

Annual Report

2023

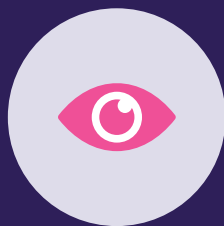


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Acknowledgement of Country

Play Matters Australia pays respect to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country in the communities in which we work and play throughout Australia. We acknowledge their connection to their lands, waters and communities. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures and to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's First Peoples and Custodians of the Land.



Vision
Connected Children,
Families and
Communities



Mission
Supporting children
and families to build
relationships, skills and
confidence through play



Values
Creative and fun
Collaborative
Welcoming and Inclusive
Contemporary practice
Accountable

Our Story

Operating for almost 50 years, Play Matters Australia (PMA) aims to provide children with the best start to life by empowering parents and caregivers with the skills and confidence to guide and support their children through the fundamental act of play.

All children have the right to play, as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 31. Play Matters Australia’s ethos of recognising parents and caregivers as a child’s first teacher is embedded in our company’s Theory of Change and underpins our programs, service design and delivery. We know that the first 1,000 and 2,000 days are critical to a child’s development. A child’s positive and nurturing relationship to parents and carers lays down the successful neurological foundations for lifelong learning. Play Matters Australia has developed and delivers a range of tailored prevention and early intervention programs that are underpinned by evidence-based methodologies. We focus on children and family services that are universal and targeted based on need.

Our services are both volunteer-led and extend to facilitated specialist and therapeutic services. As a nationally registered charity, we operate across Australia. We seek to explore multi-modal delivery and build partnerships with like-minded organisations so we can reach every child and every family, in all Australian postcodes. We act as a voice of advocacy to governments and the broader community on early childhood and parenting. We know play truly matters in connecting communities and developing resilient children and families to ensure health and wellbeing for the whole of life. We passionately believe in the importance of both the heart and science of play.

“I love what Play Matters does for our children and families in our community. They provide a relaxed space for children to play together and families to connect.”



Our Values

Creative and Fun

We encourage innovation and celebration that is equitable and inclusive.

Collaborative

We work together effectively to build relationships, and harness everyone’s capabilities to achieve positive outcomes.

“I like how easy it is to find a playgroup near me, and how up to date the website is with current research and educational theories on child development.”

Welcoming and Inclusive

We foster a friendly, supportive environment that embraces diversity and contributes to a respectful/safe culture.

Contemporary Practice

We keep abreast of emerging challenges, opportunities, and current practice, striving to continually improve to enact positive change.

Accountable

We are committed to honesty and integrity and take responsibility for our actions to ensure effective stewardship.

Chair's Report

Jane McVeigh

Dear stakeholders and members,

I am deeply honoured to address you in my new role as Chair of The Board. After seven years of dedicated service as a Non-Executive Director, it is with great pride and enthusiasm that I assume this leadership position.

Our journey as an organisation has been one of steady growth, continuous improvement, and unwavering commitment to our mission and values. As we reflect on the past year, I am filled with gratitude for the hard work and dedication of our talented team, the trust and support of our stakeholders and supporters, and the resilience that has defined our collective response to change.

It's truly remarkable to see how much we've grown and the meaningful impact we've made in the lives of families across the nation. As we reflect on the past year's accomplishments, it's evident that our dedication to fostering strong communities and supporting families has yielded tremendous growth and positive change.

Our partnership with the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) has been a cornerstone of our growth. Through our community playgroups led by passionate staff and volunteers, we've witnessed communities come together in powerful ways. These playgroups, which have increased significantly in number, have not only provided spaces for families to connect but have also nurtured child development, instilled parenting confidence, and fostered a sense of belonging within our communities.

Embracing the evolving landscape, our Play Stars program, funded by the Queensland Department of Education has extended its reach and impact. By offering a 12-month family membership, we've continued to ensure that families from all walks of life can access quality play experiences for their young children. The expansion into remote areas and the inclusion of online sessions have been instrumental in broadening our reach and engaging families who might not have otherwise had the opportunity to connect with our programs.

Inclusivity has been at the heart of our growth story and continues to be a company core value to this day. The expansion of our inclusion support programs has been transformative. We've seen families from various backgrounds come together, forming connections, and receiving the support they need. Our commitment to ensuring all play experiences are inclusive has paved the way for families to thrive and children to reach their full potential.

Our national evidence-based music therapy program, Sing&Grow, which is also funded by DSS has continued to flourish, leaving a lasting impact on families. As we've resumed in-person sessions, we've witnessed the power of music to foster growth, connection, and joy. The heartwarming feedback we've received from families is a testament to the positive transformation these sessions have brought about.

At Play Matters Australia, growth isn't just about numbers; it's about the lives we've touched, the communities we've enriched and the journeys we have walked alongside. Our commitment to inclusive playgroups, school transition programs, and parental support initiatives has been the driving force behind our growth. We've expanded our reach, opened new regional hubs, enhanced our website resources, implemented new systems and technology, and broadened our membership base.

None of this would have been possible without the dedication of our incredible staff, volunteers, and supporters. It's through their passion, hard work, and unwavering commitment that we've been able to create a ripple effect of positive change that reaches far and wide.

Looking ahead, our vision remains steadfast: to Connect Children, Families and Communities across Australia.

In the coming year, we will continue to invest in our people, our processes, and our partnerships, leveraging our collective strengths to drive innovation and positive change. Our commitment to transparency, accountability, and good governance will remain unwavering as we navigate the path ahead.

As we present this annual report, I invite you to share in our achievements, to recognise the incredible potential that lies ahead, and to join us on this exciting journey. Together, we will shape the future, building a legacy that reflects our shared values and aspirations.

Thank you for your continued trust and support. I look forward to working closely with all of you as we embark on this new chapter together.

Jane McVeigh
Jane McVeigh
Board Chair



Jane McVeigh
Jane McVeigh (née Won) is a renowned leader, serving as the Chair of the Board at Play Matters Australia. Simultaneously, she serves as the CEO of an esteemed architectural and engineering firm based in Brisbane, which has a 35-year history of operations. With a career spanning over three decades, Jane is a visionary executive known for driving excellence in leadership, policy, strategy, and infrastructure.

Jane's diverse experience spans both the public and private sectors, where she has consistently delivered outstanding results for both the organisation, client, and the community, while nurturing innovation and growth. Her legacy includes a portfolio of transformative property and infrastructure projects that have reshaped Australia's landscape, emphasising quality, sustainability, and community impact. As a dynamic leader, Jane's is pivotal in building trust among the community and stakeholders and is an advocate for strategic initiatives that foster growth, innovation, and inclusivity.

In her role as Chair of the Board at Play Matters, Jane demonstrates a steadfast commitment to governance, ensuring that the organisation operates with transparency, accountability, and ethical principles at its core. Her exceptional support for the youth and education sector underscores her dedication to the growth and development of Australia's future generations.



Play Matters CEO



Kirsty Dixon

Kirsty Dixon was appointed CEO of Play Matters Australia in March 2020. Born and raised in regional Queensland, she is passionate about social justice, education, and health equity for all Australians. Before joining Playgroup Queensland Kirsty held executive roles in local government, community services and healthcare. As an advocate for knowledge-seeking to support her community work, she has completed executive education with the Harvard Business School, London School of Economics, the Australian Institute of Company Directors, and the Governance Institute of Australia. She holds a Bachelor of Arts, Master of Business and Graduate Certificate in Health Science. Kirsty is a strong supporter of the effectiveness of collective impact, community capacity-building and early intervention programs and feels privileged to be leading Play Matters Australia to grow its positive influence across Australian communities.

Play Matters Board



Christine Chew

Non-Executive Director

Christine is a Certified Practising Accountant with experience in fast-moving consumer goods, the hospitality and services industry, small-to-medium enterprises, and the not-for-profit sector. She is a Fellow of the Governance Institute of Australia, and Member of Australian Institute of Company Directors, CPA Australia and Queensland College of Teachers. Christine is a mother of four and passionately believes in play-based learning and the beneficial developmental outcomes of playgroups for children, their families, and communities.



Janice Elsley

Non-Executive Director

Janice is a Certified Human Resources Practitioner and a current Member of the Australian Human Resources Institute. With qualifications in psychology, human resources and law, and more recently neuroscience and leadership, she is an accomplished organisational change manager, project manager and transformational leader focused on achieving successful project delivery and sustainable transformation that creates business value. As a mother of two, Janice encourages all organisations working in the early childhood space to research, evaluate and deliver programs where the importance of play is prioritised.



Gloria Sherlock

Non-Executive Director

Gloria's professional career spans more than 25 years in a variety of roles including Accountant, Business Analyst, e-Risk Consultant and Regional Administration Manager. Gloria leads a national team for a large multinational company and works with others with respect and empathy as she empowers them on her journey. Gloria holds a Bachelor of Electronic Commerce, where she graduated as Valedictorian, as well as a Certificate in Governance and Risk. She is also a Member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and a Member of Women on Boards, and is actively involved in supporting the Community. Gloria has been the Contact Person for two local Playgroups and remains in contact with many of the families who formed part of these very special communities.

Our Patron



Her Excellency the Honourable Dr Jeannette Young PSM

Her Excellency the Honourable Dr Jeannette Young PSM was sworn-in as the 27th Governor of Queensland. She is the Play Matters Australia Patron.

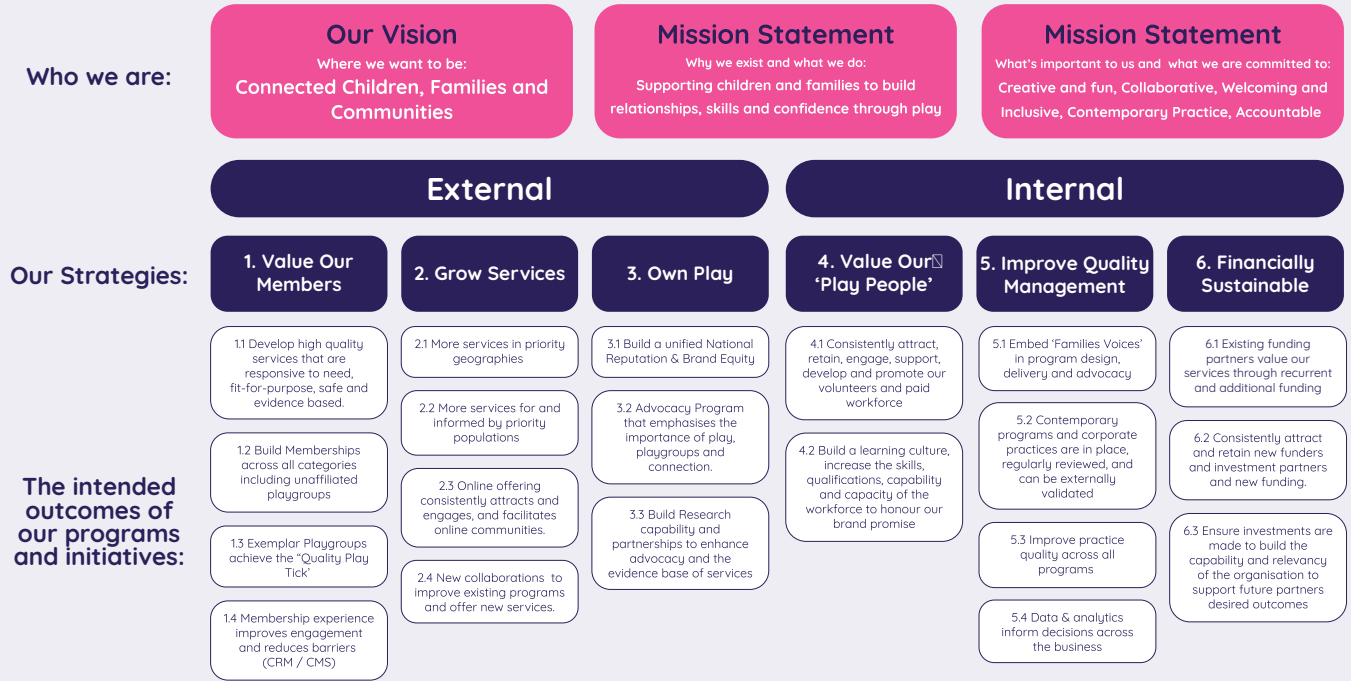
The Governor, born in Sydney in 1963, started her medical career at Westmead Hospital after graduating from Sydney University in 1986. She later transitioned to Medical Management, earning an MBA from Macquarie University. She served as Director of Medical Services at Rockhampton Hospital and Executive Director of Medical Services at the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane.

During her career, she met her second husband, Professor Graeme Nimmo, and they married in 2000, welcoming a daughter in 2001. In 2005, she became the Chief Health Officer for Queensland, leading the state's public health efforts, including the response to public health emergencies, and later, the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Young holds specialist qualifications and has received numerous awards and honors.

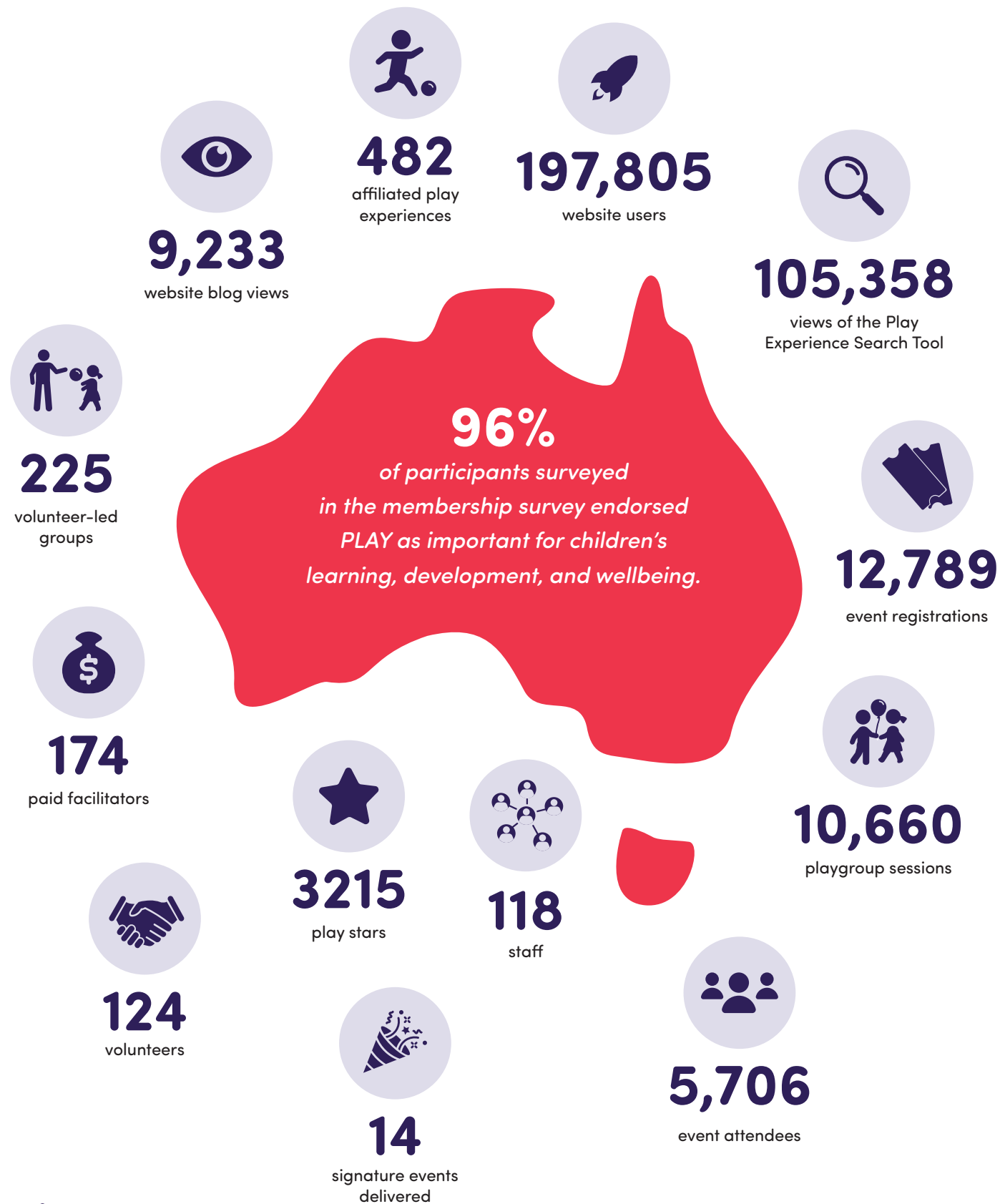
Dr Jeannette Young and her husband, Professor Graeme Nimmo are proud to serve all Queenslanders and are passionate advocates for play and the early years.

Strategy

Strategic Directions Statement 2021 – 2024



The Year in Numbers



Playgroups

Community Playgroups

Funding from the Australian Government Department of Social Services supports Play Matters to deliver a range of community playgroups. These are led by volunteers in the community. During the past year, 218 community playgroups were running Queensland-wide, along with a further 264 organisational playgroups (mostly running in schools). Every one of these playgroups and the communities they operate in are supported by Play Matters Community Development Officers, volunteers and attending families.

Community Playgroups allow local communities to connect and provide organic early intervention and prevention support to the attending families. Although the rate of parents returning to work much earlier has increased, community playgroups are still as relevant as they have been throughout the organisation's history and continue to provide a unique space for supporting and improving families' wellbeing through connection and participation.

Families attending community playgroups have indicated that attending a community playgroup has supported:

- their child's development
- parenting confidence
- increased engagement and play ideas with their children
- an increase in their social support network
- increased participation with people, activities and services within their community.

Community playgroups have endured for the full five decades of Play Matters Australia's existence and remain unique in a now crowded playgroup landscape.

During the last year, our **Community Playgroups** grew from **370 to 482**. This includes both volunteer-led playgroups in the community and playgroups in organisations (mostly schools). Our Community Development Officers worked hard to achieve these results. The 482 playgroups delivered a whopping **10,660 playgroup sessions** to children and families.

"The playgroup I mostly attend is volunteer-run. It's a small, local group and it's a nice atmosphere to get together and swap parenting war stories and meet and chat to other parents. It's often just a really nice outing at the end of the week, in a low-key and friendly setting. It's quite unstructured, although some very organised volunteer mums do a great job setting up activities."





Play Stars

Play Stars extends a complimentary 12-month family membership to Play Matters families with children under the age of one. By providing this opportunity, Play Stars is championing Queensland families to access enriching play experiences for their young ones, irrespective of their circumstances. In a significant development, in July 2021, the Queensland Department of Education endorsed a three-year extension to the Play Stars program, accompanied by novel undertakings for the under-one age group and their families.

This past year marked the successful completion of the program's second year under the prevailing contract. The focal point continues to be the 'first thousand days' of a child's life, a critical phase for families, during which baby brain development, attachment, and parental confidence are pivotal.

At Play Matters Australia, we had already established eight baby playgroups across Cairns, Rockhampton, and the Sunshine Coast. In the 2022-23 financial year, we expanded our reach by:

- Introducing three baby playgroups in remote locales – Boulia, Nebo, and Yarrabah.
- Initiating two weekly online baby playgroups – an endeavour that attracted new parents and their infants, resulting in 90 sessions and engagement with 89 families.
- Establishing additional baby playgroups across South East Queensland – in Ipswich, Sunnybank, Taigum, Redcliffe, and Enoggera.

As a result, we now oversee the operations of 20 baby playgroups each week.

A notable highlight during this year was the launch of our online Play Stars Play Hub, a digital repository enriched with activity sheets, videos, and a multitude of ideas and resources catering to babies and their families.

During the financial year, there were **2248 downloads of resources from this site.**

In the first two years of the contract, we have attracted **5836 new families to the Play Stars initiative.**

Supported Playgroups

In the past financial year, Play Matters Australia's supported programs made a significant impact by reaching diverse, remote, and rural communities. Our services extended to various locations, including Warwick, Gatton, Cairns, Yarrabah, Woorabinda, Rockhampton, Mount Isa, Dajarra, Camooweal, and Cloncurry. This outreach aligns perfectly with our vision of nurturing connected children, families, and communities, as we approach our work from an ecological systems perspective. This approach emphasises that the entire community plays a role in shaping the development of our future leaders.

Delivered by trained Early Years Facilitators, our supported playgroup sessions have a strong focus on connecting families and children with vital services within their local communities. This approach ensures that children get the best possible start in life. In many of the communities we serve, essential services might be scarce or unavailable. Our playgroup model acts as a valuable platform for families to engage in conversations about their parenting journey, while our Facilitators guide them toward relevant services through effective referral pathways.

"Absolutely adore attending Play Matters playgroup at my local state school, I cannot fault it. Both ladies who have run it are amazing, it is such a wonderful group to attend, the activities are always so well thought out and beneficial to development for children of all ages."

Our portfolio of programs is diverse and aims to address various aspects of family wellbeing and child development. Some of the programs we offer include:

- Capricorn Connect and Play
- Yarrabah Playgroups
- Yarrabah Healthy Eating Playgroup
- South Cairns Playgroups
- Cairns Holiday Program
- Pathways for Early Learning and Development
- Mount Isa Playgroups in the Park
- Play Learn Eat Strong

Throughout the past year, we achieved some remarkable successes and notable statistics that highlight the impact of our efforts:

- Our dedicated Mount Isa staff covered a distance of over 12,000 kilometres to deliver playgroup sessions in the Far North Queensland region.
- The Woorabinda playgroup, in collaboration with Woorabinda State School, experienced exponential growth, with attendance increasing from 10 families to an impressive 80 families during the financial year.
- Yarrabah community benefitted from around 120 playgroup sessions, fostering engagement and community bonding.
- In Cairns, our team delivered a staggering 200 playgroup sessions to the South Cairns community, ensuring consistent support for families in that area.
- In Rockhampton, over 200 children participated in 296 playgroup sessions, underlining the strong community response to our offerings.
- Our partnership with Mercy Community in Warwick and Gatton allowed us to provide intensive support to more than 30 families.
- A new program addressing healthy eating was introduced in Yarrabah in collaboration with Yarrabah State School, promoting wellbeing and education in the community.

These successes wouldn't have been possible without the dedication of our passionate team and the collaborative efforts of our community partners. The strides we've taken in delivering support, fostering connections, and promoting healthy development in the lives of families across diverse communities are a testament to our commitment to creating positive change.

Looking ahead, we are excited to build upon these achievements and continue making a lasting impact in the lives of children, families, and communities throughout Australia.



Good news story

This financial year saw the Supported Playgroup team join forces with the Sing&Grow team to bring evidence-based strategies to the Mount Isa region, focusing on the enriching influence of music in enhancing child development.

Courtney's presence was a catalyst in the communities of Mount Isa, Dajarra, Camooweal and Cloncurry, offering fresh experiences to parents, caregivers, and children in these remote areas. Impressively, our staff covered around 150 kilometres from their base to reach each location, demonstrating their dedication to serving these isolated communities.

"I sincerely appreciate Play Matters being able to facilitate the playgroup, otherwise I would not have access to such a thing in my town, which is very important for my mental health as a mother."





Regional Hubs

In recent times, our strategic focus has centred on a 'hub and spoke' model of delivery, a response well-suited to Queensland's expansive geography. In 2022, we took significant strides by establishing new premises in Cairns and Rockhampton, augmenting our existing hubs in Mount Isa, the Sunshine Coast, and the Redlands. Moreover, the past year marked the opening of a fresh Ipswich hub nestled in Redbank.

Our hub framework has yielded noteworthy benefits, ushering in heightened engagement from families and amplifying our roster of playgroups and programs. Families enthusiastically embrace the consistent and thoughtfully arranged spaces, specially designed to extend a warm welcome to children and families.

These hubs serve as a central repository for all of Play Matters' offerings, including community playgroups, supported playgroups, Play Stars, MyTime, PlayConnect+, Sing&Grow, and more.

In addition to hosting our own activities, the hubs function as collaborative spaces, fostering robust partnerships with other organisations in the vicinity. This collaborative spirit ensures our connections with the community remain vibrant and mutually beneficial.

Our dedicated staff operate from these hubs, enabling them to reach out to the neighbouring communities effectively. They provide essential support to community playgroups, identify potential partners, secure venues, and recruit volunteers for the establishment of new playgroups.

"Sally now runs both playgroups in town (Tues and Thurs) and she makes every parent feel welcome and safe. She is easy-going, offers many different activities for the kids and parents, knows everyone's names, and just makes you feel like you belong and you've got a friend. She creates a very positive space."



Ipswich Hub Launch 2023

Supporting Young Mothers

Every Wednesday during school terms, Play Matters supports young student parents by hosting the Young Mums playgroup. This unique initiative operates within a flexible school environment catering to young individuals. Many of these mums, currently in Year 12, navigate intricate family dynamics involving parents, partners, and fathers of their children.

The Young Mums playgroup plays a vital role in helping these young parents shape their parenting identities and choices. It empowers them with mindfulness strategies to navigate their parental responsibilities. During this period, Play Matters successfully introduced two evidence-based programs:

- **Bringing Up Great Kids:** This innovative parenting program incorporates mindfulness techniques. The participants showed tangible growth in responding to their children's needs and became increasingly aware of the impact of their actions on their children's behavior. The program encourages them to cultivate a calm, consistent, and mindful parenting approach.
- **Crossroads:** Addressing Domestic and Family Violence (DFV), this program raises awareness about DFV, its impact on children, healthy relationship dynamics, safety planning, and avenues for seeking help. By educating young mothers about healthy relationships and recognising unhealthy patterns, this initiative aims to break the cycle of intergenerational DFV and empower them with skills for making positive relationship choices.

"I wish I had known about playgroup earlier. I'm so happy and grateful that this program is available in my community because it has given me and my son a safe, welcoming and fun place to come to."



Throughout the Crossroads program, the facilitator adeptly encouraged engagement by introducing self-care activities alongside discussions. This approach helped create a safe space for participants to share experiences and gain insights.

Undoubtedly, the journey wasn't without its challenges. Keeping the young mums engaged required innovative strategies. Moving forward, Play Matters aims to enhance interactivity and ensure a captivating delivery style, thus ensuring a more engaging experience for the participants.

As the Young Mums embark on the next phase of their lives post-high school, Play Matters plans to maintain a targeted approach for weekly sessions. These discussions will encompass subjects such as healthy relationships and life beyond school. Striking the balance between imparting essential life skills and keeping the sessions lively poses a continuous challenge, but it's a challenge that Play Matters is committed to conquering.

In the end, it's these small yet significant steps that can impact the lives of these young mothers, setting them on a path towards a brighter and empowered future.



Parenting Support



Play Matters Australia takes immense pride in delivering MyTime, an invaluable peer support program designed for parents and caregivers of children aged 0-18 years with disabilities or chronic illnesses.

MyTime thrives as a nurturing space for socialisation, discussion, information exchange, and unwavering support amongst fellow parents and family caregivers. Within these sessions, facilitators go the extra mile by inviting guest speakers who impart skills and knowledge, further empowering parents and caregivers on their unique parenting journeys.

The fiscal year of 2022-23 marked a significant stride as we introduced SCORE (Standard Client Outcomes Reporting) data as a tool to assess the program's efficacy in enhancing the lives of parents and caregivers. This measurement gauge offers insights into the specific domains of parents' lives that experience improvement due to their involvement in MyTime groups. Implemented upon a new member's entry to a group and again after six months, the tool presents a comprehensive view of the impact and benefits. Moreover, the subsequent survey, administered six months into the membership, provides a platform for members to express their satisfaction with their MyTime experience and facilitator support.

In the dynamic landscape of South East Queensland (SEQ), MyTime saw significant expansion with the addition of new groups in Redlands, Moorooka, Beaudesert, and Holland Park. The Moorooka group, led by the Queensland African Communities Council, stands out with its focus on refugees and multicultural communities, augmenting the range of services available to this diverse community.

The quantitative target for Play Matters in South East Queensland was 267 individuals. Remarkably, the 2022-23 financial year saw MyTime SEQ extend its reach to 311 individuals across 20 groups in the region. Notably, 7.3% of participants proudly identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, signifying the program's inclusive impact.

In the vibrant realm of North Queensland (NQLD), MyTime groups thrive in Cannonvale, Burdekin, Mossman, Cairns, and Townsville. With an initial goal of 71 individuals, MyTime NQLD achieved an impressive outreach to 136 individuals in the 2022-23 financial year. This achievement is further enriched by the fact that 9.5% of participants proudly represented First Nations peoples, underscoring the program's commitment to diversity and inclusivity.

"MyTime for parents with a child with a disability – awesome support group, great guest speakers, and friendships formed through coffee and a chat."



Transition to School

Play Matters delivers a range of programs dedicated to supporting children's transition into formal schooling. These services aim to support children's development across domains such as social, emotional, physical, communication and cognitive skills.

Step into Prep — Rockhampton Region

The Step into Prep program made a significant impact by conducting 178 sessions across seven large and seven small schools in the Rockhampton region, benefitting a total of 131 children. This dedicated, evidence-based playgroup initiative is specifically designed to aid children in transitioning smoothly into their prep year. In a region where many families may not have easy access to early years services, this program plays a crucial role in preparing children for the demands of school. Particularly for small schools in the Rockhampton area, where the school serves as a community hub, the program brings families together to collectively support their children's educational journey.

"Step into Prep at Waraburra State School was very beneficial for my child and I really don't think there was anything that could have been done better."



HIPPY

The Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) is a home-based parenting and early childhood enrichment program helping families in disadvantaged communities get ready for school. HIPPY is based on evidence that a child's earliest and most powerful learning comes from their family. The two-year program aims to use this research by encouraging parents to become more involved in their child's learning. Using structured materials and activities, home tutors support parents/carers to be their child's first teacher. Parents/carers are supported in both individual home visits and fortnightly parent groups. HIPPY is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services and subcontracted through The Brotherhood of St. Laurence. Play Matters is contracted to delivery HIPPY to Goodna and surrounding suburbs.

During the past year, the HIPPY team moved into the new Ipswich Hub at Redbank.

Engagement and retention of families has been good, despite challenges presented by the cost of living and housing crises.

"I'm part of the HIPPY program facilitated by the Play Matters staff. We are loving the program and get a lot out of the activities outlined. I'd love to know more theories associated with the program and child development - why did they choose this activity over others, what theorists are associated with this type of learning, etc."

Transition to School — Western Sydney Region

Transition to School (T2S) is an innovative, therapeutic program delivered in partnership with Mission Australia Communities for Children – Miller, Liverpool Hospital and Play Matters Australia. The T2S program was co-developed in 2019 by Registered Music Therapists from Play Matters' Sing&Grow team, and Speech Pathologists from Liverpool Hospital. The T2S program differs from other school readiness programs as children and parents attend together. During sessions, music, reading, and play are used to promote development of school readiness skills and promote positive wellbeing.

T2S assists a family's positive transition to school through four main elements:

- Nurturing core skills for social/emotional wellbeing and language/communication development.
- Building parental capacity to support core skill development in the home environment.
- Engaging families in a simulated school classroom environment.
- Providing access to additional targeted intensive support as required.

The co-location of T2S in local primary schools and the use of a simulated classroom layout provides exposure to and immersion in the school environment to build familiarity with and aid transition into this new context. The activities of the sessions follow a consistent structure that simulates a typical school routine. T2S is comprised of 16 sessions, which are delivered weekly over two school terms. T2S has two intakes per year in Term 1 and Term 3, through which up to 30 families are included in the program.



Sing&Grow Off to School — National

Focused on children aged 4-5, Sing&Grow Off to School (OTS) groups focus on children's emotional wellbeing, supporting children to understand their feelings, become aware of their peers and their needs, and develop coping strategies using music as the tool to teach and model these skills for lifelong learning. Each session includes instrumental play, songs, rhymes, and dancing. The OTS groups have expanded across Victoria over the 2022-23 financial year through the Victorian School Readiness Funding initiative (Victorian Department of Education). Ninety group programs were delivered to kindergartens across Victoria, as well as 58 professional development workshops for Early Childhood professionals.

"My child was very shy and attending playgroup as well as Step into Prep really helped her transition into school."



Member Story

Playgroup makes a Difference

First-time mum Jo, with her six-week-old baby, attended a baby playgroup session. Although Jo tried to hide her emotional distress, she was open about her questions during the session. Struggling with postnatal depression and anxiety, Jo's partner had returned to work, and her relationship with her own mother was strained. Limited external support added to her challenges. The playgroup facilitator, recognising her symptoms, encouraged Jo to persist in attending the playgroups.

The facilitator offered information about other baby playgroups available through Play Matters and provided unwavering reassurance to Jo about her parenting journey. Jo was referred to ForWhen, a mental health support program for new parents. The facilitator also introduced Jo to strategies from Abecedarian Approach Australia (3a) to enhance her attachment with her baby. Creating an environment for sharing stories and connecting with others, the facilitator empowered families attending the playgroup.

Through consistent attendance and the adoption of evidence-based 3a strategies, Jo's confidence grew, and her interactions with her baby improved. She tapped into the parental network, gaining insights from other parents and strengthening her confidence. Connecting with external services and seeking medical assistance for her postnatal anxiety showcased her determination to address her struggles.

Though Jo still faces occasional overwhelming moments of anxiety, she now possesses coping strategies and a supportive network to manage them effectively. Her ongoing participation in playgroup sessions has proved beneficial for her and her baby, offering a safe and supportive space to connect with other families and engage in meaningful play experiences.

Online Support

Play Matters Australia has developed online digital portals to support groups, organisations, and families. The portals include access to a suite of resources, training, and useful tools.

Families are able to access two digital portals with Play Stars and Play Hub memberships. All Play Matters Australia affiliated groups and organisations get access to their own digital portal that includes high-quality activities developed by our play experts, a play management tool, hundreds of resources, and digital support information.

Feedback on website use from the 2023 membership survey:

- A total of 737 members answered the question: 'Have you accessed the PMA website?'
- Of these, 286 (39%) responded no, and **451 (61%) responded yes.**
- **96% of members who have accessed the PMA website reported it was useful.**

"Always great resources available and easy to implement both at group and for parents to implement at home."

"I enjoy learning about different ways to support my children's learning and growth. I found the website a great resource for activities to try at home!"

"I love the facilitator portal and activity packs to plan my playgroup sessions each month."

Our online baby playgroups, run each week for families, provide accessible opportunities for play and connection where face-to-face programs are unavailable or difficult to attend. They are held in a secure and engaging virtual environment and are led by experienced play experts, who are passionate about nurturing young minds.

Sing&Grow Music Therapy

Play Matters is the home of Sing&Grow Australia. Sing&Grow is a national evidence-based music therapy program providing services for young children and their families.

Group programs focus on strengthening family relationships, building capacity in parents to support their children's development in the early years of life, and supporting children's development, including supporting their transition to school. Sing&Grow is delivered exclusively by Registered Music Therapists.

Across 2022-23, Sing&Grow has grown, with Play Matters expanding its team of Registered Music Therapists across the country. Though COVID-19 continues to impact communities across Australia, it has been heartening to return more fully to face-to-face services once more.

In 2022-23 we have delivered:

- 298 Group programs
- 237 Family workshops
- 69 Professional Developments workshops
- In excess of 63 home visits.

Across Australia, support and services were delivered to:

- 2329 families
- 2888 adults (parents/carers/other)
- 5334 children.

The Sing&Grow team has increasingly delivered home visiting services across 2022-23. This kind of service provision has been especially beneficial for families who are yet to develop the skills and/or confidence to attend group programs, or for families experiencing complex needs.

"Sing&Grow was the best program I've ever had to learn new skills to work on, and to see my kids' improvements."

Here is a home visit success story, as reflected by one of our partnering organisations:

"Throughout this reporting period, [the Sing&Grow Music Therapist] was working 1:1 with a parent and child, to support the child's speech delay. Throughout the course of the home visits, the child demonstrated an increase in both receptive and expressive language. This has given the parent confidence to enrol the child in a pre-kindy program, as they will be attending kindergarten next year. Through Sing&Grow, the child had chances to practice and develop their language skills, as well as other developmental areas, and the parent learnt skills to support their child, and gained the confidence to further support their development."

Family feedback about Sing&Grow:

"Absolutely wonderful program. I have seen my twins improve and enjoy each session. I cannot thank you enough for the valuable program and knowledge you impart each session. The program is highly valued, thank you. Amazing."

"Great experience. [The Sing&Grow Music Therapist] was amazing at delivering this fantastic music experience. Kids all interacted and followed instructions. I enjoyed it as much as the kids. I will take home things I have learnt from this experience and will do it at home."



Inclusion Support

Play Matters Inclusion Support breaks down the barriers to play, so all families can enjoy the benefits of playgroup together.

Our twin programs, PlayTogether (Redlands) and Active Inclusion (across all of Queensland, excluding the Redlands), form a resilient bridge, building the confidence of families with a child with a disability or developmental concern to participate fully in playgroup activities. We also upskill playgroups to be welcoming, inclusive and safe places for all families.

Our facilitated inclusive playgroups provide targeted support for families, and include Play and Learn Supported (PALS) and PlayConnect+. Additionally, we offer peer support to parents and caregivers of children with a disability through MyTime.

This year, the Inclusion Support Team has increased geographic reach, with dedicated Inclusion Support Officers now based in Brisbane, the Redlands, the Sunshine Coast, Rockhampton and Cairns. In addition, a number of PMA field staff layer Inclusion Support upon their existing roles in the community.

The Inclusion Support Team has added to the existing online resources for playgroup facilitators, including a series of videos focused on inclusive activities and practices, and printable visual tools that can be used to support alternative communication with children with a disability or developmental concern. We have ensured consideration of different needs at events, including the provision of low sensory areas and activities.

Targeted support was provided at the 2023 Cairns Messy May event, with families given the opportunity to use a 'Sensory Tool Kit' comprised of a bucket filled with resources designed to support the engagement of children who preferred to avoid directly touching the plethora of slime, goop and other substances.

In 2022-23, we have:

- provided individual inclusion support to 121 families with a person with a disability or developmental concern.

- delivered 10 PALS groups and 10 PlayConnect+ groups, and 22 MyTime groups.
- delivered five training events, including upskilling all PMA staff to understand Inclusion Support in November at the all of staff workshops.
- had 321 downloads of our Inclusive Play Kit Booklets.
- delivered six Sing&Grow sessions designed to upskill playgroups to use music together.

Inclusion 'Bonanza'

Following the Inclusion Support Team's upskilling of all PMA staff at the end of year workshop in November 2022, the team gathered in April 2023 to take part in the Inclusion Support 'Bonanza'. This training event saw all members of the Inclusion Support Team from around Queensland develop a deeper understanding of the needs of families with a child with a disability or developmental delay, and how we can support them to enjoy participating in playgroups and their local community. This training enabled our team to increase their capacity to work cohesively across the state. The team also learned how to utilise the newly purchased Play Kits, which have been sent out to each region. The Inclusion Support Team use the three suitcases full of resources for Sensory Play, Nature Play and Music Play to engage with families, and upskill playgroups to embed accessible activities in their sessions.



Member Story

Supportive Playgroups = Successful Volunteers

Sandy has been running a playgroup for four years. When she moved from the UK to Australia with her husband and two children, she felt the need for a sense of purpose and took on the responsibility of leading the playgroup. During this time, Lyn, a local parent, reached out to Sandy. Lyn was interested in attending the playgroup but had concerns about her high-energy son joining others. Feeling unsupported and in need of guidance, Lyn believed that the playgroup could be beneficial for both her and her son.

Sandy assured Lyn that the playgroup welcomed all families without judgement and aimed to provide support. Sandy's commitment to fostering a welcoming atmosphere was a cornerstone of the playgroup's ethos. Encouraged by Sandy's approach, Lyn began attending the playgroup regularly.

Lyn shares how her son's behavior underwent a noticeable positive change after attending the playgroup and interacting with his peers. The impact of the playgroup extended beyond her son; it also empowered Lyn to seek help and connect with others. Observing different parenting styles and approaches to handling challenges and emotions, Lyn gained valuable insights into child development and effective parenting strategies.

As Sandy decided to transition from her role at the playgroup, Lyn volunteered to step up. Inspired by the positive impact the playgroup had on her family and recognising its potential to help others facing similar situations, Lyn eagerly embraced the opportunity to continue making a difference in her community.

Brand and Experience

The Brand and Experience Team oversees PMA’s marketing, communications, content development, membership, technology, and event functions.

The Brand and Experience Team works in close collaboration with our dedicated staff, volunteers, and families to create a cohesive and enriching experience for all involved. By harnessing our collective efforts and expertise, the team strives to deliver the best possible outcomes in promoting the importance of play and fostering a thriving community of engaged members.

Marketing and Communications

Marketing and Communications have played a pivotal role in amplifying the impact of Play Matters Australia in the 2022-23 period. Our rebranded Play Matters Australia identity has been successfully promoted across diverse platforms and through strategic partnerships. We reached families directly by distributing 10,000 bounty bags containing PMA collateral.

The launch of our grant program garnered over 100 applications from playgroups and play experiences nationwide, underlining our commitment to supporting play initiatives. In addition to these achievements, we orchestrated three engaging special event campaigns, celebrating occasions such as Science Week, Christmas with our digital advent calendar, and Easter with our online Easter egg hunt, which captured the imagination of hundreds of families. Through digital publications and valuable partnerships, we championed the benefits of play and developed new online nurturing journeys and communications, optimising our processes for greater efficiency in delivering our mission.

“We love the events! They offer so many options for children of all diversity and skills. I love the inclusive atmosphere and making children and parents feel welcome.”





Content Development

At Play Matters, content development takes centre stage in our mission to provide valuable resources to families and communities. Over the 2022-23 period, our dedicated team spearheaded a multifaceted content strategy, yielding remarkable results. We produced over 60 professionally filmed activity videos, offering a wealth of interactive learning experiences for families. Our online presence flourished, with a staggering 7274 views on public Play Matters videos and the publication of 27 insightful blogs. Furthermore, we took pride in supporting university placement students in content development and writing, nurturing the next generation of storytellers. Our commitment to accessibility was exemplified through the introduction of new online portals for families, simplifying access to our resources. Finally, we continued to curate a robust library of over 100+ searchable activities aligned with the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and Australian Early Development Census (AEDC).

Technology

Play Matters Australia is committed to leveraging technology for efficiency and enhanced user experiences. In the 2022-23 period, we made significant strides in our tech infrastructure. Zero-touch enrolment and multi-factor authentication were implemented across all devices, prioritising security and ease of access. We rolled out two new online portals on our website, providing a seamless gateway to our resources for groups, organisations, and families. Additionally, a suite of new tools and features were developed for our attendance system, streamlining administrative processes. Collaborating with Dell in a non-profit partnership, we upgraded our devices, ensuring that our staff have access to reliable and up-to-date technology. The launch of a new digital ticketing system further streamlined communication between staff and members, facilitating requests and enquiries. Through these initiatives, we consolidated our digital systems and platforms, fortifying our technological foundation to better serve our community.

Membership

Play Matters Australia had over 13,000 active family memberships in the 2022-23 financial year. These memberships signify more than just a numerical value; they represent the trust and engagement that families place in Play Matters. By becoming members, families have demonstrated their eagerness to participate in a network that promotes holistic child development, early learning, and meaningful connections within the community. The substantial increase in active family memberships compared to previous years indicates the expanding reach and impact of PMA.

"Free membership has been the reason for attending initially. Please continue this!"

Media

There were 38 media stories highlighting various aspects of Play Matters' work in 2022-23. From the successful launch of the new PMA Ipswich Hub, to the coverage of our grants program that underlines our dedication to community support, each story has resonated with the essence of Play Matters. Additionally, the coverage of Messy Play Matters events has showcased the vibrancy of our engagement with children and families. The combined value of over \$36,200 in (Advertising Space Rate) ASR and an audience reach of over 427,100 signify that our messages are being heard, understood, and embraced by a wide spectrum of individuals, underscoring the positive impact we're making in nurturing connections and fostering growth within communities.

PMA partnered with Adoni Media to deliver training to our Senior Leadership Team and Regional Managers. This strategic initiative has ensured our staff are equipped with the skills and confidence to engage with the media, ensuring that our messages are articulated accurately and resonate effectively with our audience. By equipping our staff with the tools to navigate interviews, presentations, and media interactions, we are enhancing our ability to share our story with authenticity and impact.



As a snapshot

Total number of stories: **38**

Total ASR (value): in excess of: **\$36,200**

Total audience reach: in excess of **427,100**





Events

Play Matters Australia continued to ramp up our marquee events this year after successfully reintroducing Messy Play Matters in 2022. Following years of cancellations and interruptions due to COVID-19, our members and the wider community regained their appetite for face-to-face engagement and interaction via our events.

In October 2022, Play Matters Australia launched 'Imaginative Play Matters', encouraging affiliated groups to hold celebrations and invite members and local families to get imaginative, dress up and attend their play experience. In addition, Play Matters also hosted a series of signature events at our Hubs to celebrate Children's Week. Across October, we delivered five Imaginative Play events in the Redlands, Brisbane, Sunshine Coast and Cairns, attracting 900 attendees.

Messy Play Matters was celebrated again in 2023 and was an opportunity to return to our pre-COVID attendee numbers. Throughout May, we delivered seven Messy Play events from Ipswich and Redland Bayside up to Rockhampton, Mount Isa and Cairns. These events attracted over 4,500 attendees with the largest celebration taking place at the Brisbane Showgrounds with 1,500+ attendees.

In addition to our marquee events, we delivered a series of pop-up playgroups throughout the course of the year. Pop-up playgroups are an opportunity to take our play experiences out into the community and give local families a taste of what to expect at a Play Matters playgroup or event. They are a way of attracting new families to the organisation as well as assisting us to promote the importance of play.



"We love the events! They offer so many options for children of all diversity and skills. I love the inclusive atmosphere and making children and parents feel welcome."



What Our Members Said

The 2023 Membership Survey underwent a comprehensive redesign, resulting in a revitalised questionnaire that garnered an unprecedented response rate exceeding 700 members.

Harnessing the capabilities of our new IT systems, we effectively employed email and text message reminders to encourage active participation among our valued members. It brings us immense satisfaction to acknowledge the diverse representation of significant stakeholders within our survey respondents, reflecting our commitment to engaging a wide spectrum of perspectives.

- **7%** identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- **22%** spoke a language other than English at home.
- **8%** of parents/carers identified as having a disability or health issue.
- **9%** of children whose parents/carers completed the survey were identified as having a diagnosed health issue or disability.

Highlights include:

- **93%** of respondents confirmed they would recommend PMA to others.
- **84%** reported that attending playgroup benefitted them in their parenting role.
- **81%** reported that attending playgroup supported their child's development.

Examples of the extensive qualitative feedback received are provided below.

"My son and I have only just started to attend playgroup in the past three weeks, and we are absolutely loving it. I'm so surprised how well he's taken to playing independently and around other children and how confident he is in this new space in such a short amount of time."

"Playgroup has helped me by increasing my overall confidence and allowed me to have a social outlet. The team at Play Matters are so welcoming and professional, their service is invaluable and has made my first year of parenting so enjoyable."

"Playgroup has helped the wellbeing of our whole family, as well as giving us more ideas around play interactions with our baby. I sing to my baby a lot more, and enjoy playing with him. The baby's father had disengaged from the family due to depression but started re-engaging firstly by coming to playgroup. I think it is a safe space, non-threatening and supportive."

"Attending playgroup completely transformed my parenting experience with my first child from lonely and hopeless to enjoyable and fulfilling. There are many other activities designed to profit off lonely new mothers but playgroup is just there to support us and our children. Now with my second child, I have a village to rely upon which isn't available for most people and which makes parenting so much easier and more enjoyable. I cannot overstate how important playgroup has been to us."



Our People

Project Staff Making a Difference

Cathy Nielson – Quality and Innovation Lead

Cathy Nielson is a Registered Teacher and came to us from the Queensland University of Technology where she was the Manager of the Centre for Child and Family Studies and for the Rhythm and Movement for Self-Regulation program. Cathy is leading a range of quality initiatives that will ultimately result in our successful accreditation under the Human Services Quality Framework. Cathy is supporting research, evaluation, and innovation work across our programs, working alongside the leadership team and program managers.

Cynthia Hicban – Specialist Project Officer

Cynthia completed her PhD focusing on children's participation in early childhood settings. Cynthia's passion for children's rights brought her to PMA to lead a six-month project looking at ways to include children's diverse voices across the company which is in line with our strategic priority to embed stakeholder voices in program design, delivery and advocacy.

Nicole Ashley – Volunteer Strategy

Nicole spent almost twenty years working to support families across different programs in government, non-government and volunteer settings. Nicole is leading work on the development of an enterprise-wide volunteer strategy that will ultimately help us to recruit, retain, support, and build capacity in our wonderful volunteer workforce.

Career Development

New Graduate Program

In 2023, our Sing&Grow team initiated a New Graduate Program, bringing Graduate Clinical Specialists to the team across Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. This new program has provided our new graduates with opportunities such as interstate and remote delivery of Sing&Grow, support to submit conference papers, peer mentoring and in-depth clinical supervision support. This has assisted in providing a career pathway for newly Registered Music Therapists.



Staff Workshops and Training Day



34.7% staff growth

We now sit at 118 employees
(casual, part-time and full time)

Tenure

24 months + **62 people**
18-24 months **7 people**
12-18 months **13 people**
6-12 months **14 people**
0-6 months **46 people**



88% retention rate

Capability Framework

A Capability Framework was developed to define and organise the skills, knowledge and abilities required for every role at PMA. This piece of work has led to clarity around expectations, consistent and objective evaluation, and improved talent acquisition. The framework will influence the development of the performance development framework as well as assist in the identification of skills gaps which will guide training initiatives. Additionally, the Capability Framework will assist in providing a roadmap for employee professional development.

Human Resource Information System

PMA has transitioned to a more streamlined Human Resource Information System (HRIS). Employment Hero has been implemented as a technology solution to help us manage and automate various HR tasks and processes. The long-term benefits will be easier reporting and analytics, improved efficiency by removing the need for HR and finance staff involvement in routine tasks. Additionally, the system enables accurate and reliable data as it reduces manual data entry, reducing risk of human error.

Annual Engagement Survey Highlights

94.1%

of respondents believe that their work has a positive impact on people.

86.7%

of respondents said they have good relationships with their co-workers.

85.3%

of respondents said they feel personally supported by someone at work.

Operations and Quality

The 2022-23 period was a year of significant growth and change for PMA's operating model. A new distributed-site model was introduced and rolled out.

The model takes a place-based approach, ensuring staff supervision, service delivery quality and regional budgets are managed locally, rather than centrally from Head Office, with each of our Hubs at the centre of a designated region:

- Brisbane Hub
- Sunshine Coast Hub
- Ipswich Hub
- Redlands Hub
- Rockhampton Hub and Mount Isa Hub (Central Queensland region)
- Cairns Hub (Far North Queensland region)

We opened a new Ipswich Hub, fitting out a commercial space to our own design, providing an excellent example of purpose-designed co-located service delivery and office space.

Our Rockhampton team moved locations to a commercial space with enhanced accessibility for staff and families, and improved opportunities for service delivery expansion.

PMA commenced its self-assessment journey against the **Human Services Quality Framework**. These standards have been developed to ensure that human service organisations are operating at the highest standard of governance and management, responding with equity and excellence to the needs of members and the community, and upholding appropriate safety, wellbeing, and human rights for staff and members. PMA is not mandated by its funders to be accredited against the standards, however it is likely that we will be in the future. PMA's initiative in addressing the

standards when not mandated is a testament to our commitment to excellence in everything we do.

This year saw the careful review of a range of existing policies, and development of new policies to ensure compliance, excellence, and consistency in all aspects of the business. This policy refinement will continue into next year.

In 2022-23, two significant pieces of work were initiated to further elevate the quality of work at PMA:

- The **Volunteer Strategy** project has involved data collection from staff and volunteers to identify our gaps in relation to volunteer recruitment, support, and retention. A full Volunteer strategy and action plan, aligned with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement and National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033, will be released in late 2023.
- The **Child Voice Matters** project has been led by a specialist project officer and seeks to develop a strategy for PMA to enhance its practices aligned with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, and to elevate the voices of children in our planning and decisions across PMA.





Research

This year, PMA partnered with researchers from the University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology, Flinders University, Telethon Kids Institute, and others to deliver the Healthy Conversations @ Playgroup research project.

This project, funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council, included a randomised controlled trial of a program designed to help parents take effective steps to improve their child's dietary, physical activity, screen time, and sleep behaviours. The program comprised 10 "healthy conversations" led by a trained peer facilitator, designed to increase parents' capability and confidence in their own parenting practices.

This year PMA has also partnered with the team at the Queensland University of Technology to research PMA's Sing&Grow program. This research will specifically look at two components of Sing&Grow delivery – our services to kindergarten-aged children in Victoria, and our services to family groups who have experienced trauma. Data collection commenced in April 2023, with results expected to be disseminated in early 2024.

*"Absolutely love playgroup!
The connections I've made
with other parents has been
invaluable for my mental
health as a mother. We also
love having the playgroup
outdoors so we can get out.
Couldn't be more thankful for
having access to this for free!
Amazing!"*





Messy Play Matters Cairns - Welcome to Country

Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)

In 2022, Play Matters Australia release its inaugural Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), a significant stride towards fostering unity with Australia's First Nations Peoples.

The 'Reflect RAP' is grounded in three fundamental pillars – Relationships, Respect, and Opportunities – each bearing essential actions and achievements that organisations must pursue in their quest for reconciliation. We've drawn inspiration from Reconciliation Australia's guidance to formulate our Reflect RAP, aimed at cultivating an enhanced understanding of First Nations culture and heritage. This serves to empower both our dedicated staff and valued members to commemorate important milestones for First Nations Peoples while nurturing a deep-seated respect for their rich cultural heritage.

Although our RAP symbolises the initial phase of Play Matters Australia's ceaseless journey of learning, both for our organisation, personnel, and members, this year witnessed the inception of several small yet pivotal steps in the right direction. Noteworthy accomplishments include:

- Articulating our commitment to reconciliation with unwavering clarity to our staff, members, and external stakeholders.
- Facilitating an enlightening experience of 'Connecting the Dots through Culture' via Cultural Awareness training, a two-day immersive session led by esteemed facilitators Aunty Jackie Bennett, Cecelia See Kee, and Ranu James. Delving deep into the histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, this training significantly bolstered our Play Matters team's comprehension. It provided invaluable insights into the rich tapestry of First Nations Peoples' history, along

with the contemporary challenges they confront.

- Our CEO's participation in the opening breakfast of National Reconciliation Week at Brisbane's Parliament House.
- The inception of a cultural garden at our Sunshine Coast Hub, embodying the beginnings of a living tribute to our commitment.
- Active engagement at NAIDOC and Children's Day events across Rockhampton, Cairns, Brisbane, Mount Isa, Warwick, and Ipswich.
- Dissemination of crucial cultural dates to foster a deeper appreciation of First Nations celebrations and significant milestones.
- Empowering groups across diverse regions to cultivate an acknowledgement of the Traditional Custodians of the lands upon which they congregate.

These accomplishments underscore our resolute dedication to advancing the cause of reconciliation and serving as a meaningful ally to Australia's First Nations Peoples. As we move ahead, Play Matters Australia remains steadfast in its commitment to this ongoing odyssey of enlightenment and unity.





Member Story

Opportunities on the Coast

Nina embarked on her playgroup journey as a young mother attending with her newborn son. As they both grew and felt more prepared, they transitioned to a multi-aged playgroup at the same venue. It was during this time that Nina embraced a volunteer role, contributing to various events organised by Play Matters. Her involvement extended to facilitating playgroups within her community. At the outset, Nina grappled with insecurities and anxiety.

Over the years, Nina's confidence flourished through her volunteer experience. The Play Matters team took notice of her growth and encouraged her to consider applying for a paid position. Motivated by this support, Nina decided to apply and succeeded in securing a role. Presently, Nina serves as a Play Matters Baby Playgroup Facilitator.

The journey of volunteering at the playgroup has been instrumental in shaping Nina's self-assurance. Her involvement in different volunteer capacities equipped her with valuable skills, enabling her to transition back into the workforce after becoming a mother. Attending playgroup not only nurtured Nina as a parent but also paved the way for her evolution from a volunteer to a paid employee, illustrating the transformative impact of this experience.

Acknowledgement and Thanks

Play Matters Australia acknowledges and sincerely thanks our funders, partners, sponsors, supporters, and research and evaluation collaborators that have enabled us to deliver programs and services across Australia. It is through this purposeful collaboration that we have been able to positively impact the lives of our families.

Funders

- Australian Government Department of Social Services
- Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Queensland Government Department of Education
- Sunshine Coast Council
- Cairns Regional Council
- Barnardos
- Mission Australia
- Westpac
- The Smith Family
- AnglicareSA
- Anglicare Victoria
- Autism Queensland
- Playgroup Australia

Community Services Program Partners

- Anglicare North Queensland Limited
- Anglicare SA
- Anglicare VIC
- Autism Queensland
- Barnardos Australia – Shellharbour
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- BUSHKids
- Catholic Healthcare
- Centacare North Queensland
- Kath Dickson Family Day Care
- Mercy Community
- Mission Australia Inala/Ipswich
- Mission Australia Miller
- Mission Australia South Cairns and Yarrabah
- Parenting Research Centre
- Playgroup Australia
- The Smith Family Mirrabooka
- The Smith Family Rockhampton
- Westpac

Supporters

- Queensland Government – Gambling Community Benefit Fund
- Bendigo Bank
- BHP
- Buderim Foundation
- Community Bank Buderim (Bendigo Bank)
- Dan Smith, The Agency
- Livingston Regional Council
- The Branding Business
- Nature Play QLD
- Panda
- Parentline
- Sunshine Coast Regional Council
- TAFE Queensland

Sponsors

- Crayola
- Goodstart Early Learning
- Lego
- Sea Life Sunshine Coast
- MamaMag
- EducationAll

Research and Evaluation Collaborators

- Children's Health Queensland
- Griffith University
- International Child Development Initiative
- Nutrition Australia Qld
- Queensland University of Technology (QUT)



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playmatters.org.au

1800 00 PLAY
86 Orchid Street, Enoggera, QLD, 4051
ABN: 80 180 917 496

