



Early Intervention Parenting Project

Improving access to playgroups for all families project

Final report

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Table of contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
1. BACKGROUND	9
2. INTRODUCTION	11
3. METHODS	12
4. CITY OF CASEY	13
4.1 Blind Bight Playgroup	13
4.1.1 Participation	13
4.1.2 Identified need	13
4.1.3 Processes undertaken by the playgroup worker	13
4.1.4 Facilitators	14
4.1.5 Barriers	14
4.1.6 Parent evaluation	14
4.1.7 Worker perspective	16
4.1.8 The Community Centre Coordinator's perspective	16
4.1.9 Learnings	17
4.2 Oakgrove Community Centre, Narre Warren South Playgroup	18
4.2.1 Participation	18
4.2.2 Identified need	18
4.2.3 Processes undertaken by the playgroup worker	18
4.2.4 Facilitators	19
4.2.5 Barriers	20
4.2.6 Parent evaluation	20
4.2.7 Worker perspective	21
4.2.8 The Community Centre Coordinator's perspective	22
4.2.9 Learnings	22
4.3 Cannons Creek Playgroup	23
4.3.1 Participation	23
4.3.2 Identified need	23
4.3.3 Processes undertaken	23
4.3.4 Facilitators	24
4.3.5 Barriers	24
4.3.6 Parent evaluation	24
4.3.7 Worker perspective	25
4.3.8 Learnings	25
4.4 Filipino Playgroup	26
4.4.1 Participation	26
4.4.2 Identified need	26
4.4.3 Processes undertaken	26
4.4.4 Facilitators	27
4.4.5 Barriers	27
4.4.6 Learnings	27

5. CITY OF WYNDHAM	28
5.1 Point Cook Playgroup	28
5.1.1 Participation	28
5.1.2 Identified need	28
5.1.3 Processes undertaken	28
5.1.4 Facilitators	29
5.1.5 Barriers	29
5.1.6 Parent evaluation	29
5.1.7 Worker perspective	31
5.1.8 The school principal's perspective	32
5.1.9 Learnings	32
5.2 Somali Group Playgroup, Hoppers Crossing	33
5.2.1 Participation	33
5.2.2 Identified need	33
5.2.3 Processes undertaken	33
5.2.4 Facilitators	33
5.2.5 Barriers	34
5.2.6 Parent evaluation	34
5.2.7 Worker perspective	35
5.2.8 The Maternal and Child Health Nurse's perspective	36
5.2.9 Learnings	36
5.3 Heathdale Playgroup	37
5.3.1 Participation	37
5.3.2 Identified need	37
5.3.3 Processes undertaken by the worker	37
5.3.4 Facilitators	38
5.3.5 Barriers	38
5.3.6 Parent evaluation	39
5.3.7 Worker perspective	40
5.3.8 Other professionals' views	40
5.3.9 Learnings	41
6. ADDITIONAL REPORT PREPARED BY THE CITY OF CASEY PLAYGROUP PROJECT WORKER	42
6.1 Lack of municipal coordination as a barrier to playgroup participation in Casey	42
6.1.1 Compilation of an accurate and up-to-date database	42
6.1.2 A contact person for residents and playgroups	42
6.1.3 A coordinated approach to training	43
6.1.4 Planning	43
6.1.5 Promotion of playgroups	43
6.1.6 A link between playgroups and council	43
6.2 Playgroup development as a community development tool in Casey	44
6.3 Playgroups, play, and parent education	44

7. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	46
7.1 Barriers to establishing playgroups	46
7.1.1 Venues	46
7.1.2 Transport	46
7.1.3 Cost	46
7.1.4 Cultural issues	47
7.2 Promotion	47
7.3 Quality of playgroups	48
7.3.1 Parent education	48
7.3.2 Groups needing additional support	49
7.3.3 Local coordination	49
7.3.4 Role of Playgrouping Victoria	51
7.4 Sustainability	51
7.4.1 Leadership	52
7.4.2 Links with other services	52
7.5 Establishment of a playgroup working party	53
8. APPENDICES	54
Appendix 1 Literature Review	55
Appendix 2 The Knox Model of Playgroup Provision	64
Appendix 3 Summary of Discussions with Local Service Providers	72
Appendix 4 Focus Group Results	76
Appendix 5 Telephone Interview Survey Results	85
Appendix 6 Parent Interview Schedule	100
Appendix 7 Table of Results of Parent Interviews	108
Appendix 8 Interview Questions for Key Service Providers	114

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The project initially involved research that explored why some local government areas, such as the City of Knox, had higher rates of playgroup participation than those in the Cities of Casey and Wyndham. The research also sought to identify the barriers to accessing playgroups for some families in Casey and Wyndham. These research findings were incorporated into the development of the models that were implemented by the two part-time playgroup workers who were employed in the Cities of Casey and Wyndham as part of this project. The City of Knox Playgroup Field Officer provided a mentoring role to the two workers and, in doing so, was able to share the learnings from the Knox model of playgroup provision.

This is the final report of the *Improving Access for all Families Project*. This report focuses on the evaluation of the project and includes descriptions of each of the playgroups that the workers established or attempted to establish. In the City of Casey five playgroup sessions were established, with approximately 40 participating families at the time of the evaluation in October 2002. In the City of Wyndham a further five playgroup sessions were established, with approximately 45 participating families.

The playgroup workers used a range of strategies to establish and maintain playgroups, including:

- linking with existing community facilities, such as community centres
- involving existing community professionals and services, such as Maternal and Child Health Nurses and Migrant Resource Centres
- identifying suitable venues
- promoting playgroups through flyers and newsletters
- reducing the cost of playgroups
- encouraging playgroup leadership training
- resourcing and supporting groups, for example by providing parenting education
- establishing a database of local playgroups
- identifying low cost transport options for playgroup participants.

A number of barriers to establishing and maintaining playgroups were identified during the project, including:

- a limited number of suitable venues
- poor understanding of the benefits of playgroups by both parents and professionals
- lack of local promotion of playgroups
- limited capacity of existing children's services staff to resource and support playgroups
- lack of centralised waiting lists and central contact person
- lack of up-to-date information on existing playgroups, making future planning difficult
- difficulty recruiting playgroup leaders, particularly amongst high need families
- high cost of playgroup membership fees and the requirement to pay for a whole term
- inadequate availability of low cost transport when venues were not easily accessible by public transport
- sustainability of playgroups which was often related to difficulties in recruiting playgroup leaders.

As a result of this project, the following recommendations were developed:

1. When buildings housing community services are constructed or renovated, consideration should be given to providing space for playgroups to operate.
2. In new housing estates, site offices or similar buildings could be modified for use as community centres and used to accommodate playgroups.
3. Playgroups should be located in venues which have good public transport access, such as shopping or other community centres. If this is not possible, low cost community transport should be made available to playgroup participants if required.
- 4a. Councils, and other organisations running playgroups, should be aware that cost is a barrier for some families and should work towards reducing fees.
- 4b. Councils, and other organisations running playgroups, should consider offering some groups as “drop in” playgroups, where participants pay a small fee for each session they attend, rather than term fees.
5. Further work needs to be done to determine whether the Australian model of playgroup is suitable for parents from other cultures. An alternative may be to offer parent education to existing cultural groups within communities.
6. A statewide, or possibly national, campaign promoting the benefits of playgroups and the "continuum of service participation" from first time parent groups to playgroups to preschool to school is required. This campaign needs to reach both service providers and parents.
7. Local promotion of playgroups is also required through:
 - service providers recommending playgroups to parents
 - provision of information about playgroups to parents by Council Community Services Officers
 - local advertising, for example, in the local paper and on community notice boards.
8. One of the possible roles of a playgroup coordinator could be to educate parents about the importance of play, how they can interact with their children through play and to suggest playgroup activities.
9. One of the possible roles of a playgroup coordinator could be to deliver or facilitate formal parenting education and coordinate guest speakers, as requested by the playgroup members.
10. All playgroups need on-going support in parent education and leadership training. Playgroups with high need families may need more intensive support, such as attendance at weekly sessions.
11. A local coordinator should be employed in each metropolitan local government. In rural areas local coordinators could be employed over several local government areas. The main role of the local coordinator would be to maintain a database of playgroups, match families to playgroups, examine local need, provide support and education to playgroup members, and liaise between Playgrouping Victoria and local playgroups.

12. The main role of Playgrouping Victoria should be to train and support local playgroup coordinators, and disseminate up-to-date information and educational materials to those coordinators.
13. Parents who are interested in becoming playgroup leaders should be offered leadership training, either through Playgrouping Victoria, or locally if they have difficulty accessing these courses.
14. One of the roles of the playgroup coordinator is to provide ongoing support to playgroup leaders, to ensure that playgroups offer a quality service to families.
15. Local playgroup coordinators should establish and maintain links with service providers in the community.
16. The Maternal and Child Health Service should promote playgroups to their clients. This should include staff asking all parents if they currently participate in a first time parents' group or playgroup. If parents are not linked to a group and would like to participate, the Maternal and Child Health Service should ensure they are directed to a suitable group.
17. The Commonwealth Department of Family and Children's Services should take responsibility to establish and resource a statewide working group to further the recommendations made in this report.

1. BACKGROUND

Children and parents benefit from attending playgroups. For children the benefits relate to the contribution that play makes to child development, for parents playgroups offer social support. Social support as an intervention reduces social isolation. Lack of social support has been associated with reduced quality of parenting, maternal depression and child abuse and neglect (see Appendix 1: *Improving Access to Playgroups for All Families: Literature Review, July 2001*).

During 2000, the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) together with Playgrouping Victoria recognised that the rate of playgroup participation in different local government areas varied significantly. A research idea emerged to examine why some local government areas were more successful in encouraging families to participate in playgroups than others. It was noted that the City of Knox had developed a model of playgroup provision and support, and had the highest rate of playgroup participation (35% of 0-4 year olds) compared to all other local government areas in Melbourne.

A research collaboration was formed to apply for project funding from the Commonwealth Government's Early Intervention Parenting Fund. The collaboration included The Centre for Community Child Health, Playgrouping Victoria, The City of Knox, The City of Casey and the City of Wyndham.

The City of Knox was enthusiastic about being involved in the project because, while their staff believed that their model was successful, they had never had the opportunity to evaluate the model and to share their learnings (see Appendix 2: *The Knox Model*). The Knox Model included the employment of a full time Playgroup Field Officer. This worker, Anne Fortune, had been employed for many years and had developed a model primarily of parent run playgroups that were supported, trained, empowered and linked to their local communities.

The City of Casey, located on the south-eastern fringe of Melbourne, was the fastest growing municipality in Victoria. Playgroup participation was low (around 12% of 0-4 year olds). Moreover with the rapid growth of new housing in this municipality, many young families were moving there and becoming socially and physically isolated. The Children's Services department of the Council was under continual pressure to meet the ever growing demand for three and four year old pre-school services. Council staff believed that if more children could attend quality playgroups there might be less demand for three year old pre-school programs.

The City of Wyndham already employed a part-time parent resource worker who had limited capacity to support playgroups. This municipality was also located on the Melbourne fringe, but on the western edge. The City of Wyndham was also struggling to meet the needs of a rapidly growing area. The staff recognised that there were some pockets of relative disadvantage that required additional consideration in order to provide appropriate playgroups to meet the needs of resident families.

Playgrouping Victoria was able to provide the project with their bigger picture perspective of playgroup provision across the state.

After bringing together the research collaborators, it was agreed that the project would involve initially reviewing the existing playgroup provision in each of the three municipalities. A number of research tasks were to be undertaken and these included:

- a literature review
- discussions with local service providers (see Appendix 3: *Summary of discussions with service providers*)
- focus groups with parents participating in existing playgroups in the Cities of Casey, Knox and Wyndham (see Appendix 4: *Second progress report: Improving Access to Playgroups for all Families: Results from the focus groups*)
- interviews with service providers
- a telephone survey of over 500 parents of young children in the Cities of Casey, Knox and Wyndham, including those who did and didn't use local playgroups (see Appendix 5: *Summary Report Telephone Interview Survey*)
- development of a model of playgroup provision
- piloting of the model in the Cities of Casey and Wyndham
- evaluation of the model.

The project design included employment of a part-time playgroup worker in the City of Casey and one in the City of Wyndham for a period of eight months. The workers were required to take up the research findings, explore barriers to accessing local playgroups and then attempt to establish new playgroups for local families who would not otherwise have been able to access playgroups. The workers were to be provided mentor support by Anne Fortune, City of Knox, to help with the implementation of some of the elements of the Knox model in the Cities of Casey and Wyndham.

The evaluation of the project was undertaken by the two part-time workers and CCCH staff and included:

- collection of socio-demographic data from the playgroup participants
- documentation of the processes undertaken by the two workers
- interviews with parents who attended the playgroups
- interviews with the playgroup workers
- interviews with other local service providers.

The results of the earlier research findings from this project were reported in a series of documents and these have been referred to in the appendices noted above. This report is the final report and focuses on the evaluation of the implementation phase of the project. It includes recommendations developed during the project.

2. INTRODUCTION

The project originally aimed to increase participation in playgroups by high need families. Preliminary work identified the existence of barriers to accessing playgroups for families from a range of socio-economic groups. Therefore the aim of the project shifted slightly to include all families. It is anticipated that the model developed during this project would facilitate playgroup access to all families, including those with additional needs.

This report focuses on the evaluation of the project and outlines the processes undertaken by the two playgroup workers employed to work on the project from February to October 2002. The report is divided into five chapters. Chapter Two briefly outlines the methods used in consulting the key stakeholders. Chapter Three describes attempts to establish four new playgroups in the City of Casey. For each playgroup the following information is provided:

- the number of weekly sessions and the number of participating families
- the need identified within the local area for playgroups
- the processes undertaken by the playgroup project worker to establish and maintain the playgroup
- the factors that facilitated and acted as barriers to establish and sustain the playgroup
- socio-demographic information about parents who participated in the playgroup, as well as their views of the group
- the playgroup worker's recommendations for ensuring the sustainability of the playgroup
- the views of key professionals in the community who had been involved in the project
- overall learnings from the experience.

Chapter Four is similar in structure to Chapter Three but focuses on the establishment of three playgroups in the City of Wyndham.

Chapter Five provides additional documentation of the processes undertaken by the City of Casey playgroup project worker. These processes do not relate to the establishment of new groups but to the systematic and procedural issues that had become barriers to accessing playgroups. These issues were more problematic in the City of Casey because, prior to this project, there had been no staff member responsible for supporting or resourcing playgroups in the municipality. In the City of Wyndham there was a part-time family resource worker with some capacity to support playgroups.

A summary of the key points emerging from the project and recommendations for future practice can be found in Chapter Six.

3. METHODS

An interview schedule was used to interview parents attending playgroups (see Appendix 6). Interviews took place in September 2002. CCCH staff members visited the playgroups and interviewed parents attending that day. A total of 50 parents were interviewed. The data resulting from the interviews is tabulated in Appendix 7.

Six key service providers who had been involved in the project were interviewed by CCCH staff in November 2002 to obtain their views of playgroups, particularly the need for community support and sustainability of the playgroups (see Appendix 8 for the interview questions).

The playgroup workers' views described in this report were taken from reports submitted by them to the CCCH project officer. The information was summarised and then verified by the playgroup workers before presentation in this report.

The information on numbers of sessions and numbers of parents attending the playgroups was collected in October 2002.

4. CITY OF CASEY

4.1 Blind Bight Playgroup

4.1.1 Participation

At project commencement (February 2002) four families were meeting each week at one session. By October 2002 approximately twenty families were meeting over two sessions per week. Almost half of the parents attended both sessions each week.

4.1.2 Identified need

The City of Casey Community Development staff had already recognised that Blind Bight Community Centre was providing one weekly playgroup and that weekly attendance was low. Council staff knew that there was a growing number of young families living in the area and that many of them were on low incomes. The staff thought that there was capacity to increase participation in the existing playgroup and to better utilise the well-equipped community centre.

4.1.3 Processes undertaken by the playgroup worker

1. The playgroup worker examined Maternal and Child Health birth notification data and identified that there were many families with young children living in the area and that a new residential estate of a further 70 homes was about to be developed.
2. The worker spent some time talking with the Blind Bight community centre coordinator highlighting the benefits of playgroups for families and for the viability of the community centre.
3. The worker met with the existing Tuesday playgroup and the Blind Bight centre coordinator to talk about what they thought were the barriers to using the playgroup, and their suggestions for overcoming them.
4. The worker assisted with local promotion including the production of 600 flyers. The existing group hand wrote the flyers and the worker printed them. The flyers were letterboxed and some were posted in shop windows. Many of the existing members started to invite their friends to come to playgroup.
5. The worker negotiated with the community centre coordinator to reduce the weekly fee from \$4 per session to \$2.50 per session making attendance more affordable for some families. The worker and the centre coordinator agreed that the more families attending playgroup, the more opportunities there were to promote other community centre activities to them and potentially make the centre more viable.
6. The worker supported the group to hold an additional session on a Friday morning offering parents an alternative to the Tuesday session (which was held at the same time as the 3 year-old preschool session in the neighbouring town.)
7. The worker and the community centre coordinator spent time supporting the two playgroup leaders by providing them with moral support, excerpts from the Playgrouping Victoria manual and information about play ideas.

4.1.4 Facilitators

1. An identifiable community to promote playgroups to.
2. The availability of a well-equipped community centre.
3. The presence of a community centre coordinator to assist with playgroup operation.
4. An existing playgroup willing to welcome new members.
5. The capacity of the centre to provide an alternative playgroup session.

4.1.5 Barriers

1. The perception that because one playgroup was poorly attended that there was no demand for additional playgroups.
2. Cost, \$4 per session, especially in a low-income area, was too high.
3. Lack of local promotion.
4. A community centre coordinator who was cautious and needed some encouragement to address the barriers, after a history of programs that had been poorly attended and a financial risk for the centre.
5. Lack of leadership training.

4.1.6 Parent evaluation

The data from the parent interviews are tabulated in Appendix 2. Eight parents participated in the interviews. The key points are summarised below.

Socio-demographics

- only one parent was aged 20 or younger, the rest were more than 25 years old
- all had one or two children. There were a total of 12 children and all, except one, was aged under five years
- five of the parents were born in Australia, two in the United Kingdom and one in Germany. The two who were born overseas had lived in Australia for longer than 10 years. One spoke a language other than English at home
- educational qualifications ranged from completing Years 9-11 to obtaining a university degree
- one was a sole parent and was in casual employment
- of those with partners, six were not in the workforce. Five of their partners were in full-time employment and one was looking for employment. One of the women was in part-time employment and her partner was in full-time employment
- three were Health Care Card holders.

History of playgroup involvement

- three parents had attended the group for more than two terms
- this was their first playgroup for half of the parents
- half were still members of another playgroup
- when asked why they had not joined a playgroup before, one reported that it was because she did not know about them and another said that she was working

- three joined this particular group because it was close to home and another commented that it was the only one in the area. A further three joined because their friends were already members, one was told about it by a Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Nurse and two reported that it was because they liked the facilities

Views of this playgroup

- all the parents attended the playgroup because it provided socialisation and play opportunities for their children. Six also reported that they attended for social opportunities for themselves. One attended because the facilities were good, while another reported that the group allowed her to network for information about the local area. One parent commented that she had nowhere else to go
- almost all attended the group most weeks
- all were very satisfied or satisfied with the playgroup
- reasons for satisfaction included the child enjoying it/being beneficial for the child, good organisation of the group, having input into the group and the people being friendly
- one person commented that they felt the playgroup could be improved by having a carpeted area
- when asked what they had been doing while attending this playgroup, all respondents reported that they had:
 - observed their child playing with other children
 - helped their child to sort out problems with other children
 - started to feel comfortable with most of the other parents at playgroup
 - thought about the way they managed their child's behaviour compared to other parents at playgroup.

Involvement in this and other community groups

- almost all of the parents were involved in some aspect of organising or running the group, although none belonged to a committee for this playgroup
- only one participant had had previous involvement in organising or managing other local community groups
- half had attended a first time parents' group run by MCH Nurses for their first child and all of them still met with parents from this group. Three of these parents were also members of this playgroup. Seven were not living in the Blind Bight area when they attended first time parents' group
- the following reasons were given for not attending first time parents' groups: not knowing about them or being offered them, not feeling comfortable in groups and being in employment
- all the parents said that they would continue to attend this group after funding for the worker ceased.

Other comments made by parents:

"I just think it is a brilliant scheme. Really improved my three year old's behaviour – he plays really well at the playgroup and with the baby at home."

"Well organised, everyone participates, encouraged to share ideas for activities."

"I have found it very rewarding and it's great to meet local mums. They are really friendly and it's a nice atmosphere."

4.1.7 Worker perspective

The worker believes the following:

1. There is a need for ongoing support for the playgroup including parent education, ideas and activities for the group.
2. The community centre coordinator needs a strong working relationship with the two playgroup leaders; eventually one or both of the playgroup leaders should join the community centre committee of management.
3. The two playgroup leaders need some formal communication between themselves and the centre coordinator.
4. The centre coordinator understands the importance of ensuring that the families moving into the new estate, currently under construction, are encouraged to join the playgroup.
5. The community centre coordinator is more positive about the benefits of playgroups to families and the community and is likely to offer alternative sessions, should the need arise.
6. The cost of attending playgroup needs to remain low.
7. There is a need for regular coordinated advertising of playgroups to be linked with the existing centre advertising.
8. The existing playgroup leaders and potential leaders should be encouraged to attend playgroup leadership training.
9. Playgrouping Victoria needs to demonstrate to the group how they can support them.

4.1.8 The Community Centre Coordinator's perspective

The community centre coordinator felt that it was enormously important to support playgroups. The playgroup may be the first contact that a family has with the community centre and this can lead them to using other centre facilities. This project reduced the barriers to playgroup access by reducing the fees, resulting in increased attendance. She believes the sustainability of the playgroups was dependent on parents in the group being able to take on the leadership role. She described how she had seen the confidence and self-esteem of one of the women who had volunteered to be a leader increase over time. She believes that council should employ a playgroup coordinator to support playgroups and offer training.

“It is absolutely crucial for playgroups to be operating in the more isolated areas as they are often the first point of contact new mothers have with other mothers. It is also very good for new families to an area to meet others.”

4.1.9 Learnings

1. Poor attendance at playgroups should not necessarily be equated with a lack of demand. It could reflect a number of barriers to access including:
 - inconvenient session times
(if it clashes with another activity such as 3 year old preschool)
 - high cost
 - lack of promotion
 - lack of support by local service providers.
2. Community centre coordinators need to be informed of the benefits playgroups can bring to parents and children and to the viability for their community centre.
3. Playgroup members need to be encouraged to promote their playgroup to other parents in their community.
4. Playgroup members require ongoing leadership training.
5. Community centres can play an important role in the delivery and coordination of playgroups.

4.2 Oakgrove Community Centre, Narre Warren South Playgroup

4.2.1 Participation

An average of fourteen families per week over two sessions (Tuesday and Thursday) participated in playgroups. The Monday session (for older children 3-5 years) has only recently been able to attract a core group of seven families. The Wednesday session for babies (aged under 18 months) has been unable to maintain a core group of families.

4.2.2 Identified need

The Oakgrove Community Centre is located in a rapidly growing area of Narre Warren South. The community centre was accommodating five morning playgroup sessions and all sessions were full. There were parents on waiting lists and there is continued development of new houses with additional young families moving into the area. The Oakgrove Community Centre is one of the only available venues located in possibly one of the fastest growing residential areas in Australia. Capacity to provide additional playgroup sessions at this centre was needed.

4.2.3 Processes undertaken by the playgroup worker

1. One of the first tasks undertaken by the worker was to establish that there was no central waiting list for parents wanting to join a playgroup at this centre and therefore no means of monitoring demand. There was no established system of directing parents interested in playgroups to other activities or playgroup sessions.
2. The worker then explored other community centre models to establish whether or not the Oakgrove Community Centre could do more to support playgroups operating within the centre.
3. The worker documented the Berwick Neighbourhood Centre model (Berwick is located in the City of Casey) in order to better understand how a community centre can take a more proactive role in supporting playgroups. The worker established the following:
 - the Berwick Neighbourhood House is a community house operating five days per week. It utilises three City of Casey buildings. The House runs nine playgroups in one building, five in another and they provide support to Parkhill Playhouse which runs twelve playgroups per week
 - the Neighbourhood House centre coordinator and the home-based playgroup coordinator act as initial contact points for parents inquiring about playgroups. They provide parents with information about the playgroup program and they play a role in matching people to playgroups wherever possible. For example, they have currently placed three grandparents in the same group and provide a playgroup for 35+ parents
 - the coordinators take enrolments, provide resource materials and provide “hands-on” support to address difficulties within playgroups (such as managing challenging behaviours, being inclusive etc). The coordinators also spend time integrating “shy” families into the groups and ensure that each playgroup session has a parent in one of the following roles: “meeter and greeter”, “activities leader” and “cleaning leader”
 - the playgroup program funds itself and runs at a surplus and this provides sufficient funding to employ the playgroup coordinator.

4. Having a better understanding of how playgroups can be supported in a community centre, the worker spent some time with the Oakgrove centre coordinator to try and encourage her to expand the playgroup program in her centre.
5. It was negotiated with the centre coordinator that the centre would offer initially two lunchtime sessions (Tuesday and Thursday), more recently the Monday and Wednesday sessions were established. The worker suggested to the centre coordinator that if the numbers of parents attending playgroups increased then, as in the Berwick Neighbourhood Centre, there might be sufficient funds to employ a part-time playgroup coordinator.
6. The worker assisted the coordinator with advertising, supplementing the community centre's letterboxed program guide, placing posters in the convenience store, two GP clinics, Maternal and Child Health Centres, preschools and child care centres. Lunchtime sessions were offered and residents were invited to contact the community centre coordinator.
7. Two of the new sessions (Tuesday and Thursday) have been able to attract a core group of approximately seven families. The space for the playgroup to operate from is relatively small with maximum capacity for each playgroup at about eight families. The Monday and Wednesday sessions have been established more recently. The Monday group (for 3-5 year olds) has started to attract a core group of seven families. The Wednesday group (for children aged under 18 months) has not proven successful, largely because the lunchtime session seems to clash with the children's sleep times, making it difficult for families to attend the session.
8. The worker spent some time with the new groups trying to resource and support them and to link them in with Playgrouping Victoria. The Playgrouping Victoria field worker visited one of the groups to discuss play ideas and provided some suggestions about how to set up the room.
9. The playgroup worker suggested that a playgroup leader be a member of the centre's committee of management.
10. The worker developed a proposal for the centre coordinator to use as a discussion tool with the centre committee of management. The proposal discussed the benefits of employing a playgroup coordinator and suggested a range of steps that could be taken.

4.2.4 Facilitators

1. A strong and increasing demand from parents, many of who were moving into the area and wanted to join playgroups as a means of meeting other local families.
2. The presence of a community centre and centre coordinator to work with.
3. The capacity of the centre to provide additional sessions in the middle of the day.

4.2.5 Barriers

1. New part-time centre coordinator without the resources to develop a sustainable playgroup program in the centre.
2. A small space restricting the maximum capacity for playgroups to eight families.
3. No sustainable means of centralising waiting lists for parents wanting to join playgroups.
4. No obvious leaders within some of the groups.
5. No one had taken the role of ongoing support and resourcing the playgroups.
6. Limited committee structure within the playgroups.
7. Lunchtime sessions clashed with sleep time for younger children.
8. No one had taken on the role of matching families to suitable groups.

4.2.6 Parent evaluation

The data from the parent interviews are tabulated in Appendix 2. Twelve parents participated in the interviews. The key points are summarised below.

Socio-demographics

- all except one of the mothers was aged between 26 and 35 years, the other was older than 41
- the majority of parents' households had only one child living in them
- thirteen of the respondents 18 children were aged under five years
- all had lived in Australia for longer than 10 years. Ten were born in Australia, one in Chile and another in New Zealand. For one woman, Spanish was the main language spoken at home
- all were married or living with a partner
- educational qualifications ranged from completing Years 9-11 to obtaining a university degree
- all had partners in full-time employment. Four of the women were in part-time employment, one was self-employed, one in casual employment and another looking for work
- three were Health Care Card holders.

History of playgroup involvement

- this was their first playgroup for eight of the women
- none were still members of other playgroups
- reasons given for leaving other playgroups included moving out of the area or that the group had been for an older child
- a number of reasons were given for not joining a playgroup previously: already participating in a mothers' group, child too young/no children, not being able to find a playgroup, being new to the area, and competing family issues
- half had joined this particular group because it was close to home. Some of the other reasons given were that a friend attended the same group, it had followed on from their mothers' group, it was new, it was in a new area and it had vacancies.

Views of the current playgroup

- most parents attended this playgroup for play and social opportunities for both their children and themselves
- almost all attended playgroup most weeks
- three quarters were either satisfied or very satisfied with the playgroup. Two were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- reasons for satisfaction were that the child liked it/beneficial for the child and the people were friendly
- some of the reasons given for lack of satisfaction with the group were that it was not well organised, there were not enough activities for the children, the area was too small and facilities inadequate
- when asked what they had been doing while attending this playgroup, all of the respondents reported that they had:
 - observed their child playing with other children
 - helped their child sort out problems with other children
 - started to feel comfortable with most of the other parents at the playgroup.

Involvement in this and other community groups

- most participants were involved in the running of the playgroup. Only one belonged to a committee for this group
- a quarter had had previous involvement in organising or managing other local community groups
- ten attended a first time parents group for their child. Eight still met with parents from this group and five were members of the Oakgrove playgroup. Eight were living in the Narre Warren South area when they attended first time parents group
- the reasons given for not attending first time parents' group were being in the workforce and family issues
- all participants reported that they would still attend the group when funding for the worker ceased.

Other comments made by parents:

"Everyone's pretty friendly. Kids get along. Don't really have any dramas."

"He loves it but the facilities are not very good."

"Not very organised. Just put in the room and told to go for it with no explanation."

4.2.7 Worker perspective

The worker believes the following:

1. Without a play group coordinator some of the playgroup sessions at the Oakgrove community centre do not seem sustainable in the long-term.
2. Because there is significant and ongoing residential growth in this area the Oakgrove community centre will have little difficulty attracting new parents to its sessions, however there will be significant numbers who will not attend more than one or two sessions until the organisation and quality of the program improves.

3. There is a need to educate the parents about the importance of appropriate play.
4. There is a need to develop a systematic process to identify and train potential playgroup leaders.

4.2.8 The Community Centre Coordinator's perspective

The Community Centre Coordinator felt that it was important to support playgroups, as they were needed by families. She reported that the project had made community centre staff more aware of space and advertising issues and they needed to put time into ensuring that the service was more accessible to families.

She believed that it was very useful to have the assistance of an outside person who focused on playgroups, as it helped centre staff to focus as well. She felt that the committee of the community centre also needed to put time and resources into supporting playgroups. She would like to see some future support of playgroups as support from outside is important to maintain their momentum. She felt it would be beneficial if the council supported the position as it would keep services across the municipality in touch with each other.

4.2.9 Learnings

1. Promoting playgroups to local families can be simple; for example, posters in local convenience stores and services can be effective. Someone needs to see it as his or her role to ensure that this promotion occurs regularly.
2. Community centres that do support playgroups require adequate space to accommodate between twelve and fifteen families in one session. There is also a need for adequate storage space.
3. There is a need to centralise up-to-date waiting lists for families wanting to attend playgroups. This should be done at a local level where demand can be monitored closely.
4. Systems need to be developed to ensure families moving in to areas are provided with up-to-date information about local services including playgroups.
5. If community centres are to take on a more proactive role in supporting playgroups they require allocated staff time or an allocated playgroup coordinator to undertake this role.
6. Playgrouping Victoria needs to be able to demonstrate to new playgroups how they can support them.
7. Lunchtime playgroup sessions can work for many families; especially families with older children who do not require sleep in the middle of the day.

4.3 Cannons Creek Playgroup

4.3.1 Participation

Four families per week attend. This playgroup started at the beginning of Term 4 2002.

4.3.2 Identified need

Cannons Creek is a small coastal village on the Westernport fringe. It had a viable playgroup meeting at a fire refuge building up to 4 years ago. This playgroup stopped when many of the children from that playgroup commenced preschool and the remaining membership declined.

An examination of birth notices for the past two years demonstrated a possible need for a playgroup in Cannons Creek. In addition to Cannons Creek residents, it was considered that other people from nearby areas - Blind Bight, Warneet, Tooradin and Devon Meadows would attend a playgroup if it ran on a day when other nearby playgroups were not running.

Another Council staff member who worked with committees of management responsible for community facilities initially approached the Playgroup Project Worker. It was decided that the new Cannons Creek Community Meeting Place was under-utilised, and that it could be an appropriate playgroup venue. The toys and equipment from the previous playgroup were in storage at the Community Meeting Place.

Given the existence of a venue and equipment and potential need, it was agreed that some work in getting a viable playgroup at Cannons Creek could prove successful.

4.3.3 Processes undertaken

1. The worker contacted Pearcedale, Blind Bight and Devon Meadows playgroups to discuss the idea of starting a playgroup in Cannons Creek. The worker discussed with them the potential need for such a group and to determine a day that would be an alternative rather than clash with existing playgroups in other towns.
2. The worker set a date for a "morning tea" in Cannons Creek to discuss starting a playgroup. The date was set shortly after the delivery of the "Coastal Villages Newsletter" which is sent to every household on the coastal fringe. The morning tea was advertised in this newsletter. It was also promoted through the MCH Nurse.
3. When no one came to the public meeting, the worker decided not to proceed. However, upon hearing that another mail out in Cannons Creek could incorporate the small playgroup flyer, another date was set and a new flyer produced and letterboxed. The flyer invited people to participate in playgroup activities.
4. Two people attended the meeting and one phoned with an apology. Both were socially isolated women who said they had "chickened out" from attending the first morning tea. Given the commitment of these women to attend again the project worker agreed to attend on four occasions to help them get a playgroup going.

5. The project worker produced flyers advertising that a playgroup had started. The two women undertook to approach and invite women with small children in the local playground, and the MCH Nurse was asked to distribute flyers to potential users.
6. The following week, another person attended who had run a toy library in her previous community and who was very keen to take on a leadership role in a new Cannons Creek playgroup. This person undertook to organise the activities over the next few weeks. The person was invited to attend a leadership-training course being conducted by the worker. The group is now comprised of five families.
7. The worker made arrangements for the group to negotiate a small rental and insurance.
8. All of the women have said that if the playgroup at Cannons Creek cannot increase numbers, they will attend the Blind Bight or Devon Meadows Playgroup.
9. Blind Bight Community Centre has agreed to auspice the Cannons Creek playgroup providing insurance and advertising to the group.

4.3.4 Facilitators

1. An available venue.
2. Some equipment and toys available.
3. Advertising opportunities that provided coverage to all households.
4. Identifiable demand through birth notices.
5. A person prepared to take on a leadership role.
6. Ongoing support by Blind Bight Community Centre.

4.3.5 Barriers

1. Historical difficulties getting community programs operating in the area.
2. Social isolation.
3. Insufficient numbers.

4.3.6 Parent evaluation

The group was still forming at the time of the evaluation, so it was inappropriate to talk to parents at this stage.

4.3.7 Worker perspective

The worker believes the following:

1. If the group size can reach six in the next month, it will form the basis of a viable ongoing playgroup.
2. There is an obvious leader who is committed for the long-term, as well as a good venue and adequate equipment.
3. If numbers are not sufficient the worker believes the positive experience has enabled the participants to seek out and attend an alternative playgroup.
4. The fact that interested people did not attend the first meeting raises some lessons for playgroup development work. It is important to remember that as well as having the confidence to attend such a meeting; families can have “busy” days e.g. a doctor’s appointment. In this instance it proved worthwhile to have another attempt at attracting interest from families.

4.3.8 Learnings

It is too early in the development of this playgroup to document learnings.

4.4 Filipino Playgroup

4.4.1 Participation

This playgroup did not eventuate.

4.4.2 Identified need

A Filipino outreach worker, based at the South-Eastern Migrant Resource Centre contacted the Playgroup Project Worker in March 2002. She had been working with a group of Filipino women trying to establish a playgroup specifically for Filipino women. She asked the playgroup project worker for some assistance.

4.4.3 Processes undertaken

1. The worker worked with the Filipino outreach worker to find:
 - a suitable venue where sessions could run for three hours
 - a venue in either Hampton Park or Cranbourne
 - a low cost or free bus service preferably with a volunteer driver
 - funds to purchase toys and equipment.
2. The worker discussed with the outreach worker the needs of the families. The outreach worker believed that a playgroup was an important place to role model alternative patterns of discipline, promote an understanding of the importance of play and facilitate the development of friendships amongst the women and children.
3. The worker spent some months trying to source an appropriate and affordable venue.
4. The worker spent considerable time trying to find affordable community transport options.
5. The need for an affordable community bus limited the options to two community centres. One did not have a venue available for longer than 1.5 hours. The other venue - Merinda Park Community Centre - appeared to be a more realistic option for the following reasons:
 - they had an available playgroup space
 - they understood playgroups
 - they were committed to including new groups
 - had a community bus that was available between the hours of 9am and 3pm.

Unfortunately, it was finally resolved the only available time would be 12.45-2.45pm and that this would be unsuitable given the pressures to have the bus returned by 3pm. Also, the additional time spent on transport at either end would conflict with the children's sleep times.

6. The worker and Filipino outreach worker agreed it was not feasible to establish a new playgroup for Filipino women at this time. They resolved the outreach worker would contact the multicultural playgroups project worker in Dandenong and refer families to attend there and the worker for this project would try to match interested families with existing playgroups who would be welcoming to the Filipino families.

4.4.4 Facilitators

1. The availability of an outreach worker who understood the needs of the Filipino families.

4.4.5 Barriers

1. Small capacity of available community buses able to accommodate only five families, assuming each family had only one child.
2. Lack of available venues with appropriate time.
3. The need for very low cost transport.
4. The absence of low cost community transport options in the City of Casey.
5. The absence of volunteer drivers or networks in the City of Casey.
6. A paucity of public transport within the City of Casey.
7. The extensive and ongoing worker support required.

4.4.6 Learnings

1. For some groups within the community, public transport or community transport is the only means of accessing services, including playgroups.
2. Some families could access playgroups if community transport including volunteer drivers were available.
3. The City of Casey has few available venues to accommodate new playgroups.
4. The cost of attending playgroups and transport are barriers to access for some families.

5. CITY OF WYNDHAM

5.1 Point Cook Playgroup

5.1.1 Participation

Thirty-five families were enrolled with an average of eight attending each session. Three sessions operated each week on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings.

5.1.2 Identified need

Council's social planner recognised the area as a newly developed residential estate that had grown at a faster rate than projected. The community comprised many young families and the planned community centre would not be completed for twelve months to two years from the time of this project's commencement. There were no existing playgroups operating in the area.

5.1.3 Processes undertaken

1. The possibility of establishing a playgroup in the Point Cook area was promoted locally by the worker including: placement of posters in the local shop and a letter box drop to each home in the area asking interested parents to attend a meeting to discuss whether or not they would like to be part of a playgroup.
2. The worker organised a meeting at the primary school and thirteen parents attended. The parents were very enthusiastic and seemed pleased about the opportunity to join a playgroup.
3. The worker negotiated with the newly built, but not fully occupied, local primary school, to utilise one set of adjoining classrooms for the playgroup until the new community centre, which was under construction, became available. The school principal was encouraging; he wanted local families with young children to become part of the school community.
4. The worker obtained some basic equipment and toys from a playgroup that had discontinued in another neighbourhood. The worker was also able to identify local community grant opportunities for the playgroup to apply. The worker also attended the first few groups and explained how the group could go about setting up a committee and how to join Playgrouping Victoria.
5. Within a few weeks the group had appointed a committee and two sessions were operating over two days, soon afterwards a third session was operating.
6. The group was successful in receiving \$2,500 grant from the Wyndham City Council to fund the purchase of additional equipment.
7. The group has also raised almost \$1,000 from a raffle and chocolate drive to fund additional equipment and the children's Christmas party.
8. The committee produces and distributes a regular newsletter to group members.

5.1.4 Facilitators

1. The Point Cook area comprises two identifiable neighbourhoods, making promotion relatively straightforward.
2. The community centre will eventually be available for use by the playgroup, which meant that only a temporary venue was required.
3. The school principal was community minded and saw the school as a community resource and was therefore willing to share the empty classrooms.
4. There were a large number of new families moving into the area, many with young children, who had limited opportunities to meet other families.
5. The parents, while isolated, were not disadvantaged and had the confidence and skills to take over the running of the group quickly.

5.1.5 Barriers

1. Until this project, no one had taken on the role of facilitating community development of the area. Most of the families were new to the area and had not developed any connections with each other – they were not mobilised. They did not know how to demonstrate that they had a need for a playgroup that would benefit their children (opportunity to learn through play) as well as themselves (opportunity for social support).
2. Because there had not been a community centre there was a perception that playgroups wouldn't be able to be provided until a dedicated space was available.
3. Many of the parents had not attended a playgroup before and possibly did not understand that it could be organised by them.

5.1.6 Parent evaluation

The data from the parent interviews are tabulated in Appendix 2. Twenty-one parents participated in the interviews. The key points are summarised below.

Socio-demographics

- the majority of parents were aged 26-35 years. Four were aged 21-25 and three were 36-40 years
- all had one or two children living in the household
- all of the children were aged under 5 years, except one
- sixteen were born in Australia, one in Chile, one in the United Kingdom, one in Macedonia and another in Papua New Guinea
- all had lived in Australia for more than six years
- all spoke English at home, except for one that spoke Spanish and another who spoke Maltese
- educational levels ranged from completing Years 9-11 to obtaining a university degree, with almost half having a Bachelors degree or higher
- all except one were married or living with a partner. All of the partners were in full-time employment

- one of the women was in full-time employment, two were employed part-time, two on a casual basis, one was looking for employment and the rest were not currently in the workforce
- one parent was a Health Care Card holder.

History of playgroup involvement

- all were in their first or second term with this playgroup
- for thirteen parents, this was their first playgroup
- three were still members of another playgroup
- reasons given for leaving the other playgroup were: moving out of the area, not feeling comfortable in the group, inconvenient times or the child not enjoying it
- the reasons given for not joining a playgroup before were not knowing about them, the child was too young, attending a mothers' group instead or not having a need
- the majority of parents chose to go to this playgroup because it was close to home.
- other reasons given include: friends attended the same group, it followed on from mothers' group, it was a new group, it was the only one in the area and to meet others living in the area.

Views of the current playgroup

- almost all parents reported that they attended playgroup for play opportunities for their children and socialisation opportunities for both their children and themselves. One woman commented that it was the only place she could go
- almost all attended playgroup most weeks
- nineteen were very satisfied or satisfied with the playgroup. Two were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- satisfaction was due to the friendliness of the people, convenient location, varied activities, being able to have input into the running of the playgroup and it being beneficial for the child
- some commented on inadequate organisation of the group and one would have liked an outdoor area
- when asked what they had been doing while attending this playgroup, most of the respondents reported that they had:
 - observed their child playing with other children
 - helped their child sort out problems
 - started to feel comfortable with one or two other parents in group
 - discussed parenting issues or child development with other parents at playgroup
 - thought about their child's development or behaviour compared with other children in the group.

Involvement in this and other community groups

- most of the parents were involved in the running of this playgroup. Five were members of a committee for the playgroup
- five had had previous experience in organising or managing other community groups
- almost all had attended a first time parents' group run by a MCH Nurse for their first child
- twelve still met with parents from the first time parents' group, and six of those were members of this group. Six were living in the Point Cook area when they attended first time parents' group
- the following reasons were given for not attending a first time parents' group: not having a car, lack of interest and not getting around to it

- all except one of the parents reported that they would continue to attend the group after funding for the worker ceases. One woman said that she will not attend because she will be having a baby soon.

Other comments made by parents:

“Mothers’ group outgrew houses, so it’s a good way to keep in touch.”

“It’s been a lifesaver. It’s our only weekly outing where we get to meet other people.”

“Friendly people and everyone gets on well together, children play well together.”

“Having playgroup in an area like this, sometimes is our lifeline, we are very isolated.”

“Filled a big hole in my life, it’s been great. There was a big need for me.”

“With each term we tend to get better. We are only a young playgroup.”

“Sometimes more difficult coming than staying at home. It’s close to his sleep time.”

“New group – no one really took charge. I didn’t really know what was going on.”

“Group needs a coordinator to give ideas to. No one to follow discussion through. No one particular person takes responsibility.”

5.1.7 Worker perspective

The worker believes the following:

1. The groups were relatively simple to set up and needed only a small amount of worker involvement in the early set up phase.
2. Most of the parents had the confidence and skills to take on the group’s management. Some would have liked more support from a coordinator employed to undertake that role.
3. There is an ongoing need for someone to resource the group, such as providing:
 - parent education around issues such as behaviour management
 - leadership training
 - ideas about appropriate play activities for children.
4. Someone will need to continue to work with the principal of the primary school, as he cannot guarantee continued access to the vacant double classroom until school enrolments are finalised for 2003. The new community centre will not be available for the group to use until Term 2 2003. The groups could therefore require another temporary space for first term 2003.
5. A strong sense of community has developed amongst the group members.
6. Participation has reduced the sense of isolation many of the parents were feeling.
7. Strong links have been developed between the school and playgroup families.

5.1.8 The school principal's perspective

The principal of the primary school felt that it was very important to support playgroups as they were a starting point for community involvement in the educational processes. He also saw that with playgroups operating in the school, it was a commitment to the school. He believed that the playgroups would not have started without this project which employed someone to be a catalyst to work through the implementation issues.

“Schools need to be involved in these processes, it is important for your relationship with people in the community.”

5.1.9 Learnings

1. In newly developed residential estates, someone – possibly at a Council level – should see it as their role to build the capacity of these neighbourhoods. This can be achieved simply by bringing together families to form playgroups or other community groups.
2. In the early stages of developing residential estates, there are usually few available community spaces for newly formed playgroups. This project has shown that playgroups can share resources, for example, with newly built schools that are often not fully occupied. Opportunities to design site offices in new residential estates that have a large open space with some storage should also be encouraged; these offices could provide temporary accommodation for playgroups until community buildings are constructed.
3. When parents have the skills and confidence, playgroups can be easily managed by parents, however there is a need to provide some ongoing support such as parent education, leadership training, information and resources to playgroups.
4. Newly formed playgroups should be advised by someone – possibly at a Council level - of community grants that are available to them to help set up their playgroups with basic equipment and toys.

5.2 Somali Group Playgroup, Hoppers Crossing

5.2.1 Participation

Per week, an average of four families attended on a regular basis and a further four attended less regularly.

5.2.2 Identified need

The local MCH Nurse felt that there were sufficient numbers of Somali families who had moved into the area to establish a playgroup. These families did not tend to join the other playgroups in the area.

5.2.3 Processes undertaken

1. The worker contacted the Victorian Cooperative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups (VICSEG) to ask for some assistance with setting up the group and to provide support, as needed, throughout the project.
2. The MCH Nurse helped to bring the women together; flyers were prepared and translated. The flyer was posted at the local Islamic school, Migrant Resource Centre and at the Maternal and Child Health Centre.
3. The Somali worker from VICSEG translated an invitation to the group asking what the women wanted from the group. The women indicated that they were interested in guest speaker sessions combined with play activities for the children.
4. The worker negotiated with the community centre to waive the room rental (\$10/session) until the group was more established and Council then agreed to cover the cost until the end of the year.
5. The community centre committee donated \$100 worth of equipment plus some from a group that was no longer operating.
6. The MCH Nurse donated some new sand play equipment.
7. The worker attended the groups most weeks to offer play ideas and to discuss leadership training.
8. The worker would often telephone the women to remind them to attend playgroup.
9. The worker organised guest speakers to attend the group. When guest speakers did attend the women would sometimes bring other friends who had school-aged children to listen to the speakers.
10. The worker would sometimes play with the children and role model play.

5.2.4 Facilitators

1. A MCH Nurse who identified a need and was supportive of the group.
2. An available community centre and a supportive committee of management.

3. The expertise of the Somali VICSEG worker who helped to set up the group.
4. The VICSEG worker was able to provide the project worker with support during the set-up phase of the project.
5. The availability of relevant and interesting guest speakers.
6. Commitment of the worker to phone parents to encourage them to attend playgroup.

5.2.5 Barriers

1. The session time was originally 10-12 noon. Some of the women found this too early and others had clashes with preschool sessions. The session was changed to 11.30am -1.30pm.
2. Many of the women had more than four children and this often meant that there was a family illness that prevented them from attending playgroup.
3. School holidays followed by Ramadan had an impact on attendance at the sessions and on organising guest speakers.
4. While playgroup leadership training was offered by VICSEG and two of the women were interested in attending, it was not possible for the women to attend the twice-weekly sessions in Coburg due to childcare and transport problems.
5. Initially, there was no other interest by any of the women to take on a leadership role however, more recently one person has informally taken on this role.
6. Despite promotion through the Migrant Resource Centre, the Islamic school and the MCH Nurses, the group has not attracted any new members since late May 2002.

5.2.6 Parent evaluation

The data from the parent interviews are tabulated in Appendix 2. Three parents participated in the interviews. The key points are summarised below.

Socio-demographics

- the parents were all aged between 26 and 40 years
- all had four children living with them. Three of the children were aged under five
- countries of birth included Ethiopia, Pakistan and Somalia. All had lived in Australia for more than six years. One spoke English at home
- all three were married or lived with a partner
- educational levels ranged from completing primary school to obtaining a diploma
- none were currently in the workforce. All had partners in full-time employment
- all were Health Care Card holders.

History of playgroup involvement

- all were in their first term with this playgroup
- it was the first playgroup for two of the parents
- none were still members of other playgroups

- reasons given for not joining a playgroup previously included not knowing about them and not being able to find one with that operated at a suitable time
- the reasons for joining this playgroup were that it was close to home, a friend attended the same group, being told about it by a friend, feeling more comfortable in this group and the others in the group sharing the same culture.

Views of the current playgroup

- all reported that they attended this playgroup for play opportunities for their children and social opportunities for themselves and their children
- all attended playgroup most weeks
- all were very satisfied or satisfied with the group
- reasons for satisfaction were that the child liked it/beneficial for the child and they were satisfied with the facilities and parking
- when asked what they had been doing while attending this playgroup, all of the respondents reported that they had:
 - observed their child playing with other children
 - helped their child sort out problems
 - started to feel comfortable with most of the parents in the group
 - discussed parenting issues or child development with other parents at playgroup.

Involvement with this and other community groups

- all of the parents were involved in the running of the group. None belonged to a committee for the group
- none had been involved in organising or managing other community groups
- none had attended a first time parents' group run by a MCH Nurse for their first child
- the reasons given for not attending a first time parents' group for their first child were that they didn't know about them and they didn't have a car
- all reported that they would continue to attend the group after funding for the worker ceased.

Other comments made by parents:

"No one encouraged me before. Dianne (the playgroup worker) encouraged us."

"Some of the children know each other. It's like a meeting place."

"When my daughter comes here she is very happy."

"My kids like it. It think it is good for me too, to meet other people."

5.2.7 Worker perspective

The worker believes the following:

1. There is a need to work closely with the Migrant Resource Centre to find out from the women what they want from the group. The Migrant Resource Centre has suggested that the "traditional" playgroup model may not be culturally appropriate for the group.

2. The women need to feel empowered to take on the responsibility of the group. This has been an ongoing issue. It has been difficult to obtain commitment from the participants and they seem reluctant to be tied to a schedule. If the women do not wish to take on this responsibility, the group will not be sustainable without the support of a paid worker.
3. The women seemed to have appreciated the guest speakers.
4. The women readily offered to help during the sessions and at pack up time.
5. The children appeared to enjoy the different play activities and the opportunity to socialise together.
6. It appears there was a strong network amongst the women before they joined the playgroup. This raises the question of whether the group needed to form formally.

5.2.8 The Maternal and Child Health Nurse's perspective

The MCH Nurse who supported the playgroup was given the opportunity to express her views about it. She believed that it was important to support the playgroup and did so whenever she could. She felt that for the group to continue it needed ongoing assistance and she could not be completely responsible for its operation. She wondered if the Somali women needed to meet as a playgroup because they were already connected to one another. However she felt that a full-time playgroup coordinator was needed in the area to help reduce the social isolation that many families experienced.

“Playgroups provide opportunities for powerful social bonding and definitely should be supported.”

5.2.9 Learnings

1. It is an important role of the MCH Nurse to identify groups of families with young children who might benefit from joining a playgroup together.
2. The “traditional” model of playgroup may not always be appropriate for some cultural groups especially if groups of women from the same culture are already connected with each other.
3. There might be a need to provide leadership training locally and in a less intensive way so that all parents who are interested can attend, for example, one possibility could be that the whole group is provided with leadership training delivered at the playgroup session.
4. Community centre management committees can act inclusively through actively encouraging groups, who might not usually participate in centre activities, through rent relief and assistance in finding a suitable time and equipment.
5. Staff working in migrant resource centres and in organisations such as VICSEG have the skills and knowledge to support Councils to better meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse families.

5.3 Heathdale Playgroup

5.3.1 Participation

Attendance levels during the first school term of operation were low with an average of three families per week. By late in the following school term, numbers had steadily increased to about six to eight families attending regularly.

5.3.2 Identified need

Most of the Heathdale neighbourhood is comprised of public housing; the area therefore has many low-income families. At the start of the school year, the principal from the local primary school held discussions with staff at Wyndham Council. She was concerned because one quarter of the new prep year children had not attended any form of early childhood service. Initially she suggested running a playgroup from the school where staff would support the playgroup by reading stories and sharing resources. She also saw this as a way of engaging high need families into the community generally and into the school. The MCH Nurse also saw a need to support some of the more isolated parents living in the area to access social support and to provide opportunities for their children to learn through play.

5.3.3 Processes undertaken by the worker

1. The worker had to find an appropriate venue. The available space in the Primary School building was not appropriate. The local preschool was approached and the teacher allowed the playgroup to use their facilities and equipment. The venue also accommodates the MCH Nurse.
2. The worker prepared flyers about the playgroup and displayed them at the school, preschool, Maternal and Child Health Centre and local shops.
3. The worker also organised the flyer to be included in the school newsletter and in the community centre newsletter.
4. The Heathdale area is a transient area with many families coping with unemployment and family breakdown. Discussions were held with the MCH Nurse and she agreed to hand out the flyer to the families she believed would benefit most from attending the group, for example, families new to the area, isolated families and young parents.
5. The preschool teacher was encouraged to refer families to the playgroup.
6. The MCH Nurse agreed to visit for a part of each session to help make members feel welcome and to be "the familiar face" to any new parents.
7. The worker visited the group most weeks and made efforts to introduce new members into the group.
8. The worker demonstrated simple play ideas to the group.
9. The worker developed a folder of activity ideas and provided each member a copy.

10. The worker and MCH Nurse role modeled play, discussed behaviour issues (usually informally) and discussed other issues with parents as the need arose.
11. The worker spent some time with two women in the group who were prepared to take on a leadership role.
12. The worker had regular discussions with the preschool teacher to sort out some issues regarding sharing the venue and equipment with the playgroup.
13. The worker organised Playgrouping Victoria to visit the group to show simple and low-cost toys.

5.3.4 Facilitators

1. The skills of the worker to work with high need families.
2. The support of the MCH Nurse to visit the group and encourage families to join.
3. The availability of a venue that is co-located with the MCH Nurse office, making it easy for her to visit the group and be accessible and familiar to the families.
4. The involvement of two women in the group who are friendly, well organised and willing to take on a leadership role.
5. Low cost (\$1 per session).

5.3.5 Barriers

1. Cost of joining Playgrouping Victoria. Membership plus term fees had precluded some of the families from joining other playgroups.
2. There have been some difficulties around sharing the preschool venue. For example, sometimes the equipment and materials set up in the preschool room are not suitable for playgroup children and the parents are asked to supervise their children closely and not allow them to touch work that is on display. Ideally it would be better for the playgroup to share a building with other playgroups.
3. It took some time to find the two group members who were willing to take on a leadership role, had these women not joined the sustainability of the group would have been uncertain. While the MCH Nurse was willing to drop into each playgroup session she did not have the capacity to organise and run the group.
4. It has taken time to build trust with some of these families.
5. Some of the parents appear under-confident and have poor communication skills. This means it takes longer for individuals within the group to form friendships.

5.3.6 Parent evaluation

The data from the parent interviews are tabulated in Appendix 2. Six parents participated in the interviews. The key points are summarised below.

Socio-demographics

- the parents were aged between 21 and 35 years
- the number of children living in the household ranged from one to three. Ten were aged under five years
- all, except one, of the parents were born in Australia. The other was born in El Salvador and she had lived in Australia for more than 10 years
- all spoke English at home
- all except one were married or living with a partner
- most had completed Year 12 and two had a trade qualification
- one of the women was in full-time employment and another worked part-time
- the main source of household income was full-time employment for three of the women, and part-time employment for another. Neither partner was in paid employment for two of the families
- four were Health Care Card holders.

History of playgroup involvement

- most of the parents were in their first term in this playgroup
- for half, this was their first playgroup. Four were still members of another playgroup
- reasons for not joining a playgroup previously included being in the workforce and the child attending child care
- half joined this playgroup because it was close to home. One was told about it by a MCH Nurse and another joined because she felt more comfortable with this group.

Views of the current playgroup

- all attended playgroup for social and play opportunities for their children. Most attended for social opportunities for themselves
- all attended playgroup most weeks
- all were satisfied or very satisfied with the group
- reasons for satisfaction included the that the people were friendly, facilities were good, it was inexpensive, the location was convenient and they had input into the running of the group
- when asked what they had been doing while attending this playgroup, all of the respondents reported that they had:
 - observed their child playing with other children
 - learnt new activities/games that they could play with their child at home
 - started to feel comfortable with one or two other parents in the playgroup.

Involvement in this and other community groups

- all were involved in some aspect of the running of the playgroup. None belonged to a committee for the playgroup
- only one had had previous involvement in organising or managing local community groups
- two had attended a first time parents' group run by a MCH Nurse for their first child. None still met with parents from that group

- five were not living in the Heathdale area when they attended first time parents' group
- five parents reported that they would still attend the group when funding for the worker ceased. One felt that the worker was needed, as no one else could run the group.

Other parent comments:

"I'm really happy with it. Dianne (the playgroup worker) is really friendly and easy to approach."

5.3.7 Worker perspective

The worker believes the following:

1. There is a need for ongoing support with this group, the MCH Nurse and Council's family resource officer should make themselves available to the group to help sort out any problems and to provide them with information and support.
2. Some of these families might have developed trust with one service provider only. There is a need for the coordination of all of the services in this area to work in a more integrated way so that they can refer families to other services as needed.
3. Sharing the preschool with the playgroup was, at times, problematic. It was useful for the worker and preschool teacher to develop a checklist together for the playgroup members to follow when they packed up and cleaned at the end of their session.

5.3.8 Other professionals' views

Both the preschool teacher and MCH Nurse who had been involved in setting up the playgroup were interviewed. They both felt that it was very important to support playgroups. One expressed the view that playgroups were often the first social contact for new parents or parents that were new to the area and that playgroups were probably more important for parents than for their children. In addition, playgroup was seen as an affordable option to three old kindergarten.

Both felt that this playgroup had reduced the barriers to accessing playgroups for some families, as the cost of one dollar per session was very affordable. Parents were not required to pay for a term at a time and this meant they could attend when they wished, without feeling they needed to attend each week. This was particularly suitable for chaotic families.

Concern about the ability of the playgroup to continue without adequate support was expressed. It was felt that it was important for this playgroup to continue as it was co-located with the kindergarten and the MCH Nurse and local primary school was nearby, facilitating links with these services.

(a) 5.3.9 Learnings

1. MCH Nurses play an important role in identifying and encouraging isolated families to join playgroups.
2. Schools can alert other service providers when they recognise that a proportion of their prep year children have not attended any early childhood services. This can assist Councils to identify gaps and pockets of need.
3. It is advantageous for Maternal and Child Health Centres to share facilities with playgroups. The co-location can facilitate nurse access to support the groups and individuals within the group.
4. There can be some issues for preschools when they share their space with playgroups, in particular the presence of materials and equipment that may not be suitable for playgroup age children.
5. Many high need families can learn from playgroup about the importance of play and some simple play ideas. They can also experience the benefit of parent-child interaction through attending a playgroup and they can benefit from social support.
6. There is a need to provide ongoing support and resourcing for high need families attending playgroups. It is not always possible to find parents with the confidence and skills to take on a leadership role in these groups.

6. ADDITIONAL REPORT PREPARED BY THE CITY OF CASEY PLAYGROUP PROJECT WORKER

This section of the report was written by the City of Casey Playgroup Project Worker and provides some additional information about the processes she undertook as part of the project. It also includes the Project Worker's suggested strategies for the City of Casey to increase participation in quality playgroups.

6.1 Lack of municipal coordination as a barrier to playgroup participation in Casey

A considerable part of the work of the project worker has been a coordinating role. The project has clearly highlighted the link between coordination at the Municipal level and playgroup participation. The following sections describe coordination tasks which demonstrate this.

6.1.1 Compilation of an accurate and up-to-date database

A major obstacle to playgroup participation is a lack of up-to-date and accessible information on what playgroups exist, where they meet, and who to contact. While Playgrouping Victoria produce a directory, the delays in compiling and distributing this, and its format, result in it not being an accurate and up-to-date tool for use in accessing a playgroup.

Early in the project, the project worker contacted every known playgroup and compiled a data base including contact people, venue, vacancies, session times, capacity, training needs, and potential to start new groups. A list of "Playgroups by Suburb" was produced and distributed through Maternal and Child Health Centres, through existing playgroups and through Customer Services Officers at Council (who distributed in excess of 150 in 16 weeks).

The data base has been a useful tool in supplying residents with the information they need to access a playgroup, and has also enabled the project worker to directly assist residents who have had difficulty finding a playgroup with a vacancy that is appropriate to their needs. It has also enabled Council for the first time to get some "picture " of where gaps in playgroup services exist, where training is needed, and where there is capacity for expansion.

6.1.2 A contact person for residents and playgroups

The project worker has been a contact person for:

- residents who have had difficulty accessing playgroups
- residents who wish to volunteer their skills to a playgroup
- a group of new mothers wishing to start a playgroup
- a playgroup who needed assistance in renegotiating rent to avoid closure
- playgroups who have needed assistance in promoting their services.

6.1.3 A coordinated approach to training

In order for playgroups to continue from year to year, and for them to offer quality programs that will meet the needs of parents/carers and their children, a planned and organised approach to training is necessary. The playgroup project worker undertook a training survey and developed and implemented a playgroup-training package, using resources developed by Anne Fortune from the City of Knox.

The provision of training to new playgroups, new leaders and existing playgroups that have capacity for expansion is central to increasing participation.

6.1.4 Planning

In order to develop further strategies to increase participation rates in Casey, the following needs to occur on an ongoing basis:

- identifying areas where there are insufficient sessions
- identifying where there is capacity for more sessions
- identifying where venues are available for playgroup use
- identifying areas where skills and/or resources to run playgroups are scarce
- identifying appropriate auspices for new playgroups
- identifying issues of inclusion for people from different cultural backgrounds or with special needs
- identifying local issues relevant to playgroup participation, and to assist playgroups to respond accordingly. An example of this in Casey is the high number of mothers working irregular part-time or casual hours who need a “drop-in” playgroup (as opposed to having to make a regular commitment). Another example is the need to have playgroups for parents with young babies who are new to an area and who have left their new mothers groups and other social and family networks behind.

6.1.5 Promotion of playgroups

There is a need to promote the benefits of playgroups in both providing social support and information to parents / carers, and in providing quality play opportunities for children that will enhance their development in the important early years.

These benefits need to be promoted to potential users, and to individuals and organisations working with families. Playgroups also need to be promoted as an integral part of the early childhood services system.

There is also considerable work to be done in promoting playgroups as an important community development tool in building communities, particularly in geographically isolated areas and in areas of rapid housing and population growth.

6.1.6 A link between playgroups and council

There are a large number of decisions, made by Council, across a range of issues that impact on playgroups. There is also a need for playgroups to better understand the workings of Local Government and how some of the programs can be of benefit to playgroups.

There is a need for playgroups to have a voice within the Family & Children's Services Department in Casey, particularly given the increasing evidence on the importance of supporting children in their early years. There remains a lack of recognition that playgroups are early childhood services, and that for them to be of high quality, and sufficient in number, resources are needed.

The important role playgroups can play in community strengthening is also relevant to the work done within the Youth & Community Development Department on building community networks in new estates.

There are also clear issues for those Council Departments building/ renovating/modifying community facilities. There is an urgent need to allocate space and storage areas for playgroups.

There is also a need to advocate for playgroup space in new estates and specifically, to encourage developers to provide such space, whether in portable buildings, or in sales offices that will ultimately be used as housing.

As well as providing a "playgroup voice" to Council, there is a role in assisting playgroups to understand the workings of Local Government, and in taking advantage of some of its programs. Playgroups have responded positively to "mail-outs" which have included information on available Committee of Management Training and Council Funding Programs.

6.2 Playgroup development as a community development tool in Casey

The role playgroups play in providing social supports and strengthening the social networks of families is well documented. Apart from new mothers' groups established by Maternal and Child Health Centres, there are few other structured opportunities for parents of young children to meet other new parents and make meaningful social contact.

In Casey, social isolation of parents with young babies is exacerbated by new housing and population growth, often meaning dislocation from family and existing community networks. It is also common in Casey that women leave a new mothers' group behind when they move into Casey.

Within new growth areas, playgroups need to be seen as useful tools in creating opportunities for people to form friendships, and in creating potentially longstanding social support systems and networks. They can also provide opportunities for participants to acquire skills in community participation, which can be used across a range of areas in community life.

6.3 Playgroups, play, and parent education

The importance of providing quality play opportunities for young children and the impact of this on early childhood development is increasingly promoted within the early childhood field. With increasing focus on the early years (birth-3years), playgroups have enormous potential to provide quality play opportunities at a critical time in a child's development.

Play helps children learn about the world around them, fosters language development, enables them to develop fine and gross motor skills, and exposes them to a range of sensory experiences. Playgroups not only provide these opportunities, but also expose parents/ carers to play ideas, and increase their understanding of the importance of play.

The City of Knox, through the Playgroup Field Officer and a focus on playgroups, has demonstrated the link between playgroups and parent education. The successful development of a playgroup program over a decade has resulted in networks through which parent education occurs. This has been a natural progression and is a model that would be appropriate for Casey.

7. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Barriers to establishing playgroups

A number of barriers to establishing playgroups have been identified during this project, including lack of infrastructure within communities and the high cost of some playgroups.

7.1.1 Venues

The establishment of new playgroups was limited by the number of suitable venues in several areas. The playgroup workers were resourceful and found alternative venues, such as vacant primary school rooms or shared preschool space. Some community centres had limited space to accommodate playgroups. Local government planners should be able to project the numbers of families likely to be living in the municipality in the future and ensure that adequate venues for playgroups are available. In areas of rapid growth, local government planners should work together with community services staff and property developers regarding the use of site offices as playgroup venues, including the requirements for adequate storage and play space areas.

Recommendation 1

When buildings housing community services are constructed or renovated, consideration should be given to providing space for playgroups to operate.

Recommendation 2

In new housing estates, site offices or similar buildings could be modified for use as community centres and used to accommodate playgroups.

7.1.2 Transport

Some municipalities do not have good public transport networks and do not offer low cost community transport. One of the main issues for parents wanting to attend the Filipino playgroup in the City of Casey was being able to access low cost transport.

Recommendation 3

Playgroups should be located in venues which have good public transport access, such as shopping or other community centres. If this is not possible, low cost community transport should be made available to playgroup participants if required.

7.1.3 Cost

Cost was a barrier to joining playgroups for some parents. Many playgroups require parents to pay a term fee of approximately \$20-30 prior to commencement. Some groups pay Playgrouping Victoria a term fee to cover insurance. Parents on low incomes, shift workers, those who work irregular hours or have chaotic lifestyles may consider up front payment of fees a barrier to participation in playgroups.

Recommendation 4a)

Councils, and other organisations running playgroups, should be aware that cost is a barrier for some families and should work towards reducing fees.

Recommendation 4b)

Councils, and other organisations running playgroups, should consider offering some groups as “drop in” playgroups, where participants pay a small fee for each session they attend, rather than term fees.

7.1.4 Cultural issues

The literature reports low attendance at playgroups by those from CALD backgrounds. Some of the professionals involved in this project have expressed the view that some CALD women may already have networks with other mothers from the same cultural backgrounds and may not need to join a playgroup. The Somali women in this study appeared to well networked with other mothers in their community, so may not have needed to meet formally in a playgroup. However these women reported that they enjoyed the talks from guest speakers who attended the group.

Recommendation 5

Further work needs to be done to determine whether the Australian model of playgroup is suitable for parents from other cultures. An alternative may be to offer parent education to existing cultural groups within communities.

7.2 Promotion

The word “playgroup” does not seem to have a positive image. Further work needs to be undertaken to promote the benefits of playgroups to both parents and professionals. In particular, there needs to be increased awareness of the benefits of playgroup for children in terms of learning through play and social opportunities. There also needs to be recognition that playgroups provide social support to parents which may reduce depression, and this in turn, may have an impact on the quality of child rearing and child abuse and neglect. In addition, playgroups give parents an opportunity to interact with their children in new ways, and learn more about parenting from other parents or through more formal parenting education programs. Playgroups should also be seen as an important community development tool. Establishment of the Point Cook playgroup was a relatively simple and low cost process which resulted in bringing disconnected parents together to form committees, apply for local grants, fund raise, produce newsletters, link with existing services and provide friendship and support to each other. All of this took place in just a few weeks.

In the municipalities studied in this project some service providers, such as community centre coordinators, did not promote playgroups to families because they did not seem to be fully aware of the benefits to children and parents. Some MCH Nurses only promoted playgroups to parents of children aged over 18 months. This meant that families could have over a year when they were not linked into any services and could miss out on needed social support.

The MCH Service (MCH Nurses and Enhanced Home Visiting Service staff) play an important role in promoting playgroups and should be encouraged to ask parents about the services they are using. It is recognised that playgroups may not suit the needs of all

parents, for example, those working full-time with their children in child care. However, all service providers should support parents to be connected with some early childhood service and, for many families, this service could be playgroup. Engagement of children in services, whether it is playgroup, child care or preschool, provides opportunities for communication between parents and professionals and opportunities for early intervention.

Other services and practitioners that could promote playgroups include Community Health Centres, maternity hospitals, General Practitioners and family support workers. In addition, preschools could promote playgroups to families of two year olds who are enrolling in preschool for the following year.

Parents should be encouraged to move straight from a first time parents' group into a playgroup. This may be problematic for parents with young children moving to new areas, leaving their first time parents group and other supports behind. Playgroups are an ideal forum to connect families to their local community. MCH Nurses should therefore identify families who are new to the area and link them to playgroups.

Recommendation 6

A statewide, or possibly national, campaign promoting the benefits of playgroups and the "continuum of service participation" from first time parent groups to playgroups to preschool to school is required. This campaign needs to reach both service providers and parents.

Recommendation 7

Local promotion of playgroups is also required through:

- service providers recommending playgroups to parents
- provision of information about playgroups to parents by Council Community Services Officers
- local advertising, for example, in the local paper and on community notice boards.

7.3 Quality of playgroups

7.3.1 Parent education

An important role for playgroups is provision of parent education. One aspect of this is improving parents' understanding of the importance of play in children's development. In this project, the playgroup workers educated parents about quality interactions through play by role modeling or provision of simple play ideas and activities which could be undertaken at playgroup and at home. Playgrouping Victoria field workers visited some of the groups to show parents how to make low cost and simple toys. The Wyndham playgroup worker showed parents how to make play dough, and for some parents, this was a new experience. The playgroup workers believed that in particular, parents required more information about the importance of sensory play.

Recommendation 8

One of the possible roles of a playgroup coordinator could be to educate parents about the importance of play, how they can interact with their children through play and to suggest playgroup activities.

Playgroup also provides opportunities for more formal education through delivery of positive parenting courses, as occurs in Knox, and by the organisation of talks by guest speakers.

Recommendation 9

One of the possible roles of a playgroup coordinator could be to deliver or facilitate formal parenting education and coordinate guest speakers, as requested by the playgroup members.

7.3.2 Groups needing additional support

More disadvantaged families, such as those in the Heathdale group, may lack the confidence and skills to keep playgroups operating without considerable support from professionals. This support includes regular attendance of workers to role model play, provide ideas for activities, assist with inclusiveness, support the leaders and introduce new families. This need for supported playgroups has been found with playgroups operating with other high need families, for example young mothers or those living in disadvantaged areas such as West Heidelberg.

Recommendation 10

All playgroups need on-going support in parent education and leadership training. Playgroups with high need families may need more intensive support, such as attendance at weekly sessions.

7.3.3 Local coordination

In both the Cities of Casey and Wyndham the workers brought people together to establish playgroups. Prior to the implementation of this project, no one had taken responsibility for this task. Existing service providers were often keen to support playgroups but had limited resources and could not take complete responsibility for playgroup coordination and support. Therefore a dedicated local coordinator is needed. In populous metropolitan areas one playgroup coordinator should be employed in each local government area. In rural areas a coordinator working part-time and across several local government areas may be adequate.

Local government appears to be the most appropriate place to locate playgroup coordinators for a number of reasons, including the facilitation of:

- networking with the Maternal and Child Health Service and other early childhood services
- input into community planning and design of buildings suitable for playgroup use
- links with community development and social planning staff
- referral of families attending playgroups to other services through access to community services directories
- monitoring of the need for playgroups through review of data on the number of incoming residents.

If local playgroup coordinators could not be located in local government, other auspice agencies, such as community health centres, could be considered.

The local playgroup coordinator's role should include the following tasks, as occurs in the City of Knox:

- visiting playgroup sessions
- providing written information to parents about playgroups
- discussing problems and issues where necessary
- maintaining a database of playgroups
- providing a central contact point for playgroups
- matching parents to suitable groups
- presenting playgroup leadership courses
- providing support to playgroup leaders
- delivering or facilitating the delivery of Presenting Positive Parenting workshops
- presenting workshops on playgroup practice
- distributing handouts on playgroup practice and parenting
- ongoing review of the need for playgroups in the municipality
- involvement in planning of new community centres and infrastructure to ensure they can accommodate playgroups
- linking with other services
- promoting playgroups to service providers
- supporting playgroup committees.

In addition to resourcing playgroups, the City of Knox Playgroup Field Officer provides education to first time parents' groups and Family Day Carers. The playgroup coordinator could take on a broader role of resourcing other children's services. The title of "parent or family resource worker" may then be more appropriate. A background in early childhood education, as well as experience in community development would be required for this role.

Local level matching of families with particular interests or needs is important. This currently takes place in Knox. Families may be matched on the basis of age or cultural background. For example, the Berwick Neighbourhood House has formed a grandparents playgroup. The Knox Playgroup Field Officer sometimes matches high need families to groups that she knows are very welcoming. This type of matching is best done at the local level.

Recommendation 11

A local playgroup coordinator should be employed in each metropolitan local government. In rural areas local coordinators could be employed over several local government areas. The main role of the local coordinator would be to maintain a database of playgroups, match families to playgroups, examine local need, provide support and education to playgroup members, and liaise between Playgrouping Victoria and local playgroups.

It is recognised that funding may not be available to employ a local playgroup coordinator in some local government areas. If this is the case, staff already employed at the local government level should take on the responsibility of coordinating playgroups. The statewide playgroup working party (see Recommendation 17) should guide the implementation of this coordinating role.

7.3.4 Role of Playgrouping Victoria

Playgrouping Victoria is a very useful resource for playgroups. It produces an informative manual on how to run playgroups, has a web-site, conducts leadership training, maintains a database of Victorian playgroups and attends individual playgroups on request. The population of Victoria is so large that maintaining an accurate database of playgroups across the state is extremely difficult. Likewise, visiting individual playgroups throughout the state is an enormous task. Playgrouping Victoria is currently reviewing its role.

Playgrouping Victoria is best placed to train locally based playgroup coordinators, support them through the production of quality, evidence-based educational materials for playgroups and communicate relevant information from government agencies to them.

Specifically the role of Playgrouping Victoria should be to:

- train local playgroup coordinators
- promote playgroups to professionals and the general community
- produce resources, such as their current manual, on running playgroups
- produce education modules for playgroups, based on the best available evidence. These modules may need modification by local playgroup coordinators to suit local need. The topics of the models should be based on need. Topics could be as diverse as “Dealing with food allergies” to “Talking to your children about terrorism”
- liaise with state and federal government agencies and other relevant bodies to collect and document up-to-date information relevant to playgroups
- disseminate information from the above sources to local playgroup coordinators
- make available a wide range of speakers who can be called upon by local playgroup leaders
- offer leadership training (this could also be offered locally to parents who were unable to travel)
- offer insurance to playgroups.

Recommendation 12

The main role of Playgrouping Victoria should be to train and support local playgroup coordinators, and disseminate up-to-date information and educational materials to them.

7.4 Sustainability

Almost all of the parents who were interviewed reported that they intended to attend playgroup after funding for the playgroup worker ceased. Despite this, a number of service providers, including the playgroup workers, were concerned about the sustainability of the playgroups established during this project. The key factors in sustaining playgroups is enabling leadership within the group, and on-going support which may be enhanced by establishing links with other community service providers.

All playgroups need on-going support to assist with activities and parent education, and some may require assistance in dealing with problems if they arise. As mentioned earlier, groups of high need families are likely to require higher levels of on-going support compared to other groups. Sustaining groups of high needs families is particularly important because it provides an inexpensive and enjoyable means of keeping families within the service system, thus providing opportunities for professionals to observe families and offer assistance if required. For some families, playgroup may be the only service attended on a regular basis.

7.4.1 Leadership

Parents who are interested in becoming playgroup leaders should be offered leadership training and ongoing support in their leadership role. Currently Playgrouping Victoria offers leadership courses. Some of the parents participating in playgroups in this project were unable to attend leadership training due to lack of transport. When parents are unable to attend Playgrouping Victoria leadership courses, training should be offered locally by the local coordinator, using Playgroup Victoria guidelines.

In the City of Knox, a representative from each playgroup session (usually the leader) participates on a playgroup committee of management. This means that each playgroup committee can oversee up to 15 playgroup sessions. This structure is efficient as it enables information from the local playgroup coordinator to be disseminated through the committees to individual playgroup sessions.

An important, and often unrecognised, benefit of playgroup participation is that it can build community capacity building through leadership training and community involvement.

Recommendation 13

Parents who are interested in becoming playgroup leaders should be offered leadership training, either through Playgrouping Victoria, or locally if they have difficulty accessing these courses.

Recommendation 14

One of the roles of the playgroup coordinator is to provide ongoing support to playgroup leaders, to ensure that playgroups offer a quality service to families.

7.4.2 Links with other services

Playgroup coordinators need to establish links and gain support for playgroups from other service providers in the community. In this project, links were formed with a variety of services including: the MCH Service, community centres, preschools, schools, VICSEG and migrant resource centres. These services promoted playgroups to their clients and often assisted in finding playgroup venues.

The role of the MCH Service is particularly important. Nurses and Enhanced Home Visiting staff should promote playgroups as a natural progression from first time parents' groups, either by supporting parents to maintain their first time parents' group, or if this is not possible, suggesting other suitable playgroups that parents could attend. MCH staff can also play an important role in ensuring that parents who are new to the area are informed about local playgroups. Where possible, MCH staff should occasionally attend playgroups. This could either be as guest speaker, facilitator, observer or to introduce a new member to the group. MCH staff could use this opportunity to promote their service to parents, particularly to parents of toddlers who may have stopped using the service. MCH staff could also work with playgroup coordinators to influence the parenting education delivered through playgroups, for example, through suggesting guest speakers.

Recommendation 15

Local playgroup coordinators should establish and maintain links with service providers in the community.

Recommendation 16

The MCH Service should promote playgroups to their clients. This should include staff asking all parents if they currently participate in a first time parents' group or playgroup. If parents are not linked to a group and would like to participate, the MCH Service should ensure they are directed to a suitable group.

7.5 Establishment of a playgroup working party

This project has demonstrated that support and coordination of playgroups can increase the number of operating playgroups, and hence increase access to playgroups for families. In order to ensure that the recommendations made in this report are taken further, a working group comprising key stakeholders should be established.

Recommendation 17

The Commonwealth Department of Family and Children's Services should take responsibility to establish and resource a statewide working group to further the recommendations made in this report.

8. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Literature review

Appendix 2: Knox model

Appendix 3: Summary of discussions with local service providers

Appendix 4: Focus group results

Appendix 5: Telephone interview survey results

Appendix 6: Parent interview schedule

Appendix 7: Table of results of parent interviews

Appendix 8: Interview questions for key service providers

Appendix 1

Literature Review

EARLY INTERVENTION PARENTING PROJECT

Improving access to Playgroups for all Families

Literature review

July 2001

Prepared by the
Centre for Community Child Health
Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne

What are playgroups?

The development of playgroups in Australia came about in the 1970's. The idea for Playgroups was influenced by the New Zealand experience, known as Playcentre. The two principles behind Playcentre were: that play is necessary for the growth of a child and that parents should be encouraged to be actively involved in the early education of their children. The experience in the UK also influenced the development of playgroups in Australia, although in the UK during the 1960's the Local Authorities and Social Service Departments began providing funding to train leaders and to pay supervisors as well as to purchase equipment (Playgrouping Associations in Australia, 1983).

The Australian model of playgrouping was much more embedded in a community development context. During the 1970's groups of women and children were coming together for mutual support in home based playgroups, taking responsibility for organisation upon themselves, instead of employing of designated play leaders (Playgrouping Associations in Australia, 1983).

Playgroups in Australia today vary somewhat in their form but generally include the following elements:

- groups of parents, carers and their young children who meet regularly
- not for profit and affordable
- for children aged birth to school age who have the opportunity to learn through play and interaction with other children and adults
- for parents and carers who share ideas and information in a supportive environment
- are community based and create a sense of community among families
- members of the group take responsibility for the planning, organisation and running of their playgroup
- held regularly usually weekly and sometimes on weekends
- usually run for about two hours
- usually meet in community spaces such as church halls, community halls, or sometimes in homes, or wherever is convenient for the group
- may comprise a diverse mix of families or may cater for a particular interest group such as for babies, particular ethnic groups, fathers, grandparents, special needs or for families with a particular need in common.
(Playgroup Manual, Playgrouping Victoria, 1998)

What does the literature say about the benefits of participation playgroups?

Playgroups, as we understand them in Australia, are rarely referred to in the literature. Although we know that playgroups have a two-fold benefit: for children involvement in playgroups provides opportunities for learning through play and socialising and for parents involvement in playgroups provides opportunities for social support. There is reasonable amount of literature covering these areas.

- Benefits for children

Play is important in the development of physical and cognitive maturity as well as a valuable outlet for expressing and working through emotions and the development of social skills. Establishing relationships with other children is a crucial task of the early childhood years. It sets the pathway to competence or deviance as children move toward middle childhood and adolescence (Phillips and Shonkoff, 2000). It is recognised that it is not easy for young children to play co-operatively make friends and sustain friendships. Children who do this well tend to “have well-structured experiences and peer interactions starting in toddlerhood and preschool, and, in particular opportunities to play with familiar and compatible peers”. (Phillips and Shonkoff, 2000). Children are more likely to initiate and engage in play when playmates are familiar to them (Howes 1988). Children are also likely to have a more secure relationship with their parents if they believe that parents have an important role in fostering their children's social interactions. Parents of socially capable young children believe that it is part of their parenting role to help their children learn to play (Goodnow, 1985). Playgroups provide children with opportunities for structured and unstructured play, with familiar children and the opportunity for parents to be involved in their children's play through the encouragement of positive interactions with other children.

- Benefits for parents

Playgroups benefit parents in that they provide social support, especially to first time parents who are making significant and crucial life style adjustments to their new role as a parent, often these parents experience feelings of social isolation and loneliness.

Social support is a term that relates to the connections between people. A basic premise between researchers and theorists is that social support is a multi-dimensional concept with both structural and functional components (DePanfilis, 1996). The functions of social support often cited are:

1. Emotional support (love, caring and empathy).
2. Tangible support (material assistance or behavioural assistance).
3. Cognitive aid (including information, guidance or feedback that can provide a solution to a problem).
4. Appraisal support (involves information relevant to self-evaluation) (Cameron, 1990; Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Thompson, 1992; Wills, 1985).
5. Social companionship (involves spending time with others in leisure and recreational activities) (Cohen and Hoberman, 1983; Wills, 1985).

Social support programs can be targeted toward serving one or more of these functions of social support. Social support also comprises a number of structural properties.

1. Accessibility, frequency of interaction and closeness with support network members (DePanfilis, 1996).
2. Reciprocity (Cameron, 1990; Thompson, 1992; Whittaker, Shinke and Gilchrist, 1986).

3. Length of time the social support has been or will be available (Cameron, 1990).
4. The stability or consistency of the network overtime (Thompson, 1992).
5. The degree of homogeneity (including socio-economic status, values etc) (Cameron, 1990).
6. The skills of the individual in the social network to access and benefit from the supportive relationships.

Having regard for all of the above complexities, social support can be defined as social relationships that result in emotional or behavioural benefits.

Playgroups as a social support intervention

Playgroups can be considered to be a form of social support intervention. Social support interventions include any interventions that at least in part address social isolation and loneliness. Depanfilis (1996) further defines social support interventions.

...Social support interventions are activities designed to alleviate stress and promote parental competencies and behaviours that will increase the ability of families to successfully nurture their children, enable families to use other resources and opportunities available in the community, and create supportive networks to enhance child-rearing abilities of parents and help compensate for increased social isolation and vulnerability of families.

Much of the literature around social support describes the correlation between lack of social support, quality of child rearing, maternal depression and child abuse and neglect (Brown and Harris 1978; Crittenden, 1985; Quittner, Glueckouff and Jackson 1990; Beeman 1997). Approximately one in ten women with young children experience depression (Gelfand 1996) with prevalence rates often reaching double this level for mothers living in poverty. Compared with children of non-depressed mothers, children with depressed mothers appear to have greater risk of developing socio-emotional and behaviour disorders (Williams and Carmichael, 1991) which can result into difficulties at school, poor peer relationships, reduced ability for self control and aggression (Campbell 1995, Cummings and Davies 1994; Zeanah 1997).

Pound and Mills (1987) reported that depressed mothers of young children were less responsive to the child's overtures and cues and more likely to respond with control when the child was distressed. There is also an association between post-partum depression and child abuse (Tonge 1984) accidental injury (Brown and Davidson 1978), language delay (Williams and Carmichael 1991)

Scott (1999) suggests that social support can act as a stress buffer and that it is likely that social support may not be effective in preventing sexual abuse but may be significant in the prevention of neglect in a context of parental stress and despair.

Majewski (1987) suggest that while partners provide new mothers with the greatest levels of support, support provided through parent groups can create a sustainable network over time.

Who participates in playgroups?

In the 1990s, the Victorian State Government required maternal and child health nurses to run 6-8 week groups for all first time mothers. Usually the participants are first time mothers, although fathers are encouraged to join to. The group sessions usually cover feeding, safety and post-birth adjustment. Dorothy Scott, for the University of Melbourne Social Work Department and the Victorian Department of Human services, undertook a study to assess the degree to which such groups evolved into self-sustaining supportive social networks. She found that two thirds of the groups were still meeting at twelve months after the sessions had ended. This supports anecdotal information that new parents groups tend to evolve into support groups for parents, and these are often playgroups.

Scott's research examined attendance at the new parents groups. Her interviews with nurses noted that some families were reluctant to join parent groups and these were subgroups of adolescent and single mothers; women from non-English speaking backgrounds and women from very low income groups. Research undertaken by Clarke (1995) included the completion of more than 600 questionnaires by mothers who had attended first time mothers groups. The research showed that the mothers attending tended to be married or living in a relationship, higher educated, earning average to above average family incomes and were predominantly English speakers.

DePanfilis (1996) found that an individual needs the motivation and skills to access and benefit from socially supportive relationships. Interventions that commence with social skills training can increase the effectiveness of other interventions targeted to serve specific social support functions. Gaudin (1993) found that some parents lack the basic verbal social interaction skills necessary for group participation. Use of modelling, coaching, rehearsing and feedback – individual, then in support groups- can significantly develop high need parents' social skills and result in strengthened informal support networks.

A Western Australian study undertaken by Gilleatt, Ferroni and Moore (1999), examined the participation by first time mothers in postnatal support groups also showed that participation in the groups tended to be by "middle-class first time mothers". They suggested that there is a need to provide interventions that are more appealing to "disadvantaged women".

In 1999 the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services conducted a research project to investigate the awareness levels and usage of Playgroups among families with children aged less than 5 years. The project included the random selection of 1015 parents across Australia for telephone interviewing. Some 15% of all respondents were using playgroups. The most frequently mentioned reason why families were not using playgroups was because *they did not believe that they had a child of an appropriate age* –28%. Some 70% of families not using playgroups were using childcare or pre-schools/kindergartens. Of the parents who were aware of playgroups but were not using them approximately one-sixth suggested that they would use one *if one opened close to home/had places available*. A similar proportion would be encouraged to use one *if they had time to take their child*. These responses indicate that there are many parents who are not accessing playgroups because either they can't find a suitable place or don't have the time to attend one. These barriers could probably be overcome with adequate resources and the provision of more flexible playgroup hours. The more challenging barriers to access were not thoroughly addressed in the telephone questionnaire.

From the summary results of the project provided by the Department of Family and Community Services, for this project, it appears that the questions asked of the non-attendees were directed at what could playgroups provide for children and how should they be organised to encourage attendance by more parents. There were also a number of questions around how playgroup information should be promoted. It does not appear that there were questions asked of what the parents' social support needs were such as the need for parents to join playgroups: with some shared values, that are inclusive, that are culturally appropriate etc.

What are the implications for this project?

The literature suggests that participation in playgroups can benefit children and parents. For children the benefits relate to the contribution that play makes to child development, for parents playgroups offer social support. Social support as an intervention reduces social isolation. Lack of social support has been associated with quality of parenting, maternal depression and child abuse and neglect. Social support can act as a stress buffer.

In Victoria, first time parents are invited to attend "new parents groups" that are facilitated by local maternal and child health nurses. Many of the parents who attend these groups tend to continue to meet after the nurse lead groups discontinue. For many of these parents their continued social networking forms the basis of new playgroups or they join existing playgroups. There is some evidence that there are subgroups of parents who are not participating in the new parent groups (adolescent and single mothers, women from non-English speaking backgrounds and parents from very low income groups). There is also some evidence that suggests that these types of parents do not always have the skills necessary to engage and benefit from socially supportive relationships.

This study provides an opportunity to build on the results of the National survey by investigating in more detail the three local areas (Cities of Casey, Knox and Wyndham) to gain more evidence about who does and doesn't participate in playgroups, and in particular the social support needs of parents who are not participating in playgroups. The telephone interviews will provide an opportunity to discuss with parents in these three local areas about why they have or haven't joined playgroups. The study also provides an opportunity to trial and report on strategies that appear to be effective in engaging a range of family types to participate in playgroups.

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Appendix 2

The Knox Model of Playgroup Provision



THE KNOX MODEL: PARENT-RUN PLAYGROUPS

A **PLAYGROUP** is a group of parents or caregivers and their pre-school children and babies who meet together regularly, usually once a week. Playgroups are not highly organised, but are a happy combination of adults and children playing and sharing experiences together.

All kinds of families are welcome to attend, including families with additional needs and families from other cultures. Fathers, mothers, babies and grandparents are welcome at playgroup. At playgroup, children and adults enjoy playing, learning and sharing experiences together

Playgroup offers Children:

- a safe, stimulating play environment to explore, full of fun and new experiences
- a place to meet other children, and to play with, or beside them
- a chance to play with different equipment and toys
- a place where they learn to trust other adults, and gain confidence in new situations and in their own abilities
- a safe place where they begin learning social skills and practicing some independence.

Young children learn best through play. They learn about the world and develop socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively.

Playgroup offers Adults:

- new friends with whom they can share ideas, information, joys and problems
- a place to share informal parent education, reassurance and support
- access to parenting information and services in the local community
- increased confidence as people and as parents
- a sense of community involvement and belonging
- special time to play with their children and to understand more about their development
 - understanding about the importance of play for young children: children learn through play.

Playgroup is as important for adults as it is for children. Knox City Council is unique in Australia in resourcing and supporting parent-run playgroups as an extension of the Maternal & Child Health service. Knox has the most parent-run playgroups, the highest uptake of families in playgroup, and is considered by Playgrouping Victoria to be the model of how playgroups should be supported, organised, and run. These groups build local networks of friendship and support, helping to reduce social isolation, and resulting in strong local communities.

History of Playgroups in Knox in Council Buildings

M&CH nurses started the first playgroups in M&CH centres in the 1960s.

- Knox deems playgroups are an extension of the M&CH service and have significant support from Council. There is a close and continuing relationship between M&CH nurses and playgroups. **First Parents' Groups**, education and support groups established by the Nurses for families having their first child, are encouraged to join playgroups in Knox centres when they are ready.

The State Government funded a **Toddler Teachers** program in Knox in the 1980s.

- Teachers worked with and beside parents in **Toddler Groups**, modelling, educating and empowering, with a particular emphasis on child development and the importance of play. This model consolidated the importance of playgroups in Knox.

When the State Government funding for this program was withdrawn.

- The local community lobbied Knox Council for some form of playgroup support. The response was Knox created a full-time position of **Playgroup Field Officer** in 1991.

Knox has always been a Proactive Council regarding playgroups:

- co-locating M&CH centres and preschools and providing appropriate indoor and outdoor play space for playgroups, including appropriate storage facilities.
co-location of these services facilitates the natural flow-on:
First Parents' Groups → Playgroups → Preschools
- establishing of incorporated committees of parents, to support the M&CH nurse, organise the playgroups and encourage parent and community health education
- in the 1990s:
 - building Murrindal and Liberty Ave Family Centres (Rowville), which included purpose-built playgroup facilities and storage
 - extending Boronia Children's Centre to co-locate M&CHC, Preschool and Childcare Centre, and include purpose-built playgroup facilities
 - extension of Park Ridge M&CHC (Rowville), adding purpose built playgroup facilities to the existing building, recognising the need for more playgroup places in the growth area in Knox.

Support from Knox City Council for Parent-run Playgroups

Deeming the parent-run playgroup program as an extension of the M&CH service.

- **provision and major maintenance of playgroup venues:** buildings and playgrounds appropriate for playgroups
- providing playgroup venues **rent free** and paying utilities in the centres
- funding of a full-time dedicated position **Playgroup Field Officer** to resource and support parent-run playgroups
- regular meetings with playgroup personnel through Combined Committees' Meetings. These meetings are chaired by a Knox Councillor with reports from M&CH team, Playgroup Field Officer and others
- appropriate interest, support and guidance from all levels of Council: Councillors, Senior management, M&CH Team, Landscape architects, Building maintenance, Finance etc.
- providing each centre with the **Guidebook for Maternal & Child Health Centre and Playgroup Committees**, which outlines the committees' responsibilities, relationship to Council, expectations, protocols and guidance.

Playgroups in Knox

In Knox, playgroups operate in Knox Council Buildings (Maternal & Child Health Centres, Family Centres, some Pre-Schools, Neighbourhood Houses, halls) and in church venues and private homes.

The majority of playgroups in Knox are in Maternal and Child Health Centres (M&CHC), and **all** M&CH Centres in Knox have playgroups. Each group in these centres comprises about 10 families (10-15 children) who meet each week, generally for a 2 hour session. The busiest centre in Knox (Murrindal Family Centre, Rowville) has 3 playgroup sessions each day (15 sessions per week), each group made up of different families. At Murrindal, over 130 families regularly attend playgroup.

The playgroups in Knox Council buildings are organised by incorporated parent committees, and are generally parent-run. Term fees for playgroups are set by the committees and are very reasonable, usually \$15 to \$25 per family per term, paid to the centre committee. Some committees also charge a Working Bee levy, which is refunded when a Working Bee is attended. If families have difficulty paying fees, the committees can reduce or waive fees. In Knox, no family should be excluded from playgroup because of financial hardship. All families in these playgroups must be covered by Playgrouping Victoria insurance.

Groups in church halls and other venues often have leaders. These groups are generally open to everybody and can be very supportive. There is no emphasis on religion, fees are very reasonable and some groups charge per session, rather than per term.

There are approximately 30 sessions of playgroup in 16 other venues, all attached to churches.

In Knox, there are approximately **250** playgroup sessions each week, **220** sessions of which are in **38** Knox Council buildings, mostly in the **25 M&CH Centres**. Other Knox buildings used to host playgroups are pre-schools, neighbourhood houses and community centres.

Each playgroup session comprises a separate group of parents/carers

- some centres run 3 sessions per day, 15 sessions per week
- Knox has more than **twice** as many playgroups as any other municipality, though only about 5th highest with the number of children aged 0-4
- Knox is the only municipality in Victoria where playgroup participation is not decreasing.

While most playgroups in Knox are open to all children from birth to school age, some playgroups are:

- for particular ages eg 2 year olds, or babies
- specifically for **young mothers**. There is a Young Mums' Playgroup in Bayswater
- specially for older children who are deferring preschool entry
- for a particular ethnic group. Currently Knox has two ethno-specific playgroups
 - an Armenian group, in Rowville
 - a facilitated Chinese group, a joint project of Knox Council and the Migrant Information Centre, in Wantirna.

Knox Council has a policy of **access and equity**, encouraging inclusion of **all** families into playgroup. There are fathers and grandparents in playgroups in Knox, families with additional needs (adults or children), as well as families with a range of cultural, social and economic backgrounds.

Knox also encourages groups to meet specific needs. In the past, there have been weekend playgroups, and groups specifically for fathers.

Talking Dads, an evening discussion group for fathers which has met monthly in a Knox playgroup centre for the past four years, grew out of fathers' participation in playgroup.

A Community Development Model

M&CHC and Playgroup Incorporated Committees

These are primarily composed of parents involved in playgroups. These parents have babies and very young children, and are often very tired. Some have post natal depression and many are in part-time employment and/or have other commitments and involvements, such as the Preschool committee, Nursing Mothers' Association etc.

Each year, they dedicate an enormous amount of time and effort to committee work and maintenance of their centre and its playgroups.

Each playgroup session must be represented on the centre committee

- support the M&CH nurse:
 - in regards to community health & well being
 - by purchasing resources for parent education, First Parents' groups etc.
- are responsible for:
 - overseeing the use of the building
 - organising parent-run playgroup sessions
 - subletting the venue, generally to community groups e.g. AMBA, 3 year old kinders, etc.
- control **INCOME** (fees, fundraising) and **EXPENDITURE** (materials, equipment, toys and major projects)
- fundraise for:
 - playgroup toys and equipment
 - resources for M&CH nurse
 - extensions and improvements to buildings and facilities.

A Close relationship is maintained between the Committees and Knox Council. Staff at the Council provide services, information, resources and support, and committees can access Council staff on an 'as needs' basis.

Formal Links between Committees and Knox Council

- **Combined Committees Meetings**, to which all M&CHC and Playgroup Committees are invited, are held at Council 3 times per year. These meetings offer regular interface between Council and the committees. They are chaired by a Knox Councillor, with reports from the M&CH Team Leader, the Playgroup Field Officer, and others. They provide a forum for discussion, and direct committee access to an elected Councillor and Council Staff. Minutes are circulated to all M&CHC and Playgroup Committees using Knox buildings
- Quarterly **Cluster Meetings**, chaired by the Playgroup Field Officer, are held in playgroup venues. There are three cluster areas in Knox: Ferntree Gully area, Wantirna area and Rowville area. These are informal network meetings in which committees are encouraged to share information, ideas and support. All known playgroups, including church and groups in other venues, are invited. Minutes from the three meetings are collated into one set and circulated to **all** playgroup centres. These minutes are effectively a quarterly newsletter, sharing playgroup information across Knox
- A **Guidebook for Maternal & Child Health Centre & Playgroup Committees**, written by Playgroup Field Officer, is provided for all committees in Knox buildings. This guidebook outlines committees' relationship to Council, roles and responsibilities, and contains a broad range of helpful information. It is updated on an 'as needs' basis
- The Playgroup Field Officer organises free **training for committees** twice a year, on Committee process and Treasurer's responsibilities
- Committee information and minutes are retained on file at Council.

The Playgroup Field Officer

Full time position, fully funded by Knox Council since 1991.

Main role: To resource and support parent-run playgroups in Knox.

Seeking to develop trust and maintaining close contact with the committees, mainly through the president and key committee members. Contact by phone, meetings, email and memos

- writing, updating the Guidebook, and circulating to committees
- setting up, and chairing the quarterly Cluster Meetings. Writing , collating and circulating the minutes
- visiting playgroup sessions: talking to the group, and individuals in it, on playgroup practice and parenting
- providing information on playgroups, written handouts (by phone, on playgroup visits, posted out to parents)
- discussing problems, issues, where necessary. Referring on to other services
- phone consultations: parents, committees and professionals
 - directing people to playgroups (listing continually updated)
 - explaining Knox Children's Services
 - providing appropriate information (verbal and written) and support to parents, committees and professionals
- presenting **Playgroup Courses** each term
 - 5 session evening course (10 hours) 1st & 3rd term
 - 2 session Saturday afternoon course (6 hours) 2nd & 4th termMany people who attend these courses become committee members
- presenting a 2 hour **Positive Parenting Workshop** each term. Fathers are well represented at these workshops
- presenting other workshops on playgroup practice etc on request
- writing and distributing handouts on playgroup practice and parenting
- available to help committees, playgroups, parents/carers with any issues or difficulties (Playgroup, parenting). Mediating disputes
- speaking at many **First Parents' Groups** about
 - the importance of playing with babies
 - playgroups in Knox (encouraging these groups to become playgroups)
- actively encouraging inclusion in playgroups of fathers, babies, grandparents, families from other cultures, families with additional needs
- providing training for incoming Knox Family Day Care providers on age-appropriate play environments and materials
- visiting Family Day Care playgroups on request, and providing in-service training for care providers on play, play materials and environments.

Liaising with:

Internal:

- M&CH nurses: providing written reports on playgroups visited in their centres, where necessary discussing concerns
- Preschool department: playgroups in preschools, children deferring preschool
- Youth department: re playgroup for young mothers
- Other council departments, on playgroup issues eg landscape architects, buildings
- Illoura Early Intervention Centre, re inclusion of children with additional needs in playgroup.

External:

- Playgrouping Victoria (regular contact)
- Parentzone, the regional parenting centre, re parent education, workshops, courses
- Monash Special Development School, re inclusion of children with additional needs into playgroup
- Multicultural Information Centre, re ethno-specific playgroups
- Strengthening Families, re finding playgroups appropriate to more vulnerable families
- Starting Out (Young mothers) and other services and agencies.

A Community Development Model: Parent-run Playgroups in Knox

Strengthening and empowering families and the local community

- safe, appropriate and non-stigmatised places to meet, make friends, build confidence and support each other
- safe, and age-appropriate environments for young children to play, socialise
- networks: linking local people to share information, parenting skills, support
- access to local parenting services, workshops and courses
- hedge against suburban isolation and loneliness, post natal depression
- encouraging commitment to local centre and neighbourhood
- locating the citizen in the community, giving a sense of involvement and belonging
- normalising problems/experiences (parenting, relationships etc)
- pool of 'normal' children, encourages more realistic expectations of behaviour
- greater understanding about the importance of play in babies' and young children's development, and age-appropriate play environments
- **LINKING COMMUNITY AND COUNCIL**
- **SEAMLESS CONTINUITY:**

Maternal & Child Health Service → First Parents' Groups → Playgroups → Preschools

Anne Fortune

Playgroup Field Officer, Knox City Council

Knox model 2001 parent-run playgroups

July 2001

Appendix 3

Summary Of Discussions with Local Service Providers

Interviews with local service providers.

A summary.

A number of discussions occurred with local service providers in Casey and Wyndham. These discussions have assisted the research in improving our understanding of:

- local community needs
- existing provision of playgroups
- the existing capacity of existing facilities and services
- gaps in current playgroup provision.

The discussions are ongoing and there are a number of further discussions with service providers in Wyndham and Casey that still need to occur. These include some of the family support agencies who work directly with high need families.

The following provides a summary of the discussions that have occurred do far.

Casey – A group discussion was held on September 19 with a range of Casey staff including representatives from: Community Development, MCH coordinator, Pre-school coordinator, Community Planner and the team leader of children’s services. The Playgroup Victoria field worker for eastern region also attended. This meeting focused on bringing together existing data to help provide a more informed overview of the City of Casey in particular to address the question “where is the need in Casey for increased participation in playgroups”. A follow up meeting was held with some of these staff in October.

To date the issues for Casey are:

- Existing playgroups do not keep waiting lists and so it is difficult to quantify the level of demand for playgroups that is not currently being met. Anecdotally, the Playgrouping Victoria field officer, who has contacted each playgroup in Casey, suggests that playgroup enrolment officers are receiving between ten phone calls per week to a one or two per month from families wanting to join their playgroups, however most of the existing playgroups are full.
- A review of Casey’s ten neighbourhood houses, has revealed that:
 1. There is no capacity for running additional groups in Hallam and Hampton Park.
 2. There is some capacity for running additional groups in Berwick, Blind Bight, Cranbourne, Doveton, Narre Warren, Merinda Park and Oak Grove.
 3. There is uncertainty about capacity for additional groups at Endeavour Hills neighbourhood house.
 4. Some of the additional capacity is dependent on the timing of planned and current extensions to some of the neighbourhood houses. Sometimes the capacity might only allow for an additional afternoon playgroup session which is not usually popular for families of very young children.
 5. Casey staff are still reviewing capacity of other facilities such as pre-schools to accommodate additional groups.

- The initial thoughts for the project direction for next year is: to firstly consider establishing a group in the Blind Bight area (near Tooradin), families living in this area are both geographically and socially isolated. A number of low income families living in this area are travelling 10km by bus to take their children to pre-school. There was a playgroup running in the neighbourhood house that was unsuccessful, there is need in this area for a facilitated playgroup. Because of the connection with the neighbourhood house it is possible that there could be staff from the neighbourhood house who could continue to support the playgroup after this project is completed. The other important issue for this area is the need to support existing playgroups (approximately 74) to operate more effectively. Casey's existing playgroups need: to be properly supported through effective committees of management; to develop ways of sharing limited resources with other community groups; to be more systematic in recording waiting lists; and to support families more actively in finding appropriate playgroups.
- It is evident that Casey requires some support to improve the existing playgroup system and network and that this is likely to facilitate increased participation by more families. Because the area is growing so rapidly there are new families continually moving into the area, often these families have no links with their new community. Rapidly growing areas like Casey need an improved system for new families to be able to find appropriate social support in a timely manner as this would reduce their social isolation.

Wyndham – A number of discussions have occurred with groups of service providers. During October discussions were held with

1. The Wyndham-Hobson's Bay Parent Education Network.
2. A group of Wyndham Maternal and Child Health nurses (including outreach nurses)
3. Existing community centre coordinators.

Individual discussions have also been held with other Council staff including Council's social planner and Christine Randich (before she left the position of parent resource worker).

The emerging issues for Wyndham so far are:

- Activity groups might be replacing playgroups in some areas.
- There are identifiable pockets of disadvantage in the municipality and these areas are Heathdale and Wyndhamvale.
- There is a lack of clarity around other projects that are currently occurring in these areas, there is a need to ensure that this project doesn't duplicate their projects.
- There is some capacity for additional playgroups to operate from the following community centres: Heathdale, Quantin Binnah Werribee, Wyndhamvale, Werribee, The Grange Tarneit, and Wilmington. For most of these centres there is no capacity for morning playgroups but possibly 11.30-1.30 groups. These times are not popular with families of very young children.

- There are some rapidly growing areas such as Point Cook that do not currently have playgroups due to the fact that there are no community facilities.
- There is a growing concern amongst staff from Glenordin primary school, Heathdale, at the increasing number of children starting school who have had not accessed any early childhood services eg there were eight for 2001.
- There are some Islamic families living in the Wyndham area, who use the Islamic school, who are not using existing playgroups.
- The initial thoughts for the project direction next year are: to look at linking in with the Islamic school to identify whether or not there is the potential for a playgroup for Islamic families (or can they be encouraged to join existing groups). There may also be an opportunity to offer a group at the Grange where the maternal and child health nurse believes she has enough Islamic families to start a group. Consider establishing a playgroup in Point Cook there will be an issue around finding a suitable venue here although the possibilities include running a group from homes or from the privately owned gymnasium. Work with the Glen Orden Primary School, Heathdale, to establish their interest in using the school as a link into that community to engage more families in playgroup.
- Glen Orden primary school have agreed to the proposition and have a double room that they are prepared to offer for 2002. This group from our discussion would initially be led by Council's Family Resource worker, it is hoped that [parents can model and learn parenting skills. The aim would be to lead the group to be self sufficient and be supported by the worker only as needed.

Appendix 4

Focus Group Results

Improving access to playgroups for all families

Results from the focus groups.

During July and August 2001 staff from the Centre for Community Child Health met with six existing playgroups two from each of the three participating municipalities (Casey, Knox and Wyndham.) Staff from each of the local governments used their local contacts to make contact with the groups and to ask for their permission for CCCH staff to visit the playgroups and talk with them.

A range of different playgroup types were included in the sample of playgroups, these included a CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) group, a young mums group, a group with a child who had additional needs, a group residing in a low-income area, two groups operating on the urban fringe one was parent managed and one had a paid facilitator. The number of parents involved in the discussions varied from between 6 and 15, the average number being around 10 parents. The discussions were taped and notes were taken by a CCCH staff member. The discussions were conducted during the playgroup sessions, in some instances the children were taken to a separate space away from the parents either by some of the parents or by the leaders of the groups. Parents who preferred to remain with their children were encouraged to do so. The length of time for each discussion was approximately 40 minutes.

Each group was asked a similar list of questions (refer to the focus group topic guide at end of this section). The results have been summarised thematically to answer some key questions that will help to inform the next phases of the study that is, the development of a telephone questionnaire and the development of strategies to increase participation in playgroups by residents living in the municipalities of Casey and Wyndham

Theme 1. How do parents find out about playgroups?

Many parents found out about playgroups through their Maternal and Child Health nurses or through information made available, notices etc at the Maternal and Child Health centres. In Casey and Wyndham, parents used a wider range of sources including friends, family, local paper, Council directories, etc. Parents talked about their experiences with Maternal and Child Health nurses and described them as “good” or “helpful” if they had helped them to find a playgroup. Many parents thought that this was part of the role of the Maternal and Child Health nurses.

I think that it starts with the health nurses. If your health nurse would let you know then you'd be fine but I think somehow nurses don't let mothers know that there are playgroups around so the parents don't know

The discussions also involved attendance at first time mothers groups and whether or not groups of first-time parents stayed together to form a playgroup. Some of the parents had met in their first time mothers groups and had stayed together. For other parents: some still regularly met up with the other first-time parents in each others homes; others had met up with the parents again in playgroups some years later; and for a few of the parents they had remained friends and joined an existing playgroup when their children were too old to meet in each others homes.

We've just formed a friendship by having something in common to start off with. We still meet about once a month and now they're older we try to go out to indoor play centres or something.

For many of the parents they no longer lived in the areas where they had their first children and so it was not possible to continue to meet with the parents they had met in the first time parents groups. Those parents who did not attend first time parents groups explained that in some instances the nurses didn't encourage their attendance because of the way the group was described to them.

I came to the sister here and the way she explained it (new parents groups), she said to me that they talk about problems and I thought I can do without other people's problems so I never bothered to come.

For some parents they didn't know what a first-time parents group was.

I didn't even know what a new parents group is.

For many of the young mums, first time parent groups wasn't a positive experience. The following comments were all made by mums aged under 25 years.

I went to first time mothers group it was horrible

I did go to first time mothers and I hated it

I didn't go, the Maternal and Child Health nurse said I should go, but there was no one under 30

I went to new mums for about 4 weeks, me and another young girl, and we'd just sit there and it was like them and us.

They (the older mothers) think I know nothing, I know how to have sex don't I.

For other young mums they thought that first time parents groups were more positive.

I went to first time parents groups and all of the other mums are aged around 25-30. There are five of us it isn't too bad. I don't know everything so I get tips and stuff like safety stuff and about solids.

Findings

Maternal and Child Health nurses are an important source of information for first time parents. The nurses can provide parents with information about first time parents groups and about how groups can stay together after the first time parents group sessions have been completed. Parents also look at notice boards and for other community information at the Maternal and Child Health centres. It seems as though the nurses also have an important role in promoting first time parents groups and playgroups as groups that can provide benefits for parents and children. Community directories and new resident kits are also important sources for parents wanting to find out about playgroups.

The literature review identified an association between attendance at first time parents groups and attendance at playgroups. It would seem important therefore for that first time parents groups to be inclusive of all parents. The playgroup participants interviewed during the focus groups shared their range of experiences with first time parents groups both positive and negative. It appears that the young mums were more likely to have had negative experiences in first time parents groups. It also seems that having formed some relationships with other parents during first time parents groups it becomes easier for these groups of friends to join a playgroup together.

Theme 2. How does participation in playgroup benefit parents?

The groups were asked what they expected to get out of joining a playgroup and had they gained anything additional to what they had expected. Most of the parents said that they had joined for their child's need to socialise. Nearly all of the parents said that they had made friendships out of the joining the group and some had not really expected to make such strong friendships.

Oh I have made a lot of new friendships, heaps I mean the people I can name off my hand that you can just ring and say hi, yeah heaps of friendships

For some parents they seemed to like the benefit of reducing their level of isolation and feeling like they are part of their community.

You go to the local shopping centre where most of us shop and you always bump into somebody.

It can be pretty isolated at home sometimes, so its good to get out and come here there is plenty more to play with...even when its wet its good to here, it's a great place to go I would come here more often if I could.

I mean it's an adult to talk to instead of just children all the time. It's isolating when you are at home with children, it limits what you can do socially. This becomes an opportunity to chat with people you have common areas of interest with.

I didn't know any one here. So ever since I have had her it's just who I have met through playgroup and the health sisters

I didn't go to first time mothers group because I had triplets so trying to go to mothers groups was impossible. I didn't have any contact with any mothers or any other kids until playgroup.

Some parents were able to discuss the type of support that they got from the group other than friendship, for some the support was more tangible like being able to ring up some one from playgroup to look after their children for a few hours. For others the support was around sharing problems.

It's nice to sit down and chat to find out that you are not the only one going through, um you know whatever problems you might be having and it's a good support.

For some parents they found it helpful and reassuring to know that their children were "normal" and behaving in a similar way to other children.

You can see other kids, you think that your child's abnormal doing a certain thing and then you see another child doing exactly the same thing and you think oh well that's OK.

Parents were also using playgroups to find out about their local community.

We talk about kinders sometimes.

We talk about kinders a lot and where do we go from here when they get older.

We talk about if they have experienced that place or that service you'd get that feedback rather than going cold turkey somewhere from the paper or not knowing anybody.

I found out a lot about local schools just by talking to the other mothers who may have children at those schools.

I found out about cheap clothing outlets.

The maternal and child health nurses and I put notices and local information sheets up on the notice board here.

The young mums group talked about the benefits that they experienced in a different way. The group didn't see themselves as a playgroup but more like a young mums group.

This is a young mum's group not a playgroup, it is for the mums and run by the council. Playgroups are an outlet for both the mother and the child.

We do activities like cooking and craft and go out for outings like bowling, movies and aerobics

My mum booked the kids in. Mum and I were ready to kill each other

You need other young people that's how I got by.

The young mums were very positive about their group, they all seemed to feel very positive about being part of the group.

It's mum's day out

This group is the best thing

I'm spewing I didn't find out about this group when I was 17.

Findings

The participants in the focus group found it easy to discuss the benefits that they had found by being part of a playgroup and these included:

- friendships
- reduced isolation
- feeling like they were part of the community
- tangible support such as babysitting
- being able to share problems
- feeling reassured about their child's behaviour and development
- being able to find information about their community.

For the young mums they saw the benefit as having an opportunity to be with other young mums and being able to do recreational activities together.

Theme 3. How does participation in playgroup benefit children?

All the parents thought that their child's participation in playgroups helped them to learn how to socialise with other children. Parents also talked about the importance of having a child friendly place for them to play together. Some parents saw participating in playgroup as preparing their children for pre-school.

She had no one else to play with it was just her. So I wanted her to interact with other kids and be able to play and share.

My child was old enough for three year old kinder but I still wanted, I wasn't ready to let him go so I wanted to do something that gave him the benefits of learning and sharing and doing activities and stuff but still having control of that.

I just wanted them to be able to play with other kids because they have only played together and this way they stay just a little bit away from me and they don't see me all of the time and that's to get my oldest son ready for kinder.

I've got twins and they only play together I wanted them to have different things to play with in a different environment.

The parents of the groups where there was a leader appreciated the leader and they felt that it gave them more time to play with their children.

I think its nice to come here where you know that the equipment is here you know that someone (the leader) is going to set up the things I mean everyone is prepared to pitch in and help but they don't want to be responsible for actually organising it.

Parents whose children didn't speak English saw benefit in participating in playgroup. For the parents of the Turkish Armenian group they wanted their children to speak their first language and to delay learning English.

With our kids once they are at school they just pick up the English and forget about other languages. So until they get to school age we want to pump up the Armenian and the Turkish because once they pick up English that's it.

If 3 year old kinder is too small next year, we will do another playgroup and kinder. I will come here, but I will decide to take him to another place as well because he needs to speak English as well. This is why I will take him to another playgroup.

One CALD parent in an English speaking playgroup thought that it was important for her child to be with English speaking children because he didn't speak English at home.

I want him to speak English here, I'm speaking my language at home.

Another parent in one of the groups had a child who was vision impaired. She thought that it was important for her child to be part of a playgroup.

At the moment she goes to a three- year old kinder at the RVIB as well. But I think it is important for her to just, you know, she is with other vision impaired kids, it's a little bit different, but its important for her to come to a normal playgroup as well and a normal kinder and a normal school and to get used to all that.

Findings

Nearly all parents talked about the benefits of playgroup participation for their children in particular they saw the benefits as being:

- learning to play and socialise with other children
- being to play in a different environment with different resources than at home
- preparation for pre-school
- either promoting the child's use of English as a second language or helping to retain their first language by being part of a non-English speaking group

- for the child who was vision impaired participating in playgroup helped the child to learn how to play with children who weren't vision impaired
- the young mum's group didn't talk about the benefits for their children, they saw their involvement in the group as being something for themselves

Theme 4. Inclusion issues and playgroups.

The issue of inclusion was discussed in each of the groups. Parents tended to talk about groups that they or their friends had previously participated in but had since left because they didn't feel that they were included in the groups.

My sister went to one playgroup where the other mothers were really aggressive, so she left and went to another one.

I think some groups can be quite cliquey, you know if you get into or join a group and the mums have been there a long time sometimes they feel out-casted.

Bigger groups are like that too. They sort of go off in their own little sets and if you come in when their already in their little sets you just miss out...it's just like joining a new school

The parents talked about how new members had to be able to be strong and confident when you joined a playgroup. There was also discussion that this seems to be easier for some parents than others.

Its up to the individual, you have to make your self included. Like everything, you have to put your part in to get anything back. Everyone in our playgroup gets along and if there is a new person we just talk to them and make them feel welcome.

I think also it depends on new the new person coming in, I mean fair enough for the first few weeks everyone is a bit quiet and tends to keep to themselves and just play with their child or watch their child to make sure that their not getting battered over the head...but then its up to them to also come half way and start talking to the other mothers and include themselves in general discussion.

For some mothers first impressions count, for example whether the other mothers are welcoming, if all the children seem happy and playing well together and the physical environment.

First impressions countthe room, the people that are in the room, the general cleanliness of the kids that are in that room....I mean if someone comes in and thinks "what a horrible bunch of little creatures" their not going to come back.

The behaviour of children can affect the parent's feeling of whether or not they feel like they belong to the group. When a child's behaviour seems to upset other children in the group and when the parent doesn't try to manage the behaviour the other parents are likely to judge the parent as a "bad parent". This judging can eventually mean that for some parents they no longer feel like part of the group and they may leave.

If a parent's trying to do their best thing for their kid, then they look as if they are having a go. Yeah I think I feel worse if the mum's just ignoring the bad behaviour, then I feel worse, but if she's having a good try to contain them then that's OK.

We don't want to go "listen your kid's a pain in the neck sort him out" because it is not good for friendships and it is not good for the group.

The Knox group relied on Anne Fortune (the playgroup worker) to help them to sort out any problems in their group with child behaviour.

Anne Fortune can just pop into the group out of the blue and help to sort things out, or we can ring her as well if we've got a problem child or if there's something going on within the group and she comes and gives us information about behaviour and how to manage things.

It (Anne Fortune's involvement) is all done very tactfully and we also try to get together as a group and try to work this out and not point the finger at anyone, it really does help.

For the most of the young mums they found that their age meant that they didn't feel like they could fit into playgroups with older mothers, some of them had tried other playgroups but had not stayed for long.

I was 18 when I went there (another playgroup). The other women were mainly over 30, the other youngest women was 28 and we got along ok but she was married so we couldn't see each other outside of playgroup. I think that it was my age which was why I didn't like it.

They are also very uppity, you are stereotyped. I was going there with all these married women...I just felt as though I shouldn't have been there.

They make you think you are a bad mother, but I knew what I was doing.

I went to another playgroup for about 18 months but I never really liked it- they were all old.

Findings

For parents it is important to feel like they are included and a part of the playgroup. A number of factors seem to influence whether or not a parent feels included in playgroup and these were:

- whether or not the playgroup had established cliques that prevented a new member to feel like they were part of the group
- whether or not people in the group are welcoming
- parent level of confidence
- "inappropriate" child behaviour can isolate some families from within the playgroup.
- age- the young mums felt they were judged and had little in common with the older mothers.

The Knox parents understood that their Council's playgroup worker could support them to deal appropriately with child behaviour and other issues in the group in a way that made the group feel like they working out any problems together as a group.

Theme 5 Barriers to Access

Near the end of the discussions the participants were asked to talk about what they thought were the barriers to accessing playgroups and they came up with following list:

1. For the young mum's transport is an important issue, some of the young mums are currently transported to the young mums group with Council's Youth Services bus.
2. Other mothers said that they were one car families and had days where they didn't have access to a car.
3. Most parents wanted to be able to have playgroup in their neighbourhood so that they could walk.
4. Parents level of English.
5. Parents thought that some people just aren't comfortable joining groups and that some parents want to stay at home or do other activities with their children.
6. There is a need for more playgroups and shorter waiting lists (not in Knox).
7. Casey had a problem with there not being a dedicated playgroup space and that priority would always be given to pre-schools over playgroups.
8. Not feeling included.
9. Difficulties around finding spaces in appropriate groups (not in Knox)

Appendix 5

Telephone Interview Survey Results

Summary Tables

Telephone Interview Results

Increasing Access to Playgroups for all Families Project

Table 1: The sample

Area	sample	<25yrs	25-50yrs	51+yrs	Health Care Card		Playgroup attendance	
					Yes	NO	Yes	NO
Knox	176	7	166	3	29	147	79	97
Casey	186	10	176	0	56	130	50	136
Wyndham	171	10	152	9	52	119	39	132

The original telephone interview sample was 200 parents from each of the three Local Government Areas (LGA's). However, after data cleaning, it was evident the sample included families where both parents were working full time, this was an oversight on behalf of the market research firm who were instructed to screen out these families. The above samples (176 parents in Knox, 186 parents from Casey and 171 from Wyndham) have been adjusted to include only families where at least one parent is not working full time. It is assumed, families with full-time working parents are less likely to use local playgroups and therefore would not be appropriate for the sample. While it is recognised there is some demand for weekend playgroups to meet the needs of full-time working parents, these families were not the focus of this project.

The above table shows there were a higher number of Health Care Card holders in the Wyndham and Casey sample than in the Knox sample. This reflects the larger proportion of lower income families living in Casey and Wyndham compared with Knox. The table also shows there were substantially more families using playgroups in Knox compared to the other two LGA's. This supports the data previously obtained from Playgrouping Victoria that showed Knox has the highest rate of playgroup participation in the State.

Table 2: Attendance at first time parents groups

	No.	%
Attend first time parents groups: Yes	359	67%
No	174	33%
Total	533	100%
Reason Didn't Attend		
I didn't know about them	38	
They weren't offered to me	21	
I didn't feel that I needed it	15	
I was working	14	
I had friends and family didn't need it	11	
I wasn't interested	11	
I'm a grandparent	7	
I came from interstate we didn't have them there	7	
I didn't have time	6	
There weren't any running at the time when I needed them	6	
Personal/family stress at that time	6	
I have additional needs	5	

Reasons Didn't Attend	No.	%
I didn't have a car	4	
I don't feel comfortable in groups	4	
Attending other groups	4	
I'm not the primary carer	4	
We lived in another area	4	
I couldn't get there at the right time/day	4	
I was overseas	3	
My child was unwell	3	
I didn't like the maternal and child health nurse	3	
I was unwell	2	
I am a young mum and felt uncomfortable around older mums	2	
I haven't heard good things about them	1	
I didn't speak English	1	
My child has additional needs	1	
Too tired baby didn't sleep	1	
It was too hot to take baby out of house	1	
I was still at school	1	
Other	3	
Total	193	

The above table should be treated with some caution. Interviewers were instructed to ask all respondents "Have you ever attended first time parents groups?" however the responses to this question appear as though respondents may have been answering the question "Have you ever attended first time parents group for your children currently aged between 0-4 years?" Responses such as "they weren't offered to me" and "I didn't feel I needed it" could therefore be expected if the respondent was answering the question for their second or subsequent children. The responses to this question were explored in some depth and where parents answered "I went for an older child", or "don't need this is not first child" the responses were adjusted to "yes I have attended first time parents groups". Having noted the limitations with this question there are still some interesting reasons why some parents didn't attend first time parent groups including not knowing about them, coming from interstate, not being available at a suitable time, parents working/too busy etc.

Table 3: Association between attendance at first time parents group and attendance at playgroup.

The literature review undertaken in 2001 seemed to indicate that there was some association between attendance at first time parent groups and attendance at playgroups. The following table shows that there is a statistical association.

	Never attended playgroup		Current or have ever attended playgroup		Total	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
Respondents who have attended first time parents group	110	31	249	69	359	100

Respondents from all 3 LGAs who attended first time parents groups were more likely to have attended playgroup at some point or currently attending playgroup than those respondents who have never attended playgroup. (chi square test, p=0.000).

Table 4: Activities take children (0-4 yr olds) to in a usual week

	Total	Knox	Casey	Wyndham
Total Rrespondents	533	176	186	171
Visit friends	443 83%	160 91%	159 85%	124 73%
Visit other family	439 82%	155 88%	149 80%	135 79%
Swimming classes	183 34%	74 42%	53 27%	59 35%
Playgroup	168 32%	79 45%	50 27%	39 23%
Visit families met at first time parents group	141 26%	77 44%	32 17%	32 19%
Library	141 26%	69 39%	37 20%	39 20%
Long Day Child Care Centre	111 21%	30 17%	45 24%	36 21%
4 yr old pre-school	109 20%	29 16%	31 17%	49 29%
3 yr old pre-school	70 13%	30 17%	22 12%	18 11%
Visit church group	70 13%	23 13%	26 14%	21 12%
Activity group	49 9%	22 13%	12 6%	15 9%
Occasional care	53 10%	25 14%	22 12%	6 4%
Toddler Gym. Gymbaroo kindergym	49 9%	19 11%	12 6%	18 11%
Dance/Music classes	38 7%	23 13%	8 4%	7 4%
Family day care	27 5%	6 3%	11 6%	10 6%
Visit other community group	13 2%	6 3%	2 1%	5 3%
Visit Early Intervention Centre	13 2%	5 3%	4 2%	4 2%
Other	8 2%	5 3%		3 2%
Total	2127	837	673	617

The above table shows that most families are undertaking some activities in a usual week with their 0-4year olds. For the total sample (533 parents) the five most common activities were visit friends (83%), visit other family (82%), attend swimming classes (34%), attend playgroup (32%) and visit families that they have met through first time parents groups. This information is interesting as it demonstrates that apart from visiting family and friends the most common activities that 0-4 year olds participate in are swimming classes and playgroups. The utilisation of playgroups in Knox was high 45% of 0-4 year olds compared with 27% in Casey and 23% in Wyndham.

The table also shows that a very high proportion of Knox respondents (44%) were visiting families that they had met at first time parent groups, this compared to the smaller proportions in Casey (17%) and Wyndham (19%) families. Some 29% of respondents in Wyndham were using 4-year-old pre-schools and this was significantly higher than the proportion in Knox (16%) and Casey (17%). There were notably more children attending occasional care in Knox (14%) and Casey (12%) when compared to Wyndham (4%). Activity group utilisation was more common in Knox (13%) and Wyndham (9%) than Casey (6%). A higher proportion of children appear to be attending private classes such as music classes, dancing, Gymparoo and toddler gym in Knox (26%) than in Casey (10%) and Wyndham (15%) this might reflect the higher incomes of the Knox residents and an increased ability to pay for these types of activities.

Overall, the Knox respondents are participating in more activities (excluding long day care in childcare centres and family day care) in a usual week than were the Wyndham and Casey respondents. This is not surprising given that only 20% of Knox respondents said that their children attended child care where as 30% of Casey respondents and 27% of Wyndham respondents said that their children attended child care. We can therefore assume that children in Casey and Wyndham have less time in a usual week to participate in activities together with their parents.

Table 5: Association between attendance at playgroup in a usual week and being a Health Care Card holder.

As an indicator of income level all respondents were asked whether or not they were Health Care Card holders. The following shows that respondents who attend playgroup in a usual week were more likely not to have a health care card (chi square test, $p=0.05$). This may indicate higher income families are utilising playgroups in a usual week.

	Health Care Card Holder				Total	
	Yes		No			
Did attend playgroup in a usual week	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
	34	20	134	80	168	100

Table 6: Type of playgroup attending

	Total	Knox	Casey	Wyndham
Total respondents	168	79	50	39
Parent run and organised	110 65%	60 76%	28 56%	22 56%
Church run playgroup	21 13%	8 10%	9 18%	4 10%
Paid playgroup worker runs group	12 7%	5 6%	4 8%	6 13%
One parent runs group all parents stay	13 7%	3 4%	4 8%	6 13%
Volunteer worker (not a parent) runs group	8 5%	1 1%	4 8%	3 8%
A continuation of 1 st time parents group	7 4%	4 5%	3 6%	
Childcare workers look after the children so parents can leave	5 3%		4 8%	1 3%

	Total	Knox	Casey	Wyndham
For a specific group of parents eg. Young mums/cultural group	2 1%			2 5%
For a specific group of children eg. Child with additional needs	1 1%	1 1%		
Not established	1 1%	1 1%		
Other	1 1%		1 2%	
Total	181	83	55	43

Of the Knox respondents attending playgroups some 76% attend parent run playgroups compared to Casey (56%) and Wyndham (56%). Some 18% of Casey respondents said they attend church run playgroups compared to Knox (10%) and Wyndham (10%). Wyndham had a higher proportion of respondents suggesting that they attend a playgroup run by a paid worker.

Table 7: Association between attendance at a parent-run playgroup and marital status.

A number of demographic variables were analysed against attendance in parent run playgroups. A statistical association between the marital status and attendance at parent run playgroups was identified.

	Married or living with a partner		A sole parent/ divorced/widowed		Total	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
Attended a parent-run playgroup	104	100	0	0	104	100

The above table shows that respondents who attend a parent-run playgroup are more likely to be married or living with a partner than being a sole parent / divorced or widowed (chi square test, p=0.025). This may indicate higher income families are more likely to attended parent-run playgroups. It could also reflect that many of the facilitated playgroups are targeted towards vulnerable families such as young mums groups.

Table 8: Is your current playgroup session the only one you have used?

	Total	Knox	Casey	Wyndham
Yes	130 77%	59 75%	40 80%	31 79%
No	37 22%	19 24%	10 20%	8 21%
Total	168 100%	79 100%	50 100%	39 100%

The above information shows that while most of the respondents had only ever used one playgroup, there is still a reasonable proportion (around 20%) of respondents who have moved to other playgroups. The reasons that the families had said that they had moved playgroups are outlined in the following table.

Table 9: Reason parents left a playgroup

	Total	Knox	Casey	Wyndham
Total respondents	37	19	10	8
10 27%	10 27%	5 26%	3 30%	2 25%
Parents too cliquey	7 19%	3 16%	3 30%	1 13%
Didn't feel comfortable/ didn't feel included	5 13%	1 5%	3 30%	1 11%
Day/time didn't suit	4 11%	3 16%		1 13%
Group too structured	3 8%	1 5%	2 20%	
Group not structured enough	4 11%	1 5%		3 38%
It was for an older child now at school	4 11%	1 5%	2 20%	1 13%
Children were too old/too young	2 5%	2 11%		
Other parents didn't discipline their child	1 3%	1 5%		
Didn't like the physical environment	1 3%	1 5%		
I didn't feel included	1 3%	1 5%		
Other	3 8%	2 11%		1 13%
Total	51	25	15	11

While some caution needs to be taken in the analysis of this question, due to the small sample size, there is a trend that the most frequently mentioned reasons for leaving a playgroup were: moving out of the area and feeling excluded (indicated in the “parents too cliquey”, “I didn’t feel comfortable/included responses”) Statistical associations for these responses were unable to be identified due to the small sample size.

Table 10: How did parents find out about playgroup?

	Total	Knox	Casey	Wyndham
Total respondents	168	79	50	39
Maternal & Child Health Nurse	65 39%	42 53%	14 28%	9 23%
From friends and family	37 22%	9 11%	14 28%	14 36%
My first time parents group stayed together become a playgroup	14 8%	8 10%	5 10%	1 3%
Local Newspaper	12 7%	3 4%	6 12%	3 8%
Church	8 5%	4 5%	4 5%	

	Total	Knox	Casey	Wyndham
School	6 4%	1 1%	3 6%	2 5%
Local Council Staff	6 4%	3 4%		3 8%
Local Council directory	7 45	2 3%		5 13%
Walking past	4 2%	3 4%		1 3%
I started it	3 2%	1 1%	2 4%	
Playgrouping Vic	1 1%		1 2%	
Other Community Services	1 1%	1 1%		
Not established	1 1%	1 1%		
Other	3 2%	1 1%	1 2%	1 3%
Total	168	79	50	39

Maternal and Child Health nurses were a more important source of information about playgroups for the Knox respondents than they were for the Wyndham and Casey respondents. For the Knox respondents more than half (53%) found out about playgroups from their Maternal and Child Health nurse, the other main sources of information were from friends and family (11%). The main source of information about playgroups for the Wyndham respondents was friends and family (36%), Maternal and Child Health nurse (23%) and Local Council directory (13%). For Casey the main responses were Maternal and Child Health nurse (28%) and friends and family (28%). The heavy reliance, in Casey and Wyndham, on finding out about playgroups from friends and family could be potentially problematic for those more isolated families who might be new to the area or who do not have local friends or family members.

Table11: How do parents travel to playgroup?

	Total	Knox	Casey	Wyndham
Total respondents	168	79	50	39
Own Car	139 83%	66 84%	43 86%	30 77%
Walk	64 38%	41 52%	12 24%	11 28%
Someone else's car	2 1%	1 1%		1 3%
Changes visit each others homes	3 2%		2 4%	1 3%
Not established	1 1%	1 1%		
Other	1 1%			1 3%
Total	210	109	57	44

Travelling by car to playgroup is the most common means. More respondents in Knox (52%) walk to playgroup compared to Casey (24%) and Wyndham (28%). This possibly reflects the large number of local neighbourhood children’s centres where most playgroups meet. Knox residents do not therefore need to travel as far to playgroup compared to Casey and Wyndham.

Table12: Places where playgroups meet

	Total	Knox	Casey	Wyndham
Total respondents	168	70	50	39
Maternal & Child Health Centres	47 28%	36 46%	7 14%	4 10%
Community Centre Hall	36 21%	4 5%	14 28%	18 46%
Church Hall	32 19%	9 11%	15 30%	8 21%
Pre-school building	22 13%	11 14%	6 12%	5 13%
Private home	16 10%	8 10%	4 8%	4 10%
Designated playgroup building	12 7%	9 11%	3 6%	
Child Care Centre	1 1%		1 2%	
Not established	1 1%	1 1%		
Other	1 1%	1 1%		
Total	168	79	50	39

The above table shows that the most frequently mentioned venues for playgroups were Maternal and Child Health Centre in Knox, Church Halls in Casey, and Community Centres in Wyndham. In Wyndham church halls also seem to well utilised. This might suggest the limited access to community centres as being a possible barrier to the formation of playgroups in the Cities of Casey and Wyndham.

Table13: History of playgroup attendance for parents not currently using a playgroup

Have you ever attended a playgroup?	Total	Knox	Casey	Wyndham
Yes	171 47%	58 60%	51 38%	62 47%
No	194 53%	39 40%	85 63%	70 53%
Total	365	97	136	132

This information shows the number of respondents who have never joined a playgroup. Having looked closely at the demographic characteristics of the “never attended playgroup” group it was discovered that an association exists between respondents who have never attended playgroup and the number of times respondents change address.

(chi square test, $p=0.043$). Through further analysis (logistic regression) it was shown that if you have moved address 1-2 times in the past 5 years you are more likely to have never attended playgroup than those who have never moved (OR=.68, 95%CI =.47,.99, $p=0.050$). A similar trend was noted for those respondents who have moved 3-4 times in the past five years compared to those who have never moved (OR=.53, 95% CI=.28,1.02, $p=0.059$) although this did not reach a level of statistical significance. The most likely reason for this is the small sample size in this category.

	Have not moved		1-2 times		3-4 times		5-6 times		6 or more		Total	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
Never attended playgroup	97	50	76	39	20	10	1	1	0	0	194	100

Table14: Reasons parents left a playgroup

Respondents who said that they had left a playgroup were asked for their reasons for leaving. Not surprisingly the most frequently mentioned responses were “child does other activities now” and “the group was for a older child. A number of other interesting responses were given including “I didn’t fell comfortable in the group” and “the day/time didn’t suit me”. A substantial proportion of Casey respondents (18%) said that they had left a playgroup because they had moved out of the area. In an area such as Casey, where there are large numbers of new residents moving into the municipality each week, this response could be expected.

	Total	Knox	Casey	Wyndham
Total respondents	171	58	51	62
Child does other activities now	40 23%	14 24%	9 18%	17 27%
Group was for an older child	42 25%	21 36%	10 20%	11 18%
Didn’t feel comfortable in group/not included	14 8%	7 12%	3 6%	4 6%
Day time didn’t suit	13 8%	3 5%	5 10%	5 8%
Moved out of area	13 8%	1 2%	9 18%	13 5%
Went back to work/study	11 6%	2 3%	4 8%	5 8%
Parents to cliquey	8 5%	3 5%		5 8%
I have other children so didn’t need to	7 4%	3 5%	1 2%	3 5%
Child didn’t like	6 4%	1 2%	1 2%	4 6%
Not enough time	5 3%	1 2%	2 4%	2 3%
Group wasn’t structured enough	5 2%	1 2%	1 2%	2 3%
Inadequate numbers	3 2%	1 2%	2 4%	

	Total	Knox	Casey	Wyndham
Group finished	3 2%		2 4%	1 2%
I have local friends don't need	3 2%		1 2%	2 3%
Children too old/too young for my child	3 2%		1 2%	2 3%
Too far away	2 1%	1 2%	1 2%	
Parents didn't discipline children	2 1%			2 3%
Didn't like the activities	2 1%	1 2%		1 2%
Not a safe environment	2 1%	1 2%		1 2%
I didn't feel included	2 1%	1 2%		1 2%
My child has additional needs	2 1%		1 2%	1 2%
I didn't like the physical environment	1 1%	1 2%		
Other parents too old	1 1%	1 2%		
Other parents too young	1 1%			1 1%
Not enough resources	1 1%	1 2%		
My child was unwell	1 1%		1 2%	
I was unwell	1 1%	1 2%		
The other parents were culturally different to me	1 1%			1 1%
Group too structured	1 1%			1 2%
Other	4 3%	2 3%	1 2%	1 2%
Total	199	68	56	75

Table15: Would parents who have left a playgroup join another playgroup if it better meets their needs?

	Total	Knox	Casey	Wyndham
Yes	57 33%	21 36%	18 35%	18 29%
No	114 67%	37 64%	33 65%	44 71%
Total	171	58	51	62

The above table is revealing, it shows that of all the respondents who have left a playgroup, around one-third have suggested that they would like to attend a playgroup if the group could better meet their needs. This also shows that for the remaining two-thirds of the parents, who had said that they had left a playgroup, they are probably not interested in joining other playgroups.

Table16: Reasons why parents who have left a playgroup would not join another playgroup

	Total	Knox	Casey	Wyndham
Total respondents	114	37	33	44
Child too old	38 33%	11 30%	13 39%	14 32%
Too busy	20 18%	7 19%	3 9%	10 23%
Have friends don't need	15 13%	2 5%	6 18%	7 16%
Prefer other activities	15 13%	5 14%	4 12%	6 14%
Child attends daycare or other	10 9%	5 14%	4 12%	6 14%
I don't feel I need to	8 7%	4 11%	1 3%	3 7%
Don't like playgroups	6 5%	3 8%	1 3%	2 5%
They are too cliquy	5 4%	4 11%		1 2%
Child has additional needs	2 2%		1 3%	1 2%
My child is too young	2 2%		1 3%	1 2%
I don't have a car	2 2%	1 3%	1 3%	
I can't afford it	2 2%		2 6%	
I work	1 1%	1 3%		
It is just for mums not for their children	1 1%	1 3%		
I was unwell	1 1%	1 3%		
I am young wouldn't feel comfortable	1 1%		1 3%	
I have additional needs	1 1%			1 2%
I don't like being part of groups	1 1%	1 3%		
Other	2 2%	1 3%		1 2%
Total	133	47	36	50

The respondents who had left playgroups suggested a number of the reasons for not joining another playgroup. The main reasons suggested were “too busy”, “child too old”, “have friends don’t need”, “prefer other activities” and “child attends day care or other”.

Table17: Reasons why parents have never joined a playgroup

	Total	Knox	Casey	Wyndham
Total respondents	194	39	85	70
Too busy	40 21%	8 21%	20 24%	12 17%
Have friends/family don't need	36 19%	7 18%	19 22%	10 14%
Child too young	33 17%	8 21%	13 15%	12 17%
Prefer other activities	23 12%	5 13%	12 14%	6 9%
I don't know about them	16 8%	2 5%	4 5%	10 14%
Child goes to daycare or other	12 6%		9 11%	3 4%
I didn't feel I needed to	11 6%	1 3%	3 4%	7 10%
I work	8 4%	4 10%	3 4%	1 1%
I can't find one at a suitable time	6 3%		2 2%	4 6%
I have additional needs	5 3%	1 3%	2 2%	2 3%
I don't know where they are	4 2%		1 1%	3 4%
Too cliquey	4 2%	2 5%	2 2%	
Don't have a car	3 2%		1 1%	2 3%
I'm not interested	3 2%			3 4%
I don't like playgroups	3 2%		1 1%	2 3%
Can't afford	3 2%	1 3%	2 2%	
I am young mum don't feel comfortable	3 2%	2 5%	1 1%	
Don't like being part of groups	2 1%	1 3%		
I didn't like the way the group was organised	2 1%		1 1%	1 1%
My child is unwell	2 2%		2 2%	
Child has additional needs	1 1%		1 1%	
On the waiting list	1 1%		1 1%	

	Total	Knox	Casey	Wyndham
Can't speak English	1 1%		1 1%	
Child too old	1 1%	1 3%		
It is too difficult for me to get out of the house	1 1%			1 1%
Family Stress	1 1%			1 1%
Child behaviour is too difficult	1 1%			1 1%
Other	4 2%	1 3%		3 4%
Total	230	44	101	85

The number of respondents who had never attended a playgroup was much smaller in Knox compared with Wyndham and Casey. The responses of “too busy” and “have friends and family” “child too young” and prefer other activities were the most frequently mentioned responses across the three municipalities. From a more detailed examination of the Wyndham and Casey responses it appears that information dissemination is a big issue for Wyndham parents not attending playgroups “I don’t know about them” (14%), “I can’t find one at a suitable time” (6%) and “I don’t know where they are” (4%). It also seems more respondents in Casey have suggested that their children are involved in other activities “prefer other activities” (14%) and child goes to daycare or other activity” (11%).

Summary of Key Findings:

Having analysed the findings of the telephone interview results the following key findings have been made, they should assist in the following phase of the project and should provide the playgroup project workers with an improved understanding of why parents in Knox, Casey and Wyndham do and don’t currently participate in playgroups.

1. It seems as though parents are more likely to attend playgroups if they have attended first time parent groups.
2. Apart from visiting friends and family, attending swimming classes and playgroups are the most frequently participated activities for 0-4 year olds. Swimming centres should therefore be considered as a point from where information could be disseminated to families with young children.
3. A higher proportion of children in Casey and Wyndham attend day care than children in Knox.
4. Parents who hold Health Care Cards are less likely to join a playgroup than non-Health Care Card holders are.
5. There seems to be a smaller proportion of families in Casey and Wyndham participating in parent run playgroups compared with Knox.
6. Parents who are married or living with a partner is more likely to join a parent run playgroup than are single parents.
7. About one fifth of regular playgroup users have tried other playgroups.

8. The main reasons parents seem to leave playgroups are when they move to another area; their child undertakes other activities or they feel excluded from the group.
9. Maternal and Child Health nurses in Knox are more likely to tell parents about playgroups than Maternal and Child Health nurses in Casey or Wyndham.
10. Casey and Wyndham parents likely to rely on friends and family to tell them about playgroups. This is problematic for those parents who are new to these areas, as they are more likely to be isolated and not have local friends and family.
11. More families are walking to playgroups in Knox than they are in Casey and Wyndham.
12. Playgroup access to community centres appears problematic in Casey and Wyndham, where they have a large proportion of playgroups operating out of church halls.
13. Parents are less likely to use a playgroup if they have moved house during the past 5 years.
14. It is estimated that about one-third of parents who have left a playgroup would like to join another one if it met their needs.

Appendix 6

Parent Interview Schedule

Playgroups for all Families Project.

(a project undertaken by the Cities of Wyndham, Knox and Casey together with Playgrouping Victoria and the Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne)

A questionnaire for families who have joined playgroups.

1a. Playgroup name _____

1b. How long have you been a member of this playgroup _____

Some questions about you.

2. Is this the first playgroup you have joined?

- Yes (go to Q 4)
 No (go to Q 3a)

3a. Are you still a member of another playgroup?

- Yes (go to Q 5)
 No (go to Q 3b)

3b. Why did you leave the other playgroup?

(Do not read out multiple responses OK)

- Moved out of the area
- Group was for an older child
(who is now at pre-school or school)
- Didn't feel comfortable in the group
- Parents too cliquey
- Child didn't like it
- Group was too structured
- Group wasn't structured enough
- Didn't feel included
- Parents were too old
- Parents were too young
- Parents were culturally different
- Too busy
- Group became too small
- The other children were too old/too young
- Didn't like the space (too big, too cramped)
- Wasn't safe environment
- Day/time didn't suit
- Too far away
- Other (specify).....

(now go to Q 5)

4. Why haven't you joined a playgroup before?

(Do not read out multiple responses OK)

- Didn't know about them
- Couldn't find one where the time/day suits
- Have been on a waiting list
- Too busy
- Child too young
- Child too old
- Don't speak English
- Too far away
- Too expensive
- I have additional needs
- Child has additional needs
- Haven't felt comfortable in groups before
- Other specify.....

5. Why did you join this particular playgroup? (If a member of tow groups probe further for the differences between the two groups)

(Do not read out, multiple responses OK)

- Close to home
- Friend goes to the group
- Time/day suits me
- People have similar culture to me
- MCH nurse told me about it
- Not cliquy because it is new
- Feel more comfortable with this group
- Other specify.....

6a. What are the main reasons you attend playgroup? (Probe is it for the child, parent or both)

.....
.....
.....

6b. Do you attend playgroup most weeks

- Yes** (Go to 7)
- No**

why.....
.....

7. How satisfied are you with this playgroup? Would you describe your self as very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, neither satisfied or dissatisfied, satisfied or very satisfied ?

(choose one response only)

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Very
Dissatisfied | Dissatisfied | Neither Satisfied
nor Dissatisfied | Satisfied | Very
Satisfied |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please explain why.....

Some questions about your experiences with this playgroup.

8. Parents seem to do a range of different things while they attend playgroups. Thinking about what you have been doing while attending this playgroup, have you?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
a. Observed your child playing with other children.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Helped your child to sort out problems with other children (eg sharing, taking turns)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Thought about your child's development or behaviour compared with other children at playgroup.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Learnt new activities/games that you can play with your child at home.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Started to feel comfortable with one or two other parents at playgroup.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Started to feel comfortable with most of the other parents at playgroup.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Made new friends with other parents of this playgroup and see them outside of the playgroup.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Discussed parenting issues with other parents at playgroup, for example how to manage child behaviour, setting routines, eating patterns (etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Discussed parenting issues or child development issues with the worker coordinating the group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Found out more about local services for families from the other parents at playgroup (eg doctors, child-care, babysitting, parks etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
k. Thought about the way you manage your child's behaviour compared with other parents at playgroup.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Some questions about your involvement in the running of your playgroup.

9. Do you	Yes	No	Don't know
a. Get involved in deciding what the group will do each week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Help set up or pack up the session	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Help organise morning/afternoon tea	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Belong to a committee for this playgroup	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Have you ever volunteered to be involved in organising or managing other local community groups?

- Yes (specify).....
- No
- Don't know

Some more questions about you

11a. Did you ever attend a first time parents (or mothers) group run by your local maternal and child health nurse for your first child?

- Yes (Go to 11b)
- No (Go to Q 13)
- Don't Know (Go to Q14)

11b. If yes, do you still meet with the other parents from first time parents group?

- Yes (Go to 11c)
- No (Go to 12)

11c. If yes, are any of these parents members of this playgroup?

- Yes (Go to 12)
- No (Go to 12)

12. If you did attend a first time parents, were you living in this area when you attended first time parents group?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

(Now Go to Q14)

13. Why didn't you attend a first time parents group (mothers group) for your first child?
(Do not read out, multiple responses OK)

- I didn't know about them
- I came from interstate we didn't have them there
- They weren't offered to me
- They weren't running at the time when I needed them
- I couldn't get there on the right day/time
- I didn't like the topics covered in the group
- I didn't like the maternal and child health nurse
- I haven't heard positive things about these groups
- I was unwell
- My child was unwell
- I didn't speak English
- I didn't have a car
- I don't feel comfortable in groups
- My child has additional needs
- I had additional needs
- Too tired/baby didn't sleep
- Other (specify).....

14. How old are you?

- 20 or younger 21 - 25 26 - 30 31 - 35
- 36 - 40 Older than 41

15. How many children are there in your family who currently live with you?

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 or more

16. How are old are the children?

	≤ 1yr	>1-2 yrs	>2-3 yrs	>3-4 yrs	>4-5 yrs	>5-6 yrs	>6-10 yrs	>10 yrs
Child 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child 4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child 5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child 6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child 7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child 8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

17. Were you born in Australia?

- Yes (Go to Q.20)
- No (Go to Q.18)

18. **If you were not born in Australia, which country were you born in?**

19. **If you were not born in Australia, how long have you lived in Australia?**
- Less than 6 months
 - 6-12 months
 - 13 – 24 months
 - 2-5 years
 - 6-10 years
 - Longer than 10 years
20. **What is the main language spoken at home?** _____
21. **Are you:**
- Married or living with a partner
 - A sole parent
 - Other (specify)
22. **What is your highest level of educational qualification?**
(Read out)
- Some primary school education***
 - Completed primary school***
 - Year 7-8
 - Year 9 –11
 - Year 12
 - Trade qualification
 - Undergraduate or Associate Diploma
 - Bachelor degree or higher
 - Other (please specify) _____
23. **Are you currently in the workforce?**
(Read out)
- Yes, Full time employment
 - Yes, Part time employment
 - Self employed
 - Yes, Casual employment
 - No on maternity / paternity leave
 - No not in workforce
 - Looking for employment
 - Other (please specify) _____
24. ***(Ask only those married or have a partner)* Is your partner currently in the workforce?**
(Read out)
- Yes, Full time employment
 - Yes, Part time employment
 - Yes, Casual employment
 - No on maternity / paternity leave
 - No not in workforce
 - Looking for employment
 - Other (please specify) _____

25. Are you a Health Care Card holder?

- Yes
- No

26. When Dianne/Catriona are no longer funded to continue supporting playgroups in Wyndham/Casey will you still attend this playgroup?

- Yes
- No

why.....
.....

27. Do you have any other comments?

The interview is complete now.
Thank you for your help.

Appendix 7

Tables of Results of Parent Interviews

Table 1: Socio-demographics of respondents

	CASEY		WYNDHAM			TOTAL	
	Blind Bight	Oak-grove	Pt Cook	Somali	Heathdale	no.	%
Total	8	12	21	3	6	50	100
Age							
20 or younger	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
21-25	-	2	4	-	3	9	18
26-30	2	5	8	1	2	18	36
31-35	2	4	6	1	1	14	28
36-40	3	-	3	1	-	7	14
Older than 41	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
Number of children living in household							
1	3	9	10	-	1	23	46
2	5	1	11	-	3	20	40
3	-	1	-	-	2	3	6
4	-	1	-	3	-	4	8
Age of children living in the household							
Number under 5 years	12	13	31	3	10	69	78
Number aged 5-10 yrs	1	5	1	8	5	20	22
Country of birth							
Australia	5	10	16	-	5	36	72
Ethiopia	-	-	-	1	-	1	2
Pakistan	-	-	-	1	-	1	2
Somalia	-	-	-	1	-	1	2
Elsalvador	-	-	-	-	1	1	2
Chile	-	1	1	-	-	2	4
United Kingdom	2	-	1	-	-	3	6
Germany	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
New Zealand	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
Macedonia	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
Papua New Guinea	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
If not born in Australia – length of time lived in Australia							
6-10 years	-	-	1	1	-	2	4
Longer than 10 years	3	2	3	2	1	11	22
Main language spoken at home							
English/ English & another language	7	11	19	1	5	43	86
Uralu	-	-	-	1	-	1	2
Somali	-	-	-	1	-	1	2
Spanish and Italian	-	-	-	-	1	1	2
Spanish	-	1	1	-	-	2	4
Maltese	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
German	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
Family type							
Married or living with a partner	7	12	20	3	5	47	94
Sole parent	1	-	1	-	1	3	6

Table 1: Socio-demographics of respondents (continued)

	CASEY		Pt Cook	WYNDHAM		TOTAL	
	Blind Bight	Oak-grove		Somali	Heath-dale	n	%
Total	8	12	21	3	6	50	100
Highest level of education							
Completed primary school	-	-	-	1	-	1	2
Year 9-11	2	3	3	1	4	13	26
Year 12	-	2	3	-	2	7	14
Trade qualification	1	-	1	-	-	2	4
Undergraduate or Assoc. Diploma	1	2	5	-	-	8	16
Bachelor degree or higher	3	1	9	-	-	13	26
Diploma	1	1	-	1	-	3	6
Traineeship	-	2	-	-	-	2	4
Other	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
Currently in workforce							
Full-time	-	-	1	-	1	2	4
Part-time	1	4	2	-	1	8	16
Self employed	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
Casual employment	1	1	2	-	-	4	8
On maternity leave	-	-	3	-	-	3	6
Not in workforce	6	5	12	3	4	30	60
Looking for employment	-	1	1	-	-	2	4
Partner currently in workforce							
Full-time	6	12	20	3	3	44	88
Not in workforce	-	-	-	-	1	1	2
Looking for employment	1	-	-	-	1	2	4
Health Care Card holder							
Yes	3	3	1	3	4	14	28
No	5	9	20	-	2	36	72

Table 2: History of playgroup involvement

	CASEY		WYNDHAM			TOTAL	
	Blind Bight	Oak-grove	Pt Cook	Somali	Heath-dale	n	%
Total	8	12	21	3	6	50	100
Length of time member of this group							
First term	2	3	10	3	5	23	46
Second term	3	4	11	-	1	19	38
Third term	2	-	-	-	-	2	4
More than three terms	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
Not specified	-	5	-	-	-	5	10
First playgroup?							
Yes	4	8	13	2	3	30	60
No	4	4	8	1	3	20	40
Still a member of another playgroup?							
Yes	-	-	3	-	4	7	14
No	4	4	5	2	1	16	32
Reason for leaving other playgroup							
Moved out of area	2	2	1	-	-	5	10
Group was for an older child	-	2	-	1	-	3	6
Didn't feel comfortable in group	-	-	2	-	-	2	4
Parents too cliquey	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
Child didn't like it	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
Other children too old/young	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
Day/time did not suit	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
Why haven't joined a playgroup before?							
Did not know about them	1	-	1	1	-	3	6
Couldn't find one	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
Couldn't find one where the time/day suits	-	-	-	1	-	1	2
Child too young/no children	-	2	5	-	-	7	14
Was working	1	-	-	-	1	2	4
Child in child care	-	-	-	-	1	1	2
New to area	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
In mothers' group	-	4	2	-	-	6	12
Issues in the family	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
Did not feel the need	-	-	3	-	-	3	6
No reason	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
Why did you join <u>this</u> playgroup?							
Close to home	3	6	15	1	3	28	56
Friend goes to same group	3	1	3	1	1	9	18
Told about it by friend	-	-	-	1	-	1	2
Followed on from mothers' group	-	1	3	-	-	4	8
MCHN told me about it	1	-	-	-	1	2	4
More comfortable with this group	-	-	-	1	1	2	4
People have same culture as me	-	-	-	1	-	1	2
New project/playgroup	-	1	1	-	-	2	4
Only one in area	1	-	2	-	-	3	6
In a new area	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
Meet others in area	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
Like the facilities	2	-	-	-	-	2	4
Had vacancies	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
Just found this one	-	1	-	-	-	1	2

Table 3: Views of current playgroup

	CASEY		WYNDHAM			TOTAL	
	Blind Bight	Oak-grove	Pt Cook	Somali	Heath-dale	no.	%
Total	8	12	21	3	6	50	100
Main reasons for attending playgroup							
Socialisation and play for child	8	11	20	3	6	48	96
Socialisation for mother	6	10	18	3	5	42	84
Good facilities	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
Networking for info about area	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
Only place I can go	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
Attend playgroup most weeks?							
Yes	7	11	20	3	6	47	94
No	1	1	1	0	0	3	6
Satisfaction with this playgroup							
Very satisfied	7	3	12	2	4	28	56
Satisfied	1	6	7	1	2	17	34
Neither	-	2	2	-	-	4	8
Dissatisfied	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
Very dissatisfied	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
Reasons for satisfaction							
Child likes it/good for child	3	3	1	1	-	8	16
Facilities good	-	-	-	1	2	3	6
Not expensive	-	-	-	-	1	1	2
People friendly	1	1	2	-	3	7	14
Convenient location	-	-	1	-	1	2	4
Had input into it	1	-	1	-	-	2	4
Well organised	3	-	-	-	-	3	6
Parking good	-	-	-	1	-	1	2
Varied activities	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
Reasons for dissatisfaction							
Not well organised	-	2	2	-	-	4	8
Would like a carpeted area	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
Would like more activities for child	-	2	-	-	-	2	4
Would like a larger area	-	2	-	-	-	2	4
Would like an outdoor area	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
Facilities not good	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
Activities while attending this playgroup							
Observed child playing with others	8	12	20	3	6	49	98
Helped child sort out problems with other children	8	12	20	3	5	48	96
Thought about child's development or behaviour compared with others	7	9	18	2	4	40	80
Learnt new activities/games for home	6	3	13	2	6	30	60
Started to feel comfortable with one or two other parents at playgroup	8	12	20	3	6	49	98
Started to feel comfortable with most of the parents at playgroup	8	12	16	3	5	44	88
Made new friends with parents & see them outside playgroup	5	5	10	1	2	23	46
Discussed parenting issues with other parents at playgroup	7	9	20	3	4	43	86
Discussed parenting issues or child development with playgroup worker	4	3	6	2	2	17	34
Learnt of local services from parents	3	6	11	-	3	23	46
Compared how you manage your child's behaviour with other parents	8	7	15	1	4	35	70

Table 4: Involvement in this and other community groups

	CASEY		WYNDHAM			TOTAL	
	Blind Bight	Oak-grove	Pt Cook	Somali	Heathdale	n	%
Total	8	12	21	3	6	50	100
Involvement in running this playgroup							
Decide what group will do each week	5	12	14	2	4	37	74
Help set up or pack up session	8	12	20	3	6	49	98
Help organise refreshments	6	9	16	1	5	37	74
Belong to a committee for this group	-	1	5	-	-	6	12
Previous involvement with organising or managing community groups? ^a							
Yes	1	3	5	-	1	10	20
No	5	9	16	3	5	38	76
Attendance at first time parents' group run by MCHN for first child?							
Yes	4	10	18	-	2	34	68
No	4	2	3	3	4	16	32
Still meet with any parents from this group?							
Yes	4	8	12	-	-	24	73
No	0	2	5	-	2	9	27
Any of those parents members of this group?							
Yes	3	5	6	-	-	14	54
No	1	3	8	-	-	12	46
Living in this area when attended first time parents' group?							
Yes	1	8	6	-	1	16	50
No	3	2	11	-	-	16	50
Reasons for not attending first time parents' group for first child							
Didn't know about them	3	-	-	2	-	5	10
Weren't offered to me	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
Didn't have a car	-	-	1	1	-	2	4
Don't feel comfortable in groups	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
Was working	1	1	-	-	-	2	4
Family issues	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
Didn't get around to it	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
Didn't need it	-	-	-	-	1	1	2
Not interested	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
No reason	-	-	-	-	1	1	2
When funding for worker ceases will you still attend this group?							
Yes	8	12	20	3	5	48	96
No	-	-	1	-	1	2	4

^a Community groups specified were:

- Kindergarten committee
- CFA
- Playgroup
- Youth welfare
- Occasional care
- Recreational reserve committee
- Child care centre committee
- Tennis club

Appendix 8

Interview Questions for Key Service Providers

Interview questions

1. How important do you think it is to support playgroups?
2. Do you think this project has reduced barriers to accessing playgroups? If so, how?
3. Do you have any comments about the sustainability of the playgroups after the playgroup project workers have finished?
4. Any other comments about the project?