

On behalf of the committee of the Christian Playgroup Network our heartfelt thanks to all our members for your dedication to your playgroup in 2005. We are now well into a new year with a new sense of motivation and excitement to walk in all that God has for us. Join with us in prayer that a new fresh wind of revival will sweep over our playgroups. Let's move into the promise of Ephesians 3:20 so we can experience "far over and above all that we dare ask or think – infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, hopes or dreams..." (Amplified version)

What a special occasion the November Annual General Meeting turned out to be as playgroup leaders shared ideas and experiences and we recalled together the blessings of the year. After the official meeting was over one leader spontaneously shared how she became a Christian through the love and care of the church playgroup she attended. Now she leads a playgroup and needs no persuasion about the fact that playgroups are truly missional.

How privileged we are to share our life's journey with other families, babies and young children as we share God's supernatural love through our normal everyday relationships at playgroup.

Did you enjoy telling the Christmas Story? Did your playgroup do anything special that you would like to share? Do you have any suggestions for Easter or outreach ideas using the Commonwealth Games as a theme? If so, do let us know so we can share your ideas through this newsletter to help others. Email kaye@playgroup.org.au as we would love to hear from you.

It has been so exciting to see our steady growth as a committee to reach out target of being interdenominational. Currently on the committee we have representatives from the Anglican, Baptist, Brethren, Churches of Christ, City Life Churches, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist and Uniting Church. If your denomination is not represented let us know.

Dates for your Diary:

GREAT STATE WIDE CPN CONFERENCE WITH YVETTE WYNNE

29 APRIL 2006

DON'T MISS IT!

Yvette is the playgroups coordinator at Kingsway Community Church in Sydney, which has had great success in reaching families with the gospel.

BECT/CPN training days - Chose the training session closest to you, and bring your team along:

20 May Wonthaggi
22 July Geelong/Lara
9 August Kilsyth (evening)

Other conferences that include playgroup training:

26,27,28 September Crossways Children's Ministry Conference

LITERACY AND LANGUAGE

The term Language and Literacy more often than not brings up thoughts of children knowing the alphabet, reading and writing their own name. But there is much that needs to occur before this can really happen.

Children's rate of development in the first few years of life is mind boggling when you consider how much learning and growth occurs, and language and literacy is just a part this. There are some important activities that children need to regularly participate in for them to master language and literacy. These are all simple and can happen during the normal everyday routines that go on in all families.

One of the most important things to understand is that children learn by modelling and example. The easiest way to encourage language is to talk to your child. This can be as basic as to what you are doing at home, what clothes they will wear for the day, what is happening, and where you are going. As you drive in the car or walk down the street talk about where you are going, what you can see, what might be around the next corner and at the end of the journey. An example of this is when taking my 2-year-old grandson for a walk to the park the other day my daughter was encouraging him to walk under the red leafed trees. This created much use of language such as under, through, around, wide, big, little, red, green, and much more. Hanging washing on the line is another example - ask for a particular colour peg, talk about what will come out of the basket next, big shirt/little top and so on. So it is easy to see how we can develop children's vocabulary and language by talking and using everyday objects and activities.

While television can be one of the tools to develop language it is better to have designated times where you can be with your child to watch the program and talk about what you see and participate. Do not leave the television on all day, or large portions of it, as this can be distracting and not encourage conversation.

Literacy is part of language also, but children need exposure to a variety of books and written word very early. While they are not able to read it is important for

them to develop a love of books and learn to handle them appropriately. The cloth books are a good first option, also the thick card books. At the start you could be reading to your child while they are breast or bottle-feeding. As soon as they are able to sit up include books as part of their “toy” collection. Before bed make it part of the routine that you look at a book or two. Make sure that the illustrations are realistic and can be recognized by the child. Talk about the picture, point out various aspects, eg “Look at the man’s hat, isn’t that big for his head?” Every time a book is read children enjoy revisiting the pictures and story over and over. This is an important part of learning; children learn by repetition.

I hope this is giving you a taste of how easy it is to encourage and develop an enjoyment of language and literacy very early in your child’s life. Everything we do in a young child’s day can support and encourage the wonderful world of early language and literacy.

Joy Williams

THE BIG DAY OUT REPORT

The inaugural Baptist Early Childhood Team Playgroup Conference was an exciting opportunity for those of us involved in Playgroup Ministry or considering starting a Playgroup to get some professional development and personal inspiration.

The day began with a pampering and energy filled morning tea while people registered and collected show bags of information about contacts and resources.

After a while of praising God together in song, Pastor Andrew Shepherd encouraged us all to take the opportunity God surrounds us with (Esther 4:7-17). The keys to this are courage, love, prayer and purpose. The assistance we have is the Holy Spirit. The result is new family members in Christ and favour with God.

A short drama was a surprise inclusion, before Heather Karrasch spoke on the topic of “Task versus Relationship”. This was an opportunity to consider the model of Jesus who was open to all people, and identified with whomever He was with. Heather challenged us to consider whether we are too busy doing good things to get to the most important things. This was followed by an opportunity to break into small groups to discuss the topic. Our group felt that our focus needs to be on people: on their needs and on our relationships with them. Steps we could take are to consider each person a potential friend, and have inclusive social events.

Another thought provoking drama preceded the second topic, brought by Anne Leary-Smith, on “Loving Each Other”. THIS is the attribute which is supposed to identify Christians. We can only assist people if we know them and their needs,

which means we have to commit to having time available for others. To build life changing relationships requires prayer, love and time.

The next thought provoking drama showed a scenario where a Playgroup leader totally missed an opportunity to talk about what a difference Jesus makes to her day, followed by an alternate scenario where the Playgroup leader just openly took the same opportunity. This was a fantastic lead in to the segment led by Karen Shepherd on "Conversation Opportunities". We were challenged to consider whether the blockages were discomfort, insecurity or lack of training. Then we were challenged to consider ways we can look to God to overcome these obstacles and be the witnesses we are here to be. (I can personally recommend the wonderful course which CPN sponsored earlier this year run by Steve Abbot on "Everyday Evangelism")

Cathy DeWitt spent some time encouraging everyone to PRAY, before we had a lunch break to clear the cobwebs and meet some other people.

Heather Karrasch then made us really think, with a challenge to identify some common "Blockages and Myths" that may be hindering the effectiveness of Playgroup in our church. Then we had to consider ways of altering these perceptions!

We were greatly encouraged by some testimonies from people who have had life changing experiences through the ministry of Playgroup.

A panel opened up for answering some curly questions people had put on paper during the lunch break.

The Playgroup video recently released from Kingsway Community Church was shown, and we were given details to buy this and the accompanying workbooks to help us as leader teams to get united and focused on reaching out to the people who are in our groups.

The final topic for the day was presented by Ruth Kernick on the topic of "Discerning the Softhearted". From the passage in Matthew 5 she discussed how we can be aware of the: broken hearted, grieving heart, gentle heart, truth seeker, compassionate heart, good heart and open heart.

The day was run in a nondenominational style and dovetailed in wonderfully with the training days CPN put on in each area of Victoria during the year. I haven't given details of the dramas because... you had to be there! And that is exactly what I would encourage you to do if the BECT ever run a conference for Playgroup Leaders again - go and be blessed.

Judy Harris

PLAYGROUPS AND PARENTING

A number of churches offer parenting courses for playgroup parents and for other interested members of the community. These courses are in demand: many parents have had very little contact with young children until they have children of their own. They have to learn “on the job”, and greatly value ideas and input about parenting. City Life Church closed “normal” playgroup sessions for a term and ran a parenting course based on a video series and book “On Becoming Child-Wise” for ten weeks (one term), while providing carers for the children. Other churches offer evening or weekend parenting courses. Two recommended Christian parenting courses include:

Toolbox.

Parenting with Confidence Inc. has developed the Toolbox Parenting Course. This is a 6 week course based around videos and small group discussion, and can easily be run in a home environment. The course looks at the following aspects of parenting:

Session 1

- What is a parent? Are there different species of parent?
- What type of parent do children need?
- How do we become the kind of parent we really hope to be?

Session 2

- What are the physical and emotional needs of children?
- Why is positive labelling important?
- What are the different ages and stages?

Session 3

- How to engage children’s cooperation.
- How can we spend less time correcting and more time enjoying?
- What role do rules, routine and charm play in bringing kids on board?

Session 4

- What does discipline actually mean?
- How to handle difficult behaviour and stay sane.
- How do we get the ‘thinking’ in-between the ‘feeling and acting’?

Session 5

- How do we create a childhood to remember?
- What role do the different love-languages play?
- What kinds of activities, rituals and traditions make a family?

Session 6

- How do I become a parent coach or backbone parent?
- What about the problem areas?
- How do I stay calm and keep my cool?

CPN Committee member comment: I attended the Toolbox Training Day at St Hillary's Anglican Church Kew recently and was very impressed by the way the 2 Trainers from New Zealand helped us through the training. They were bright and friendly and presented themselves as ordinary people not necessarily experts but there to help us as trainers and parents discover a box of helpful tools. They encourage parents to take a tool, try it and adjust it for their parenting. They use humour well, which they encourage you to use also to help parents relax and enjoy the course.

Each session has a warm up activity, content from a video, group interaction, and reinforcement by wrap ups, quotes, and hot tips. There are 3 levels: Early years, 0-6; Middle years, 6-12; and Teenage years, 12+.

They talk about the four types of parent: the Sergeant Major, the Jellyfish, the Neglectful and the Too Busy parent. This is helpful in discovering family patterns and in setting up goals for your family. They look at things like helping children deal with their feelings. They have tools for engaging children in co-operation, identifying and sharing your values with children, and many more. Beth Barnett from St. Hillary's took the 0-6 years sessions, as she has run one of these courses in her church. I can recommend this course and am looking forward to trying it in my own church next year. Chris and Beth Barnett hosted the training. For more information their details are: chrisb@shack.org.au or 9817 4513. (Pat Horman)

Starting Points

Starting points is a four week course developed by Focus on the Family. It focuses on parenting children in the 0 – 4 age group. It uses video / DVD clips, powerpoint presentations, group discussions and creative activities to present well-researched material on parenting. There is a detailed facilitators guide, and a participants manual. The course covers:

Session 1: Observing my child: My child's developing personality

- my child's temperament and developing personality
- parenting styles and my child's developing personality

- communicating with my child
- helping my child manage change

Session 2: Walking forward with my child: Building self-confidence

- the confident resilient child
- nurturing healthy emotions
- how parent conflict and stress can affect a child
- parent to parent communication

Session 3: Transferring Values: correcting my child and setting boundaries

- parental expectations and how I was parented
- setting boundaries (limits) and correcting my child
- encouraging positive behaviours
- passing on family values and encouraging responsibility

Session 4: Understanding my child's world: important relationships

- the parent to parent relationship
- the parent roles
- the parent to child relationship
- the importance of other relationships for the family.

The Christian values are implicit rather than explicit, and non-church families would not find the material “religious”. For more information, check out the Focus on the Family website at www.families.org.au, and look for “Starting Points”

CPN committee member comment: I am happy to recommend this course: the material is excellent, very well presented, and detailed. It could easily be run over 8 sessions with more time for discussion. I imagine the course facilitator would need to be confident in giving presentations, and in working with DVD's and Powerpoint presentations. Some small churches or playgroups might have trouble with the upfront cost of \$285 for the facilitator training day, manual, participants workbook, DVD training disc and promotional CD. (Janet Woodlock)

RESOURCES

CPN and BECT have just completed a book called: “Starting a Christian Playgroup” This is designed for individuals or churches who are interested in starting a group for the first time, but it also provides useful information for groups that are already established.

“Becoming a Contagious Christian” This is a study guide by Bill Hybels on how to share your faith in natural ways. If your playgroup leadership team (and any

Christian mums from playgroup) want to grow in sharing their faith, you may want to meet together for a number of sessions based around this material. The book includes understanding your personal style, how to give a 3 minute testimony, and how to share a gospel outline. There is a book, leader's guide, participants manual, and video. It is important to practice the skills developed regularly with this group, and to pray for opportunities to put these skills into practice with playgroup parents. It is available through Christian bookshops such as Word and Koorong.

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
Brethren	Judy Harris	98120062, (0415 832 823) juanha@optusnet.com.au
Churches of Christ	Janet Woodlock	9870 1244 (0405 758 286) jwoodlock@churchesofchrist.org.au
Salvation Army	Jacqui Berris	9428 9005 (0400 455 300) jacol@netconnect.com.au
Seventh Day Adventist	Leanne Deanshaw	9259 2327 (0419 256 067) ldkanshaw@adventist.org.au
Uniting Church	Joy Williams	0418 546 816 joy.williams@vic.uca.org.au
Other	Kaye Plowman	9388 1599(BH) 9808 4062(AH)

Kaye@playgroup.org.au

FEEDBACK

Please let us know your questions on anything, or your response to any of the articles in the newsletter, by hitting “reply”, or emailing the editor (Janet) at jwoodlock@churchesofchrist.org.au. We'd love to hear from you!