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Relationships Matter:
The Social and Economic Benefits of Community Playgroups

Ian McShane, Kay Cook, Sarah Sinclair,
Georgia Keam & Jane Fry

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About the Authors

Dr Ian McShane is a Senior Research Fellow at
the Centre for Urban Research, RMIT University.

Dr Kay Cook is a Senior Lecturer in the School
of Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT
University.

Dr Sarah Sinclair is a Lecturer in the School of
Economics, Finance and Marketing in the College
of Business, RMIT University.

Georgia Keam is a Research Assistant in the
School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT
University.

Jane Fry is a Researcher in the School of
Economics, Finance and Marketing in the College
of Business, RMIT University.

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Executive Summary

Community playgroups have been a feature of Australia's early childhood education and care landscape for at least forty years.

Community playgroups (hereafter referred to as playgroups) have a significant presence in Australian communities. As this report shows, around 40% of families surveyed in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) participated in playgroups. Despite this level of engagement, playgroups struggle for visibility and policy traction. In part, this is because their benefits have not been fully described in terms that can be readily taken up in social and economic policy.

Research in this field has focussed on the developmental benefits of playgroup participation for children. However, as a playgroup member interviewed for this study said, that tells only half the story of playgroups' benefits. The other half – and the focus of this report – describes the benefits of participation for parents and carers, and the spillovers or wider social value that this generates.

This report is the major outcome of a research project that sought to analyse the social and economic value of playgroups. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data, detailed in the report, the research contributes to knowledge and advocacy gaps by critically appraising:

- the contribution of playgroups to the landscape of social care
- their adaptive response to changing social and economic trends
- their role in developing social capital and acting as a catalyst for parents and carers to engage with other social settings, and
- their contribution to the informal or non-market economy.

To achieve these aims, the report conceptualises playgroups as a form of *community capacity building*. The concept of community capacity describes the range of personal, social and organizational resources available to playgroup members. These resources are enhanced and developed as a result of playgroup participation, and in turn build the capacity of the wider community. The report adapts Chaskin's (2001) model of community capacity to the playgroup environment to structure our literature review and findings.

This report draws on LSAC's data to show that playgroup participation is an important predictor of social trust.

Social trust is a key element of community capacity building. Trust encourages cooperation and reciprocity, fosters knowledge sharing and facilitates business transactions.

The report details our methodology, findings and conclusions, and includes a set of recommended actions to optimise playgroups' role in community capacity building.

The findings of this study emphasise the point developed by social capital theorists that *relationships matter*. However, the report also reveals some structural weaknesses and constraints that may impede playgroup participation and the contribution of playgroups to community capacity building. These include:

- constraints around the finances, leadership and training support of playgroups
- variable participation across cultural, linguistic and faith groups
- gaps in information provision about playgroups.

Key findings

Playgroups make a unique contribution to community wellbeing and community capacity building

- they cater for needs that are not met elsewhere, providing essential social supports in cases where child-rearing is occurring without a peer support network
- they equip members with parenting skills and resources, and civic information and contacts, that 'flow out' to the households of members and beyond
- they can overcome the experience of social isolation in larger urban areas
- they foster a 'sense of place', or affiliation with a local community, particularly for families who are newly arrived to an area.

Playgroups can adapt nimbly to changing social and economic trends

- There is little difference between playgroup participation across urban and rural Australia, contrary to many indicators showing an urban/rural divide. The wide distribution of playgroups positions them well to meet local needs.
- The emergence of distinctive forms of playgroups (grandparents, fathers, ethno-specific, language, educational philosophy, special needs or interests) indicates the adaptability of the model to meet changing demographic, social and economic circumstances.

Playgroups are a catalyst for engaging with other institutional and social settings

- The social networks and leadership experience acquired through playgroups encourages active contribution to children's 'educational journey', including their transition to school, and the participation of parents in children's schooling and school governance.
- Playgroups' adaptability has led to innovative partnerships, including with aged care homes, libraries, and schools.
- Playgroups are an important part of the early childhood continuum of care, particularly in their connections with maternal and child health services , other forms of pre-school care, and the formal education system.

Playgroups make an important contribution to the informal or non-market economy

- they are important sites of trust, reciprocity and knowledge exchange
- playgroup members contribute to local community fundraising and other civic activities, and provide valuable services (transport, meals) for families in peri-natal settings
- playgroups are an important pathway to volunteering in other settings - in some instances, playgroups provide members with their first volunteering experience, and provide a training and development function in this area
- playgroups bridge the informal and formal economies. They play a role in human capital formation, by developing or maintaining personal skills in areas such as organization and leadership, finance and ICTs. These skills are important to the work of playgroups as voluntary associations, and in turn contribute to enhancing productivity when playgroup members participate in or re-enter the paid workforce.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and objectives of the research

This report is the major outcome of research commissioned in 2015 by Playgroup Australia to investigate the social and economic value of community playgroups.

The study set out to achieve the following objectives:

1. Examine the unique contribution of community playgroups to the landscape of social care, with a particular emphasis on the role of playgroups in providing support for parents;
2. Explore community playgroups' adaptive response to changing social and economic trends, such as increasing female workforce participation and the uptake of grandparent and father care of children;
3. Document the role of community playgroups in building community capacity, including developing social capital, and acting as a catalyst for engagement with other institutional and social settings; and
4. Assess the contribution made by community playgroups to the informal or non-market and the formal economy.

An Australian model of community playgroups has operated for at least four decades and is recognised as one of the early childhood 'settings' in Australia's Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR 2009). Community playgroups are unique in the landscape of early childhood education and care. In addition to contributing to the social learning of children, they provide support and peer education for participating parents and carers. The profile of playgroups includes groups for grandparents, fathers, teenage parents and culturally specific groups. Community playgroups operate in self-organised and supported frameworks. Both the participatory model and diversity of playgroups contrasts with formalised and commercialised child-care provision. This positions playgroups at the leading edge of social care, with a capacity to respond at a community level to structural changes more nimbly than formalised models.

> " More than 40% of families surveyed in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) participated in playgroups when the study child was aged less than one, with a high rate (78%) of continued engagement as the child transitioned from baby to toddler. 54% of the sample participated in playgroups when their child was aged 2 – 3. "

Playgroups have a significant reach and presence in the early childhood landscape. More than 40% of families surveyed in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) participated in playgroups when the study child was aged less than one, with a high rate (78%) of continued engagement as the child transitioned from baby to toddler. 54% of the sample participated in playgroups when their child was aged 2 – 3. Playgroup participation then declines as the child transitions to formal kinder programs and school. This figure broadly corresponds with data from the Australian Early Development Census, which suggest that around one-third of children whose pre-school history is known to teachers have attended playgroups prior to starting school (Gregory et al., 2016). Playgroups are spread across Australia, with participation rates slightly higher in regional locations than urban ones (Gregory et al., 2016).

Situating playgroups within the wider setting of Australian civil society shows their significance

as social institutions. Around 200,000 Australian families participate in playgroups (Playgroup Australia 2015, p. 17). By comparison, the Australian surf life saving movement – claimed to be the largest initiative of its type globally – has a club membership of around 170,000 (Surf Life Saving Australia 2016).

> " The distinctive role and value of playgroups risks being obscured in a policy landscape that has become increasingly focussed on quality and learning standards in formalised childcare. "

Many families participating in playgroups also access other forms of childcare, as they juggle employment and care responsibilities. Engagement in this mixed economy of childcare suggests that playgroups have distinctive values for parents and carers. We argue that the distinctive role and value of playgroups risks being obscured in a policy landscape that has become increasingly focussed on quality and learning standards in formalised childcare. In part, this is because the policy focus on playgroups has been on their contribution to the developmental outcomes of children. These benefits are documented in a body of research that, while still relatively modest in comparison to the literature on formal pre-school and early intervention programs, extends back at least three decades (for example see Gregory et al. 2016, Sincovich et al. 2014, New & Guilfoyle 2013, Needham & Jackson 2012, McKenzie & Stooke 2012, Hancock et al. 2012, Jackson 2011 & 2009, Dadich & Spooner 2008, French 2005, Maatita 2003, Daniels 1995, Barnett 1990, Lloyd et al. 1989).

However, as a parent interviewed for this study said, the developmental benefits for children 'tells only half the story' of playgroups' value. The other half – and the focus of this report – is on the benefits of participation for parents and carers. As such, this study contributes to a modest

research literature that examines those benefits (see Chapter 2 for a review). Our research shows that those values are not simply personal benefits, but have positive externalities or spillovers that benefit society as a whole. Playgroups, we argue, provide public goods beyond their contribution to child development. We argue that the social and economic value of playgroups as sites of personal development, social support, networking and civic engagement has not been fully described in terms that can be readily taken up in social and economic policy.

This research contributes to documenting the social and economic value of playgroups by drawing on two principal datasets:

- grounded-theoretical qualitative interviews with community playgroup coordinators and participants conducted by the researchers
- the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC).

The analysis is framed by the concept of community capacity building (Chaskin 2001). We argue that the spillovers or social benefits generated when parents and carers participate in playgroups contribute to community strengthening, through outcomes such as increasing trust, connectedness and volunteering, as well as the development and maintenance of knowledge and skills that contribute to informal and formal economies.

The following section of the report outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the research, focussing on social capital and community capacity. After that, we review the published literature that specifically addresses the benefits of playgroups for parents and carers, drawing on the central themes of this modest body of work to frame the focus and methods of the study. Then follows a description of our research methodology and two chapters that analyse qualitative and quantitative data from the datasets described above. The conclusion discusses some research and policy implications of this study.

1.2 'Relationships Matter' – Social Capital and Community Capacity

There is growing acknowledgement that 'relationships matter' and that social networks and their attendant social capital are valuable assets. The conceptual history of social capital and its theoretical developments draw on a range of work, including Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988, 1990), Putnam (1993, 2000), Weil & Putnam (1994), Fukuyama (2001), Portes (1998, 2000), and Woolcock (Woolcock, 1998; Woolcock, 2001; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). The cumulative effect of this research suggests that well connected individuals are more likely to be "housed, healthy, hired and happy" (Woolcock, 2001, p.12). The research indicates positive economic outcomes for well-connected individuals and benefits extending to the broader community – such as reductions in transaction costs and the generation of positive externalities such as information flow and trust.

The concept of social capital has a number of competing definitions. The literature has tended to focus on interpersonal networks that have positive value both to members and to society. Community playgroups are examples of social capital. Our analysis adopts the following definition of social capital, in line with the work of both Coleman (1990) and Putnam (2000):

> Social capital is the store of value generated when a group of individuals invests resources in fostering a body of relationships with each other (a social network) which generates benefits in later periods. (Ogilvie 2005, p. 1)

Playgroups are an opportunity for a heterogeneous group of parents and/or carers to meet in small groups around a common point of interest. The primary source of common interest is that of parentage or carer status for a child of a given age range. Playgroups may also form around a second common interest, be it cultural, linguistic, religious, special needs or the carers own personal interests or general support needs.

Playgroups thus offer the potential to build both bonding capital and bridging capital. Bonding (exclusive) social capital refers to interpersonal relations between a relatively homogeneous group while bridging (inclusive) social capital concerns relations across rather than within groups (Iyer et al., 2005).

Putnam differentiates between the two when he notes "bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological super glue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD40" (Putnam 2009, p.19). The idea of social capital is intuitively appealing yet difficult to measure, given its many and varied components (Dasgupta 2005). However, there are four forms of economic value associated with social capital (Ogilvie, 2005), the first two of which are specifically relevant to the playgroup scenario:

1. **Norm fostering** – social capital and the development of social networks create expectations of trustworthiness which reduce transactions costs. This may also include norms of reciprocity.
2. **Information flow** – creating trust necessary to solve market failures or asymmetric information (e.g. about parenting support, toy library, or other services). Social interaction can improve decision making and increase social learning through copying if there is a hierarchy of knowledge, or through pooling of knowledge if participants each have some knowledge but there is no single 'best' informed individual.
3. **Sanctions against deviations** – the trust that is built through playgroup interactions may discourage deviation from network norms, values or expectations.
4. Social capital creates trust to overcome obstacles to **collective political action** associated with monitoring or lobbying governments or service agencies around family and child specific issues.

Trust is the key outcome of social capital, creating economic value via the above pathways.

> Generalized trust is an advantage to people and societies that possess it, as trusters are more likely to initiate cooperative relations that might be beneficial for themselves as well as for their social environment, which benefits from cooperation…generalized trust plays an important role for engagement in cooperation. Trusters do not only engage in mutually beneficial relations more frequently they are also generally more socially active, engaged, tolerant, and more inclined to support liberal rights, such as minority rights and free speech. (Stolle, 2002, p.398).

Although it is difficult to price, trust has public good[2] characteristics and creates an argument for public support to develop social networks or to make them work better. Trust is not a sentiment but "an observable propensity to engage in certain actions", and thus is important from an economic perspective (Ogilvie 2004, p 4). Lacking trust, economic agents will refrain from engaging in transactions with people or institutions and mutually beneficial cooperation will go unrealised. This pertains to both the formal and informal economy, or market and non-market transactions (Dasgupta, 2000).

Social Capital and Community Capacity

To frame our inquiry, we draw on the concept of community capacity, understood as "the interaction of human capital, organizational resources and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of a given community" (Chaskin, 2001, p.295). Rather than focusing exclusively on social capital (such as the network and supports available to parents), we engage this broader notion of community capacity to capture the range of personal, social, and organizational resources available to playgroup participants

– resources which are in turn enhanced and developed as a result of playgroup participation, building the capacity of the entire community. Within this framework, concepts identified in the social capital literature, such as trust, remain of core significance.

Our focus on community capacity was identified through our review of the international research literature on parents' experiences of playgroups, as outlined in Chapter 2. This broader concept helps to frame our qualitative interviews with playgroup participants, and analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children.

Modelling Community Capacity

A key reference for our discussion of community capacity is the work of Chaskin (2001). Chaskin's model of community capacity has six dimensions that describe how certain community initiatives strengthen their communities:

> **Dimension 1:** the four fundamental characteristics of community capacity: a sense of community, commitment, ability to solve problems, and access to resources;
> **Dimension 2:** the level of social agency at which community capacity can be fostered, and at which community capacity building initiatives can operate, including individual, organizational and network levels;
> **Dimension 3:** the particular outcomes that interventions attempt to develop with the intention of increasing community capacity, such as stronger community connection, and stronger parenting skills;
> **Dimension 4:** the particular qualities that are developed with the intention of increasing the capacity of the participants, including confidence and empowerment, knowledge, support and trust, leadership and skill building;
> **Dimension 5:** the influences that may facilitate or inhibit efforts to build community capacity; and
> **Dimension 6:** the outcomes of the initiative beyond that of community capacity building.

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2 A public good is a product that one individual can consume without reducing its availability to another individual and from which no one is excluded. Economists refer to public goods as "non-rivalrous" and "non-excludable".

Figure 1: Playgroup specific model of community capacity building (adapted from Chaskin 2001).
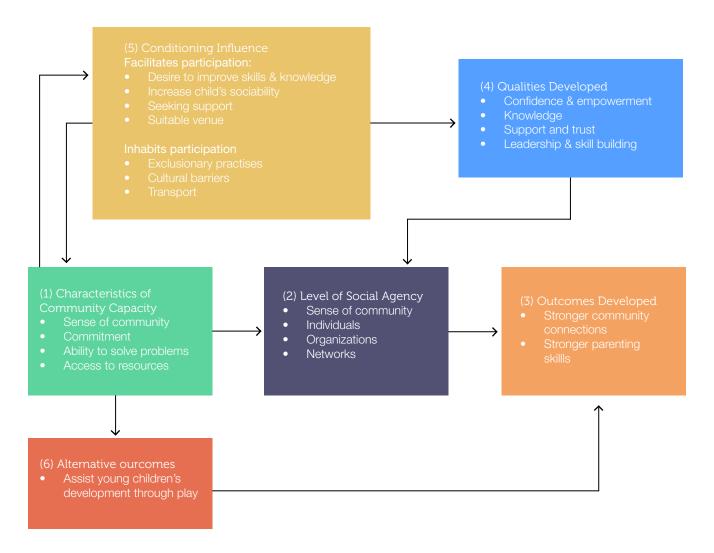

Figure 1 maps Chaskin's (2001) original model onto playgroups. The model demonstrates how the six dimensions do not work independently in a linear sense; rather they influence and build upon each other to show how developing community capacity is a multifaceted process.

In the text that follows, our literature review and results chapters provide data and analysis to respond to each of these points, culminating in a final concluding chapter that draws the results together into a cohesive account of the contribution that community playgroups make to building community capacity. We begin our analysis by providing a review of the international empirical research on parents' experiences of playgroup, followed by an account of the research methods, and then report the results of our investigations.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Methodology

A comprehensive literature review was undertaken to analyse literature on playgroups that specifically discussed the effect of attending playgroup on parents/carers. Two social science bibliographic databases, ProQuest and SAGE Journals, were searched for English language articles published between 1 January 1960 and 30 November 2015 utilising the search terms 'playgroup', 'parents' and 'community'.

The broad scope of these terms was designed to provide an inclusive account of the literature in the first instance; one that was then narrowed through further selection processes. The initial search for each database yielded 1,145 articles that were then subject to inclusion criteria. Studies were only included in the initial review if they:

1. Focused on playgroups or other early child education settings;
2. Focused on parents building relationships in social settings;
3. Focused on the importance of play and socialisation for young children.

Most of the initial 1,145 articles were excluded because they only mentioned playgroups in the broad context of community service provision. Through a series of refinements, as well as additional, targeted searches (including searching the biographies of researchers prominent in the field, and the contents of relevant journals not included in the above databases, such as the *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*), a total of 59 articles were identified for analysis.

These 59 articles were subject to further inclusion criteria to identify articles that:

1. Focused on supported and community playgroups, excluding studies of intensive playgroups, given the needs and motivations of parents participating in the latter differ greatly due to personal circumstance;
2. Focused on the relationship between playgroups and the parents, though parental experience did not have to be the exclusive focus of the article.

The majority of the 59 articles were excluded because they solely focused on the experiences of children and did not examine the parent's role. In the majority of articles reviewed, the parental benefits were addressed in passing in no more than a few sentences. Typically, such statements noted that parents needed support and an opportunity to get "out of the house… a break from day-to-day routines" (McKenzie & Stooke, 2012, 48).

The further inclusion criteria, however, identified nineteen studies that provided in-depth insight into the reasons why parents choose to participate in playgroups that extended beyond the benefits to their children. A complete list of the studies is found in Appendix 1. The studies also provided insight into what parents believed they gained from participating in playgroup and what inhibited their participation. Our analysis revealed that parents' experiences of playgroups aligned with notions of community capacity.

2.2 Community Capacity Building Operationalized

In the following review, we use Chaskin's (2001) six dimensions of community capacity to organise the results of our literature review. The nineteen studies selected were coded using these six dimensions to discover the commonalities and differences in the literature.

The following table provides an overview of how the nineteen reviewed studies were distributed across the dimensions, before we turn to describe each of these in detail.

Figure 2.2: Dimensions of community capacity and type of playgroup matrix

Dimensions of Community Capacity	Type of Playgroup		
	Community	Supported	Both
1. Characteristics of Community Capacity	Gibson et al. (2015), Harman et al. (2014), Loizou (2013), Mulcahy et al. (2010), Sincovich et al. (2014)	Jackson (2009), Jackson (2011), Lee & Thompson (2007), Liebmann (1996), Lloyd et al. (1989), McLauglin & Guilfoyle (2013), Moss et al. (1992), Needham & Jackson (2012), Warr et al. (2013)	Finch (1983), Hancock et al. (2015), Maatita (2003), McLean et al. (2015), Strange et al. (2015)
2. Level of Social Agency	Gibson et al. (2015), Mulcahy et al. (2010	Jackson (2009), Jackson (2011), Lee & Thompson (2007)	McLean et al. (2015)
3. Outcomes developed	Gibson et al. (2015), Harman et al. (2014), Loizou (2013), Mulcahy et al. (2010), Sincovich et al. (2014)	Jackson (2009), Jackson (2011), Lee & Thompson (2007), Liebmann (1996), McLaughlin & Guilfoyle (2013), Needham & Jackson (2012), Warr et al. (2013)	Finch (1983), Hancock et al. (2015), Maatita (2003), McLean et al. (2015), Strange et al. (2015)
4. Qualities developed	Gibson et al. (2015), Harman et al. (2014), Loizou (2013), Mulcahy et al. (2010)	Jackson (2009), Jackson (2011), Lee & Thompson (2007), Liebmann (1996), Lloyd et al. (1989), McLaughlin & Guilfoyle (2013), Mss et al. (1992), Needham & Jackson (2012), Warr et al. (2013)	Finch (1983), Hancock et al. (2015), Maatita (2003), McLean et al. (2015), Strange et al. (2015)
5. Conditioning influences	Gibson et al. (2015), Harman et al. (2014), Loizou (2013), Mulcahy et al. (2010), Sincovich et al. (2014)	Lee & Thompson (2007), Lloyd et al. (1989), McLaughlin & Guilfoyle (2013), Moss et al. (1992), Needham & Jackson (2012), Warr et al. (2013)	Hancock et al. (2015), Maatita (2003), McLean et al. (2015)
6. Alternative outcomes	Gibson et al. (2015), Harman et al. (2014), Mulcahy et al. (2010), Sincovich et al. (2014)	Jackson (2009), Jackson (2011), Lloyd et al. (1989), McLaughlin & Guilfoyle (2013), Needham & Jackson (2012), Warr et al. (2013)	Hancock et al. (2015), Maatita (2003),

1. The characteristics of community capacity

Chaskin (2001) suggests that there are four fundamental characteristics of community capacity: 1) a sense of community is developed, 2) there is a level of commitment among the participants, 3) the participants have the ability to solve problems together, and 4) the participants have access to resources. Within the articles included in the review, all reports of parents' playgroup experience instanced these four characteristics. This is because playgroups were formed by people of similar circumstances, who wanted to come together and commit to a program that would assist them and their children during a period of change. Consequently all nineteen articles reviewed encompass Dimension 1.

2. Social Agency

According to Chaskin (2001) there are three levels of social agency. An initiative can operate on an *individual level* building skills, on an *organisational level* providing goods and services, or on a *networking level* creating positive community relations. While playgroups provide a service to the parents, a link with the organisational level of social agency was not found in the literature and consequently is not discussed in the review. The term social capital is used widely in the literature to demonstrate how the playgroups operated on both an individual level and a networking level.

In her study of supported playgroups in Australia, Jackson described social capital as the 'glue' that holds society together and consists of the "connections between people and the social networks and norms of trust and reciprocity that arise from such connections" (2009, p.19). On an 'individual' level, the playgroup articles indicated that participating parents had a place where they could find support and share experiences (Gibson et al., 2015, Jackson, 2009 & 2011, Lee & Thompson, 2007, McLean et al., 2015, Mulcahy et al. 2010, Sincovich et al. 2014). According to Lee & Thompson (2007, p.35) in their Australian study of the supported indigenous Mungullah playgroup, on an individual level playgroups work to build skills, knowledge and

empower the participants. On a 'networking' level, the studies revealed that parents felt that they had connections to a community that shared resources, information and other services (Gibson et al., 2015, Jackson, 2009 & 2011, Lee & Thompson, 2007, McLean et al., 2015, Mulcahy et al., 2010). Lee & Thompson (2007, p.35) found that maximising "local participation and sustainability through capacity-building and action learning processes" developed social capital.

3. Outcomes Developed

The third dimension explored the broad outcomes of participating in playgroups. The literature suggested that these outcomes were found in two broad areas: strengthening community connections and strengthening parenting skills.

The literature revealed that the ways parents developed community connections or a sense of community varied, depending on the type of playgroup and the expectations of the parents. There was a distinction in the literature between parents who experienced greater community connections with the wider, geographical community as a result of their playgroup participation (Warr et al., 2013, McLauglin & Guilfoyle, 2013) and parents who developed strong internal communities of interest with the other parents from the playgroup (Jackson, 2009 & 2011, Loizou, 2013 & Maatita, 2003). There were also differences regarding who was responsible for forming the community, whether this was the responsibility of the facilitators (Jackson, 2009 & 2011), the parents (Hancock et al., 2015, Gibson, et al., 2015, Mulcachy et al., 2010) or both (Lee & Thompson, 2007).

The second broad outcome was parenting skills. This ability was described in the articles as being

> " The literature suggested that these outcomes were found in two broad areas: strengthening community connections and strengthening parenting skills. "

developed in a number of ways, including by modelling different parenting practices, parental education, and when parents' actions were validated (Jackson, 2009 & 2011, McLean et al., 2015, Maatita, 2003, Warr et al., 2013, Harman et al., 2014, Liebmann, 1996, McLean et al., 2015, Loizou, 2013, Strange et al., 2014, Needham & Jackson, 2012 and McLaughlin & Guilfoyle, 2013). Harman et al., in their Australian study of maternal participation in playgroups, discovered that the parents "were able to see what they want to be and what they did not want to be as a parent" (2014, p. 134). Warr et al. (2013, p.43), in an Australian study of supported playgroups with participants from a migrant background, found that facilitators can play a significant role in "modelling new concepts and parenting approaches" to participants.

4. Qualities developed

This dimension examined the qualities that were nurtured in playgroups, increasing the parent's capacity to participate in their community. These qualities were developed through community-building efforts as well as the development of particular skills. There were four broad qualities found in the literature that, when nurtured in the playgroup setting, built community capacity.

The first quality that playgroups tried to nurture in parents was gaining confidence and feeling empowered to be better parents. These outcomes were linked in the articles to parents contributing more to the immediate playgroup community as well as the wider community (Lee & Thompson, 2007, Warr et al., 2013, McLaughlin & Guilfoyle, 2013, Needham & Jackson, 2012, Loizou, 2013 and Mulcahy et al., 2010). In her study on an action research based playgroup in Australia, Loizou (2013, p.86) found that the parents developed self-efficacy and fashioned "more confident empowered parenting identities" through playgroup participation.

The second quality that playgroups nurtured in parents was being a knowledgeable parent. This meant having the opportunity to gain insight into childhood development and learn different parenting skills (Lee & Thompson, 2007, McLean

et al., 2015, Needham & Jackson, 2012, Loizou, 2013, Strange et al., 2014, Warr et al., 2013, Mulcahy et al., 2010, Liebmann, 1996, Harman et al., 2014). In the articles reviewed, parents were reported to have greater access to knowledge and as a result some parents then acted as a resource to others. This knowledge uptake and dissemination was reported to increase the capacity of the playgroup to solve problems collaboratively. Mulcahy et al. (2010) found, in a Canadian study into exclusion and conformity in playgroups, that "many women spoke of sharing parenting knowledge" with their husbands and family who don't participate in the playgroup, creating a flow of information to the community.

The third quality that the playgroups nurtured was the creation of an environment where parents could find support and trust. The broad range of support that could be found in the playgroup setting often helped counter feelings of isolation experienced by new parents. This was often cited as a key reason why parents sought out playgroups (Jackson, 2009 & 2011, Warr et al., 2013, McLaughlin & Guilfoyle, 2013, Needham & Jackson, 2012, Lloyd, Melhuish, Moss & Owen, 1989, Strange et al., 2014, Mulcahy et al., 2010, Maatita, 2003, Gibson et al., 2015, Harman et al., 2014). Strange et al. (2014, p.2839), in their Australian study into how community is fostered in playgroups, noted the empathy and support felt by the mothers and how it was easier for the mothers to connect with other parents from a similar background.

Finally, the fourth quality that was found in the literature was nurturing leadership potential and building organisational/managerial skills. The

> "
> The literature demonstrates that while there are a range of challenges to building organisational and managerial skills in both community and supported playgroups, it is possible and is often the first experience women have to build their skill set and capacity to contribute in other social and economic settings in the long term.
> "

literature demonstrated that playgroup was often the first place that women could develop managerial skills and take on new levels of responsibility (Lloyd et al., 1989, Moss et al., 1992, Lee & Thompson, 2007). According to Moss et al. (1992, p.314), in an English study of parental involvement in playgroups, participating in a supported playgroup "undoubtedly provides a unique range of opportunities for parents to become involved" in their community. The literature also found a number of challenges to building organisational/managerial skills in the playgroup, including the high turnover of parents (Moss et al., 1992), a lack of authority and competency from the parents (Lloyd et al., 1989) as well as a mode of skills transfer being more suited to a middle-class environment than a lower socio-economic environment (Finch, 1983). In summary, the literature demonstrates that while there are a range of challenges to building organisational and managerial skills in both community and supported playgroups, it is possible and is often the first experience women have to build their skill set and capacity to contribute in other social and economic settings in the long term.
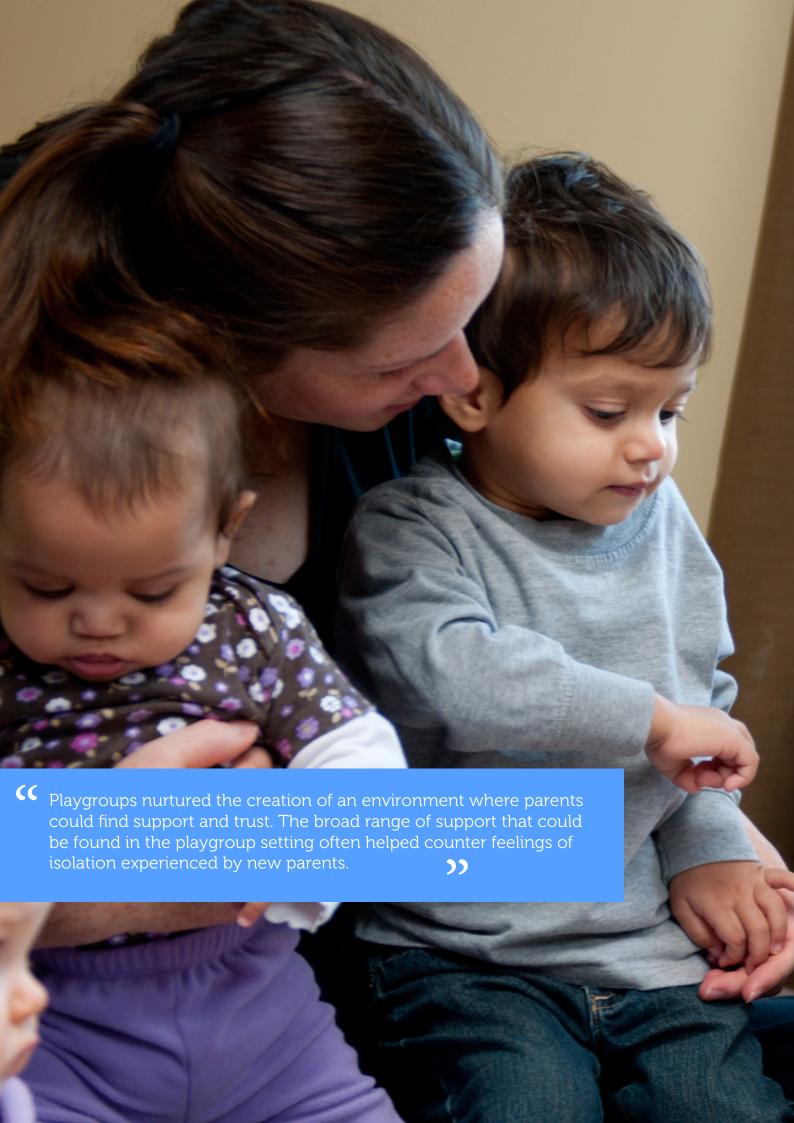
5. Conditioning Influences

The fifth dimension explored the factors that inhibited or facilitated participation in the community initiative. There were two broad factors that facilitated participation in a playgroup. First, were the benefits that parents perceived that playgroups would provide for them, and in turn, their children. These benefits included, improving their parenting skills, learning about their child's development, and their children having the opportunity to socialise with other children (Sincovich et al. 2014, Lee & Thompson, 2007, McLean et al., 2015, Loizou, 2013, Lloyd et al., 1989, Maatita, 2013, Moss et al., 1992, Warr et al., 2013, McLaughlin & Guilfoyle, 2013). Second, were the benefits parents perceived that playgroups would provide them, such as finding a community that would support them during a challenging period of their lives (Sincovich et al. 2014, Jackson, 2009 & 2011, Maatita, 2003). For example, Jackson (2009) found that the mothers in her study spoke at length about needing a place where they could "be themselves and chat" (p.60).

The literature also illustrated that there are a broad range of both factors that inhibited parents' participation in a playgroup or lessen their desire to continue to participate. These could be divided into emotional and practical factors. The emotional influences reported in the literature centred upon exclusionary practices occurring within playgroups (Maatita, 2003, Mulcahy et al., 2010, Gibson et al., 2015). Mulcahy et al. (2009, p.13) discovered that "exclusion was a large part of the process, and this exclusion often hinged upon differences in mothering style or simply differences in personality" and that "sometimes mothers get left out unintentionally, and sometimes they get left out in an absolutely purposeful manner". The practical barriers to participation included changing family dynamics (e.g. divorce, children starting primary school), increasing female employment, language or cultural barriers, limited transport and the cost of joining and running a playgroup being prohibitive for lower socio-economic families (Hancock et al., 2015, Harman et al., 2014, Moss et al., 1992, Needham & Jackson, 2012, Sincovich et al. 2014 and Warr et al., 2013).

6. Alternative outcomes

In addition to parental outcomes, in Chaskin's framework there was one other key outcome present in the literature: to assist young children's development through play (Sincovich et al. 2014, Jackson 2009 & 2011, Lloyd et al. 1989, Maatita 2003, Hancock et al., 2015, Needham & Jackson, 2012). The positive outcomes for children are unsurprising, as this is a core purpose of playgroups and has been extensively researched elsewhere (McKenzie & Stooke, 2012, New & Guilfoyle, 2013). For this reason, the child development outcomes of playgroup participation are not the focus of this report.

In conclusion, the six dimensions that operationalize Chaskin's (2001) understanding of community capacity illustrate the multi-faceted ways that playgroups directly contribute to building the capacity and wellbeing of the communities involved. This review of the literature provides a basis on which we build our primary and secondary data collection and analysis, which is reported in the following chapters.

> **"** Playgroups nurtured the creation of an environment where parents could find support and trust. The broad range of support that could be found in the playgroup setting often helped counter feelings of isolation experienced by new parents. **"**

3 Research Approach & Methodology

3.1 Research context

This project took a mixed-methods approach using two main techniques:

- the collection of primary qualitative data through interviews with playgroup participants and coordinators. The interview data was supplemented by questionnaires issued to interviewees.
- analysis of Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) data to reveal patterns of engagement and participation and the role of community playgroups in the community capacity and social capital process.

The research design was approved by RMIT University's Human Research Ethics Committee in October 2015.

The data collection and analysis methods for each data source are discussed below.

3.2 Individual interviews with volunteer playgroup coordinators and playgroup participants

Qualitative interviews with playgroup participants

We conducted 33 interviews with playgroup participants, drawn from a list of willing Playgroup Victoria members. Eleven of these participants were, or had previously been, volunteer coordinators. Most of the other interview participants had been, or were currently, members of their playgroup committee. The interviews were all conducted by telephone at the request of participants, and averaged 35

minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed. Identifying details were then removed, and the transcripts de-identified. Participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms in the following discussion.

Participants were each provided with a $30 Coles Myer voucher to thank them for their time. All participants were then sent a questionnaire, as outlined in the following section.

Interview questions were semi-structured and focused on the participant's playgroup history, rationale for joining, perceived benefits and barriers to participation, and associated topics (see Appendix 2).

To analyse the data, the researchers read each transcript in detail, looking for meaning, and commonality of experience or points of divergence across the transcripts, using a process known as thematic coding (Morse & Field, 1995). This process generated five themes that we report on below. These themes map on to Chaskin's (2001) notions of community capacity, and provide useful insight into areas that function well, or could be fostered through an injection of resources, as they are conceptualised by Chaskin.

3.3 Questionnaires issued to interviewees

All interviewees were provided a questionnaire to complete (see Appendix 3). The questionnaire collected key demographic data that enabled the researchers to make some inferences about participant representation.

Participants were sent the questionnaire via email prior to the interviews, and in this respect, the questionnaire also provided a further opportunity for participants to discuss their playgroup experiences. All but four participants returned their completed survey (a response rate of 88 per cent).

We analysed the questionnaire data descriptively, reporting the distribution of the sample across age groups, number of children, income, employment status and a range of other characteristics. As discussed below, the questionnaire data show differences between the Playgroup Victoria interview sample and the representative sample of parents as found in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, which was used to compile our statistical results.

Description of the qualitative survey

The majority (65.6 per cent) of our interview participants were aged between 30 and 39 with between one and three children (96.6 per cent). Around 24 per cent of our participants worked part-time or on a casual basis, with none working full-time. Nearly a third of our participants were on maternity leave at the time of the interview, with another 17.6 per cent of participants reporting that they were unemployed.

3 of our 33 participants lived in households that spoke a language other than English at home. Four of our participants were single mothers and one was a grandparent carer. As such, our sample was predominantly Anglo-Saxon, middle class, married mothers with a normative number of children.

The average amount of time that our participants had spent in their current playgroup was 31.2 months, while their total involvement in playgroup was 35.1 months.

Table 1: Participant demographics

	N	%
Age		
25-29	4	13.8
30-34	13	44.9
35-39	6	20.7
40-44	5	17.2
50+	1	3.4
Missing Values	4	
No. of children		
1	10	34.5
2	10	34.5
3	8	27.6
4	0	0
5	0	0
6	1	3.4
Missing values	4	
Employment status		
Full Time	0	0
Part Time	4	13.8

Casual	3	10.3
Self-Employed	5	17.3
Unemployed	5	17.3
Maternity	8	27.6
Retired	1	3.4
Student	1	3.4
Other	2	6.9
Missing values	4	
Household income		
Under 30,000	1	3.4
30,000 to 50,000	3	10.4
50,000 to 75,000	4	13.9
Above 75,000	18	62
Prefer not to say	2	6.9
Don't know	1	3.4
Missing Values	4	
Highest level of education		
Secondary Uncompleted	0	0
Secondary Completed	3	10.4
Trade Qualification	1	3.4
Vocational	8	27.6
Tertiary Degree	17	58.6
Prefer not to say	0	0
Missing values	4	

3.4 Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) analysis

This component of the study, engaging research objective 3, aimed to examine measures of economic returns to social capital investment via patterns of playgroup participation. The key outcome variable used in the analysis was trust, aligning with Chaskin's fourth dimension of community capacity.

Using probit regression techniques, we used data from the LSAC to examine the extent to which patterns of playgroup participation across the ages of 0-12 months (wave 1) and 2-3 years (wave 2) are associated with a propensity to trust for mothers at wave 3 (child is aged 4-5 years) and wave 5 (child aged 8-9) years. A range of socio-demographic characteristics in wave 1 -

diversity, geographic and initial levels of social capital such as family and friendship support - is controlled for.

Introducing LSAC (Release 5)

LSAC is a longitudinal study with a dual cohort cross-sequential design. It tracks development pathways of Australian children exploring family and social issues, and addresses a range of research questions about children's development and wellbeing. Information is collected on the children's health, education, and development, from parents, child carers, pre-school and schoolteachers and the children themselves (Sanson et al., 2002).

LSAC is conducted in partnership between

the Department of Social Services (DSS), the Australian Institute of Family Studies ('the Institute') and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Recruitment of over 10,000 children and their families took place from March until November 2004. From 2004, the families have been interviewed every two years. In addition, between-waves mail-out questionnaires were also sent to families in 2005, 2007 and 2009.

Participant selection and data collection

LSAC used a two-stage clustered sample design, first selecting postcodes then children, with the clustered design allowing analysis of children within communities and producing cost savings for interviews. The sample was stratified by state, capital city statistical division/balance of state and two strata based on the size of the target population in the postcode.

Postcodes were selected with probability proportional to size selection where possible, and with equal probability for small population postcodes. Children from both cohorts were selected from the same 311 postcodes. Some remote postcodes were excluded from the design, and the population estimates were

adjusted accordingly.

A summary of sample size of responding Parent 1s appears in Table 3.1, below. The primary source of information is the primary caregiver of the study child (Parent 1). Parent 1 was asked to complete an in home interview as well as a leave behind questionnaire.

Figure 3.1 LSAC sample size by wave

wave	n
1	5107
1.5	5036
2	4606
2.5	3192
3	4386
3.5	2999
4	4242
5	4077

For our purposes, we use the B cohort, i.e. children born between March 2003 and February 2004, across waves 1-5 of the general release dataset (see Figure 3.2, below).

Figure 3.2: Age of Cohort B study child across waves

Cohort	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5
B cohort	0-1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9

We focus on 'Parent 1' of the study child, as this person answers the questions relating to playgroup participation and social capital. It should be noted that the identity (and therefore characteristics and responses) of Parent 1 can change between waves (according to who answers the survey). For example, Parent 1 may be mother/father, or (new) step-parent and (new) partner of (SC's natural) Parent 2, or Parent 1 may be a grandparent. These differences have been identified and tracked and for modelling purposes the sample is limited to mothers only. Sample sizes between waves were smaller than in the main waves due to attrition, non-return of

questionnaires and item non-response.

Some key points relative to this analysis are that, relative to census 2001, for our purposes, at wave 1 the B cohort of LSAC over-represents children:

• with mothers who have completed year 12
• with no siblings
• from an ATSI background

and under-represents children:

• in lone-parent families
• with two or more siblings

- with mothers who speak a language other than English at home
- in New South Wales.

Playgroup participation

Participation in playgroups was identified at waves 1, 2, and 3 for cohort B. Parent 1, most often the study child's mother, was asked if:

"In the last 12 months, have you used any of these services for the study child? Playgroup or parent-child group" (Yes = 1 No =0)

A limitation of the data is that the frequency of attendance at playgroup or the type of playgroup attended cannot be determined. However we can identify those that attend a playgroup in a subsequent wave, suggesting ongoing attendance.

Playgroup use

Wave	% yes
1	41.87
1.5	46.77
2	53.82
3	26.41
4	1.7
re-use	% yes
1-1.5	73.88
1.5-2	79.44
2-3	40.91
3-4	4.42

Economic valuation of playgroup participation

The objective of this empirical analysis is to explore the associations between playgroup participation, the development of social networks, and the perceived benefits of these social networks in later periods.

When an individual invests 'resources', such as time and out of pocket costs, into attending playgroup and developing interpersonal networks, they are investing in social capital that resides in relationships – either their own or their child's.

Applying an economic perspective we explored the benefits generated by this social behavior, specifically playgroup attendance.

This study aims to examine measures of trust via patterns of playgroup participation. The key outcome variable to be measured in the LSAC analysis is one relating to the neighbourhood belonging scale and is derived from the following question:

"How much do you agree that most people in your neighbourhood can be trusted?"

Modeling approach

Our analysis takes a two-step approach – the first is to identify the characteristics of the parent who chooses to participate in playgroups. In the initial analysis playgroup participation is the dependent variable, with a range of socio-economic, demographic and social capital covariates. It can then be determined why / if certain individuals are more / less likely to participate. Playgroups are a channel to developing social capital. The determinants of social capital more broadly are considered as determinants of playgroup participation and so inform the control variables applied in the empirical model.

Identifying the key characteristics of those choosing to participate in playgroups serves two purposes. First, it helps identify patterns of social capital formation, and second it helps identify if playgroups follow similar patterns to other forms of social capital investment. The empirical literature identifies the following as factors which can affect an individual's stock of social capital (Iyer et al., 2005).

- **Education** - higher levels of education are associated with the development of social capital (Hall, 1999; Putnam, 2000). Education may provide an initial stock of social capital that can be built on.
- **Mobility** – the incentive to join networks may depend on how long the benefits might accrue.
- **Labour market participation** – the workplace may be a place where social capital develops - however work intensity may have

a negative effect on social capital.

- **Family** - strong family support is positively related to social capital investment.
- **Ethnic homogeneity and immigrants** - according to Glaeser (2001) the formation of social capital requires coordination and such coordination is difficult when people are different.
- **Economic variables** – economic homogeneity, especially through higher and more equal income, is positively related to social capital.
- **Age** - Glaeser et al. (2002) find strong life-cyle effects. Social capital is expected to increase as we age initially and decline as we grow older. Given the reproductive cycle, it would be expected that the mother's age would be a key determinant of playgroup participation.
- **Home ownership** - homeownership may induce a greater incentive to develop social capital. DiPasquale and Glaeser (1999) found strong associations between social capital and homeownership, as homeownership reduces mobility and creates a strong incentive for community improvement.
- **Urban / rural** - the degree of urbanization may impact the development of social capital.

Urban areas may offer more opportunities, however they may have lower levels of social trust.

The second stage of the analysis examines the association between playgroup attendance and generalized social trust. A binary probit model is developed with trust as the dependent variable and playgroup attendance in previous periods as a predictor of trust.

The LSAC data analysis, and the key focus of this section of the report addresses the economic outcomes of playgroup participation. It has been established in the literature that an increase in social trust has an array of positive economic spillover effects, most of which transmit via reduced transaction costs, information channels and norm fostering.

 Any positive association between playgroup attendance and social trust would suggest that the economic benefits of playgroup attendance are sustained and extend beyond playgroup participation years. Results are presented in Chapter 5.

> "Parents found that participating in a playgroup benefited not only themselves and their child but also helped them create strong bonds with their community. "

4 Playgroup interviews

In this chapter, we outline the primary themes derived from the qualitative interviews with playgroup participants and coordinators. These interviews examined participants' experiences of playgroup, which we then examined thematically to identify the broad categories and the connections between them. Here, we outline these themes in a loose chronological order, indicative of the journey parents take into and through playgroups, from their initial contact to the ongoing benefits of playgroup and opportunities for them to 'give back' to the playgroup system. The themes we describe in the following section that capture this journey include carers' pathways into playgroups, the friendships and support network developed through playgroup participation, skills developed through playgroups, and the pathways to community leadership.

Pathways into Playgroup

The common thread when discussing how the women began their playgroup journey was the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) nurse. The majority of the women were initially in a mothers group with their first child and this experience, we discovered, was often the determining factor to whether women were interested in pursuing a playgroup.

Olivia, a mum of three, did "eight weeks with the new mums' group and that was facilitated by the maternal health nurse, and then from there we created our playgroup". This experience was similar to that of Kelly who "had a mother's group running through the, just the normal maternal child health system. And then at the end of the twelve week session we decided to start a playgroup between us".

The transition to a playgroup was found to often be at the encouragement of the MCH nurse. Nancy discussed how the Maternal and Child Health Centre "encouraged us to keep meeting up after the initial six weeks…. So we spent a little bit of time going around to each other's houses and things like that but as they [the children] got bigger and more boisterous" were actually "encouraged by that original maternal and child health nurse to join a playgroup".

> " MCH nurse referrals to playgroups were common but not universal, and some women 'fell through the cracks' into social isolation. "

But the transition from mothers group to playgroup was also brought about by the disintegration of the mothers group, once the mums return to work. Bonnie explained that her "original mum's group set up by the Maternal Health Centre folded, because it was only a very small group and a few went back to work". Holly found that she felt quite socially isolated after the mothers group she had been a part of disintegrated due to people returning to work while she was still at home. At this point, there are few resources available to mothers to reconnect to other groups. Imogen found that after the mothers group ended she "wanted to still continue" due to the benefits she and her daughters had experienced. However, being recommended playgroup by the MCH nurse was not a universal experience of our interviewees.

Here, playgroups, in conjunction with MCH nurses could play a vital role, connecting women with

older babies (i.e. 6-12 months old), and those who have had subsequent children, with groups of other women with children of similar ages. With minimal support, these groups may evolve into self-organising playgroups. MCH nurse referrals to playgroups were common but not universal, and some women 'fell through the cracks' into social isolation. The design of our sample and recruitment methods, however, precluded us interviewing many women who were isolated from playgroups and other support structures, and further exploration is needed here.

A minority of the interviewees found information about joining a playgroup through a range of different ways, such as seeing an advertisement or through word of mouth. Some women talked about the 'luck' they needed to find a suitable playgroup. Lauren was told about the local playgroup by her sister, who had previously been a member. Alexandra was referred to the playgroup by one of her friends, while Petra was recommended playgroup by her sister who wanted them both to join the local branch. Other interviewees used their own initiative to find a playgroup. Wendy "saw it on a flyer that was in our local shopping centre… picked it up and saw that they had a grandparents' playgroup, thought it would be interesting to try it out".

> " Women who move suburbs, lose contact with their mothers' group, lack confidence or are socially or culturally isolated, may lack the time and resources required to find a playgroup through their own initiative. "

Mary, Fiona and Isabel were moving to a new area and were interested in finding something for both themselves and the children to do that would get them involved with their new community. Fiona explained that she moved "literally right next door to a park and there's a Girl Guide's hall there and my husband noticed one day a whole lot of mums, or women walking in, to the Girl Guide's hall with their kids. And so he asked what it was all about… we've been going ever since".

Amber, in contrast, saw an advertisement on Facebook for the playgroup that encouraged her to attend a trial session. Brittany initially joined a pilot playgroup program that was run by the local council before deciding to join another playgroup in a different area that she had attended as a child, as she wanted to create some connections to the area. Teresa also already knew about her playgroup, as it was based at her local church that she was already involved with.

Women who move suburbs, lose contact with their mothers' group, lack confidence or are socially or culturally isolated, may lack the time and resources required to find a playgroup through their own initiative. Here, with additional resources, the state and territory-led playgroup organisations could boost their work with MCH Nurses, GPs and other contact points for mothers of young children, to integrate them into a group of carers with children of similar ages, providing the impetus for community playgroup formation.

Developing Friendship and Support Networks

A common theme in the interviews was how important playgroup was to the women, as it had helped them find much needed support and friendship during what was described as an isolating period of their lives. This support was described as essential for the women and had kept them returning to playgroup each year as these needs are not meet anywhere else in their lives.

The interviewees described how meeting other women with children was crucial to their playgroup experience as they often didn't have friends with children of the same age with whom they could talk about their experiences. The interviews demonstrated that a safe and inviting space where women meet up and chat is crucial to assisting women navigate motherhood. The opportunity to leave the house and talk to someone was something that was important to the vast majority of our interviewees. Jackie said the "key thing" for her was "obviously meeting other mums" as she previously didn't have friends with children whom she could discuss "things in

regard to kids or family life". Eveline noted that before joining playgroup she didn't "have a lot of friends my age that have babies, at the same time as me".

This experience of facing the challenges of motherhood without a peer support network was present in the majority of the interviews. Abigail spoke of how she had migrated to Australia and consequently didn't have any friends or family here. She used playgroup as the tool to "look for new friends" and get out in the community. Nancy described how much she looked "forward to that adult conversation each week" since she is currently staying at home with a baby and found that conversation was something really crucial she had been missing. Caitlin said it was really for good her to get out of house, talk to other people and "have a vent, basically". Brittany remarked "it's 50:50 about the kids getting an educational experience… [and] 50 per cent about the mums being able to have a coffee with another mum and just say, this is what's going on for me".

Beyond the opportunity to talk to others with similar circumstances, the ability to form friendships with others in the community was highly valued by the interviewees. Mary said "I get friendship. I've met quite a lot of friends through playgroup" and highlighted the importance of meeting people from the local area. The importance of local friendships was also brought up by Veronica who remarked that thanks to playgroup she is now friends with a woman who "literally lives maybe six doors up from me, on our street" and it was great to meet someone whom she "never really knew existed before, that lives so close". Debbie found that through playgroup her family has "made friends with people in the local area, so we've a strong network of people around us that are close by that we can call on if we need help or just to spend social time with". Brittany spoke about how she "didn't make any friends until I joined playgroup. These are women that have been living in the town for 15 years". Brittany stressed that the feeling of isolation had been extensive in her playgroup, saying "they had no friends in the town and then suddenly come to playgroup and they made friends, local friends, like drop in and have a cup of coffee friends".

The feeling that playgroup participation countered isolation was also discussed in a number of the interviews. Samantha noted how important attending playgroup had been for her mental health, describing that when she has "been really tired when you've had a really shit night with your baby, when you actually managed to get yourself up and out the door and go, you're happy that you've actually managed". Brittany discussed that "often women have been at work, been surrounded by grownups doing things. Then all of sudden they have a baby and it's like what do you do with your time? I think playgroups are really beneficial for stopping that isolation occurring". Her comment was mirrored by Grace who discussed how for new mothers especially:

It can be really isolating at first, and I think to have… somewhere to go and other mothers who have children who are of a similar age to you is are really, from a support point of view it's brilliant because you can sit there and there were times when we first started that we'd have a 25 minute conversation about poo. We can't really have that sort of conversation with anyone else really and be taken seriously. But it's raised, it's like a forum that if you trust each other, you can say and raise things that you're worried about when it comes to your mothering that maybe there's nowhere else that you can go to ask that question.

The view that playgroup was a safe and trusting space that allowed you to relax and seek help was consistent in the interviews. Fiona spoke about her experience with postnatal depression and how participating in the playgroup and "getting out into the fresh air… really lifted my

spirits". Fiona believes having a space where mums felt safe and trusted the others involved is crucial because she has seen "mums come to sessions and just drop their bags and just drop [their] bundle basically. Just, you know, burst into tears". She believes that playgroup is crucial for vulnerable mums as others going through similar circumstances can reassure the women that "what they're going through is normal and offer help".

> " The view that playgroup was a safe and trusting space that allowed you to relax and seek help was consistent in the interviews. "

Many women in the interviews discussed how playgroup gave them much needed additional support in their lives. Holly discussed how her group is "very supportive and non-judgemental" and feels very fortunate to have that in her life. Veronica highlighted the reciprocity that was present in her playgroup, noting people are frequently "asking and giving advice where they haven't found it elsewhere" and feeling "supported" to do so. Olivia noted that support was an essential element to playgroup as "baby's not sleeping and you're up every two hours" so you see "frazzled mums and frazzled dads" but everyone listens and understands what they are experiencing. Kelly noted how important information sharing is for her playgroup, having found that:

> It's been really helpful and interesting to be able to see their perspective on motherhood and also, any struggles or things that they've found difficult to go through and offer advice and also receive advice. What we've also found useful is that as a part of playgroup we've had like a Facebook group. And so we've been able to communicate, you know, on a day to day basis as well.

Holly noted the support she has received when pregnant with her second child, saying "there's quite a few mums who've gone through that four months/six months ago in the group so that social, that support of actually having someone to talk to who has been through this and see that they came out and it's okay. And then… being able to support other people as well". The interviewees demonstrate that what they get out of attending playgroup - friendship and support - is crucial to their ability to navigate motherhood. The ability of playgroups to help counter isolation, create social connections and support networks for women during this challenge should not be underestimated and should be researched further.

The opportunities for women to make connections through playgroups, and to benefit from the support that they provide, is of crucial importance, but it is not a benefit that is available to carers who are unfamiliar with playgroups, have practical difficulties accessing existing groups, or who find entering an existing group socially daunting. Here, MCH nurses could be further supported to connect mothers and other carers to playgroups through such activities as bringing groups of second (or subsequent) time mothers together, as is routinely done for first-time mothers, to form mothers' groups, facilitating contact between isolated carers and playgroups, including personal introductions, and taking particularly isolated carers to playgroup sessions. However, such activities require resources. The benefits for isolated carers and their families, however, will likely outweigh such outlays, as our economic analysis in Chapter 5 indicates.

Skill Development

A common theme in the interviews related to the skills that the women developed or maintained through their participation in the playgroup. Some women discussed how they improved their parenting skills, others their ability to work in a team, while other women discussed how being in the playgroup gave them an opportunity to maintain previously developed skills.

A number of the women discussed how their

previous experience gave them the confidence to take on roles on the committee or become the coordinator. For these women, participating in the playgroup didn't assist them in developing skills but helped maintain existing skills while on maternity leave. Grace found that being a coordinator at playgroup allowed her keep on top of leadership skills while she was away from work. Olivia noted that her role as secretary of the playgroup gave her the opportunity to utilise her past administration experience.

Bonnie said that while being a part of playgroup didn't broaden her skill set, it did assist her to focus on activities she wants to do in the future. Fiona found that being the coordinator gave her the opportunity to use skills that she hadn't used for years such as creating spreadsheets, which she found "good to sort of refresh my memory of the skills that I did have". Holly found her background as a prep teacher gave her the confidence to take on the coordinator role as she has been able to utilise much of her previous knowledge. Holly said she has enhanced her understanding of under-five preschool education through the Playgroup Victoria resources and has enjoyed "seeing different children in different developmental stages".

> " These women demonstrate there is a clear pathway for women who want to continue engaging their minds while raising their children, utilising some of their past experiences in the playgroup. "

Nicole spoke of how she has taken on a fundraising and administration role in her first month of playgroup. She is excited about this as she already has "experience in events, but on a different sort of scale, on a more corporate sort of level" which gave her the confidence to take the role so early in her playgroup journey. These women demonstrate there is a clear pathway for women who want to continue engaging their minds while raising their children, utilising some of their past experiences in the playgroup. Specifically, both Brittany and Mary spoke about

how they needed something to do with their brains while at home with their children.

In contrast, some of the women discussed the new skills they developed through participating in playgroup. These skills were more focused on communications and social skills as the experience of trying to manage the needs of a group of mothers was new. Justine discussed how she developed "a lot more skills in trying to keep everyone happy, and definitely trying to make sure that everyone is getting a fair go". Debbie spoke of improving her communications skills through "being the liaison between the playgroup and the school" as well as explaining to potential members the "various benefits of playgroup and also what our particular playgroup has to offer". Other participants spoke of the qualities they have built through their participation such as confidence, patience and delegation. Petra spoke of how she had improved her networking skills through her participation which has been good for bookkeeping business as it can "generate more clients" by talking to them in a "social setting that is quite relaxed". Samantha found that "it either enhances or helps you get skills… there are certainly people who are reps and who have been part of playgroup just by putting their hand up and learning new stuff". The ability to both develop new skills and maintain previously developed ones was discussed in a number of interviews. The interviewees' experiences illustrate that the ability to participate in a playgroup committee or be the coordinator is open to people from a wide range of abilities.

Beyond the skills learnt through participating in a committee or being the coordinator are the parenting skills that the members can enhance through participation. Robin found she "learnt lots of strategies and different things to try" as well as "other parenting styles that you really aspire to or things that you don't want to". Samantha spoke about playgroup giving the opportunity to share "knowledge and troubleshoot with each other". Nancy spoke about how she learnt about the home visiting doctor service that bulk bills, and thought that playgroup was a great time to work through challenges as a group and give suggestions. Caitlin found the ability

> " Playgroups were found to be a great avenue to counter isolation in new mums and provide friendship and support during challenging times. "

to troubleshoot problems with the other mums such as "my child's not sleeping at the moment, or throwing food or whatever" helped her develop her parenting skills. On top of discussing problems between the mums, Fiona has created a noticeboard in her playgroup to act as a resource for her members to find out further information and advice which has pamphlets from the MCH nurse, PANDA and Beyond Blue.

The interviews demonstrate that there is room for skill development in playgroups. Members who join the committee or are the coordinator should be encouraged to undertake further education with Playgroup Australia's state branches.

Developing Community Connections

Beyond the playgroup mothers coming together weekly and supporting each other, playgroup brings the broader community together. A number of the interviewees spoke of the diversity in their group and how they felt that was a sign of the broader community coming together. Jackie said that playgroup lets "people from all kind of avenues, I suppose, to come together as one. So different nationalities… lower income and higher income come together" and "learn from each other". Grace similarly said it was important to interact with other families, whether the difference is "cultural and ethnic background… more kids in the family or whether they're single parent families", and come together as a group. Olivia also spoke about the diversity of her group noting that they have "lots of people from different walks of life" such as "English as a second language" mums and it makes her feel like she is a "part of the community". Meaghan spoke of the four grandmas in her group as well as having representation from the broader community that, for her, represents the community coming together. Grace spoke about the getting the "husbands and partners" involved when socialising with people from the playgroup and believes that by bringing people together the community benefits as people aren't isolated. Debbie thought that playgroup did help the community as it "welcomes anybody and everybody who wants to be involved".

> "Playgroup can be seen as site for a diverse range of people to come together and create a sense of community and belonging that proximity alone does not create."

The interviewees spoke of how this coming together with groups of people from different walks of life would likely not have happened without playgroup. Holly observed that even though "most people who come, walk to playgroup so we all live in quite a small radius… you wouldn't necessarily know them." As a result, playgroup can be seen as site for a diverse range of people to come together and create a sense of community and belonging that proximity alone does not create.

Other interviewees spoke about the importance of making local community connections. Caitlin spoke about how good "getting out in your community and meeting other people" can be and how she enjoys the opportunity to help others. Teresa discussed the importance of joining a playgroup for "mums who don't really have much connection and are in a similar situation to me where they've kind of moved" and as a result "don't have a lot of friends". Brittany spoke about how she loved her "community connections growing up" so she wanted the same for her children. Brittany described playgroup as "a really connecting place" that acted as a "good starting point for making friends and being part of the community". Bonnie talked about her playgroup being "very involved in the community, like with the fundraisers that they do" which helps them engage with families who might be interested in joining. Elizabeth discussed how she enjoyed her role as a coordinator as it gave her a feeling of "working in the community and doing things for the community" and found the process of understanding her community better by getting to know her shire workers was great. Wendy spoke about how "it brings more people into your network of family, just broadens your horizons".

Imogen noted how important it was for people who lived close by to actually interact with each other "instead of just playing in your own home". Holly spoke of how playgroup "does help to create a sense of belonging to a place" and how that is important for the "wellbeing of the community". In exceptional circumstances the playgroup community has the opportunity to be a real support to those in need. Eveline spoke about a mother who was in her playgroup who passed away from brain cancer and how her husband still attends with their children. Eveline said the playgroup "paid for their Playgroup Victoria membership… drop off food for them, and we organised flowers". Elena spoke of how her group has "gotten in contact with mums that have been due to have their baby and we've organised meal drives for them" and organise transport for those wanting to participate in the playgroup. Amanda said that being a part of playgroup made her realised "so many people need help" but "never reach out for it". This community does not stop with playgroup attendance though, with some interviewees speaking of the playgroup community transitioning into a school community.

> " In exceptional circumstances the playgroup community has the opportunity to be a real support to those in need. "

Eveline found that she has been friends with women through mothers group and playgroup and is now continuing to see them at the local primary school where their children attend. She commented "it's been really nice to keep that friendship going". Caitlin similarly noted that her daughter went to kinder and primary school with playgroup friends. Playgroup was a good place for parents and children to make those friendships. This transition was touched on by a number of interviewees who were happy to be going on their 'school journey' with familiar people.

The interviewees' experiences with connecting to the broader community and the sense of belonging ensuing from their participation in playgroups reflects a shared concern about

isolation during a challenging life stage. However, the comments also reflect a wider view that playgroup is an important place for the community to come together and develop their ability to work collectively.

Pathway to Community Leadership

The eleven playgroup coordinators who were interviewed all discussed their leadership journey. A common thread through the interviews was how they first became coordinators, how their background influenced their decision, how being a playgroup leader led to them taking on further volunteering opportunities and the challenges involved in the experience.

While the women interviewed were all happy to be coordinators, they discussed what spurred them to take on the responsibility, and the combination of confidence and hesitation with which they approached the role. Eveline wasn't initially keen to take on the role as she was heavily pregnant, but since no one else put up their hand, she felt she was "the last option". She was confident that her background in running programs previously and passion for playgroup would assist her so she said "yeah, sure, no worries, I'll take it over. Obviously someone needs to run it". Fiona found that her proximity to the playgroup was a key to her becoming the playgroup coordinator - she had assisted previously with "almost everything except the enrolment", such as being first point of contact for new members as she lived close to the playgroup venue. Consequently, Fiona "jumped at the chance to come on board" as the coordinator. Grace had experience in previous leadership roles, and so was keen to take on a leadership role in the playgroup while taking a career break. She found that it was "really good to keep my hand in" and that "it was nice to be able to use those skills again, outside of a work context". Elena took on the coordinator role alongside a friend when they created their own Islamic playgroup. This decision came about as they previously had not been able to find a playgroup to fit their needs.

In contrast, Caitlin described herself as having "reluctantly taken over the keys" to her current

playgroup. Having co-run a playgroup previously, she knew she had the experience but was reluctant due to how time consuming it can be. Holly decided to take over her playgroup when the other members including the coordinator left, and Holly did not want it to close. Though she initially said "well if it's not hard I'll take it on", she found promoting the playgroup to be a "hard slog" and there were times when she felt like she was "banging [her] head against a wall" when it was just her and her children attending to keep it open. Now she has around ten regulars and is "very glad" she didn't give up. Holly did contact Playgroup Australia who put her in touch with other playgroups but still felt like she was "struggling" to find other members and that she would have liked more support. Eveline also noted that the improved support for the coordinators would be really beneficial, especially when the coordinators are managing multiple groups.

Playgroup leadership was found to be a clear pathway to further volunteering in the community. The majority of the coordinators discussed how they had built their confidence and abilities through being a leader and this had encouraged them to take on further volunteer roles. Mary described the confidence that she gained, giving her the ability to "talk to anyone from any background" which led to her "being president at kinder as well". Brittany described being the playgroup coordinator as "a precursor to me doing these other roles with the kinder" and "if I had never joined the committee at playgroup I might not have felt confident enough to learn at kinder. I probably wouldn't have ever considered it". Elizabeth described the experience gained as the playgroup coordinator meant she could easily fulfil the role of president of the kinder committee. According to Bonnie, she "keeps stepping up" as volunteer opportunities are available: having first been a president at playgroup, she has been the kinder committee president and is now the president of the school committee. By developing confidence and the ability to coordinate a group through being a part of a playgroup, the interviewees were able to participate to a greater degree in the community and support further community initiatives in the future.

However the interviewees also discussed how taking on this role and the responsibilities is not without its challenges. These challenges were found to not only influence the ability of the coordinator to successfully lead the group but can dissuade the coordinator from further volunteer opportunities. Brittany discussed how she was struggling to encourage her group to participate in the committee and help out more. The prevailing attitude in the group is that of ambivalence, with the mentality of "…it's not my job. I come, I pay my fees". Caitlin mirrored these sentiments, saying "everyone wants to come and obviously play and reap the rewards, but it's hard to get other people to help". Some participants "take the service a bit for granted, kind of come in, do their thing, never help set up, never pack up" which at 38 weeks pregnant she was finding frustrating.

A consequence of this situation is that the women felt that their effort wasn't really valued by the group, which makes continuing in the position less appealing. Fiona discussed the challenges of managing group dynamics, which was a new experience for her. Fiona described having to deal with a group of mums who are "quite cliquey and quite rude", creating an "us versus them" situation. She indicated this ongoing experience was becoming "a bit of a headache" but described it as "part of the job" of the group leader. Debbie discussed having to put a "happy face on to our playgroup" when negotiating with the school where the playgroup was held – the school was considering letting go of the playgroup. Debbie discussed the challenge involved with "being the person in the middle that tried to make our playgroupers still feel like they're welcome" while behind the scenes having to convince the school of the benefits of continuing the playgroup for the school community. Grace spoke of her time as a playgroup representative, which she did for a year before becoming burnt out. During her year as the representative she had to find a new venue, involving "a whole load of work" with the local council. This left her feeling like she didn't have the time to commit to the role which due to the move became incredibly time consuming. Elena also found being the coordinator very frustrating and challenging as
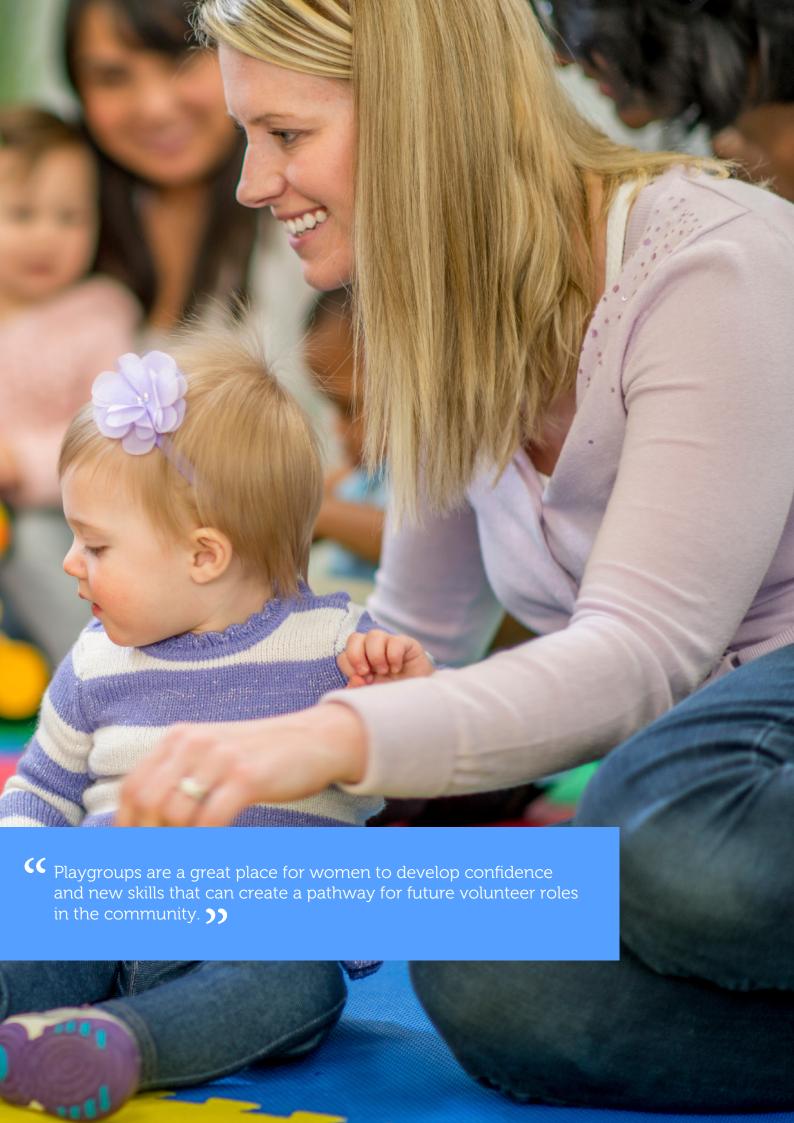
she struggled to speak up and ask for help. Although the situation has improved she decided to step down from the role this year due to how time consuming it was.

Interviewees, then, described a wide range of challenges, and while some playgroup leaders confidently handled some of them, for people often in their first leadership position some of these challenges resulted in burnout and stepping out of the role. The data suggest there is clearly a need for greater support for the coordinators in modelling sessions, handling group dynamics and assistance when working alongside councils, businesses, and so on.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have enabled the participants themselves to give voice to why they first became involved in playgroups, why they continued this participation, and how they became involved in coordinator duties. Across all of the themes, participants reported great benefits that were conferred upon them, their families and the wider community as a result of playgroup participation. However, these benefits were not achieved without effort, and sometimes the social and economic costs deterred people from participating, or from taking on coordinator roles. While taking on the role has a positive impact on the participant's life, building confidence and abilities and providing a pathway for future volunteer opportunities, the interviews illustrated that the experience is not without challenges that can become a burden for the leaders, and a threat to the sustainability of playgroups. The participants have provided valuable insights into the types of supports that would enhance the benefits they derived from playgroup without imposing further costs on them.

> Playgroups are a great place for women to develop confidence and new skills that can create a pathway for future volunteer roles in the community.

5 Results of the LSAC analysis

This chapter discusses the community capacity building nature of playgroups, determined through an assessment LSAC data.

The discussion presents two analyses. The first analysis explores patterns of playgroup participation and the characteristics of parents who choose to engage in playgroups as a form of social capital investment. This analysis seeks to answer the following question:

Do the patterns of engagement follow other forms of social capital development, and what is distinctive about playgroups as a means of building community capacity?

Importantly we can explore how patterns of usage may change as the study child moves through different playgroup-relevant ages. Some parents may use playgroups when their children are babies, others engage when children are toddlers and others continue to attend playgroup when their children move into school age. Different groups engage in the playgroup community at different stages of their child's development depending on their needs and their family constraints.

The second analysis aims to quantify the economic benefits of playgroup attendance. Trust is well documented as a valuable economic asset that oils the working of both the formal and informal economy. Social trust is a measure of community capacity. The second analysis seeks to answer this question:

How might playgroup attendance be associated with building social trust?

Does playgroup participation have a positive effect on building social trust – not just due to the direct social networks developed in playgroup but also via a catalyst effect, inducing other forms of community engagement? To measure this we examine the propensity of trust across LSAC waves 2, 3 and 5, using playgroup participation as a predictor of high levels social trust.

5.1 Playgroup participation – what matters, when and to whom

The LSAC data enables us to identify a list of factors that are statistically significant determinants of playgroup participation in wave 1 (Child aged 0/1), as presented in Table 5.1. The marginal effects reported indicate the estimated probability of playgroup participation and are calculated using probit regression model coefficients. The models include an array of factors typically identified as determinants of social capital development. Only statistically significant factors are reported for simplicity[2].

As the average age of the study child is 8 months in wave 1, those children that are relatively older are more likely to participate in playgroups, particularly those with no older siblings. This suggests there is a transition from the formally organised mothers group to the formation of a community playgroup. The mother's age follows an expected pattern in that those who are older are more likely to participate, up to a point when mother's age has a negative effect. This most likely reflects the age-specific fertility patterns of mothers.

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2 Full regression results and diagnostics are available on request.

Ethnic homogeneity often predicts higher levels of social capital investment and while there are predicted lower participation rates for certain ethnic and religious groups, i.e. Indigenous, mothers born in China and those of Islamic faith, this relatively low initial participation in playgroups in wave 1 is actually reversed in later waves when children are older and more able to socialise. This suggests that the pathways into playgroups may be different for these groups and not necessarily a transition from the mothers group setting. On aggregate we observe a high degree of ethnic and cultural diversity in playgroup participation

The interaction between social capital and human capital is strong in the literature. Higher levels of human capital predict higher playgroup participation. Yet, the effect of level of education does not hold in later waves.

> " The pathways into playgroups may be different for these groups and not necessarily a transition from the mothers group setting. On aggregate we observe a high degree of ethnic and cultural diversity in playgroup participation. "

Playgroup usage patterns differ across child age and across Australian jurisdictions. A higher proportion of the state specific sample in WA and NT use playgroups when children are aged less than one[3]. Higher proportions of children aged 3-4 participate in playgroups SA and NSW.

To identify initial pathways into playgroups, the levels of social support from friends or family and the use of services such as MCH services were examined. Those who were neutral about the level of family support were more likely to use playgroups while those with a weak friends network were less likely to at this stage.

Those with the least support and help were not engaging in playgroups at this stage. Census data in the linked areas (Statistical Local Area's) suggest that lower income and higher employment in areas are positive predictors of playgroup participation but these effects are of little practical significance. As might be expected, maternal health service attendance / use is a strong predictor of playgroup, again reflecting that many mothers groups go on to form their own playgroup. The civic engagement nature of playgroups is illustrated by the high levels of volunteerism: 45% of those attending volunteer to support a playgroup or pre school's operation.

Table 5.2 reports the marginal effects for significant predictors of playgroup attendance in wave 2. This wave captures the cohort of study children when they are at prime playgroup age, 2-3 years old. Participation patterns suggest busy family life - participation in playgroup decreases with an increasing number of older children in the household. Interestingly those mothers born in China who were less likely to use playgroups in wave 1 are more likely to participate in wave 2.

The interaction of workforce participation and playgroup participation becomes particularly important at this stage. Parents who are partnered and are not in the workforce are more likely to attend playgroups. Mobility also becomes a significant factor in wave 2. Those who moved in the last two years, and perhaps are more likely to have a lower accumulated stock of social capital in their current area, are more likely to invest time in playgroup participation as a means to connect with other families.

Living in South Australia and New South wales predicts much higher levels of participation in playgroup, particularly in capital cities. Playgroups are not only a supplement for those with poor family connections and support, as participation is strong among those with and without strong family support. Having good friendships predicts higher participation and indeed it may be these friendships that act as the stimulus to join a group. Mothers who have a poor perception of their neighbourhood as a place to bring up children are less likely to attend playgroup.

3 Playgroup numbers in these states are small compared to Victoria and NSW.

Table 5.1. Marginal effects of statistically significant variables Dependent variable playgroup participation in wave 1 –	
	Average Marginal effects W1
Study Child's (SC) age (months)	0.0113***
No. older siblings of SC in the household	-0.0841***
Parent 1's Age	0.0282*
Age Squared	-0.000479**
Indigenous Status = 1, yes	-0.177***
Religion Islam	-0.238***
COB Chinese Asia	-0.224**
Highest qualification = 1, Postgraduate degree	0.0923***
Highest qualification = 3, Bachelor degree	0.0730***
Highest qualification = 4, Advanced diploma/diploma	0.0554*
State of residence = 5, wa	0.0690*
State of residence = 7, nt	0.136**
Home - % family <$1K/week in linked area	0.00252**
Home - % working in linked area	0.00531***
Used for SC - M+C center/phone = 1, Yes	0.0900***
Feels closely attached to family / neutral	0.0764***
Feels closely attached to friends disagree	-0.0619*
Parenting info = 3, Do not need	-0.262*
Practical help = 2, No one	-0.0786***
Volunteer - playgroups/preschools = 1, Yes	0.451***
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1	

Table 5.2 Marginal effects of statistically significant variables in wave 2: Dependent variable = Playgroup participation	
	Marginal effects W2
Age of oldest child in household	0.0103**
Age of youngest child in household	-0.0177*
No. older siblings of SC in the household	-0.0974***
W2 Religion = 3, Judaism	-0.194*
W2 Religion = 5, Buddhism	-0.287**
Region of birth P1 = 9, Maritime SE Asia	-0.226**
Region of birth P1 = 10, Chinese Asia	0.295***
W2 Parent 1 has a partner = 1, Yes	0.110***
W2 Employment status = 3, Not in labour force	0.158***
W2 Distance involved in most recent move) = 2, changed area/region/ state/country	0.0776*
W2 State of residence = 1, nsw	0.0761***
W2 - State of residence = 4, sa	0.210***
Capital cities versus rest of state = 2, Rest of State	0.0514*

W2% Australian born in linked area	-0.00693**
W2% speak English in linked area	0.00340*
W2 % working in linked area	0.00630**
W2 Used for SC - M+C nurse = 1, Yes	0.145***
W1 Feels closely attached to family = Agree	0.0406*
W1 Feels closely attached to family = Neutral	0.0548*
W1 Feels closely attached to family = Disagree	0.0822*
W1 Feels closely attached to friends = Agree	0.0376*
W2 Neighbourhood to bring up children = 3, Fair	-0.0729*
W2 Neighbourhood to bring up children = 4, Poor	-0.207***
W1 Practical help = 3, Do not need	-0.137*
W1 Volunteer - playgroups/preschools = 1, Yes	0.167***
W1 Used for SC - playgroup	0.191***
Observations	**2,254**

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The importance of the maternal health care system is reiterated in the wave 3 marginal analysis results. Use of the maternal health centres predicts playgroup use across all waves. The younger the child the more likely to attend playgroup as older children transistion to school. Wave 3 analysis illustrates the community building capacity of playgroups and suggests that playgroups could be a useful means of integrating new arrivals to Australia. Being a newly arrived mother between 2000 and 2004 increases the probability of playgroup participation in wave 3 by 15%. The marginal effect of home ownership is negative, indicating that homeowners are 5.09% less likely to participate. This may be due to the financial pressure of home ownership and the need to have dual incomes to support mortgage payments. Many children at this age with full time working parents have formal child care arrangements or have started school. Religious group membership in particular those of Christian and Islamic faiths are a strong predictor of playgroup participation with this older group of children.

Table 3.3 Marginal effects Wave 3 Dependent variable = Playgroup participation (0/1)	(3) W3
W2Used for SC - M+C nurse = 1, Yes	0.0592***
W1 Used for SC - playgroup	0.0781***
W2 Used for SC - playgroup	0.263***
W3 SC's age (months)	-0.0127***
W3 Age of oldest child in household	0.00906*
W3 Age of youngest child in household	-0.00769
W3 No. older siblings of SC in the household	-0.0355**
W3 Year of arrival in Australia, 2000-2004	0.152**
W3 Religion = 1, Christianity	0.0515**
W3 Religion = 4, Islam	0.192*
W3 Region of birth P1- Sub-Saharan Africa	-0.180***
W3 Parent 1 has a partner = 1, Yes	0.0633*
W3 Employment status = 3, Not in labour force	0.0518***

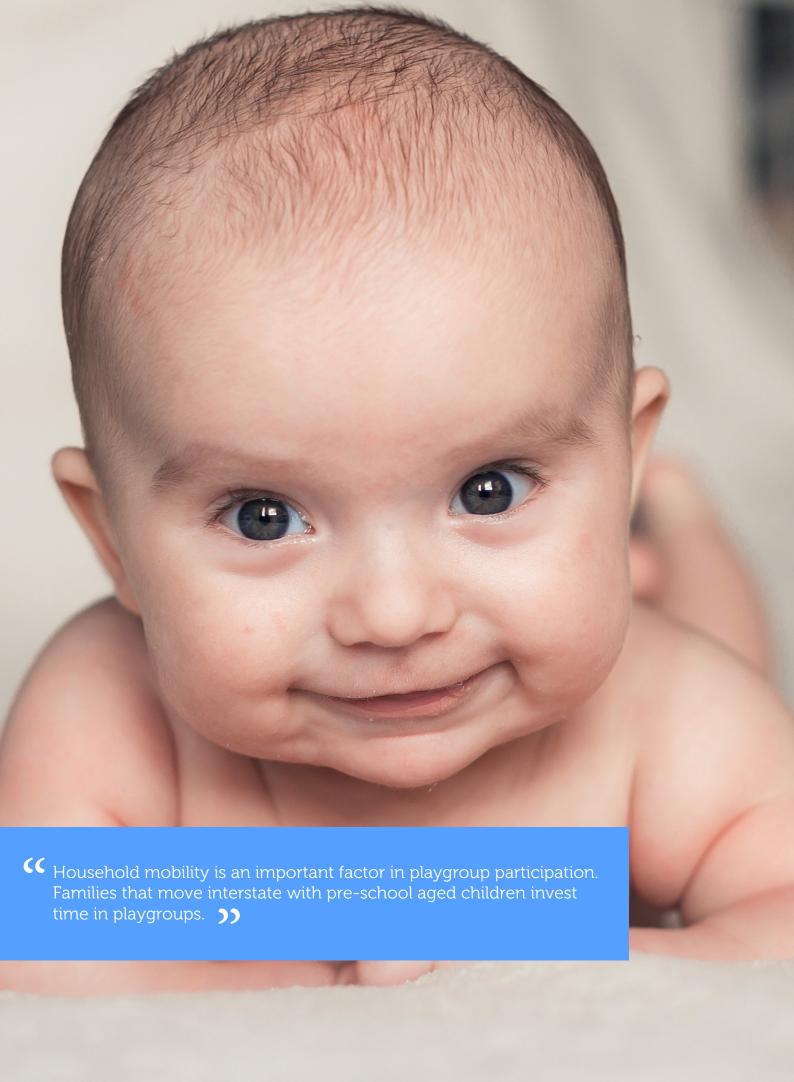|	
Housing tenure = 1, home owner	-0.0509**
Most recent move = 2, changed area/region/state/country	-0.130***
State of residence = 1, NSW	0.0734***
State of residence = 3, Qld	0.0694**
State of residence = 4, SA	0.0811**
State of residence = 6, Tas	0.211***
Home - % aged <5 in linked SLA	-0.0350**
Home - % aged <10 in linked SLA	0.0202**
Home - % family <$1K/week in linked SLA	0.00320*
Home - % working in linked SLA	0.00446*
Used for SC - M+C nurse = 1, Yes	0.0805***
W3 Safe to play outside = 3	-0.0584**
W3 Safe to play outside = 4	-0.110***
W3 People help neighbours = 2	0.0463**
W3 People help neighbours = 3	0.0917***
W3 People help neighbours = 4	0.123*
Observations	**2,415**

*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

In summary, playgroup participation initially follows patterns relating to other forms of social capital investment: age matters, mobility matters, mothers education matters and employment matters. Playgroups are particularly important for parents with toddlers moving to a new region who want to develop social networks and make new connections. However moving when children aged 4 to 5 negatively predicts playgroup participation.

What is special about playgroups as a form of social capital is the engagement across different cultures, language and religious affiliations. Some of this interaction may be due to diverse multicultural playgroups or others may be more homogeneous in nature, formed when children are a little older. Interestingly patterns of engagement of playgroups were different for different cultural and religious groups. Some were less likely to participate with young babies but more likely to with toddlers. Playgroups can facilitate both bonding and bridging social capital and can offer a very effective and diverse form of civic engagement. The importance of the MCH nurse and the progression from mothers group to playgroup is reflected in the data but it also suggests that certain groups are less likely to

> Playgroups can facilitate both bonding and bridging social capital and can offer a very effective and diverse form of civic engagement.

follow this path – in particular those with weak networks of friends. This low participation of mothers with limited social capital suggests more could be done to engage these mothers in their community when their children are babies, a time that can be very isolating particularly for new mothers. This leads us to the second quantitative model.

> Playgroups are particularly important for parents with toddlers moving to a new region who want to develop social networks and make new connections.

> "Household mobility is an important factor in playgroup participation. Families that move interstate with pre-school aged children invest time in playgroups."

5.2 The social and economic benefits of playgroup

The objective of the second analysis was to examine:

- To what extent does the civic engagement and social capital embodied in playgroup participation enhance generalized / social trust?
- Does the increase of generalized trust occur immediately, or does it take some time to develop?

5.2.1 The social and economic benefits of trust

Tables 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6 show the average marginal effects generated from three probit regression models run on data for levels of trust observed in waves 2, 3, and 5. The dependent variable in each case is a binary variable where 1 = high levels of trust and 0 = low levels of trust.

Playgroup participation is entered into each model as a determinant of social trust. The results are presented in the same manner as the previous model, where marginal effects for only those variables that are statistically significant are presented. Where relevant, an exception is made for playgroup participation as this is the variable of interest in this case. The full model includes an array of socio-demographic, cultural and social capital variables. Results are reported in the form of marginal effects which estimates the change in the outcome (social trust) for a given change in an explanatory variable (playgroup attendance being the specific variable of focus here). The marginal effects presented for playgroup participation identifies the probability of having high levels of trust for those that attend playgroups relative to those that did not.

Average marginal effects essentially compares two groups: one that attended playgroup, one that did not attend, but they have the same values on the other independent variables. The only difference between the groups will be the participation in playgroups.

The results suggest that playgroup attendance is a catalyst to generating greater social trust. In this case the incidence of trust is increased by 2.91% in wave 3 when playgroup attendance in wave 2 (ages 2/3) is considered. This positive effect of playgroup participation is further substantiated in wave 5 where participation when the child is a toddler predicts a 3.5% increase in social trust.

This result clarifies playgroup participation as a form of social capital that delivers measurable economic and social benefits. Not only are playgroups a form of social capital that create community cohesion while parents attend but they generate lasting measurable benefits that outlive direct participation, captured via a delayed positive increase in social trust.

> " Playgroup participation delivers measurable economic and social benefits. Playgroups are a form of social capital that create community cohesion while parents attend and generate benefits associated with social trust that outlive direct participation. "
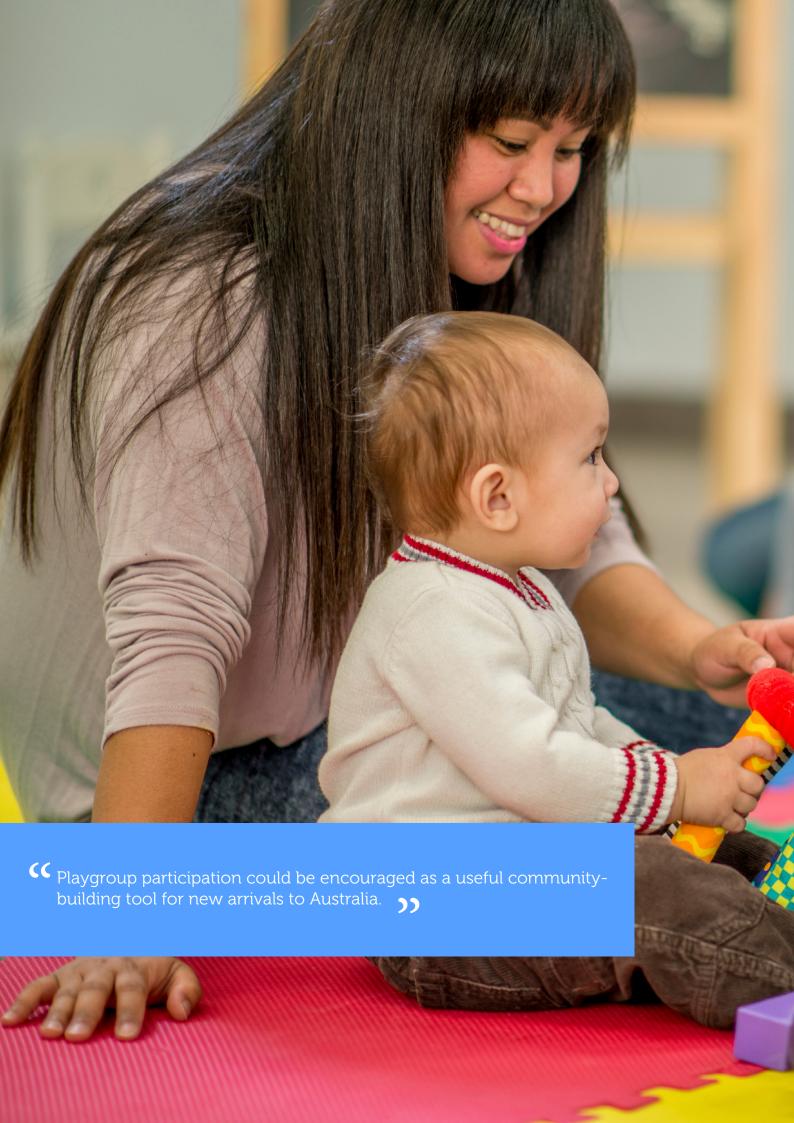
Table 5. 4 Marginal effects of statistically significant variables wave 2	W2
Dependent variable - High social trust 0/1	Marginal effects
W2 Used for SC - playgroup	*0.0239*
W1 Used for SC - playgroup	*0.00481*
Trust most people	0.245***
W2 No. same age siblings in the household	-0.0848*
Region of birth P1 Sthn/SE Europe	0.306***
Religion = 5, Buddhism	0.215**
W2 Parent 1 has a partner = 1, Yes	0.0873*
Employment status = 2, Unemployed	-0.118*
Distance involved in most recent move) = 1, moved locally	-0.0559**
Distance involved in most recent move) = 2, changed area/region/ state/country	-0.0890**
School completion = 3, Year 10 or equivalent	-0.0633**
W2 Home - % aged <10 in linked area	-0.0170*
W2 Used for SC - M+C nurse = 1, Yes	0.0528**
W2 Used for SC - early education = 1	0.0599*
W2 Used for SC - other psych/behav = 1	-0.218**
W2 Used for SC - Other specialist = 1	-0.0611**
W2 Neighbourhood to bring up children = 2, Good	-0.108***
W2 Neighbourhood to bring up children = 3, Fair	-0.221***
W2 Safe to play outside = disagree	-0.137***
W2 People help neighbours = agree	-0.194***
W2 People help neighbours = 3	-0.407***
W2 People help neighbours = disagree	-0.566***
W1 Neighbourhood to bring up children = 5, Very poor	0.255***
W1 Parenting info = 2, No one	-0.324***
W1 Parenting info = 3, Do not need	0.285**
W1 Practical help = 2, No one	0.0658*
Observations	2,120
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1	

Table 5.5 Marginal effects of statistically significant variables Dependent variable - High social trust 0/1	wave 3 Marginal effects W3
W3 Used for SC - playgroup	**-0.0139**
W2 Used for SC - playgroup	***0.0291***
W1 Used for SC - playgroup	**-0.00668**
Japan/Koreas country of birth	0.147*
Home owner	0.0674***
W3 Currently studying = 2, Yes full-time	0.124***
W3 Currently studying = 3, Yes part-time	-0.0475*
State of residence = 4, sa	-0.105**
State of residence = 5, wa	0.0532*
W3 Used for SC - M+C nurse = 1, Yes	0.0373*
W3 Used for SC - GPs = 1, Yes	0.0459**
W3 Used for SC - speech therapy = 1	-0.0746***
W3 Used for SC - guidance counsellor = 1	0.126***
W2 Used for SC - speech therapy = 1	0.0823***
W2 Used for SC - other psych/behav = 1	0.104*
W2 - Used for SC - dental services = 1	0.0399**
W2 Used for SC - Other specialist = 1	-0.0567**
W1 Used for SC - M+C center/phone = 1, Yes	-0.0284*
W1 - Used for SC - M+C nurse = 1, Yes	-0.0360**
W3- Safe to play outside = 2	-0.0605***
W3 - Safe to play outside = 3	-0.144***
W3- Safe to play outside = 4	-0.230***
W3 - People help neighbours = 2	-0.113***
W3- People help neighbours = 3	-0.439***
W3- People help neighbours = 4	-0.428***
W2- Neighbourhood to bring up children = 2, Good	-0.0408**
W2- Neighbourhood to bring up children = 3, Fair	-0.0643*
W2- Safe to play outside = 2	0.0777***
W2- Safe to play outside = 3	0.0980***
W2- Safe to play outside = 4	0.0932**
Observations	1,971
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1	

Table 5.6 Marginal effects of statistically significant variables Dependent variable - High social trust 0/1	Wave 5 Marginal effects
W3 Used for SC - playgroup	-0.00672
W2 Used for SC - playgroup	*0.0346**
W1 Used for SC - playgroup	0.00351
W3 Trust most people	0.124***
W2 Trust most people	0.125***
W1 Trust most people	0.0970***
W5 Age of oldest child in household	-0.0167**
W5 No. same age siblings in the household	-0.0857*
W5 Country of birth = 4, Viet Nam	0.304***
Language other than English spoken at home) = 2, Arabic	0.145*
Language other than English spoken at home) = 3, Vietnamese	-0.657***
Language other than English spoken at home) = 8, Cantonese	-0.293*
W5 Other religion	-0.144*
W5 Household income= 3, $104 000-$114 399 per year	0.0624*
W5 $200-$299 per week $10 400-$15 599 per year	0.212**
Housing tenure = 1, home owner	0.0729**
W5 State of residence = 5, wa	-0.0947**
W5 Home - % working in linked area	-0.00676**
W5 Used for SC - guidance counsellor = 1, Yes	-0.0905*
W5 Used for SC - other psych/behav = 1, Yes	0.0803**
W5 Used for SC - Disability services = 1, Yes	0.269***
W3Used for SC - paediatrician = 1, Yes	-0.0890**
W2 Used for SC - paediatrician = 1, Yes	-0.0574*
W5 Neighbourhood to bring up children = 2, Good	-0.214***
W5 Neighbourhood to bring up children = 3, Fair	-0.567***
W5 Neighbourhood to bring up children = 4, Poor	-0.693***
W3 Safe to play outside = 2	0.0589**
W2 Neighbourhood to bring up children = 3, Fair	0.142***
W2Neighbourhood to bring up children = 4, Poor	0.135*
Observations	1,873

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

"Playgroup participation could be encouraged as a useful community-building tool for new arrivals to Australia."

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has sought to fill a knowledge gap in our understanding of the value of community playgroups by analysing the social and economic value of participation in community playgroups, with a particular focus on parents and carers.

As we noted, community playgroups are a long-established part of the early childhood education and care settings in Australia, and many parents and carers engage with playgroups in addition to using other forms of childcare – notably long-day forms. This engagement in a 'mixed economy' of childcare suggests that the participatory model of playgroups has a value that is not realised in other forms of childcare. The research literature that has attempted to identify this value has largely focussed on the developmental outcomes of playgroup participation for children. This study is based on the premise that playgroups have additional social and economic values that require analysis and articulation to inform well-targeted and evidence-based policy, and its flow through to operational settings.

We hypothesised that this value is found in the following areas:

- the contribution of playgroups to the landscape of social care
- their adaptive response to changing social and economic trends
- their role in developing social capital and acting as a catalyst for engagement with other institutional and social settings, and
- their contribution to the informal or non-market economy.

We designed a mixed-methods approach for the research, gathering and analysing qualitative (interviews with playgroup coordinators and members) and quantitative (LSAC Release 5) data to test the hypothesis and value criteria. These data strongly informed some areas of inquiry, but also highlighted areas requiring more research.

Theoretically, we framed the social and economic value of playgroups as contributing to community capacity, as that concept is articulated and modelled by Chaskin (2001).

Our key findings against the criteria listed above are:

Playgroups contribute to the **landscape of social care** through their participatory and self-organised model, providing choice in the institutional landscape. In some instances, playgroups are the only form of provision in 'thin' childcare markets of rural and remote Australia.

Participation in playgroups is slightly higher in rural and regional urban areas than in cities, a trend that runs counter to the urban advantage that is apparent in many other areas of social provision. The level of participation in rural areas points to the particular value of the playgroup model in areas of relative isolation.

Yet, in more densely populated areas, playgroups provide one solution to what we refer to as the paradox of proximity, where making social contact with peers who may live close by is more difficult in large, more anonymous urban settings.

The interviews provide strong evidence of social isolation in cities.

Playgroups provide valued social support for parents and carers, particularly mothers, at a challenging time of life. Playgroups provide a setting for non-formal learning and modelling of parenting practices.

Playgroups' adaptability to changing social and economic trends is most evident in the plural forms that they take, reflecting changes to labour market and family care arrangements, as well as a desire to supplement out-of-home care with a model that is personalised and socially engaged, rather than service oriented.

An additional perspective on this 'change' thesis directs our attention to the change in personal and family circumstances that the arrival of children brings. In this light the playgroup model meets underlying needs for social contact and peer support during a challenging life stage. The qualitative evidence is particularly strong on this point.

Playgroups' role in developing social capital and building institutional and social networks is evidenced by their position within wider care and education settings. The interview data describe the connections that participation in playgroups fosters at a personal level and between institutions. Playgroups form two particularly important linkages, - with MCH services and with schools – but there is clear evidence of the preparedness of some playgroups to experiment with new alignments (for example, conducting them in aged care homes). Our concern here is that these ventures may be undertaken under conditions of adversity – for example, venue scarcity – rather than strategic choice.

The findings of this study emphasise the point developed by social capital theorists that *relationships matter*. Playgroups are interactions in social spaces, meaning that place matters too. The findings of this study are complemented by data from a national member survey on playgroup venues conducted by Playgroup Australia in

2014, analysed in McShane (2015). Together, these reports highlight the significance of venues in supporting the community capacity building role of playgroups.

Playgroups' contribution to the informal or non-market economy is most convincingly demonstrated through the LSAC data that participation in playgroups predicts increasing levels of trust. In this report, we have drawn on a substantial body of literature arguing that trust, reciprocity and information flows are important spillovers that encourage market and non-market transactions. We have analysed LSAC data to quantify playgroups' contribution to increasing trust during and after participation.

In more specific terms, we have produced evidence that participation in playgroups contributes to personal development, including the acquisition of new skills and knowledge.

While it has not been the main focus of this research, our contention that playgroups are a site of skill maintenance and development that bridge informal and formal economies also taps into wider concerns about the productivity of the Australian economy. Boosting female participation in the labour market is held to be an important avenue for increasing economic output (Productivity Commission 2014). The data presented above suggest that playgroups' contribution to the 'human capital' of playgroup members – more than 85% of who are female – may be an important but under-recognised factor in boosting Australia's economic productivity.

In focussing overly on quantifying the economic contribution of playgroups, though, we risk introducing a reductive view that equates playgroups as economic actors, losing sight of how they engage with wider social, economic and environmental trends. In Australia and elsewhere, the growth of participation in the non-market, 'sharing' or informal economy has been fuelled by just this concern. For some, advanced neo-liberalism, with its privileging of individual economic agents, has increased social and economic stresses for many people and eroded social bonds and authentic social interaction. For

some people, the informal economy presents alternatives for social exchange and contributes to the institutional pluralism that is characteristic of strong and resilient societies. The significance of strong local institutions that build community capacity has been demonstrated in recent years through responses to several Australian disasters, notably the Victorian bushfires of 2007. In a likely future of non-linear change and increasing uncertainty influenced by human-induced climate change, together with demographic, social and economic changes Australia will face in the twenty-first century, support of local institutions such as playgroups is a vital investment in social and economic stability and prosperity.

Recommendations for further inquiry and action

The study has highlighted several areas where further research is warranted, or where policy development and advocacy are needed.

Playgroups and cultural diversity
There is a gap in our understanding of how playgroups engage with Australia's cultural diversity. It is clear from the aggregate data that playgroup participants come from a wide range of CALD backgrounds, although as the LSAC data show, several ethnic communities have low levels of participation in playgroups. However, the degree to which this diversity is represented at the level of individual playgroups is unclear. The published literature and the data used in this report are equivocal on this point. It is evident that the playgroup model can be adapted to meet the needs or appeal to particular CALD communities, as the inception of a playgroup for Muslim women, cited above, indicates. However, we have a limited view on the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that operate at individual playgroup level. This point is not restricted to ethnic diversity, but also speaks to the socio-economic composition of playgroups. We can confidently observe different use patterns of playgroups across cultural groups. At certain stages - in particular when children are babies – there appear to be different pathways into and out of playgroups for different CALD backgrounds. This warrants further investigation. It may be influenced

by cultural norms, or it may be because mothers from some CALD groups do not attend mothers groups and thus are less likely to follow on to playgroups, but participate via a different channel (eg. linguistic, cultural or religious group) when children are a little older.

Playgroups and patterns of engagement
The LSAC data show a relatively high rate of 're-use', or continued engagement with playgroups yet the patterns of initial engagement with playgroups differs across religious and ethnic groups, and are particularly low for those that could most benefit from developing social networks, those with weak friend networks. What are the reasons for this? Does it indicate particular patterns of labour market participation? Does it suggest that playgroups are not meeting the needs of this cohort of parents and carers? These are questions that merit further investigation, to determine the significance of this issue, and any response that may be required.

Playgroups and housing dynamics
The LSAC data also show that the participation rate of homeowners in playgroups is less than that of non-homeowners in wave 3 when children are transitioning to school age and to more formal

> " It is clear from the aggregate data that playgroup participants come from a wide range of CALD backgrounds, although as the LSAC data show, several ethnic communities have low levels of participation in playgroups. However, the degree to which this diversity is represented at the level of individual playgroups is unclear. "

kinder programs, yet homeowners are 7% more likely to have higher levels of social trust. This is consistent with the published literature that suggests homeownership may be an incentive to develop social capital. However, the statistic poses a challenge for Playgroup Australia to engage with a population cohort that may be –

through high housing costs necessitating parents working full time – more tenuously attached to local networks and more reliant on formalised childcare.

Playgroup leadership
While playgroups are characteristically self-organised and localised, it should not be assumed that they are self-supporting. The interview data show a level of reluctance to undertake playgroup coordinator roles, and concerns to have a level of program support and resources to enable playgroups to function well. The interviews demonstrate that there is room for skill development in playgroups. Participants expressed a desire for greater support for coordinators in modelling sessions, handling group dynamics, budget management, and negotiating with landlords. Providing such support would also entail additional resources for the playgroup associations. Members who join the committee or are coordinators should be encouraged and facilitated to undertake further education with Playgroup Australia state branches. However, it is also clear that in some instances significant coordinator time is taken up in securing playgroup venues, adding to the burden of running the group. In this instance, a structural or system-level response is required, including encouraging local councils to provide more assistance in an area that is squarely within their jurisdiction.

Promotion of playgroups
This study has also raised questions about information flows regarding playgroups. Some of our interviewees discuss the difficulty of locating information on playgroups, suggesting that, at least in some areas, the awareness of and commitment to providing this information may need to be tested at local institutions such as MCH services, councils, schools and public libraries. Information flow in the digital sphere is also a vital area to investigate. The interviews revealed the use of social media as an important communication channel for playgroup participants. Playgroup Australia's presence in the digital sphere might be enhanced in innovative ways through partnership with not-for-profit digital enterprises such as Code for Australia.

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Appendix 1: Overview of the Literature

Authors	Year Published	Year data collected	Type of playgroup	Location	Method Summary	Sample
Finch	1983	Over a three year period	Community & Supported	England	Qualitative: Interviews and Observations	5 Playgroups
Gibson, Harman & Guilfoyle	2015		Community	Australia	Qualitative: Interviews and Observations	15 Playgroups Participants
Hancock, Cunningham, Lawrence, Zarb & Zubrick	2015	2004-2012	Community & Supported	Australia	Quantitative: LSAC Cluster Sample Design	Longitudinal Study of Australian Children
Harman, Guilfoyle & O'Conner	2014		Community	Australia	Qualitative: Interviews and Observations	11 One-on-one interviews and two focus groups
Jackson	2009		Supported	Australia	Qualitative: Interviews and Observations	3 Playgroups
Jackson	2011		Supported	Australia	Qualitative: Interviews and Observations	3 Playgroups
Lee & Thompson	2007		Supported	Australia	Qualitative: Interviews and Video Recording	1 Playgroup
Liebmann	1996		Supported	England	Qualitative: Overview	English Playgroups
Lloyd, Melhuish, Moss & Owen	1989	1970-1989	Supported	England	Qualitative: Literature Review	English Playgroups
Loizou	2013		Community	Australia	Qualitative: Observations, Journals, Group Interviews	2 Playgroup Participants
Maatita	2003	2002 & 2003	Community & Supported	United States	Qualitative: Interviews	25 Playgroups Participants and 4 Facilitators
McLaughlin & Guilfoyle	2013		Supported	Australia	Qualitative: Interviews	9 Playgroup Participants

McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, Skouteris, Harrison, Hemphill, Sullivan & Lambert	2015		Community & Supported	Australia	Qualitative: Literature Review	International Literature
Moss, Brophy, Statham & Coram	1992	1989-1990	Supported	England	Qualitative: Interviews	435 Playgroups Participants from 45 Playgroups
Mulcahy, Parry & Glover	2010		Community	Canada	Qualitative: Interviews	24 Playgroup Participants
Needham & Jackson	2012		Supported	Australia & England	Qualitative: Comparative Case Studies	Playgroups in England & Australia
Sincovich, Harman-Smith, Brinkman	2014		Community	Australia	Qualitative: Interviews & Focus groups	Playgroups in NSW, WA, SA, QLD and VIC
Strange, Fisher, Howat & Wood	2014	2011-2012	Community & Supported	Australia	Qualitative: Interviews	39 Playgroup Participants
Warr, Mann, Forbes & Tumer	2013	2009-2010	Supported	Australia	Qualitative: Interviews	14 Playgroup Participants and Facilitators

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. Tell me about playgroup, how you got involved and why you thought you'd join? Why this group in particular and not another?

2. What do you get out of coming to playgroup? Why do you come each [week/fortnight/month]?

3. What does it look and feel like when you leave, and think "that was a great playgroup session"? What are the best parts; what parts are not so great? Why?

4. How do you see your playgroup participation going over the next [year/few years, depending on age of children]?

Interview Questions – Coordinators

1. Tell me about your playgroup history, from when you first got involved, to how you became a coordinator?

2. What are the best parts about being a coordinator?

3. What are the worst parts about being a coordinator?

4. How have things changed within playgroups since you first got involved?

5. What would you like to change about how playgroups work?

Interview Questions – Playgroup Participants

1. Tell me about how you first got involved in playgroup, from when you first joined to what you're involved in now.

2. Why is it that you are involved in playgroup? What do you get out of attending?

3. What makes a great playgroup session?

4. What about playgroup is hard, annoying or inconvenient? What makes for a bad session, or is a reason why you might end up leaving?

5. Would you ever consider becoming a volunteer coordinator? Why/why not?

Appendix 3: Questionnaire

1. Gender

[ ] Male

[ ] Female

2. Age

[ ] under 18 years

[ ] 18-24

[ ] 25-29

[ ] 30-34

[ ] 35-39

[ ] 40-44

[ ] 45-49

[ ] 50+

[ ] prefer not to say

3. Type of carer

[ ] Mother

[ ] Father

[ ] Grandparent

[ ] Other _____

4. Number of children in the household: ___

5. Age of child(ren) currently attending this playgroup

Child 1: _____

Child 2: _____

Child 3: _____

Child 4: _____

6. If you are primary caregiver to the children you have attending this playgroup are you a sole parent?

[ ] YES

[ ] NO

7. If you are not the primary caregiver to the children you have attending this playgroup is the primary caregiver a sole parent?

[ ] YES

[ ] NO

8. Employment status of attendee

[ ] Full Time

[ ] Part Time

[ ] Casual

[ ] Self-employed

[ ] Unemployed

[ ] Maternity or paternity leave

[ ] Retired

[ ] Student

[ ] Other _____

[ ] prefer not to say

9. If you are not the child's primary carer, please record his/her employment status

[ ] Full Time

[ ] Part Time

[ ] Casual

[ ] Self-employed

[ ] Unemployed

[ ] Maternity or paternity leave

[ ] Retired

[ ] Student

[ ] Other _____

[ ] prefer not to say

10. Household Income

[ ] Under $30,000 p.a.

[ ] $30,000 to $50,000 p.a.

[ ] $50,000 to $75,000 p.a.

[ ] Over $75,000 p.a.

[ ] Prefer not to say

[ ] Dont know

11. Highest level of formal education completed by primary caregiver

[ ] Secondary schooling incomplete

[ ] Secondary schooling completed

[ ] Trade qualification

[ ] Vocational certificate

[ ] Tertiary education

[ ] Prefer not to say

12. Country of Birth of primary caregiver

[ ] Australia

[ ] United Kingdom

 [ ] USA or Canada

[ ] New Zealand

[ ] Europe

[ ] Asia

[ ] Africa

[ ] Middle East

[ ] Oceania

[ ] Central/South America

[ ] Prefer not to say

13. Is a language other than English the main language spoken by the primary caregiver/s?

[ ] YES

[ ] NO

14. Time attended/coordinated this playgroup:

YEARS [_____] MONTHS [_____]

15. Length of total playgroup involvement:

YEARS [_____] MONTHS [_____]

16. Benefits of playgroup: List of likely suspects to choose from (tick as many as apply) OR open-ended

_____

_____

_____

17. Main drawbacks of playgroup: List of likely suspects as above (tick as many as apply) OR open-ended

_____

_____

_____

18. What makes it hard to attend/participate in/conduct a playgroup

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

19. Would you consider becoming a volunteer coordinator?

[ ] YES

[ ] NO

20. Why/why not?

_____

_____

_____

_____