



MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 23rd March 2016

New national report shows major Playgroup benefits

A major new national report has shown that children who attend Playgroup during their early childhood have significantly better child development when they start school, but that many children are missing out on this valuable community service.

The **Community Playgroup Quantitative Evaluation Report**, being released on 23 March by Telethon Research Institute and Playgroup Australia, shows that while a considerable number of children across Australia attend Playgroup prior to starting school (36% nationally), there is a need to increase the reach of playgroups to extend the benefits to an increased number of children.

This is the first report of its kind to track Playgroup participation and benefits using Australian Early Development Census data.

The **Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)** is a nationwide data collection of early childhood development recorded by teachers when children commence full-time school. The AEDC measures five key areas of development:

- Physical health and wellbeing;
- Social competence;
- Emotional maturity;
- Language and cognitive skills;
- Communication skills; and
- General knowledge.

Playgroup SA CEO Carley Jones says the AEDC provides critical information to organisations such as Playgroup SA about what is working well and what needs to be improved or developed to support children and their families.

“The AEDC provides us with a snapshot of how children are faring developmentally across the country. Although the majority of children are doing well, more than 1 in 5 South Australian children are developmentally vulnerable by the time they get to school,” Ms Jones says.

“The AEDC data can be drilled down to individual regions across the State. This allows us here at

Playgroup SA to look at areas geographically that are displaying vulnerabilities and establish Playgroups to assist. We also use the domains of development used in the AEDC to guide our framework and curriculum, for example play activities and the skill sets they target.”

According to the new Community Playgroup Quantitative Evaluation Report, evidence suggests that today’s children are engaging in much less play with other children than previous generations due to a range of factors, such as demographic changes in family structures, an increased focus on literacy and numeracy, an increase in passive entertainment, as well as the perception of a lack of safe outdoor areas for children to play.

“Playgroups provide a safe environment where children can play with similar aged children on a regular basis, and as such they offer an important opportunity for parents to assist in their child’s development,” the report says.

“In addition, playgroups also have a range of positive effects on parents and caregivers which are likely to translate into better outcomes for children, such as reduced social isolation, improved parenting skills and self-confidence, increased knowledge of relevant community services, and a greater awareness of their child’s needs.”

Report findings also demonstrate that playgroup is universally beneficial to all children from a range of different backgrounds. And the benefits of playgroup are seen across all domains of child development: physical, social, emotional, language and cognitive development and communication.

“Children who do not attend playgroups are 1.78 times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable on 1 or more domains of the AEDC at school entry, after adjusting for socio-economic and demographic differences between the two groups,” the report says.

Playgroup SA is the starting point for parents or groups who want information about community playgroups and the positive impacts on child development.

“Children’s early years are so important – their brains are developing rapidly. Children who are thriving when they start school are likely to continue to do well. Getting it right in the early years sets the foundation for lifelong benefits to children and to the whole community,” Ms Jones says. “We’re here to help with that.”

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

For a copy of the **Community Playgroup Quantitative Evaluation Report** contact Playgroup SA on 1800 171 882 or email info@playgroupsa.com.au

For comments about **community playgroups and their impact on early childhood development** contact Carley Jones on (08) 8344 2722 or email eo@playgroupsa.com.au

For more information about the **Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)** visit www.aedc.gov.au