

PLAYGROUP PROFILE: KIDZ BIZZ

Kidz Bizz Playgroups were started by Allison Hellier as a ministry of Waverley Christian Fellowship (Now City Life Church). Although they are run as a ministry of the church and have a leader and assistant leader who are church members, they differ from many church playgroups in that they mostly use community venues. (For example, council run kindergartens, maternal and child health centres). This means Kidz Bizz playgroups operate in a large number of different suburbs, although they all use the same basic format. Katie Albanis became the coordinator of Kidz Bizz playgroups at the start of 2004. This article tells something of her story

My journey with playgroup started nearly four years ago. I met Allison Hellier at a leader's meeting for our Children's ministry at church. (For those of you who know AI, she is PASSIONATE about playgroup) While speaking to her, I asked if Kidz Bizz had a playgroup for children with special needs. So far, they didn't. Immediately, I started to catch her vision, and we spoke about the possibility of starting a group for families with special needs children.

For the rest of that year, Allison put together and trained a team of women who were willing to serve in this new group, and Kidz Bizz Plus was launched in February 2002. It went well for three terms, but in fourth term, most of the children had appointments on Friday mornings. I was a bit disappointed that it didn't work the way I had hoped, but I quickly learned that God had bigger plans in mind.

In fourth term, I moved to another group where a mother had twins with special needs. I quickly formed a close friendship with her (we had met previously at early intervention) and within weeks, she asked to do Christianity Explained and gave her heart to the Lord. I was now completely sold out to our vision, and God's potential for playgroup ministry.

The following year in May 2003, Dorothy and I were privileged to go on a short-term missions trip lead by Allison to the Czech Republic and Hungary to train other churches in playgroup ministry. Altogether, we trained nearly thirty churches. It blew me away, that mothers all over the world have the same needs: to be in community and share their experiences. Playgroup ministry transcends cultural, social and economic differences. In Hungary, they don't even have an equivalent word for playgroup, but they love the concept and run very successful baba-mama groups!

Playgroup not only benefits the child, it places the kind of value on motherhood that God intended (they won't get this from the world today). It is where women and their children can feel loved, nurtured and safe. To provide this environment is to be in alignment with God's heart for women and families.

For the remainder of 2003, I worked closely with Allison, who became my first mentor, and the one who believed in and trusted me to lead Kidz Bizz. I became the Co-ordinator in January 2004. It was my first job in both early childhood and ministry, so I was more than a little overwhelmed!

A regular prayer program was established last year. We meet three Wednesdays each month for two hours. It was the most important thing we did, as we soon became aware that God was about to expand our ministry further than we could have imagined.

Kidz Bizz also began a Leadership Development Program, consisting of a leaders meeting and workshop each term, dessert and coffee night, and an end of year dinner. Our core leaders attend a mid-year retreat, planning day and have a book each term.

In second term, we trained twelve leaders in a ten-week parenting course. We were only planning to run the course once last year as a pilot group, but God thought we could do better than that. Due to demand, we ended up running eight courses over third and fourth terms. Our ministry workload almost doubled, but we were so fired up with what God was doing, we didn't care. I can't tell you how hungry families are for help with parenting. It fits in perfectly with playgroup ministry. This year, we are going to offer every group the opportunity to stop their playgroup program for a term in order to complete the course during their normal session time, and our leaders will provide childcare. We'll also run nighttime sessions so that fathers can do the course as well. Our vision is that it will be normal for every playgroup family to do the parenting course. It's a package deal!

We also consulted some industry professionals, particularly Kaye Plowman, and read the latest research, which led to some restructuring of our playgroup schedule, and the introduction of a new mat time program. Kaye's wisdom and guidance paved the way for much of what Kidz Bizz looks like today. After launching this new program three weeks ago, we have had a lot of positive feedback from leaders, mothers, and of course the children!

It has been a wonderful, challenging time – I no longer underestimate what God wants to do through playgroups. And He will, we just need to report for duty, and hold on for the ride. All of our leaders run hard all year, but we're chasing down the vision God has placed in our heart. We want the harvest!

I feel blessed to be a part of the CPN Committee, a company of awesome, godly women who share a vision for relationship evangelism through playgroups in this nation. What better times than these to reach out to our community families and demonstrate Christ's love, bringing hope to a hopeless world?

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