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Supporting children with needs in playgroups

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Different playgroups

Community Playgroups

- Initiated and self-managed by parents
- Often with assistance or guidelines from State organisations
- Aim to include families and provide opportunities for children to learn and develop through play
(FaHCSIA, 2011)

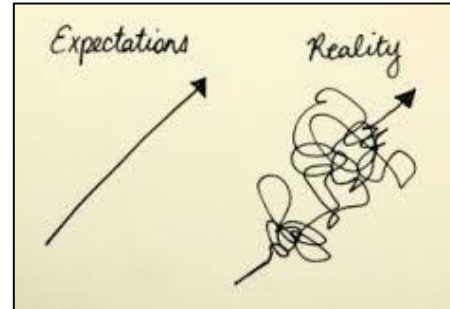
Supported playgroups

- Facilitated by a paid facilitator – usually an early childhood educator
- Funded by State initiatives/organisations
- Target particular groups of children/families
- Aim to support families with particular needs or vulnerabilities
(Jackson, 2011)

Target for our playgroup

- Children with diagnosed, or undiagnosed disability
- Allows for a 'soft entry' point
- Some families find local community playgroups challenging at this stage
- Some families very early in the diagnosis process

A family's ability to cope with diagnosis of a disability and their resilience is increased with information and accessibility to appropriate resources (Dunst, Trivette and Hamby, 2007; Schoon 2006)



Variation in community playgroups

- Potential lack of necessary support in community playgroups
- Potential lack of awareness about disability, or lack of understanding of its impacts
- No trained facilitator
- Significant variation in experience, expectations, what is wanted from playgroup

How to make a community playgroup more inclusive

- Encourage people to share about what they want from playgroup
 - What could you ask?
 - How could you get this information?
- Encourage and model inclusive language and attitudes
- Enlist the assistance of someone who can support the inclusion if needed

Why set up a supported playgroup?

- Supported playgroups target a particular group – families that may be vulnerable, or facing stressful life circumstances
- Supported playgroups thus offer an option for families who may not be able to effectively engage with, feel included in, and benefit from parent-led community playgroups (Berthelsen et al., 2012; Warr et al., 2013; Mulcahy et al., 2010).

So how is a supported playgroup helping inclusion?

- Stepping stone
- Confidence building
- Introduction to possibilities for both parents and children.

“The beginning of my journey was horrible with lots of tears and self esteem kicking, it grew into laughs, a brand new beautiful preschool, transitioning onto an early intervention preschool, friendships a sense of greater belonging and less blame (and only the big appointments needing someone to come with me to advocate for my loss of words.) There is no way on this Earth that I could have gotten by without the support I have received.”



A typical session

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 9.30 am | • Arrival / Indoor play with basic cause/effect toys & functional play |
| 9.45 am | • Parents to go next door for R & R, speakers, etc. |
| 10.00 am | • Morning tea |
| 10.15 am | • Parachute or other physical activity |
| 10.30 am | • Circle time – focus on sitting, turn taking, being part of a group |
| 10.40 am | • Sensory box |
| 10.50 am | • Painting or play dough |
| 11.10 am | • Gross motor play |
| 11.30 am | • Playgroup finishes |

Objectives – parents/family

- Increase parent/carer self esteem and satisfaction with their parenting skills
- Knowledge base of professionals and parents expanded
- Establish regular contact with appropriate health and community services
- Assist families to develop supportive networks to assist them in the care of their children.
- Families feel less isolated and more connected to their local community



What does it offer parents?

- To meet other families who may share similar experiences and develop a network of support within their community to empower them to be self determining (Barnett, Clements, Kaplan-Estrin and Fialka, 2003)
- To introduce new families to range of services (Kennedy et al, 2009)

'The group has enabled us to value ourselves as parents and trust our instincts with our children and parenting skills' (Melita - parent)

Great to be in touch with families going through similar experiences, and hear their stories, and get some ideas on problems you are having with your own child' (Emma – parent)

'More awareness of what is available in the community – through both the playgroup staff and other parents, allows us to make more informed choices about what is going to be useful to us' (Debbie - parent)

Families' Experience

"The educators have become part of our family and support circle. We love the support, kindness and love they have shown our child and our family"

"My child is interacting with other children, and I get a break and am able to interact with other parents which has been a lifesaver. I highly recommend it to anyone"

"Being part of the playgroup has helped me grow as a person – they have taught me to embrace the child we have and help us through the whole diagnosis process. The staff will be part of our family forever"

"Sometimes it is like not being able to swim being thrown in the ocean alone - it's lonely and scary. Being supported is like learning how to swim! Initially you hold on, then you let go a little, and before you know it, you are swimming"

"Since starting playgroup, my not so social little girl (with ASD) is interacting more not only with children, but also with adults. You meet parents in a similar situation as you, which is often difficult"

"I'm so grateful that you showed me how I could do what I needed to do when I really didn't know that I could do it, and you waited around helping me when I couldn't"



How could you set up a supported playgroup in your area?

- Consider:
 - Location
 - Expertise in your community
 - Possible funding sources
 - Resources
 - Sustainability
 - Accessing families

Objectives - children

- Increase children's access to other children's services
- Improve parent-child interaction and relationships
- Provide developmentally appropriate experiences and individually suitable opportunities for children

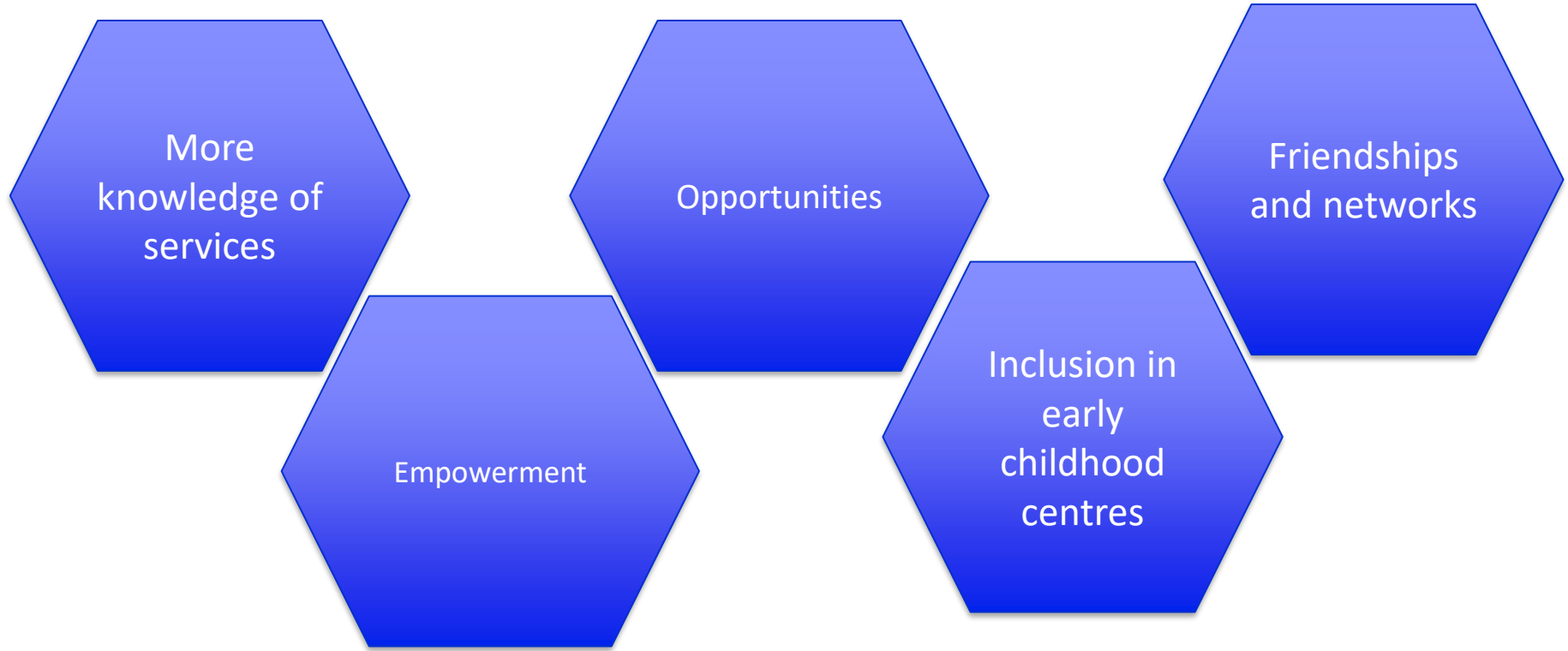


Expected outcomes

- To meet other families who may share similar experiences and develop a network of support within their community to empower them to be self determining (Barnett, Clements, Kaplan-Estrin and Fialka, 2003)
- Provide a safe environment for children to explore, play, learn and grow (Govt of South Australia, 2005; Muir 2008)
- To introduce new families to range of services (Kennedy et al, 2009)



Where can this lead?



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