

Mittagong Community Playgroup Wrap Around Project (WAP)



**Project Report to Southern Highlands Community Foundation (SHCF)
Prepared by Fritz Family Foundation**

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Executive Summary

In November 2024, the Fritz Family Foundation ran a pilot community programme called 'WAP' (Wrap Around Project) for Mittagong Community Playgroup – a free facilitated playgroup operating out of Renwick Community Centre. The programme, co-funded by a grant from Southern Highlands Community Foundation (SHCF), brought together a number of allied health professionals and child-focused experts to present to Playgroup families over the course of four weeks.

WAP was structured around the regular playgroup sessions, allowing families to engage with specialists in a familiar and informal setting. Sessions covered a range of developmental topics such as speech and language milestones, motor skills, sensory diets and feeding concerns. Allied health professionals participated in play-based activities, held one-on-one conversations with parents and carers, and referred them to additional services where necessary.

Feedback from families and participating specialists indicate the programme fostered community connections and improved parental awareness of child development. Parents and carers appreciated the accessibility of expert advice without long waiting lists and valued the structured, practical and hands-on learning approach, while specialists praised the effectiveness of the playgroup setting for parental engagement.

The wrap-around programme was seen as a valuable addition to existing local resources. Several AHPs commented on the lack of formal guidance for young parents and the reliance on community and family support which has diminished due to modern lifestyles and COVID-19. In recent times, regional preschools have seen an increase in dysregulated children, and programmes such as WAP help reestablish important community support systems.

Key recommendations included creating a network of allied health professionals to formalise WAP connections; improving coordination between specialists; expanding the range of specialist presentations to Playgroup families; enhancing the continuity and effectiveness of future programmes by providing more time for informal one-on-one engagement; and exploring partnerships with local businesses and NGOs to sustain and expand WAP.

Building on WAP's success, the Fritz Family Foundation aims to develop a comprehensive directory of local allied health professionals, expand service offerings and establish Mittagong Community Playgroup as a hub for early intervention and preventative child health education. The SHCF grant played a pivotal role in launching this initiative.

The following report summarises the programme's activities, outcomes and future recommendations based on feedback from the allied health professionals and families who participated in WAP.

Project Overview

In May 2024, the Fritz Family Foundation received a one-off grant of \$5,000 from SHCF towards a new community programme aiming to provide enhanced support and resources to local families with young children attending Mittagong Community Playgroup.

The programme, titled 'Wrap Around Project (WAP)', was designed to address children's developmental needs by offering their parents and carers access to a range of allied health professionals specialising in child health and early development:

“The WAP will bring allied health professionals and other child-focused experts to present on a regular basis to the families that attend the Mittagong Playgroup. The programme provides access to Occupational Therapists, Child Nutritionists, Child Psychologists and other local services required by local young families, all in one place. – Project summary from the FFF/SHCF grant agreement, SHCF 2024 Grants Round 1

The programme was developed by the facilitators and volunteers of Mittagong Community Playgroup and the Director of Mittagong Preschool, in consultation with the Fritz Family Foundation and its expert advisory. The programme was delivered **over four weeks in November 2024** at Renwick Community Centre.

WAP involved **over 100 families** that attend the Playgroup on a regular basis, **five local allied health professionals** – three speech pathologists and two occupational therapists operating within the Southern Highlands – and Playgroup staff. **Sixteen sessions** were held in total, including four sessions for the *New Cubs Club* (the 0–12-month group) and 12 sessions for children 1–4 years old (see **Figure 1**).

WAP services were 'wrapped around' the normal weekly programming of Mittagong Community Playgroup. Allied health professionals presented to families, participated in children's playgroup activities and engaged in informal one-on-one conversations with parents and carers, offering expert advice and practical strategies to help support their children's development. Families had an opportunity to directly discuss their parenting concerns in a confidential setting and, where necessary, receive a referral to relevant support services.

Following the programme, the Fritz Family Foundation organised interviews with the specialists who participated in WAP to gauge their professional views on the effectiveness of the engagement and their interest in continuing collaboration with the Playgroup. A parental survey was also undertaken to assess the value of this exercise and the potential for similar programmes in the future from the parents and carers' perspective.

About the Organisers

Fritz Family Foundation

The Fritz Family Foundation supports initiatives and projects that work with families to help more children engage in early learning programmes. It partners with visionary people and organisations who share its commitment to deliver high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) for all young Australians.

The Foundation invests in quality early learning programmes such as Mittagong Community Playgroup at the Renwick Community Centre in NSW. This free facilitated playgroup is run by a team of professional ECEC teachers with a passion for learning with children and supporting families, and a deep understanding of the local community.

The Foundation also supports programmes that strengthen the home learning environment, such as those run by *Early Start* at the University of Wollongong to deliver high quality, play-based experiences for children and families. The Foundation runs its activities in partnership with other organisations and offers financial support, fundraising experience and access to a broad network of experts and decision-makers in government and business to help at the grassroots level to get new initiatives off the ground.

The Fritz Family Foundation is an initiative of the independent non-profit institute for active policy Global Access Partners (GAP). It was established in 2020, following a recommendation of the GAP Standing Committee on Early Childhood Education and Care.

Mittagong Community Playgroup

Mittagong Community Playgroup is a facilitated playgroup located at the Renwick Community Centre in the Southern Highlands and focused on development, learning, play and community. Funded by the Fritz Family Foundation and supported by Mittagong Preschool, the Playgroup was established in 2020 to alleviate the shortage of ECEC services in and around Mittagong. It works to ensure that local children are given every opportunity to participate in a high quality, play-based, facilitated early childhood programme.

The Playgroup welcomes all young families with children from 0 to 6 years old and aims to engage the entire family in quality early learning and development programmes for their child. The Playgroup serves an average of **60 local families per week**. It operates as a community support centre where young parents can come together, hear presentations from experts and engage in meaningful play activities with their children.

On average, about **150 people** attend Mittagong Community Playgroup every week, including parents, carers and children, across three playgroup sessions and one *New Cubs Club* event.

The Playgroup is run by **a team of professional ECEC teachers and** educators from Mittagong Preschool who have a deep knowledge of the local community and a passion for early learning and family support. The teachers facilitate age-appropriate early learning programmes, songs and book experiences, which can then be replicated at home, to build parental confidence and competence in supporting their child's development.

Mittagong Community Playgroup is **an inclusive community hub** that welcomes families from diverse backgrounds, including newly arrived migrants. About 20% of children in the Mittagong region experience socioeconomic disadvantage.

With the backing of the Fritz Family Foundation, the Playgroup is developing **a network of allied health professionals and other service providers** that are easily accessible to young families to support them as required.

Project Rationale

The Fritz Family Foundation and its associated GAP Standing Committee on Early Childhood Education and Care have accumulated extensive evidence that integrating health, welfare, school and early learning on the same site improves outcomes for all children, but in particular the vulnerable and disadvantaged cohort.¹ Engaging local communities to use integrated services produces the best outcomes for children and their families and generates social and economic benefits to the whole community.

Research also suggests that a supported playgroup is an ideal setting for young families to share information with other likeminded parents and carers and can act as a nurturing and safe environment for them to ask questions and discuss parenting challenges. Facilitated playgroups provide an opportunity for soft entry points into formal support systems, linking families to specialists and critical information about child development.²

This rationale formed the basis of WAP. While traditional models of integrated care are centred in preschools, schools and community centres, the Fritz Family Foundation has proposed **a facilitated and professionally run community playgroup as a feasible and cost-effective model for ECEC service integration**. WAP 2024 was the first step towards realising that vision.

¹ GAP Taskforce on Early Childhood Education 2016 Final Report, https://globalaccesspartners.org/ECE_Taskforce_Report_GAP_Oct2016.pdf

² Commerford, J. & Robinson, E. (2016), 'Supported playgroups for parents and children', <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/supported-playgroups-parents-and-children>

Impact and Outcomes

Feedback from participants suggests the programme successfully fulfilled its objectives. It fostered new community connections and increased the ability of parents and carers to identify areas of need in their children's health and learning profile. It helped fill a gap in provision in a local community currently underserved in terms of ECEC and allied health provision for children, by offering young families access to services they might not easily access on their own.

The participating allied health professionals (AHPs) played a key role in the programme by delivering information sessions and engaging directly with families through informal one-on-one conversations. They also answered specific questions from parents and carers, joined in informal play with their children and provided targeted resources (**Figure 2**). Several parents attended multiple sessions and benefitted from follow-up conversations with specialists.

The range of issues discussed included strategies to boost vocabulary by incorporating language in physical or imaginative play, age-appropriate milestones in book reading and comprehension, and the developmental benefits of music and movement. The AHPs also addressed concerns regarding feeding, swallowing and reflux, delayed mobility, the importance of breathwork, baby massage and bubble play. They also demonstrated techniques to encourage sitting and crawling, emphasised the value of hearing tests, and stressed the benefits of a 'sensory diet' to improve attention and self-regulation (see Facilitator Notes in the Attachments).

Parents and carers expressed interest in hearing from a broader range of specialists in the future, including nutritionists, music therapists and first aid coaches, behavioural therapists, psychologists, physiotherapists, baby massage specialists and sleep consultants (**Figure 3**).

WAP facilitated closer connections between families and professionals, creating a more supportive and knowledgeable community. Greater collaboration between allied health professionals, increased resources for the Playgroup to run the programme, and a stronger focus on informal engagement between specialists and families were suggested to further enhance the effectiveness of the programme.

The success of WAP highlights the importance of high quality, community-driven programmes in supporting early childhood development and parental education in regional areas experiencing a shortage of ECEC and allied health provision.

Participant Feedback

Feedback on the project was gathered through one-on-one interviews with AHPs, a parental survey distributed via email, and conversations with Playgroup staff members.

Allied Health Professionals

WAP involved five local AHPs – three speech pathologists and two occupational therapists (OTs) – to offer a range of unique perspectives and broad expertise. The OTs focused on helping parents understand the neurological aspects of their child's behaviour and the importance of developmental milestones, particularly in the first two years of life. The speech pathologists covered topics such as reading to children, communication milestones and tips for effective parenting.

In post-programme interviews, the AHPs noted that many parents had been eager to speak to them about their concerns and that a high number of families returned to the sessions, indicating satisfaction with the resources and information provided.

All the interviewed AHPs agreed that the Playgroup's structured activities presented a perfect setting for engagement and learning, and demonstrated the value of informal interactions, community support and **'it takes a village' mentality** in fostering child development. The playgroup setting was seen as particularly effective for connecting families in the post-COVID 19 period, as more preschool-age children in Mittagong and surrounds have presented with dysregulation and other developmental concerns since the pandemic.

An OT who participated in six sessions (two *New Cubs Club* and four sessions with older children) offered strategies and resources to support children's development during the critical first two years of their life – for example, the importance of daily 'tummy time' to build the core muscles for crawling. Practical components included obstacle courses encouraging children to crawl through tunnels and climb over hurdles to develop essential motor skills, and demonstrations of the benefits of music and rhythm to both child development and maternal mental health. This therapist now plans to organise follow-up workshops for parents willing to learn more.

One of the speech pathologists said her desire to give back to the Mittagong and surrounding communities motivated her participation in the programme. Rather than seeking new clients, she was happy to direct parents to other relevant services as appropriate in the local area. She praised the sessions' high attendance rate, noting the baby group filled its maximum capacity of 14 families per session. Over the course of the programme, three families from the *New Cubs Club* and four from the older children's group sought one-on-one discussions with her regarding particular issues.

Another speech pathologist with prior experience working in playgroup settings structured her sessions around the Playgroup's weekly themes and activities that parents and children were already familiar with. Having worked with other NGOs and in public health before transitioning to private practice, she found the experience valuable and praised the advance notice provided by the Playgroup staff which allowed her to prepare accordingly. Her sessions generated strong attendance, with an average of 20 families participating, and the number increased as the sessions progressed. Conducting back-to-back sessions also allowed her to build greater rapport with families.

The same speech pathologists found that casual five-to-ten-minute conversations with individual families were a more effective approach than presenting in front of a large group, as families appeared more confident in discussing their concerns in personal interactions. She aligned her work with the clear learning goals set by Playgroup staff, and her practical component included reading the book of the day and offering parents tips for improving communication with their children. She also set up an information station with posters and other material on reading techniques and communication milestones.

Challenges mentioned during AHP interviews included finding enough time to provide families with sufficient information and resources while their children were actively engaged in play. However, parents of older children who could play independently were more available to engage in conversations with specialists. The Playgroup's structured group time was a particular highlight for families and AHPs alike.

All the interviewed AHPs found the engagement worthwhile and stressed their desire to keep developing relationships with these families and participate in similar programmes as a service for the local community. They praised the Playgroup staff for their excellent facilitation of the programme and the opportunities it provided to create connections between families. In their view, this playgroup was different from other volunteer-run playgroups and offered something new to the local community.

The AHPs also appreciated the opportunities to connect with each other and expressed interest in receiving a list of all allied health professionals who participated in WAP to develop a community of health providers around the Playgroup.

For future programmes, the AHPs suggested several potential improvements such as the installation of information booths with additional information pamphlets, better coordination between participating specialists to ensure continuity across their sessions, and the distribution of preliminary material to parents and carers to improve their understanding of what each specialist does and better prepare them for the upcoming sessions.

Parents and Carers

The parental survey was completed by a sample of 13 families. It included open-ended questions about the elements parents and carers found most beneficial about WAP and additional elements they would like to see included in the future (see the Survey Questionnaire in the Attachments).

Most respondents found the experience highly beneficial, and valued the opportunity to access expert guidance without long waiting lists and ask “burning questions” in a timely way. Many commented positively on *‘the hands-on approach’* of practical demonstrations and personalised feedback on their babies’ development. One parent observed that *“seeing the professionals at work, e.g., reading a story, leading relaxation, giving baby massage, commenting on activities we were doing”* helped them understand what these specialists do and how to apply their advice at home.

Others highlighted the ability to ask direct questions, with one noting, *“The speech therapist gave me insight into what constitutes a ‘Word’ for my child’s age range and taught me what reasonable expectations would be for this age range”*.

Respondents also found the take-home handouts and resources valuable, as well as learning reading strategies such as asking Blank’s Level questions³ after reading a story, baby massage techniques and simple and straight-forward communication methods. One parent appreciated learning that *“speech is just a small part of a speech therapist’s job”* and discovering ways to build an *“improvised routine”* and support their child’s language development and interest in books.

When asked about potential improvements, parents suggested follow-up sessions with presenters, a broader range of specialists, smaller group sizes to improve engagement, and more structured activities led by allied health professionals. Some also asked for a more detailed explanation of the roles played by occupational therapists.

Overall, the programme received highly positive feedback, with parents calling it *“an amazing”* initiative that connects families with services they may not have otherwise accessed. One parent summed up their experience by saying the programme *“gave peace of mind that my child is within the range that they should be in”*.

Eighty-five percent of respondents said they would attend a similar project in the future and were interested in contributions from nutritionists, music therapists and first aid coaches, as well as behavioural therapists, psychologists, physiotherapists, baby massage specialists and sleep consultants (**Figure 3**).

³ The Blank’s Level of Questioning - a framework to help children develop key oral language comprehension skills. There are four levels of questioning which move from simple, concrete questions to more difficult, abstract questions.

Playgroup Staff

Feedback from Michelle Hinton, Playgroup Facilitator:

“The WAP project felt like a ground-breaking opportunity for an established, facilitated playgroup. Our sessions are highly attended and to ensure families did not miss out, we enacted a waitlist system during WAP. This communicated the importance of this extended service and minimised underutilised spots within a session. We pre-circulated the program to the AHs, asking for feedback from their developmental domain context. It was validating to hear the array of programmed experiences exceeded their expectations and covered vital learning areas and skills. Some additions were made, accommodating specific goals for AH participation.

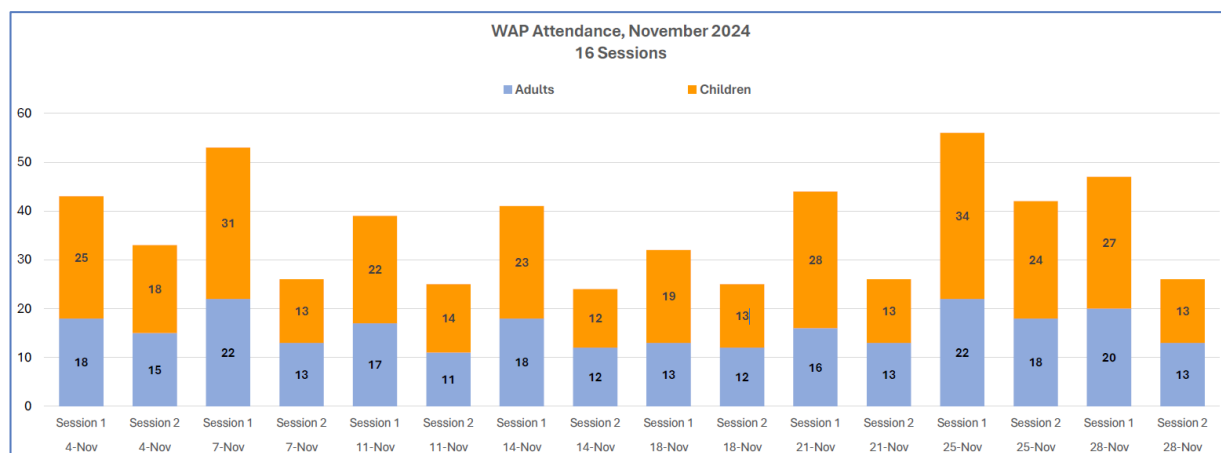
As the project was held later in the year, most families were comfortable and familiar with the space, therefore felt at ease in the setting. Many families often ask a range of child development questions and having the support of Allied Health ensured we were giving holistic responses. During the year, many families have noted seeking Allied Health support for speech queries, OT issues and other developmental concerns. Having the AHs in the setting allowed for immediate answers, reassurance and direction as to where to seek further help. Parents are often daunted by the process and thereby hold off seeking assessment. This project brought the professionals to a place they regularly attend, thereby making the whole process more streamline. As the AHs chosen for the project mainly had a philanthropic lens, their engagements were genuine, and the parents felt heard. The highest success rate was from families attending multiple sessions and following up with AHs they had already built a rapport.

We believe pre-advertising the AH focus of the day was successful as parents were intentional in their sign-ups and came with prepared questions. Many families referred to hand-out information, stating that they looked at the flyers during a quiet moment at home and completed activities with their children in the home setting. As a facilitator, the feedback given by families was glowing and they truly understood how poignant the sessions were, the unique opportunity, the background work, the vision and overall, felt privileged to attend.”

Data Analysis

The following chart presents attendance data for the WAP sessions conducted in November 2024. It is divided into two categories for adults (blue) and children (orange). Sixteen sessions were conducted over the course of the four weeks, with the morning sessions proving most popular.

Figure 1. WAP Attendance, November 2024



Attendance peaks:

- The highest total attendance occurred on **25 November (Session 1)**, with a combined total of 56 participants (34 children and 22 adults).
- Other notable high-attendance sessions were Session 1 on 7 November with 53 participants (31 children and 22 adults) and Session 1 on 28 November with 47 participants (27 children and 20 adults).

Distribution insights:

- Children's attendance varied more significantly across sessions, with the highest at 34 and the lowest at 12.
- Adult attendance remained relatively stable, ranging from 11 to 22 attendees per session.

The above data demonstrates strong and consistent participation across all sessions, indicating sustained interest and engagement. On average, **37 people** attended each session (**21 children** and **16 adults**). Peaks of attendance and consistently high child turnout highlight the project's appeal to families. Such consistent family engagement as well as the enthusiasm from the AHPs expressed in post-project interviews, suggests that a similar programme would likely attract a comparable audience and remain successful if held again.

The following diagrams show families' methods of engagement with AHPs during the programme and the range of other specialists they would like to hear from in the future.

Figure 2. Q3: How did you engage with the allied health professional?

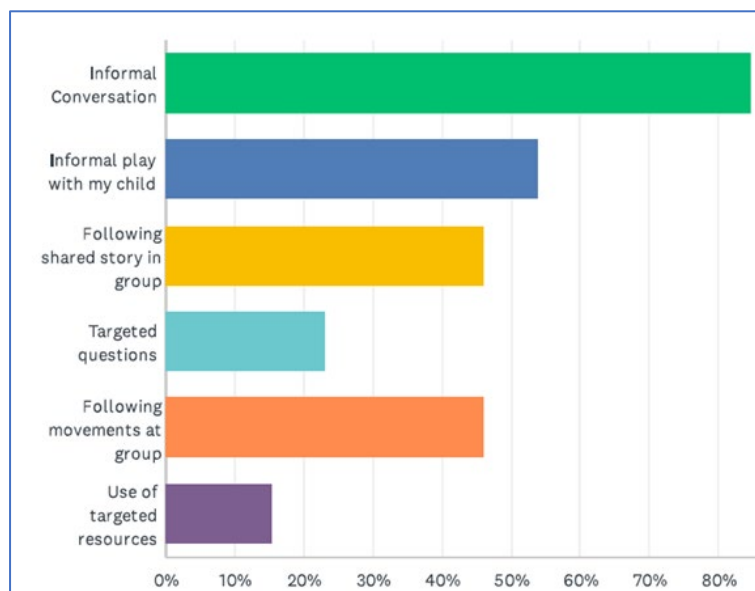
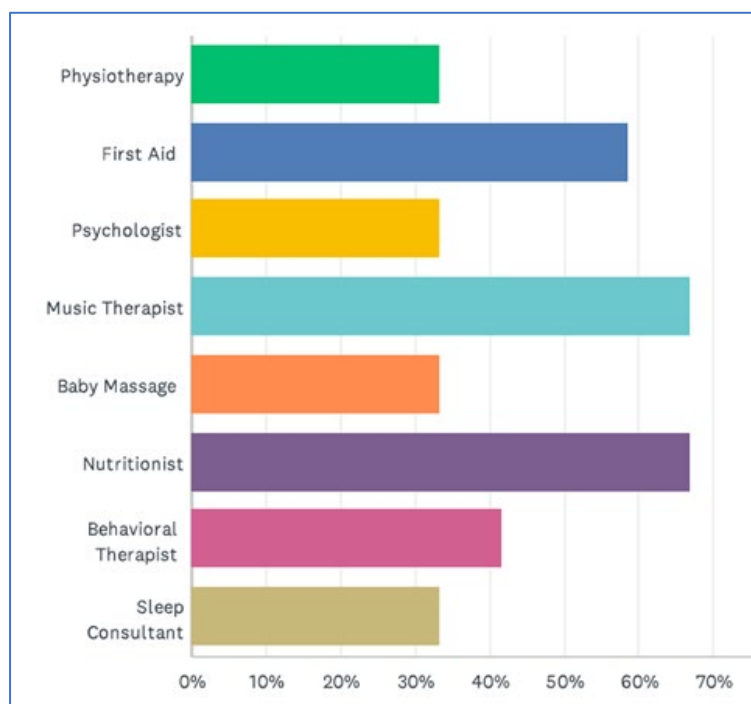


Figure 3. Q9: Are there any other health care professionals or the like that you would like to hear from in the playgroup setting?



Testimonials

- *“The playgroup is an amazing opportunity for the community to connect and for us as allied health to be able to be a part of something very special. The more formal nature of this wonderful playgroup is so essential in this current climate where the opportunity for play is significantly reduced. As an OT we understand fully the importance of play as a child's "work" and that without the freedom to explore their environments in a safe and targeted manner with one to one attention, the child will miss out on so much learning and the foundations they need to become fulfilled adults with the life skills and confidence to navigate a challenging world.” – Allied health professional*
- *“Thank you for the opportunity to conduct the wrap around project throughout November. It was highly beneficial for our families and the therapists involved. The project was received well and there were many meaningful flow-on conversations.” – Playgroup staff member*
- *“So thankful for this initiative and the entire team.” – Parent*
- *“It’s really interesting to hear from allied health professionals since it’s a world I know nothing about, and there’s always something to learn. It’s great to learn about them in a low-stakes environment instead of an appointment which may or may not have payment attached to it. It’s great to get a feeling of who might be a good match if/when they are needed too.” – Parent*
- *“Loved the allied health visits, very helpful and a great initiative.” – Parent*
- *“Great program, really well run and great for both mothers and babies”. – Parent*
- *“This is an amazing program that helps connect the community with services they may not have had the opportunity to connect with, or known they needed to connect with. Im my case it gave peace of mind that my child is within the range that they should be in.” – Parent*
- *“Thank you so much for a wonderful program.” – Parent*
- *“I wanted to thank you very much for facilitating the new cubs group for the past year. Archie and I have benefitted so much from the program. He started coming when he was only three months old and it has been lovely to watch him grow over the months (into the big 10-month-old that he is now). Providing a cost free play group has meant so much to us. We really felt valued and welcomed into the group. We have loved meeting the other families and watching their children grow as well. When we were having a tough week with hardly any sleep, coming to the play group helped me to feel less alone and connected to other families with similar lived experience. As a clinical psychologist myself, I can see how beneficial the community is for the mental health of families and would recommend it to anyone.” – Parent*

- *“Thank you for making the Mittagong Playgroup a reality. The playgroup is an amazing contribution to the families in our community and strengthens community bonds. My family has been able to form friendships with others in the community as a result of the playgroup. My son has a severe speech delay and benefits immensely from his time at the playgroup each week. He has begun to vocalise more and I attribute some of that success to the educators from Mittagong Preschool. I cannot express how thankful I am for your centre's contributions to the community, and thank the Fritz Family for the funding that makes that possible. I am very hopeful that the playgroup will continue well into the future.” – Parent*
- *“My husband and I relocated our little family to the Highlands late last year. At the time, I had a newborn baby and a two year old and I felt incredibly overwhelmed and really alone when my husband started work (we'd left our support network in Sydney). I was adrift a lot of the week, trying my best to mother my two babies but feeling so insecure and out of my depth. [] Playgroup has given me a much needed anchor during this transition. It's given me opportunities to play with my children without the added labour of play set up and pack down. It's given me a place to connect with others who value this precious time in children's lives. It's given me ideas that have empowered me in my play at home. It's given my blurry, muddled weeks some structure. It's given me friendly faces to see again in the shops, on walks with my children, to bump into at Tabatinga. It's given me people who share in the moments of awe in my children's growth and development. It's given me confidence to make hard decisions that involve me prioritising time with my children while they are so young. It's given me a community when I really needed it and I am so grateful for that. I wanted to give a special mention to Michelle and Sue. It's an act of real generosity to show up week to week, regardless of personal situations or fluctuations and offer that sense of community and connection to others. I wanted to share this so that you know how much difference playgroup makes to real parents who are trying their best and looking for a village to raise their children in.” – Parent*

Acknowledgment

The support of Southern Highlands Community Foundation was acknowledged on all promotional material related to WAP, including community posters, the social media channels of Global Access Partners and Mittagong Community Playgroup, and the parental survey and written communication. The Chair of the Fritz Family Foundation, Catherine Fritz-Kalish AM, spoke about the programme and SHCF's support during her presentation at the Rotary Club Board in Mona Vale to newly elected members of the Wingecarribee Shire Council in October 2024.

SHCF will also be acknowledged in any future proposals to expand the wrap-around AHP network of Mittagong Community Playgroup and scale up the playgroup ECEC service integration model.

Mittagong Community Playgroup's Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/Mittagong-Community-Playgroup-100083225737438/>

GAP social media channels:

- Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/GlobalAccessPartners/>
- LinkedIn - <https://www.linkedin.com/company/global-access-partners/>
- X - <https://x.com/GlobalAccessAu>
- Instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/globalaccesspartners/>

X/Twitter

GlobalAccessPartners @GlobalAccessAu · May 13, 2024

Congratulations to #FritzFamilyFoundation for winning a #SHCF grant for the Wrap Around Project (WAP) - a programme to bring #alliedhealthprofessionals and other child-focused experts to present regularly to the families attending the #Mittagong Community Playgroup



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SHCF Community Grants champion grassroots initiatives that target areas of need in the #SouthernHighlands community. Among 2024 recipients is #FritzFamilyFoundation's Wrap Around Project to support #earlychildhood development in a #playgroup environment
<https://lnkd.in/gVgsduMX>



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Global Access Partners
Published by Olga Bodrova
November 22, 2024

The Wrap-Around Project (WAP) at [Mittagong Community Playgroup](#) is underway, with occupational therapists and speech pathologists conducting information sessions for young families. Implementation of WAP was made possible by the support of the Fritz Family Foundation and a grant from The Southern Highlands Community Foundation [#SHCF](#)



Mittagong Community Playgroup Wrap-Around Project

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Presentation



Wrap-Around Project

Research demonstrates that a playgroup is a perfect setting for young families to share information with other likeminded parents and carers and can act as a nurturing and safe environment for them to ask questions and talk about challenges.

Facilitated playgroups also provide an opportunity for soft entry points linking families to formal support services and critical information about child health and development.

The Fritz Family Foundation is building a wrap-around network of allied health professionals and other child-focused experts to augment the work of Mittagong Community Playgroup. Specialists in occupational therapy, child psychology, child nutrition, speech pathology and physiotherapy are regularly invited to present to the families that attend the Playgroup.

Families can discuss their developmental or parenting concerns and may be referred to support services as required, making the process less overwhelming and more accessible.

The project is supported by a \$5,000 grant from the Southern Highlands Community Foundation (SHCF).




Recommendations

The success of WAP demonstrates the value of community-driven and professionally run programmes to support early childhood development and parental education in Mittagong and its surrounds.

Recommendations offered by parents and carers, allied health professionals and Playgroup staff at the conclusion of the programme included:

- 1. The establishment of a network of local allied health professionals**

There was overwhelming support for creating a wrap-around network of allied health professionals and other child-focused experts to augment the work of Mittagong Community Playgroup and build on the success of WAP.

- 2. Regular presentations by specialists**

A broader range of AHPs, including experts in child psychology, child nutrition, physiotherapy and music therapy, could be invited to present regularly to the families that attend the Playgroup.

- 3. More opportunities for informal engagement and follow-up**

Several AHPs stressed the effectiveness of informal, one-on-one interactions with parents and carers. Future programmes should ensure there is enough time and space for professionals to engage with families in a casual and comfortable manner.

- 4. Collaboration among allied health professionals**

Future programmes should encourage greater collaboration between AHPs to provide continuity between sessions and increase the impact of the services provided.

- 5. More written information prior to specialist engagement**

Participants suggested creating additional informational resources, such as pamphlets or prep materials, to send to families ahead of the sessions to help them prepare.

- 6. Increased availability of funds and resources for future programmes**

Suggested potential sources of funding included Bunnings, hospital outreach programmes, and regional NGOs that emphasise community support.

Project Expenditure

Item Description	Amount
Programme development	\$2,000.00
Programme resources and equipment	\$500.00
Programme facilitation	\$1,000.00
Therapist liaison and booking	\$400.00
AHP fees	\$2,500.00
Programme M&E analysis and reporting	\$2,000.00
TOTAL	\$8,400.00

Next Steps

Encouraged by the WAP pilot, the Fritz Family Foundation plans to expand the programme and is looking for supporters to build **a wrap-round network and registry** of allied health professionals for Mittagong Community Playgroup to use as a reference to support the needs of children and their families.

A service directory of local allied health professionals will be created to help parents understand what each specialist provides and increase ease of access to much need services for young families. The directory will be regularly updated and made available to all Playgroup participants (up to 250-300 families on the booking system, with an average of up to 150 people attending per week).

The allied health network will provide a vehicle for **family-centred prevention and early intervention** for children with special health and developmental needs. Screening assessments could help identify children that require specialist consultation. Therapists could offer one-off sessions with children in the 0-2 years age bracket, usually the stage of most concern. Allied health professionals could deliver health literacy talks at Playgroup sessions and empower parents and carers with additional skills and a greater understanding of what developmental milestones to expect at each age.

The expanded WAP programme could facilitate developmental assessments for children with special needs and provide information to the newly revised National Disability Insurance Scheme, becoming one of its Foundational Support partners. Some families in the community do not speak English as a first language and need extra support. Early intervention needs to be holistic and functional but is also a process that needs to be well-explained and understood.

Preventative health education will help children maintain their physical health and mental resilience, while early intervention for children with special needs will promote healthy development and the acquisition of skills. This will, in turn, result in a stronger, more resilient and connected community.

The SHCF grant helped kick-start this process.

Attachments

WAP Session Schedule and Facilitator Notes

Date	Booked attendees	Therapist	Reason for attendance
1. Monday 4 th Nov #1	43 Adults: 18 Chn: 25	Occupational Therapist 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Mum came specifically to speak to Occupational Therapist 1 about her daughter and delayed mobility
2. Monday 4 th Nov #2	33 Adults: 15 Chn: 18	Occupational Therapist 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Dad came with prepared questions about child's physicality
3. Thursday 7 th Nov #1	53 Adults: 22 Chn: 31	Speech Pathologist 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lots of general discussion Question about how to boost vocabulary. Incorporating language in physical play, i.e., obstacle course – under, over, etc.
4. Thursday 7 th Nov #2 – New Cubs Club	26 Adults: 13 Chn: 13	Speech Pathologist 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mum came with specific concerns around feeding and swallowing Lots of questions surrounding book reading and babble
5. Monday 11 th Nov #1	40 Adults: 17 Chn: 22	Speech Pathologist 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Mum had lots of questions around how to support language in imaginative play A Mum asked about appropriate length of sentences for her 3 year old A few questions surrounding comprehension How to access a hearing test
6. Monday 11 th Nov #2	25 Adults: 11 Chn: 14	Speech Pathologist 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaged mainly in informal chats and answered questions arising in conversations
7. Thursday 14 th Nov #1	41 Adults: 18 Chn: 23	Occupational Therapist 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Movement and regulation
8. Thursday 14 th Nov #2 – New Cubs Club	24 Adults: 12 Chn: 12	Occupational Therapist 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions surrounding movement and reflux

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementing baby massage for bonding Importance of breathwork How to support sitting and crawling
9. Monday 18 th Nov #1	32 Adults: 13 Chn: 19	Occupational Therapist 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A conversation with a parent surrounding developmental concerns and possible ASD Talk with a parent about appropriate tools for toddlers – demonstrated use of chubby, animal textas
10. Monday 18 th Nov #2	25 Adults: 12 Chn: 13	Occupational Therapist 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussions around use of scissors How to support a sensory diet
11. Thursday 21 st #1	44 Adults: 16 Chn: 28	Speech Pathologist 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Mum attended specifically as she had concerns about a potential lisp
12. Thursday 21 st Nov #2 – New Cubs Club	26 Adults: 13 Chn: 13	Speech Pathologist 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Mum wanted to know strategies about how to engage her 9 month old in longer book experiences
13. Monday 25 th Nov #1	56 Adults: 22 Chn: 34	Speech Pathologist 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Mum read the materials and reconnected with Speech Pathologist 2 with some questions around sounds and age of child Discussion surrounding mouth shapes and bubble play
14. Monday 25 th Nov #2	42 Adults: 18 Chn: 24	Speech Pathologist 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting language in play, specifically sensory-based The importance of rhyme and nonsensical sounds Lots of discussion Parent came with a question about eye-contact and conversation
15. Thursday 28 th #1	47 Adults: 20 Chn: 27	Occupational Therapist 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to promote gross motor play and the importance of climbing
16. Thursday 28 th Nov #2 – New Cubs Club	26 Adults: 13 Chn: 13	Occupational Therapist 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting vestibular movement

Survey Questionnaire

Mittagong Community Playgroup - Wrap Around Project (WAP) with Allied Health Professionals

We are seeking to gather your feedback on the November Playgroup sessions where an Allied Health Professional was present. We call this our Wrap Around Project (WAP) as it offers extra services that wrap around normal programming to give extra support to our playgroup families.

This project was made possible through a grant from the Southern Highlands Community Foundation NSW.

We would like to better understand your experience with the program and hear your feedback.

1. How many sessions did you attend during November?
2. Which Allied Health Professionals were at those sessions?

Speech Pathologist	Occupational Therapist
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3. How did you engage with the Allied Health Professional?

Informal conversation	Targeted questions
Informal play with my child	Following movements at group
Following shared story in group	Use of targeted resources
Other _____	
4. What did you find most beneficial about attending the WAP sessions?
5. What else would you have liked to see included?
6. Following the session and the take-home information provided, what strategies or ideas were useful within your household?
7. Are you thinking about reaching out to the Allied Health Professional for more advice or support?

Yes	No
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Comment:
8. If a similar program was conducted in the future, would you attend again?

Yes	No
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Comment:

9. Are there any other Health Care Professionals or the like that you would like to hear from in the playgroup setting?

Physiotherapy	Baby Massage
First Aid	Nutritionist
Psychologist	Behavioural Therapist
Music Therapist	Sleep Consultant
Other _____	

10. Any other thoughts or comments to share?

Thanks so much for taking the time to give us feedback on this addition to our facilitated playgroup program. It is vital information for the Fritz Family Foundation in the accountability process for the grant. It will also be used as evidence for future grant applications.

