



When Your Cohort Won't Stand Still: Measuring Change in Vulnerable Client Groups

Claire Grealy
Urbis

Morag McArthur
Institute of Child Protection Studies
Australian Catholic University



Supported Playgroup and Parent Initiative

- What effect does participation in a supported playgroup have on participants' knowledge and sense of wellbeing as a parent?

Early Years Centres

- What effect does participation in EYC programs have for parents?

Evaluation focus



- Social networks and supports
- Knowledge and use of early childhood services and supports — in particular MCH and kindergarten services
- Parenting skills and confidence
- Impacts on the parent–child relationship
- Activities and interactions in the home setting

Domains investigated



Victoria

Parent tracking

- Time one 61 surveyed; 43 interviewed in-depth
- Time two: 42 parents re-interviewed; 21 of time one in-depths re-interviewed
- Literature review
- Facilitator interviews

Queensland

Parent tracking

- Time one under 40 parents interviewed; all survey and in-depths
- Time two majority re-interviewed – survey and in-depth
- Client data analysis
- Literature review
- Extensive interviews with professionals
- Integration and partnership survey
- Cost analysis

Study methods



- Experience of playgroup
- Aspirations for themselves and their child/ren
- Knowledge and use of services
- Activities at home
- Levels of informal support available
- Level of skill and confidence as a parent
- Levels of social connectedness

Selected measures



“A lot of things are better now because of playgroup. I feel I know more about the community and have more friends now.”

“The most important thing I’ve gained from going to playgroup is meeting other mums and talking to other people. It’s nice having that connection.”

“It’s great for my child to learn new things. Every week there is something new to learn.”

Understanding the impact



- *“I am more willing to listen to suggestions now on how to do things better”.*
- *“I have limited education and I have only really been a mum, so for a mum to ask me questions, makes me feel good”.*
- *“One of the other mums, she asks her how I handle and deal with things as a mother... It is so flattering because I had my first child as a teenager so it shows I have come a long way if another mum wants my opinion. I tell her things and it makes me feel good”.*

Understanding the impact



Participation in a supported playgroup has a positive effect on parents' social networks and supports, and as a result helps to build parents' confidence and skills.

Key finding



- Found it easier to talk to people like doctors and nurses about their children
- Reported having greater capacity to get useful information about their children's needs
- Were more likely to feel good when they thought about their children's future
- Reported being more able to work out what to do if any of their children have a problem
- Found it easier to maintain clear rules and routines in their family
- Reported being more able to find services for their children when they need to
- Felt that there is more to enjoy than to worry about in their family
- Found it easier to stay calm and manage even when things get stressful
- Found their local community to be more child-friendly
- Reported being happier to be raising their children in their community
- Reported having greater capacity to help other families find help when they need it
- Were more likely to feel they have someone to rely on to help out with their children when needed
- Were more likely to report knowing parenting tips that they can share with others
- Were more likely to feel that they are doing a good job as a parent
- Were more likely to report feeling good about themselves
- Were more likely to feel a part of their community
- Were more likely to report having good friends outside their family
- Reported being more able to leave their child, knowing their child won't be distressed.

Quantifying impact



Recruitment

- Engagement with staff critical
- Communication strategy, materials, briefings
- Build confidence of staff

Retention

- Incentives
- Ongoing engagement with staff
- Communication via staff to parents

Risks associated with self-report in socially desirable attributes

- Combination of survey and in-depth
- Use of skilled telephone interviewers
- Building of rapport, reference to previous responses at Time 2
- Use of same interviewers Time 1 and Time 2

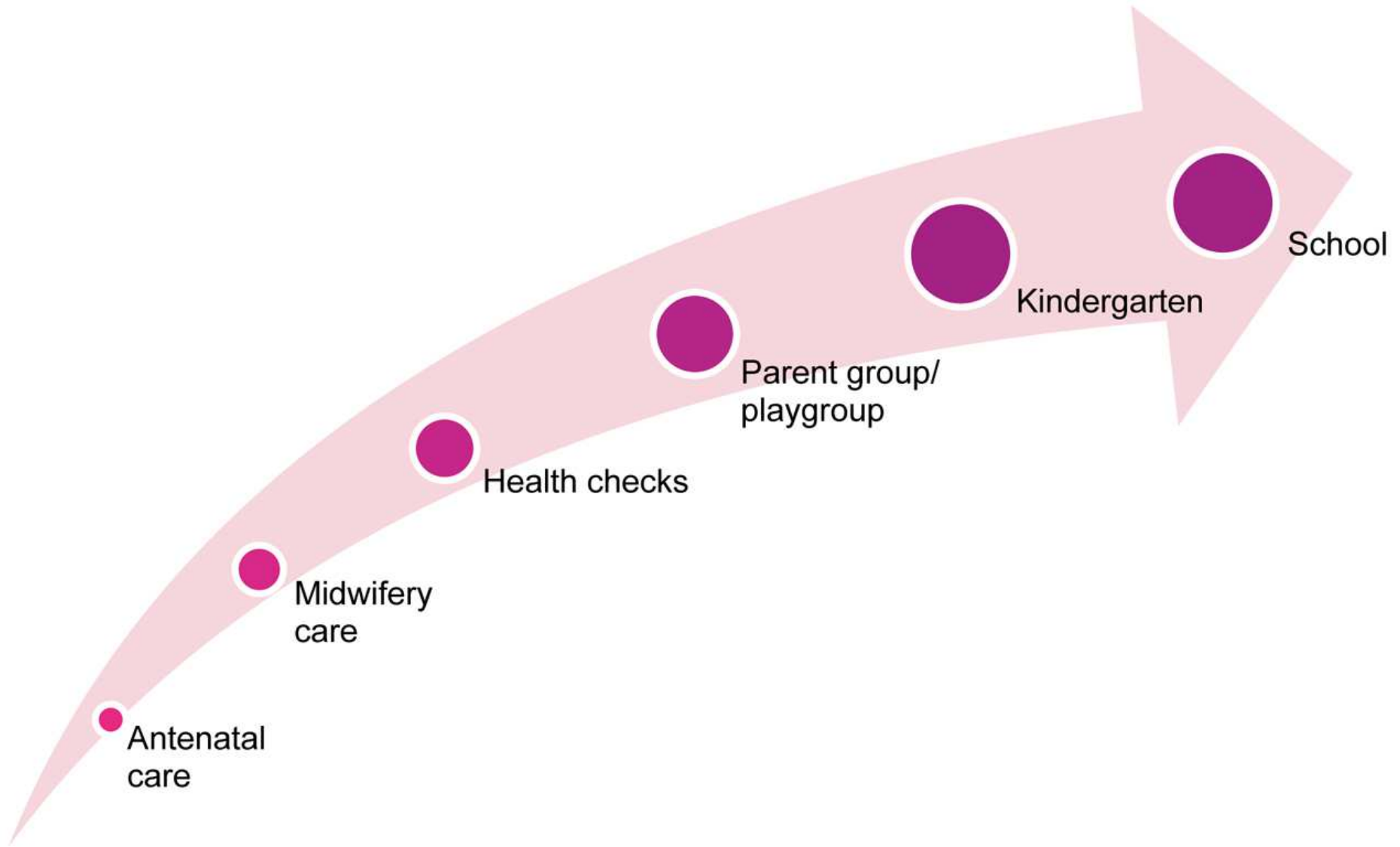
Challenges



- Skilled facilitator
 - consistent, reliable and structured program
 - enables relationships between facilitator and parent, between parents, between parent and child
- Environment conducive to help seeking *and* taking advice
 - *“Used to not admit something was wrong now I ask.”*
- Strategies to maintain attendance
- Quality resources and facilities

Recipe for success





Early years pathway



the evaluation of the supported playgroups and parent groups initiative



Research about Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups

Parents generally say playgroups are helpful. To find out more, a research team wants to speak to parents who are involved with playgroups. This brochure gives you some information about this research.

What is the Victorian Government doing about play groups?

The Victorian Government wants to improve the future for all children. To do this, the Government has asked the Department of Education and Childhood Development to start special play groups and parent groups.

These groups will help parents and children from different backgrounds by:

- building relationships with parents.
- supporting parents.
- making sure that children and parents get the most out of the play groups.

What does the research mean?

The Victorian Government wants to make sure that the play groups are working. To test this, the Department of Education and Childhood Development has asked an independent research team to evaluate the groups.

Independent researchers will collect information to see whether the groups are making a difference to parents and children who use them. The research team work for the Australian Catholic University and a research company called Urbis.

Parents who would like to take part in the research will be contacted to make a time for an interview. The interview can be done in person or over the phone.

Parents who are willing to be part of the research will be interviewed twice, once shortly after joining a playgroup and again some months later. For each interview, the parent will receive a financial incentive for their time and contribution.

What would I be asked in the interview?

You would be asked some questions about:

- + What you think about the play groups?
- + Whether the groups have helped you and what kinds of things have helped the most?
- + Whether you have learned about or used other services because your child attended the play group?
- + Whether the groups have made things easier for you at home?

All the information you share will be kept totally confidential and you will not be identified in the research.

If you have any questions or concerns about this, please contact Karen Oliver at Urbis on 03 8663 4865

Communication

