2011
annual report
learning together

PLAYGROUP
AUSTRALIA
WE VALUE:

FAMILIES AND CHILDREN:
All families with children from birth to under school age learning and developing together through play. Parents as a child’s first educator. Parents and caregivers supporting each other through positive Playgroup experiences.

COMMUNITY:
The power of Playgroups to strengthen communities.

OUR PARTNERS:
Integrity of purpose, performance and accountability in dealing with all funding bodies, sponsors and stakeholders. The partnership between our members, staff and volunteers and their expertise, commitment and dedication.

PLAYGROUP AUSTRALIA STAFF
Karen Merange
Chief Executive Officer
Public Officer
Company Secretary
Mike Quilty
Programs Manager
Lois Jewell
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Administration Manager
K’Lissa Reardon
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Policy & Research Officer
Adrienne Costin
Media & Communications Officer
Vanessa Paget
Program Support Officer

PLAYGROUP AUSTRALIA
AUDITOR
Craig Hausler
HS Partners Chartered Accountants
About Playgroup Australia

Playgroup Australia is the peak body recognised as the leading voice for Playgroups in Australia and it is our vision that ALL Australians value the benefits of Playgroups to nurture young children, connect families and build communities through play.

We are a Brisbane-based, not-for-profit organisation, reliant on community and member organisation support, and all funds raised by, or on behalf of, Playgroup Australia are re-invested through our own activities or those of our member organisations into the development and promotion of Playgroup activities across Australia.

Each week during school terms, 105,000 families gather with their 145,000 children at 8,300 Community, Supported and PlayConnect Playgroup sessions for two hours of fun, laughter and learning together through play. They meet in venues as varied as the families attending; some in private homes, others at church and community halls, kindergartens, preschools and schools, health clinics and women’s centres.

Our members, the State and Territory Playgroup Associations, deliver the Playgroup programs across Australia and provide support and assistance to a wide range of Playgroup services.

Playgroup Australia provides membership support to the Associations through the development of nationally consistent frameworks, policies, resources and partnerships. We are a recognised leader in the development of sustainable, strengths-based, facilitated Playgroups and our framework for transitioning facilitated Playgroups into parent-run Community Playgroups is broadly considered best practice within the early childhood sector.

Supported Playgroups that assist a diverse target audience, and the PlayConnect program for children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder or similar behaviours, are run according to this capacity building model.

Playgroup Australia is the national advocate for the value of Playgroup. We actively promote the value of play and Playgroups, and parents as a child’s first educator, through marketing activities including National Playgroup Week, our biennial Power of Play Conference, print, broadcast and social media representation, and at industry and government forums.

Facebook post by Fiona, Playgroup Parent: “Playgroup is a great way to relax with my kids and swap stories and tips with other parents. Thank you Playgroup.”

OUR VISION
Playgroup Australia is the national body recognised as the leading representative and advocate for Playgroups.

OUR PURPOSE
Playgroup Australia advocates for, and promotes at a national level, Playgroup participation for all families with young children who have not yet started school. We advocate learning through play and the role of Playgroups as an integral part of the early childhood experience.
Chair’s Report

Playgroups tell me about how connected a community is; they open up networks of every kind.

Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC, Governor-General
(Patron Playgroup Australia)

2010-11 was our first full year of operation under the new structure and it has seen a wonderfully dedicated and creative effort by many people across the nation.

Changing to a new structure has certainly given us plenty to work on and discuss. With so many different communities and families to consider, and so many passionate people involved, the world of Playgroups is not short of inspiration and challenges. We find ourselves with fresh, talented faces and experienced, dedicated voices around the nation’s Playgroup leadership tables in a good balance of old and new CEOs and Chairs/Presidents of the various State and Territory Associations.

We are moving through the establishment phase for the new structure and have worked through many new policies as we lay the foundation for excellence in governance and continuous improvement for the long-term future of Playgroups in Australia. Much of the groundwork laid this year will culminate in increased momentum for 2011-12.

Playgroup Australia has been busy advocating for and promoting Playgroups in all parts of Australia. It is our reason for being and our daily work. Together we accomplish this through our Board, our Foundation Members, our staff and partners, as well as through our website, social media, events, publications and all those people who contribute to their own Playgroups across Australia.

This report documents Playgroup Australia’s main achievements of 2010-11, but I’d like to touch on a few highlights.

One of the key achievements was strengthening our ongoing relationship with the Federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) who renewed our funding for Supported Playgroups and worked with us to enable a 30 percent increase to per-group funding levels. Working with FaHCSIA, we were also able to establish Community Playgroups as one of the four streams of the Australian Government’s revised Family Support Program.

On behalf of the Board of Playgroup Australia, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC, Governor-General of Australia as our national Patron. Ms Bryce is a renowned supporter of children’s services and we are very proud to have her official endorsement.

In 2011-12 I look forward to the results of our work with the Centre for Community Child Health at Royal Children’s Hospital Melbourne and building on the good work already begun by Foundation Members to provide us and our stakeholders with robust and deep evidence of the value of Community Playgroups for children, families and the community. We will also see the results of two major projects provided for in 2010-11; our first major Strategic Review and a wonderful new website.

And most of all I look forward to continued work with our Foundation Members as we all endeavour to provide Australian families everywhere with ever-improving Playgroup experiences.

We also wish to acknowledge and thank:

- Our Foundation Members for their vision and courage in setting up Playgroup Australia Ltd as a separate entity and their support throughout this year;
- FaHCSIA for its recognition of the value of Playgroups, and its ongoing, evolving support for what we do;
- Our partners and sponsors;
- Our CEO, Karen Merange and all the dedicated staff of Playgroup Australia who undertake a huge workload of often unseen tasks with a shared and deep enthusiasm.

Finally, I would also like to thank my fellow Board members, all of whom volunteer a huge amount of their time. Thank you all for your wisdom, experience and dedication to Australian children and their families.

Joan Brennan
Chair

The Family Support Program supports the Australian Government’s commitment to the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children. Inclusion of Community Playgroups as one of the four streams of the revised program demonstrates the value that Playgroups offer.
Chief Executive Officer’s Report

Community Playgroups are regular gatherings of parents and caregivers with their under school age children. Led by the parents, and in formats they determine, these groups provide opportunities for young children to learn and develop through play activities and social interaction with their parents/caregivers and other children and adults; for their parents and caregivers to establish social and support networks to encourage and assist them in their valuable parenting role; and for community development through enhanced social capital and the potential for networking between families and local businesses and services. Playgroups foster social capital and build local capacity, community connectedness and partnerships.

Playgroups are an integral component of Australia’s early education and care continuum. We know that Playgroup attendance contributes to beneficial outcomes for children, families and communities and are proud of the crucial role Playgroup Australia has in advocating and promoting the value of Playgroups nationally.

Over this past year, Playgroup Australia and its members, the State and Territory Playgroup Associations, have embraced significant change with the culmination of the National Structure Review that commenced in 2007, and the transition to a new entity, Playgroup Australia Ltd, with a new Constitution and a new independent Board. It has been a challenging, inspiring and exciting year as the governance, structure and processes have been reviewed, refined and embedded. Thank you to all the staff and Boards of our members for their support and long standing partnership and commitment to work together in collaboration with Playgroup Australia.

The Australian Government continues to support the Community Playgroup Program and national facilitated Playgroup programs including the PlayConnect Playgroup Program (facilitated Playgroups for families with children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or ASD-like behaviours), and the Supported Playgroup Program (facilitated Playgroups for families who, for a range of reasons, do not access Community Playgroups).

It is with pleasure we can announce the extension of funding for a further 105 Supported Playgroups over the next three years. These crucial programs are in high demand and delivered through our members across Australia. Under a review of the services delivered under the Australian Government’s new Family Support Program, Community Playgroups have been identified as one of the four key program components highlighting the Government’s recognition of the importance and value of Community Playgroups for Australian families with young children. Thank you to FaHCSIA for its ongoing support of Playgroup Australia and its members’ activities and programs.

The State and Territory Playgroup Associations have the crucial role of delivering Playgroup services across the country. Thank you for the tremendous and valuable work you do to ensure Australian children are given the best possible start in life.

I am privileged to work with a small, but extremely dedicated team, who ‘bat well above their weight’. Thank you to the wonderful staff of Playgroup Australia for their professionalism and enthusiasm. It is an absolute pleasure to work with you.

I would also like to thank the inaugural Board for their passion, support and leadership over the year. Their dedication and commitment to ensuring Playgroup Australia has a strong and sustainable governance framework is to be commended. I look forward to the coming year as we work together to deliver against the strategic plan and the shared vision and commitment to the value of Playgroups to nurture children, support families and build communities in Australia.

Karen Merange
Chief Executive Officer

Playgroups are an important part of the continuum of programs and services that defines the broader sector.

Professor Collette Taylor,
Chair of Early Education and Care,
Melbourne Graduate School of Education,
The University of Melbourne

Karen & Playgroup
SA Development Worker
Naomi Wilkey at the Eden Hills
100th PlayConnect Playgroup celebrations.
This first year of trading as a new entity, Playgroup Australia Ltd, has finalised the successful transition, financially, from an ‘incorporated entity’ to a ‘company limited by guarantee’. With the employment of a fully qualified accountant and the advice of the newly appointed auditors, HS Partners Chartered Accountants, Playgroup Australia formally adopted the mandatory Australian Accounting Standards applicable to all entities reporting under the Corporations Act 2001.

In the current economic climate, it is very pleasing that Playgroup Australia has successfully maintained or increased existing levels of government funding for national Playgroup programs. There were a number of partnerships that provided ‘contra’ support for the work of the organisation and work continues on seeking alternate funding sources.

Playgroup Australia’s main source of income is the Australian Government (FaHCSIA). Recognition is also due to the long term support of the Foundation Members – thank you. More than $1,376,000 was provided to the State and Territory Playgroup Associations for their service delivery of the Supported Playgroup Program and the PlayConnect Playgroup Program.

This year’s consolidated surplus of $184,904 has been achieved through careful monitoring of expenditure and has enabled the Board to commit to two major activities planned for 2011-2012. The Board has committed $160,000 of this year’s surplus to a robust and comprehensive strategic review process and the review and update of the website.

The accounting and financial reporting processes and framework have again been reviewed and streamlined to provide greater levels of transparency, clarity and effectiveness for the Board.

Meeting other mums and dads sure beats the baby blues if you’re feeling trapped at home. Playgroup is a winner!

Kerry, Playgroup Parent

Playgroup Australia Ltd is now obliged to comply with the requirements of the Corporations Act 2001. The breadth of skills established in the new Board has assisted our transition to this more rigorous level of governance and accountability.
Governance

Playgroup Australia is governed by an independent, competency-based Board whose primary role is to ensure the ongoing success, through best practice governance, of Playgroup Australia as an independent entity and peak body for Playgroups throughout Australia. Under ASIC regulations regarding companies limited by guarantee, this new model for Playgroup Australia means it is now required to meet a more rigorous level of governance accountability.

This change in governance model was initiated by the State and Territory Associations as a result of a major Structure Review project. Our members realised that the higher level of governance accountability would, in the long term, be much better for Playgroups across Australia. The former Board of Playgroup Australia Inc left the new Board a legacy of a strong framework to guide the ongoing adaptation of governance approaches and we expect their vision and insight to be reflected in outcomes in the years ahead.

The Board’s terms of reference clearly define a separation between the strategic and operational activities of Playgroup Australia. The operation and administration of the company are the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer and staff while the Board is responsible for corporate governance. It oversees the business affairs of the organisation, establishes strategies and financial objectives to be implemented by staff, and monitors standards of performance.

The Board is absolutely committed to the future of Playgroup Australia. The Directors are passionate about the role Playgroup Australia plays in ensuring the key outcomes Playgroups offer to younger children, their families and the community are recognised in the political arena and the wider community.

As well as their ongoing responsibilities as a director, each Board member has undertaken at least one portfolio responsibility, based around their particular area of expertise, about which they provide strategic advice to the Chief Executive Officer and other Board members. Several directors also assist with other portfolios and have responsibility for overseeing particular projects. Due to the breadth of the skills base within the current Board, all portfolio positions are declared vacant annually to allow yearly review of skills allocation.

We also take this opportunity to thank Jacquie Thomson, General Manager, Grants & Community Development, Lotterywest for the valuable role she played in the independent Nominations Committee that was given the authority to appoint the first Playgroup Australia Ltd Board according to the skills matrix developed by the previous Board. We are grateful she has accepted an invitation to continue to sit as the independent member of the current Nominations Committee.

Moving to a new governance model and legal structure was never going to be straightforward or easy. It has brought challenges for the new Board, Playgroup Australia staff and our Foundation Members as we all adjust to the changes, but we can reflect on the change process with much satisfaction and look to the future. There is still much to be worked through to accomplish all we hope to on behalf of Australian Playgroups and the families they serve. Accordingly, the next major step in the establishment phase for the new structure is a comprehensive Strategic Review in 2011-12, to be followed in 2012-13 with an Operational Review.

At this point, the establishment phase will be well and truly behind us and we will stand together as ready as possible for the exciting journey ahead.

Just got back from playgroup with the two boys - loving every minute of it!

Facebook post by Tim, Playgroup Parent
Advocacy and Promotion

You get out of playgroup what you put into it.

Playgroup Mum, WA

The Memorandum of Understanding between Playgroup Australia and our Foundation Members – the State and Territory Playgroup Associations – identifies advocacy as one of the key responsibilities for the national peak body.

Advocacy is not a linear exercise, rather it is an activity in which good work this month or year will generate benefits at a later date. With the governance and legal model changes in place, Playgroup Australia was better able to devote energy to building momentum around national advocacy, laying groundwork that has generated some benefits already and will prove even more valuable in the years ahead.

As the complementary roles and execution capabilities of Playgroup Australia and our members continued to evolve and mature, we focussed our efforts on national issues and audiences. The 2010 Federal Election provided opportunity to present the social, health, education and community outcomes from Playgroups in the form of a targeted campaign including a series of fact sheets:

- Free & universal access to Playgroups;
- Playgroups role in preventative health & early intervention;
- Early childhood learning starts with parents & play;
- Helping Children with Autism; and
- Supporting Vulnerable Families.

The campaign was directed to key members of each political party with messages tailored to individual portfolios that helped position Playgroups. It was backed up by media releases, online content with news links, and Playgroup commentary on relevant election issues.

Playgroup Australia advocated for improved access to Playgroups through the abolition of membership fees.

This activity opened doors for continuing conversations and a stronger working relationship with key policy makers. With the PlayConnect Playgroup funding agreement due for renewal in 2012, the groundwork was laid for a focused advocacy campaign to secure the government’s continued, and hopefully evolving, financial support.

Playgroup Australia had ongoing communications with relevant Australian Government Ministers, their advisors and departments to maintain awareness and support for all types of Playgroups on the policy agenda. This relationship-building resulted in growing recognition of Playgroups as a channel to engage with families with young children illustrated by the following outcomes:

- Community Playgroups recognised as one of the four key streams under the new Family Support Program;
- Increased partnership between Playgroup Australia, our members and FaHCSIA on the promotion of national initiatives such as the introduction of the Paid Parental Leave scheme;
Appropes by other Australian Government departments to participate in other programs and initiatives such as communications around 2011 Census. Proactively leveraging these relationships to drive new outcomes for Playgroups will become a focus of advocacy efforts in 2012.

Playgroup Australia also continued as a member of the National Children’s Services Forum, building strong connections with Australia’s peak bodies across the early childhood sector and ensuring a high profile for Playgroups. The evolving role of Playgroup Australia as the national peak body became evident throughout 2011 in the changing focus of promotion and communication activities. National promotions were more focussed on the value and benefits of Playgroup participation generally, with each State and Territory Playgroup Association leading promotions within their jurisdictions on finding Playgroups and becoming a member.

Playgroup Australia’s online communication channels continued to grow in their use and effectiveness as we worked to establish our ‘voice’ as the national peak body. The Playgroup Australia website remained the top ranking site for relevant keywords in Australia and experienced a 17 percent increase in use in the year ending 30 June 2011. Social media channels also saw exciting growth in numbers of both followers and interactions.

In shifting our focus from parents to promoting Playgroups within the early childhood education and care sector, Playgroup Australia began work on building professional networks online through LinkedIn. “The Power of Play” group was launched in support of the second biennial conference scheduled for October 2011.

National Playgroup Week remains an exceptional driver of awareness and interest for the Playgroup experience. In 2011 it was held from March 20-26, with World’s Biggest Playgroup events taking place around the country on Wednesday, March 23.

A survey of Playgroup members conducted through Totline in August 2010 showed that 95% actively use Facebook, confirming the importance of online social media for Playgroup marketing communications.

After a very tough four days driving across the Nullarbor, the kids were extremely excited when I mentioned the word ‘Playgroup’.

Sharon Smith, travelling Playgroup blogger
PlayConnect Program

When I first started going I didn’t know anyone else with a child with ASD, so meeting other parents was great for me – a relief in a way. Also at the Playgroup we have guests come along who are Professionals in different fields - this has opened up new doors for me and my family that I didn’t know of before.

Parent, PlayConnect Coins

As a component of the Australian Government’s Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) package, PlayConnect Playgroups have assisted more than 1400 families and 2200 children since July 2008. Meeting all the program milestones, 150 PlayConnect Playgroups were delivered across Australia by 30 June 2011.

The program brings parents and families together in an environment of mutual understanding. It has a strengths-based focus to support and connect families and provides a place where parents can network, share their experiences, and discover other services for their children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in a safe, secure and accepting environment.

Children with an ASD or ASD-like behaviours who attend PlayConnect are presented with play-based learning opportunities. Their siblings, who may require support and understanding of their own, also have the opportunity to connect with others in similar situations.

PlayConnect is a unique component of the HCWA Package for a number of reasons.

It is free to attend therefore these Playgroups are open to all families regardless of their financial circumstances. Families also do not need a formal ASD diagnosis to attend. As a result, parents who identify ASD-like behaviours in their children are also able to benefit from the Playgroups. Finally, PlayConnect caters for the whole family. Autism does not just affect the child with an ASD or ASD-like behaviours; it affects all family members including grandparents, other relatives and friends.

The combination of these aspects places PlayConnect in a key position in supporting all families by acting as a vital “soft-entry point” to the world of Autism. With the assistance of a trained and dedicated facilitator, PlayConnect Playgroups provide a non-threatening environment for support, networking, ideas and information exchange. PlayConnect Playgroups have built important referral pathways for families and gained acceptance and trust from professional services and community organisations for the essential services they provide.

Playgroup Australia and the State and Territory Playgroup Associations continue to build on the early successes of the program. Advocacy and promotion through direct mail-outs, emails and phone calls to autism advisors, medical specialists and community organisations are key to ensuring that referrals of families to PlayConnect Playgroups continue. A monthly ‘eNews’ has almost 1000 subscribers including parents, carers, community workers, educators and ASD specialists. The PlayConnect program and its benefits were also promoted at a variety of national conferences including: Association of Children’s Welfare (ACWA), Sydney (August 2010); Partners in Play, Melbourne (August 2010); and Queen Elizabeth International Conference Centre (QEC), Melbourne (November 2010).

Ongoing funding of the PlayConnect program will ensure the continuation of this vital service to families and communities across Australia.
Supported Playgroups

With its members Playgroup Australia continues to build on the success of the National Supported Playgroup Program. Since the program’s inception in 2005, 366 Supported Playgroups have been established throughout Australia, supporting and nurturing nearly 6,000 families and more than 7,500 children.

The program is funded by FaHCSIA. Playgroup Australia continues to meet all the milestone deliverables required by the department for the implementation of this program and is constantly looking for ways to improve its management and delivery, as well as the outcomes for the families and the communities in which they live.

Our key partners in the delivery of the Supported Playgroup Program are the State and Territory Playgroup Associations whose proven expertise over many decades attracts the interest and ongoing support of early childhood specialists along with key community and health organisations. Supported Playgroups are considered by many professionals and organisations within the Early Childhood sector to be ‘best practice’ for the support of families and communities.

Supported Playgroups provide opportunities for parents and children who would not normally access a Playgroup to enhance their relationships in a supportive environment, increase their parenting skills and confidence, and develop valuable social and family support networks. These Playgroups differ from mainstream Community Playgroups because they are facilitated by a trained coordinator whose primary role is to empower families to support young children’s development through a variety of appropriate play experiences and to develop the capacity of families to manage their own Playgroup or to access an existing Community Playgroup.

In 2010-2011 a further 77 Supported Playgroup sites were established across Australia. Of this number, 48 percent were established in communities identified by the Australian Government as requiring assistance to establish, facilitate and nurture social inclusion initiatives.

As an early intervention initiative, Supported Playgroups have been found to be effective in empowering families from within the identified target groups to make choices that positively influence their children’s development whilst also fostering the skills needed to effectively participate in and contribute to the development of their local community. In these ways, Supported Playgroups contribute to improving both short and longer-term outcomes for children, parents and families, and have a positive effect of the health and vitality of communities across Australia.

As a result of the excellent and proven track record of Supported Playgroups, Playgroup Australia, along with its many supporters, is looking to the future by continuing to build upon the foundation of this life-changing and community-building initiative.

Playgroup Australia met the requirements of both the PlayConnect and Supported Playgroup funding agreements by the 30 June 2011 milestone. The Supported Playgroup Program has now been funded for a further three years.
Research

Playing together at playgroup is not only playing, but also meeting new people and sometimes making new friends that will last a lifetime!

Peta, Playgroup Parent, WA

Developing a national research agenda to establish an evidence base on the value of Playgroup is a priority for Playgroup Australia and our members.

Our aim is to collect a robust and independent body of knowledge that validates the immediate impact and long-term outcomes of Playgroup programs as the basis for informed decision making, advocacy and promotion, and strategic planning.

A number of substantial milestones towards this aim have been achieved over the past year, including the appointment of a Policy and Research Officer in February and the commissioning of the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) to prepare a logic model and policy brief to define the position and impact of Community Playgroups in Australia.

This work was successfully completed as a collaboration between Playgroup Australia and the State and Territory Playgroup Associations, resulting in a number of key statements about Community Playgroups around the immediate and long-term outcomes they offer for children, parents, services and communities. This work provides structure to what we have known anecdotally for the past 40 years, and will serve as the framework against which national research projects will establish the supporting evidence base.

With this Community Playgroup program logic now endorsed by all State and Territory Playgroup Associations, it is our priority to refine the national research agenda and expand our research base to encompass all Playgroup programs – Community, Supported and PlayConnect. The suite of research questions developed by CCCH for Community Playgroups provides a base from which we can work to meet the broader needs of our research agenda and build on the existing research work of the State and Territory Playgroup Associations.

To achieve these aims we are actively seeking resources to further develop our research agenda, including identification of potential research partnerships.

Concurrently, Playgroup Australia has been collating information about existing and planned research projects so we can create a unified picture of research conducted in our sector with the aim of reducing replication of effort and to enhance the quality of research available to us and our member associations.

We are working for the day when all families with children under school age:

- have opportunities for social play and learning in their communities;
- have positive social networks that support their parenting; and
- have opportunities for meaningful participation in community life.
Looking Forward

In this coming year some of our members will be looking back over 40 years of Playgroup in their State, and the others are not far behind. We acknowledge the important role they have played in the lives of so many young children, many of whom are now Playgroup parents and grandparents. Playgroup Australia is proud to recognise the long history of the State and Territory Associations and looks forward to supporting them in 2012.

The new financial year brings with it a time of cultural change for Playgroup Australia and our members as we work together through a comprehensive, strategic review process to develop a comprehensive and collective understanding of where we are, and how we plan to work strategically together for the best outcomes for Playgroups in Australia.

A critical outcome of the strategic review will be the development of the next three year Strategic Plan.

New, more contemporary and streamlined sponsorship policy, as well as agreed advocacy and external communications strategies will be developed to lift our momentum on these crucial workfronts.

In October, Playgroup Australia will host the biennial Power of Play National Playgroup Conference in Melbourne. The theme for this second event in our series is “All Together Now”. It encapsulates the spirit of the thousands of Playgroups that meet around Australia each week as well as the power of play to include, unite, and inspire communities. The keynote speakers and concurrent sessions at the Conference serve as a reminder of the diverse and profound impact play has on the development of children, parents, caregivers and the wider community.

While we will continue to advocate for Community Playgroups and facilitate the delivery of quality outcomes for families, children and communities through the PlayConnect and Supported Playgroup Programs, our focus is on actively seeking renewal of funding arrangements and exploring additional program funding opportunities.

Other activities for the coming 12 months include:
- Continued development of a national research agenda with identified research priorities;
- Further development of key messages and a national advocacy strategy;
- Playgroup data mapping project;
- November 2011 Member Forum;
- Website redevelopment;
- Establishment of annual Media Awards to encourage the continuing flow of quality information about the value of play and Playgroups in the early years to the Australian public;
- Development of an information, support and play resource for families of young children with an ASD.

Moving beyond the structural and governance changes of the last few years, 2012 will see a comprehensive planning process to collaboratively develop a Strategic Plan for the next three years.
We love Playgroup.
Playgroup is great
for the children
and for the parent to
get together,
meet new people,
share stories and
laugh together.

Kerissa,
Playgroup Parent, WA

Our Community

The ongoing support enjoyed by Playgroup Australia from our partners, ambassadors, and of course, our Foundation Members, is invaluable.

The State and Territory Playgroup Associations are the backbone of the Playgroup community in Australia. They support the thousands of families with young children who attend Community Playgroups each week; they deliver quality programs; they host the fabulous events that engage families and position Playgroups in the early childhood community; and their talented staff work tirelessly on delivering valuable member services to maintain and expand the Playgroup community.

Playgroup Australia commends the efforts and achievements of all our members over the past year, and thanks each Association for their ongoing support.

An ongoing strategic priority for Playgroup Australia is to deliver relevant and valued member services. Playgroup Australia strives to deliver:

- Economies of scale in the purchasing of goods and services at a national level – such as hosting shared website infrastructure and provision of a national 1800 free-call service;
- Representation as the lead voice for Playgroups at the national level – such as FaHCSIA’s Family Support Program, the National Children’s Services Forum and National Health and Medical Research Council;
- Professional development and networking opportunities – such as the biennial Power of Play National Playgroup Conference;
- Advocacy for Playgroups and learning through play - through our communication with decision-makers;
- Thought leadership on play and Playgroup – through activities such as the data mapping project and research agenda; and
- Facilitating national collaboration – through activities such as the Marketing Network and State Program Coordinators network.

We sincerely thank the Australian Government for their continued funding and recognition of the importance of Playgroups. We also value the support offered by our media partners, Bub Hub, Practical Parenting and Copeland Publishing, for the opportunities provided through their print and online products.

Our ambassadors give generously of their time to attend events and act as public spokespersons, advocating the benefits of play and promoting the key messages and value of Playgroup. We particularly acknowledge the acceptance of the Governor-General as our National Patron and the continued support of Dr John Irvine in 2010-11.

Building relationships across the early childhood sector supports Playgroup Australia’s mission as a national peak body and Playgroup advocate. Association memberships have been maintained with:

- Australian Council of Social Services;
- Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth;
- Early Childhood Australia;
- Families Australia;
- Not for Profit Network;
- Pathways Australia.