Centre for Excellence
in Child and Family Welfare Inc.

Draft Future Service Model Options

Toy Libraries and Playgroups

February 2019

Developed for the City of Port Phillip Family, Youth and Children Department
by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

Contents

Executive Summary 3
Introduction 4
Purpose of the report 4
Methodology 4
Part One: Policy context 5
Critical success factors 5
Demographic information about families in the City of Port Phillip 6
Part Two: The Importance of Play 8
The Right to Play 8
Rationale for Council involvement in supporting play opportunities 9
Part Three: Current Service Model 15
Toy libraries operating in the City of Port Phillip 15
Playgroups operating in the City of Port Phillip 15
Council support for playgroups 15
Perspectives of stakeholders and the community 17
Part Four: Draft future service response options 19
Draft service response options- Toy libraries 19
Draft Service Response Options- Playgroups 25
Appendix 1: Current toy libraries in the City of Port Phillip 31
Appendix 2: Benchmarking of Toy Libraries 36
Appendix 3: Selected playgroups 38
Appendix 4: Benchmarking of Playgroups 39
Appendix 5 Summary of current services with policy objectives 40
Appendix 6: Feedback from toy libraries 45
Appendix 7: Feedback from playgroups 47

Executive Summary

The Centre for Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) was commissioned by the City of Port Phillip (the Council) to provide critical input to the service response options for the development of the new Children's Services Policy as they relate to two aspects of services – playgroups and toy libraries.

The Centre reviewed the relevant City of Port Phillip demographic data and policy documents, undertook a limited review of the literature on the importance of play and the benefits of playgroups and toy libraries, and consulted with selected key stakeholders as identified by the City of Port Phillip.

Based on the data, review and consultations, the Centre has provided two service options in relation to toy libraries and two options in relation to playgroups for consideration by the City of Port Phillip.

For toy libraries, Option 1 would see the City of Port Phillip enhance the delivery and reach of the existing toy libraries and Option 2 would begin a process of amalgamating the management of toy library services.

For playgroups, under Option 1, Council would retain the current service model for playgroups while enhancing the delivery of supported playgroups and ensuring that demand for playgroups in Fishermans Bend is met. Under Option 2, Council would enter into a partnership model with playgroups and toy libraries and deliver both services in a new purpose built council owned building located at Fisherman's Bend.

The report provides the rationale for each option.

The report highlights the challenges associated with local government involvement in toy library and playgroup service delivery, but also the benefits for the City of Port Phillip's children and families.

Introduction

This report on current and future service delivery for toy libraries and playgroups in the City of Port Phillip is structured as follows:

- Part 1 provides a context for the report and examines the policy objectives, critical success factors and demographic information relating to the City of Port Phillip.
- Part 2 explores the research, including the importance of play and national and international examples of best practice.
- Part 3 examines the current service models for toy libraries and playgroups.
- Part 4 outlines future service options for consideration by the City of Port Phillip.

The Council is committed to delivering high quality services to families and their children in the Port Phillip community. As part of this commitment, the Council is currently reviewing its service offerings to families and children across a range of different settings.

The Centre was commissioned by the Council to undertake a targeted review of its current service delivery of toy libraries and playgroups to provide critical input into the service response options for future development of these services.

Purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is to provide a set of service delivery options to guide the Council's future delivery of toy libraries and playgroups.

The review includes an analysis of:

- Demographic data relating to families in the Council (Part 1)
- Research on the importance of play (Part 2)
- Research on best practice locally and internationally in relation to the delivery of playgroups and toy libraries (Part 2)
- Current service delivery of toy libraries and playgroups (Part 3)
- Future Council needs in relation to toy libraries and playgroups (Part 4)
- Draft service delivery models for toy libraries and playgroups including costings and infrastructure requirements (Part 4).

The draft service delivery models are guided by the policy objectives of the new Children's Services Policy Objectives and accompanying Critical Success Factors.

Methodology

The limited timeframe for the project has meant consultations and the review of relevant literature have been condensed. The Centre project team undertook the following approaches to gain information relevant to the project:

- Conducted a short survey with playgroups and toy libraries
- Conducted phone interviews with a selection of playgroups and toy libraries
- Undertook a desktop review of documentation provided by Council including future demand modelling figures, and access analysis
- Reviewed research on the importance of play and the benefits of toy libraries and playgroups
- Assessed comparable toy libraries and playgroups across similar municipalities.

Part One: Policy context

The policy objectives of the Children's Services Policy state that:

1. Council will work with partners to ensure that every child, regardless of their abilities or background, will have access to affordable, safe, accessible, quality Early Years services to support development to their full potential.

2. Council will understand current and future needs of families in the city and influence the provision of Early Years services to meet those needs.

3. Early Years services will be financially sustainable and consistently aligned with relevant policies and legislation at the local, state and federal level.

4. Council will encourage collaboration across all Early Years services.

5. Families will have access to the services and information they need, at the times they need it, to make choices appropriate for their needs.

6. Early Years services will be supported by safe, accessible, contemporary, fit-for-purpose, sustainable facilities and environments.

7. Children will have access to natural environments, which allow them to learn about and experience play in nature. This includes natural environments within Early Years' services.

Critical success factors

Seven critical success factors were endorsed by Council to guide decision-making and identify specific actions against each policy objective.

The table below explains these critical success factors.

Critical Success Factor	Definition
Legislative compliance	The option that Council implements will enable all facilities and services in the market to comply with legislation including but not limited to: • Disability Discrimination Act • Occupational Health and Safety Act • National Competition Policy • National Construction Code
Meeting national quality standards	The option that Council implements will support all services in the market to "meet" or "exceed" expectations in line with State Government assessment and rating process.
Positive market impact	The option that Council implements will include an assessment of the impact of Council service provision on the local children's services market. Council seeks to support a healthy and thriving Early Years' sector and understand the economic rationale for the role of Government in children's services in line with the LGA Competition Principles Agreement to ensure there is no competitive advantage where Council provides support to services, especially where the market can provide.
Access for all	The option that Council implements will ensure that the facility and service offerings have equity of access for all members of our community including:

	• Affordability • Geographic spread aligned with demographics • Support for vulnerability • Support for additional needs (disability, CALD, income, transience etc)
Future-focused	The option that Council implements will meet the population growth and be adaptable to changing children's services market requirements into the future. Council's role as planner is to ensure that decisions are made and actions are taken having regard to their financial effects on future generations.
Financial sustainability	The option that Council implements will be financially viable. Council's obligations under the Local Government Act are to: • manage financial risks prudently, having regard to economic circumstances • align income and expenditure policies with strategic planning documents • undertake responsible spending and investment for the benefit of the community to achieve financial, social and environmental sustainability over the long term • provide value-for-money services and infrastructure which are accessible and responsive to the community's needs • consider the use of Council's subsidies to incentivise alternative provision by the NFP or profit providers.
Ability to implement	The option that Council implements will identify actions that are able to be delivered effectively, within the approved budget and timeframes. • The option chosen is feasible to deliver in consultation with community and service providers.

Demographic information about families in the City of Port Phillip

The following information comes from a range of sources, including ABS and Council data.

General:

- The City of Port Phillip resident population is 100,863.[1]
- The three largest ancestries in the Council in 2016 were Australian, English and Irish.[2]
- There are 392 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents in the Council.[3]
- 43.6% of residents have a bachelor degree or higher (compared to 27.5% for Greater Melbourne).[4]
- There were more professionals than any other occupation in the Council in 2016.[5]
- In the Council, 23.5% of the population earned an income of $1,750 or more per week in 2016.[6]

[1] ABS (2016) Census of Population and Housing accessed 13/02/2019.
[2] City of Port Phillip .id community profile (2019) Ancestry, https://profile.id.com.au/port-phillip/ancestry accessed 13/02/2019.
[3] City of Port Phillip .id community profile (2019) Population, https://profile.id.com.au/port-phillip/population accessed 13/02/2019.
[4] City of Port Phillip .id community profile (2019) Education, https://profile.id.com.au/port-phillip/qualifications accessed 13/02/2019.
[5] City of Port Phillip .id community profile (2019) Occupation, https://profile.id.com.au/port-phillip/occupations accessed 13/02/2019.
[6] City of Port Phillip .id community profile (2019) Individual income, https://profile.id.com.au/port-phillip/individual-income accessed 13/02/2019.

- 89.9% of the dwellings were medium or high density, compared to 33% in Greater Melbourne.[7]
- The Council population forecast for 2019 is 116,245, and is forecast to grow to 145,341 by 2031.[8]
- In 2016, there were 72 dwellings located in Fishermans Bend; by 2031 there will be 20,916 dwellings.[9]

Families in the City of Port Phillip:

- There are 4,893 residents aged 0-4 years in the Council and 3,828 residents aged between 5-9 years.[10]
- There were 5103 couples with young children in the Council in 2016, and 1019 single parents with young children in 2016.[11]
- 19.3% of residents in 2016 provided unpaid childcare to their own children or other children.[12]
- In the Council, 19.9% of the population reported doing some form of voluntary work in 2016.[13]
- 4% of 0-4 year old children are living in a low income household.[14]
- By 2041, the 0-9 year's population will make up 7.1% of the total population of the City of Port Phillip.[15]

Analysis of demographic trends based on the above data

While there will be more children in the Council by 2031 than currently, as an overall percentage of the population the number of young children (0-8 years of age) will decline. The Council is characterised by great affluence (in comparison to other local government areas) and pockets of disadvantage which are concentrated near short-term rooming accommodation, social housing and public housing. Council has the second highest number of people experiencing homelessness across the Melbourne Metropolitan region.[16] There will also be an increased number of families with young children living in apartments by 2031.

The data suggests that while the number of children will decline by 2031, the fact that many of these children will be living with their families in apartments means there will be an even greater need for 'play spaces,' such as those offered by playgroups, if children are to have stimulating environments in which to grow and thrive.

[7] City of Port Phillip .id community profile (2019) Households and housing, https://profile.id.com.au/port-phillip/dwellings accessed 13/02/2019.
[8] City of Port Phillip .id community profile (2019) Overview , https://forecast.id.com.au/port-phillip accessed 13/02/2019.
[9] City of Port Phillip .id community profile (2019) Dwellings , https://forecast.id.com.au/port-phillip/dwellings-development-map accessed 13/02/2019.
[10] City of Port Phillip .id community profile (2019) Age of Population, https://profile.id.com.au/port-phillip/five-year-age-groups accessed 13/02/2019.
[11] City of Port Philip .id community profile (2019) Household type, https://profile.id.com.au/port-phillip/households-with-children accessed 13/02/2019.
[12] City of Port Phillip .id community profile (2019) Aged Groups Profile, https://profile.id.com.au/port-phillip/unpaid-childcare accessed 13/02/2019.
[13] https://profile.id.com.au/port-phillip/volunteering
[14] City of Port Phillip .id community profile (2019) Low Income Households, https://profile.id.com.au/port-phillip/low-income-by-age accessed 13/02/2019.
[15] City of Port Phillip .id community profile (2019) Forecast age structure – 5 year groups, https://forecast.id.com.au/port-phillip/population-age-structure accessed 26/02/2019.
[16] City of Port Phillip (2019) Homelessness Action Strategy 2015- 2020. (http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/CITP16656_Homelessness_Strategy_WEB_v2.pdf) accessed 16/02/2019.

Part Two: The Importance of Play

To help inform this report, the Centre reviewed some of the literature on toy libraries and playgroups and the importance of play. The review indicates why continued local government investment in services that enable children to play is fundamental to early childhood development. The role of City of Port Phillip in facilitating play is particularly important in the case of families experiencing some form of vulnerability, and who might be limited in their capacity to provide an enriching home environment for their developing child. Council should consider how it can continue to support existing play opportunities provided through toy libraries and playgroups, as well as looking at its role in delivering playgrounds and outdoor spaces for families.

The Right to Play

A child's right to play has been long recognised by The United Nations High Commission for Human Rights[17] and is enshrined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Research has identified that play is critical to the social, emotional, cognitive and physical wellbeing of children.[18]

Benefits of play

Emotional Behaviour Benefits of Play	• Reduces fear, anxiety, stress, irritability • Creates joy, intimacy, self-esteem and mastery not based on other's loss of esteem • Improves emotional flexibility and openness • Increases calmness, resilience and adaptability and ability to deal with surprise and change • Can heal emotional pain.
Social Benefits	• Increases empathy, compassion, and sharing • Creates options and choices • Models relationships based on inclusion rather than exclusion • Improves nonverbal skills • Increases attention and attachment
Physical Benefits	• Positive emotions increase the efficiency of immune, endocrine, and cardiovascular systems • Decreases stress, fatigue, injury, and depression • Increases range of motion, agility, coordination, balance, flexibility, and fine and gross motor exploration

Play and the brain

Play increases brain development and growth, establishes neural connections and makes us more intelligent.[19] Neuroscientist Jaak Pankseep found that play stimulates production of a protein, 'brain

[17] Lucie K Ozanne and Julie L Ozanne (2011) A Child's Right to Play: The Social Construction of Civic Virtues in Toy Libraries in *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*.

[18] Regina M Milteer and Kenneth R Ginsburg (2012) The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent- Child Bond: Focus on Children in Poverty in *American Academy of Paediatrics*.

[19] Jeffrey Goldstein (2012) Play in Children's Development, Health and Well-being. Brussels: Toy Industries of Europe.

derived neurotrophic factor' in the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for organising, monitoring and planning for the future.

Types of play

Locomotor play	This type of play includes exercise play and increases from toddler to preschool and peaks at early primary school ages. There is evidence that active, playground-type breaks help young children to concentrate better at subsequent sedentary tasks.[20]
Social play	Refers to playful interactions between children and parents/caregivers up to 2 years old and then increasingly with other children from ages 2 -6.[21]
Parallel play	Common in children between 2-3 years old, describes when children play next to each other without much interaction. Some play is solitary. 'This type of play can be physical, incorporate objects or language, be pretend, or include all of these aspects.'[22]
Object play	Refers to playful use of objects such as building blocks, jigsaws, puzzles, cars etc. With babies, this play involves mouthing objects and dropping them. With toddlers, it is sometimes just manipulating objects but can also involve pretend play. Playing with objects allows children to try out new combinations of activities free of constraint and may contribute to problem solving skills.
Language play	At around 2 years old, toddlers often talk to themselves before going to sleep or upon waking. This is playful, repetitious language. Children start to use language humorously at 3 and 4 years.
Pretend play	Involves pretending an object or an action is something else than it really is. This play develops from 15 months of age with simple actions such as pretending to put a doll to sleep. Sociodramatic play is common around 3 years of age; it involves pretend play with others, sustained role play. It involves understanding others and the development of novel and intricate story lines.[23]

Erosion of play

Children today have less time for play of all kinds than previous generations and are missing out on vital developmental opportunities as a result.[24] Some of the barriers to play include limited parental time for children's play due to working commitments; reduced access to outdoor spaces; overuse of technology; and fear of leaving children to play alone or in the care of other adults.

Rationale for Council involvement in supporting play opportunities

The Council plays a critical role in the delivery of early year's services to families and children in the community. Historically, City of Port Phillip has been responsible for early childhood service delivery in the absence of sufficient service provision by state and federal governments. Without City of Port Phillip involvement in the delivery of Early Year's services, there is a risk that children in the community who would otherwise not be able to access services, will miss out. Councils help to meet the costs of raising a

[20] Peter K Smith and Anthony Pellegrini (2013) Learning through Play, pg 2 in the *Encyclopaedia of Early Childhood Development.*
[21] *Ibid*
[22] Ibid
[23] Ibid
[24] Real Play Coalition (2018) Value of Play Report Pg 3-6.

child through supporting parents via services like toy libraries and playgroups. These services are particularly important to low income families, or families experiencing other forms of disadvantage. Given the importance of play to early childhood development, there is a strong case for why the Council should continue to invest in these services, particularly for families experiencing vulnerability who might experience more barriers in supporting their children's needs for play. Similarly Council should continue to invest in opportunities for unstructured play through playgrounds, outdoor spaces and parks.

Best Practice in toy libraries and playgroups

Understanding best practice in relation to the delivery of toy libraries and playgroups will assist the Council to assess the quality of its services. Through understanding the history and purpose of toy libraries and playgroups, council can consider whether current services are operating optimally and if not, how best to improve these services.

This section of the report summarises the history of toy library and playgroup services, their purpose and literature on best practice in delivering a quality service.

Appendix 2 contains information on toy libraries and playgroups that are operating in comparable local government areas.

Types of toy libraries

Toy libraries are locally based facilities that distribute toys to children and parents in much the same way as a public library lends books. There are two dominant models of toy libraries:

1. Lekotek – developed in Sweden in the 1960s, is a form of toy library staffed by professionally trained personnel that provides toys, support and information to families to help children with special needs through play.[25]
2. Community toy libraries – serve the needs of local families, are more informal, and often run by community and family volunteers. Members can borrow toys for a fixed period. There is usually a membership fee and borrowing rules apply.[26]

Benefits of toy libraries

Toy libraries provide access to toys that offer financial savings for the families and developmental challenges for their children. They actively build the social fabric of local communities through ongoing social interactions, connections and exchanges.[27] The literature examined for this report and the consultations with stakeholders show that toy libraries:

- Teach skills, provide jobs and develop community capacity
- Increase support for children's development
- Improve family bonds and parent-child relationships
- Increase a child's experience of play
- Provide opportunities for children to gain independence and responsibility
- Provide opportunities for children to enhance communication with carers through toys
- Provide families who are socially isolated with an opportunity for engaging and connecting with other local families

Toy libraries are an effective means of engaging isolated families in areas of social deprivation and of redressing part of the imbalance between the supply of play equipment available to children from affluent areas and those growing up in poverty.

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[25] Lucie K Ozanne and Julie L Ozanne (2011) A Child's Right to Play: The Social Construction of Civic Virtues in Toy Libraries pg 2 in *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*

[26] Ibid

[27] Robat Powell and Nia Seaton (2007) A Treasure Chest of Service: the Role of Toy Libraries within Play Policy in Wales pg 10 in *National Foundation for Educational Research*

Best practice in toy libraries

> *'A good quality toy library is staffed by toy library assistant(s) who can advise parents about the most suitable toys for children of different ages and how playing with different kinds of toys and materials support children's learning and development.'*[28]

The research suggests a good toy library:

- Provides a welcoming and supportive space for parents and their children
- Provides sessions such as 'stay and play' sessions, toy making/handicraft sessions or literacy workshops
- Provides information about other children's services, such as local kindergartens, child care or maternal and child health care services
- Is accessible for families with young children (near or co-located with kindergartens or schools)
- Has low shelving to display toys
- Provides books as well as toys
- Has sufficient floor space or low tables for children to play with toys
- Includes seating for adults

Playgroups

Playgroups for parents and young children 0-6 years are increasingly viewed as an important part of Australia's early childhood landscape, alongside formalised quality early childhood education. Playgroups provide children with opportunities for the development of social skills, learning competence and positive social emotional functioning, as well as facilitating positive transitions to kindergarten and to school.[29]

Playgroup remains the only forum where families meet other families in their local community to support each other, strengthen connections and children learn through play.[30]

Types of playgroups

Community playgroups – aim to include all families and to provide opportunities for children to learn and develop through play.[31]

Supported playgroups – aim to support families with particular needs or vulnerabilities (such as socially isolated or disadvantaged families) who may not otherwise attend community playgroups. A supported playgroup is usually run by at least one paid facilitator and they have a dual focus on supporting the development and wellbeing of children and their parents.[32]

There are also emergent models such as those where councils provide capacity building support to community playgroups.

Benefits of playgroups

- Children learn and develop through play activities and social interactions with their parents/caregivers and other children/adults
- Parents/caregivers establish social support networks
- Families improve family functioning through increased parental wellbeing and capacity
- Community connectedness is enhanced through new networks being formed between families

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[28] Roma Education Fund (2016) Guidelines for Setting Up and Running a Toy Library pg 5.
[29] Victorian Cooperative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups (2014) Evidence into Action: Playgroups for Diverse Communities pg 2-4.
[30] Deborah Njegac, Joanne Tarasuilk and Janine Regan (2016) Laying the Foundations: The Playgroup Framework, Playgroup Victoria pg 3-4.
[31] Ibid
[32] Ibid

The regular opportunity for play encourages learning and exploration, and development in children.[33] Research also highlights that establishing early relationships through play is important for working through emotions, and learning how others think, feel and behave.[34]

Playgroups create positive social environments for adults. They create friendship opportunities, offer social support, and provide connectedness to the broader community.[35]

A report commissioned by Playgroup Australia to investigate the social and economic value of community playgroups highlighted that playgroups have a significant reach and presence in the early childhood landscape.[36] Of families surveyed in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), more than 40% of families surveyed had participated in playgroups when their child was aged less than one, with a high rate (78%) of continued engagement as the child transitioned from baby to toddler.

Best practice in playgroups[37]

Playgroups are about play: play should be freely chosen, largely self-directed, intrinsically motivated, spontaneous and pleasurable. Playgroups should also:

- Be child-focused, child-inclusive and developmentally appropriate
- Foster connections – provide a platform for social and community connectedness through the development of informal social network and by linking families with local services
- Be safe and welcoming, providing a culturally, physically and emotionally safe and inclusive space that is child safe.
- Be culturally safe, adaptive to different cultural groups; playgroups can be culturally specific
- Be flexible according to the needs of carers and children and the local community
- Be strengths based and strengthening
- Have organisational level support and governance and be adequately resourced to provide oversight and assistance

Supported playgroups

For the majority of children, a loving home environment in the care of parents who are attuned to their needs and provide support, stimulation and encouragement sets them on a good developmental pathway.[38] However, children growing up in disadvantaged environments are less likely to participate fully in early childhood education and care services.

> *'There is a growing body of evidence that participation in a supported playgroup run by a skilled and qualified worker and with evidence-based practice embedded, has a positive impact on children's learning, social and emotional development.'*[39]

[33] Nicole Oke, Janet Stanley and Jacqui Theobald (2007) The inclusive role of playgroups in Greater Dandenong, The Brotherhood of St Laurence, pg 5.
[34] Ibid
[35] Ibid
[36] Ian McShane, Kay Cook, Sarah Sinclair , Georgia Keam and Jane Fry (2016) Social and Economic Benefits of Community Playgroups The Centre for Urban Research , pg 3-10
[37] Joanne Commerford and Cathryn Hunter (2017) Principles for high quality playgroups: examples from research and practice, Australian Institute of Family Studies: Child Family Community Australia, pg 4
[38] Victoria State Government (2017) Department of Education and Training Supported Playgroups: Policy and Funding Guidelines pg 3-5, accessed 20/02/2019
[39] Ibid

What is a supported playgroup?

Supported playgroups are initiated and led by a paid coordinator/facilitator. Supported playgroups typically target families who may need additional support due to pre-existing vulnerabilities or disadvantage.[40]

Supported playgroups may work with families who are:

- Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD; including migrant and humanitarian entrant families)
- Indigenous
- Young parent families
- Socially isolated
- Disadvantaged
- Experiencing mental health issues; or
- Living with a disability (either the parent or child).[41]

Families in these groups are often vulnerable, facing stressful life circumstances alongside low social support and economic pressures.[42] Supported playgroups can offer an option for families who may not be able to effectively engage with, feel included in, and benefit from parent-led community playgroups.[43]

Supported playgroups funded by the Department of Education and Training (DET) are required to deliver *smalltalk* to all participating families. *Smalltalk* is a set of evidence-based strategies that enable parents to become more aware of the importance of their interactions with their child, and to foster quality interactions.[44]

Supported playgroup also provides an option for in home support for some families. This is provided by a qualified facilitator who visits the family home fortnightly for 1.5 hours each fortnight.[45] Supported playgroups operate on the basis that no more than ten families are enrolled in each supported playgroup session.[46]

Similarities/Differences between supported playgroups and community-led playgroups: [47]

[40] Playgroup Victoria (2015) Supported Playgroups, accessed 18/02/2019.
[41] Joanne Commerford and Elly Robinson (2016) Supported playgroups for parents and children: The evidence for their benefits Australian Institute of Family Studies , CFCA Paper No.40 , accessed 10/02/2019 .
[42] Ibid
[43] Ibid
[44] Victoria State Government (2017) Department of Education and Training Supported Playgroups: Policy and Funding Guidelines pg 3-5, accessed 20/02/2019.
[45] Ibid
[46] Ibid
[47] Joanne Commerford and Elly Robinson (2016) Supported playgroups for parents and children: The evidence for their benefits Australian Institute of Family Studies , CFCA Paper No.40 , accessed 10/02/2019.

Similarities	Differences
Parents attend and engage with their children in the activities	Supported playgroups usually run with the same families for multiple years
Focus on play-based activities	Guidelines for transitioning families out of the supported playgroup
Groups meet regularly	How structured the playgroup program is
Opportunities are provided for parents to socialise with each other	The target group of participants
	Guest speakers are invited to address topics of interest to the group
	Facilitator is present to lead the playgroup

Benefits of supported playgroups

There is evidence that supported playgroups, which target a particular group of parents and children when recruiting (e.g. parents with difficulties due to illicit drug use), have a higher level of engagement and attendance from members in comparison to supported playgroups that are open to anyone.[48] A literature review by the Parenting Research Centre on the benefits of supported playgroups found that further rigorous research - which includes a focus on child outcomes and a long term follow up of impacts on children, is required.[49]

Council's role in supported playgroup delivery

Currently the Council operates two supported playgroups that are led by a council-employed playgroup facilitator. The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides funding to deliver supported playgroups and requires that supported playgroup sessions include the delivery of the *smalltalk* program. Given that supported playgroups provide an opportunity to engage families and refer them to appropriate services for further assistance, there is a strong argument for council to maintain current support for supported playgroups.

[48] Ibid

[49] Pourliakas, A., Sartore, G-M., Macvean, M. & Devine, B. (2016) Supported playgroups for children from birth to five years, prepared for The Benevolent Society Victoria by Parenting Research Centre , pg 2-5.

Part Three: Current Service Model

Toy libraries operating in the City of Port Phillip

Families residing in the City of Port Phillip can access toy libraries by purchasing an annual membership.[50] The cost of this ranges and most toy libraries operating in Port Phillip offer substantial discounts for Health Care Card holders and grandparents who purchase a membership to their local toy library.

A core principle of membership is that families must volunteer for a set number of hours (usually six hours) per year. Some toy libraries offer an exemption from volunteering requirements but families who opt out of volunteering are charged a higher membership fee; this additional sum is used to fund a paid coordinator.

In the City of Port Phillip there are four toy libraries operating in Elwood, Middle Park, South Melbourne and Port Melbourne.

Appendix 1 provides details about toy libraries operating in the Council.

Playgroups operating in the City of Port Phillip

There are 98 playgroup sessions currently operating in the City of Port Phillip.

Suburb Breakdown of Playgroup Sessions:
Port Melbourne (16)
Montague (1)
South Melbourne (5)
St Kilda Road (0)
Albert Park/Middle Park (4)
St Kilda/St Kilda West (0)
Balaclava/St Kilda East (24)
Elwood/Ripponlea (44)
Other locations (4)

Please note: Playgroup Victoria has listed 40 playgroups as operating in the City of Port Phillip.[51]

Some of the larger playgroups in the City of Port Phillip operate in St Kilda, Elwood and Port Melbourne.

Appendix 2 provides details about some of the playgroups operating in the Council.

Council support for playgroups

The majority of playgroups in the City of Port Phillip run autonomously. The St Kilda and Elwood playgroups operate as incorporated groups that have overarching management committees made up of volunteers.

The St Kilda Playgroup operates out of the Bubup Nairm Family and Children's Centre which is a council-owned building. The playgroup has its own dedicated space at the centre. The Elwood Playgroup operates from a dedicated council-owned building.

[50] City of Port Phillip, Early Years Services Access Analysis, pg.8 (provided by the City of Port Phillip).
[51] Playgroup Victoria, Find a Playgroup http://www.playgroup.org.au/FindaPlaygroup/Playgroup-Results.aspx?municipality=Port%20Phillip&pgs=1

There are also around 15 playgroup sessions which are held at Bubup Womindjeka Family and Children's Centre in Port Melbourne. This is also a council-operated building that includes a kindergarten, maternal and child health services and an Early Year's program (childcare service).

New parents groups run by the MCH service are encouraged to continue to meet and become playgroups. Council provides information on how to set up a playgroup, as well as offering support to find a venue to meet if they are in a suburb without a dedicated playgroup venue.

Appendix 5 summarises the alignment of toy libraries and playgroups with Council policy objectives and Critical Success Factors.

Table 1 in Appendix 5 shows how Council toy libraries align with Council policy objectives.

There are opportunities to improve the delivery of toy libraries in the Council in order to ensure that they are able to meet the council's policy objectives. In particular, the financial sustainability of the operating model could be improved across all four toy library services. Toy libraries are currently operating from within council spaces and buildings which will require upgrades and renovations to ensure that they are future ready.

Table 2 in Appendix 5 shows how Council toy libraries align with the Critical Success Factors identified by Council.

Improvements could be made to ensure that toy libraries are meeting legislative requirements, that they are accessible, future-focused and have a positive market impact. In particular there is insufficient knowledge of what legislative requirements toy libraries should be adhering to and as highlighted above there are concerns about the financial sustainability of the current operating model.

Table 3 in Appendix 5 shows how Council playgroup services align with the Council policy objectives.

Playgroups included in this assessment are operating to a high standard, however; there is scope to further enhance how playgroups are delivered to better align their delivery to the Council's policy objectives. In particular, for some playgroups it is unclear if they collaborate with other services, and how they are achieving access for all. Overall, playgroups are meeting the current needs of families but there is a slight risk that future needs of families in the community will be unmet without more playgroup sessions being created.

Table 4 in Appendix 5 shows Council playgroups align with the Critical Success Factors identified by Council.

Improvements could be made to ensure that playgroups are complying with relevant legislation. Currently it is unclear whether playgroups have knowledge of current legislative requirements (Child Safe Standards, Disability Discrimination Act and Working with Children requirements) and how they apply to their operations. Ensuring accessibility of playgroups to the Council community is also an area for improvement.

Perspectives of stakeholders and the community

Table 5 below summarises the key findings from the consultations undertaken as part of this project. The rest of this section of the report provides a summary of the key findings from the consultations and then more detailed explanation of the responses.

Table 5: Summary of key findings from consultations

Toy Libraries	Playgroups
Volunteer model is unsustainable	More playgroups are needed
Opening hours could be extended to accommodate working parents	Greater flexibility would help to increase access; currently families must attend a playgroup at a set time which can be an impediment to attending
Some buildings from which toy libraries are operating from within require renovations to ensure that the space is contemporary and fit for purpose	Smaller playgroups could benefit from more communication from council, particularly in relation to funding and grant opportunities
Communication between Council and toy libraries needs to be strengthened	Outdoor spaces and dedicated playgroup rooms are fit for purpose and contemporary
Financial sustainability of toy libraries	Playgroups are needed in the northern end of the city

Overview of community feedback

Stakeholder and community consultations undertaken by Mosaic Lab[52] for Council in 2018 and Centre consultations for this project in 2019 identified a number of recurring themes and challenges in relation to the delivery of toy libraries and playgroups in Council.

Consultation with the community undertaken by Mosaic Lab highlighted the importance of council supporting children and families experiencing vulnerability. There was also awareness amongst participants of the need to make sure that there are sufficient children's services in growth areas. The most pressing challenge identified by participants was ensuring that there was an adequate supply of childcare for children less than three years. This suggests there is growing community awareness of the challenges that disadvantaged parents experience and the need for council to play an active role in mitigating disadvantage through tailoring their service offerings to this vulnerable cohort.

Key challenges identified in relation to all child and family services:

- Ageing buildings and a lack of integrated service delivery.
- Lack of knowledge regarding available services, in particular toy libraries and playgroups.
- Access and equity challenges including supporting families that are experiencing vulnerabilities.

Community feedback on possible service improvements - Toy Libraries

- Greater integration with library networks and other services
- Create an online toy library, enable online reservations
- Provide longer opening hours and open more days per week; in particular toy libraries should be after work hours.
- Increase the size of toy libraries/provide dedicated spaces for toy libraries

[52] MosiacLab (2018) Children's Services in the City of Port Phillip: A Better Future for Port Phillip Children' Community and Stakeholder Engagement Summary Report.

- Costs can be too high and the requirement to volunteer prohibitive to some families in the community.

Overall, council needs to provide an accessible service to enable families from a diverse array of backgrounds to actively participate. This might be achieved through extending opening hours, and co-locating toy libraries with other services that families use.

Community feedback on possible service improvements – Playgroups

- More flexible operating hours to enable parents who are working full time to also attend
- Operate playgroups specifically for fathers
- Offer more supported playgroups
- Enable drop-in sessions as opposed to being assigned to a playgroup at a set time.

Overall, playgroups should be flexible in relation to time, days and venues. There needs to be more cohort-specific playgroups (e.g. for parents under 25, dads and grandparents). Council should also provide greater levels of assistance to enable playgroups to be established and should subsidise costs of attendance for low income families.

Appendix 6 provides detailed feedback from toy libraries..

Appendix 7 provides detailed feedback from playgroups consulted.

Part Four: Draft future service response options

The following service response options were developed in consideration of:

- Critical success factors as they relate to the new Children's Services Policy
- The policy objectives of the Council's new Children's Services Policy
- Feedback from community members including local families and children gathered in community consultations in June and July 2018
- Feedback from current services undertaken in February 2019
- Demographic information including future growth projects for the City of Port Phillip
- The specific needs of vulnerable families in the City of Port Phillip
- Literature on the importance of play to early childhood development
- Best practice in the delivery of toy libraries and playgroups in communities across Australia and internationally
- Benchmarking of current services against services in comparable council areas (including the City of Yarra, City of Stonnington and Darebin City Council)
- Current financial and in-kind support provided by the City of Port Phillip to toy library and playgroups
- Assessment of the suitability and future readiness of the toy library and playgroup sites in the City of Port Phillip

Draft service response options- Toy libraries

Overarching recommendations

- Council should assess whether a toy library/toy libraries will be required at Fishermans Bend and where best to locate this service within the community
- Council to consider how to extend operating hours of toy libraries and in particular how to offer evening session times to enable greater access
- Investigate the cost of providing an online toy library borrowing service for each toy library
- Undertake consultations with each toy library to better understand the current limitations of the buildings that they operate from, and consider how to make improvements to current locations whilst also factoring in the costs of doing so
- Council to review its own internal record keeping procedures to ensure that there is ongoing communications with toy libraries regarding when grants and subsidies are due from council
- Council to develop more streamlined agreements with toy libraries that are tied to outcomes for the community.

Option One: Enhancing the delivery and reach of current toy libraries in the City of Port Phillip

Key recommendations

1) Target services to families who would benefit most from them
2) Invest in online systems to enhance user experiences and enable greater flexibility
3) Investigate operating a mobile toy library service that visits council libraries on a rotating basis
4) Extend the hours of operation of current toy libraries
5) Council assistance to toy libraries to help diversify revenue streams
6) Retain current management structure of toy libraries
7) Undertake minor upgrades and improvements to existing sites
8) Undertake a review to ascertain whether a new toy library/multiple toy libraries are required at Fishermans Bend

Recommendation 1: Better targeting existing services to families in the City of Port Phillip

The City of Port Phillip has a large proportion of high income families (those earning over $2500 per week) that are able to easily navigate and access services. The City of Port Phillip however has some communities that are experiencing disadvantage. These families tend to be residing in or near to the City's public housing estates in South Melbourne and St Kilda.[53]

Currently, toy libraries do not have the time or resources to intensively engage and build connections with families that may be experiencing vulnerability.

Recommendation: Council works closely with toy libraries, maternal and child health services, childcare centres , playgroups , and other child and family services to develop a long term strategy with key outcomes sought to ensure that families who are in need have access to toys from toy libraries.

Strategies employed could include:

- Council employs a part-time support worker to build linkages between toy libraries and other services, this could include helping families to pick up and drop off toys.
- Council undertakes a review to ensure that the current subsidies provided to toy libraries for families with a low income health care card are applied correctly.
- Toy libraries commit to a yearly schedule of activities that aim to increase awareness of the service in vulnerable communities.
- Meetings (frequency to be confirmed) between services and council to be held to discuss how to ensure accessibility of toy library services to the community.

Recommendation 2: investing in online systems to enhance user experiences and enable greater flexibility

- Council should provide a one-off grant to toy libraries to enable them to improve online borrowing and cataloguing platforms. Functions that should be included in an online system could include the ability to borrow toys, and extend borrowing period, membership information/personal profile, and volunteer roster sign up should also be integrated into the one online system.

Recommendation 3: investigate operating a mobile toy library service that visits council libraries on a rotating basis

- In order to increase access to toy libraries, the council should consider how to commence a mobile toy library service that visits council libraries, or targeted sites such as Council's Adventure Playgrounds or public housing sites.
- Council could provide a small contribution to toy libraries (as part of their yearly grant) to enable them to provide this service to the community.

Recommendation 4: increase the operating hours of toy libraries, and offer evening sessions

- Currently the operation hours of toy libraries are limited which can pose a barrier to some families from accessing the service. On weekends, toy libraries are open for approximately 1 ½ hours to 2 hours on a Saturday.
- Increasing opening hours could also help to minimise congestion at toy libraries.
- Council could provide some financial support toy libraries to modify their hours to include evening sessions, and also to have longer sessions on the weekend. This cost could be off-set over the long term by increased membership numbers.

[53] City of Port Phillip (2019) Children Youth and Families, Population Overview and Key Statistics

Recommendation 5: council assistance to toy libraries to help diversify revenue streams

- Council could offer support to toy libraries to help them to diversify their revenue streams. For example, offer training to toy library coordinators on how to apply for grants, provide regular updates on grant and funding rounds that are available for community organisations.

Recommendation 6: retain current management structure of toy libraries

- Toy libraries would continue to directly employ part-time coordinators.
- Management of the toy libraries would remain with volunteer committees.
- Toy library membership continues to require for member participation.

Recommendation 7: Undertake minor upgrades and improvements to existing sites

- Council could work with existing toy libraries to better understand the architectural challenges of current library sites.
- Council could undertake a cost benefit analysis to determine what upgrades to undertake in consideration of current policy objectives and success factors

Recommendation 8: Undertake a review to ascertain whether a new toy library is required at Fishermans Bend

- Based on future demand modelling, the greatest need for a new toy library will be in Fishermans Bend (Sandridge/Wirraway/Montague)[54]. However, it is possible that there could be opportunities – through extending hours of operation of current toy libraries or delivering mobile toy library services – that will help to mitigate the need for council to establish a new toy library site.
- Council should consider how to best address the service gap that will arise as the population increases at Fishermans Bend now, and identify council owned assets and council subsidised spaces (such as South Melbourne Primary School) that could be utilised to deliver a toy library.
- Council should also consider how to include a toy library within Family and Children's hubs.

Assessment of Option 1 against the City of Port Phillip Children's Services policy objectives

Policy objectives	Alignment of option with policy objective	Risks
Affordable, safe and a high quality service	✓	• Membership costs for low income families are not subsidised • Council subsidies for low income families holding a Health Care Cards are not passed on in full or at all
Meets the current needs of families	✓	• Families are not able to manage volunteering during extended hours
Meets the future needs of families	Will require further consideration by Council	• No current toy libraries exist in the Fisherman's Bend precinct • Decline in membership levels forecasted as the proportion of children (0-8 years) living in the city decreases
Financially sustainable	✓	• Inability to effectively diversify revenue

[54] City of Port Phillip (2019) Children Young People and Families Department , Population Overview and Key Statistics

		• Lack of council funding available to enhance services
Complies with relevant legislation and policies	✓	• Risk that staffing movements will lead to insufficient oversight of policy and legislative requirements
Collaboration with other services	✓	No risks identified
Accessible to the community	✓	No risks identified
Contemporary, sustainable and fit for purpose facilities	✓	• Minor upgrades cannot deliver fit for purpose facilities
Provides natural environments	X	• Not possible to accommodate natural environments within the current sites

Assessment of Option 1 against Critical Success Factors (CSF)

Critical Success Factors (CSF)	Alignment of option with CSF
Legislative compliance	✓
Meeting national quality standards	N/A
Positive market impact	✓
Access for all	✓
Future focused	✓
Financial sustainability	✓
Ability to implement	✓

Option Two: The City of Port Phillip manages toy libraries services

Under this option, Council would begin a process of amalgamating the management of toy library services. The ultimate outcome would be for Council to directly oversee the delivery of toy library services; this would mean that the council employs toy library coordinators, that the burden on volunteer management committees is reduced and that the revenue generated from membership fees goes to Council so that they can deliver toy library services.

Currently, Council divests responsibility for managing toy libraries to a paid part time coordinator and a volunteer management committee. Under this model, the volunteer management committee is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the toy library, applying for grants and funding throughout the year, ensuring that the toy library complies with relevant legislation and policy, maintaining and building relationships with other services in the community and ensuring that the paid coordinator of the toy library is receiving superannuation, pay and leave entitlements.

The current model is highly dependent on volunteers and there is a risk that the model is not sustainable. There are fewer parents staying at home to care for children meaning that in the coming years there will be a smaller pool of volunteers available to manage toy library services.

In order to facilitate a gradual transition towards a centralised management model, Council will need to consider how to off-set the costs of taking on more responsibility for toy libraries. One way in which Council could achieve this is through introducing a new flexible membership system where members of toy libraries pay more to be exempted from volunteering duties. The additional revenue would then be used to pay for the coordinator to undertake more hours. In turn this would also provide an opportunity

to extend the operating hours of toy libraries – which would increase membership numbers as working families could also access the service after work hours.

Key Recommendations:

1) Develop a central membership system with uniform membership fees for each service
2) Introduce new membership types enabling greater flexibility and revenue
3) Create a central online presence which provides information on all four toy library services
4) Continue to encourage volunteerism at toy libraries and require a volunteer committee for each toy library
5) Retain paid coordinator positions employed by the council
6) Council to fund an engagement officer that works across all four services to build connections between toy libraries and other services in the community

Recommendation 1: Develop a central membership system enabling uniform membership fees for each service

- Council can centralise membership payments, and manage this process in a more cost effective manner. Members would still be able to pay a member for use of their toy library of choice but the mechanism to do so would be centralised with council maintaining a central database of all members across the four toy libraries.
- In order to do this effectively, council will need to contract a service provider to develop a central membership system and will need to commit ongoing resources to processing members and addressing enquiries in relation to membership.

Recommendation 2: Introduction of new membership types to enable greater flexibility and revenue

- Council could introduce a new membership type which allows for members to be exempted from volunteering provided that they pay an additional sum of money. This option is increasingly popular at comparable toy library services and will enable a paid coordinator to undertake more hours.
- Council could investigate the viability of offering a membership type which enables for mutual borrowing rights across all toy library services.
- Council could also consider introducing longer membership options (2 - 3 years) as well as premium options which allow for members to borrow more toys/or for a longer period of time. These additional options will help to generate more revenue enabling additional staffing hours, toys and essential equipment.

Recommendation 3: Create a central online presence for toy library services

- A council website which provides information on all four toy library services and provides a way for individuals to make payments for memberships would greatly improve knowledge of toy libraries.
- Currently, information on toy libraries is dispersed across multiple platforms and essential information such as opening hours and membership costs is not easy to locate.
- A central online presence would also enable council to better understand who uses toy library services and to adapt service delivery to attract different members (i.e. through targeted marketing and promotional activities).

Recommendation 4: Continue to encourage volunteerism at toy libraries and require a volunteer committee to assist in the overarching operation of all toy libraries

- It is critical that Council continues to provide opportunities for the community to actively participate in the delivery of toy libraries –the model of community ownership should continue to be an integral element of toy libraries in the City of Port Phillip.

- Council can achieve this through continuing to encourage members to volunteer at toy libraries and providing an easy system to register for volunteering shifts.
- There should also continue to be a requirement for a volunteer management committee to exist, this committee should work closely with the council to optimise service delivery and to ensure that the service is relevant to the community.
- The volunteer committee should comprise a variety of skill sets and would be responsible for delivery of core aspects of toy library service delivery.

Recommendation 5: Paid coordinator positions employed by the council

- Toy library coordinators should be directly employed by the council.
- Council HR could take responsibility for ensuring that leave, and other entitlements are made available to coordinators.
- Council could consider whether to employ coordinators on a casual or part time basis.
- The role of coordinator should remain largely the same however council should expect the coordinator to ensure that the toy library is compliant with relevant legislation and policy provisions. This should also include ensuring that coordinators have Working with Children Checks and awareness of Child Safe Standards.

Recommendation 6: Council to employ an engagement officer that works across all four services to build connections between toy libraries and other services in the community

This role could involve:

- Managing a mobile toy library service (same service as description in Option One)
- Running sessions for parents and children from within toy libraries
- Providing toys to playgroups, kindergartens and schools to raise awareness of toy libraries
- Visiting family and child services to encourage membership amongst members of the community that would benefit from the service.

Assessment of Option 2 against the City of Port Phillip Children's Services policy objectives

Policy objectives	Alignment of option with policy objective	Risks
Affordable, safe and a high quality service	✓	No risks identified
Meets the current needs of families	✓	• Families are not able to manage volunteering during extended hours • Vulnerable families are not able to access online information or reservation systems
Meets the future needs of families	✓	No risks identified
Financially sustainable	✓	• Funding for engagement officer may not be offset by increased membership, budget allocation may require further consideration.
Complies with relevant legislation and policies	✓	No risks identified
Collaboration with other services	✓	No risks identified
Accessible to the community	✓	No risks identified

Contemporary, sustainable and fit for purpose facilities	X	♦ Current toy library locations will need council support to future proof. Council may wish to review in detail the current sites and assess the cost of upgrading facilities
Provides natural environments	X	♦ Toy library locations do not provide access to natural environments

Assessment of Option 2 against Critical Success Factors (CSF)

CSF	Alignment of option with CSF
Legislative compliance	✓
Meeting national quality standards	N/A
Positive market impact	Further work is required to properly assess this
Access for all	✓
Future focused	✓
Financial sustainability	✓
Ability to implement	✓

Draft Service Response Options- Playgroups

Summary:

The current playgroup service model is operating in an effective manner. Elements of the model that are working well include:

- ♦ Strong integration between playgroups and other children's services in the City of Port Phillip
- ♦ Co-location of playgroups with maternal child health services, childcare and kindergarten
- ♦ Dedicated, fit for purpose playgroup spaces which include outdoor environments
- ♦ Effective volunteer management of playgroups
- ♦ Well established communication channels between the City of Port Phillip and playgroups
- ♦ Affordable membership fees that include insurance through Playgroup Victoria
- ♦ Information on playgroups is easily accessible online and in person

Option One: The Council should retain the current service model for playgroups while enhancing the delivery of supported playgroups and ensure they meet the demand for playgroups in Fisherman's Bend.

Recommendations:

1) Planning and design to meet the changing needs of the community
2) Undertake a yearly survey of playgroups
3) Offer more supported playgroup sessions to the community
4) Build stronger linkages with community organisations to ensure that families experiencing vulnerability are accessing supported playgroups
5) Build relationships between supported playgroups and community playgroups
6) Enable an integrated service response

Recommendation 1: Planning and design to meet the changing needs of the community

- ♦ Currently the majority of playgroups are located in the areas of Elwood/St Kilda, there are very few playgroups operating in the northern parts of the Council.

- As the majority of population growth will occur in the new Fisherman's Bend precinct, Council needs to consider now how it will meet the needs of this new community.
- The Council should consider how to plan for the needs of this new community in the next 2 to 3 years and consider how to ensure that playgroups are co-located with other services and easily accessible to the community.
- This might require council to invest in building a new dedicated space for playgroups or to ensure that there is a dedicated playgroup room incorporated into the design of a new children and family centre.
- Council should also explore how to use existing community funded spaces such as the South Melbourne Primary School.

Recommendation 2: Undertake a yearly survey of playgroups

- Council should undertake a yearly survey of playgroups to determine:
  1) How council could provide better assistance to playgroups – assistance could include providing playgroups with information on grants that they could apply for, or the contact details of local services that support families. There might also be opportunities to consider how toy libraries and playgroups could work together more.
  2) Who is using playgroups in the community and what their experience of accessing this service has been.

Recommendation 3: Offer more supported playgroup sessions to the community

- Currently only a small number of families are able to access supported playgroup in the City of Port Phillip Council, Council could distribute funding and support for playgroups to ensure that more supported sessions are offered.
- There is only one Council-employed supported playgroup facilitator; Council should consider how it could fund an additional, part time facilitator to enable for co-facilitation of playgroup sessions. This would lead to families involved receiving more intensive and personal support.

Recommendation 4: Build stronger linkages with community organisations to ensure that families experiencing vulnerability are accessing supported playgroups

- Currently it is unclear whether there is knowledge of supported playgroups amongst community organisations that operate in the City of Port Phillip.
- The City of Port Phillip should look to extend relationships and improve referral pathways to ensure that families who would benefit from supported playgroup are able to access it.
- There should also be stronger links made between community organisations and supported playgroups to ensure that families with additional support needs receive referrals to appropriate services.

Recommendation 5: Building relationships between supported playgroups and community playgroups

- It is not clear whether community playgroup know about supported playgroup sessions. Given their longstanding relationship with the community, and the number of families that attend their playgroup sessions, playgroup would benefit from more information on supported playgroups.
- The supported playgroup facilitator could attend community playgroup sessions to explain the service and its benefits.

Recommendation 6: Enabling for an integrated service response

- Council has an opportunity to provide a holistic service response to families who might be struggling with their new role as a parent.
- Council should consider how it could better integrate maternal child health services, toy libraries, childcare services and playgroups to make sure that parents are receiving timely, accurate information when they need it, and in a manner that makes sense to them.
- The Council could look at ways to utilise existing community development officers to help families to navigate through services so that they are accessing essential support.
- For example, toy libraries could deliver a mobile toy library for supported playgroups, and supported playgroups could organise to meet at Council libraries to provide parents with access to reading resources for their children.

Assessment of Option 1 against the City of Port Phillip Children's Services policy objectives

Policy objectives	Alignment of option with policy objective	Risks
Affordable, safe and a high quality service	✓	• Participation costs (including nominal fees for HCC holders) may be an access for some families)
Meets the current needs of families	✓	No risks identified
Meets the future needs of families	✓	• Playgroups do not meet the needs of vulnerable families. Further engagement and co-design with vulnerable families and support agencies can support development of child and family centred, and appropriately supported, playgroups.
Financially sustainable	✓	• Council will need to consider the unique needs of small playgroups to ensure their sustainability • Playgroups for vulnerable families may not be financially self-sustaining • Shared use of facilities and staff such as community development officers can optimise us of existing resources and infrastructure
Complies with relevant legislation and policies	✓	No risks identified
Collaboration with other services	✓	No risks identified
Accessible to the community	✓	• Some playgroups may not be accessible for vulnerable families. Co-design with families and support agencies can support the establishment of accessible supported playgroups

Contemporary, sustainable and fit for purpose facilities	✓	No risks identified
Provides natural environments	✓	No risks identified

Assessment of Option 1 against Critical Success Factors (CSF)

CSF	Alignment of option with CSF
Legislative compliance	✓
Meeting national quality standards	N/A
Positive market impact	N/A
Access for all	✓
Future focused	✓
Financial sustainability	✓
Ability to implement	✓

Option Two: The Council should enter into a partnership model with playgroups and toy libraries and deliver both services from within a dedicated Council building that also hosts a maternal child health, kindergarten and long day care services.

Recommendations:

1) A new family and children's service centre could be purpose built in one of the new suburbs of Fisherman's Bend (Sandridge, Wirraway and Montague)
2) The new model should be premised on a partnership approach with the community
3) Operating costs could be met through membership fees, and fundraising activities throughout the year and the delivery of fee- based services (childcare and kindergartens)
4) A suite of evidence based parenting programs and supported playgroups should be delivered through the new family and children's service centre

Recommendation 1: A new family and children's service centre could be purpose built in one of the new suburbs of Fisherman's Bend (Sandridge, Wirraway and Montague)

- Based on future demand modelling, the majority of population growth within the 0-8 year's age range will occur in Fisherman's Bend.[55]
- A new purpose built family and children's centre will help to meet the needs of the growing Fisherman's Bend community and will also help to address the current lack of playgroup and toy library services in the northern part of the City of Port Phillip.

Recommendation 2: The new model should be premised on a partnership approach with the community

- A hybrid model of management will enable for sufficient Council oversight while also retaining meaningful input from the community.
- The new building could be a Council owned facility, with a mixture of Council staff located at the centre and volunteer parents who assist to operate the toy library and playgroup services.

[55] The City of Port Phillip (2019) Population Overview and Key Statistics

Recommendation 3: Operating costs could be met through membership fees, and fundraising activities throughout the year and the delivery of fee- based services (childcare and kindergartens)

- To ensure that the new centre is financially viable, Council should undertake a detailed cost analysis that takes into account revenue that could be generated through toy library and playgroup membership fees.
- Council could also consider how other services currently operating, such as the Port Melbourne Toy Library could be moved from its current location (which is not fit for purpose) into the new centre.

Recommendation 4: A suite of evidence based parenting programs and supported playgroups could be delivered at the new family and children's service centre

- The Council could collaborate with community service organisations to deliver low cost or free parenting programs and supported playgroups to families and children that are experiencing vulnerability.
- In particular, Council should invest in programs that can demonstrate positive long-term outcomes and have a robust evidence base to support their findings. For example, Council could consider incorporating a program such as the 'Parent Child Mother Goose' program into playgroup delivery. This program builds on the parent-child relationship and gives parents the tools that make daily life with a young child more fulfilling.[56]

Assessment of Option 2 against the City of Port Phillip Children's Services policy objectives

Policy objectives	Alignment of option with policy objective	Risks
Affordable, safe and a high quality service	✓	• Participation costs (including nominal fees for HCC holders) may be an access for some families)
Meets the current needs of families	✓	No risks identified
Meets the future needs of families	✓	No risks identified
Financially sustainable	✓	• Financial model requires further development
Complies with relevant legislation and policies	✓	No risks identified
Collaboration with other services	✓	No risks identified
Accessible to the community	✓	• Some playgroups may not be accessible for vulnerable families. Co-design with families and support agencies can support the establishment of accessible supported playgroups
Contemporary, sustainable and fit for purpose facilities	✓	No risks identified
Provides natural environments	✓	No risks identified

[56] Parent Child Mother Goose Australia (2019) About the Parent Child Mother Goose Australia Program, accessed 20/02/2019

Assessment of Option 2 against Critical Success Factors (CSF)

CSF	Alignment of option with CSF
Legislative compliance	✓
Meeting national quality standards	N/A
Positive market impact	N/A
Access for all	✓
Future focused	✓
Financial sustainability	✓
Ability to implement	✓

Appendix 1: Current toy libraries in the City of Port Phillip

Elwood Toy Library

Location	Elwood St Kilda Neighbourhood Learning Centre (ESKNLC) 87 Tennyson Street Elwood **Description:** ESKNLC provides a variety of services to the community including adult English language courses, computer courses, health and wellbeing classes, and art classes. The ESKNLC also provides activities for children including painting, art therapy and the toy library.
Building Description and condition	• Community managed building • Only children's service offered from this building is the toy library • Building has heritage overlay, built first in the 1860s. Converted to community centre in the 1980s. • The toy library has a small space within the building
Fit for purpose/future readiness	• Existing building condition and functionality is good. • Building is scheduled for major redevelopment. • Potential to re-develop into a childcare centre.
Management	Run by a committee of volunteers with the assistance of a paid coordinator who works 15 hours per week
Cost of membership	• 1 Child (3 toys + 3 puzzles/games) $100/$45 concession • 2 Children (6 toys + 6 puzzles/games) $110/$50 concession • 3 Children (9 toys + 9 puzzles/games) $120/$55 concession • Concession rate is available to Health Care Card holders
Number of members	224 members
Service delivery model	• Members are required to volunteer 3 times per year • Online catalogue where members can borrow toys, select volunteering shifts, book party packs. (https://elwood.mibase.com.au/home/index.php)
Operating hours	6 hours per week 9:30am-11:30am Wed, Fri, Sat
Current utilisation by the community	• Current service offering is **meeting** community needs There are 2492 families with children aged 0-8 years in East St Kilda, Balaclava, Elwood, Ripponlea, St Kilda and St Kilda West (not including St Kilda Road)

Future demand	Areas of greatest need will change: • Elwood/Ripponlea – no change from current levels. Will still require the current toy library service. • Balaclava/St Kilda East – no toy library currently, but current demand for one toy library. • St Kilda/St Kilda West – no toy library currently, but current demand for one toy library.
Financial support and in-kind support from Council/ other sources	Minor/no rent paid for current site use – Council subsidises the cost. Council provides the following subsidies each year to the Elwood Toy Library • $11.12 + GST per child • $87 per child no GST (families with a health care card) • $1233 operational subsidy paid yearly Other funding sources • Toy librarys apply for a variety of grants throughout the year (Council/other grantors) • Fundraising/Partnership activities ad hoc
Social media/online presence	• Website: https://www.elwoodtoylibrary.org/about-us/ • Facebook page, very regular posts and call outs for volunteers via Facebook

Middle Park Toy Library

Location	Middle Park Community Centre/Middle Park Civic 256 Richardson Street Co-located with Civic Kindergarten (23 places), MCH , playgroup and Middle Park Library (small)
Building Description and condition	• Community managed • 1920s double storey brick building, underwent significant refurbishment in 2013 • Rooms quite small, building has heritage overlay – no ability to increase capacity • Toy library is housed in a small room; capacity for 3 to 4 adults. No room for prep/return stations.
Fit for purpose/future readiness	• Due to heritage listing there is no ability to increase capacity • Facility has capacity to meet future needs with some alterations
Management	• Volunteer committee, part time coordinator (6 hours per week)

	• Challenges to maintain volunteer committee
Cost of membership	• Annual membership fee is $70 (concession fee is $30) • $50 additional fee if unable to volunteer • $20 bond is also taken to charge for broken/damaged toys
Number of members	Approximately 60 members
Service delivery model	• Membership structure requires members to volunteer (3 to 4 sessions per year) or get involved in fundraising events • Caters to 0-5 year olds predominantly (service too small for children) • Families tend to be members for 3-4 years • Has an online album of toys: https://get.google.com/albumarchive/105423371110328129289?source=pwa
Operating hours	• Difficult to find this information – not on website • Facebook page has the following listed hours – Tues and Sat 9:30-11am
Current utilisation by the community	• Currently exceeding community needs based on demand modelling
Future demand	• By 2021 –no toy library service will be required based on demand modelling
Financial support and in-kind support from Council/ other sources	Minor/no rent paid for current site use – Council subsidises Council provides the following subsidies each year: • $11.12 + GST per child • $87 per child no GST (families with a health care card) • $1233 operational subsidy paid yearly Other funding sources: • Toy libraries apply for a variety of grants throughout the year (Council/other grantors) • Fundraising/Partnership activities ad hoc
Social media/online presence	• Facebook page – regular posting (need to distribute information more widely, only 171 likes) • Council information http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/ind_occ_playgroups.htm

South Melbourne Toy Library

Location	 410 Clarendon St South Melbourne Co-located with, MCH services adjacent to childcare centre (40 places)
Building Description and condition	• 1928 single storey solid brick school converted into childcare in the 1980s • Recently refurbished, small in size and heritage listed
Fit for purpose/future readiness	• Purpose built in consultation with Toy Library committee during 2014 building refurbishment • Limited ability to increase space
Management	• Volunteer committee supported by a part time paid coordinator position (6 hours per week)
Cost of membership	• Could not find this information
Number of members	• Approx 70 members (however service provider suggests it is now closer to 82 members)
Service delivery model	• Families stay as members for 3-4 years (based on service provider input) • No current online catalogue but there is one being developed
Operating hours	9:30am-11am Thursday/Saturday
Current utilisation by the community	Exceeding community needs *note that consultations with the community suggested that the demand for services is growing
Future demand	Current service offering is adequate to meet the future needs of the community (based on demand modelling) *note that consultations with the community suggest that there is a need to enhance current toy library
Financial support and in-kind support from Council/ other sources	Minor/no rent paid for current site use – Council subsidises Council provides the following subsidies each year: • $11.12 + GST per child • $87 per child no GST (families with a health care card) • $1233 operational subsidy paid yearly Other funding sources: • Toy libraries apply for a variety of grants throughout the year (Council/other grantors) • Fundraising/Partnership activities ad hoc
Social media/online presence	• Facebook page -143 likes • No website (unable to find website) • Council information - http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/ind_occ_playgroups.htm • Email addresses/phone numbers- but no names of who to speak to

Port Melbourne Toy Library

Location	Operates inside the Port Melbourne Town Hall 333 Bay Street Port Melbourne
Building Description and condition	• 1882 substantial brick two storey building • No other children's services located in this building • Small space in large community building • Port Melbourne Library is also in the same building
Fit for purpose/future readiness	• Toy library is smaller than design specifications require it to be. • Options to be sought to find additional space – particularly for storage • Additional space required – space could be found within the town hall or in an alternative location.
Management	Unknown
Cost of membership	Unable to determine from website/Facebook/Council webpage what the cost of membership would be
Number of members	Approximately 90 members
Service delivery model	• There is an online catalogue of toys https://pmtoylibrary.mibase.com.au/home/toys_hire.php • Members required to volunteer 4 hours over the course of the year
Operating hours	Wednesday and Saturday 10:30am – 12:30pm
Current utilisation by the community	• Meeting community needs currently (based on demand analysis)
Future demand	• Based on modelling unlikely to require a further service however modelling does suggest that there will be a need for a toy library service in Montague by 2031.
Financial support and in-kind support from Council/ other sources	Minor/no rent paid for current site use – Council subsidises Council provides the following subsidies each year: • $11.12 + GST per child • $87 per child no GST (families with a health care card) • $1233 operational subsidy paid yearly Other funding sources: • Toy libraries apply for a variety of grants throughout the year (Council/other grantors) • Fundraising/Partnership activities ad hoc
Social media/online presence	Website – not easy to use/lacking information Facebook page – active; lots of posting (over 240 likes)

Appendix 2: Benchmarking of Toy Libraries

The project team assessed delivery of toy library services in comparable municipalities, the below is brief summary of toy library services that offered well- integrated, contemporary service models that attracted high numbers of members.

Moonee Valley Toy Libraries	
Management structure	• Volunteer management committee that operates two toy library branches (Essendon and Avondale Heights) • Not for profit incorporated association
Opening hours	Across both services, operates Tuesday – Saturday (2 or 3 hour sessions)
Community presence	Extensive engagement on Facebook (over 1000 likes) and a dedicated, easy to use website.
Memberships	Two membership types (with roster duty and with a roster duty exemption) $95 with roster duty $185 with roster exemption

Pied Piper Toy Library (Ashburton)	
Management structure	Run by members however supported by a coordinator that is paid through membership fees.
Opening hours	First Monday of every month: 7pm to 9pm Friday and Saturday: 9:30am to 12pm
Community presence	• Located across the road from Ashburton Library • Website is very informative and well set up • Lots of engaging Facebook posts
Memberships	Multiple memberships (standard, deluxe) and 50% discount for Health Care Card Holders Members are required to complete six hours of volunteer work each year or pay an $80 duty levy on top of membership fees.

Bayside Toy Library (Brighton East)	
Management structure	Extensive and very active volunteer management committee (two managers, treasurer, president, secretary, payroll officer, banking officer, grants officer, general committee member, IT coordinator, maintenance officer, marketing, community engagement, fundraising and events, memberships coordinator, toys coordinator and HR coordinator)
Opening hours	Wednesday 7pm to 9pm Thursday- Saturday 9:30am to 11:30am
Community presence	Strong online presence- very easy to use website Website includes a toy library catalogue Run variety of sessions from the toy library including 'sensory sensitive session' and 'let's stay and play sessions' which are open to members and non-members. Have a 'Local love initiative' which involves inviting child care centres, playgroup, kindergarten, crèche and schools to form part of the community.

Memberships	Multiple membership options including bronze (3 toys) silver (6 toys), gold (9 toys) , grandparents, school kids and trial memberships. Members are required to volunteer for 6 hours across the course of the year or otherwise pay a $90 levy. Concession rates are 50% of the full rate.

Collingwood Toy Library	
Management structure	Community owned resource, operates on a not for profit basis and is managed by a committee of volunteer members who are elected annually.
Opening hours	Tues/Wed/Thurs 9:30am – 12pm Fri 9:30am – 5pm Sat 9:30am – 2pm
Community presence	Established in 1992, have over 3900 toys and over 520 families. Lots of events held throughout the year including family days , board game nights, messy play days, no lights no lycra family disco , seminars on Saturdays (yoga play, understanding your baby, first aid for parents (subsidised by the Bendigo Bank).
Memberships	1 child: $80 per year / 3 toys + 2 puzzles for 2 weeks 2+ children: $90 per year/ 3 toys + 2 puzzles per child for 2 weeks Concession: $20 per year/ 3 toys + 2 puzzles per child for 2 weeks Games + puzzles only: $ 40 per year/ 3 games per membership for 2 weeks *an additional $60 levy is payable by families who are unable to fulfil their membership responsibilities

Darebin City Council - Toy Library Plus	
Management structure	Centralised management by the Council, supported by volunteers at each site: - East Preston Community Centre - Reservoir Community and Learning Centre - Northcote Family Centre
Opening hours	Thurs/Fri/Sat 10am – 12pm
Community presence	Unknown
Memberships	Multiple membership types: • Family - $47 • Concession - $6.50 • Group - $67 • Student - $11.50 • Grandparent- $11.50 • Additional toy (small) - $2.60 • Additional toy (large) - $5.60

Appendix 3: Selected playgroups

Playgroup name	St Kilda Playgroup Inc.
Venue	Bubup Nairm Centre
Playgroup address	99A Carlisle St , St Kilda
Playgroup description	https://www.stkildaplaygroup.org.au/ Sessions that operate Mon- Fri 9am to 5pm Annual membership fee : $55 (covers Playgroup Victoria membership and insurance) Has two playgroup rooms with a shared, enclosed outdoor space and a range of age appropriate toys.

Playgroup name	Elwood Playgroup
Venue	Burnett Grey MCH Centre
Playgroup address	51 Broadway Elwood
Playgroup description	https://www.elwoodplaygroup.org.au/ Sessions operate: Mon – Fri 9am to 6pm Annual membership fee: $70 (also Playgroup Victoria to cover membership and insurance) Dedicated building with multiple rooms for playgroups.

Playgroup name	Multiple playgroup sessions
Venue	Bubup Womindjeka Family and Children's Centre (BWFCC)
Playgroup address	85 Liardet Street Port Melbourne
Playgroup description	http://www.bwfcc.org.au/ playgroups operating Tues – Fri (9am to 5pm) • Fees - $40 registration fee for all new playgroup families. This amount is paid to Playgroup Victoria (covers insurance) $30 yearly fee paid to BWFCC; amount covers the cost of playgroup coordinator, equipment and resources (including the room). Multiple services run from BWFCC including maternal and child health services, kindergarten, childcare, star health child development team, new mother's groups and first food groups

Appendix 4: Benchmarking of Playgroups

Springvale Service for Children	
Management structure	Community managed, not for profit organisation. Board of management comprises community representatives and representatives from the City of Greater Dandenong Council
Opening hours	Playgroups operate Friday and Saturday morning
Community involvement	Volunteer parents who help with the running of the playgroup
Memberships	Charge of $2 per child

Collingwood Steiner Playgroup	
Management structure	Unclear, partially volunteer operated
Opening hours	Collingwood College Mon – Friday 9:30am – 11:30am https://sites.google.com/site/collingwoodsteinerplaygroup/
Community involvement	Operating from within Collingwood College
Memberships	Term enrolments

Mitcham Community House	
Management structure	Maternal Child Health service operates the playgroups
Opening hours	Mondays during school terms (9:30am -11:30am) Facilitated playgroup sessions operating Monday, Tuesday and Wednesdays
Community involvement	Unclear
Memberships	$50 per family/term - standard playgroups $89 per family/term – 8 week facilitated playgroups

Gumnuts Playgroups – Malvern	
Management structure	Operated by committee of parent volunteers
Opening hours	Open all day, every day (7 days per week)
Community involvement	Volunteer operated
Memberships	Members are able to come at whatever time suits them , not limited to a particular session $120 per year

Knox City Council Playgroups	
Management structure	Operated by the Knox City Council Family and Children Services Department in partnership with parents who run the playgroup session
Opening hours	Various sessions throughout the week
Community involvement	Extensive involvement lots of different types of playgroup ,including cohort/interest specific playgroups (intergenerational, Chinese, young parents, children with special needs , Japanese , Korean , inter-country adoption playgroup , premature babies playgroups)
Memberships	Unknown

Appendix 5 Summary of current services with policy objectives

Table 1 below shows how Council toy libraries align with Council policy objectives.

Table 2 shows how Council toy libraries align with the Critical Success Factors.

Table 3 shows how Council playgroup services align with Council policy objectives.

Table 4 shows how Council playgroups align with the Critical Success Factors.

Alignment of current services with policy objectives

1	Service does not currently meet this policy objective
2	Service partially meets this policy objective
3	Service currently meets this policy objective

Table 1: Toy Libraries – Current service alignment with policy objectives

	Affordable, safe and a high quality service	Meets the current needs of families	Meets the future needs of families (until 2031)	Financially sustainable	Compliant with relevant policy and legislation	Collaborates with other services	Accessible to the community	Contemporary , sustainable and fit for purpose facilities	Provides natural environments
Elwood Toy Library	3	3	3	2	2	3	2	2	1
South Melbourne Toy Library	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	1
Middle Park Toy Library	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	1
Port Melbourne Toy Library	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	1

Table 2: Toy Libraries - alignment with Critical Success Factors (CSF)

NB: Critical success factors are used to assess a variety of Council-delivered children and family services, including kindergartens and childcare. In considering the above assessment, it should be noted that several of the critical success factors are less relevant to the delivery of toy libraries and playgroups than to other early years' services. For example, National Quality Standards are applicable to the delivery of childcare services in particular and the requirement to have a positive market impact is also less applicable in the case of playgroups and toy libraries as neither of these services are delivered by private providers.

1 - Service does not currently meet this CSF

2 - Service partially meets this CSF

3 - Service currently meets this CSF

Critical Success Factors (CSF)	Alignment with CSF
Legislative compliance	2
Meeting national quality standards	N/A
Positive market impact	2
Access for all	2
Future focused	2
Financial sustainability	2
Ability to implement	N/A

Table 3: Playgroups – Current service alignment with policy objectives

1	Service does not currently meet this policy objective
2	Service partially meets this policy objective
3	Service currently meets this policy objective

	Affordable safe and a high quality service	Meets the current needs of families	Meets the future needs of families (until 2031)	Financially sustainable	Compliant with relevant policy and legislation	Collaborates with other services	Accessible to the community	Contemporary, sustainable and fit for purpose facilities	Provides natural environments
St Kilda Playgroup Inc (operates from Bubup Nairm Family and Children's Centre)	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	3
Elwood Community Playgroup	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	3
Playgroups operating from Bubup Womindjeka Family and Children's Centre (Port Melbourne)	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	3
Playgroups operating from Alma Road Community Centre (Maternal Child Health)	2	2	2	N/A	N/A	2	2	2	N/A
Playgroups operating from the Middle Park Community Centre	2	3	3	N/A	N/A	2	2	2	N/A

Table 4: Playgroups - alignment with Critical Success Factors

NB: Critical success factors are used to assess a variety of Council-delivered children and family services, including kindergartens and childcare. In considering the above assessment, it should be noted that several of the critical success factors are less relevant to the delivery of toy libraries and playgroups than to other early years' services. For example, National Quality Standards are applicable to the delivery of childcare services in particular and the requirement to have a positive market impact is also less applicable in the case of playgroups and toy libraries as neither of these services are delivered by private providers.

1 - Service does not currently meet this CSF

2- Service partially meets this CSF

3- Service currently meets this CSF

CSF	Alignment with CSF
Legislative compliance	2
Meeting national quality standards	N/A
Positive market impact	3
Access for all	2
Future focused	2
Financial sustainability	2
Ability to implement	N/A

Appendix 6: Feedback from toy libraries

Suitability of current locations

Suitability of current locations for some of the toy libraries was raised as a major concern. For example, the Port Melbourne Toy Library is located in a small space within the Port Melbourne Town Hall. This space isn't ideal for the operation of a toy library. Similarly, Middle Park Toy Library is lacking sufficient space and can only accommodate 3 -4 adults at one time.

Elwood Toy Library is currently sharing a space within the Elwood St Kilda Neighbourhood Learning Centre (ESNLC), a consequence of sharing this space means that every Toy Library session they need to set up and then pack away toys and equipment including roller cabinets. This process takes approximately 45 minutes, and impacts on the time that volunteers and the paid coordinator have to engage in other activities such as building better connections with the community. The Elwood Toy Library also highlighted that there are functional challenges with the space in which they are currently located, including that doors open outwards. Despite these challenge, the Elwood Toy Library were overall happy with their location in the community, noting its close proximity to other services including a playground and park.

The South Melbourne Toy Library was opened in September 2015; it is located in a Council owned facility where there are three maternal and child health suits. The Toy Library is adjacent to the Clarendon St Childcare Centre. The South Melbourne Toy Library highlighted that the space was relatively small and thus did not enable for an optimal customer experience. For example, the current location does not allow for two distinct work areas – a preparation station (for when families are ready to borrow toys) and a return station (to enable an efficient return process).

Current volunteerism model

Toy libraries in the City of Port Phillip also identified that the requirement to volunteer as a condition of membership to a toy library was discouraging some families from becoming members. There was broad agreement that the model of expecting families to volunteer for approximately 6 hours per year was causing some challenges. All toy libraries noted that the need to find volunteers to fill shifts required ongoing effort. Many used a rostering system to enable for volunteers to sign up to shifts. Some felt more strongly about the challenges with the model of volunteering. There was acknowledgement amongst all toy libraries spoken to that the pool of volunteers is largely based on membership numbers, therefore those services which has less members were struggling more to operate sessions. For some toy libraries, such as the Elwood Toy Library, they have a large pool (over 200) of members and can more easily fill shifts.

There were some doubts raised by toy libraries about how best to manage volunteerism in the future. Some believed that it was important to require that members volunteer and consequently did not offer membership types that enabled for members to pay more to be exempt from volunteering responsibilities. Other toy libraries believed that the model was unsustainable- they noted that there were fewer individuals who had time to volunteer but that there was an expectation now that services should be at a much higher quality.

Volunteer management committee – reliance on skillsets of members

Another theme raised by toy libraries was that the current service model relied heavily on the skillsets of the volunteer management committee. When asked about the volunteer committee, most identified that there were three essential positions (President, Treasurer and Secretary) that needed to be filled in order for the toy libraries to operate effectively. While all toy libraries were able to fill these essential positions, the challenge was to find individuals who could take on other roles in order to strengthen the committee. For example, the Elwood Toy Library has a large committee (nine members) and includes marketing, event coordination and a MCH coordinator positions.

There was agreement that the stability of the committee was also critical to a well-functioning toy library as was the ability to leverage off the strengths of members. For example, the ability (and willingness) of a volunteer to write grant applications could be very helpful to a toy library given their reliance on grants throughout the year –however the time required to complete a grant application needed to be commensurate with the amount of funds that were available. Other skills that were desirable include the ability to undertake fundraising activities and to pursue sponsorship. Toy libraries also identified that in order to 'spread the word' of the service and in particular to generate awareness of the services provided by toy libraries amongst vulnerable families required time and skills.

Support (financial and in-kind) from Council

Toy libraries receive a grant from Council every year, the total amount is currently $14,000 and it is shared amongst all of the toy libraries. The amount distributed to each toy library is proportionate to the number of members that they have. Some toy libraries highlighted how this model can lead to 'empire building' – services that have a large membership base will receive a larger share of funding which enables them to invest more into toys, promoting the service and having a paid coordinator on site.

Toy libraries highlighted that the timing of this grant is critical to the viability of the service. One service said there has been little communication from Council on the timing of the grant in recent years, and the onus had largely fallen on the toy libraries to inform Council that they were due to receive their yearly grant. This has presented challenges in the past as one toy library was required to 'dip into' their reserve in order to make payments.

Furthermore, some toy libraries believed that the grant amount should increase in accordance with the 'Consumer Price Index' and that the amount received hasn't increased in multiple years.

Most of the toy libraries we spoke to were happy with the current leasing arrangements. Current toy libraries pay a yearly 'peppercorn' rent to lease out spaces in Council buildings. The amount is approximately $120 per annum. Some acknowledged that Council had not diligently followed up on rental payments and that there had been some years where they had not made their rental payments. The Elwood Toy Library currently leases a shared space from the Elwood St Kilda Neighbourhood Learning Centre. The Elwood Toy Library pays a community rent of $1300 per annum. This is a much higher amount that other toy libraries and was identified as potentially being an issue.

Communication from Council to Toy Libraries

Toy libraries highlighted that communication with Council is sporadic. There are infrequent updates provided and they do not always know who to raise issues with. The majority of toy libraries seek advice directly from Toy Libraries Australia however there is a sense that there is a greatly role for Council to play in the delivery of toy library services in the city.

Enhancing current services

Toy libraries believe that there is a need to enhance the current service offering of toy libraries in the - however there are divergent views on how best to achieve this. One toy library had previously proposed to Council that current toy libraries should amalgamate into one entity, and that Council should take over managerial responsibility for all the toy libraries. They suggested this would enhance the operation of toy libraries, enable for more resources to be invested into the service and would allow for better integration with other services.

Others believed that Council needed to strengthen the existing model – not necessarily take over the management of the services. There is a sense that there is a need amongst all services to balance the need for community activism in the delivery of toy libraries, and to ensure the long term sustainability of this important community resource.

Appendix 7: Feedback from playgroups

Please note – due to timeframes we were unable to conduct detailed consultations with playgroups.

Reliance on volunteers for effective service delivery

Feedback received highlighted that the operating model of playgroups is heavily reliant on the willingness of parents to establish, run and promote a playgroup. While this model is currently working well, there is a risk that in the future there will not be a sufficient pool of volunteer parents to manage the number of playgroup sessions required to cater to the demands of families in the city of Port Phillip. Further, there is a risk too that many of the current volunteers involved in delivering playgroups will begin to move into other roles as their children age, this will lead to an exodus of skills and expertise which will also be a challenge for Council to manage.

Council support

Council provides parents who want to start up a playgroup with information on how to establish a playgroup. Council also provides venues to playgroups to use free of charge, the only requirement being that all members of the playgroup are registered with Playgroup Victoria.

The current arrangements work relatively well, especially for large providers of playgroups such as Elwood Community Playgroup and St Kilda Playgroup Inc. Both of these services run multiple sessions across the course of the week and have dedicated facilities. Playgroups running out of Council managed buildings are also provided with seed funding to enable the purchase of toys and other equipment. However this seed funding does not happen for every group that starts up or morphs from a new parents groups to a playgroup. Other than this support, there is no financial support provided to playgroups.

Service integration and coverage

A community support officer for the Family, Youth and Children Department promotes playgroups through maternal child health services and new parent groups. Integration between other child and family services and playgroups is well established and operates effectively. There are regular meetings between playgroup and Council enabling for updates and issues to be resolved in a timely manner.

There are some concerns however that the current service provision is not evenly spread throughout the city of Port Phillip. While there is a concentration of services in Elwood/Ripponlea and St Kilda East/Balaclava there is a lack of services in the northern end of the city – as the majority of demand for services is likely to be in this area given anticipated population growth at fishermen's bend, Council will need to address this gap promptly.

Challenges to operating model

Playgroup Victoria highlighted that the traditional 'community'/family run playgroup is becoming less common as families are time poor and less likely to be able to volunteer. In contrast, there is growth in the number of families that enrol their children in paid activities such as childcare.