Local governments are also best placed to advise on venue availability,

whether council-owned or not.

This resource aims to provide information and strategies to local governments to assist them in supporting local families through community playgroups. It was initially developed in 2011 in partnership with the WA Local Government Association (WALGA) and in consultation with Western Australian local governments. It was then launched at a local government forum. This is the third edition.

The resource is designed to be used by local government professionals in their planning and community development. It outlines the steps a local government can take to encourage and support a vibrant community playgroup sector.

This resource consists of a series of information sheets:

- About community playgroups
- About Playgroup WA
- The value of community playgroups to families and the broader community
- How community playgroups operate
- Key priorities and factors to be considered

About Playgroups

What is a Playgroup?

A playgroup is a group of parents, caregivers and extended family who come together with their babies and young children to learn together through play. Playgroups vary, ranging from one session a week with 3 or more families, to multiple sessions over the week with over 200 families. Each session is about 2 hours long.

How are Playgroups different?

It is important to note that playgroups are different to childcare and kindergarten programs. At playgroup, parents and caregivers attend with their children and retain responsibility for supervising their children. Playgroups are not subject to any specific government legislation, quality frameworks or workforce standards.

What happens at Playgroup?

- First and foremost PLAY!
- Free play and planned activities
- Indoor and outdoor play
- Arts and craft
- Music and movement
- Story time and nursery rhymes
- Conversation and support
- Learning together through play
- Morning tea

Where do Playgroups happen?

Playgroups are a thriving part of many communities across the State and meet in a variety of venues depending on the needs of the group and the availability of suitable premises. Often they will be in or close to other community services like community centres, schools, healthcare centres and libraries.





Who is Playgroup WA

Playgroup WA is the peak body for playgroups in Western Australia and has been establishing and supporting playgroups throughout Western Australia since 1972.

It is a membership-based not-for-profit community organisation, connecting thousands of families with children aged between 0 and 5 years of age. We have hundreds of registered playgroups running in local communities across Western Australia.

In addition to family memberships, we offer associate and professional playgroup memberships.

We have a substantial social media following and e-newsletter subscriber database.

Playgroup WA has a main office in the Perth metropolitan area and a regional office in the South-West. We have a place-based approach with Development Officers assigned to local government areas across Western Australia, including regional and rural areas.

Support is provided to playgroups ranging from community based and parent-led groups, through to supported or facilitated playgroups.

How does Playgroup WA support community playgroups?

Playgroup WA:

- Provides advice and resources on how to run a playgroup
- Provides an information service to the community on the location of member playgroups across the state
- Offers ongoing and timely support and advice to playgroups through a free call 'hotline' number and email
- Advocates on behalf of playgroups where necessary
- Publishes information and articles on a range of topics relevant to families with young children through a range of digital platforms, including activities that parents can do at home to encourage positive home learning environments
- Issues a monthly eNewsletter with up-to-date information on Playgroup WA and the activities of member playgroups across the state, as well as information on community events and resources at a local level
- Maintains a website where people can search for their nearest playgroup, as well as play ideas, member benefits and the Playgroup WA Resource Kit.



How do Playgroups support children and families?

Whilst it is true children can play anywhere, playgroup provides an added benefit of playing with other children and practicing important social skills.

Importantly, playgroup also provides the opportunity where parents and children can play together, which is critical to children's healthy development. By creating a space where parents, grandparents and other caregivers have the opportunity to spend time with their children, playgroups can enhance relationships through play.

In a nutshell, community playgroups support children by:

- Providing safe and nurturing environments where children can play and learn
- Enhancing healthy early brain development through play
- Providing opportunities for children to create, invent, reason and problem solve
- Provide opportunities to build attachment between adults and children as they play together, and share time and experiences
- Help children to learn social skills as they negotiate with peers, resolve conflict, take turns, share and make friends
- Help children to build resilience, cope with new situations, manage stress and adapt to change.

In a nutshell, community playgroups support families by:

- Providing a community-based space where families can create their own locally-based friends and social networks
- Providing a place where parents and caregivers can support each other through sharing ideas, parenting experiences, concerns and information
- Building family capacity through peer support
- Providing a place where families can build long-term friendships as their children grow and transition to school
- Offering affordable and regular opportunities for families to enjoy a shared outing
- Providing a cost-effective focal point for engaging families with other community services.

How do Playgroups support communities?

Community playgroups are an important part of the fabric of a vibrant community. Playgroups assist the development of social capital by promoting supportive relationships within and between families. Being predominantly run by parents, they also offer opportunities for active citizenship through an emphasis on volunteering and peer support.

Community playgroups are particularly useful in areas of new development and population increase as they offer a positive, cost-effective and simple way to build community connection and engagement.

Playgroups support the development of human capital by promoting the healthy development of children prior to school age, as demonstrated by the fact that areas in Perth with high playgroup participation also have higher Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) results.

Research from the Telethon Kids Institute found that children who attend playgroup are half as likely to have developmental vulnerabilities when they start primary school. This was across all developmental domains, in particular their Language and Cognitive Skills and Communication and General Knowledge (Gregory, T et al, 2016).

For more information on the AEDC, visit www.aedc.gov.au.

In a nutshell, community playgroups:

- Encourage a sense of belonging, identity and social inclusion within communities
- Build enduring social groups through relationships based on a common purpose
- Promote shared interests and purpose
- Promote social competence for children and families
- Build community resilience and sustainability
- Contribute to creating child friendly communities where children and families are valued
- Increase awareness and access to information about the community
- Provide a 'soft entry point' to introduce services to families with young children.

Did you know community playgroups are mostly run by volunteer parents?

Generally, playgroups have a committee or an organising group who will collect members' fees, keep records, fundraise, manage finances, arrange venues, and liaise with the playgroup members.

This makes playgroups a great place to develop skilled volunteers and build capacity in communities.

In the long-term, community playgroups encourage civic participation and build the social capital of communities.

Gregory, T., Harman—Smith, Y., Sincovich, A., Wilson, A., & Brinkman, >. (2016). It takes a village to raise a child: The influence and impact of playgroups across Australia. Telethon Kids Institute, south Australia. ISBN 978-0-9876002-4-0.



How can Local Government support Community Playgroups?

Community playgroups are a sustainable community resource requiring little to no financial support; they are self-funding and self-managed. With just a little help they can be an even more effective support to local families and children.

Where to start

Ask yourselves some key questions:

- What are your council and community aspirations for young children and their families?
- How do playgroups fit into your Integrated Planning and Strategic Community Plan?
- How does your community recognise the support role community playgroups play in developing positive school readiness outcomes?
- How are you nurturing active citizenship within your community?
- Does your community have the physical and social capital to support children's development?
- Are positive connections being maintained between local agencies and services working with families and young children?
- Is there an Early Years Network in your region and does it have local government representation?
- Do you have a designated contact person for community playgroups?

What to do next

Step 1: Get to know your community playgroup sector

- How many community playgroups are operating in your local government area?
- How many families are members of local community playgroups?

- How many children attend and what are their ages?
- What venues and facilities are they using?
- Are they incorporated?

Step 2: Consult with community playgroups

- What support would assist them?
- Do they have room for growth or are they struggling to maintain numbers?
- Would there be advantages in amalgamating smaller playgroups in terms of resources, support and sustainability?
- What challenges have they experienced in establishing and maintaining the playgroup?

Step 3: Review planning processes, policies and procedures

- How do your policies encourage playgroups to establish and flourish?
- Is the need for community playgroup venues considered in the planning of new residential developments?
- Do venue hiring systems, leasing arrangements and fee schedules adequately recognise the benefits playgroups bring to the community, especially in relation to encouraging new groups to form?
- Are community playgroup committees invited to annual volunteer celebrations?
- Are community playgroup committees included in capacity building workshops and activities for local clubs and community groups?
- Do your community playgroups know they may be eligible for community funding and the types of funding available?

How Playgroup WA can support Local Governments

- Provide up to date information on playgroup availability and contact details for member playgroups across WA
- Advise on the development of facilities
- Mediate issues between playgroups and local government
- Provide information to support funding applications regarding playgroups
- Auspice local government grants to unincorporated member playgroups
- Provide advice on the development of playgroup programs that best fit community needs
- Provide data on local community playgroup participation rates for member playgroups
- Provide cross referenced data on AEDC results and local playgroup participation rates for member playgroups
- Assist new playgroups to establish by assisting them to source a venue if needed and advising on playgroup activities and playgroup session planning.



Playgroups need places to play

The ability of playgroups to establish and provide quality activities is highly dependent on access to venues. However, Community Playgroups can be flexible and often 'make do' with the facilities that are available.

Playgroups operate in a wide range of different types of venues. These include family homes, church halls, schools, community centres, and local government facilities. Some community playgroups have a dedicated building provided by their local government or developed through a partnership with the playgroup. Dedicated facilities designed for playgroup use encourage larger, incorporated and more sustainable playgroups.

When considering whether a facility is suitable for the use of a playgroup there are several things to keep in mind. Playgroup facilities are not required to meet any legislative requirements or standards. The facility must be fit for use for community purposes as required by any community group.

Some local governments may choose to work with their playgroups to provide additional improvements to the venue with council resources or through external funding.

However, many playgroups have the capacity to mobilise their community to carry out maintenance and improvements to facilities. Many are also successful in applying for funding to upgrade facilities through a joint application with their local government.

Local governments may find some benefit in clarifying with playgroups the types of improvements they are allowed to make under a lease agreement and when it is necessary to contact their local government if planning redevelopment work.

It can also be beneficial to clarify the hiring arrangements and lease agreement to ensure playgroups understand their rights and obligations, for example, management of maintenance needs, cleaning responsibilities and rules on subletting.

What makes a great playgroup venue?

If playgroups were able to give a wish list, it would look something like this:

- Inside and outside facilities
- A safe environment both inside and outside
- A light and airy space
- Toilets inside the facility with a change room/area for babies
- Toilets need to cater for children as well as adults
- Kitchen facilities that can be blocked off from the play area and accessible from all play areas/rooms
- Secure storage space for toys and equipment (e.g. small chairs and tables, bikes, gym equipment, etc.)
- Fencing around outdoor areas
- Sand pits/digging areas should have covers
- Shaded outside areas
- Play equipment outdoors (play areas would ideally be designed to optimise opportunities for natural play, discovery and quiet play)
- Adequate parking facilities with pedestrian access for parents/caregivers with young children and strollers
- Space for strollers outside the play space.



Venue issues experienced by Playgroups

Access to appropriate and affordable venues can present a range of challenges to families wishing to establish a playgroup and for the sustainability of established community playgroups. It is clear to Playgroup WA (supported by research in Victoria) that playgroup participation is price sensitive. Alignment between community outcome objectives and facilities management policy and practice is essential to ensure local government objectives are being met.

Whilst we know local governments support community engagement, there are still times when they can find themselves under pressure to implement new and expensive services. For example, introducing professionally facilitated playgroups because facility management policies have resulted in the closure of volunteer-run community playgroups. A quality professionally run playgroup or other community play activity can easily cost a local government more than \$25,000 per year, whilst new playgroups find it hard to form due to policies, such as \$500 key bonds and expensive weekly hire. We understand that facility management policies are becoming more efficient and commercial, however, it is not efficient or commercial to have increasing cost of services in other parts of council being the result of efficient facilities management.

Availability of venues varies significantly from area to area, with some regional and outer Perth metropolitan areas often having fewer community options. Many inner-city venues also have waiting lists for existing playgroups due to space.

Community playgroups that hire their venues have a range of fee circumstances from free hire to upwards of \$25 per hour. These fees are typically based on the local government assessment of the perceived importance of playgroups and available resources. The capacity of community playgroups to afford hourly rates depends on the number of families attending the playgroup and on the fee schedules of facility owners. For example, an hourly rate based on square metres may be affordable for a group with 20-30 families but out of reach for a group of 3-4 families. Sudden rental increases, particularly if they are substantial, can force the closure of community playgroups.

Below is a list of issues to consider:

- Multi-use facilities where playgroups share the facility with a range of other user groups do offer healthy opportunities for integrated service delivery and referral pathways, but they also have challenges, particularly if the different group activities are not compatible.
- Lack of adequate storage can limit the range of activities and play opportunities for families and requires families to store equipment and resources in their own homes.
- Lack of clarity around user responsibility for building improvements and upkeep of shaded areas, fencing and outdoor equipment.
- New playgroups are typically smaller, have less capacity to pay and are only in the formation stage in relation to their trust and financial procedures. Policies such as expensive bonds and immediate weekly hire fees do not encourage new groups to form, even if the cost can be offset by applications for community grants (which can be equally daunting for people embarking on their first community activity).



Insurance matters

When leasing facilities to community playgroups it is important for local governments to have a full understanding of insurance as it relates to community groups.

- In the main, community playgroups are members of Playgroup WA and as such will have insurance cover for liabilities on playgroup related assets, public liability and accident cover for participants. However, there are community-based playgroups who are not members whose insurance cover will require investigation.
- In general, the Local Government Authority will be liable for council owned assets. However, in some instances, community playgroups also enter into lease agreements whereby the playgroup has responsibility for maintenance and insurance of the building and outdoor areas.
- Whilst most community playgroups will have some understanding of how they will approach insurance, it is important to be aware that some will have a limited understanding of the implications of insurance.
- Community playgroups should be required to demonstrate they have insurance in place to cover liability on all playgroup related assets and participants.
- A copy of the Certificate of Currency can easily establish this.
- At community playgroups parents/carers are fully responsible for the safety and discipline of their own children and/or those in their care.
- Community groups may decide to become incorporated in order to be recognised as legally separate from the members. This means the playgroup, separate to the members, can:

- continue even if the members change
- buy and sell property
- enter into legal contracts
- sue and be sued

All Playgroup WA playgroups are provided with a certificate of currency should a local government require a community playgroup to demonstrate their insurance cover with Playgroup WA.

Playgroups are required to renew their membership annually with a one-off payment. To ensure there is continuity of insurance this must be paid by the end of March each year.

Some community playgroups take out additional insurance to increase coverage for assets or to support casual hire capacity that some have through their lease arrangements.

How much does it cost to be a Playgroup WA member?

Membership fees are reviewed annually and set at the Annual General Meeting. We aim to keep fees low and affordable.

The most current fees can be found on our website.



Financial matters

Community playgroups are mostly self-funding. Each group will have their own membership fee to cover their facility and equipment costs and the annual Playgroup WA membership, if applicable. With the exception of Playgroup WA membership fees, community playgroups set their own schedule for other fee payments which may be annually, on a term-by-term basis, or as instalments.

Each community playgroup decides what is right for their group and then establishes procedures for collection and accounting. Playgroups, in particular incorporated groups, will generally hold bank accounts and delegate one person as Treasurer.

Many community playgroups will also generate income through fundraising events and/or funding applications, often through their local government community grants.

What happens when a playgroup dissolves?

If incorporated, a playgroup must follow the Incorporations Act. On winding up the playgroup, all surplus property (cash assets, equipment and any physical property) must be distributed to another association incorporated in Western Australia, or for charitable purposes. They must also prepare and lodge with the Commissioner a plan for the distribution of the surplus property. Surplus property cannot be distributed to members or former members of the association.

Unincorporated playgroups are not compelled to meet the above requirements. However, Playgroup WA members are provided with advice on how to close down a playgroup in an appropriate manner.

Where a playgroup requires assistance to dispose of equipment, Playgroup WA will advertise the equipment on behalf of the playgroup to other member playgroups.

If there are individual families wishing to find another playgroup, they can contact Playgroup WA for their nearest community playgroup.

Files on attendance that may be required for insurance purposes at a future date can be scanned and stored electronically.

If you require contact details for a playgroup, Playgroup WA can provide the most up-to-date contact person for all member playgroups.

Where can Community Playgroups go for funding?

- Lotterywest
- Royalty for Regions
- Early Years Department for Communities
- Sponsorship and donations*

*Note: Playgroup WA is a deductible gift recipient (DGR) and businesses or organisations wishing to make a tax deductible donation to a local playgroup can do so through Playgroup WA.





How to contact Playgroup WA

Office Hours: Monday to Friday 9am to 4.30pm

Tel: 08 9228 8088 or 1800 171 882

Email: hotline@playgroupwa.com.au

Web: playgroupwa.com.au

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