Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups Initiative (SPPI) Process Evaluation
Acknowledgments

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Executive summary

The Parenting Research Centre (PRC) was engaged by the Victorian Government Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in a project to review, extend and disseminate the scientific evidence on what factors are important in the engagement of families in supported playgroups. This report presents the results from the second of three project activities which were:

- a comprehensive review of the literature on engagement in parenting and family services that is relevant to supported playgroups
- a qualitative analysis of data from two sources; Supported Playgroup and Parent Initiative evaluation reports from the 2006 funding round, and stakeholder interviews
- a practice guide for practitioners and services on engagement of families who are the targeted groups for the Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups Initiative (SPPI).

Reports on the other activities are presented separately. What follows is an executive summary of the approach and findings of the qualitative analysis reported in four sections.

Section 1: Background and rationale

Since 2006, the Victorian Government, SPPI has funded the establishment of supported playgroups in 29 sites across Victoria, Australia (14 sites in 2006 and a further 15 sites in 2009). While the benefit of these supported playgroups to families has been documented, attendance is often irregular and participation rates vary across areas.

Research evidence suggests that three essential features of successful implementation of programs are attracting parents to the group, encouraging parents to attend the groups regularly and parents’ participation in the activities of the groups while they are there. Therefore, for the purposes of this project, engagement is said to have three elements: recruitment, retention and involvement.

A number of factors influence the degree to which parents are inclined to join, attend and involve themselves in family interventions including family and personal factors (e.g. single parenthood, mental health, employment status), service or program characteristics (e.g. what is offered, how, where and by whom) and cultural and contextual factors (e.g. availability, accessibility and cultural appropriateness of services). Because these factors are also likely to contribute to the effectiveness of supported playgroups offered in the SPPI, they were taken into account in the analysis of data from the reports and interviews.

Section 2: Method

Section 2 outlines the method used to collect and analyse data regarding the engagement of families in SPPI playgroups.

A qualitative research design was used to examine data from two sources:

- pre-existing data from six biannual SPPI Anecdotal Reports, collected between July 2006 and December 2009, containing information on strategies staff used to increase recruitment and retention of families into playgroups
- semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders to supplement data from the SPPI reports. This section describes the selection of interviewees and the range of stakeholders interviewed.

Section 2 also describes the approach to analysis of the two sets of data. Responses from both the anecdotal reports and the interviews were organised into themes and coded into three main categories, according to a conceptual model developed from the scientific literature. The categories were personal and family factors, program and service factors and cultural and contextual factors, all of which were reported to influence recruitment, retention and engagement of families to some degree.

Section 3: Findings of anecdotal reports

Section 3 presents findings from data provided in the SPPI reports, including a summary of strategies proposed to facilitate recruitment and retention of families, and strategies to promote positive child and parent outcomes. Appendices 1 and 2 contain the reporting form and tables with the coded data.
Recruitment and retention

There was considerable overlap between strategies reported for recruitment of families into playgroups and maintenance of attendance. Program and service factors such as playgroup staff, promotion of the playgroup and program content were reported to be the most important features of recruitment and retention of families into SPPI playgroups. Section 3 outlines the most common strategies that playgroup staff reported using to facilitate the recruitment and retention of families, which were:

- building rapport and trust by showing a genuine interest in the wellbeing of parents and their children and adopting a friendly, warm, supportive and non-judgemental manner.
- individually welcoming each family to the group
- maintaining regular contact and communication with families including informal telephone calls to remind them of upcoming sessions or making contact when they miss sessions.
- once trust is established, providing individual support, additional information or resources, and if required refer families to relevant services

Areas of concern, outlined included:

- the considerable out-of-session time commitment required for playgroup facilitators to support this level of engagement with families
- the difficulty of finding staff with appropriate training and skills for successful group facilitation and maintenance of attendance (e.g. knowledge of child health and development, attachment, parent–child interaction and working with vulnerable families), in addition to knowledge of specific issues (e.g. post-natal depression).

Respondents reported the advantage of supplementary staff or group visitors (e.g., volunteers or visiting professionals). Supplementary staff can encourage attendance by establishing connections with families, providing attention and support that increases participation and providing child and maternal health services during the session.

Successful promotion of the SPPI program is also considered essential for recruitment of families into playgroups. Suggested promotional strategies include:

- use of broad and inclusive terms to describe the playgroup
- provision of incentives (e.g. food, excursions)
- utilising a range of promotional strategies (e.g. flyers, word of mouth, promotional days, ‘bring a friend’ days).

Forming partnerships with local early childhood services, health providers, volunteer organisations and community agencies was also highlighted as being important for both referral of families and opportunities for supplementary funding to support recruitment and retention of families, such as for travel payments.

Aspects of program content that were deemed important in the recruitment and retention of families were:

- a welcoming, safe, non-judgemental and inclusive environment
- appropriate play activities
- child behaviour management strategies
- support for parent–child interaction and bonding
- encouraging the development of social relationships within the group, and supporting the establishment of social networks outside the group
- promotion of general health and wellbeing
- parent participation in the program (e.g. shared decision-making involvement in session planning, preparation and participation in activities)
- providing the opportunity for families to transition into community groups and become involved with community activities.

The family and personal factors reported to have an impact on recruitment and retention of families to playgroups included ease of getting to the playgroup (e.g. via public transport or walking), financial constraints or personal hardship. Strategies used to overcome these difficulties were:

- keeping the cost of attending the group to a minimum (e.g. free or subsidised groups)
• subsidise the cost of transport or pick up/drop off families who may be experiencing isolation
• and in the case of personal hardship, offering support and connection with services.

The influence of cultural and contextual factors on successful recruitment and retention of SPPI targeted families into playgroups is discussed. For recruitment of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families, recruitment is said to be more successful when staff are bilingual or come from the same cultural background. Forming partnerships with community agencies or cultural groups also provides an effective way to access families from specific groups who may be missed or reluctant to attend if approached through the usual avenues of recruitment.

Involvement: Strategies to improve parent and child outcomes

Strategies suggested to promote playgroup activity, thus improve the developmental outcomes for children and to increase parent confidence and connectedness are discussed. There was considerable overlap between the strategies suggested to improve outcomes for children and parents.

The content of the program was paramount to achieving successful outcomes, while the influence of staff factors also emerged as a prominent theme. Important aspects of program content designed to promote parent and child activity were:

• session planning and encouragement of parents to become involved in planning and taking ownership the sessions
• developmentally and culturally appropriate activities involving both the child and parent
• informal and fun activities that facilitate parent–child interaction and extend skills through play (e.g. gross and fine motor skills, coordination, problem solving, communication, social, emotional and cognitive functioning, language and literacy).
• session routines that include free play, morning tea, an interactive activity, shared reading and pack-up time.

The pivotal role of the playgroup facilitator in enhancing parent child outcomes is stressed. A number of strategies were deemed essential to promoting parent–child interaction and learning from play including:

• regular informal one-to-one and group conversations about child development, play and behaviour
• building parent confidence in their parenting skills through recognising and reinforcing incidences of positive parenting regardless of how small
• use of trained volunteers to assist with the running of the group and free up the facilitator to respond to the individual needs of the parents
• providing parents with support, advice, and where necessary, appropriate referral
• facilitator modelling of appropriate behaviours in an informal and non-threatening way so as not to reduce parental confidence.

According to respondents, the key to achieving these strategies is staff having appropriate professional supervision and peer support, opportunities to acquire knowledge, training and skills in group facilitation, and opportunities for professional development to maintain and build on their skills.

Partnerships with government, community, early childhood and health services were seen as beneficial to parent and child outcomes as they can provide referral into the program and links to external services as well as support by offering information and resources.

Section 4: Findings: stakeholder interviews

Section 4 presents findings from semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders on strategies to facilitate recruitment and retention of families, and strategies to foster active participation of families who are attending playgroups. This information was intended to supplement what was provided in the SPPI reports. Appendix 3 has the interview schedule and Appendix 4 has tables with the coded data.

Findings from the interviews by and large were consistent with the data that emerged from the SPPI anecdotal reports; very few new themes emerged. As in the anecdotal data, the major factors that were seen as important to recruitment and retention of families included:

• the need for effective program promotion, e.g. use of promotional strategies that are non-stigmatising and inclusive.
• the importance of developing referral partnerships with other local community organisations.
• staffing issues, including adequate resourcing of staff (both financial and through professional development) to support the range of needs of families attending playgroups.
• the provision of program content that suits the needs and interests of the target group in a welcoming and non-judgemental environment.
• encouraging parents to become actively involved, contribute and take more responsibility for playgroup activities.

Consistent with the anecdotal reports, a number of family and personal factors were seen to impact on willingness or ability of families in vulnerable circumstances to attend playgroups, including:
• access to transport
• personal circumstances (e.g. families moving, unavoidable life circumstances, low parental confidence).

Attracting families from diverse cultural backgrounds to playgroups was reported as a significant challenge. Establishing working partnerships with key bodies from cultural groups and developing culturally inclusive and sensitive promotional materials was seen as essential to the engagement of these families, consistent with points raised in the SPPI reports.

Section 5: Conclusion and recommendations
Both the anecdotal reports and stakeholder interviews revealed consistent themes about recruitment, retention and involvement of families in supported playgroups. In addition, a broad range of strategies was suggested to facilitate parental engagement. To enhance practice across the board it is recommended that these ideas are communicated widely in the field and that they are also incorporated in a systematic way into planning and evaluation of the service.

Almost every informant emphasised the critical importance of the staff who coordinate the services and facilitate groups. Recruitment of staff with good relationship and communication skills is vital, as is appropriate training and professional development to support facilitators in their multifaceted role.

Many of the ideas and concerns expressed require attention to the level of funding and support that the supported playgroups need to achieve their aims, particularly in relation to the facilitator time required to successfully recruit, retain and support families in the service.

One implication from both reports and interviews is that playgroups work best when they are integrated in and receive both informal (e.g. volunteers) and formal (e.g. funding, agency partnerships) community support.

It is clear that further research needs to be carried out with families from supported playgroups to explore factors influencing recruitment, retention and involvement (of both mothers and fathers) and, in particular, how the factors identified in these anecdotal and stakeholder reports influence one another.
1. Background and rationale

This section presents background information and a summary of the aims, method and analysis of data in the current study.

In 2006, the Victorian Government provided funding to establish supported playgroups and parent groups in 14 Best Start sites across Victoria, Australia. The aims of the government funded Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups Initiative (SPPI) are three fold: to provide young children with quality play opportunities that foster language, motor and sensory development, provide families with social support networks and community connectedness, and to promote child health and development (Playgroup Victoria 2010). Additional funding was made available by the Victorian Government to support a further 15 SPPI sites in 2009. The benefit of supported playgroups to families in the targeted community has been documented (ARTD Consultants 2008), but attendance is often irregular with considerable variability in participation rates across areas (Wain 2008). In 2003 the United Kingdom Home Office commissioned an independent review of research surrounding effectiveness of parenting support programs. In their review Moran et al. (2004) described three factors that influence successful implementation of parenting programs.

... ‘getting’ parents (persuading parents to attend the service in the first place) ...
keeping’ them (persuading them to attend sessions regularly and complete the course) ...
... ‘engaging’ parents: making it possible for them to engage actively with
what the service has to offer ... (Moran, Ghate and van der Merwe 2004, p. 95).

These three matters are also likely to contribute to the effectiveness of supported playgroups offered in the SPPI. For this reason, exploration into what attracts, maintains and engages families in these groups is needed; that is, an analysis of what is needed for recruitment, retention and involvement of families.

Conceptual model

Reviews of evidence for what works in parenting support have distinguished a number of factors that influence engagement of parents and affect implementation of programs (Forehand and Kotchick 2002; Moran, Ghate and van der Merwe 2004). These include practical issues, type and conduct of the service offered, relational factors, the influence of culture and context, and strategic and structural factors. Such factors can be described under three headings:

- Family/personal factors
- Programs/services factors
- Cultural/contextual factors.

The parent engagement model is shown in Figure 1.1.

Family/ personal factors

Families’ or parents’ personal circumstances that can affect uptake, engagement, and effectiveness of a service include single parenthood, marital discord, mental health, poverty, poor housing, unemployment, gender, culture and ethnicity. However, this category is about factors that affect people in an individual way, rather than solely due to their membership of a particular cultural group, or because they belong to a particular social stratum. Events such as a death or illness in the family, moving house, change in work times and arrangements, and change in access to child care are other examples. Moran and others (2004) refer matters in this category as ‘life circumstances and stress’. An individual family may have a combination of such factors. Reasons for dropping out of parenting or other family intervention programs are often idiosyncratic with no particular patterns emerging. The implication is that families’ individual circumstances need to be accommodated.

Program/services factors

This category refers to the characteristics of the program or service that is provided for the family. It includes what is offered, how and when, as well as who is involved in offering the program/service. Also included are the amount and appropriateness of program resources as well as the type and use of strategies for engagement of families.
Cultural and contextual factors

Engagement and implementation of programs for families can be affected by broader societal, policy and structural elements. For example, there is a need to acknowledge that different models of parenting arise within different cultures, and therefore this is need to tailor programs accordingly, while at the same time recognising the commonalities of parenting within different cultures (Kolar and Soriano 2000). An example of a major contextual factor is local services infrastructure – the availability, accessibility and suitability of services and the degree to which services coordinate their activities. When families experience a range of difficulties, strong interagency working practices enable appropriate and timely responses.

Purpose

The project w commissioned by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and conducted by researchers at the Parenting Research Centre, focuses on engagement and retention of families into supported playgroups and has three aims:

- To provide a comprehensive review of the current literature
- To undertake a qualitative exploration and analysis of data from SPPI evaluation reports from the first funding round and stakeholder interviews
- To develop a best practice guide for practitioners and services with particular attention to engagement and continued participation of families who are the targeted groups for the SPPI initiative.

This report presents results from the qualitative analysis – the second of the three aims. The literature review and practice guide are presented as separate reports.
2. Method

This study employed a qualitative research design to conduct thematic analyses of two data sets. The first is pre-existing data from SPPI reports containing information on strategies staff used to increase engagement and retention of families into playgroups, what were perceived to be barriers to success, and parent and child outcomes. Information was collected during a three year period (July 2006 to December 2009). The second data set was derived from semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders undertaken in August and September 2010 to supplement data from the SPPI reports.

Anecdotal reports

Twice a year playgroup facilitators are asked to report on the progress of groups within their area. This information is routinely collated by Playgroup Victoria (PGV) and is a contribution to the statewide evaluation of the SPPI initiative. In the current study, six bi-annual reports with data from SPPI sites across Victoria, Australia were analysed. These reports contained qualitative responses to open-ended questions about strategies used to increase or promote parental engagement (attraction), retention, child outcomes and developmental play experiences, parental confidence, capacity and community connectedness. A copy of the 2009 report form is shown in Appendix 1.

Over the three-year reporting period, a total of 21 sites supplied information on existing playgroups in their area. However, there was no information from eight of the possible 29 sites primarily because they had not yet established playgroups. Details of each report are shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Breakdown of dates and site locations for the reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report</th>
<th>Number of groups</th>
<th>Number of SPPI sites</th>
<th>Reporting method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July-Dec 2006</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-Jun 2007</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July-Dec 2007</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-Jun 2008</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July-Dec 2008</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-Jun 2009</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This field provides the total number of groups included in each report. The count includes the same group on alternate days.

This field represents the method used to report data. Site = aggregate data was reported for all groups within each site. Group = individual data was reported for each group within each site.

Stakeholder interviews

A list of potential interviewees was generated in consultation with DEECD. Stakeholders were contacted by the research team and invited to participate in either a face-to-face or telephone interview. Seven stakeholders from metropolitan (Casey, Whittlesea and Yarra Ranges) and rural (Gippsland, Grampians, Shepparton and Horsham) areas of Melbourne were interviewed.

A semi-structured discussion schedule was used to guide the interviews (Appendix 3). It focused on attraction and retention of families into supported playgroups. Probes were used to generate further discussion around the areas of interest (Minichiello et al. 1995). Detailed notes of the discussion were taken during each interview, and were later coded and categorised into themes according to the conceptual model.

Analysis

A qualitative exploratory research approach employing Ritchie and Spencer’s (1994) analysis framework was used to systematically organise and code data into themes and sub-themes. The framework has five key stages of analysis: familiarisation of the data, identification of a thematic framework, indexing themes with a meaningful reference, charting of themes, and mapping and interpretation of the data.

Data from the SPPI reports was stored and managed using NVivo qualitative research software (QSR International 2008). Two researchers independently reviewed the SPPI reports and listed recurrent themes and ideas generated from the data. A conceptual model relevant to factors influencing retention and engagement of families into playgroups was developed from literature in this area and major themes arising from qualitative analysis were identified.
from the current study. The model, described in Section 1, comprised three constructs (personal and family factors, program and service factors and cultural and contextual factors) and was used to organise, group and interpret data from the SPPI reports and interviews. Responses from the stakeholder interviews were coded according to themes consistent with the three constructs proposed in the conceptual model. Due to the small number of interviews (n = 7), NVivo was not used for coding. Instead, themes arising from the data were organised into a thematic chart (Appendix 4).
3. Findings of anecdotal reports

This section presents findings that emerged from data provided in the SPPI reports. Themes and sub-themes are identified from the answers to questions posed in the SPPI reports on recruitment and retention, and parent and child outcomes (involvement), and then interpreted according to their fit within constructs of the conceptual model (family and personal factors, program and service factors and cultural and contextual factors). Appendix 2 has a detailed list of themes and sub-themes arising from the analysis of the SPPI reports.

Recruitment and retention of families

Preliminary analysis of the data revealed considerable overlap between themes generated from the first two questions posed in the SPPI report form – ‘Strategies and actions to engage isolated and disadvantaged families to join playgroups’ and ‘Strategies and actions to maintain the attendance of participants in the groups’. For this reason, findings related to recruitment of families into playgroups (Question 1) and maintenance of attendance (Question 2) are presented together. Appendix tables A.2.1 and A.2.2 show a detailed summary of themes arising from Questions 1 and 2, respectively.

Four major themes emerged from the SPPI data – staffing, program content, promotion and access to the group. With respect to the conceptual model, three of the four themes represented Program/Service factors, two themes related to cultural/contextual factors, and one represented Personal/Family factors. Table 3.1 lists themes and sub-themes.

Table 3.1: Anecdotal reports – list of themes for recruitment and retention of families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program / Service</td>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>Characteristics (personal qualities and attributes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills (training and teaching strategies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supplementary staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content of program</td>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Purpose of the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Session structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parent involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships / promotion</td>
<td>Marketing and advertising</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Referral pathways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal / Family</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural / Contextual</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Venue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>Characteristics (personal qualities and attributes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This theme includes sub-themes that can be categorised under more than one construct.

Recruitment and retention: Program and service factors

Playgroup staffing, content and promotion were the most commonly reported themes that influenced recruitment and engagement of families into SPPI playgroups. According to the conceptual model, these themes were categorised as Program and Service factors.

Staffing

Regular contact and communication between staff and families was reported as the most important staffing factor that encouraged attendance. Respondents recommended that staff should welcome each family to the group, make informal telephone calls to parents reminding them of the next group session, contact families when they were absent and show a genuine interest in the wellbeing of parents and their children. This level of contact was considered central to establishing trusting relationships and rapport with families. Respondents also mentioned that staff should be friendly, warm, supportive and non-judgemental.

Making the time to get to know families, learning names and welcoming families each week ... Families come back when you take interest in their children and remember their names (making it personal) – they feel valued and important. (Question 1, January–June 2008 report)

Don’t give up even if a family doesn’t come the first few times you ask, keep in contact. I did this with one family and now they attend. I kept the phone conversations casual and tried to make it friendly rather than making them feel obliged to come along. (Question 1, January–June 2009 report)
Once trust was established, staff could provide individual support, additional information or resources, and if required refer families to relevant services. But this level of interaction was likely to be time consuming and require work outside normal group contact hours. The question here is whether staff have the time and resources available to provide this high level of contact and demand to all families who attend the playgroup. If not, what needs to be done to maintain attendance and keep families engaged in the group?

- Time frame for successfully engaging vulnerable families was short and could be quite difficult. (Barriers, January–June 2007 report)
- Developing relationships with isolated women from diverse cultural and linguistic background takes significant time yet these connections are integral to establishing groups or networks... (Question 1, January–June 2008 report)

Staff training was considered necessary to ensure successful group facilitation and encourage continued attendance. Respondents expressed the need for staff to have skills relevant to child health and development, attachment, parent–child interaction and working with vulnerable families. Suggested staff training included a Certificate III in Children’s Services, Family Centred Practice and Workplace training.

Appendix 2 provides a complete list of training courses that were mentioned by respondents who completed the anecdotal reports. Regular attendance to playgroup network meetings was also encouraged. Staff availability was another issue raised. A few respondents described difficulties in finding a suitably qualified staff to meet the specific needs of families in their group (e.g. mothers with post-natal depression).

- Provided Family Centred Practice training to several of Council’s supported playgroup facilitators... Facilitators have more knowledge... Facilitators of the group is encouraged and attends network meetings and is therefore in a better position to encourage full participation from other parents. (Question 2, January–June 2008 report)
- We are currently trying to resource an expert in the area of PND [post natal depression] to co-facilitate ... Challenge finding suitably qualified facilitator for the Playgroup. (Question 1, January–June 2009 report)

The advantage of having trained staff was that they could use learnt strategies such as role modelling to encourage child development and promote parent–child interaction. They were also better resourced to provide appropriate educational play experiences and communicate with families. For example, a conversational style to communication with practical demonstration was raised as an essential approach for staff to use to ensure families felt comfortable and benefited from attending the group.

A trained facilitator is employed to run the groups... Facilitator has used skills as an early childhood educator to develop age appropriate play for children... (Question 1, January–June 2007 report)

Communicate the style of presentation that the group is comfortable with. This includes: being careful not to use language that appears to ‘blame’ individuals, such as say things like ‘you should’; including plenty of practical demonstration (showing how) and group participation; and a conversational approach, where it is clear that questions are welcome. (Question 2, January–June 2008 report)

The advantage of having supplementary staff or group visitors was mentioned by several respondents. They reported that staff such as volunteers or trained professionals could provide additional support and advice to staff and families. Having supplementary staff encouraged attendance by establishing connections with families, increasing participation and providing child health services during the session.

- Trained volunteers physically help by assisting the family to and from the car ... Participants feel valued. (Question 2, January–June 2007 report)
- Maternal and Child Health nurse attends the group to provide services (immunising, weighing and measuring babies) and discussing health issues with mums. (Question 1, July–December 2007 report)
- A trained volunteer offers peer support and assists the 2 paid staff members ... The positive relationship [with parents] is the result of the warm and welcoming manner of the paid staff and volunteers. (Question 1, January–June 2008 report)

Partnerships and promotion

Successful promotion of the SPPI program and what it had to offer played an integral part in recruitment of families into the playgroup. In a number of reports, respondents highlighted the importance of, and complexity involved in, how the program was marketed to families. The use of broad and inclusive terms to describe the playgroup was crucial to attracting families who felt that they did not meet the criteria for specialised supported playgroups. But the need for exclusive playgroups that cater to specialised groups such as families with disability, complex needs or new arrivals to Australia was also raised. Overall, parent
perceptions and feelings of being included and accepted by members within the group were fundamental to maintaining attendance.

Encourage access through use of the term ‘Additional Support needs’. This enabled families who would be excluded under strict early intervention criteria to access the group ... Diversity of reasons for families accessing service e.g. Multiple births, affordability, behavioural/developmental issues, social isolation. (Question 1, January–June 2007 report)

Inclusive programming for special needs children and those from diverse ethnic background, Indigenous families and families with complex needs ... All participants feel welcome to attend regardless of age and ability. (Question 1, January–June 2007)

Community perception has been an issue – there was feedback at the regional office that this playgroup is for children with additional needs only – i.e. needing therapy... (Question 1, January–June 2009 report)

Offering morning tea was repeatedly raised as a useful incentive for attracting families into the playgroup. Promotion of the program through a variety of avenues was also considered necessary for successful recruitment of families. Suggested strategies included promotion via ‘word of mouth’, flyers, promotional days, newsletters and ‘bring a friend to group’ month. Various points of distribution were also highlighted as important considerations that were determined by characteristics of the target group. Further detail about the type of promotional strategies mentioned in the SPPI reports is provided in Appendix 2.

Have families attend a free fun day in the park to promote playgroups. (Question 1, January–June 2007 report)

Use of local schools to meet and engage families that may not attend other venues. (Question1, January–June 2007 report)

Colour photographs of playgroup members and playgroup events in local newspapers proved successful in stimulating interest in the group. (Question 1, January–June 2008 report)

Furthermore, forming partnerships with early childhood services, health providers, volunteer organisations and community agencies played a very important role in referral of families targeted for the program. Families could be referred into the group, but partnerships also provided a pathway for referral to services external to the group.

Strong links with MCH service – promoting playgroups to families – and running an open session the same time as a playgroup session ... Early Childhood Services (kinder, MCH and childcare) promote playgroups as well and we often run playgroups from these centres ... Gets families in the early childhood service ‘loop’ – once they are engaged with playgroup the facilitator can promote [maternal and child health] MCH, childcare services and kinder and link these families in. (Question 1, July–December 2007 report)

Partnerships and financial support were seen to be important for sustainability. Funding emerged as a continuous challenge for playgroups with respondents describing difficulties associated with identifying and sourcing funding from Government and other agencies. Funding was also related to the service’s ability to assist parents with their transport needs and provide adequate facilities that meet the needs of targeted families.

Barriers ... Identifying effective and appropriate partnerships to ensure long term funding and sustainability of initiatives. (Barriers, July–December 2007 report)

Providing transport can be a challenge because there are not many options available and funding is limited. (Question 1, July–December 2008 report)

Program content

A major theme that emerged from the data was related to the purpose of the playgroup, the structure and content of the playgroup and parent involvement. Respondents reported that the supported playgroup program should demonstrate appropriate play activities and behaviour management strategies, support parent–child interaction and bonding, encourage development of social relationships within the group, support establishment of social networks external to the group, include core elements of healthy relationships, promote general health and wellbeing and provide the opportunity for families to transition into community groups and get involved with community activities. To achieve these goals, the playgroup should be welcoming, safe, non-judgemental and inclusive.

The content of the supported parent group was strategically planned to build trust with the parents. This included group rules, discussion about the issues impacting on the parents, non-threatening activities to encourage group discussion and personal reflection, and content to address issues raised by parents. (Question 2, January–June 2008 report)
It is important to provide services that are relevant to the family’s needs and facilitated by staff that use strength based approach so that a welcoming environment is fostered. (Question 1, January–June 2009 report)

Parents being able to relate to others’ circumstances as well as the shared understanding ‘they are not alone’. (Question 2, January–June 2009 report)

For the program to meet the needs of every family, respondents said that each playgroup session needed to include a variety of activities that were appropriate to a child’s age, developmental stage and also culturally relevant to the target group. This included a diverse range of indoor and outdoor activities, excursions and guest speakers. A complete list of activities is provided in tables A.2.1 and A.2.2 of Appendix 2. In addition, the program should be flexible and allow time for parents to talk amongst themselves, as a group, or one-one-one with the facilitator.

Providing a variety of developmentally appropriate play activities ... Children enjoy themselves and learning new skills, which keeps them coming back to playgroup. (Question 2, July–December 2007 report)

Providing activities that are interest based such as messy, cooking, Dress ups, Chalk, sand, balls, construction including incursions and excursions to ensure all developmental needs are addressed as our program evolves, thereby encouraging return visits as everyone is enjoying their experience. (July–December 2008 report)

A set routine – we have free play for the first hour, then 15 snack and 15 min. music session. When families know what to expect, they feel more at ease. (Question 2, January–June 2009 report)

For some groups, being able to provide activities that met the developmental needs of all children was difficult. This was particularly relevant to groups that comprised a broad range of children aged birth to five years. Respondents reported that this influenced attendance of older children because they were not interested in activities aimed towards the younger age group and became disengaged.

The main challenge for this playgroup has been to provide opportunities for valuable play experiences and bonding with parents for children in a diverse ability and age range. Flexibility has been required in the day to day structure of the group to facilitate a comfortable environment each week with differing developmental and health needs of the children attending the service. (Question 1, January–June 2009 report)

Parent involvement in the program was highlighted as a key element that encouraged a sense of group ownership, which in turn increased attendance and ensured that the group met the needs of parents and their children. Respondents mentioned that the program should focus on shared decision-making by offering parents choices and opportunities to be involved in session planning, preparation and participation in activities. However, respondents stressed the importance of staff acting upon any requests and suggestions that parents had made.

Parents have opportunity to provide feedback via feedback form ... Parents feel their views are valued and accepted. (Question 2, July–December 2007 report)

The participants are asked on a regular basis about what they need and want to happen in the playgroup which helps this group to have ownership of what is happening in the group. When they have asked for something and it comes to playgroup, like the First Aid, Children Ages and Stages, Maternal and Child Health, and nutritionist, they engage really well. (Question 1, January–June 2008 report)

Some families arrive early as they are extremely keen to get to playgroup so I get them to help me with the setting up which makes them feel important. (Question 1, July–December 2008 report)

In answer to question 2, respondents commented on the importance of staff demonstrating how activities or skills learnt in the playgroup could be used at home. According to parent feedback, respondents reported that this increased parental confidence at home and encouraged parent–child interaction.

The parents joined with their children for the last hour and were encouraged to connect with their children in activities that they could also do at home. These included making playdough and playing with their children with the playdough; drawing, pasting and paper craft activities. (Question 2, January–June 2008 report)

... a summary sheet for parents is given out each week that summarises what the children learnt, how they can reinforce these skills in their children and providing step-by-step instructions on how to assist their children to carry out their social skills homework. (Question 2, January–June 2008 report)
Recruitment and retention: Family and personal factors

According to the SPPI reports, personal and family factors played a role in influencing recruitment and playgroup attendance for some families. Several strategies were suggested by respondents as a way to minimise the impact of these factors.

Access

Transport emerged as the most common factor that influenced playgroup attendance. Families could not attend the group because they had no access to a car or had no licence. Financial constraints and personal hardships such as homelessness also impacted upon attendance.

... many of the families who attend this group have one car and have one adult who works shift work thereby limiting access to a vehicle and as a result the group. (Question 1, January–June 2008 report)

Due to the transient nature of the group (homelessness or at risk of homelessness) maintaining participants on a consistent basis can be difficult. (Question 1, January–June 2009 report)

A number of strategies were reportedly used to help overcome access issues. These included keeping the cost of attending the group to a minimum, for example, providing it at no cost, subsidising the fee (part/full) or by asking parents to bring food or snacks to the group. Transport supplied to and from the group was also offered in an attempt to increase attendance by giving 'home-bound' families a way to get to the group, but coordination of this was sometimes problematic and unreliable.

Participants were provided with transport to and from the playgroup to facilitate access ... Significant strategy in facilitating engagement in the group particularly for more isolated families. (Question 1, July–December 2008 report)

Offering a free service is also important as many of our families experience financial hardship. (Question 2, January–June 2009 report)

Recruitment and retention: Cultural and contextual factors

Cultural and Contextual factors appeared to influence successful recruitment and retention of SPPI targeted families into playgroups. Language barriers and cultural relevance of the program emerged as common issues.

Staffing

With respect to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families, respondents reported that staff who were bilingual or came from the same cultural background had greater success in attracting these families. Knowledge of the community was also necessary to connect with families targeted for supported playgroups and encourage them to attend. Furthermore, forming partnerships with community agencies or cultural groups was an effective way to gain access to families from specific groups who may be missed or reluctant to attend if approached through the usual avenues of recruitment.

Employment of ‘Indigenous Playgroup Leader’ ... Creates trust and provides a familiar link, support and role model for families. (Question 2, January–June 2007 report)

Employment of adequately skilled facilitator who is ‘accepted’ by the multicultural community and has extensive experience in working with the CALD community. (Question 1, January–June 2008 report)

Bi-lingual worker (Arabic speaking) was able to develop connections with Arabic speaking women to promote the playgroup, particularly through individual settlement casework. (Question 1, July–December 2008 report)

Moreover, comments were made in relation to barriers to attracting families from CALD backgrounds. A few respondents provided examples of situations where CALD families had found it difficult to integrate into mainstream groups. For this reason, some cultures preferred groups with families of similar backgrounds and who could speak the same language. However, there was a report of successful inclusion of CALD community members in a culturally mixed group.

There is a challenge with communication due to the number of families from different backgrounds but it is a learning process working out how to communicate with one another. (January–June 2008 report)

The CALD community members are reluctant to join a mixed playgroup, but once included in the planning they appear to settle in well and are active participants. (Question 1, January–June 2008 report)
Access
The location of the venue appeared to impact upon the success of recruitment and continuing attendance of families into the playgroup. Respondents reported that the venue should be centrally located, within walking distance or close to public transport to maintain attendance. A conveniently located venue could increase attendance of families who had significant transport issues that were compounded by playgroups located in hard to reach areas. Some respondents suggested that the playgroup would benefit from using a venue that was shared by another local service (e.g. maternal and child health centre).

Provided a play experience in an easily accessible location for families and children by partnering with a local school or community house ... Remote families have a quality, accessible playgroup that ensured the children have an early childhood learning option. (Question 1, July–December 2006 report)

Location of the program – community centre, walking distance from Neighbourhood Renewal area ... Non-threatening venue and known to participants – been there before. (Question 1, January–June 2009 report)

Involvement: Parent and child outcomes
Similar to findings from Question 1 and 2, preliminary analysis of the SPPI reports revealed considerable overlap between themes generated from the Questions 3 and 4 of the SPPI report form – ‘Strategies and actions to improve outcomes for children, including developmental play experiences’ and ‘Strategies and actions to increase parent confidence, capacity and connectedness to the community’. For this reason, findings related to child and parent outcomes (Question 3 and 4, respectively) will be presented together. Appendix 2 tables A.2.3 and A.2.4 show a detailed summary of themes arising from questions 3 and 4.

A total of three major themes emerged from the SPPI data – staffing, program content and partnerships. With respect to the conceptual model, all of these themes represented Program/Service factors and one theme also represented Cultural and Contextual factors. A list of themes and sub-themes are shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Anecdotal reports – list of themes for parent and child outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
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<tr>
<td>Program / Service</td>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>Communication and relationship building</td>
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<td>Skills (training and teaching strategies)</td>
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<td>Supplementary staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Information provision and support</td>
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<td>Content of program</td>
<td>Activities</td>
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<td>Planning</td>
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<td>Purpose of the group</td>
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<td>Session structure</td>
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<td>Parent involvement</td>
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<td>Environment</td>
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<td>Partnerships</td>
<td>Referral pathways</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Community awareness and connection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural/contextual</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Parent involvement</td>
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Program and service factors
The strong influence of program and service factors upon child and parent outcomes was apparent in data from the SPPI reports. The content of the program was paramount to achieving successful outcomes, while the influence of staff factors also emerged as a prominent theme. Respondents outlined strategies they used to encourage child development and strategies they used to facilitate interaction between members of the playgroup. They also raised the importance of parents establishing social networks within the group and links with the community.

Program content
According to the SPPI reports, session planning by experienced staff was vital to achieving a well resourced program that focused on developmentally and culturally appropriate activities involving both the child and parent. However, staff also encouraged parent involvement in session planning because it promoted a sense of ownership, confidence and provided them with the relevant skills needed to run a community playgroup.

Qualified staff employed, which means facilitators have an understanding of the developmental stages of children and can plan age appropriate activities. (Question 3, July–December 2007 report)
In conjunction with the members of the group we have established guidelines to ensure that playgroup is as much about the mums having opportunity to engage and converse with other mums as it is to engage with their own children. (Question 3, January–June 2009 report)

I observe the children attending and make notes of what they like to do, interests or recent experiences (such as our farm visit) developmental weaknesses and strengths. I then plan play experiences around these. (Question 3, January–June 2009 report)

Offering families a variety of activities in an informal and fun way was considered an integral part to facilitating parent–child interaction and extending skills through play. Respondents reported that activities should focus on enhancing developmentally appropriate abilities of the child such as gross and fine motor skills, coordination, problem solving, communication, social, emotional and cognitive functioning, language and literacy. They said that the group should be inclusive, non-judgmental and safe, and provide a supportive environment. Some respondents also suggested that each session should have a predictable set routine that included free play, morning tea, an interactive activity, shared reading and pack up time.

Create an environment that facilitates opportunities for fun interactions between parents and their children to build positive relationships – setting up activities that parents can participate in and verbally encouraging parents to take part, setting up an environment that encourages participation i.e. no adult size chairs at the edges of the room. (Question 3, July–December 2006 report)

‘Play stations’ are set up around the room, e.g. Cars, trucks, train sets, puzzles, books, tents, play pens etc... Children had freedom to move about to any selected activity. (Question 3, January–June 2007 report)

Age appropriate activities and extensions of activities allows parents to see changes in their children and provides parents with an understanding of development. (Question 3, January–June 2008 report)

**Staffing**

The important role staff played in facilitating positive child outcomes and promoting educational play experiences was alluded to throughout the SPPI reports and cannot be underestimated. It was reported that staff used various teaching strategies to promote parent–child interaction and learning from play.

Some parents complained about children being bored and destructive at home has resulted in conversations around planning, play, development and the importance of parent interaction when at home. The result of this has been parents regularly asking questions around development and ideas for what they can be doing at home to prevent what they see as poor behaviour. Parents have stated that taking home play ideas and implementing them has been helpful and that they feel better about themselves as a result of spending more time with their children. (Question 3, January–June 2008 report)

Role modelling promotes better understanding and interaction between parents and their children, particularly when coping with their children's behavioural issues. (Question 3, January–June 2009 report)

Respondents emphasised the need for strong parent-facilitator relationships in order to maintain attendance and encourage open and honest communication with families. This required regular informal conversations on a one-to-one basis, where staff showed a genuine interest in parents and their children by acknowledging and listening to their concerns. However, due to the limited number of hours available per session, time constraints were likely to impact upon the ability of staff to speak to each member within the group.

The social side of playgroup for parents is as important as the parenting information. Families need to feel trust in the workers before opening up. The ability and enthusiasm of staff when responding to parents is crucial for the development of an ongoing positive relationship. (Question 4, January–June 2008 report)

A potential way to decrease the demand placed upon playgroup staff was to employ the help of trained volunteers and professionals. Volunteers could assist with the daily running of the group and give additional support to families on a one-to-one basis, while professional staff were able to provide families with information about relevant services in the community and act as mentors.

Inclusion of trained volunteers to assist with facilitation of playgroup ... Volunteers provide peer support by role modelling appropriate ways to play and communicate with children. (Question 3, January–June 2007 report)

Volunteers from the community have been involved in assisting the function of the playgroup. Their involvement has helped attend to practical tasks, generate friendly conversations and engaging children in play. (Question 4, January–June 2009 report)
Once staff had established an open line of communication with families, they could give parents support, advice and further information on issues raised in the group. Respondents also mentioned that provision of information to parents about child development increased their awareness of the importance of play. Such information could be distributed through newsletters, tip sheets, booklets or notice boards.

- Provide parents and caregivers with information about the importance of play and its role in learning and development – written and verbal, brochures, tip sheets, role modelling. (Question 3, July–December 2006 report)
- Facilitator provides sessions to discuss issues and introduce new and informative ideas for the mothers. (Question 4, January–June 2007 report)
- Provide educational sessions (information) relating to literacy and age-appropriate play activities ... Greater parental understanding of developmental play experiences (literacy and age-appropriate play activities). (Question 3, July–December 2007 report)
- Keep a supply of child development brochures, NAPCAN brochures and the opportunity to discuss issues with the facilitator. (Question 3, July–December 2008 report)

As mentioned previously, role modelling age and culturally appropriate play experiences in an informal and non-threatening way was deemed necessary to encourage parent–child interaction and teach parents the importance of play. However, successful implementation of these strategies relied upon adequate knowledge, skills and experience. Consistent with recommendations about staffing as reported in Section 2, respondents stressed the need for staff to have access to appropriate training opportunities and regularly attend playgroup network meetings. This provided staff with a greater understanding of child development, knowledge of teaching strategies, the opportunity to share ideas with one another, discuss challenges they had experienced and learn about strategies or activities that others were using with their group. Various programs were suggested such as child-centred training with a focus on families with specific needs or vulnerable groups. A complete list of these is shown in Tables A.2.1 to A.2.4 of Appendix 2.

- Qualified and experienced staff employed, which means facilitators have an understanding of the developmental stages of children and can plan age appropriate activities. (Question 3, July–December 2007 report)
- Run Playgroup Victoria Training (every 2nd year) and offer it to every playgroup across the municipality as well as potential playgroup leaders ... Helps playgroup facilitators learn new skills and knowledge in regards to setting-up, planning and running playgroup sessions to ensure everyone gets the most out of every playgroup session. (Question 3, July–December 2007 report)
- Attend council meetings, Playdaze, liaise with ... other playgroup personnel, surf the internet re – ideas for activities, child development, and observe my/other children. (Question 3, July–December 2008 report)

In addition to formal training, respondents reported that staff should have access to information such as PGV activity sheets, cultural sheets and a directory of local services. These resources increased the ability of staff to deliver appropriate play activities to the group and enhanced their knowledge about community services that could be offered to families.

- Encouraged all playgroups to become Playgroup Victoria members in order to gain access to fantastic resources available on line e.g. A-Z Play sheets and quarterly playgroup newsletter. Each of these resources contains valuable play ideas. (Question 3, July–December 2006 report)
- ...'Story Time Starters’ booklet ... Provides practical reference for any playgroup leader involved in preparing and presenting a story time activity during their playgroup session. (Question 3, January–June 2007 report)

The role that staff played in increasing parent confidence in their parenting ability and connection to the wider community was discussed extensively in the SPPI reports. For example, recognising when parents demonstrated positive parenting, no matter how small the example, was essential to increase confidence and reinforce appropriate instances of parent–child interaction. Furthermore, showing parents skills that could be used at home and offering encouragement and praise also helped build confidence in their ability to transfer play experiences from the playgroup to the home environment.

- Play experiences are based on cheap, repeatable activities at home. (Question 3, January–June 2006 report)
- Engaging parents in activities and providing information on similar options for interactions at home. (Question 3, January–June 2007)
- PRAISE for the things that parents do to engage positively [with] their child and when the child is engaging with the parent reflect that to the parent no matter how small. (Question 3, January–June 2009 report)
The importance of staff facilitating individual and group discussion about issues related to parenting, development, play and behaviour was raised. The main benefit of these discussions was that it provided the opportunity for parents to share their stories with others who had experienced similar situations. It made them feel as though they were not alone and what they were experiencing was normal. Staff also encouraged interaction between group members because it empowered families by increasing their confidence to build social networks and develop community connections.

Each week a facilitated ‘parenting’ discussion is provided. Topic is chosen by the group. E.g. Rules and boundaries, tantrums, communication and praise ... Greater knowledge of parenting and its varying issues. (Question 4, January–June 2007 report)

Peer discussion encouraged – this created the opportunity for parents to share their stories and discuss their children. This reinforced that most behaviour and experiences were a natural part of child development. (Question 3, July–December 2008 report)

The socialisation aspect of group work is equally as important as the parent education component and it is important to encourage both in order to decrease the incidence of social isolation while enhancing mental and emotional wellbeing within families. (Question 4, January–June 2009 report)

**Partnerships**

Partnerships with Government, community, early childhood and health services were beneficial in that they provided information and support to the playgroup by offering resources (e.g. funding or venue), referral into the program and links to external services – all aimed at building parenting capacity. Respondents suggested that staff and guest speakers could encourage participation in community events by giving information about local events, arranging visits to external venues or community playgroups and providing opportunities for parents to contribute to the community.

Inviting guest Speakers from organisations builds parental confidence in making referrals for themselves and their children. For example, after having the Financial Counsellor attend playgroup I asked the women who would like to make an appointment now and some did. Also after we had the Allied Health Team visit we then got referrals to their services. (Question 4, January–June 2009 report)

**Parent and child outcomes: Cultural and contextual factors**

Cultural factors appeared to influence various aspects of the program particularly acceptance and involvement of culturally diverse families in the group.

**Program content**

In the SPPI reports, respondents stated that culturally specific homogeneous groups increased the quality of participation of CALD families, hence affecting parent and child outcomes. Barriers to engagement of these families were also raised.

At times it has been a challenge to ensure families from a CALD background feel welcome. Staff have encouraged interaction between different cultural groups by facilitating discussion on the commonalities of parenting as well as the differences across cultures. They have role modelled acceptance and interest in all families. (Question 4, January–June 2008 report)

The culturally specific environment invited parents to feel more comfortable to share their experiences, difficulties and concerns and be supported with this. (Question 4, January–June 2009 report)
4. Findings of stakeholder interviews

This section has the findings from semi-structured interviews conducted with key stakeholders. Themes arising from the interview data are presented according to their fit within constructs of the conceptual model (family and personal factors, program and service factors and cultural and contextual factors). Appendix 4 has a detailed list of themes and sub-themes arising the analysis of the interviews.

Findings from the interviews supported data that emerged from the SPPI anecdotal reports. The major themes included staffing, program content, promotion, partnerships and access to the group. Table 4.1 lists themes and sub-themes in relation to constructs of the conceptual model.

Table 4.1: Interviews – list of themes for recruitment and retention of families

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Funding</td>
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<td>Content of program</td>
<td>Planning</td>
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<td>Parent involvement</td>
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<td>Environment</td>
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<td>Partnerships</td>
<td>Referral pathways</td>
<td>Community awareness and connection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>Marketing and advertising</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal / Family</td>
<td>Access *</td>
<td>Transport</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural / Contextual</td>
<td>Access *</td>
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<td>Staffing</td>
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<td>Partnerships</td>
<td>Program development</td>
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<td>Referral</td>
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*This theme includes sub-themes that can be categorised under more than one construct.

Program and service factors

In the interviews, the major themes discussed by respondents were related to program factors. These included program promotion, partnerships, staffing and content. These findings largely resemble themes identified from the anecdotal reports, but with a greater emphasis on branding issues and the need for tailored content specific to the target group.

Promotion and partnerships

The importance of tailored strategies and resources used to promote the playgroup to families was a common theme raised throughout the interviews. It was apparent that branding and marketing strategies used to promote the group to families was paramount to successful attraction and engagement. Respondents discussed difficulties associated with branding, especially if it is too specific.

The problem [with recruitment] is the stigma of the SPG and criteria for inclusion. There is a problem with attracting some families who are in the grey area because they don’t feel as though they are high needs families or welfare based. (Coordinator, outer metropolitan)

What information is on the flyer is important – the message needs to be customised to the target audience ... For example, [name of local government area] operates an Afghan supported playgroup for children with a disability and initially no-one came to the group. When reviewing the information on the flyer it was pointed out by a representative from the Afghan community that the culture does not acknowledge disability so having this information as a key marketing message on the flyer was putting families of attending. The wording on the flyer was then changed to be just a playgroup for people from Afghanistan and attendance was much better. (Coordinator, outer Metropolitan)

The role that partnerships played in referral and program development was raised by a number of respondents. They suggested that for recruitment of families to be effective referral partners should be well informed about what the program is and what it offers.

Put effort into providing information to those who refer families to playgroups – make sure they know about availability and what the playgroups are doing ... If resources allow, spend time talking to agencies in the start up phase – going out to places – works well in some communities. (Child and Youth Services Manager, rural)
To attract families to playgroup it is important to have good referral networks in the community and one of the challenges is maintaining these networks and making sure local services have up to date information about the types of playgroups being offered and when and where they will be running. To assist with this, Good Beginnings produces and sends out a regular e-newsletter to local services (Anglicare, [Department of Human Services] DHS, Quantum, local primary schools, kindergartens, MCH) to keep them up to date with playgroup information to maximise referrals. (Facilitator, rural)

Trust between the referral person and family was considered as an essential component for effective recruitment and continued attendance. Respondents also believed that it was important to explain the purpose and direct relevant of the playgroup to families and their children.

Trust between the family and the referring person (MCH nurses, Child First, family support workers) into supported playgroups is critical to get the family to the supported playgroup. Encouraging the families to go along to playgroup and then following up to see how the family felt about the playgroup. The combination of trust in the person referring families to the playgroup and trust in the facilitator is what helps to ensure families engage with supported playgroups. (Coordinator, rural)

Recruitment at a personal level is important. A personal approach means you can tailor to individual needs – i.e. emphasise different things – for some you may be emphasising the social contact, and for others, the emphasis may be on what the child will get out of it. (Child and Youth Service Manager, rural)

Furthermore, one respondent discussed the need to evaluate the success of the playgroup against realistic outcomes for the target population.

The objectives/goals for the families need to be baby steps. You can’t expect them to make significant changes in a short time. Little improvements are realistic and as important as other larger steps for these vulnerable families. (Coordinator, outer metropolitan)

Staffing

Similar to findings reported in the anecdotal reports, the significant role that staff play in program delivery was evident throughout the interviews. Respondents discussed the importance of informal one-on-one contact between staff and parents in order to establish trust and build strong relationships with families. They emphasised the need for staff to communicate with parents in a non-threatening way, but also acknowledged that this was difficult at times.

Staff need to follow up when parents participate e.g. thanking them for coming, highlighting the positive aspects or advantages to coming. It is hard for the facilitator to talk to parents in a way that is not belittling. The facilitator doesn’t want to be seen as superior to families who attend the group. (Coordinator, outer metropolitan)

It is necessary for the facilitator to have a passion for the role so they will be prepared to look beyond the ‘difficult’ outward personas of families and not to judge them – it requires the facilitator to have a real commitment to delivering early play and learning to children. (Coordinator, rural)

With respect to program delivery, respondents mentioned the need for staff to have relevant skills and knowledge related to child development. These skills included role modelling and incidental and teaching. One respondent also attributed the skill of staff to their ability to blend in with the group and provide assistance when needed.

Facilitator characteristics – need a knowledge of child development and also how to engage with parents. Also have a sense of boundaries. (Child and Youth Service Manager, rural)

The true skill of the facilitator is seen when someone comes into the group and can’t tell who the facilitator is and who the parent is. They blend into the group. A skilled facilitator is a blender in the group. They observe when the family needs them and when they don’t. (Coordinator, outer metropolitan)

Respondents discussed the considerable amount of variability that existed between playgroups and the different needs of families who attended. One respondent mentioned the need for group-specific training to ensure that the program addressed the needs of the target group and their circumstances.

... [staff] training needs to be relevant to the group’s needs and their environment. Also need to understand the challenges and sensitivities of the group that need to be addressed. In order to achieve this, training needs to be developed around the middle-class model of training and be careful to make sure is relevant to the group. Need to recognise that each group is different and individual or grass roots training needs to meet their [group] needs. Need to develop manuals or training...
methods to address these individual characteristics. (Coordinator, outer metropolitan)

Funding was an issue that affect the way staff operated in their playgroup roles. Respondents stated that funding was needed to support staff working additional hours outside of the session.

The expectation that the agency has of the facilitator is that they allow for extra time outside playgroup hours to establish a connection and make contact with parents. But for this to occur facilitators should be supported by additional funding to cover the cost of additional hours that facilitators put in outside their normal playgroup hours. (Coordinator outer metropolitan)

The impact of limited funding upon resources was also mentioned. Despite this, one respondent suggested possible strategies to overcome these shortfalls that require staff who are creative and motivated.

... resources are limited. In this situation you [staff] need to be creative with resourcing educational material and equipment – the facilitator should make things, go to op shops – these are a valuable resource, the facilitator also needs to be flexible with resources. (Coordinator, outer metropolitan)

Program content

The applicability of the playgroup content to targeted families was repeatedly raised throughout the interviews. Respondents stressed that the group had to suit the needs and interests of the target group, otherwise parents would not attend. They also reported that a welcoming and non-judgemental environment was essential to maintain continued attendance.

Not one size fits all – this needs to be understood by all in order to offer a relevant and effective program to targeted families. There are also factors that are relevant across groups (e.g. facilitator qualities). Things may physically look the same, but these could sometimes be different. There are many practical strategies. (Coordinator, outer metropolitan)

Families will not keep attending the playgroup if there’s nothing in it for them – the information provided needs to tie in with where the parent’s are at and what they’re interested in ... The environment has to be welcoming – parents need to feel they can openly contribute to group discussions without being judged. (Coordinator, outer metropolitan)

In the interviews, respondents emphasised the value of parent involvement in the playgroup. They described it as a key element for maintaining attendance and improving parent self confidence. Three aspects of parent involvement emerged from the data. These included planning, set up and participation in playgroup activities.

Parents want to feel as though they are contributing, they need to have a good idea of what the group involves and the purpose, and they need to know their role in the group. You would do this by first establishing trust with the family and allowing them to have some positive experiences. (Coordinator, outer metropolitan)

Getting parents engaged in the playgroups is also important – encouraging them to arrange morning tea and to pack up at the end of the session can help parents feel they ‘own’ the group and want it to be successful ... [name of LGA] has a Playgroup Development Officer and they host a Play Day each term where all of the facilitators and all of the parents from the [name of LGA] supported playgroups are invited to attend ... this helps to foster personal agency. (Coordinator, outer metropolitan)

Parental self confidence is really important – encouraging parents to take on more responsibility in the playgroups (e.g: organising Easter egg hunt) can improve their confidence and also help them to feel invested in playgroup – this helps to keep families attending. (Coordinator, rural)

Family and personal factors

Respondents reported that some families were unable to attend the playgroup because of family or personal factors such as limited access to transport. The impact of transport on attendance was also identified in the anecdotal report data.

Access

In the interviews, respondents discussed the influence of transport issues for individuals (personal) and groups (contextual). However, it was apparent that the provision of transport was problematic and often could not be sustained.

... transport is important, but providing transport has varied success. Pickups and drop offs have been successful, but this doesn’t suit everyone’s needs and instead parents choose to transport themselves or taxi vouchers are offered. Unfortunately, this still doesn’t engage some families because it may not be the right time for them
or when they get to the group they don’t feel accepted. (Coordinator, outer metropolitan)

... have offered transport to families but this has not really worked because of the logistics involved in having to fit out a bus with child car seats and then travel large distances over Casey to pick up families – it can take too long that it becomes unsustainable. (Coordinator, outer metropolitan)

Personal circumstances and the transient nature of families targeted by the SPPI were also reported as barriers to recruitment and retention. These factors included unavoidable life circumstances of vulnerable families and low confidence.

Vulnerable families generally have no control in their lives and this makes attendance difficult. (Coordinator, outer metropolitan)

... easier to retain middle class families in a playgroup environment than more vulnerable families because families who are candidates for SPPI may lack confidence in parenting, have low self esteem, and find it difficult to socialise in a group setting. (Facilitator, rural)

Because of the lack of public housing in this community, families often have to move out of the areas to get accommodation, and thus leave the playgroup. (Coordinator, outer metropolitan)

The families are transient and are often moved on to other rural locations by authorities. (Coordinator and Facilitator, rural)

Parental concern about DHS monitoring in relation to child protection issues was raised as a common challenge for attracting families into the program. However, this was only raised by one respondent and it was not mentioned in the anecdotal report data. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning.

The challenge for facilitators is to educate parents about the role of playgroup and inform them whilst it is funded by the State Government it is not a mechanism for reporting on families engaged in child protection services ... The balance here is that the facilitator needs to inform families that whilst playgroup is not in itself a mechanism to monitor and report back to DHS, facilitators do have an obligation to report if something arises around the health and welfare of children attending playgroup. (Facilitator, rural)

Cultural and contextual factors

Cultural factors appeared to influence attraction of families into playgroup and impacted upon attendance.

Staffing

Establishing working partnerships with key bodies from cultural groups was raised as an important consideration for attracting Aboriginal and CALD families. Respondents reported that knowledge gained from these partnerships would provide essential information needed to tailor the program to suit the needs of the target group. Partnerships were also an important way to source staff with relevant personal attributes such as cultural background.

[name of LGA] previously had an Aboriginal supported playgroup operating but attendance was poor because it wasn’t run in conjunction with the local Aboriginal Co-operative. For these very specific playgroups to work, the key agencies, peak bodies, and even the ‘elders’ need to be involved from the start – these people know how to reach the target families to get them to attend the playgroup. (Coordinator, outer metropolitan)

... having the facilitator come from the same cultural background as the target families is important ... Facilitators need to be respected by the target group and/or have some sort of link with the target group. (Coordinator, outer metropolitan)

For multicultural playgroups it is important to engage cultural ‘leaders’ in the community to spread the word and encourage families to attend. (Coordinator, rural)

Promotion

As previously discussed, promotional strategies used to target CALD families need to be tailored to suit their culture and beliefs about playgroup and parent–child interaction.

Multicultural groups – the concept of playgroup is ‘foreign’ to many cultures and so it needs to be introduced and carefully explained so it is not seen as just a social opportunity for the parents – this can influence the structure of the playgroups as there may be a need to include more structured play activities to encourage more parent–child interactions to get the parents to understand the group is about the children. (Coordinator, rural)
5. Conclusion and recommendations

Both the anecdotal reports and stakeholder interviews show that the field has a sound grasp on the issues related to recruitment, retention and involvement of families in supported playgroups. Saturation of themes was achieved early in the analyses of the two sources of information, suggesting that there is little critical information that has not been captured by these sources. The model of parent engagement offered in this report was substantiated by the themes that derived from the reports and interviews.

Furthermore, the informants provided a broad range of ideas and strategies for facilitating parental engagement. To enhance practice across the board it would be important to communicate these ideas widely in the field and incorporate them in a systematic way into planning and evaluation of the service.

Regardless of the local areas that informants came from there was general consensus about some significant issues. A theme mentioned in almost every report was about the critical importance of the staff who coordinate the services and facilitate groups. Because the success of supported playgroups relies heavily on personal relationships, the characteristics of the facilitator, in particular, were emphasised. This leads to the issue of staffing and the consensus that recruitment for good relationship and communication skills is vital and that appropriate training is needed to prepare facilitators for their multi-faceted role.

Involving parents in decision-making, planning and running playgroups was highlighted. This can often require considerable expertise on the part of staff to achieve the right balance between the need for parental guidance and the need for parental autonomy. The reports emphasised the importance of building parental confidence to attend the playgroup and become involved in decision-making and the activities of the group. The implication is that staff training should involve not only a grounding in child development and learning but input on working with families and parents specifically.

Many of the ideas and concerns expressed require attention to the level of funding and support that the supported playgroups need to achieve their aims. In particular, the opinion was that current funding did not cover the amount of facilitator and coordinator time needed to implement strategies to successfully recruit and retain families in the service.

An overwhelming impression that came from the reports and interviews was that supported playgroups work best when they are embedded in the community. That is, when the community supplies, resources and provides additional services to participants, and contributes to the running of playgroups. The rich source of community support includes services and agency partnerships as well as informal supports such as volunteers.

It is clear that further research needs to be carried out with families from supported playgroups to explore factors influencing recruitment, retention and involvement and, in particular, how the factors identified in these anecdotal and stakeholder reports influence one another.

There is also a need for services to evaluate how well their strategies for improvement are performing and for the resources and supports for them to do this as part of their regular operations.

Finally, in the SPPI reports, brief mention was made about father groups and strategies to engage them, with the acknowledgement that mothers were the main participants in supported playgroups. It would be worthwhile to investigate the views of fathers about playgroup involvement with the purpose of developing a strategic approach to father engagement tailored to local needs.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups Initiative 2009 reporting form

(Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2010)

Supported Playgroup and Parent Group Initiative

2009 REPORTING FORM

Sections of this report (Q1 to Q6) were removed

Reporting period
☐ 1 January to 30 June 2009    ☐ 1 July to 31 December 2009
(due to regional office 15/7/09)    (due to regional office 15/1/10)

7. ANECDOTAL INFORMATION
(Please indicate the playgroup’s primary target group)

☐ Indigenous children and their families or carers
☐ Culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families, with a particular focus on recently arrived families
☐ Disadvantaged families with complex needs
☐ Children and families affected by disability

a) How do you engage families to join the playgroup?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Successful strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SPPI: Progress evaluation report 27
### Outcomes including key learnings, challenges, barriers and opportunities

- 

### b) How do you facilitate and maintain the attendance of participants in the groups?

#### Successful strategies

- 

### Outcomes including key learnings, challenges, barriers and opportunities

- 

### c) What developmental play experiences do you offer to improve outcomes for children?

#### Successful strategies

- 

### Outcomes including key learnings, challenges, barriers and opportunities

- 

---

SPPI: Progress evaluation report
d) How do you build parental confidence and capacity?

Successful strategies

Outcomes including key learnings, challenges, barriers and opportunities

e) How do you promote social networks and community connectedness?

Successful strategies

Outcomes including key learnings, challenges, barriers and opportunities

8. FUTURE PLANS
Outline your future plans for this playgroup – please limit response to 200 words

9. REFERRALS AND/OR PARTNERSHIPS ESTABLISHED WITH OTHER SERVICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Families referred from other services</th>
<th>Partnerships established with other organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>•</td>
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<tr>
<td>Families referred to other services</td>
<td>Partnerships established with other organisations</td>
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<td>•</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

10. **CASE STUDY**
Please share a story to highlight the impact of your work. Please do not use any identifying information; the stories will only be used after seeking permission.

**Note:** There was slight variation in wording used for each of the four questions across the three-year reporting period. For example, in the 2007 report question four was ‘Strategies to increase parent confidence, capacity and connectedness to the community’. In the 2009 report, question four was separated into two questions. The first was ‘Strategies to build parental confidence and capacity’ and ‘Strategies to promote social networks and community connectedness.’
## Appendix 2: Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups Initiative anecdotal reports coding summaries

### Table A.2.1: Question 1 – Strategies and actions to engage isolated and disadvantaged families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme (index category)</th>
<th>Components within the sub-theme (description)</th>
<th>Model – key theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Access       | Cost                       | - fee: no cost to attend the group increased attendance, keeping the cost to a minimum, the cost of attendance was to bring something small such as fruit, activities were at a low cost, full/part of the cost was subsidised, discounted concession fee, activities subsidised, free for very disadvantaged families (e.g. Isolated or complex needs)  
  - financial difficulties decrease attendance (e.g. money for transport) | personal factors               |
|              |                            | - provision of transport: offering transport to get to the group. (e.g. community bus service, fuel vouchers)   | - personal factors            |
|              |                            | - barriers to parent transport: lack of car, financial, far from venue                                      | - contextual factors          |
|              |                            | - barriers to program transport provision: difficulties providing transport was bus seats                    | (group impact)                |
|              | Venue                      | - ease of access/transport: within close proximity to the family home, within walking distance and close to public transport  
  - location: close to a MCH centre | - program factors               |
| Staffing     | Characteristics            | - attributes: bilingual, Indigenous, Asian, Koori, Arabic                                                    | - program factors             |
|              |                            | - personal qualities: Welcoming, friendly, supportive, non-judgemental                                      | - cultural factors            |
|              | Communication              | - strategies: reminders, follow-up of non-attendance, general chat about wellbeing, establish rapport, relationship, trust  
  - personal contact: Phone calls, SMS, home visits | program factors                |
|              | Supplementary staff        | - volunteers: help support the facilitator  
  - professionals: offer support and advice to parents and facilitators, guest speakers provide activities          | program factors                |
|              | Skills                     | - training programs: Workplace Training and Assessment course developed for Indigenous workers, tertiary qualifications, Family Partnership training, Family Centred Practice training, Workplace Training and Assessment course, leadership training, Formal Childcare training  
  - strategies: role modelling, focus on developmental play experiences and use a strength based approach to program development  
  - knowledge: community and culture of the population | program factors                |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme (index category)</th>
<th>Components within the sub-theme (description)</th>
<th>Model – key theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Program**           | Content                   | - activity criteria: appropriate for the child’s age, developmental stage, ethnicity and culture and meet the needs of the target group (e.g. Special needs, complex needs), diverse, focus on developmental play and parent–child interaction  
- activity type: music, dancing, singing, rhymes, finger and hand painting, storytelling, playing with play doh, free drawing, colouring, excursions (e.g. park days, family days with grandparents, teddy bear picnic), celebrate birthdays, prayer, cooking and food preparation, crafts (e.g. making floor cushions, scrap booking  
- role: provide the opportunity to transition into community groups, encourage development of social networks external to the group, encourage social relationships within the group, include core elements of healthy relationships, healthy foods, play activities, behaviour management, social interaction, promote health and wellbeing, parent–child bonding, provide the opportunity to get involved in community activities  
- structure: sessions should be both flexible and structured, planned to encourage health and wellbeing, parent–child relationships | program factors |
| **Environment**       |                           | - what it is: welcoming, inclusive, safe, accepting of all cultures, safe, secure  
- what it should do: encourage open communication | program factors |
| **Group composition** |                           | - specialised: exclusive, group-specific, homogeneous groups  
- mainstream: inclusive, mainstream, heterogeneous groups  
- the key was for parents to feel included and like they belong to the group  
- challenge: finding a balance between the group being too specific or too broad | - program factors  
- cultural factors |
| **Parent involvement**|                           | - planning: parental involvement in planning of the session, involved in decision-making, feedback  
- participation: interaction within the group (e.g. Setting up) was important to increase a sense of ownership and increased attendance | program factors |
| **Promotion**         | Marketing and advertising | - strategies: promotion about the low cost of attendance was an incentive to attend the group, marketing the importance of play, benefits of attending the group for children and parents (e.g. the group is free and fun) and suggest parents come and visit the group with not pressure to sign up  
- materials: Pamphlets, flyers, brochures, articles in local primary school newspapers, signage, booklets, posters  
- distribution points: promotion of the group through various avenues (e.g. Waiting rooms, MCH centres, early childhood services, media, restaurant, hotel, service station, shopping centre, medical centre, sports facilities, notice board  
- incentives: food provided (e.g. morning tea, snacks), free show bag, low cost to families | program factors |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme (index category)</th>
<th>Components within the sub-theme (description)</th>
<th>Model – key theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Partnerships | Referral and support      | - organisations: DHS, Child Protection, SCOPE  
- health services: GPs, psychologists, MCH centres (MCHN and EMCHN), case workers, hospitals, paediatric services, Specialist Children's Services, Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS), Post and Ante Natal Depression Association (PANDA)  
- early childhood services: kindergartens, Primary and Secondary Schools, childcare centres, TAFE  
- community and volunteer agencies: Neighbourhood house, VACCA, Anglicare Family Support Program, Uniting Care, Baptcare Family Services, local Church and migrant resource centres  
- referral pathways: referral of families by agencies into the playgroup, self referral  
- role: partnerships for referral, provision of resources, funding | program factors    |
Table A.2.2: Question 2 – Strategies and actions to maintain the attendance of participants in the groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme (index category)</th>
<th>Components within the sub-theme (description)</th>
<th>Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>- fee: free, subsidised, minimal cost&lt;br&gt;- incentives: morning tea provided</td>
<td>personal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>- provision of transport to families on a group (e.g. Limited transport in the area) and individual (e.g. no car) basis depending on the needs of the group.</td>
<td>personal factors (individual impact)&lt;br&gt;- contextual factors (group impact)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Venue</td>
<td>- environment: safe, accessible, large, well resourced&lt;br&gt;- ease of access/transport: close to public transport or within walking distance&lt;br&gt;- location: held at the local primary school or next door to a MCH centre</td>
<td>contextual factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>- attributes: Indigenous, bilingual&lt;br&gt;- personal qualities: Welcoming, warm, friendly, non-judgemental, supportive</td>
<td>- program factors&lt;br&gt;- contextual factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>- strategies: Remembering names of parents and children, welcoming families at each session, encourage families to attend next week, reminder phone call between sessions, providing one-on-one support, encouragement of interaction at playgroup, maintain contact throughout, one-on-one communication, follow up on issues arising in the group, keeping families informed, referral&lt;br&gt;- personal contact: regular, before and after each session</td>
<td>program factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supplementary staff</td>
<td>- volunteers: trained, to support staff and families&lt;br&gt;- professionals: trained, visit the group to offer support and advice to families, e.g. Music therapist, therapist</td>
<td>program factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>- training programs: Family Centred Practice training, Certificate III in Children’s Services, attend workshops, SPPI training day, forums, professional development seminars, guidelines for participation and supervision&lt;br&gt;- staffing: paid&lt;br&gt;- strategies: demonstrates play experiences, conversational approach, positive role modelling&lt;br&gt;- knowledge: community, information sessions to learn about the community and new arrival issues, child health, understands the needs of the target group</td>
<td>program factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>- activity criteria: variety, age appropriate, developmentally appropriate, parent needs catered for, equipment, have activities that represent physical, cognitive, creative and social development, culturally specific based on group needs (traditional dance), relevant to needs of the child and parent, fun,</td>
<td>program factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Sub-theme (index category)</td>
<td>Components within the sub-theme (description)</td>
<td>Model</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Environment</strong></td>
<td>- what it is: friendly, inviting, welcoming, safe, inclusive, non-judgemental, relaxed, no pressure to attend, non-threatening, child friendly space, fun, non-confronting, consistent environment, creative, has a community feel, supportive, respectful</td>
<td>program factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- what it should do: encourage discussion and interaction, encourage fun through play, encourage parents to come even if they have a sleeping baby, allow time for parents to interact with each other, make parents feel valued, new families are made to feel welcome</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- the benefit of culturally specific groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Parent involvement</strong></td>
<td>- planning: encouragement to contribute ideas about activities, provide feedback, program planning, involved in decision making, activities determined by the group, the program is parent directed, program designed by parents</td>
<td>program factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- participation: assist in preparation (e.g. Morning tea, clearing tables, packing away toys, sweeping), participating in activities (e.g. family fun day), encouraging them to interact with their child, involvement in implementation, talking to the group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- translation to home: discussion with families on how they could use things learnt in the group at home, summary sheet for home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Records</strong></td>
<td>- use of attendance records and family registration to more accurately record attendance.</td>
<td>program factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Promotion</strong></td>
<td>Marketing and advertising</td>
<td>program factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- strategies/materials: ‘bring a friend to playgroup’ month, playgroup directory, promotional days, flyers, brochures, newsletters, word of mouth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Sub-theme (index category)</td>
<td>Components within the sub-theme (description)</td>
<td>Model</td>
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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Partnerships | Referral and support     | - distribution points: shopping centre, MCH, local groups, youth resource centre, neighbourhood house, newspaper, school gate  
- incentives: food provided (e.g. morning tea, lunch, coffee, cake, fruit), training parents to become playgroup leaders, literature, free products, welcome bag, newsletters, special guests, free use of computers, families have lunch together  
- individuals: Early Years Community Development Worker, Playgroup Resource Worker, Early Childhood Worker, Communities for Children Project Worker  
- health services: speech pathology, MCH  
- early childhood services: preschool, child care centre  
- community and volunteer agencies: early years network, OZ child volunteer support program, VACCA, Parentzone, community house, local playgroups, Playgroup Victoria, Parks Victoria, Arts Centre, St Vincents  
- referral pathways: MCH centres, agencies into playgroups and also referral from PGs to external agencies/services                                                                 | program factors     |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Components within the sub-theme (description)</th>
<th>Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Staffing**  | **Communication** | - strategies: encourage discussion (group and individual) about parenting, development, play and behaviour. This can be done by showing families resources that initiate discussion – conversation starters. This type of discussion allows parents to share and feel as though they are not alone and what they are experiencing is normal.  
- personal contact: maintain ongoing contact with families to encourage attendance, develop relationships and build trust with families  
- support: discuss parental concerns (personal and family life) and assist them to find solutions to their questions or issues, provide resources and information | program factors |
| **Supplementary staff** | | - volunteers: trained to assist and support families by role modelling appropriate ways to play with children or participate in activities (e.g. reading), have developed relationships with parents and children  
- professionals: trained to offer support to families (e.g. music therapist, councillor, kindergarten teacher, MCH nurse, librarian) and staff (e.g. mentor) | program factors |
| **Skills**    | | - training programs: activity based play training (useful for program planning), specific needs groups training, working with vulnerable groups training, several PGV training modules offered, provide training at various venues, professional development opportunities, Diploma in Children’s Services, Certificate III in Childcare, bi-annual playgroup network meetings (e.g. share ideas, discuss problems, strategies, resources, activities). Training ensures that facilitators have an adequate understanding of child development.  
- strategies: role modelling, promote importance of age related play, encourage social interactions, encourage positive parenting, base the program around parent–child interaction, encourage communication and discussion between parents and staff, work on strengths, use appropriate language, staff participate in activities, provide new ideas and experiences for children that cater to various aspects of child development, offer parents different techniques to increase parent–child interaction, encourage families to try activities learnt in the playgroup at home  
- knowledge: awareness of local services | program factors |
| **Resources** | | - for parents: provide a quarterly playgroup newsletter, information on child development. These provide ‘awareness’ for appropriate activities for children.  
- for staff: PGV A–Z playsheets activity booklet, ‘Story Time Starters’ booklet, provided strategies to encourage children’s language, link staff to universal services to facilitate referral, extend knowledge (e.g. importance of play), access to culturally appropriate resources, developmentally appropriate resources (e.g. age appropriate activities), activity ideas, PGV membership provided, quarterly playgroup newsletter for staff provided by council, access to PGV cultural kits (e.g. Koori kit), provide resources. These resources increase knowledge and understanding of child development and promote activities that enhance learning. | program factors |
<p>| <strong>Partnerships</strong> | <strong>Referral</strong> | - individuals: Playgroup Development Officer, librarian, Playgroup Coordinator, Primary Welfare Officer, Council Playgroup leaders | program factors |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme (index category)</th>
<th>Components within the sub-theme (description)</th>
<th>Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- organisations: PGV, philanthropic organisations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- early childhood services: kindergarten (teacher), preschool</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- health services: MCH services offered, local health service, music therapist, speech therapist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, dietician</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- referral pathways: MCH centre</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- community and volunteer agencies: Indigenous community, local community, Arts centre, playgroup networks, other playgroups, programs (e.g. Lets read), Smith Family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>- activity criteria: weekly reading opportunities (language and literacy skills), age appropriate, developmentally appropriate (skills – gross and fine motor, coordination, problem solving, communication, social, emotional, cognitive), culturally appropriate, provide choices (variety), provide variety of toys, encourage language development, encourage parent–child interaction, fun, child initiated, cheap and repeatable at home, encourage sharing, sensory stimulation</td>
<td>program factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- activity type: story time, music, movement, singing (songs and rhymes), painting, play doh, puzzles, jumping castle, peek a boo, excursions, art and craft, indoor and outdoor play, solo or group activities, celebrations (birthdays, Easter, Christmas), body tracing, messy play, cooking, games, dressing up</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- planning: activities planned to benefit parent engagement with their child, activities appropriate for child age and developmental phase, culture and group (e.g. Young mothers), planned by experienced staff (e.g. early childhood workers, PGV), child and parent focused, appropriate activities researched (e.g. library, notes on the group), plan developed in advance</td>
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<td>- role: ‘learning through play’ teaching focus, child-centred program, encourage a positive family environment (e.g. Parenting, self esteem, communication), encourage social networks and peer relationships, stimulate language, social, emotional, physical and cognitive responses, motor skill development, develop competence, group is based on parent–child interaction, extend child development.</td>
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<td>- structure: informal manner (e.g. on the floor), variety of activities set up at different stations around the room, structured program with a flexible routine (e.g. play, morning tea, activity, pack up, reading, end), predictable routine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>- what it is: physically and emotionally safe, fun, informal, culturally sensitive, friendly, nurturing, supportive, non-judgemental, space, well resourced with equipment, stimulating, child friendly</td>
<td>program factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- what it should do: encourage social and emotional interactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives</td>
<td></td>
<td>- program supplies: food (snacks), drinks</td>
<td>program factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td>- planning: encourage organisation of group activities, encourage feedback</td>
<td>program factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- participation: encourage interaction with other members, take part in activities</td>
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<td>- translation at home: use activities learnt from playgroup at home</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Table A.2.4: Question 4 – Strategies and actions to increase parent confidence, capacity and connectedness to the community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Components within the sub-theme (description)</th>
<th>Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Staffing    | Communication   | - strategies: encourage facilitated discussion on topics of interest to the group (e.g. communication, praise), encourage transfer of play experiences from the playgroup to home (increase parent confidence), increase parent confidence by giving praise and encouragement, introduce families to other members in the group, refer parents to other services if needed, acknowledge parent’s contribution to the group, listen to families and acknowledge their concerns, give parents space for ‘time out’ if they need it.  
- personal contact: one-to-one discussions between parents and facilitators, a strong parent-facilitator relationship is important to encourage open communication, make time to get to know families, build rapport by greeting families at the start of each session, maintain telephone contact with families, communication in parent’s native language is a benefit  
- support: offer guidance, advice and information to parents when needed (includes following up queries), provide reassurance related to parenting, discuss cultural issues with the group, be a support network | program factors  |
|             | Resources       | - program information for parents: tips on activities that can be used at home, more detailed information to support the session, session plan (newsletter or noticeboard), child related articles (e.g. child development, parenting, toddler behaviour, health), low cost play activities for use at home, summary sheet for each session  
- community information for parents: newsletter with community events, information on support services, cultural issues, community directory, other playgroups in the area, programs (e.g. toy library, music program)  
- general information for parents: food intolerance, allergies, child safety, opportunities for parent education and training, kindergarten, MCH ages and stages, health reminders  
- for staff: have additional resources to give to parents if requested, access to a copy of the family and children’s services directory, database of community playgroups | program factors  |
|             | Skills          | - training programs: access to training opportunities, first aid, guest speakers, playgroup network  
- knowledge: child development, disability  
- strategies: role modelling of positive play experiences using a strength based approach (also role model health and well being, parenting strategies, child development and engagement), informal modelling, moulding in a non-threatening manner, show photos to demonstrate skills, provide tips of what can be done at home, link families with each other, provide additional information to parents, provide reassurance to families about their parenting, encourage discussion of issues amongst the group, engage parents in activities with their child, recognise when parent does something well – no matter how small, praise or give positive feedback (positive reinforcement) when parent does something well, remind parents of their strengths, acknowledge parent’s effort and their contribution to the group, promote appropriate parent strategies for behaviour management | program factors  |
|             | Supplementary   | - volunteers: provide support to the playgroup (staff and families), culturally diverse  
- professionals: kindergarten teachers, MCH nurse, occasional care staff, early parenting professional, Early Years Community Development Worker, Playgroup Resource Worker | program factors  |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme (index category)</th>
<th>Components within the sub-theme (description)</th>
<th>Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Partnerships and community                | Community connection and participation                           | - promotion: information on services offered in the community through leaflets, flyers, newsletters (e.g. Doctors, parks, school programs, pre-school), external speakers (e.g. librarian, MCH nurse, occasional care staff, social workers, community health, sleep professionals, oral health, kindergarten teacher)  
- transition group developed where families attend community playgroups  
- strategies: ‘playgroup in the park’ program, arrange visits to community venues, link groups to external programs, encourage contribution to community (e.g. blankets for homelessness, donations) and acknowledge or publicise this contribution, encourage participation in external activities in the community (e.g. family fun days, festivals)  
- referral pathways: professionals attend playgroup to inform families of services that they offer, facilitators refers parents to external services (but they need access to a directory for referral)  
- program partnerships: provide funding opportunities, use of other venues or resources  
- social networks: members of the group exchange contact details, encourage friendships between the group members, encourage provision of support by other members of the group, suggest parents meet over the holiday period |       |
| Program                                   | Content                                                         | - activity criteria: play experiences that can be continued by parents at home  
- activity type: parent information sessions (e.g. language development, literacy, age-appropriate play), one-on-one time with facilitator, discussions (one-on-one or group), play mornings at Arts centre, singing, dancing, craft, external speakers (e.g. MCH nurse, schools, librarian, social worker, midwives, VACCA representatives, policeman, speech pathologist), songs, rhymes, reading, cooking, excursions (e.g. visiting other playgroups)  
- planning: planned by experienced staff (e.g. early childhood worker), activities based on parent needs and interest, activities involve or promote parent–child interaction  
- role: promote and strengthen parent–child relationship, create social networks within the group, increase confidence to access community services/resources, enhance parent–child interaction, create learning opportunities, provide an open environment for discussion of issues and concerns from families in similar situations or circumstances (share experiences), teach parents activities they can do at home, building skills in parenting and coping, reaching isolated families, provide the opportunity or venue for families to interact  
- structure: simple routine, same routine each week with small changes made, consistent environment, informing parents of the program timeline and what would happen once it ended, small group, flexible attendance, time allocated to parent-facilitator discussion, interactive nature | program factors |
| Environment                               | - what it is: child friendly, fun, safe, non-judgemental, supportive, welcoming, inclusive  
- what it should do: allows sharing of information (e.g. issues, concerns, difficulties, experiences), allows time for discussion, facilitate relationship building with other members, parent engagement and communication | program factors |
<p>| Parent involvement                        | - planning: involve parents in planning, parents choose topics discussed at playgroup, decision-making for activities, feedback sought | program factors |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme (index category)</th>
<th>Components within the sub-theme (description)</th>
<th>Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|       |                           | - participation: assist in packing up, parents provide morning tea, take part in activities, distribute flyers promoting the playgroup to friends  
- translation at home: suggest how activities can be used at home  
- incentives: training (e.g. first aid), use playgroup for 'time out', encourage parents to continued with group after funding has ended |       |
Appendix 3: Discussion schedule for stakeholder interviews

Project: SPPI Evaluation

Stakeholder Interview Discussion Guide – 30 mins

1. **Introduction** – Introduction, establish purpose of study and to get an overview of the respondent’s situation (5 minutes)

2. **Attracting parents to supported playgroups** – To explore the challenges in attracting parents to supported playgroups and the strategies to overcome these challenges (10 mins)

3. **Retaining parents in supported playgroups** – To explore the challenges in retaining parents in supported playgroups and the strategies to overcome these challenges (10 minutes)

4. **Summation** – To encourage respondent to summarise key engagement and retention strategies (5 mins)

5. **Thank and close** – Thank respondent and inform them of next steps

Section 1 – Introduction – 5 minutes

**Objective:** *Introduction, establish purpose of study and to get an overview of the respondent’s situation*

**Overview**

- Introduce self and the PRC
- Explain purpose of the interview in helping to identify strategies to attract parents to supported playgroups and to encourage them to continue attending
- Explain the information will be used in conjunction with literature review and thematic analysis to provide a report and Practice Guide to DEECD
- Explain respondent’s name will not be included in report to DEECD – only position titles
- Explain audio taping – so I can analyse comments later
- Reassure the importance of honest feedback and no right/wrong answers
- Thirty minutes duration – general explanation of what to expect (a discussion not a question/answer session)

**Introductions**

- Respondent’s position
- Length of time working with current organisation
- Brief outline of what they do in their role
- Their connection to supported playgroups
Section 2: Attracting parents to supported playgroups – 10 mins

**Objective:** To explore the challenges in attracting parents to supported playgroups and strategies to overcome these challenges

I’d like to start by getting your thoughts on attracting parents to attend supported playgroups

>Note: for Playgroup Coordinators/ Facilitators encourage respondent to draw on their own experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guide questions:</th>
<th>Probe for the following:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What sorts of challenges are there in attracting parents to supported playgroups?</td>
<td>• Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Referral mechanisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parental trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Competitive landscape (i.e., other playgroups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cultural fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Time of day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What sorts of strategies are used to help overcome these challenges?</td>
<td><strong>Probe for:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What strategies work well and why?</td>
<td>• Promotion/marketing activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What strategies don’t work and why?</td>
<td>• Partnering organisations for referrals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Flexibility in program structure and session times/duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Transport provided/funded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 3: Retaining parents in supported playgroups – 10 mins

**Objective:** To explore the challenges in retaining parents in supported playgroups and strategies to overcome these challenges

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We’ve talked about challenges and strategies in attracting parents to supported playgroups, now I’d like to get your thoughts on retaining parents in supported playgroups after enrolment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

[Note: for Playgroup Coordinators/Facilitators encourage respondent to draw on their own experience]

**Guide questions:**

- What sorts of challenges are there in retaining parents in supported playgroups?
- What sorts of strategies are used to help overcome these challenges?
- What strategies work well and why?
- What strategies don’t work and why?

**Probe for the following:**

- Lack of program/content fit with parents
- Venue
  - Location
  - Atmosphere
- Transportation
- Cost
- Group dynamics
- Lack of child care arrangements for siblings
- Lack of parental trust/confidence
- Parents relocating
- More pressing ‘issues’/needs to attend to (e.g.: financial, family)
- Other

**Probe for:**

- Facilitator qualities/training
- Program/content flexibility
- Venue matched to target group
- Food/morning or afternoon tea
- Subsidised transportation/costs
- Encourage parents to bring a friend to group
- Assistance with child care for siblings
- Other
Section 4: Summation – 5 mins

**Objective:** To encourage respondent to summarise key engagement and retention strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guide questions:</th>
<th>Probe for the following:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Of all of the strategies we’ve discussed for helping to attract parents to supported playgroups, which are the most important strategies to implement? Why?</td>
<td>• Facilitator training/ mindset shift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And which are the most important strategies to implement in retaining parents in supported playgroups after they enrol? Why?</td>
<td>• Altered program structure/ content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is needed to maximise the success of these strategies?</td>
<td>• More support from LGAs/State Government</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increased/improved data collection to assess SPPI effectiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Improved understanding of the needs of vulnerable families</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Improved referral mechanisms / partnerships</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section 5: Thank and close

**Objective:** To thank the respondent for their time and inform them of next steps

Finally, I’d like to review some of the important comments and suggestions you have raised today

**Approach**
- Thank respondent for time and contribution
- Reinforce to them we will be using their information together with literature review and thematic analysis to report back to DEECD
- Ask if they have any other comments to add or any questions
- Close interview
## Appendix 4: Stakeholder interview coding summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme (index category)</th>
<th>Components within the sub-theme (description)</th>
<th>Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access</strong></td>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>fee: no cost (attraction)</td>
<td>personal factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>- barriers to parent transport: large municipality, new arrival families to Australia, no access to vehicles - barriers to program transport provision: bus with child-appropriate seats, round trip to collect each parent too long, unsustainable, double prams don’t fit on buses, doesn’t suit everyone’s needs, lack of funding to provide transport</td>
<td>contextual factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Venue</td>
<td>- ease of access/transport: within close proximity to the family home, within walking distance, close to public transport - location: attached to the local kindergarten - physical size to accommodate the group</td>
<td>contextual factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges</strong></td>
<td>Attraction</td>
<td>- parent factors: parents don’t believe that they need to attend, fear of DHS involvement, families with complex needs that are already accessing services (e.g. mental health, violence), parent characteristics (e.g. Low self esteem, lack of confidence, difficulty socialising with others) - cultural factors: cultural relevance/importance of playgroup - contextual factors: transport [refer to transport sub-theme for more detail] - program factors: referral networks need to have up-to-date information on playgroups being offered in their area, stigma attached to SPGs (inclusion criteria)</td>
<td>- personal factors - cultural / contextual factors - program factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>- personal factors: transient group because of accommodation issues or moved by authorities, circumstances of families (no control), fear of DHS involvement, low parent motivation (e.g. mental health issues) - program factors: content of the group needs to continue to keep parents engaged</td>
<td>- personal factors - program factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partnerships</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>- individuals: family support workers - organisations: library - health services: MCH centres, Southern Health - early childhood services: kindergartens, primary schools - community and volunteer agencies: Anglicare, Anchor, local Aboriginal Co-operative, Child FIRST - role: referral into playgroups, funding (monetary and in-kind), address the group’s cultural needs, providing a venue for the group (session or term)</td>
<td>- program factors - cultural factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Sub-theme (index category)</td>
<td>Components within the sub-theme (description)</td>
<td>Model</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| **Program**      | Content                   | - activities: culturally relevant, guest speakers/visitors, ideas for new activities, inside and outside activities, guest speakers (informal – talk about topics that parents want), cooking, songs, dancing, encourage parent–child interaction  
- planning: partnerships to address the group’s cultural needs (e.g. Aboriginal links), cultural relevance (customising the group to the target audience – their beliefs and understanding), special needs specific playgroup, facilitator keeps a reflective diary for the session, planning day for staff and families, mainstream groups do not cater to families who are targeted (‘grey area’)  
- role: build parent confidence, transition families into mainstream/community groups, encourage parent–child interaction and build relationships, improve parent skills in small steps, connect families with external groups and services within the community  
- structure: time of day for the session, theme for each session, informal, individual discussion with parents, number of families in the group | - cultural factors  
- program factors |
|                  | Environment                | - what it is: friendly, welcoming, warm, supportive, inclusive, accepting, non-judgemental  
- what it should do: make parents feel as though they ‘fit’ | program factors |
|                  | Group composition          | - homogenous groups: culturally specific, vulnerable families  
- heterogeneous groups: culturally mixed | - program factors  
- cultural factors |
|                  | Parent involvement         | - participation: participate in activities with their children, welcome other families, assist in preparation (e.g. Morning tea, packing up), get parents to lead an activity, peer mentoring  
- planning: staff and parents involved in a planning day, staff and parents discuss group rules  
- translation at home: make play doh and take this home | program factors |
|                  | Promotion                  | - distribution points: Playgroup Victoria directory, local ‘pokies’ venue, need to customise it to the target group, advertise externally (e.g. Anglicare), local stores, doctor’s surgery  
- incentives: free excursion for new families, providing light refreshments  
- strategies: letter box drop, no-cost introductory session for new members, explaining the importance of playgroup to cultural groups, trust is important between the referral agency/person and the family, term program sent out to families in advance, deliver a presentation to external organisations, ‘word of mouth’  
- materials: tailored flyers, posters, newspaper, advertisements | program factors |
|                  | Staffing                   | - funding: increased to cover preparation time and professional development  
- time: more time for planning and reflection  
- training: more training dates | program factors |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme (index category)</th>
<th>Components within the sub-theme (description)</th>
<th>Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- staffing: more staff per group</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
|       | Characteristics | - attributes: same background to the group (e.g. culture, ethnicity), gender to match the target group (e.g. male facilitator for a father’s group)  
- personal qualities: non-judgemental, sensitive, creative, flexible | program factors |
|       | Communication | - strategies: comment of what the parent does in the group (encourage and acknowledge their participation), establish trust, follow-up of non-attendance, reminder phone call between sessions  
- personal contact: texting (SMS), phone calls | program factors |
|       | Resources | - for staff: funding information, need access to other resources – not only written materials, if limited need to be creative (e.g. op shops) | program factors |
|       | Skills | - training programs: need to be specific to the needs of the target group and their environment  
- strategies: consistent facilitator, personal welcome each family, shows a genuine interest in the parent and child, role modelling, indirect and informal education, incidental learning, opportunistic learning and teaching, no preaching, non-prescriptive, blend into the group, reflection of how the session went, buddy system with families from similar circumstances, point out the benefits of attending the group  
- knowledge: awareness of cultural issues that may be relevant to the group, child development, play, local services that could be offered to families | program factors |

Note. Only major themes arising from the interview data are discussed in Section 4 of this report.
References

ARTD Consultants 2008, Evaluation – Phase 2: Final report to the Communities Division of the NSW Department of Community Services, Communities Division of the NSW Department of Community Services, Sydney.


QSR International 2008, NVivo: Qualitative data analysis software, version 8, QSR International Pty Ltd.
