

Wyong Supported Playgroups

Contact details

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Hours of service: Monday to Friday: 9.00am – 5.00pm

Manager: Cheryl Wells

Operations Manager: Sue Jennings

Team Leader: Rhonda Richardson

Director Burnside North: Linda Mondy

About the program

Wyong Supported Playgroups was established in September 2002 funded by “Families NSW”, a NSW Government initiative that aims to support parents and carers raising young children, by providing a coordinated network of services that focus on prevention and early intervention.

The program currently facilitates six groups, including a CALD group and an Aboriginal group across the Wyong Shire, with approximately 95 families registered in the program.

The service is free to families living in the Wyong Shire and also provides transport for those families who are unable to access playgroups.

Eligibility

Under the Families NSW guidelines, the target group for the program is families caring for children 0-5 years where vulnerabilities are present. These vulnerabilities may include social/geographical isolation, particularly those living in housing estates, caravan parks, isolated rural areas or other parts of the local area that are otherwise poorly serviced; first-time and single parents; young parents; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and culturally and linguistically diverse families.

Objectives

The overall aim of Families NSW is to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect in the Wyong Shire and increase social and educational development for

children 0 – 5 years. Wyong Supported Playgroups intend to achieve the following results by providing families with quality playgroups that are strength-based, innovative, supportive and safe:

- an increased level of self esteem and satisfaction with parenting
- an increased knowledge of child development and positive parenting strategies
- an expanded supportive social network
- improved parent–child interaction.
- improved developmental and educational outcomes for children

Referral

The main source of referrals comes from the local early childhood services and other Burnside services; however, a wide range of government and non-government agencies also refer families to the program. Referrals also come from parents who don't have access to preschool and other related services.

Services

Similar to traditional playgroups, Supported Playgroups provide opportunities for parents to meet and share experiences while their children play and develop social skills. Supported Playgroups are facilitated by a worker with qualifications in early childhood/welfare who provides parents with support, parenting information and links to other family services in their community. Parents are also encouraged to become involved in the planning and development of the playgroups' activities.

Parents attend a weekly playgroup in their local area where they meet other parents, learn positive parenting strategies and where their children are able to play and interact in a stimulating and safe environment.

Funding

UnitingCare Burnside \$43,000 ; Brighter Futures program \$70,000 ; Community Services \$113,000

Key facts

Playgroups are conducted at Blue Haven, North Wyong, Wyong, Toukley, and Berkeley Vale. A multicultural group is held at the Toukley Neighbourhood Centre and an Indigenous playgroup at the Wyong SaCC building. Each playgroup consists of up to 15 children, and runs for 1½ hours weekly throughout the school term. Supported Playgroups also provide mini-bus transport for those parents who are unable to access playgroups.

Each group has a program designed to include age-appropriate play for the children attending the group; this may include water play, story time, craft and musical activities. Facilitators encourage positive parent–child interaction during the group's activities and provide parents with an assortment of innovative, low cost, play activities that can be transferred to the home environment. Parents are

also encouraged to interact and build support networks with each other while still being provided with support from the facilitators to link to other local facilities, services and activities.

Other features of the playgroups are guest speakers covering such topics as nutrition, First Aid and parental self care. At least once a term, all playgroups have an excursion which will be arranged outside of their usual venue.

Family perspective:

Case 1

A parent originally attended playgroup for support with her children and did not venture out, for example, for a walk unless accompanied by her husband. Mum expressed within a few weeks her fear of walking, socialising etc. due to her weight problem; she felt no-one wanted to talk to her, let alone look at someone her size. After four months attendance at the group, mum was able to express the following achievements to the worker:

- She feels she belongs to the group; people want to know how her week has been.
- She now has practical support and information for difficult behaviour that has helped her greatly with her three-year-old child.
- She has a completely new hair style to go with her success with losing weight. She has gained confidence to walk every day with her children and now attends weight watchers. She is so proud of herself.

Case 2

A grandmother who had full custody of her three-year-old grandson since he was four months old had been asked to leave two other traditional playgroups. The grandmother was concerned about attending our group and needed a great deal of encouragement to trust that Supported Playgroup was there to support her with her children. Both grandma and grandson now attend with smiles and enthusiasm. Grandma stated that she has found somewhere that accepts her role and her difficulties; her grandson's social skills have improved greatly and he loves attending playgroup.