

BENDIGO PLAYGROUP

by Ros Elms

Team leader Andrea has certainly found gold in the playgroup ministry at Bendigo Salvation Army. Held in the children's room in historic 'Gravel Hill' primary school, the playgroup enjoys an average weekly attendance of 28. Andrea heads a committee of 8 leaders, however she says one of the key features for inclusion of families is that the running of each session is shared among the families, as all adults attending have children to look after. All families have the opportunity to go on the roster to perform a task & responsibility during the sessions (eg: children's craft/activities open & set-up, children's morning tea, adults morning tea, story & song, pack-up & close).

Some of the gold that this community playgroup has achieved:

- The Playgroup is a 'Five Star Playgroup', awarded by Playgroup Victoria.
- Successfully gained \$1500 from the City of Greater Bendigo Community Grants Program. Their project was titled 'Five Star Fun for Families @ Playgroup'.
- The Playgroup is now recognized by the City of Greater Bendigo Council as a 'Child Friendly Service' after our completion of an application.

When asked what they have intentionally focused on in setting up a playgroup ministry Andrea offers the following:

Help to meet a demonstrated need of families with young children in our community.

By completing the 'Five Star' training modules with Playgroup Victoria we demonstrated our desire & commitment to provide best practice (eg: policies & procedures in place).



A wonderful 'team' of dedicated parents/carers who all work together very cooperatively & effectively to provide an enjoyable experience each week. Playgroup 'belongs' to everybody!

All families are given a 'Responsibilities & Expectations' document. This creates a community where families feel comfortable, accepted, supported & encouraged in a Christian environment – (evident by regular attendance & arrival of new families).

Aim to have a holistic ministry in action – meeting people's needs (morning tea, fellowship, having something worthwhile to do & go to with their children), building relationships & community, education, and demonstrating & communicating the love of Jesus.

Conscious effort to encourage everyone to be friendly and welcoming, to deal with conflict in constructive ways and to learn from each other – provide hints and ideas about behaviour management and childhood development.

Andrea sees her role as a facilitator and encourager – creating opportunities for families to enjoy their playgroup experience and to encourage & support them when they take on responsibilities & leadership.

They dream big dreams at Bendigo. Andrea's dreams for the ongoing ministry of the playgroup include:

To provide a safe, enjoyable and enriching experience for families in our community in a Christian environment where the love of God is displayed.

To help meet the needs of families with young children in the community.

For all members to continue to build & strengthen their relationships with each other (adult to child, adult to adult, child to child, etc.) so we truly become a loving, caring & supportive community.

Most importantly I pray that each member experiences the love of God at Playgroup and seeks and/or further develops a spiritual relationship with Jesus.

For families to feel accepted, supported & encouraged in the journey of parenting. For children to feel safe and encouraged in their play & learning experiences & socialization. That God's Kingdom is built with families who have started and/or deepened their faith while attending a Christian playgroup.