



Strengthening Playgroups in Community Hubs

Part B: Insights into Playgroup Needs and Supports

Executive Summary

The National Community Hubs Program (NCHP) was launched by Community Hubs Australia (CHA) to support newly arrived migrant and refugee families by improving access to education, health, and social services, as well as opportunities for economic participation. Supported playgroups are a key activity of the NCHP's early years pillar. Hume City Council's unique supported playgroup model within Community Hubs includes two key features:

- a) **Paid, community-based facilitators**, who are typically sourced from the school or playgroup community and are required to hold a minimum Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care or a related field; and
- b) **Hume Qualitative and Inclusive Playgroups Project Officer (FTE 0.6)** dedicated to supporting and enhancing playgroup facilitation through training, mentoring and resource development.

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.

This report, **Part B: Insights into Playgroup Needs and Supports**, is the second in a three-part series that documents the *Strengthening Playgroups in Community Hubs* project. It aims to explore the following research questions:

1. What are the current learning needs of facilitators delivering playgroups in Community Hubs?
2. What types of support, resources, and delivery formats do facilitators find most useful and accessible?



Who we spoke to

To inform this report, we gathered qualitative insights from 67 people connected to playgroups in Community Hubs, including 42 professionals across Victoria, South Australia, and Queensland, and 25 families from Hume, Victoria.

Key Insights

To analyse and categorise the qualitative findings, we applied a strengths-based framework that reflects the different dimensions of the facilitator experience and development. Insights were organised into four categories: Beliefs and Attitudes, Resources, Agency and Capacity Building. Key insights are summarised below.

Section 1: Beliefs and Attitudes – “I believe...”

Key insights into *beliefs and attitudes* included:

- Parents in Hume turn to playgroups for connection, learning, and a sense of belonging.
- While parents in Hume appreciate the social and developmental benefits of playgroups, varied beliefs about their role in children’s learning reflect a broader pattern observed across the CHA network
- Playgroups are often positioned as either educational settings or social supports - an emphasis that can limit recognition of their full scope, impact and required resourcing
- The implications of these mindsets suggest that facilitators are required to navigate these layered and often competing expectations with varying supports in place.

Section 2: Resources – “I have access to...”

Key insights into *resources* included:

- Facilitators value relational, hands-on support such as peer observation and embedded learning.
- Facilitators frequently use mobile-friendly digital tools to plan sessions but find navigating multiple platforms time-consuming and prefer a centralised resource hub.
- The Community Hubs Australia website has valuable playgroup resources but is underused due to low awareness and usability challenges.
- Access to playgroup funding, support, and facilities varies significantly across hubs, affecting delivery quality and facilitator capacity.

Section 3: Agency – “I feel able to, but...”

Key insights into *agency* included:

- Facilitators often have access to resources, but structural and time-related barriers limit their ability to plan and deliver high-quality sessions.
- Improving the impact of digital resources will require more than access – streamlined platforms, clearer guidance, and training are needed to support effective and intentional use in practice.
- A mismatch between facilitator self-confidence and Hub Leader perceptions may highlight the need for clearer expectations of the facilitator role.
- Limited access to external providers often requires Hub Leaders to facilitate playgroups themselves, despite not having formal early childhood training. Many expressed a preference for in-house facilitators due to challenges with high turnover, limited input, and lack of continuity from external services.



Section 4: Capacity Building - “I want to learn...”

Key insights into *capacity building* included:

- Facilitators and Hub Leaders have varying levels of experience and qualifications, highlighting the need for differentiated professional development and ongoing support. Some require a stronger understanding of early childhood development and play-based learning to effectively tailor sessions for children across a range of ages.
- Ongoing, targeted professional development is essential for applying theory effectively in the unique, less structured playgroup environment.
- As key professionals supporting families, facilitators are well placed to identify developmental concerns but often lack the confidence and skills, highlighting the need for targeted professional development.
- Cultural competency and trauma-informed practice training are priorities for facilitators working with families from migrant and refugee backgrounds.
- Watching videos, looking at photos, receiving support from other facilitators and learning through observation were identified as the most effective ways for facilitators to learn.

Interview participants identified resources and professional learning opportunities that would enhance facilitators’ capacity to deliver quality playgroup sessions. These support needs have been grouped into seven key areas, listed in order of how commonly they were raised, and are outlined in the table below.

- a) Tailoring supports to account for diverse facilitator backgrounds and experience within and beyond Hume
- b) Strengthening facilitator knowledge to plan developmentally appropriate playgroup sessions and share learning outcomes with families
- c) Implementing supports to address time constraints and strengthen session planning
- d) Building confidence to address developmental concerns and engage families
- e) Building cultural confidence, inclusive practice and trauma informed practice
- f) Strengthening support and capacity building for Hub Leaders to enhance playgroup delivery and facilitator development
- g) Strengthening the connection between playgroups and school readiness



Table 1. Resources and professional learning recommendations

Support need	Suggested resources and professional learning to meet support need
Tailoring supports to account for diverse facilitator backgrounds and experience within and beyond Hume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange Program to support mentoring and peer learning • Qualitative and Inclusive Playgroup Project Officer to help bridge theory into practice on a needs basis
Strengthening facilitator knowledge to plan developmentally appropriate playgroup sessions and share learning outcomes with families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundational knowledge in early childhood development and play-based learning • Resources linking outcomes to play based activities • Training/resources on the importance of play • Age-appropriate activity suggestions • Visual child development milestone chart • Imaginative play resources • Scope and sequence plan that provides structure to sessions and defines the intention and purpose of playgroup activities
Implementing supports to address time constraints and strengthen session planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning checklists including a list of resources and activities, different playgroup structures for different age groups, how the room should be set up • Themed activity packs • Centralised resource hub (with links to websites, activity plans, process guides, training, videos, themed activities) • Resources organised by age groups/development stages • Online facilitator meetings
Building confidence to address developmental concerns and engage families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training on building relationships with families, especially CALD communities • Guidance from professionals on recognising developmental delays • Child development milestones resources • Behaviour management training • Communication strategies with children • Disability inclusion training • Training on difficult conversations with families • Creating inclusive spaces (e.g., for children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder) • Supporting emotional regulation of children • Increased knowledge of local services (e.g., NDIS) • Mental Health First Aid
Building cultural confidence, inclusive practice and trauma informed practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural safety and inclusion training • Trauma informed practice training • Resources e.g., songs activities that allow for incorporation of families' language and culture • Inclusion resources e.g., how to support families to feel included and how to create inclusive spaces • First Nations dolls and cultural toys • Peer support from other Hub Leaders/facilitators with shared backgrounds on families • List of Australian songs, books and activities • Links to Australian nursery rhymes and songs • Hard copies of Australian books



Support need	Suggested resources and professional learning to meet support need
Strengthening support and capacity building for Hub Leaders to enhance playgroup delivery and facilitator development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of playgroup structure and planning ideas (particularly helpful to provide to new staff) • Links to relevant theories and resources • Guidance on facilitator skills/qualifications needed • Strengths-based leadership training for Hub Leaders to be able to build the capacity of facilitators • Support for training volunteers • Resources to support onboarding of facilitators including facilitators from local agencies to help them understand the broader aims of Community Hubs • Guidance for facilitators and Hub Leaders to support parents understanding of the purpose of playgroup
Strengthening the connection between playgroups and school readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance on the role of playgroups in school readiness • A set of outcomes or benchmarks/ key milestones toward which playgroups can work toward to measure school readiness • Resources for parents e.g., how to manage separation anxiety, what to expect when children are starting kindergarten, tips around transition

Recommendations

Building on the findings of this Insights Report, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Recommendation 1:** Provide national guidance on the role of playgroups as a core early years intervention
- **Recommendation 2:** Strengthen the playgroup workforce by investing in paid, qualified, and well-supported facilitators from culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- **Recommendation 3:** Scale tailored, in-person support and ongoing professional development for facilitators and Hub Leaders
- **Recommendation 4:** Centralise and streamline access to playgroup resources that support facilitator development and program quality
- **Recommendation 5:** Partner with expert service providers to deliver practical, specialist training grounded in real-world scenarios