

FROM THE PRESIDENT

How exciting to be in 2005 with all the wonderful opportunities it offers us through our playgroup ministry.

We have an exciting year ahead. CPN and the Baptist Early Childhood Team (BECT) have teamed up to provide training days in Sydnham, Traralgon, Geelong, Syndal and Bendigo. Hope to see you at one of them.

We are also looking to have a children's concert. Would anyone like to offer their church as a venue? We would love to hear from you.

For those of us who attended the *Ministry to Children Conference* it was a great time to learn and share. Thank you to all the people who came up to me and shared their playgroup experiences. It never ceases to amaze me what God is doing. I love hearing all the encouraging stories of people's lives being changed through playgroup.

We all have a very busy year ahead. Be assured that we are praying that this year you will have many break - through experiences in your playgroup ministry.

Kaye Plowman

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 lead 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?

Katie Albanis
Kidz Bizz
City Life Church

"PLAYGROUP CAN BE MISSIONAL" PART THREE

The principles to playgroup being missional have been instrumental in many of the testimonies I have heard from community people who have come into a relationship with Jesus through playgroup. I am also encouraged by the increasing number of churches of all denominations who are not only seeing the impact possible, but who are also actively working towards having a stronger focus on friendship evangelism.

"How do we take the next step?" I would like to comment. One consistently made comment is "I am here to sow seeds", but I wonder and ask: "What if you are the person God has placed in the path of this person to introduce him/her to Jesus?" The second comment is around another common response "God can be found in the glass of water I give, or the Christian craft I organise". I have learnt through the testimonies I have heard that most community people do not connect what we do to God in a significant way. I have heard comments like: "I thought it was her hormones" and "There's something different about her (playgroup Christian) that I was attracted to and wanted, but I didn't know what it was". I have discovered that although essential, the caring and sharing is not enough. At some stage Jesus needs to come into the conversation. I have also discovered this is seen to be impossible for many people involved in playgroup ministry. What do we do with this challenge?

MISSIONAL PLAYGROUPS

At the same time I have also identified some of the characteristics of groups that are being effective in seeing people come into a relationship with Jesus. These can be shared as part of the answer to the obstacles and myths mentioned before.

I would like to give you an overview profile of three churches:

Eltham Baptist, Melbourne, Victoria
Kingsway Community Church, Sydney, N.S.W.
Moolap Baptist, Geelong, Victoria

Eltham Baptist, Melbourne, Victoria

OVERVIEW

Around 13 years ago one of the women from Eltham Baptist was encouraged by her Pastor to start a playgroup. The playgroup started with four (4) women from the church and four (4) women from the community. The emphasis of the playgroup was on friendship. Of that first group the four (4) community mums came to know the Lord. It was then decided this was a good model to run with and so the pattern was set. Today Eltham runs six (6) playgroups with four (4) community mums/dads and four (4) Christian men/women in each group.

Raelene is one of the adults who has come to know the Lord through Eltham Baptist playgroup. I have met Raelene and she shares her testimony as part of the Playgroup presentation for the "Grace Unleashed" workshop run by Evangelism Victoria.

Raelene talks openly of coming along to playgroup with her bottle of Prozac and her two (2) pre school children. It was because of the relationship that developed with the "A team" as Raelene came to think of three (3) Christians involved in playgroup that Raelene first experienced "unconditional love". A two-year journey led her from no awareness of God to a decision to become a follower of Jesus

Church profile

The churches mission statement is "to build relationships with God and people": That is; us with God, us with each other and us with mankind (those not in relationship with God).

The church is seen to exist for the community of believers within it and to represent God within the community.

The church believes it is not by accident that we are born in this day and age and live where we do. They believe God shapes them to fulfill His greater purpose.

Evangelism and playgroup: guidelines

- Work with like-minded people & form a team
- Agree to love God, each other & 'others'
- Define your mission, vision, purpose
- Develop a structure/basic program/set of guidelines/boundaries
- Pray intentionally & be disciplined (the HS does the convicting)
- Balance the number of Christians & 'others' in your group
- Keep the group number small enough for everyone to interact (approx 12 adults max)
- Know that kindness speaks loudest!
- Remember that people matter more than programs - respect where they are at
- Christian content is unnecessary - people already know that they are attending a church sponsored event
- Putting time into people & keeping structure basic impacts relationships
- Be advocates for families, know names, remember details & include them in some way

- Earn the right to present Jesus -Is He recognised in you? -Are you a genuine friend? - Admit your own struggles!
- Be spiritual-pray and be practical-respond to need & celebrations
- Drip Gods love/ways into their lives
- Spend more time in contact: phone call, meet for coffee, invite to your place
- Use simple language to speak of your faith, prayer, church & the goodness of God
- Have a planned opportunity for 'others' who want to investigate faith
- Know how you will involve them when they choose (give responsibility) or refuse (keep on loving)

Playgroup testimony – Raelene

Raelene was a single mum at 18; she was the youngest of four girls. Her dad was young when she was born, and really wanted a boy.

She felt lost and lonely. She lost her best friend to drug addiction. Raelene was struggling in her marriage, had been thru IVF, and had a near death experience. She suffered from clinical depression. Her career had stopped. Raelene has 3 children and states she arrived at playgroup with Jack and Holly and a bottle of Prozac. She was struggling to keep living. And in fact now believes she was psychically, emotionally and spiritually dead. Although on the outside every thing looked in control, her children were in designer cloths (matching of course) her lipstick was always applied, her hair was sleek and stylish. Raelene's house was spick and span but "don't look to close you may see a tear in my eye." says Raelene

Raelene met the A team (as she came to think of them) at playgroup. Three ladies that showed her a love and acceptance she had never experienced before.

The things they did for her

Gave her a birthday party, brought her meals, listened, they were always available to her; they never made her feel like she was a burden. They had her in their house at the most inconvenient times. Raelene says for about 2 years they loved and accepted her just how she was, warts and all.

About the A team

They loved each other, never were they heard to gossip. They had 8 children between them, one child with Cystic Fibrosis.

Raelene shares:

"Over a 2-year period we had some lunches together and briefly talked about God, but there was never any pressure, I didn't know what Baptist meant as I had no religious upbringing except for my early primary school days where I went to RE and I invited the brothers home for Sunday lunch and they came. My earthly father is proud to be an atheist."

"How did I get to church? Jack was invited to sing on stage at church. We came in the wrong door but were made to feel so welcome. We were offered coffee after church. The people loved each other. I told my husband Joe that I wanted what they have got, and I just had to find out what it was.

After that I felt like I was in Intensive care. What was intensive care like for me, someone

new to the kingdom of God? It was - BSF (Bible Study Fellowship), Christianity Explained, interceding through prayer, love, hanging with Christians, being plugged in, time, and the best example was Jesus, and then it was branching out. What was it I saw? It was Jesus love for me through them, Jesus acceptance of me, Jesus grace for me. I praise God for their obedience, as I may never have known what it feels like to really be alive and simply not just be breathing. I was 33 years old when I met with God. He saved my life and pulled me from the pit, but I can see as I look back over the years he was walking beside me all the time. Gods timing is perfect.

Raelene's life now:

I'm alive, my now 22-year-old son is getting thru drug addiction, and my Dad and a friend are both in prison. My sister has been set free from addictions and is now a Christian. My husband is a Christian and deacon. I am involved in youth ministry etc.

Matthew 28 verses 18,19,20 The Great Commission

Then Jesus came and he said, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the father and the son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of age"

Heather Karrasch
To be continued

THE SECRET DIARY OF A PLAYGROUP NOVICE

Monday the 7th of June

CPN committee meeting tonight. I ask whether someone can give me some tips for dealing with mindless violence in playgroup: pushing, gouging, biting etc. General consensus was that prevention is better than cure, (enough appropriate, engaging activities) and that it's important not to over-react in case the offending child enjoys all of the attention and just does it more as a result. Which seems to me to involve near super-human restraint (especially when one's own child is the victim). I guess it makes sense though. Joy promises to write an article for the CPN newsletter on biters.

Tuesday the 8th of June

We do the second session of "40 days of Purpose". Jacqui's neighbour Kathryn has decided to come along too, as well as Jacqui, Ali, Nicole and Trish. Rick Warren's Hawaiian shirt is as alarming as ever, but we have a fantastic discussion. Jacqui is teary with "good tears", and so am I!

Monday the 21st of June

A new girl, Rachel, comes to playgroup today with her two-year-old son Flynn. She found out about playgroup through MOPS.

Rachel starts sharing about her experiences of visiting her clairvoyant. I am bursting to say that in the bible it says that one shouldn't consult mediums etc., and that even if they tell some things that are true, there's plenty of things God doesn't want us to know. However, I remember how Yvette Wynne shared at the CPN AGM about being positive with "not yet Christians", and encouraging what they say that is good, rather than having a go at them about things you disagree with. Some things can just "go through to the keeper", while you pray that God will reveal truth.

So instead, I take a deep breath and say: "Tell me more about it". Everyone else joins in the conversation about clairvoyants, etc. I'm seriously wondering whether I should have tried the "positive" approach... the whole conversation makes me cringe.

Monday the 12th of July

Playgroup starts up again after the school holidays. Only Jacqui and Nicole come, and they are really late. "When are my friends coming?" Matthew moans at me. Some days it's such a struggle, and I think I should be pushing to have a "big, successful" playgroup. Though I think I have a deep sense that a small, intimate group is the right call for us for now.

Monday the 19th of July.

Rachel comes again, and we end up having another conversation about how wonderfully helpful her clairvoyant is. I'm not convinced this positive reinforcement of good ideas and ignoring the not so good is such a great idea. Uggh.

Wednesday 4th of August

We have an evening Playgroup / 40 days of Purpose group dinner out at "Sweet Chilli's" in Heathmont. Great food... and great to have some child free time to talk. Must do this more often.

Tuesday 14th of September

We have finally finished "40 days of Purpose"... in our case, "Several Months of Purpose, with some social mornings thrown in due to childminding constraints." So I get together with the girls and lead a reflective session with candlelight, a water fountain, and a time of silent reflection on Ephesians 3:14 – 21. We then share what spoke to us from the passage, and then pray for one another. After the final "Amen", Jacqui says: "I hope you don't mind, but I have to pray too." She then prays: "Lord, this is the first time I've prayed out loud, and I'm nervous... but I just had to thank You for drawing me back to Yourself and for showing You love me. Thanks for letting me meet these girls who have helped me get to know you. Amen." She's crying, I'm crying... I don't think there's a dry eye anywhere. What an enormous privilege to have been part of her journey to this point.

Friday 17th of September

After consulting all the girls, we have switched to running playgroup on Fridays. As this is the last day of term, we have playgroup at my house. This is also a 5th birthday party for Kate. Dee and her family have decided to move back to Queensland, and this is her last day in Melbourne. It's lovely that she has wanted to share this time with us. It's a glorious Spring day, and I feel that our eating (and playing) all together is something of a foretaste

of the Kingdom of God, and the great banquet at the end of time. The house gets completely trashed of course, (thinking on a far less spiritual plane) but the girls do help sort out some of the chaos.

I go back to Dee's place to supervise Kate and Matthew outside while she and her husband madly try to clean up the house (they are moving out today and the real estate inspector is coming to return their bond money, if possible. The chance of a full refund isn't looking good, if the chaos within is anything to go by).

I clean all the outside windows, do the lunch run, and other sundry tasks until school pick up time, then exchange fond farewells.

I tell my husband about my heroic helping efforts later that evening. He just looks at me and sighs: "I wish you'd clean our windows". It's far more fun to clean someone else's house of course.

Friday 10th of December

Yes, dear diary, I have been most remiss in filling you out. But I had to tell you of something exciting that happened today. It was our playgroup breakup, which we held at Wyreena café and outdoor playground.

Rachel, who has continued to share about her clairvoyant from time to time at playgroup, suddenly said to the group: "I know there's something missing in my life... I'm going to start coming to church... and to your prayer group too, Janet". She then went racing after Flynn, leaving me guarding the bags at the table as the other mums chased after their youngsters also. I prayed like mad, deeply humbled by the fact that God was drawing Rachel to Himself. What if I had "had a go" at her for her dabbling in New Age stuff... might I have lost the opportunity to keep loving her and showing Christ to her?

Sunday the 12th of December

I sit with Rachel at church... praise God!

Friday the 21st of January

I ring Rachel about her Mother's partner, Geoff, who is seriously ill in hospital. She tells me how she prayed for him when he was unconscious, and dying (she thought), and how he "came back." I let her know I will ask others to pray for the success of his next operation, and send the message on through the church prayer chain.

Monday the 24th of January

Geoff is much better. Rachel believes in the power of prayer all right! God is so gracious.

Friday the 4th of February

First day of playgroup for the year. Although Matthew has now started school, I have to stay involved with playgroup... it's been such a privilege to see God at work through this ministry. I think I'm hooked.

I've survived a whole year... I guess I'm no longer an outright playgroup novice.

Perhaps one day I'll write: "Confessions of a relatively inexperienced but enthusiastic playgroup leader".

Janet Woodlock

BITING AT PLAYGROUP

Suddenly there is a scream of pain where children are playing "dollies." Oh no, Callum has bitten Sally again!

Why is it that some children bite and others do not even consider it? Biting is a common problem, particularly with toddlers, and dealing with it is complicated by the fact that it is so emotive.

Why do Toddlers Bite?

A toddler may have learnt that biting works: it gets them the toy they want and it is quicker than using words.

A toddler whose language is not well developed may resort to biting as a quick means of expression, often without malice, or a reliable way of gaining attention.

Make sure the children in the group are not experiencing too much frustration, are 'uncrowded' and are receiving sufficient stimulation: but not too much!

Sometimes biting is a one-off attack, and the biter receives as bigger shock as the victim if the reaction is explosive. If the biter finds that this is the best way to gain the desired toy or attention, this can become a way to communicate needs that is successful. The trouble is that children learn quickly from modeling behaviours that are rewarded, and you could find a number of children start this practice.

Some Suggestions for Managing this Behaviour

Remember there are no quick or magic cures, but a calm approach and patience are probably your most valuable assets.

- Ensure that your playgroup offers enough equipment with multiples of the 'favourites' and a balance of active and quiet activities, with challenges, but not so difficult that children become frustrated.
- Support children and teach them to use words rather than biting to gain what they want.
- While the victim will need comforting, the biter may also be distressed by the reaction the biting has caused and may need comforting too.
- Facial expression and tone of voice can convey a clear message that biting hurts, and redirect the child to a solitary activity or an activity with an adult. They need time away from others to calm down and have a breather. This is not a punishment, as punishment will not work.

- Make sure the activity that you are moving the 'biter' to is satisfying, and this should help reduce the need to bite.
- It is worthwhile to try and work out the reason behind the biting and assess what triggers the biting (eg tiredness), and try to change the situation to create less stress and frustration for the child. Prevention is better than cure.
- Avoid large groups, eg. all toddlers in the playgroup do not have to come and sit for story, these could be in smaller groups during the session.

Adults should never retaliate by biting biters or encouraging victims to bite back. Toddlers are not mature enough to understand and there would be no surer way of destroying a toddler's trust in you.

Remember keep this in perspective and do not over react. Your reaction might keep the biting happening, as this in itself is so entertaining!

FRANKLIN GRAHAM CRUSADE

Many of you will be aware of the Franklin Graham crusade on the 18th, 19th, and 20th of March at the Telstra Dome. On Saturday the 19th there will be a huge children's rally. This is designed for primary aged children and their families. There may be playgroup families who have older children who might be encouraged to take the whole family along. It should be an awesome time! You can check out www.kidfest.com.au for more details.

WHO TO CONTACT:

If you would like to speak to someone about playgroups and/or CPN, you can speak to the following denominational representatives:

Anglican	Pat Horman	9653 4276 (0421 501 212) phorman@melbourne.anglican.com.au
Baptist	Heather Karrasch	9810 7833 (0438 068 548) heather.karrasch@baptistvic.asn.au
Churches of Christ	Janet Woodlock	9870 1244 (0405 758 286) janetw@mira.net
Salvation Army	Jacqui Berris	9428 9005 (0400 455 300) jacol@netconnect.com.au

