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Playgroups are more than just child's play.

Community-based playgroups have been a positive and fun part of life for many children growing up in the Blue Mountains and across Australia. But playgroups are about much more than just children playing for entertainment's sake. Playgroups offer significant benefits for children, parents and carers, and community.

Research conducted by the Telethon Kids Institute has shown that children who regularly attend playgroups during early childhood have significantly better development when they start school than those who haven't attended playgroups. The research shows that playgroup is universally beneficial to all children from a range of different backgrounds, however, only 36% of children attended playgroup prior to commencing school.

Children under five are going through a stage of rapid brain and skill development. For optimum development, young children need a stimulating environment to play and learn. Play is vital for emotional, intellectual and physical development. Through play, children develop important learning and life skills, such as exploring, identifying, negotiating, and risk-taking, all of which help to prepare them for early education and the challenges that can come with that transition. While children will of course play at home, playgroups offer something new.

Playgroups provide a safe environment for parents and carers to spend time with their babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers and experience a variety of learning experiences. They are an opportunity to learn about the world and to develop social skills together. Playgroups also have a range of positive effects on parents and carers which are likely to translate into better outcomes for children, such as reduced social isolation, improved parenting skills and self-confidence, increased knowledge of information and support available, and a greater awareness of their child's needs.

While there are well recognised benefits for children, parents and carers as individuals, playgroups are also a wonderful way to strengthen our community. Children have the opportunity to make friends from their own communities, connections that often continue into school life and make that transition to big school smoother. And for parents and carers, sharing experiences and talking in a space that is non-judgemental and empathetic creates a community that is supportive and connected.

Belong Blue Mountains run a number of facilitated playgroups across the mountains from Blaxland to Katoomba. At Kookaburra Playgroup, held every Monday morning in Lawson, children can participate in activities such as painting, sand play and craft - activities that may not be possible or encouraged at home due to mess, availability or space. There is something for every little person with indoor and outdoor play and activity stations which are organised depending on age, ability and interest. K-Town Play & Chat is held in Katoomba on Thursday mornings and provide an opportunity for parents and carers with babies and pre-schoolers to come together, relax and connect. Little ones can enjoy craft activities, story time and floor play while you relax, have a cuppa and a chat.

If you, or someone you know, would like to go along to a playgroup, please call Belong Blue Mountains on 4782 1117, email info@belongbm.org.au or contact your local neighbourhood centre.



PLAYGROUPS WORK: Community-based playgroups offer significant benefits for children, parents and carers, and community.

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