

“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. God's 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