

JUST PLAYGROUP?



Recently in my role at Intergen I've noticed that most of the workshops I have been asked to present on areas of Justice, such as the inclusion of people with disabilities within the church, have been well received but poorly attended. This has led us to ask why? Are issues of justice not a priority for children and families ministry? Are they perhaps seen as too political or controversial? Or is this is one step too far for most leaders who are struggling to find volunteers and adequate resources for their already over stretched programs?

So why do issues of justice matter in the playgroup setting? Justice is part of the DNA of playgroup ministry. Many playgroups seek to respond to a justice issue within our communities – the significant mental and physical health risk of social isolation amongst families caring for young children. Alongside that many groups also intentionally connect with marginalised and socially disadvantaged communities. Given this deep-seated commitment to living justly in our neighbourhoods, what other ways are there for groups to embody God's call to justice?

REDUCING THE WASTE

Careful use of our world's limited resources is one way playgroups can act justly. The reuse of craft materials and reducing the production of take home crafts which often end up in landfill, can actually encourage creativity. Natural found objects such as stones, leaves and flowers can be returned after use without creating pollution.

TOYS AND GAMES

The use of good quality second hand toys is a mainstay of playgroup ministry. However, also paying attention to what material is being used and where and how they are being manufactured, can help groups to make sustainable and just choices.

LANGUAGE

The way we speak and the topics we talk about can either create a culture of inclusion and welcome or it can allow less helpful ideas such as consumerism and competitiveness to dominate our spaces. Be mindful of stereotyping and excluding others by the language we choose to use.

GIVING TABLE

Group members can bring surplus fruit and vegetables or second hand baby goods for others to take and use.

PICTURE BOOKS THAT ENGAGE WITH ISSUES OF JUSTICE

Jesus was a refugee: Andrew McDonough
Giraffe's can't dance: Giles Andreae
Yobbos do yoga: Phillip Gwynne and Andrew Joyner
Hats of faith: Medeia Cohan
Same: Katrina Roe
I'm an Australian too?: Mem Fox

JUSTICE PROJECTS

If you decide to participate in an external justice project do some research. Don't just assume every project is ethical, beneficial or a good use of resources. The following books might be helpful:

When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor and Yourself: Steve Corbett & Brian Fikkert
Another way to love: *Ed.* Tim Costello and Rod Yule

By Stacey Wilson, Intergen staffer, stacey.wilson@intergen.org.au