



Strengthening Playgroups in Community Hubs

Part B: Insights into Playgroup Needs and Supports

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**Strengthening Playgroups in Community Hubs
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The Centre for Community Child Health acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging.



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List of abbreviations

CCCH	Centre for Community Child Health
CHA	Community Hubs Australia
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
HCC	Hume City Council
LBOTE	Language Background Other Than English
NCHP	National Community Hubs Program



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



Background

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 practise English
- **Vocational pathways:** Build pathways to volunteering and employment (Community Hubs Australia, n.d.)

Supported playgroups are a key activity of the early years pillar, offering children aged 0-5 years opportunities for structured and supported play-based learning. Playgroup facilitators play an integral role in ensuring these learning experiences and referral pathways for families are supportive, safe, and relevant.

About the Hume City Council's Playgroup Model

The Hume Playgroup Model operates within school-based Community Hubs and is designed to engage families from refugee and migrant backgrounds with children aged 0–5 years. The model aims to provide culturally safe, welcoming environments where families can connect with each other, build relationships with local services, and support their children's early learning through play-based activities. Key features of the model include:

- **A paid, 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. Facilitators in Hume are required to hold a minimum Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care or a related field.
- **Hume Qualitative and Inclusive Playgroups Project Officer (FTE 0.6):** A Communities for Children (CfC) role - funded through Uniting Vic. Tas - focused on developing, curating, and sharing playgroup resources and training tailored to the needs of the playgroup facilitators.

For more detail on the model's structure, goals, and intended impact, see Part A: Our Theory of Change and our Logic Model in **Appendix A**.



About the *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.

Our 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 scaled across the Community Hubs Australia network.



About 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 will explore the following research questions:

What are the current learning needs of facilitators delivering playgroups in Community Hubs?

What types of support, resources, and delivery formats do facilitators find most useful and accessible?

The purpose of this Insights Report is to synthesise the findings from our learning needs assessment. It draws on qualitative and observational data from facilitators, Hub Leaders, and project partners to identify common challenges, strengths, and opportunities. These insights will directly inform the development and testing of resources tailored to facilitator needs.

Please note that in some Community Hubs, Hub Leaders take on the role of playgroup facilitators. Throughout this report, references to facilitators may include these Hub Leaders when they undertake facilitation roles.



Who we spoke to

To address the research questions guiding this report, we conducted qualitative data collection with a national cross-section of professionals and families connected to playgroups in Community Hubs (see Figure 1 below). This approach was designed to ensure that the insights and resulting resources would be scalable and relevant beyond the Hume context.

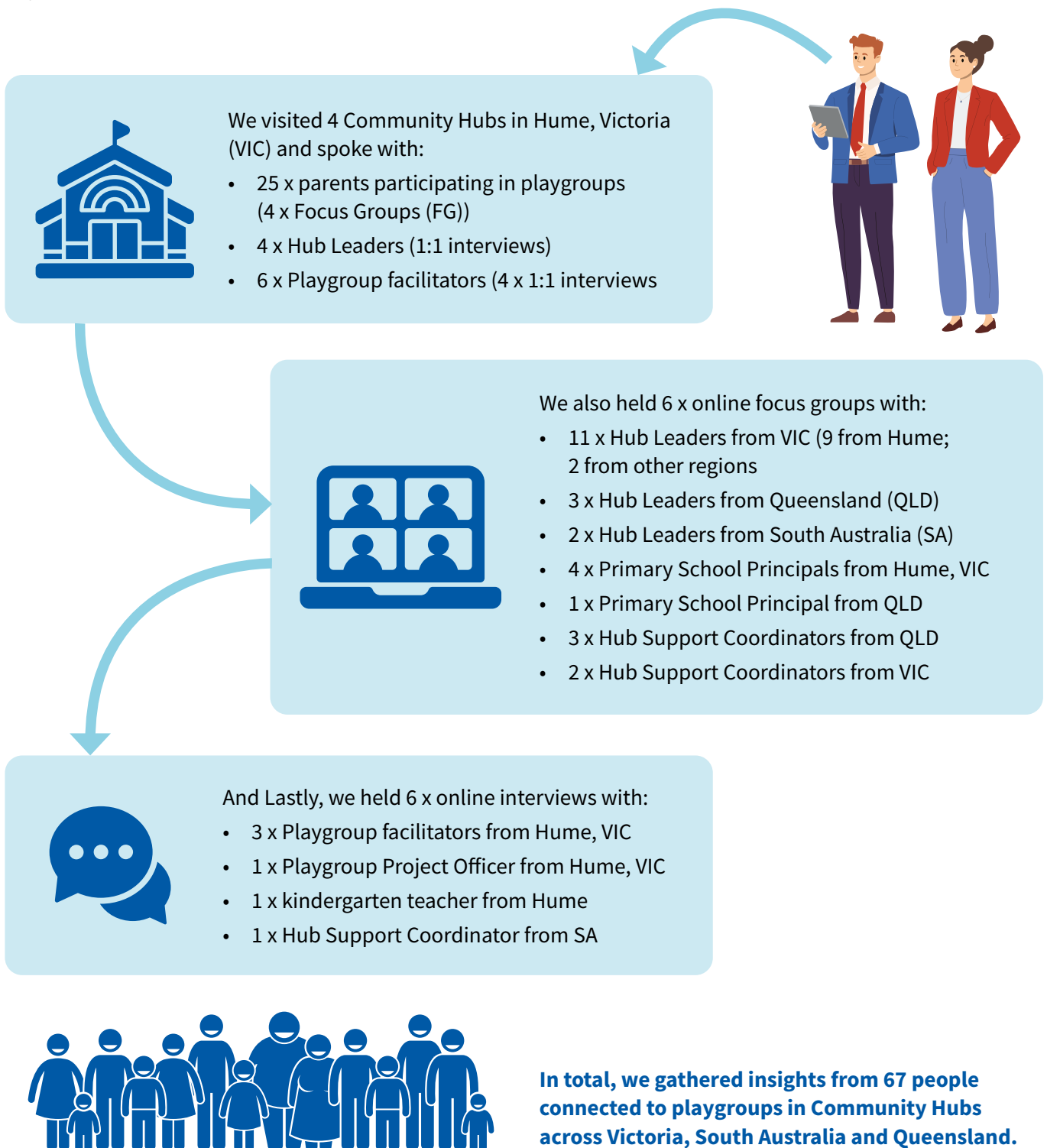


Figure 1. Research methodology for understanding learning needs and gaps



Strengths and limitations

This report has several strengths and limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. These are outlined in the table below.

Table 2. Strengths and limitations to Strengthening Playgroups in Community Hubs Part B Report

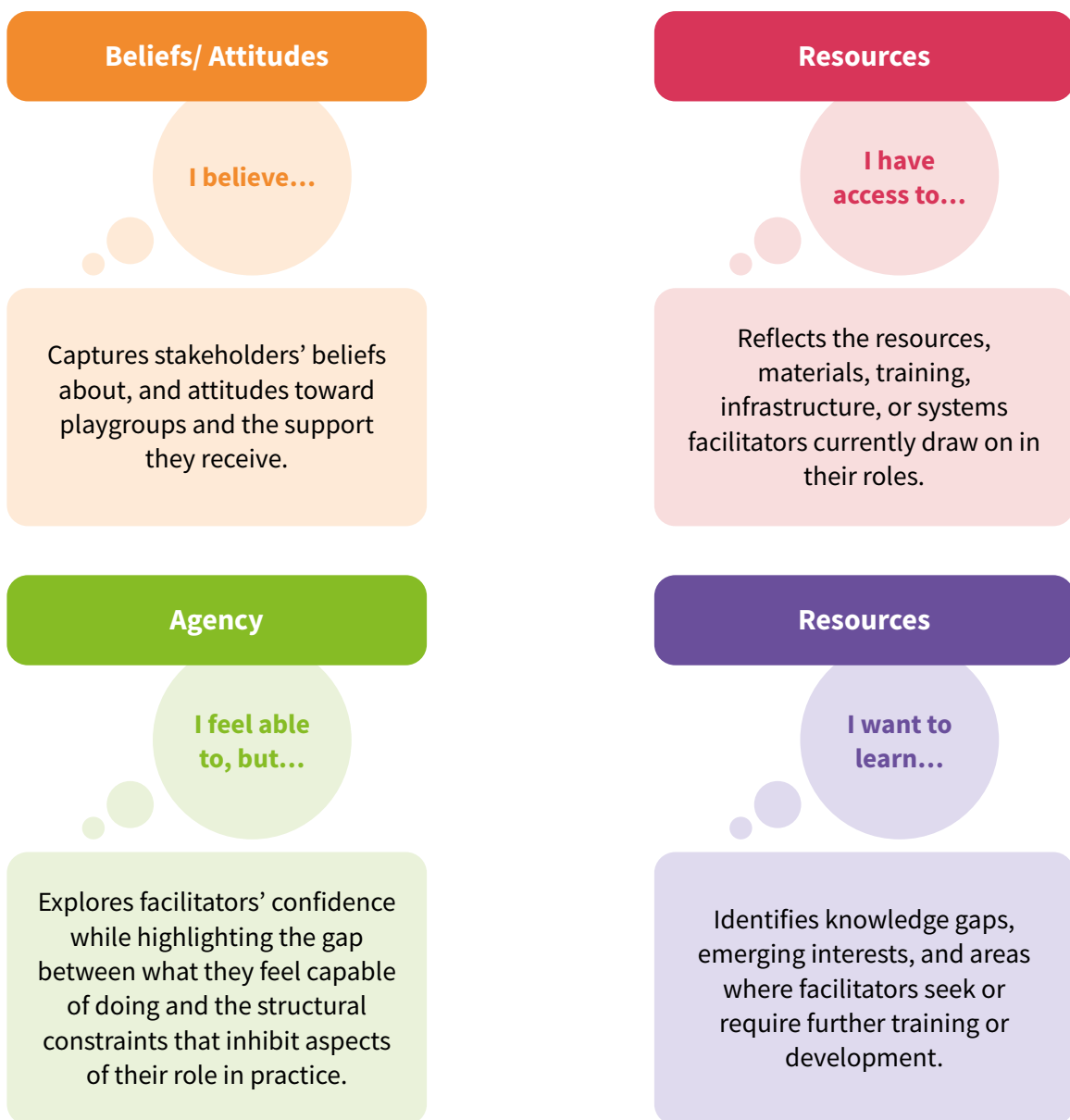
Strengths	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A multidisciplinary team was formed to undertake the community research. • The research team possess contextual knowledge of Early Childhood Education and Care allowing them to quickly understand relevant information within a short timeframe. • A diverse group of stakeholders were engaged across multiple states to understand the varying challenges across the Community Hubs network. • Hub Leader and Facilitator interest in the project was high, leading to strong engagement and a high response rate across data collection activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The findings are based on interviews with a small number of stakeholders and may not capture the full diversity of perspectives across all Community Hubs. • Due to timeline constraints in obtaining approval from the Victorian Department of Education’s Research in Schools and Early Childhood, our recruitment process started later than planned which may have impacted participation. • Processes to conduct research in schools involves a multi-step consent procedure requiring principals’ approval for hubs to participate. Given principals’ busy schedules, some schools did not respond, limiting participant recruitment. • There is no unified national platform for conducting research in schools, with each state, and each school sector, having its own approval requirements. Due to resourcing constraints, the project team sought approval only for government schools in Victoria and Queensland, and Catholic schools in Victoria and South Australia. This limitation reduced both the number and diversity of stakeholders who could participate in the research. • The capacity of kindergarten teachers and principals to participate in this project limited the number of respondents, resulting in a smaller sample size.



Framework for analysing findings

To analyse and categorise the qualitative findings from interviews and focus groups, we applied a strengths-based framework that reflects the different dimensions of the facilitator experience and development. This approach allowed us to group data meaningfully and identify areas of confidence, access and growth aligned with adult learning theories. Interview and focus group responses were transcribed and initially grouped by key questions, then coded and thematically analysed to identify common patterns and themes. Quantitative data collected through the use of polls during interviews was analysed separately using Microsoft Excel.

Insights were organised into the following four categories:





Key Insights

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

This section captures participants’ beliefs about, and attitudes toward, playgroups (i.e., what they understand the purpose or function of playgroups to be, and what aspects of playgroups they see value in). Exploring these perspectives is essential, as beliefs and attitudes directly shape how playgroups are delivered, supported and experienced. They influence facilitator practices, resourcing decisions, and how playgroups are positioned within the broader early years and community support landscape.

Key Insights:

- 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.

1. Parents in Hume turn to playgroups for connection, learning, and a sense of belonging

Site visit data revealed that families in Hume value playgroup as much for the community as for the content and learning opportunities. Many adults appreciated the opportunity to connect with other caregivers, share parenting experiences and strategies, and relate to others navigating similar experiences. Some formed friendships that extended beyond the playgroup setting, while others liked that playgroup provided an opportunity to “*get out of the house.*”

“It’s helped with connecting and communicating with other parents.

We make plans with each other outside of playgroup.”

– Parent (Hume)

In one group, grandparents regularly attended with their grandchildren. They valued the intergenerational connections it fostered as well as the opportunity to participate in and be part of their grandchildren’s lives.

Parents and caregivers in Hume described playgroup as a welcoming space where children could socialise, play, and build friendships. They also valued the learning and development benefits of playgroup activities.



Story time, rhyme time, learning new songs, arts and craft, games, and outdoor play were all cited as highlights. Some families appreciated being able to borrow books, songs, and toys to support learning at home, while others shared tangible gains in their children's confidence, language skills, social skills, emotional regulation, comfort with routines, and overall wellbeing.

"[My son] starts conversations with other kids now. Originally, he was a little quiet... he is becoming confident."

– Parent (Hume)

"They learn skills like sharing, and they get to interact with other kids."

– Parent (Hume)

Most families in Hume heard about playgroup through a family member (n=7) or friends (n=5). Others found out through their MCH nurse (n=3) or had previously attended with an older child (n=3). One family learnt about playgroup through the local school, and another through their older child's kindergarten.

2. 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

Research data reveal that some caregivers in Hume had limited understanding of their role in supporting their child's learning during playgroup sessions. Broader insights from Hub Leaders and Hub Support Coordinators across the three states suggest that this is part of a wider pattern, where some parents view children's development as the responsibility of schools and have limited understanding of the value of play – especially at home. It was observed by participants across those three states that some families perceived playgroups as child-minding services. This mindset often manifests in passive participation, such as parents disengaging from activities or using phones during sessions. In some hubs across all states interviewed, facilitators reported needing to gently redirect parents toward more active involvement and explain the child development intent behind playgroup activities.

"In some of our hubs it's a challenge to try and get [parents/caregivers] actively engaged with the child through the playgroup session... and really trying to support them to understand the purpose of playgroup, so there's been a lot of conversation around that."

– Hub Support Coordinator



Interview data reveal that shifting these beliefs and attitudes requires both cultural sensitivity and persistence. Strategies included modelling parent-child interaction, using bi-cultural workers to communicate in families' first languages, and setting expectations around participation to reinforce that playgroups are spaces for children and their carers to connect, bond and play together. However, this attitude shift is complex. Cultural norms, trauma backgrounds, and parental fatigue - especially among mothers caring for multiple children - can affect engagement. Participants across the network often empathised with these factors, acknowledging that playgroup may be the only space where parents feel they can relax.

“It also could be that Mums and carers are just exhausted, and playgroup is the only space they have to have some ‘me’ time. The phone is a way to relax and disconnect from the day-to-day, responsibilities and especially for families that have more than three kids. They come to playgroups and feel like their children are safe and have adult time and conversations with a person that also speaks their language.”

– Hub Leader (Queensland)

3. 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

There is strong consensus among participants across the CHA network that playgroups support children's learning through play, model positive parent-child relationships, and help build community connection. However, some perspectives tend to overemphasise either the social or educational aspects of playgroups, rather than recognising the value of their complexity. Some Hub Leaders and School Principals view playgroups as early learning platforms that should explicitly prepare children for formal education through structured routines and educational content. Others emphasise the role of playgroups as inclusive, community-building spaces that respond flexibly to family needs and cultural practices.

“It's more about that child learning and the parents engaging with the child learning because they're mothers and fathers, they are the first teacher in their child life. If we want to see good results in the future and good education, I think that's where we have to start.”

– Hub Leader (Hume)



“There are just different types of playgroups and some are more structured than others. I think both are legitimate and I don’t think any one’s better than the other. I think a less structured playgroup can be more comfortable for some parents... where they’re not told they have to do certain things. I think structure can be really good. But I also think it’s around what your community needs and wants.”

– Hub Leader (Victoria)

The following beliefs and attitudes regarding the complex yet interwoven social and educational purpose of playgroup were observed across the CHA network:

a) **Play-based learning sits at the heart of most stakeholder definitions.**

Principals and Hub Support Coordinators across the CHA network described playgroups as spaces where children learn foundational skills through guided play. Playgroups are seen as a place to practice routine-following, cooperation, creativity, and language skills - all essential for school readiness. Several stakeholders across the network highlighted the importance of modelling positive parent-child interactions in play, especially for newly arrived or trauma-affected families, for whom play-based engagement may not be familiar.

b) **Social connection and peer support were commonly seen as key outcomes of playgroups.**

Facilitators in Hume and coordinators across the network highlighted that regular attendance helps parents build relationships, share cultures, and strengthen community ties – especially in hubs supporting migrant and refugee families. For many, the social and emotional aspects of playgroup were either the main purpose or an important complement to learning through play.

c) **Structured and intentional delivery was valued across the ecosystem.**

While there was acknowledgment of variation in how playgroups are structured, there was a general consensus that intentional programming adds value. Coordinators across the network and facilitators in Hume spoke of the need for engaging environments, clear routines, and session plans that involve parents and promote shared learning.

d) **Stakeholders also viewed playgroups as a ‘soft entry’ into services and school.**

Hub Leaders and Principals across the network described playgroups as early platforms for identifying family needs, supporting developmental concerns, and building family trust with schools and services. The accessibility and informality of the playgroup setting made them ideal spaces for families to connect with service providers, with some sites involving allied health professionals, maternal and child health nurses, or university students on placement to support playgroup and Hub activities.

e) **Playgroups were seen as building bridges between schools and families.**

Principals described playgroups as potentially strengthening school enrolments, familiarising families with the school setting, and aligning home and school expectations. Several participants expressed that playgroups allow schools to get to know families early, reducing barriers to future engagement.



In sum, while key playgroup partners emphasise or place more value on certain aspects of playgroup than others (social or educational), there is a shared belief that playgroups are holistic platforms that aim to support children's learning, family social and emotional wellbeing, and school transition in interconnected ways.

It was noted, however, that when schools or funding bodies overemphasise aspects of playgroups - such as school readiness or social connection - these perceptions can influence the broader ecosystem that shapes how playgroups are designed, resourced, and evaluated. This prioritisation can have downstream effects on how playgroups are valued and whether they receive adequate support. Regardless of which emphasis is prioritised, a **skilled, paid, and trained workforce** is essential to meet the diverse needs of refugee and migrant families attending playgroup and to deliver high-quality, responsive experiences.. These implications for resourcing are explored further in the section Resources – “I have access to...”

“Are the playgroups just about parents and children engaging with each other, or are they about education, which is very important. Playgroups need more money and resources if we want to do it properly.”

– Hub Leader (Hume)



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

This section explores the resources, materials, training, infrastructure, and systems that facilitators across the network currently draw on to support the delivery of playgroups. It considers both formal and informal supports - including digital platforms, printed materials, mentoring relationships, and physical environments - and highlights how these enablers vary across different hub settings. Understanding what facilitators are already using, what is missing, and what could be improved is critical to designing accessible, relevant, and sustainable tools that align with the diverse needs of the workforce and the families they support.

Key Insights:

- Facilitators across the network value relational, hands-on support such as peer observation and embedded learning.
- Facilitators across the network 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 and states, affecting delivery quality and facilitator capacity.

1. Valued available supports are relational, in-person, and embedded in practice

Facilitators in Hume and Hub Leaders across the network – some of whom are engaged in playgroup facilitation - consistently emphasised that the most effective supports for playgroup delivery are those that are hands-on, relational, and embedded within their everyday context. The following types of supports stood out:

a) Opportunities to learn through peer observation

Peer learning was widely regarded across the three states as one of the most practical and inspiring forms of support. Facilitators valued the chance to observe how experienced colleagues structure sessions, set up imaginative play environments, and manage transitions and routines. In Hume, the “Exchange Program” delivered through the Qualitative and Inclusive Playgroups Project Officer allows facilitators to visit other hubs and learn directly from their peers in action. This observational model gives facilitators real-time insights into how to manage diverse age groups, engage families more actively, and co-deliver sessions alongside Hub Leaders.

b) Participation in external training opportunities

External training programs were another key source of support, though how widespread and frequent these opportunities are unclear. Hub Leaders and facilitators across regions described participating in professional development delivered by organisations such as Play Matters QLD, Foundation House, The Smith Family, Playgroup SA, and Supported Playgroups in Catholic Education (SPiCE). Topics included trauma-informed practice, cultural diversity, early literacy and numeracy (e.g., Let’s Count, Let’s Read), and the Abecedarian approach. Another example of professional development support related to improving practice through observation and feedback. In South Australia, for example, Playgroup SA conducted six-week observations of playgroups to provide tailored feedback.



c) **Engaging service providers to share early childhood information with families and simultaneously enhance facilitator knowledge**

In addition to direct training and peer learning opportunities, many facilitators in Hume and Hub Leaders engaged in facilitation in other states reported drawing on external service providers as an important support mechanism. These partnerships not only enhanced the educational content available to families but also served as informal professional development for facilitators themselves. Common examples included inviting Maternal and Child Health nurses, NDIS and disability support providers, local councils (e.g., for sessions on kindergarten enrolment), and organisations like DPV Health. Service-led incursions - such as music therapy, gross motor activities from the Multicultural Sports Club, and themed library visits - enriched session content and provided opportunities for families to connect with services in a familiar environment. Some partnerships, however, were affected by staffing changes or shifting policies. For example, one facilitator noted that increased data collection requirements had made it more difficult to involve MCH nurses, even for brief visits.

These and other supports accessed by playgroup facilitators, along with how they are used and experienced in practice, are summarised in **Table 4 in Appendix B – Resources and supports available to facilitators across the network.**

2. **Most facilitators in Hume and Hub Leaders access web-based resources, but fragmented access limits impact**

The following three insights were observed:

a) **While digital literacy is sometimes limited, informal digital engagement on mobile applications is high**

Observational and interview data suggests that some facilitators in Hume are not confident using desktop programs like Microsoft Word/Excel or navigating structured platforms that require more advanced IT skills. However, facilitators access web-based content through mobile-friendly apps and platforms. This highlights the importance of sharing resources in accessible, user-friendly formats - such as short videos or visual guides - on mobile-friendly platforms, rather than relying solely on text-heavy websites that assume a high level of digital literacy.

b) **Use of early childhood education websites and online tools**

Facilitators and Hub Leaders across the CHA network reported drawing from a wide variety of online resources to inform session content, including activity ideas, sensory play, fine and gross motor development, multilingual support, and seasonal or cultural themes. Frequently cited platforms included Twinkl, Raising Children Network, Aussie Childcare Network, Canva, local council pages, and websites managed by Playgroup Australia. While this demonstrates strong self-initiative and digital engagement, some facilitators noted the inconvenience of needing to subscribe to or navigate across multiple platforms. A preference emerged for having a centralised, free resource hub tailored to community hub playgroup needs. One facilitator specifically suggested providing access to a Twinkl account to streamline planning efforts.

c) **Social media as a supplementary planning tool**

Facebook groups, Pinterest, YouTube and Instagram were also mentioned as sources of inspiration for activity planning across the CHA network. These platforms were valued for their real-time sharing of photos, creative ideas, and peer-driven tips from other early years educators. However, social media content is often uncurated, inconsistent in quality, and not always evidence-based. This means facilitators must exercise professional judgement when adapting ideas for their own diverse group contexts.



3. Use of digital resources is relatively high, however engagement with the Community Hubs Australia website remains low

Despite widespread use of online tools to support playgroup planning, the Community Hubs Australia website is not widely accessed by playgroup facilitators across the network. One Hub Support Coordinator and a few Hub Leaders acknowledged drawing on these resources, particularly the videos but cited difficulties navigating the CHA website, suggesting usability issues may be a barrier. Only one Hub Leader in Hume described the website as their “toolbox,” highlighting its breadth of useful content - including the *How to Run a Playgroup* guide, setup information, case studies, and videos.

Most Hume-based facilitators, however, reported they were either unaware of the site’s offerings or did not use the resources available. Overall, the website appears to be an underutilised resource - valued by those who know about it, but not yet embedded as a core support tool for the wider network of facilitators and Hub Leaders.

4. Facilitators have access to a variety of resources to support the delivery of playgroup, but access is not equitable across Community Hubs Australia sites

The level and quality of resources accessed by facilitators is inconsistent across Community Hubs Australia sites. Hubs in some regions benefit from dedicated staff and structured supports, while others rely on limited resources. The following insights were observed:

a) Funding arrangements differ across the CHA network

Although Early Childhood is a core CHA pillar and hubs are expected to offer playgroups, interview participants noted a lack of clarity around who is responsible for funding facilitators. In Hume, seven of the Hubs playgroups are funded by Communities for Children (CfC) through Uniting Viv. Tas., while others receive funding from schools, utilise a Community Hub budget typically used for resources, or have local agencies deliver playgroup (who use their own funding). Interview data suggests it is ultimately at the school’s discretion as to whether they will fund a playgroup facilitator. Factors that impact this decision include:

- The availability of funds.
- The school’s understanding of the Hub Leader’s role - for example, some Principals acknowledge the broad scope of the role and recognise the Hub Leader’s limited capacity to also run playgroup.
- How much the hub is valued within the school.

While some schools have accessed external funding to engage a playgroup facilitator, several Hub Support Coordinators outside of Hume reported difficulties securing funding, both in persuading principals to apply for relevant grants and in securing funds themselves. Without consistent access to funds to employ a playgroup facilitator, Hub Leaders outside of Hume are required to facilitate playgroups themselves.

b) Facilitators in Hume City Council receive dedicated, ongoing support

Playgroup facilitators in Hume benefit from a dedicated Playgroups Project Officer who provides tailored supports, including quarterly training sessions, regular meetings, a WhatsApp Community of Practice, and support with resource development and session planning. Hume facilitators also receive ongoing support and guidance from their Hub Leaders. Outside of Hume, some hubs may have funding to employ an external playgroup facilitator; however, high turnover in these roles often results in Hub Leaders taking on the responsibility themselves. In some hubs, there may be no funding for an external facilitator at all, and playgroups are solely run by Hub Leaders. **See 5 in Appendix B for a full list of available resources and training to Hume facilitators.**



“We have a Qualitative and Inclusive Playgroups Project Officer. She’s a wonderful resource to us as well. She attends our hub meetings and has just sent out a new resource. It’s a dad’s newsletter, so it’s to encourage dads to participate in play groups.”

– Hub Leader (Hume)

“She’ll [Hume PO] visit and provide training. She’s providing some facilitator training here next week for playgroup facilitators and volunteers around including Indigenous children and making sure that they’re culturally appropriate.”

– Hub Leader (Hume)

c) **Venue limitations also affect playgroup quality and access**

Hub Support Coordinators and Hub Leaders across the network reported that the resources and facilities available at each hub can vary significantly - an important consideration when developing resources for facilitators. While some hubs are well equipped with quality indoor and outdoor play areas and accessible amenities, others face limitations that impact playgroup delivery. These included hubs located upstairs, making access difficult for families with prams or in wheelchairs; distant amenities; lack of air conditioning during extreme heat; and limited or no access to water and shaded outdoor areas. Some hubs lack outdoor areas altogether or are too small for exploratory activities like sand play. Smaller venues also limit the number of families that can attend playgroup, with some hubs reportedly reaching capacity and ceasing advertising in the community. Additionally, while some hubs have permanent access to playgroup space, others are sharing a space with schools which can limit their ability to set up the environment in a way that is welcoming or appropriate for younger children.

“Outdoor play activities like sand, painting are important, but the space we have available is a big limitation. The area is very small, which restricts what we can do during playgroup sessions. We can manage activities like arts and crafts or playdough, but outdoor play is not an option because the premises don’t allow it. There’s also no space to bring in sand, and we’re generally limited in the types of activities we can offer.”

– Hub Leader (Hume)

These resource challenges and limitations are further explored and overlap with key concepts in the next **Section 3: Agency – “I feel able to, but...”**



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

This section explores the gap between what facilitators feel themselves capable of doing and the structural constraints that inhibit aspects of their role in practice. For instance, whilst facilitators may possess valuable practical knowledge, skills, confidence and/or have access in principle, to resources that can support them in their role, there can be structural, environmental and logistical barriers that prevent or interfere with their ability to exercise use of such knowledge, skills or resources (i.e., their capacity to act).

Key Insights:

- Facilitators across the network 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.
- In Hume, 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 outside of Hume to facilitate playgroups themselves, despite not having formal early childhood training.
- Many expressed a preference for in-house facilitators – similar to the Hume model - due to challenges with high turnover, limited input, and lack of continuity from external services.

1. Despite having access to a range of resources and to community, a gap between structural, environmental and logistical barriers inhibit capacity to act

Most sites across the three states report having access to resources - whether through training, web-based tools, or peer networks - but access alone does not guarantee utilisation or impact. The following key barriers were identified. (See Figure 2 below). These barriers often limit facilitators' ability to plan, deliver, and reflect on sessions effectively.

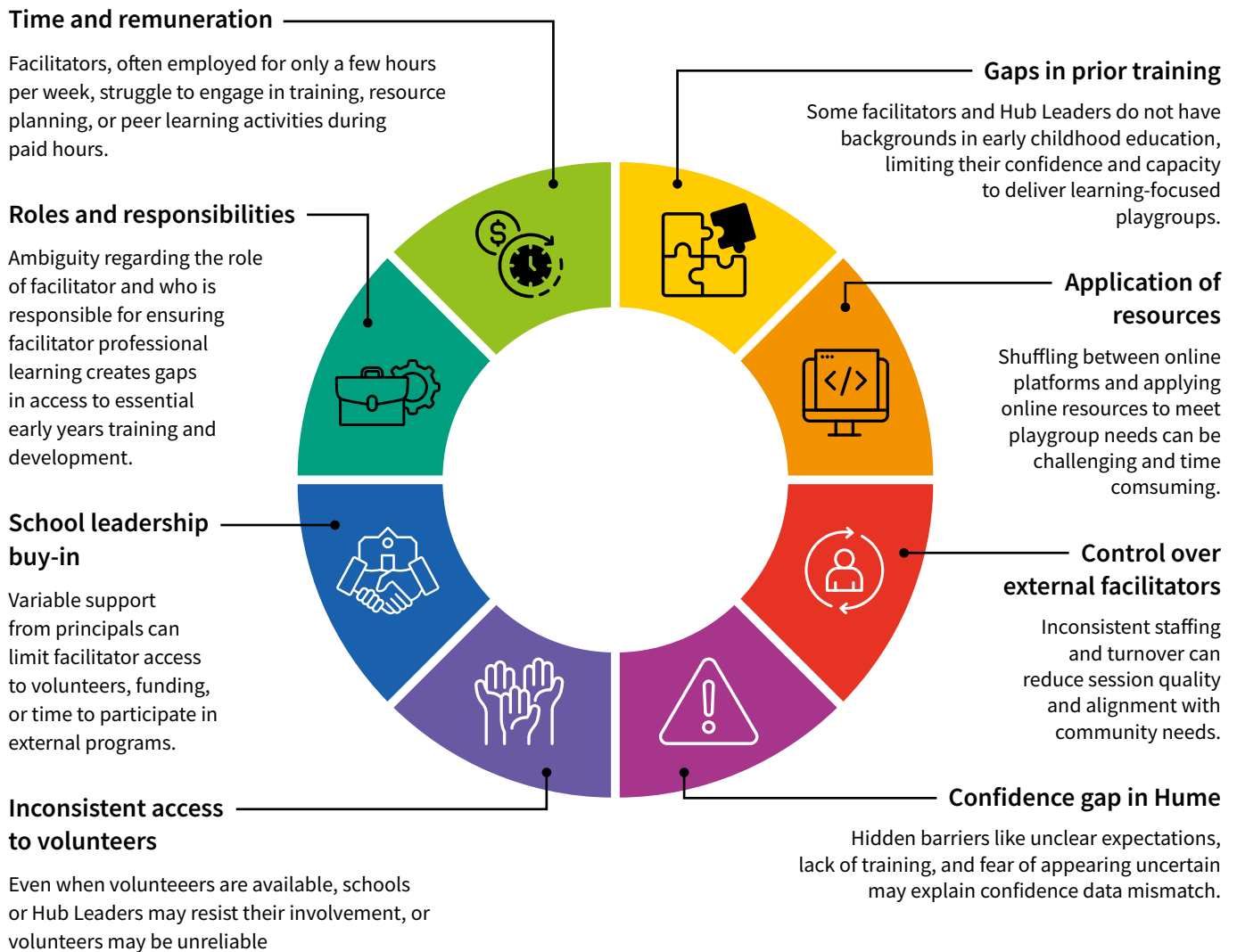


Figure 2. Identified barriers to planning and delivering quality playgroups

The following section will explore some of these identified barriers inhibiting facilitators of playgroups capacity to act across sites in and beyond Hume.

a) Digital access does not guarantee effective session planning application

While most facilitators across the network report regularly accessing online resources to support playgroup delivery, the utility of these tools is mixed. Facilitators frequently draw on a wide range of online platforms to generate activity ideas. However, shuffling between multiple sources can be time-consuming, especially for those with limited paid hours and no planning time built into their role.

Even when activities are sourced, some facilitators face challenges in adapting them to suit the diverse developmental needs of children attending playgroups – as mentioned above. As a result, session planning can sometimes rely on intuition and peer inspiration rather than intentional educational design.



This disconnect between access and application of resources suggests that improving digital resource uptake will require more than availability - it will require **streamlined navigation, greater visibility, and complementary training** that builds understanding of how to use tools in practice.

b) **A mismatch between perceived and self-reported confidence suggests hidden barriers to capability in Hume**

While many facilitators in Hume are connected to their communities and often feel supported in their roles, there is a notable discrepancy between how confident they feel and how confident their Hub Leaders perceive them to be, particularly for those Hubs in Hume. In a poll conducted as part of this assessment, most Hub Leaders reported low confidence among facilitators in key areas of their role, including:

- Creating session plans and finding resources (59%)
- Managing challenges (55%).

In contrast, facilitators in Hume tended to report high confidence across these same domains. This distinction may reflect unspoken barriers - such as facilitators not wanting to appear uncertain, differences in expectations between Hub Leaders and facilitators, or a lack of shared understanding around what “confidence” looks like in practice. It could also suggest that facilitators feel confident managing their current routines but are less prepared to navigate more complex or evolving demands in the role. These findings highlight the importance of unpacking confidence as more than a self-perception – it is also shaped by clarity, training, support structures, and the degree of responsibility placed on facilitators.

c) **Inconsistent role definitions and variable experience undermine facilitator confidence and capacity**

Across sites outside of Hume, Hub Leaders are frequently placed in playgroup facilitator roles - often out of necessity due to funding shifts or lack of available external facilitators. This dual responsibility presents multiple challenges. Many Hub Leaders do not have a background in early childhood education and may feel unprepared to design sessions that align with developmental outcomes. Theoretical understanding of play-based learning, confidence in facilitation, and knowledge of child development vary widely depending on individual experience.

“You’ve constantly got Hub Leaders with varying degrees of skill. You have some come in with training not related to playgroups.”

– Hub Support Coordinator

“I come from a non-early years background and when I started putting out activities, they were too old for the kids because I just had no concept of age-appropriate material.”

– Hub Leader (South Australia)



Time constraints further exacerbate this challenge. Switching between their strategic Hub Leader responsibilities and the hands-on demands of playgroup facilitation can dilute the effectiveness of both roles. In some cases, the absence of a cultural or linguistic connection to the families attending playgroup can make it harder to build trust and engagement. Without clear role expectations, adequate training, and resourcing, Hub Leaders who step into facilitator roles risk feeling isolated and underprepared - affecting the consistency and quality of playgroup delivery and potential wellbeing of facilitator.

d) **Hub Leaders note challenges using external agencies to deliver playgroup and would prefer having their own playgroup facilitators**

Interview data indicate that some external agencies receive funding to deliver playgroups in high-need areas, and Community Hubs are seen as a valuable setting for this work. However, challenges can arise when playgroups are delivered by external service providers. For example, Hub Leaders typically have little control over who the facilitator is and must rely on the hope that working relationships will be positive. They often have limited input into how the sessions are run, which can make it difficult to ensure the program aligns with the needs of the local community. Additional challenges include high facilitator turnover and difficulties securing permanent external providers, who are often only available for a single school term. This lack of consistency can impact continuity and stability for families. Some Hub Leaders also noted that facilitators from external agencies may arrive only for the session itself, leaving set-up and pack-down responsibilities to the Hub Leader. For these reasons, many expressed a preference for having their own facilitator, who they can onboard and orient to the purpose of the Hubs and their approach to playgroup delivery.

“Some of our hubs have external providers delivering playgroup, but they have to renegotiate contracts every 6 months due to providers having other commitments across [the state]. So for example, in Term 1 they can facilitate a playgroup but in Term 2 they may not be available.”

– Hub Support Coordinator

“There’s not a lot of say in how the hubs can run the playgroups when it’s provided by another service. I’m pretty lucky that we can employ our own playgroup facilitator and I have more say in how I work with the facilitator and how we want to run it, rather than how it’s expected to be run because it’s been provided by another agency.”

– Hub Leader (Hume) Coordinator



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

This section explores the learning priorities and capability-building needs identified by facilitators and Hub Leaders across the network. It highlights areas where additional training, guidance, or resources are sought to strengthen the delivery of inclusive, developmentally appropriate, and high-quality playgroup experiences. It also explores preferred methods of learning by facilitators. These insights reflect a shared desire to grow professionally and adapt practice to meet the evolving needs of families and communities.

Key Insights:

- Facilitators and Hub Leaders have varying levels of experience and qualifications, highlighting the need for differentiated professional development and ongoing support. Some require 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 into practice 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, peer support and learning through observation were identified as the most effective learning methods for facilitators.

Participants identified a range of capacity-building needs, reflecting the diverse backgrounds and experiences of facilitators and Hub Leaders. Strengthening capability in these areas is essential to ensuring playgroups are responsive to the needs of playgroup children and families. These support needs have been grouped into seven key areas, listed in order of how commonly they were raised, and are explored in more detail below.

Network Support Needs:

- 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



1. Tailoring supports to account for diverse facilitator backgrounds and experience within and beyond Hume

Facilitators and Hub Leaders across the network bring varied levels of experience and qualifications to their roles, highlighting the need for differentiated support.

In Hume:

- One third of facilitators have been delivering playgroups for three years or less; another third between four and nine years; and the remaining third for over ten years.
- Facilitators hold a mix of qualifications: some have a Certificate III or Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care, while others are trained as kindergarten or primary school teachers.

Across the broader Community Hubs network:

- Several Hub Leaders responsible for running playgroups have no formal early years training.
- Others bring expertise from adjacent disciplines such as psychology or community development.

This diversity underscores the need for **differentiated professional development and support** that reflects the varying levels of experience and qualifications across the network.

While many facilitators from Hume hold formal early childhood qualifications – as a minimum requirement – continued professional development is essential. Facilitators may need support to apply theory effectively in the less structured, parent-attended playgroup environment. Unlike formal early learning settings, playgroups rely on facilitation rather than direct instruction, and facilitators may not have been trained to support both child development and parent engagement simultaneously.

In Hume, the **Qualitative and Inclusive Playgroups Project Officer** has played a valuable role in helping facilitators bridge theory and practice. Similar models of dedicated mentoring or coaching could strengthen facilitator capacity across the national network – particularly in hubs where leaders are supporting others without early years expertise.

2. Strengthening facilitator knowledge to plan developmentally appropriate playgroup sessions and share learning outcomes with families

Another key area of support identified across the network is enhancing facilitator and Hub Leader **knowledge of and connection between early childhood development and play-based learning**¹ – not only to guide activity planning, but also to help families better understand their child's learning and development. Interview data indicate that many Hub Leaders² both within and outside of Hume, as well as some newer facilitators in Hume, require additional support in **applying early childhood knowledge in practice**.

1 This capacity-building area was identified through qualitative interviews, focus groups, and quantitative polling conducted during these sessions. For detailed poll responses, please see Appendix C.

2 This applies to both Hub Leaders who are facilitating playgroups directly and those who are supporting facilitators in their roles.

**Within Hume:**

- Facilitators reported challenges planning engaging activities for babies – especially in mixed-age groups.
- These gaps are more pressing under the *Best Start, Best Life* reforms, which have shifted the focus of many playgroups to children under three.
- Feedback from Hume parents echoed this need: some asked for more information on child development, including milestones, health, and practical parenting tips.

“I also need to know early childhood developmental stages to be able to support the facilitator and guide them.”

– Hub Leader (Hume)

“Facilitators need more knowledge about child development and planning sessions to meet different developmental needs and target specific developmental area.”

– Facilitator (Hume)

Across the broader network:

- Many Hub Leaders, particularly those without early years qualifications, reported needing support to apply early childhood knowledge in their playgroup facilitation or mentoring roles.
- Some indicated a lack of confidence in understanding how toys or materials support specific aspects of development, making it harder to choose appropriate resources.
- Some noted they were unsure how to link play-based activities to developmental outcomes or how to explain this to families.

“[Facilitators need to be able to] link activities really explicitly to a ‘why’... what outcomes are connected to the activities? What is [the activity’s] purpose in supporting child learning and development?”

– Hub Leader (South Australia)

“Figuring out what you’re setting up for one or two year olds is different to two and three year olds... you’ve really got to put a lot of time and effort into making sure that you have [activities] set up for different ages.”

– Hub Leader (South Australia)



To address these needs, both facilitators and Hub Leaders across the network would benefit from:

- Resources that link learning outcomes to play-based activities
- Age-appropriate activity ideas and imaginative play prompts
- Milestone charts and guidance on supporting different stages of development
- Training on the value of play in child development and how to communicate this to families
- Practical tools to support dual roles: engaging children while building parent capability.

These supports would support facilitators capacity to confidently **design and adapt activities that foster critical developmental areas**, such as language, motor skills, and social-emotional learning. It would also allow facilitators to **observe and respond to children's needs** while explaining the benefits of play-based learning to parents, building their confidence and encouraging more active engagement in playgroup sessions.

3. Implementing supports to address time constraints and strengthen session planning

Structural and practical challenges – particularly limited paid hours – were identified as key barriers to planning and delivering high-quality playgroup sessions across the network. Many facilitators are employed for only three hours per week, restricting their capacity to engage in professional development, prepare activities, or connect with local services. Several facilitators in Hume noted using their personal time to fulfil these responsibilities, while others found it difficult to consistently source new materials.

To address these constraints, participants across the broader network recommended centralising access to tools such as:

- Website links
- Play-based activity plans
- Training opportunities
- Themed resources tailored to different age groups
- Local service directories
- Videos
- Process guides.

A Hub Leader in Hume also suggested developing a session planning checklist, including guidance on required materials, room setup, and structuring sessions for varied age groups. Facilitators in Hume proposed online peer learning opportunities as a more accessible alternative to in-person meetings, especially for those balancing multiple roles.

Given the logistical challenges of meeting in person, some participants in Hume suggested offering **online facilitator meetings** to improve accessibility and peer support. Hume facilitator, Hub Leader and parent focus group data also highlighted the need for additional volunteers to support facilitators managing large groups of families, which would help alleviate the time required for setting up and packing down during playgroup sessions.

“If we can have a website that would be good, like a one stop shop. [I don't] want to register with lots of different websites.”

– Facilitator (Hume)



“It would be helpful to have everything somehow organised in one place - an activity plan alongside the necessary resources. While it’s easy to find activity ideas, the challenge is knowing where to access the required materials, having the time to gather them, and securing funding for them.”

– Hub Leader (Hume)

4. Building confidence to address developmental concerns and engage families

Interview data revealed that facilitators across the network often feel underprepared to identify family needs – particularly when recognising early signs of developmental delay – or to initiate sensitive conversations with families about support options. These challenges are further compounded by an increase in children with additional needs attending playgroup, alongside large group sizes (sometimes up to 40 participants), which make it difficult to engage families meaningfully and manage children’s behaviour effectively.

Across the network, facilitators and Hub Leaders identified a strong need for:

- Professional guidance on identifying developmental delays
- Training in behaviour management and child communication, and
- Strategies for navigating difficult or sensitive conversations with families.

Parents in Hume also expressed a desire for more support and resources related to children’s mental health and behaviour management, reinforcing the importance of accessible, culturally appropriate materials for families as well as staff.

“We want to make sure that the Playgroup Facilitators feel comfortable identifying areas of potential delay or concern... and then feeling confident raising that with families and [asking], ‘Do you feel OK with me talking to the Hub Leader about it.’”

– Playgroups Project Officer (Hume)

“[Facilitators] need more training, [they] have Cert 3 or 4 in Early Years Support. They are working with a lot of children who have limited language skills, and a lot who have difficulties learning, or who might be on the autism spectrum. The Playgroup Facilitator is not trained to deal with these challenges. It can be overwhelming.”

– Hub Leader (Hume)



5. Building cultural confidence, inclusive practice and trauma informed practice

While many facilitators in Hume come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds – a strength that helps build trust with local communities – three Hume Hub Leaders noted that some facilitators have limited familiarity with Australian early childhood resources, such as songs and books. This can create challenges in delivering play-based learning that is both culturally responsive and aligned with local early childhood practices and expectations. Building facilitator knowledge in this area was identified as a specific need within the Hume context.

A Hume Hub Leader and a Victorian Hub Support Coordinator recommended training in cultural safety and inclusive practice. This would support facilitators not only to engage more confidently with First Nations families, but also to ensure playgroups are inclusive and welcoming for families from all backgrounds. Although engagement with First Nations families has historically been limited in some locations, this is beginning to change. Suggestions to strengthen cultural inclusion included:

- Introducing First Nations dolls and culturally relevant play materials (Hume facilitator)
- Sharing songs and activities in multiple languages (Hume facilitators), and
- Providing peer support opportunities with Hub Leaders who share cultural backgrounds with families (Queensland Hub Support Coordinator).

Facilitators in Hume also identified a need for more resources that support inclusion of families from unfamiliar cultural backgrounds.

“I’m wondering whether cultural awareness training might be helpful [focused on] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [cultures]... historically we haven’t worked so much in that space, but we’re certainly moving more into it with the schools we’ve got on board now.”

– Hub Support Coordinator

“Language and cultural background of facilitator poses a challenge when selecting songs because of the Anglo-focus.”

– Hub Leader (Hume)

Across the network, both facilitators and Hub Leaders consistently emphasised the importance of trauma-informed practice – particularly in contexts where families have experienced displacement, loss, or cultural transition. Understanding how trauma can influence children’s behaviour was seen as essential to supporting emotional safety and building trust with families.



6. Strengthening support and capacity building for Hub Leaders to enhance playgroup delivery and facilitator development

Hub Leaders from Queensland and Victoria emphasised the need for structured onboarding resources to support new facilitators, student placements, and local agency staff involved in playgroup delivery. This would ensure a more consistent and confident approach to playgroup facilitation, particularly for those unfamiliar with early childhood practice.

In Hume, additional capacity-building needs were identified:

- One Hub Leader highlighted the need for training and support tailored to volunteers, including guidance on how to engage and retain them effectively.
- Another Hub Leader noted a lack of clarity around the skills and qualifications required to deliver playgroups, suggesting the value of clearer role guidance.
- A Principal suggested that in hubs where both a Hub Leader and facilitator are present, investing in capacity-building for Hub Leaders – such as strengths-based leadership training – may be a more sustainable and impactful model given the limited paid hours available to facilitators.

A Victorian Hub Leader also identified the need for practical training and tools on how to:

- Work effectively in partnership with facilitators
- Manage issues when they arise during playgroup sessions, and
- Respond to challenging or sensitive situations.

“It’s important to have a good connection with the facilitator and provide that extra training and onboarding and orientation so playgroups are inclusive and they’re aware of what’s going on in the school.”

– Hub Leader (Hume)

“A document that summarises... structure or planning ideas that we can use. That links to specific resources and theories that support why we do what we do. Some sites have student placement volunteers that rotate every 3-6 months so having a document that can be shared for consistency would be helpful.”

– Hub Leader (Queensland)

These findings suggest that clearer role expectations, along with targeted training and onboarding support, could help strengthen collaboration, build confidence, and improve the consistency of playgroup delivery across the network.



7. Strengthening the connection between playgroups and school readiness

Principals and kindergarten teachers view playgroups as a critical foundation for supporting children's transition to kindergarten and school. Interview data from across the network suggests that some schools are observing increasing challenges among children entering kindergarten – including delays in language and early numeracy, as well as heightened separation anxiety, particularly among three-year-olds.

In response, some school professionals recommended that playgroups adopt a more structured approach with a stronger focus on school transitions. Suggestions included:

- Professional learning for facilitators on the role of playgroups in promoting school readiness
- Resources to help parents understand and manage their child's separation anxiety, and
- Guidance on how to prepare their child for kindergarten.

A Principal from Hume proposed the development of clear developmental outcomes or milestones that playgroups could use to support and track school readiness.

“Principals [would like] playgroups to be more structured and to be based around school transition, language skills, numeracy skills for kids because we are seeing a lack of these skills when they come into preschool.”

– Hub Support Coordinator

“[It's a] big problem, children separating from parents and parents separating from kids. A huge issue for 3yos. Facilitators could maybe talk to parents more about preparing them better for separation and what to expect from kinder/ what will happen when [their kids] start kinder.”

– Kindergarten Teacher (Hume)

These seven areas reflect the complex and multifaceted nature of facilitator and Hub Leader roles as well as the varying needs across individual hubs. Addressing these capacity-building needs through targeted support, resources, and training will be essential to strengthening playgroup delivery and better meeting the needs of children and families. The following section explores the most effective learning methods for facilitators, while the resources and training suggested by the network to address these needs are outlined in Table 3.



“How I want to learn...”

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.

Research findings identified Hume-based facilitators and Hub Leader perspectives on the best ways for *facilitators* to learn. Figure 3 below visualises the responses. Participants were asked to select three categories.

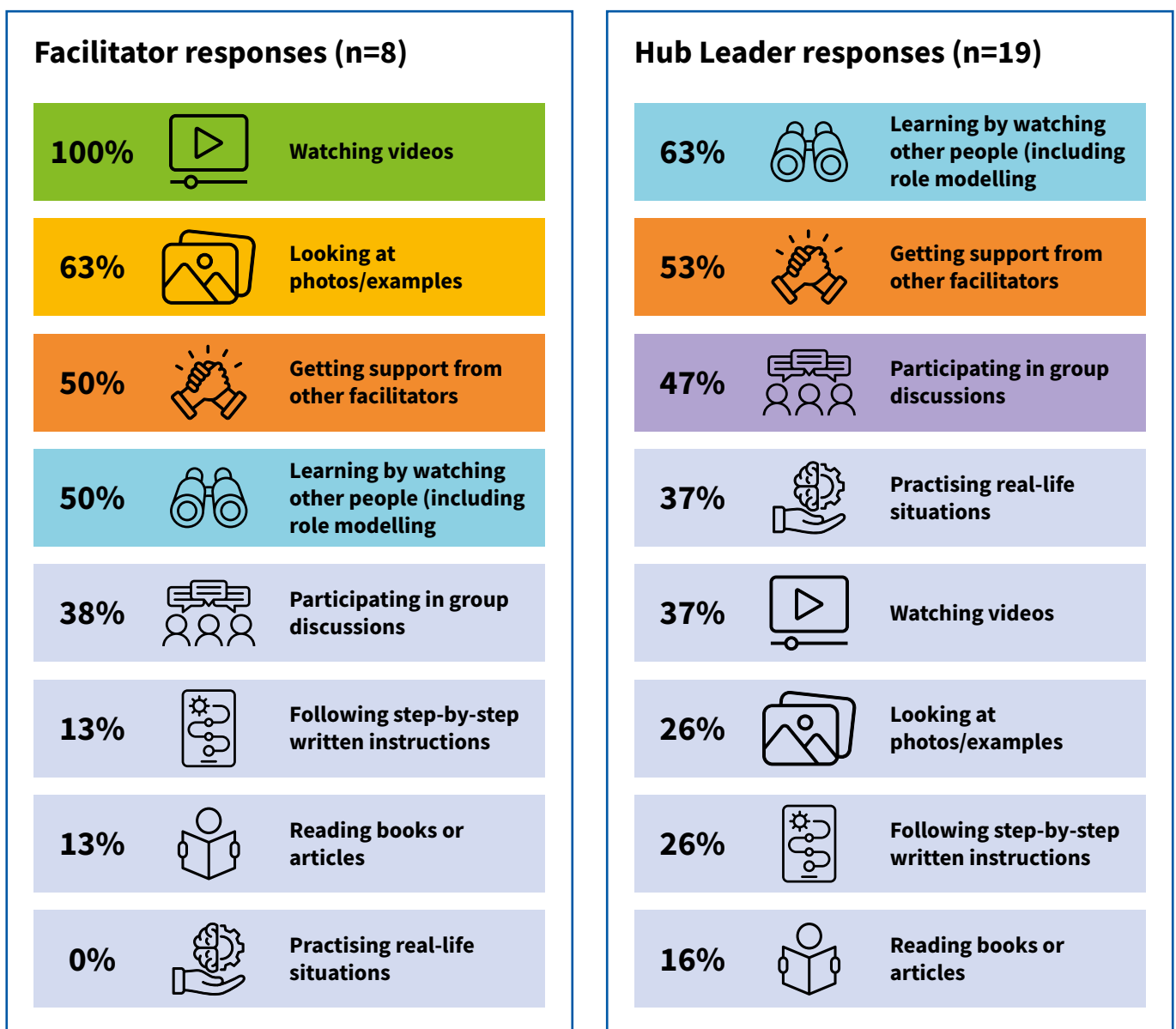


Figure 3. Facilitator and Hub Leader perspectives on the most effective ways for facilitators to learn



The results revealed both differences and commonalities in how facilitators in Hume and Hub Leaders across the network view effective learning methods. Facilitators showed a clear preference for visual and peer-supported learning - particularly videos, photos, and learning from others - indicating a tendency toward lower-pressure, observational approaches rather than practicing real life situations.

Hub Leaders across the network agreed that peer support and learning through observation were effective learning methods for facilitators. Interview feedback also highlighted the value of learning through practice, observation, and peer conversations. The emphasis on role modelling and peer support reflects the on-the-job nature of facilitator learning, especially given limited access to formal training. Videos were widely seen as flexible and accessible (especially when easily viewed on mobile devices), while reading materials and step-by-step guides were less favoured - due to time constraints, language barriers, and varying literacy levels. It is important to note, however, that through interviews, a small number of facilitators and Hub Leaders felt that accessible written materials, in plain English, may be beneficial.



“Supports I want access to...”

The resources and professional learning opportunities suggested by the network are listed in the table below. Items suggested by facilitators and Hub Leaders in the Hume region have been bolded; however, this doesn’t imply that these suggestions came exclusively from Hume staff, many of these ideas were also raised by staff across the network.

Participant insights highlighted the need for increased support, targeted training, accessible resources, and dedicated planning time to strengthen the quality and inclusiveness of playgroup delivery.

Table 3. Resources and professional learning recommendations suggested by the network

Support need	Implications of gap on delivering high quality playgroup	Network suggested resources and professional learning to meet support needs
Tailoring supports to account for diverse facilitator backgrounds and experience within and beyond Hume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of playgroups and wellbeing of facilitators given the varying levels of experience and qualifications across the network. 	<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 need’s basis
Strengthening facilitator knowledge to plan developmentally appropriate playgroup sessions and share learning outcomes with families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of session planning, the learning value of playgroup experiences, and the ability to tailor experiences that are developmentally appropriate and meaningful for children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased 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"> Limited time for session planning and sourcing activities Limited time or long commute to participate in face to face meetings. 	<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



Support need	Implications of gap on delivering high quality playgroup	Network suggested resources and professional learning to meet support needs
<p>Building confidence to address developmental concerns and engage families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited ability to identify additional developmental needs • Limited knowledge on how to support and communicate with children with additional developmental needs • Limited confidence engaging families in difficult conversations • Limited understanding of family’s needs • Limited knowledge of local supports and services • Limited understanding on how to create inclusive spaces for 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 how to have 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
<p>Building cultural confidence and competency and strengthening inclusive practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited cross cultural knowledge and inclusion skills • Limited knowledge on how trauma impacts child behaviour • Limited familiarity with Australian early childhood resources e.g. songs, nursery rhymes, books 	<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
<p>Strengthening support and capacity building for Hub Leaders to enhance playgroup delivery and facilitator development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited resources to support onboarding of new staff in the delivery of playgroup • Limited guidance around the skills and qualifications required of facilitators • Limited knowledge on how to support volunteers • Limited foundational knowledge in early childhood 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



Support need	Implications of gap on delivering high quality playgroup	Network suggested resources and professional learning to meet support needs
Strengthening the connection between playgroups and school readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited language and numeracy skills of children entering kindergarten Limited knowledge of parents around how to support their children with kindergarten transition 	<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

To strengthen playgroup facilitation across Community Hubs, several priority areas have been identified. These are outlined below.

Recommendation 1: Provide national guidance on the role of playgroups as a core early years intervention

- Position playgroups as both a social connector and a learning space that promotes school readiness, parental engagement, and early years development.
- Establish and communicate consistent language around the purpose, value, and scope of playgroups, with links to national and state early childhood frameworks to ensure alignment across hubs.
- Strengthen governance by setting minimum expectations for school leadership, including guidance on sustainable funding and infrastructure to support playgroup delivery.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen the playgroup workforce by investing in paid, qualified, and well-supported facilitators from culturally and linguistically diverse communities

- Acknowledge playgroup delivery as specialised relational work requiring early childhood expertise and cultural competency.
- Develop a standardised facilitator position description, outlining minimum qualifications (e.g. Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care), relevant experience, and cultural competency expectations.
- Ensure facilitators are appropriately remunerated, with sufficient paid hours allocated for planning, family engagement, and professional development.
- Explore pathways for caregivers or community members to become in-house facilitators, reducing reliance on external services and enhancing continuity.

Recommendation 3: Scale tailored, in-person support and ongoing professional development for facilitators and Hub Leaders

- Expand or replicate Hume's Qualitative and Inclusive Playgroups Project Officer role across other CHA regions.
- Establish peer learning networks to support mentoring, modelling, and reflective practice among facilitators and Hub Leaders.
- Pilot a national Playgroup Facilitator Exchange Program, based on Hume's model, to enable peer observation and shared learning.
- Develop onboarding resources for new facilitators and Hub Leaders, including guidance for working with volunteers and understanding the broader purpose of Community Hubs.

Recommendation 4: Centralise and streamline access to playgroup resources that support facilitator development and program quality

- Enhance the CHA website to host a user-friendly digital resource hub, with materials grouped by theme (e.g. developmental stage, session planning, inclusion, parenting support).
- Include contextual descriptions, visual examples (e.g. videos, photos), and clear links to child developmental milestones to guide practical application.
- Optimise resources for mobile access, recognising the time constraints and field-based nature of facilitator work.



- Curate high-quality existing resources – such as from the Raising Children Network and the South Australia Playgroup Guide – to avoid duplication.
- Communicate clearly and consistently across the network about available resources, and assign responsibility for maintaining and updating the central hub over time.

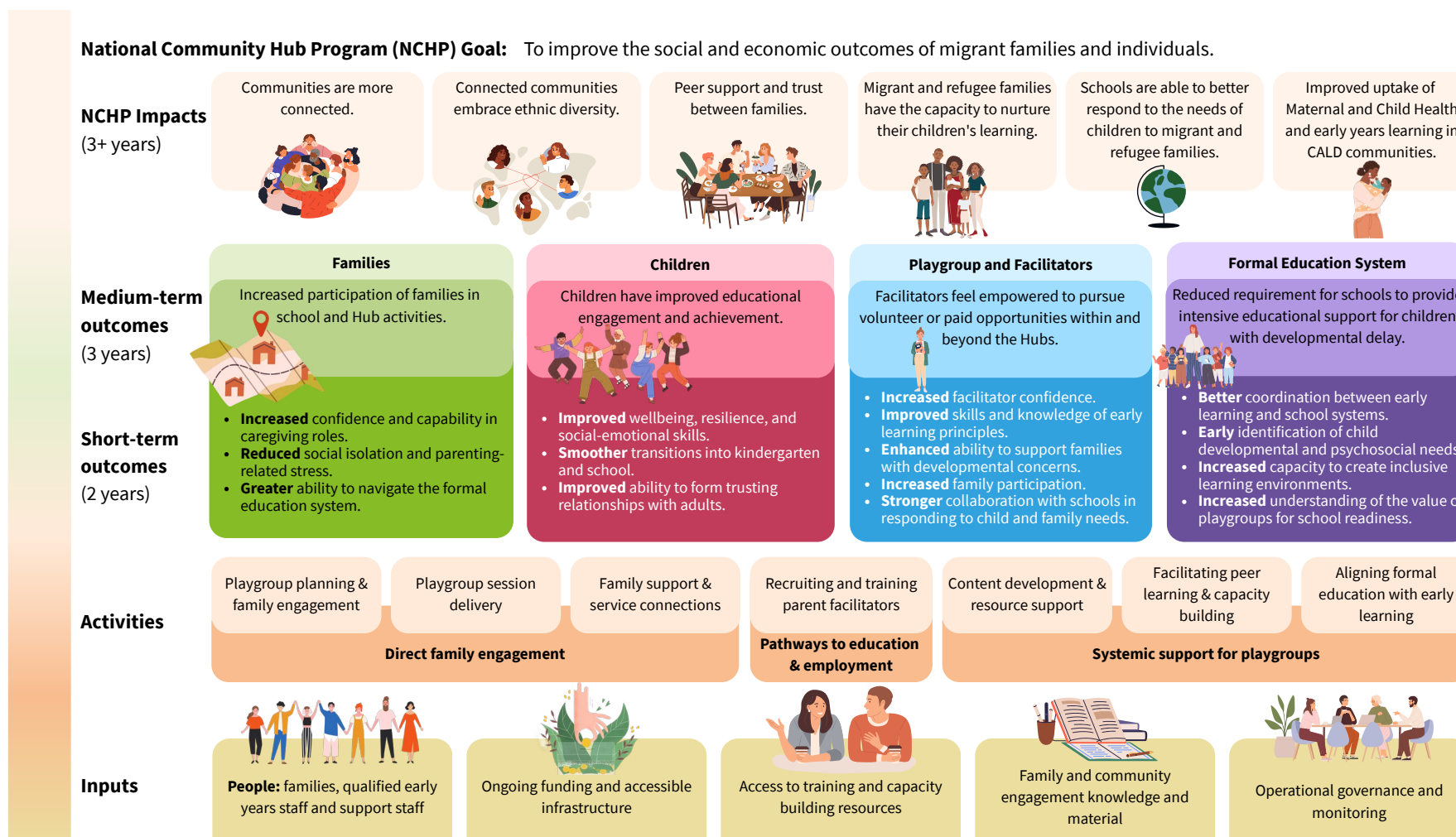
Recommendation 5: Partner with expert service providers to deliver practical, specialist training grounded in real-world scenarios

- Provide facilitators and Hub Leaders with access to external training and in-person support tailored to local needs.
- Focus on the following training priorities:
 - Trauma-informed practice for all Hub staff supporting refugee and migrant families.
 - Communication strategies for engaging children in group settings, particularly those with additional needs.
 - Disability inclusion and early identification of developmental delays.
 - Mental health literacy and effective family engagement strategies.
- Maintain an up-to-date list of relevant support services and training providers in each state.



Appendices

Appendix A – Hume Playgroup Logic Model





Appendix B – Resources and supports available to facilitators

Table 4. Internal and external supports and resources available to playgroup facilitators

Existing support/resource	Description
Opportunities to learn through peer observation	Facilitators visiting other playgroups or hubs to observe experienced facilitators deliver playgroup. In Hume, this peer learning activity is known as the “Exchange Program”.
Community Hubs Australia resources	Information and resources related to the delivery of playgroups available on the Community Hubs Australia website
Utilising volunteers and students on placement	Volunteers and students assisting in running playgroups.
School funding	Schools sometimes provide financial or logistical support for playgroup operations.
Feedback from families	Facilitators seek input on family background, childcare use MCHN and additional needs from families to inform playgroup planning.
Participation in external training opportunities	Hub Leaders and facilitators attend training run by external organisations
Engaging service providers to share early childhood information with families	Involvement of Maternal and Child Health, local councils, and other external partners.
Web-based early childhood education platforms and online resources	Use of early childhood education websites and online resources to inform session planning.
Social Media platforms	Use of social media platforms to inform session planning.
Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)	Use of the EYLF to inform session planning and understand developmental outcomes.
Donations	Playgroups receive donated toys and materials.
Other resources	Miscellaneous resources like toolkits (e.g., ‘Teeth Tails’ booklet, SPICE program), planning guides and session templates.

Table 5. Supports and resources available to playgroup facilitators in Hume City Council

Existing support/resource	Description
Learning from peers/information sharing*	Meetings that bring together facilitators to share ideas
Hume City Council’s Qualitative and Inclusive Playgroups Project Officer*	Hume City Council employs a Project Officer to support the delivery of playgroups
WhatsApp Community of Practice*	Platform for facilitators and Hub Leaders to share ideas, resources, and updates across Hume Community Hubs.
Hub leader support*	Ongoing guidance, debriefing, and planning support from Hub Leaders.
Internal training*	Training sessions facilitated by the Playgroup Project Officer or external providers



Appendix C – Knowledge and skills that would help facilitators better support families

Quantitative findings revealed the knowledge and skills that would help facilitators better support families. Participants were asked to select their top three priorities. Figure 4 below visualises the responses of both facilitators and Hub Leaders.³

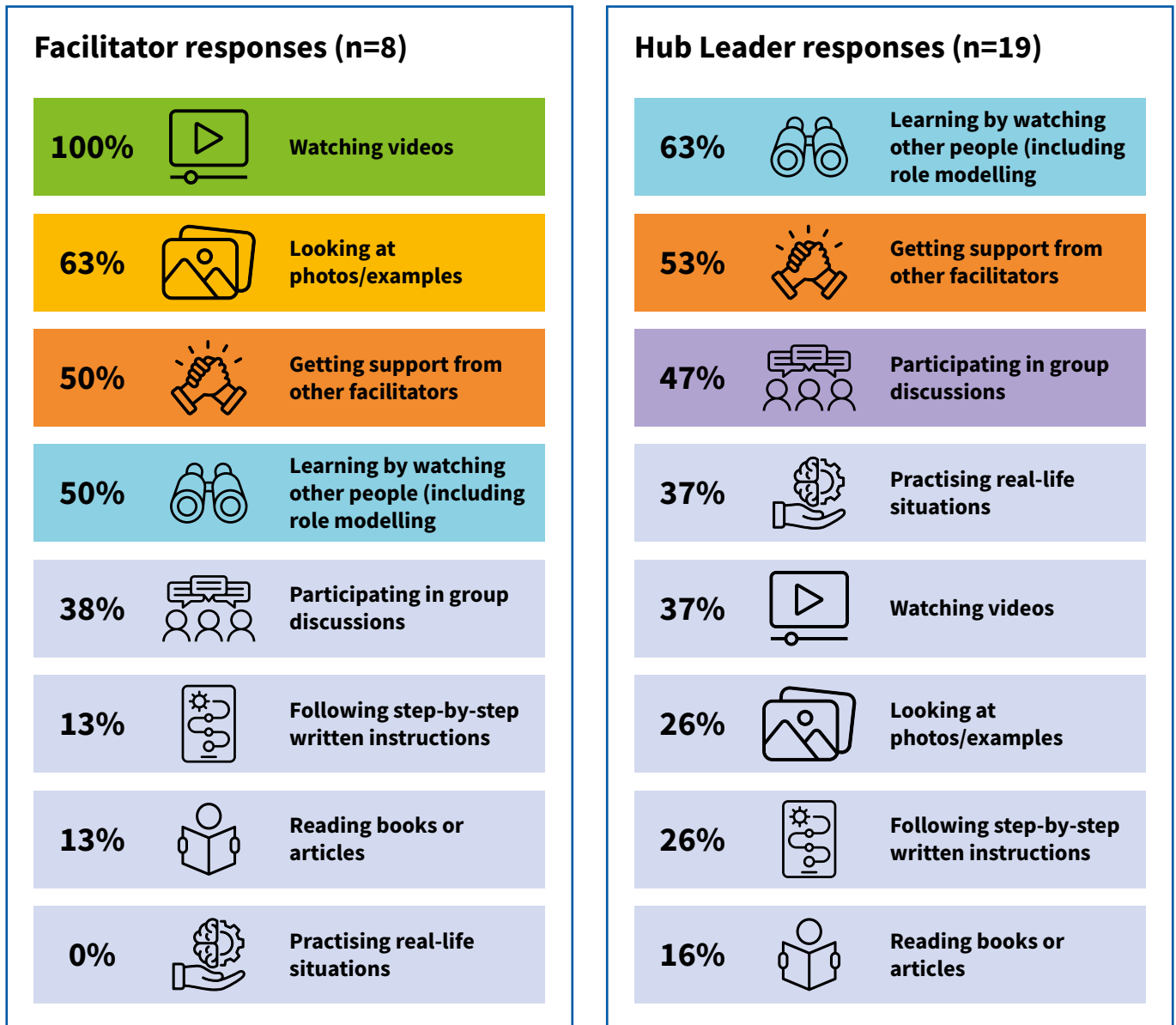


Figure 4. Facilitator and Hub Leader perspectives on additional knowledge and skills needed to better support families. Participants selected up to three priority areas

³ Participants noted that all options were valuable, with some highlighting that “why play is important,” “child development stages,” and “child brain development” are closely interconnected.



References

Community Hubs Australia. (n.d.). Home. Retrieved April 12, 2025, from <https://www.communityhubs.org.au/>

Wong, S., Press, F., & Cumming, T. (2015). Discussion paper for the development of an outcomes evaluation framework for the National Community Hubs Program. National Community Hubs Program. Retrieved from https://communityhubs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Final_Discussion_Paper_NCHP_June_2015.pdf



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