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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)

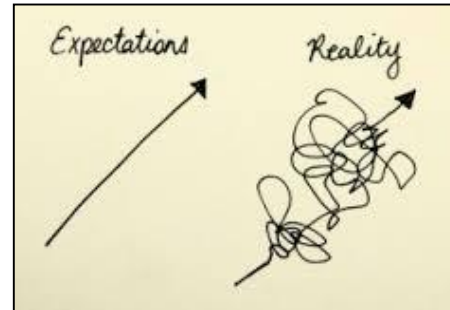
## Supported playgroups

- 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?

More  
knowledge of  
services

Opportunities

Friendships  
and networks

Empowerment

Inclusion in  
early  
childhood  
centres

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