



# PlayForever

Playgroup SA's Intergenerational Playgroup program:  
A guide for aged care providers and stakeholders



A woman with brown hair in a ponytail, wearing a grey t-shirt, is smiling and looking down at a baby. The baby is wearing a yellow top, a black headband, and a black beaded necklace. The baby is holding a small object in its hand. The background is slightly blurred, showing a wooden chair and some colorful objects.

***“We don’t stop playing  
because we grow old.  
We grow old because  
we stop playing.”***

- Playwright, George Bernard Shaw



# What is PlayForever?

Playgroup SA's PlayForever program supports the establishment of intergenerational playgroups in the community and aged care facilities. They are a popular program that bring together our youngest and oldest members of the community in something they both benefit from: PLAY! Everyone can benefit from play, but PlayForever playgroups offer something extra special.

## What are intergenerational playgroups?

Intergenerational playgroups provide a unique opportunity for parents, children, aged care residents and older people in the community to engage, learn and play together. Through partnerships with aged care services, retirement villages, and seniors' groups, intergenerational playgroups bridge generational gaps and reduce isolation and ageism within local communities by bringing people from all walks of life together to create a village through play. They create opportunities for children to further develop their skills, for parents to create a local peer support network, and to provide isolated older adults with vital community interaction. Intergenerational playgroups show that play really is ageless!

To meet this need, Playgroup SA started PlayForever, a unique offering that supports children, their families and older people to engage in intergenerational playgroup. Other intergenerational playgroups and programs also exist outside of the specific PlayForever program.



## Benefits of intergenerational playgroups and programs

Intergenerational playgroups and programs with preschool- and school-aged children and adolescents have been growing in popularity across Australia in the last ten years. This is because the vast range of benefits they offer to children and young people, parents and caregivers and older people. These benefits are reciprocal and playing together transcends age, generational differences and fosters a culture of respect and understanding for both young and old.

A growing body of research has explored intergenerational playgroups, different models and the benefits for older people and attending families.

## Benefits for older people

Getting older can be challenging, lonely and represents a major change in someone's life. Engaging in play and interaction with children counteracts some of the risk factors this stage of life can present, such as lack of independence, feeling unable to contribute to community or undignified, being isolated and a sense of boredom. Introducing intergenerational playgroups into the lifestyle program at your facility will provide new and exciting social and cognitive opportunities for residents and promote psychological and physical health. Alternatively, establishing community-based PlayForever programs in local community centres, where local older Australians are welcome to attend, can support improved connections across generations.

Emergent results suggest that Intergenerational Playgroups improve outcomes and quality of life for older people, particularly those experiencing isolation/loneliness, dementia, or disengagement from community. Other beneficial outcomes for older people include: <sup>12</sup>

- Fun and enjoyment
- Increase in dignity, particularly with residents who have dementia
- Increase in longer lasting joy and happiness and improved wellbeing (reduced depression)
- Higher levels of self-esteem
- More active participation in the community
- Improved mobility (movement)
- Opportunity to develop multi-aged friendships
- Opportunity to improve long-term memory and recall childhood experiences.

## Benefits for children and families

However, the benefits of intergenerational playgroups extend beyond those of the older person to the parents/ caregivers and children within the playgroup too. Where parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents of attending families may have passed or who do not live locally, the playgroup provides them with the opportunity to engage and interact with older people and provides a safe and fun environment for positive shared experiences. Older people often have time and patience to spend time with young children that other adults lack when dealing with busy life pressures.

Children's play changes when it is intergenerational, often being more playful and communicative rather than competitive or solitary. Other beneficial outcomes for children include:<sup>3</sup>

- Fun and enjoyment
- Improved social skills
- Greater empathy for others
- Improved self-regulation
- Opportunity for increased levels of literacy
- Development of positive attitudes towards the elderly and ageing
- Opportunity to develop multi-aged friendships.



<sup>1</sup> Williams, S., Renehan, E., Cramer, E., Lin, X., & Haralambous, B. (2012). 'All in a day's play' – An intergenerational playgroup in a residential aged care facility. *International Journal of Play*, 1(3). 250-263. DOI: 10.1080/21594937.2012.738870

<sup>2</sup> Skropeta, C. M., Colvin, A., & Sladen, S. (2014). An evaluative study of the benefits of participating in intergenerational playgroups in aged care for older people. *BMC Geriatrics* 14(109). 10.1186/1471-2318-14-109

<sup>3</sup> Stanley, M., Allen, P., & Lawrence, W. (December 2019). 'All ages play: Intergenerational playgroups in residential aged care'. Australian Institute of Family Studies.





# Models of intergenerational playgroups

Playgroup SA recommends a co-design process when deciding on the most appropriate model for an intergenerational playgroup. This should involve consultation with residents, local community, families, service staff, and Playgroup SA program partners to ensure it is successful, sustainable and fun for enjoyable for everyone.

## Model 1: Supported playgroup in a community centre or external venue in local area

This model will require you to identify a suitable venue in the community, such as a community centre or church hall. You will need to inspect the venue and ensure it is appropriate for your needs.

You will need to consider transport arrangements to get residents there and back, as well as provide staff for supervision and facilitation of the playgroup. This model can be organisation-led, or volunteer-led. Playgroup SA can be contracted to facilitate the playgroup. This model can sometimes be supported by local government, so check in with your council to see if there is interest in contributing through grant funding, venue provision or in-kind support.

One of the benefits of this model is that it opens the playgroup to other members of the community who may like to attend.

## Model 2: Facilitated within the aged care or retirement facility

This is an option if you have a large open space available to accommodate children, prams, wheelchairs and walkers and activities like craft tables, floor mats and ball games. It is easy for residents who are participating and also allows those who may be unsure about the program to observe or join in without much effort. Some research has found that hosting the playgroup at the aged care service made it easier for older people to attend, particularly those with additional mobility and cognitive needs.<sup>4</sup>

If you host the playgroup in an aged care facility onsite, you need to ensure there is an appropriate playspace available, preferably with an indoor and outdoor area. This area would need to be available for the playgroup session time and any set-up or pack up time. You also need tables and chairs, room to store the playgroup toys and equipment and ensure there is adequate parking facilities for families.

You will also need willing staff and volunteers to support residents and families participating in the playgroup. To be approved, you will need to provide Playgroup SA information about the Safety & WHS Procedures at your facility.

# Want to start a PlayForever Playgroup?

Getting started might seem daunting, but we can help. Playgroup SA will be here to help you at every step.

First, ask the Lifestyle and Wellbeing Coordinator (or equivalent) at your service to facilitate discussions with residents and site managers about establishing an PlayForever playgroup. If there is interest in having PlayForever at your site, the Lifestyle and Wellbeing Coordinator can contact the Playgroup SA Community Impact Team on 1800 171 882 and arrange a meeting to discuss fees and charges, requirements, training, WHS and provide an opportunity to ask any questions. At this meeting, we will also provide you all the necessary paperwork and Playgroup SA affiliation information.

You can talk to the older people you work with, and families in the community, about the idea. Participants should be able to have input into the purpose of the playgroup and best meeting time and day. You can also speak with other staff about roles within the playgroup and sharing the workload.

You will need to arrange a facilitator, this could be a Lifestyle Coordinator, Health and Wellbeing Officer. Provide an assistant (volunteer or paid) The playgroup will need resources, toys and craft activities. You can start to gather these through donations, second-hand stores and purchase these through grants. Playgroup SA can also support the provision of activities and resources. Ideas for resources and materials you might like to provide are:

- Art and craft materials like paper, textas, pencils, glue, scissors and stickers
- Building blocks
- Soft balls
- Cars and trucks
- Books
- Dolls, prams and blankets
- Ride on or push toys
- Dress ups and imagination kits
- Toy animals
- Puzzles

After the first session, you can observe the children and older people and see what interests them. Then, you can add to your resource collection.

You can name the playgroup whatever you agree on as a site. Then, it's time for your first session- HAVE FUN!









# How Playgroup SA can help you

Playgroup SA is the peak body for South Australian playgroups, including intergenerational playgroups. We are a growing organisation that is run by an appointed Board and has been operating since 1974. As a non-profit organisation, all funds received go directly into the servicing and support of delivering and supporting high-quality playgroups in SA.

With over 2000 family members attending more than 200 playgroups across South Australia, Playgroup SA offers practical, professional advice and support, training and development including additional needs services, broad insurance coverage, play resources and playgroup workshops, among other services.

We aim to facilitate positive, enriching & educational experiences in a safe environment for young children and their families/carers by providing an accessible network of playgroup services in the community. Playgroup SA has a commitment to intergenerational playgroups because we understand the reciprocal benefits for younger and older people participating in activities together, building connections and building on capacity of all generations through these connections.

When you register to start a PlayForever playgroup, we will provide you with support, information and resources. These include:

- Support for your organisation to develop a project plan detailing objectives, outcomes and measures, and roles and responsibilities of all involved in the intergenerational playgroup.
- Co-branded promotional materials to assist in your promotion of the playgroup.
- A starter kit and administration paperwork.
- Access to marketing support and advertising through the Playgroup SA Facebook page.
- Ongoing free and low-cost training and professional development opportunities for playgroup facilitator/s to be provided by Playgroup SA Community Impact Team including Play Foundations, Play Essentials, PlayTogether (inclusive practices) and PlayForever.
- Subscription to ePlayNEWS, Playgroup SA's state-based membership newsletter, which is distributed six times per year.
- Assistance with grant applications including the auspicing of grants where applicable.
- Fortnightly Session Planners - a new themed Playgroup Session Planner per week that includes craft ideas, book suggestions, songs, sensory and outside activities linked to the Early Years Learning Framework.
- Draft playgroup routines.
- Referral of your PlayForever playgroup to families who enquire about playgroups in their local area. This includes a listing on the "Find a Playgroup" page of Playgroup SA website.
- Risk Assessment advice for your play space.
- Access to a community of other playgroups and coordinators.

For aged-care providers interested in registering three or more sites as PlayForever playgroups, Playgroup SA can tailor a support package to meet your organisation's specific needs. This can include access to online and face-to-face training, planning for PlayForever program implementation, partnership brokerage with local services and monitoring and evaluation of the program.



# What you need to provide to Playgroup SA

If you decide to register a PlayForever playgroup, Playgroup SA will need the following from you:

- Signed Playgroup SA affiliation documents and fees
- Your site's high-resolution logo and contextual information (for Playgroup SA to support with promotion)
- Working With Children checks for all staff or volunteers involved in the PlayForever program.

## Costs for families

Families attending your PlayForever playgroups need to be members/enrolled with Playgroup SA. This gives them a range of benefits including discounts and access to events and most importantly, ensures all children, parents and carers are covered by our insurance.

To keep costs down and attract families to attend, the aged care site could purchase memberships on behalf of families. Alternatively, families can become individual members for a small fee. They can join for a year, half a year or just a term. Whichever option you choose, parents must complete a Playgroup Enrolment Form on their first session and these must be returned to Playgroup SA.

The PlayForever playgroup can decide whether to charge families a small fee or donation to cover the cost of materials, catering and toys, or whether to absorb this cost.







# Special considerations for intergenerational playgroups

**Safety and risk management:** Wherever you decide to run your PlayForever playgroup, you need to be aware of any hazards or risks to the attendees. Conducting a risk assessment of the venue and designated areas that playgroup will be held in is an essential first step. Playgroup SA can provide you with the risk assessment matrix and advise on risk mitigation strategies. You also need to be aware of safety and risk in relation to the activities you facilitate, such as whether some materials like rice or foam might be slipping hazards. Other practical considerations include having travel mugs for tea and coffee, handwashing and toileting facilities, all allergies of residents and children are recorded and ensuring the space can be kept warm.

**Sickness:** It is important that everyone attending the playgroup is healthy, especially for the safety of vulnerable older people. You must establish very clear policies and expectations in relation to when people are unwell that they should not attend playgroup to keep everyone (including other residents) safe and well. All incidents and injuries should be recorded on a form we provide and lodged with Playgroup SA for insurance purposes.

**Staff who can work across ages:** It has been noted that having staff with a knowledge of community development, especially aged care and young children's play, can support the sustainability and success of intergenerational playgroups.

Aged Care Standards: Intergenerational playgroups should operate within the eight relevant Aged Care Quality Standards.

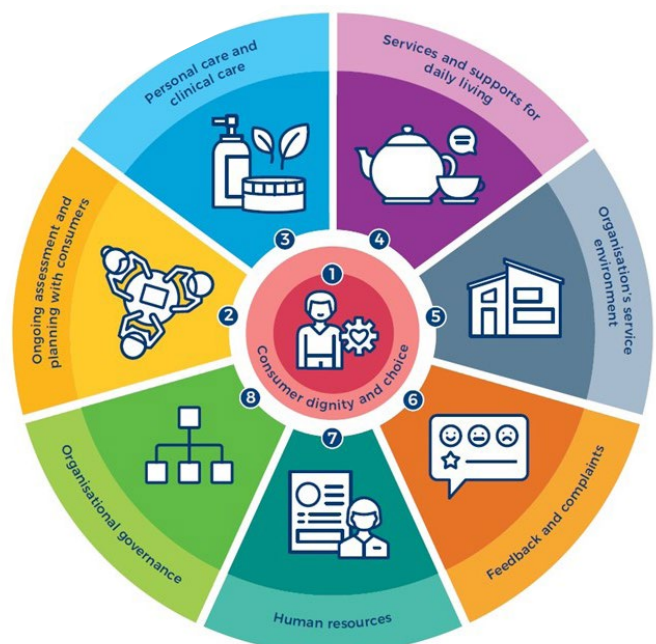


Figure 1: Aged Care Quality Standards

<sup>5</sup> Stanley et al. (2019).

<sup>6</sup> Australian Government Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (2022). 'Quality Standards'.

# What does a PlayForever playgroup typically look like?

Playgroups run smoothly when there is a set structure to follow that can be adapted if things change. You have flexibility to decide the session time, length, and content to suits your local needs however most playgroups run for 1.5-2 hours. This is an example routine that might give you an idea of how other PlayForever playgroups run:

10.00am – Sign in and welcome families to playgroup.

10.10am – Short group time activity, including a welcome song.

10.15am – Children, families and residents move to activities provided. This can be free play as well as a craft activity.

11.00am – Pack up to begin.

11.10am – Fruit time.

11.20am – Group time, including goodbye song or book.

11.30am – Playgroup finishes.







## For more information

Want to find out more about PlayForever Intergenerational Playgroups?

Please call Playgroup SA on 1800 171 882 from 9am-4pm Monday to Friday.

You can also email [info@playgroupsa.com.au](mailto:info@playgroupsa.com.au)



**1800 171 882**

**[www.playgroupsa.com.au](http://www.playgroupsa.com.au)**