

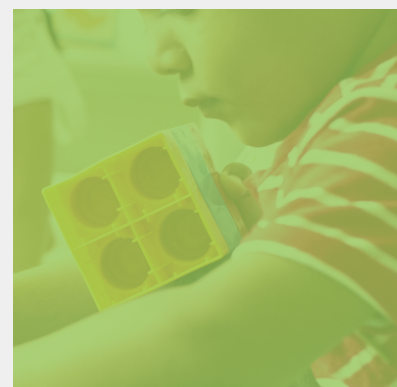
Hume City Council



Strengthening Playgroups in Community Hubs



Part A: Our Theory of Change



Hume City Council Strengthening Playgroups in Community Hubs: Our Theory of Change

Version 0.4

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How to read this report

This report is divided into the following sections:

Our Background

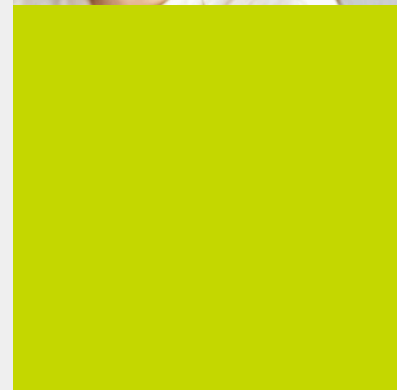
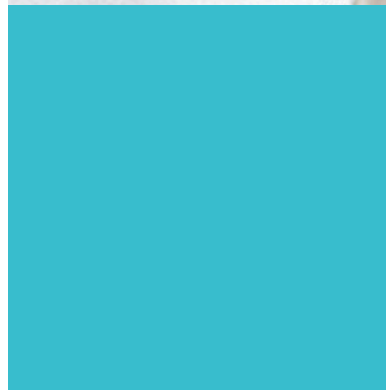
- Children and families in Hume City Council
- The National Community Hubs Programs
- Our supported playgroups in Community Hubs
- About the *Strengthening Playgroups in Community Hubs* project
- About this report

Our Theory of Change

- How we framed our Theory Of Change
- Our approach to co-designing the Theory of Change
- Our findings of how the Hume Playgroup Model works

Our Logic Model

- A visual and operational interpretation of our Theory of Change detailing inputs, activities and short term and long term outcomes.



1. Our Background

This section of the report provides contextual information regarding the purpose of the *Strengthening Playgroups in Community Hubs* project in Hume City Council. It includes information regarding children and families in Hume, the Community Hubs model, the need for playgroups in Hume, and an overview of the Strengthening Playgroups in Community Hubs project.



1.1. Children and Families in Hume City Council

Hume City Council is a diverse and growing local government area (LGA) located in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria. Home to over 250,000 residents, Hume is one of the fastest-growing regions in the state, with a population that is richly multicultural (idcommunity, 2024). Nearly 40% of residents were born overseas, and more than 50% speak a language other than English at home (id, 2024). This diversity is both a strength and a challenge, particularly for the many refugee and migrant families working to build a secure future for their children.

Families from migrant and refugee backgrounds often face systemic barriers that hinder their children's access to a safe, healthy, and supportive start in life. Challenges such as navigating past trauma (Fazel et al., 2012), learning a new language (McLean, Edwards & Mantilla, 2020), adapting to unfamiliar educational systems (Commerford & Robinson, 2017), and overcoming social isolation (McLean et al., 2022; Warr et al., 2013) can significantly impact children's school readiness and development (Harrison et al., 2014). Evidence from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) shows that children with language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) experience greater developmental vulnerability in one or more AEDC domains, compared to children from English-only backgrounds (25.3% compared with 20.8%) (AEDC National Report, 2021). For instance, children with a LBOTE are 2.3 times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable in the 'communication skills and general knowledge' domain than children with an English only background (14.3% compared with 6.2% respectively).

While overall participation in early childhood education the year before school is high in Victoria (93.4%), children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds have consistently been found to have lower engagement with early childhood services compared to their non-CALD peers (ECCV, 2019). This includes lower attendance at kindergartens, playgroups, long day care, and maternal and child health services. In Hume, there has been a sharp decline in kindergarten enrolment of children from non-English speaking backgrounds (DE, 2024). Research also shows that suburbs with lower early childhood participation often overlap with areas of higher cultural diversity and lower socio-economic status (Harrison et al., 2017; Mitchell & Meagher-Lundberg, 2017; House, 2016). These trends suggest structural barriers that disproportionately affect families from CALD backgrounds and reinforce the need for targeted, culturally responsive interventions to support early childhood engagement during settlement.

1.2. The National Community Hubs Program

The National Community Hubs Program (NCHP) was launched by Community Hubs Australia (CHA) in 2013 to support newly arrived migrant and refugee families by improving access to education, health, and social services, as well as opportunities for economic participation. At its core, the NCHP is a place-based, person-centred initiative that connects families with schools, community services, and settlement support. Community Hubs are co-located in primary schools, providing a welcoming space where families can build social connections, access essential services, and strengthen their sense of belonging (Wong, Press & Cumming, 2015). Community Hubs serve as gateways to services, information, and learning opportunities, enabling migrant and refugee families to strengthen their connections with the local community (*Ibid*).

The NCHP works across the following four key pillars:

- **Engagement:** Engage and connect families in culturally diverse communities
- **Early Years:** Connect preschool children into playgroups and prepare them for school
- **English:** Provide opportunities to learn and practice English
- **Vocational pathways:** Build pathways to volunteering and employment (Community Hubs Australia, n.d.)

This program was first initiated and trialled by Hume City Council in 2011. An independent evaluation found that the NCHP was making substantial progress towards the program's intended outcomes (Wong et al., 2015). These include:



Migrant children enjoy and succeed in school and achieve optimal health, development and wellbeing.



Migrant families function well, have the capacity, confidence and skills to nurture child learning and are connected, active participants in the community and workforce.



Schools respond to the needs of migrant children and families.



Community services respond early and effectively to migrant child and family needs.

As of 2025, more than 100 Community Hubs are embedded in government and Catholic primary schools, as well as community centres, across 24 local government areas in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, and Queensland. By 2024, Community Hubs had supported 13,790 families (Community Hubs Australia, n.d).

Designed to foster social inclusion and cohesion, the NCHP relies on the strong collaboration between Hub Support Coordinators, Hub Leaders, and school leadership. As a leader in innovative Community Hubs, Hume City Council oversees and supports a cluster of 15 hubs within the region. Hume City Council directly funds 7 playgroups operating within these hubs through Communities for Children funding.

1.3. Our Supported Playgroups in Community Hubs

As one of the four key pillars of the NCHP, early childhood programming plays a crucial role in supporting young children's development before they enter school. Playgroups are a key component of these early years programs, offering children aged 0-5 years opportunities for structured and supported play-based learning. Playgroups in Australia have a rich history dating back to the 1970s, when they first emerged as informal gatherings for parents and young children to play and socialise (McLean et al., 2022). Over time, they evolved into two distinct models: community playgroups and supported playgroups (*ibid*).



Community playgroups are typically run by parents or caregivers themselves, fostering peer-led interactions where families gather in a local setting to participate in unstructured play.



Supported playgroups are often facilitated by trained professionals targeting families facing specific challenges, such as those from low-income backgrounds or with complex needs. These playgroups provide additional resources, guidance, and support, helping to ensure that all children and families can benefit from the enriching experience of play.

Each of these models addresses different community needs and circumstances, ensuring that families across Australia have access to supportive and enriching early childhood experiences.

1.3.1. The expected benefits of supported playgroups

In 2023, Deloitte Access Economics conducted a comprehensive social return on investment (SROI) evaluation of the NCHP. It found that 85.3% of Community Hub census respondents with children aged five years or younger reported bringing their children to the hub, demonstrating the central role hubs play in early childhood engagement. The evaluation estimated that approximately 4,000 children accessed playgroups for the first time through a connection with a community hub (Deloitte Access Economics, 2024). These playgroups provide a critical entry point into early learning, particularly for migrant and refugee families, fostering children's cognitive, social, and emotional development while supporting their transition to formal education (McLean et al, 2022).

As part of the NCHP, supported playgroups offer structured play-based learning that helps children build social skills (Moore, 2024), emotional regulation (McLean, Edwards, & Mantilla, 2020), and resilience (PEDAL, 2023) — key skills for school readiness. By familiarising children with school environments, routines, and peers, playgroups help smooth their transition into the education system (Edwards et al., 2022). The long-term benefits of early years programming within Community Hubs are significant. In 2023, the program's contribution to improving early childhood outcomes for children participating in hubs was valued at \$6.5 million, including an estimated \$0.8 million in cost savings from reduced need for in-school support for children with developmental delays (Deloitte Access Economics, 2024).

For families, supported playgroups provide more than just early learning opportunities — they also foster social connections, parenting confidence, and access to essential services. Parents can build peer networks, practice English, and receive practical strategies to support their children's development (Commerford & Robinson, 2017; McLean et al., 2022). Playgroups act as soft entry points to maternal and child health services, kindergarten programs, and other community supports (McLean et al., 2022). By reducing social isolation and increasing access to resources, supported playgroups empower families to navigate the early years system with greater confidence (Harrison et al., 2014; Moore, 2024).

Despite these benefits, barriers to access and participation persist. These include limited awareness of playgroups, cultural gender norms that restrict some parents' involvement, and transport challenges, particularly in outer urban growth corridors (VICSEG, 2014). The 2024 AIFS practice guide also highlights delivery-side challenges, including inconsistent funding, limited facilitator training, and high staff turnover, which can affect playgroup continuity and quality. Facilitators often require more professional learning, stronger local partnerships, and tailored tools to support inclusive, developmentally appropriate sessions. Addressing both family-facing and delivery barriers is essential to ensuring that all families — regardless of background or circumstance — can meaningfully participate in and benefit from supported playgroups.

1.4. Our Strengthening Playgroups in Community Hubs project

To continue to support playgroup facilitator capacity building, Hume City Council has engaged the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) to lead the Strengthening Playgroups in Community Hubs project. The purpose of the project is threefold:

1. To strengthen access to high-quality, evidence-based early childhood and facilitation resources that build the capability and confidence of playgroup facilitators in Community Hubs.
2. To articulate and share Hume's playgroup model—as a scalable approach that strengthens community connection and creates vocational pathways for playgroup families.
3. To improve outcomes for children and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds through a better-supported, better connected, more consistent and professionalised playgroup workforce in Community Hubs.

1.4.1. Our approach

Hume City Council and CCCH's approach to meeting the objectives of the *Strengthening Playgroups in Community Hubs* project is five-fold and will be phased over two years:

Year 1

1. Support the development and articulation of the playgroup model through the creation of a Theory of Change.
2. Identify the gaps and needs in the existing resources and supports available to enable implementation of the playgroup model.
3. Develop required supports to address these gaps and needs.

Year 2

4. Test these supports in the Hume pilot site and in other sites across Australia.
5. Determine how these supports can be best scaled across the Community Hubs Australia network.

1.4.2. Our Research Questions

Our research support is guided by five research questions:

1. **How is the model anticipated to work?**
2. What are the support gaps/needs to be able to implement the model?
3. What supports would address these gaps/needs?
4. How do these supports enable implementation of the model?
5. How could these supports be scaled to other sites?

1.5. About this report

This is Part A: Our Theory of Change. It addresses research question 1, focusing on the articulation of the Hume Playgroup Model through the creation of a Theory of Change.

- **Part B: Our Research** will address questions 2 and 3.
- **Part C: Final Report** will address questions 4 and 5.

In this report, **the playgroup model of focus is on the supported playgroups that do not rely on an external provider or external facilitator across the 15 Hub sites.** The supported playgroup in Hume Community Hub sites will be referred to as the **Hume Playgroup Model** throughout this document.

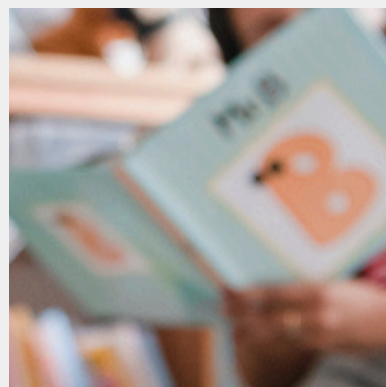


2. Our Theory of Change

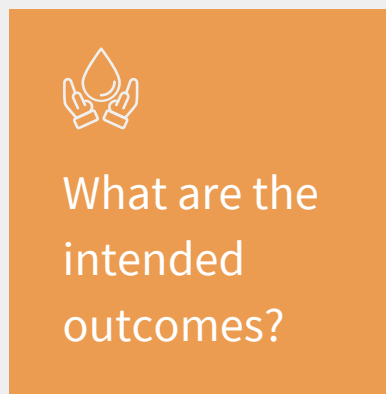
A Theory of Change is a description of how a program works, including the people involved, the activities undertaken, the expected outcomes, and an explanation of how these outcomes happen. A Theory of Change supports the planning, implementation, and evaluation of initiatives. It enhances clarity, strategic focus, partner engagement, accountability, and learning — critical elements for achieving meaningful and sustainable change. This section of the report presents a narrative Theory of Change, grounded in evidence-based literature.



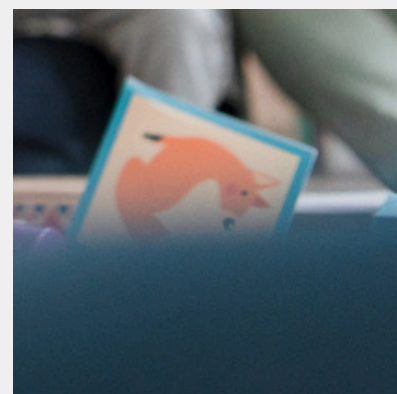
How does the model work?



Who is the model for?



What are the intended outcomes?



2.1. How we framed our Theory of Change

In 2019, CHA engaged Deloitte Access Economics to conduct a comprehensive Social Return on Investment (SROI) evaluation of the NCHP, which was later updated in 2021. This update provided a detailed logic framework outlining the overarching goal of the NCHP, the objectives of its four program pillars, and the broader impacts these pillars collectively contribute to. See Appendix A for the full NCHP logic model.

As we develop the Theory of Change for the *Strengthening Playgroups in Community Hubs* project, we have carefully considered how it aligns with and expands upon the Early Years pillar within the existing framework. Our Theory of Change builds on the foundational principles of the NCHP while offering a more focused perspective on the unique role of Hume’s playgroups model as a key activity that supports CHA’s broader Early Years pillar objectives and outcomes (see Figure 1).

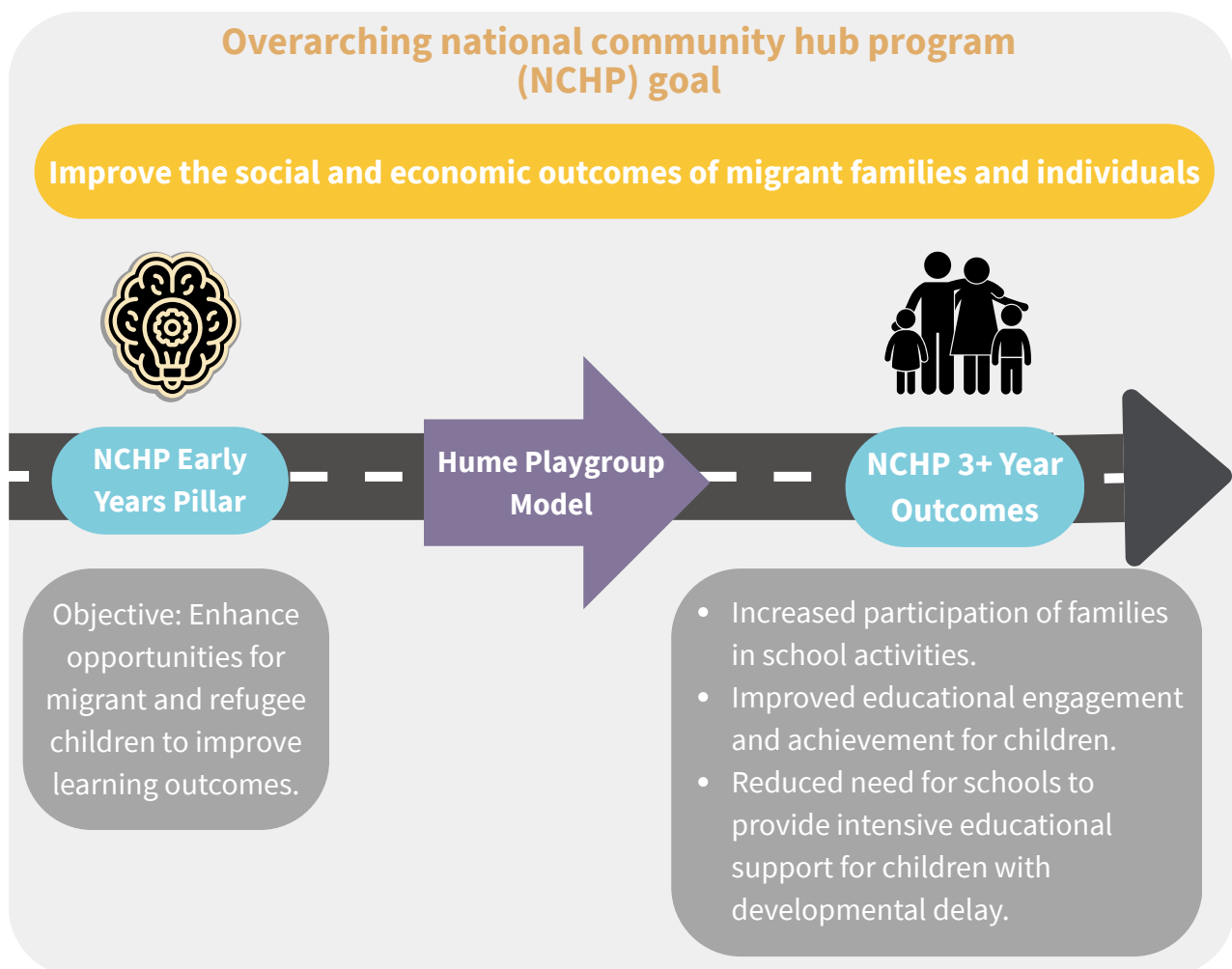


Figure 1. Alignment of the Hume Playgroup Model with the Early Childhood Years Pillar of the NCHP Framework

By positioning Hume’s Theory of Change within this established framework, we aim to highlight the critical role of playgroups - particularly Hume’s unique playgroup model - fosters these early childhood outcomes and enhances CHA’s long-term goal of improving social and economic opportunities for migrant and refugee families.

2.2. Our Approach to co-designing the Theory of Change

Our approach to developing the Theory of Change (ToC) was a multi-stage, collaborative process. The *Strengthening Playgroups in Community Hubs* project is guided by a Reference Group made up of diverse community partners. This group plays a critical role in ensuring accountability, providing insights, and helping to shape the direction of our project.

The Reference Group has been instrumental in refining our approach, offering feedback, and ensuring that the ToC aligns with the needs and strengths of the communities it serves. Figure 2 below outlines the key stages of our process.

1. DEVELOPMENT OF A REFERENCE GROUP

The project developed a Reference Group. Members were selected based on their capacity to actively contribute to articulating the Hume Playgroup Model. Refer to Appendix B for group member details.

4. SENSE CHECKING THE THEORY OF CHANGE

An online meeting was held on August 1st with the project's Reference Group to validate and refine the draft ToC developed in Step 3.

2. BRIEFING AND THEORY OF CHANGE WORKSHOP

A 1-hour online briefing session was conducted on May 31st to introduce the project and the purpose of the Reference Group. This was followed by a 2-hour in-person ToC workshop with the reference group at Roxburgh Park Primary School on June 6th 2024.

3. REFINING THE THEORY OF CHANGE

CCCH combined data from the ToC workshop with findings from a literature scan conducted by its early years experts to develop a draft ToC. The literature scan included topics on playgroup models, engagement of refugee and migrant families, social and economic benefits of playgroups, and culturally responsive early childhood programs drawing from peer reviewed reports, evaluations, and grey literature.



Figure 2. Our approach to co-designing our Theory of Change



2.2. Our findings of how the Hume Playgroup Model works

2.2.1. Who is the Hume Playgroup Model for?

The Hume Playgroup Model targets families from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their children aged 0-5 years. While fathers and intergenerational carers are welcomed and present in many of the playgroups, there is a stronger focus on mother and child to promote cultural safety.

2.2.2. Who are the key players of the Hume Playgroup Model?

Across all Community Hubs Australia (CHA) sites, two core roles consistently oversee hub activities:

1. **Hub Support Coordinator** – provides regional oversight, coordination, and strategic support across multiple hubs.
2. **Hub Leader** – embedded within each school, responsible for managing day-to-day hub activities and connecting families to services.

The Hume Playgroup Model has two additional roles that uniquely strengthen playgroup delivery:

- **Community-Based Facilitator:** Unlike many other sites, Hume facilitators are often recruited directly from within the school or local playgroup community. This fosters strong relationships, cultural alignment, and continuity.
- **Hume Qualitative and Inclusive Project Officer (FTE 0.6):** A Communities for Children (CfC) funded role through Uniting Vic. Tas focused on developing, curating, and sharing supported playgroup resources and training tailored to the needs of the playgroup facilitators.



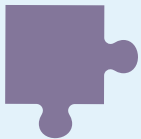
2.2.3. What are the activities of the Hume Playgroup Model?

There are seven key activities of the Hume Playgroup Model that function as unique features of the model. These seven activities can be divided into three components:

Direct Engagement with families



- Playgroup Planning & Family Engagement
- Playgroup session delivery
- Family Support & Service Connections



Pathways to Education and Employment

- Recruiting and training Parent Facilitators and volunteers

Systemic support for playgroups



- Content Development & Resource Support
- Facilitating Peer Learning & Capacity Building
- Aligning formal education with early learning



1. Direct Engagement with Families

Playgroup planning and family engagement

- During playgroup registration, Hume facilitators survey and understand the needs of the newly engaged families. This informs playgroup groupings. For instance, some groups may be child age bracket specific or some families with children who have special needs may benefit from being placed in smaller groups.
- Session planning in Hume is conducted on a term basis and aims to capture the different needs of the playgroup.
- Hume facilitators determine weekly playgroup goals drawing on a calendar of events for inspiration (e.g., Reconciliation Week, Mother's Day, holidays).
- Hume facilitators text families on WhatsApp groups to remind them of the upcoming playgroup sessions, to inform them of kindergarten registration, to share local activities that are happening outside of playgroup. Families are encouraged to use the WhatsApp group to share information with each other.

Playgroup session delivery

- Hume facilitators and Hub Leaders are responsible for setting up the playgroup and for welcoming families as they enter the Hub.
- Hume facilitators share playgroup protocols with participants to ensure maximum participation. This includes no use of mobile phones in sessions and expectations that participants will help and assist the facilitator.
- Facilitators run structured, two-hour sessions incorporating routines, indoor and outdoor play, and opportunities for learnings (See Appendix C for a typical session plan).
- Playgroup spaces in Hume are set up to elicit imaginative play and creative use of the play resources.
- Playgroup sessions may include incursions from MCH nurses or the library, and excursions to parks and city farms.
- Playgroups include access to books, arts and crafts and other play based resources.
- Families are encouraged to assist in cleaning up the playgroup space.

Family support and service connections

- Through ongoing engagement and building relationships with playgroup families, Hume facilitators observe and become aware of their families' additional needs.
- Facilitators work with their Hub Leader to refer families to other services co-located at the Hub. These hubs offer resources such as English classes, early years language and literacy programs, computer training, certification courses, and support for the Australian citizenship test.
- Identified through ongoing engagement with families, Hub leaders and/or facilitators in Hume may provide "soft referrals" to families requiring settlement and other family and community support beyond the Hub.

2. Pathways to Education and Employment

Recruiting and Training Parent Facilitators and Volunteers

- Parents from the playgroup and/or school community in Hume are recruited and trained to become Hub volunteers.
- Parents from the playgroup and/or school community in Hume are encouraged and supported to become a playgroup facilitator, embedding lived experience into playgroup leadership. This process includes mentorship from the Hub Leader, skill-building, and formal training in Certificate III in Early Years Education and Care.
- Parents from the playgroup and/or school community in Hume are encouraged and supported by facilitators and/or Hub Leaders to transition from volunteers to paid positions within and beyond the Hub.

Case Study: From Parent to Facilitator – A Pathway of Empowerment and Inclusion in Hume

Background

In 2017, Mira* - a newly arrived parent from a migrant background - joined a playgroup at a Community Hub in Hume with her three-year-old son. She had just arrived in Australia — facing a new language, new systems, unfamiliar weather, and no social or family support. Her first connection to community life came through her child's school, where the Principal introduced her to the local Community Hub and its programs.

Initial Engagement

As a parent attending the playgroup, she found support, social connection, and a safe, welcoming environment. The playgroup not only helped her children settle but also became a space where she began building confidence and new relationships.

Stepping Into Leadership

Encouraged by staff and supported by her husband and the school, she began volunteering at the Hub — first with the playgroup, then helping with the breakfast club. This early involvement provided a foundation of experience and nurtured her confidence in working with children and families.

Skills and Study

Motivated by her growing interest and confidence, she enrolled in a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care during COVID in 2020. She is now completing a Diploma, building on her skills and formal qualifications.

Current Role

Since 2021, she has been a paid playgroup facilitator. With one child now in grade 6 and another at university, she saw this role as a meaningful way to contribute to her community.

“I didn't want to stay at home [...] —I wanted to do something.”



3. Systemic Support for Playgroups

Content Development & Resource Support

- Hume’s Qualitative and Inclusive Project Officer (PO) facilitates a Community of Practice via WhatsApp and is responsible for developing and sharing resources, supporting session plans, and providing best-practice tips with facilitators across all 15 Hub playgroups in Hume.
- Hume’s Qualitative and Inclusive Project Officer (PO) interacts with external supported playgroups hosted at the Hubs, as needed.

Facilitating Peer Learning & Capacity Building

- Hume’s Qualitative and Inclusive Project Officer conducts at least one Hub playgroup visit per term.
- Hume’s Qualitative and Inclusive Project Officer coordinates training for all playgroup facilitators in person at a Hub location once every term. This training is either facilitated by the PO or through an external provider. Topics have included neurodiversity in children, speech and language delay, First Nations activity content.
- Playgroup facilitators are encouraged to share their experiences facilitating playgroups, engaging in new content and engaging families so they can reflect on their practice and learn from each other.
- Hume’s Qualitative and Inclusive Project Officer facilitates an ‘Exchange’ program whereby newer facilitators can shadow more experienced facilitators at different Hub locations.

Aligning formal education with early learning

- Formal education leadership in primary schools in Hume provide extra support to playgroups through funding, play-based resources and training opportunities to ensure alignment with formal education.



2.2.4. What are the underpinning frameworks of the Hume Playgroup Model?

The following Hume City Council frameworks underpin the playgroup activities by providing guiding principles that align with the program's goals. These are detailed in Figure 3 below.

0-24 Framework

Ensuring a continuum of care and support, helping children to thrive from early childhood through to young adulthood

Multicultural framework

Ensuring that diverse cultural backgrounds of residents are acknowledged, respected, feel welcomed and are celebrated

Reconciliation Action Plan

Incorporating First Nations perspectives and practices that celebrate First Nations culture, educate families and foster respectful relationships

Social Justice Charter

Fairness, equity and inclusion for all residents and addressing social inequalities through providing equitable access to services

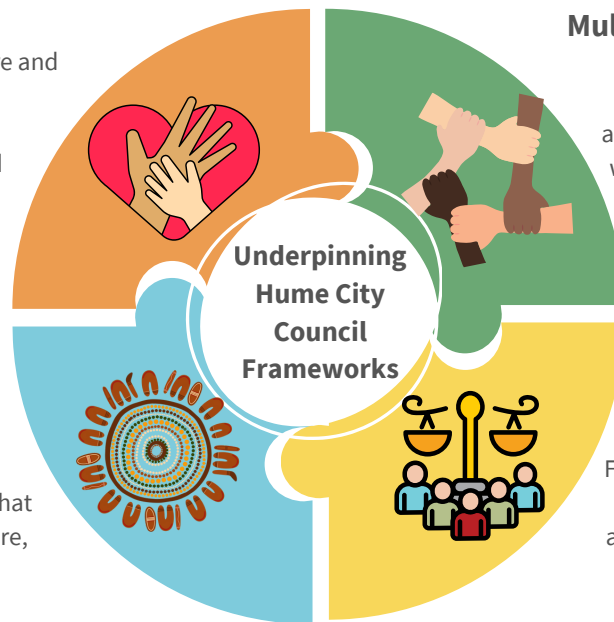


Figure 3. Hume City Council's underpinning frameworks



2.2.5. How does the Hume Playgroup Model work?

Mechanisms in a Theory of Change are the processes or pathways that explain how and why an intervention produces specific outcomes. They are the "active ingredients" that connects what the program does (activities) with what it seeks to achieve (outcomes). Mechanisms are evidenced based and often reflect the psychological, social, or behavioral processes that drive change. The following mechanisms have been identified by Hume's ToC workshop participants as critical in the Hume Playgroup Model. These mechanisms - unique to the Hume Playgroup Model - are underpinned by evidence from the broader early childhood literature.

Hume hub playgroups are accessible, inclusive and culturally safe spaces



- Playgroups are hosted in welcoming Community Hubs co-located within schools, encouraging family participation, fostering curriculum alignment, and supporting local partnerships and referrals to settlement services (VICSEG, 2014).
- The model prioritises engaging mothers and their children, addressing gender barriers and ensuring culturally safe environments for participation (VICSEG, 2014).

Hume hub playgroups have skilled and compassionate facilitators



- Facilitators are often recruited from within the playgroup community, bringing warmth, compassion, and responsiveness that drive positive outcomes (Edwards et al., 2022; McLean et al., 2022).
- Their ability to engage parents and share child development knowledge naturally, rather than through formal instruction, fosters meaningful learning experiences (Commerford & Robinson, 2016).
- Familiarity with the local community and cultural groups is key to building trust, connecting families, and encouraging participation (Gray, 2015; Warr et al, 2013).
- For children who have experienced trauma, facilitation by warm, sensitive, and attuned adults supports healing and fosters emotional well-being (PEDAL, 2023).

Hume hub playgroups offer flexible and needs-based activities



- Recognising that play is limited when children's basic needs are unmet, playgroups prioritise flexibility to address individual family circumstances (PEDAL, 2013).
- Data gathered from surveys helps facilitators understand the external supports families may require, leading to higher participation rates and better outcomes related to attendance (Berthelsen et al., 2012; VICSEG, 2014).
- Flexibility in delivery allows facilitators to adapt sessions in real-time, identify emerging needs, and connect families to appropriate support services (Hynie, 2018).

**Hume hub
playgroups
engage in
routines and
instruction-
following**



- Playgroup activities are structured to include routines that support children’s self-regulation and school readiness (Edwards et al., 2022; McLean et al., 2022).
- Facilitators address cultural differences in how play is valued and practiced by sharing playgroup protocols with families, such as limiting mobile phone use to encourage active engagement (Commerford & Hunter., 2017).
- For families who have experienced migration, these structured routines foster connections with supportive adults and provide a safe, predictable environment, aiding children’s recovery from trauma and distress (PEDAL, 2013).

**Hume hub
playgroups are
centred on
play-based
learning**



- Play is a fundamental right (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) and a vital part of childhood, reflecting the well-being of thriving citizens and communities (PEDAL, 2013).
- Play-based learning promotes children’s cognitive and social development, with regular, structured play sessions building essential social, emotional, and cognitive skills (Harris, 2023; McLean et al., 2022).
- Playgroups directly address core needs such as peer interaction, physical exploration, and exposure to positive learning environments, enhancing socio-emotional, developmental, and educational outcomes (Moore, 2024; Commerford & Robinson, 2017).
- For families impacted by migration-related trauma, well-facilitated playgroups provide safe spaces, engaging play materials, and comforting routines, creating a secure environment that fosters recovery and resilience (Jackson, 2006; PEDAL, 2013).

**Hume hub
playgroups
model positive
relationships**



- Playgroup activities provide parents with opportunities to observe and adopt effective parenting strategies, enhancing their confidence and skills (Edwards et al., 2022; McLean et al., 2022).
- Sensitive and responsive caregiving, modeled through playgroup interactions, fosters secure parent-child relationships and is strongly linked to positive developmental outcomes (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016).
- By facilitating positive interactions among parents, facilitators, and children, playgroups nurture secure attachments and support children’s social and emotional development (Moore, 2024).
- Positive reinforcement within the playgroup setting builds confidence in both parents and children, encouraging ongoing participation, learning, and growth (Commerford & Robinson, 2017).

**Hume hub
playgroups
facilitate
empowerment
through peer-
led facilitation**



- Peer-led facilitation empowers community members to take active roles as facilitators, fostering leadership and capacity-building within refugee and migrant communities (Edwards et al., 2022).
- By involving parents as facilitators, playgroups promote relational support and mutual learning, where facilitators and participants collaboratively co-construct knowledge and parenting practices (Jackson, 2009).
- Peer-led facilitation creates safe, non-judgmental spaces where participants feel supported and valued. Facilitators model positive behaviors, encourage strength-based parenting, and respect diverse cultural approaches (Jackson, 2009; Prichard, 2018).
- Shared cultural and lived experiences between facilitators and participants build trust and engagement, bridging gaps in understanding while addressing systemic barriers to participation (Jackson, 2009; Prichard, 2018).
- Community leadership embedded within the model strengthens social bonds and helps families transition into broader social and educational systems more seamlessly, demonstrating the power of community-led interventions (Jackson, 2009; Prichard, 2018).

**Hume hub
playgroups
adopt trauma
informed
practices**



- Playgroups are specifically designed to address the diverse and complex needs of families from refugee and migrant backgrounds, acknowledging the impact of pre-migration trauma and loss alongside settlement challenges in a new country (Jackson, 2006).
- Services are tailored to meet these unique needs, ensuring support is both effective and culturally relevant (Hynie, 2018; The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2021).
- Grounded in attachment theory, the model operates on the principle that trauma-informed interventions that holistically address physical, social, and emotional challenges are more likely to improve child developmental outcomes (Moore, 2024).
- Trauma-informed, culturally responsive practices help minimise the risk of secondary trauma while alleviating feelings of isolation and distress commonly experienced by newly arrived families (Fazel et al., 2002; Jackson, 2006).
- By creating an enabling environment that supports parent-child attachment, these playgroups promote positive outcomes for individual families and strengthen the broader community (Moore, 2024).

**Hume hub
playgroups
provide a space
to support
English language
acquisition**



- Playgroups provide a supportive environment for non-English speaking families to practice English at their own pace, aiding language acquisition and integration (VICSEG, 2014).
- Facilitators model English in a non-threatening way while encouraging families to communicate in their preferred language, promoting gradual and confident language learning (VICSEG, 2014).
- These sessions foster improved English proficiency, preparing families for better engagement in early childhood education and broader community participation (Gray, 2015).

**Hume hub
playgroups
celebrate cultural
diversity**



- Multilingualism is celebrated, offering significant cognitive benefits for children, including enhanced problem-solving, mental flexibility, and executive function (Harrison et al., 2014).
- Playgroups can help break down cultural barriers and divisive attitudes, promoting more inclusive pathways to early education (Gray, 2015; Edwards et al., 2022).
- Cross-cultural intervention enriches children's experiences, equips them to navigate multicultural societies, and strengthens social capital in school communities (Edwards et al, 2022; Gray, 2015).

**Hume hub
playgroups
strengthen social
and community
support networks**



- Parental stress and depression can hinder secure parent-child attachments by reducing parental sensitivity (Atkinson et al., 2000; Booth et al., 2018). Positive social connections through playgroups mitigate these stresses and enhance emotional well-being (Moore, 2024).
- Playgroup facilitators create safe and welcoming environments that encourage parents and children to interact, fostering supportive social networks and reducing isolation (McLean et al., 2022; McLean et al., 2020).
- For families new to an area, playgroups provide a sense of belonging, acting as vital social networks where mothers can form friendships and develop alternative support systems in the absence of traditional family networks (McShane et al., 2016; VICSEG, 2014).
- These networks often extend beyond playgroup sessions, offering ongoing connection and mutual support (Jackson, 2006; McLean et al., 2020).
- Parents exchange valuable knowledge about child development, parenting practices, and local services, enhancing their ability to support their children's growth and development (Commerford & Robinson, 2017; Edwards et al., 2022).

**Hume hub
playgroups build
awareness of and
confidence to
access services**



- The co-location of playgroups within community hubs enhances parental awareness of, access to and utilisation of a wide range of family support services and resources (Commerford & Robinson, 2017).
- Playgroup facilitators and practitioners act as "soft entry points," providing information and referrals to health, education, and social services to families experiencing isolation or vulnerability (Edwards et al., 2022).
- Peer-led playgroups foster reciprocal learning and collective confidence-building among parents, enabling them to form strong social networks and support systems (Jackson, 2011).

**Hume hub
playgroups
facilitate
transition to
formal education**



- Children become familiar with school environments and routines allowing them to form early friendships with future classmates, fostering a sense of belonging and reducing anxiety during the transition (McLean et al., 2020; Edwards et al., 2022).
- Schools benefit from children's improved school readiness, confidence, and classroom dynamics (Wise et al, 2005).
- Educators gain early insights into children's additional needs, enabling better preparation and support, while children demonstrate enhanced socio-emotional regulation and concentration (Edwards et al., 2022; Knaus et al., 2016).

**Hume hub
playgroups are
valued by school
leadership**



- When leadership actively supports playgroups, schools are more likely to provide the essential conditions for quality: appropriate materials, skilled facilitators, dedicated and safe spaces, convenient scheduling, and accessible locations (Edwards et al., 2023).
- Leadership commitment at both the school and systems level is needed to embed playgroups as a core part of early engagement infrastructure, ensuring they are not ad hoc but sustained and integrated (Edwards et al., 2023).
- Concerted leadership is integral to enabling service integration and continuity across universal and targeted supports. This includes ensuring frontline staff, including playgroup facilitators, have the conditions and endorsement to collaborate and innovate (Child and Family Hubs Framework, 2021).
- Strong leadership creates a culture where playgroups are recognised as an essential early intervention strategy, with their contributions to school readiness, family engagement, and community connectedness valued and supported through governance and resource allocation (Child and Family Hubs Framework, 2021).

2.2.6. What are the benefits of the Hume Playgroup Model?

Drawing on the strong evidence-based literature on the benefits of playgroup, Figure 4 overleaf outlines outcomes for families, children, facilitators, and the school community. These benefits align with CHA's logic framework, adding and expanding on predefined outcomes of the logic framework. These benefits contribute to the National Community Hubs Program's overarching goal of improving the social and economic outcomes of families from refugee and migrant backgrounds.



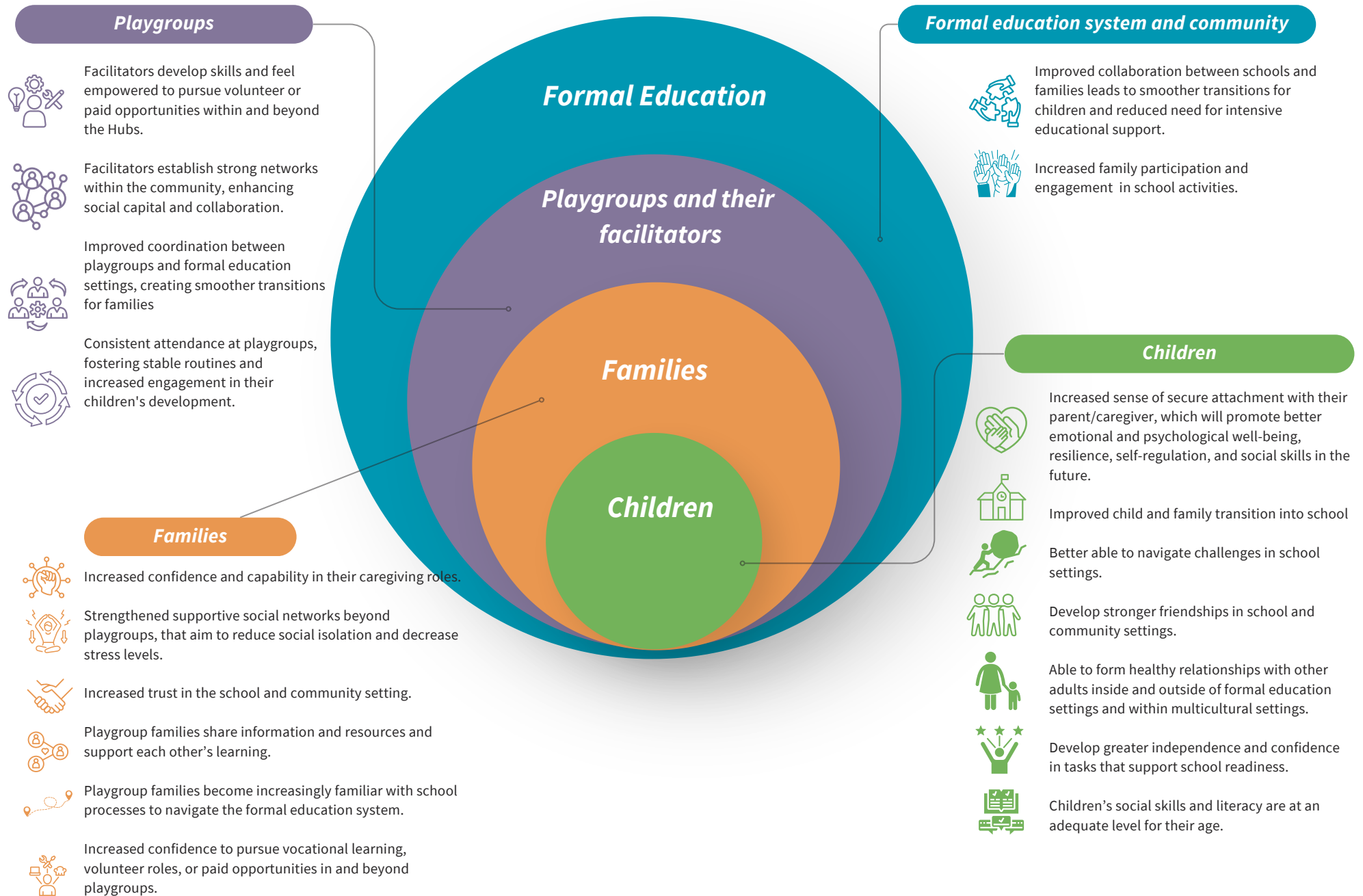


Figure 4. Benefits of supported playgroup across the eco-system

3. Our Logic Model

This logic model is a visual representation of how the playgroup intervention is expected to work through a more operational lens. It provides a clear and systematic way to connect the inputs, activities and intended outcomes of the Hume Playgroup Model, highlighting the relationships between these components.



National Community Hub Program (NCHP) Goal: To improve the social and economic outcomes of migrant families and individuals.

NCHP Impacts
(3+ years)

Communities are more connected.



Connected communities embrace ethnic diversity.



Peer support and trust between families.



Migrant and refugee families have the capacity to nurture their children's learning.



Schools are able to better respond to the needs of children to migrant and refugee families.



Improved uptake of Maternal and Child Health and early years learning in CALD communities.



Medium-term outcomes
(3 years)

Families

Increased participation of families in school and Hub activities.



- **Increased** confidence and capability in caregiving roles.
- **Reduced** social isolation and parenting-related stress.
- **Greater** ability to navigate the formal education system.

Children

Children have improved educational engagement and achievement.



- **Improved** wellbeing, resilience, and social-emotional skills.
- **Smoother** transitions into kindergarten and school.
- **Improved** ability to form trusting relationships with adults.

Playgroup and Facilitators

Facilitators feel empowered to pursue volunteer or paid opportunities within and beyond the Hubs.



- **Increased** facilitator confidence.
- **Improved** skills and knowledge of early learning principles.
- **Enhanced** ability to support families with developmental concerns.
- **Increased** family participation.
- **Stronger** collaboration with schools in responding to child and family needs.

Formal Education System

Reduced requirement for schools to provide intensive educational support for children with developmental delay.



- **Better** coordination between early learning and school systems.
- **Early** identification of child developmental and psychosocial needs.
- **Increased** capacity to create inclusive learning environments.
- **Increased** understanding of the value of playgroups for school readiness.

Short-term outcomes
(2 years)

Activities

Playgroup planning & family engagement

Playgroup session delivery

Family support & service connections

Recruiting and training parent facilitators

Content development & resource support

Facilitating peer learning & capacity building

Aligning formal education with early learning

Direct family engagement

Pathways to education & employment

Systemic support for playgroups

Inputs



People: families, qualified early years staff and support staff



Ongoing funding and accessible infrastructure



Access to training and capacity building resources

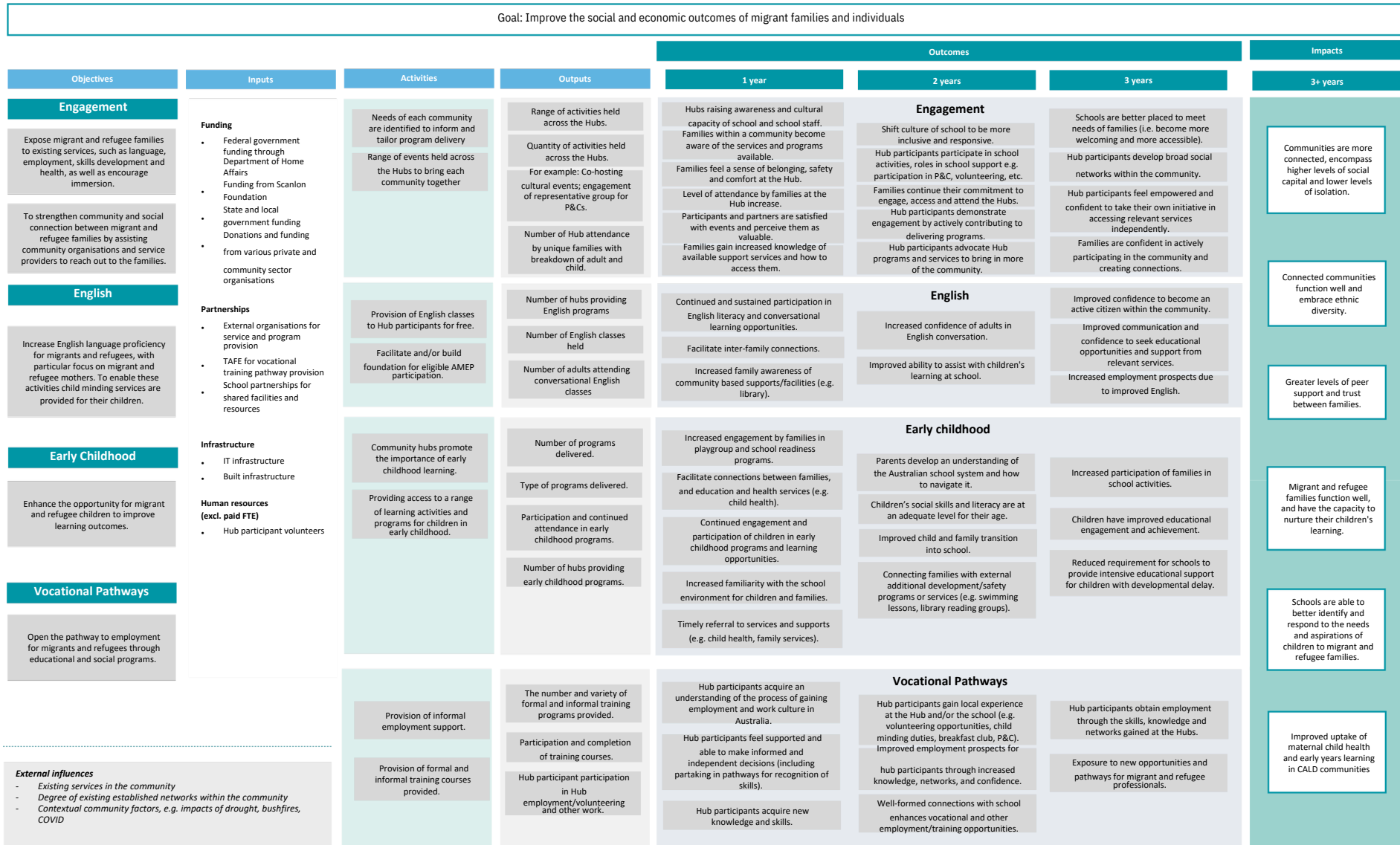


Family and community engagement knowledge and material



Operational governance and monitoring

Appendix A: National Community Hubs Program logic model



Source: Deloitte Access Economics National Community Hubs Program SROI Evaluation Report FINAL Community Hubs Australia 30 July 2021

Appendix B: Reference Group members and roles involved in Theory of Change Workshop

Reference Group Member	Role / Occupation
Amal Eless	Parent engaged in playgroup
Jennifer Voogt	Former Hume Project Officer
Julia Mayes	Former Manager, CCCH
Leanne Dhami	Playgroup VIC Development manager
Loretta Pilla	Senior Consultant, CCCH
Maureen Leahy	Former Hub leader
Melissa Kosteas	Hub Leader
Samantha R Kenely	Principal at Roxburgh Park
Serpil Kemal	Playgroups facilitator
Silvia Amici	Hubs Support Coordinator

Appendix C: Typical Session Plan (structured and unstructured activities)

Before (30 mins)

Facilitator arrives 30 minutes prior to playgroup commencing.

They are responsible for:

- Setting up the rooms with chairs and tables
- Setting up activities and play areas to encourage imaginative play

During (2 hours)

Welcome

- Greeting and connecting with families 1:1

Free time (1hr)

- Unstructured activities

Break (20 mins)

- Families join to have a snack

Indoor/Outdoor time

- Families can choose from a range of indoor or outdoor activities.

Storytime/rhyme time

- Session ends with a book and songs

Pack down

- Families help facilitators tidy up the room

After (30 mins)

Facilitators complete a final clean up of the space.



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