



**VACCA**

Connected by culture

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL  
CHILD CARE AGENCY

# VACCA's Cultural Intensive Supported Playgroups – Findings from an evaluation across three VACCA sites

OPEN Symposium 2023



# About VACCA

Victorian state-wide ACCO servicing children, young people, families and community

Guiding function is to heal the Aboriginal community by strengthening safety, wellbeing and cultural connectedness

925 staff (46% Aboriginal) and growing; six regions, 27 offices

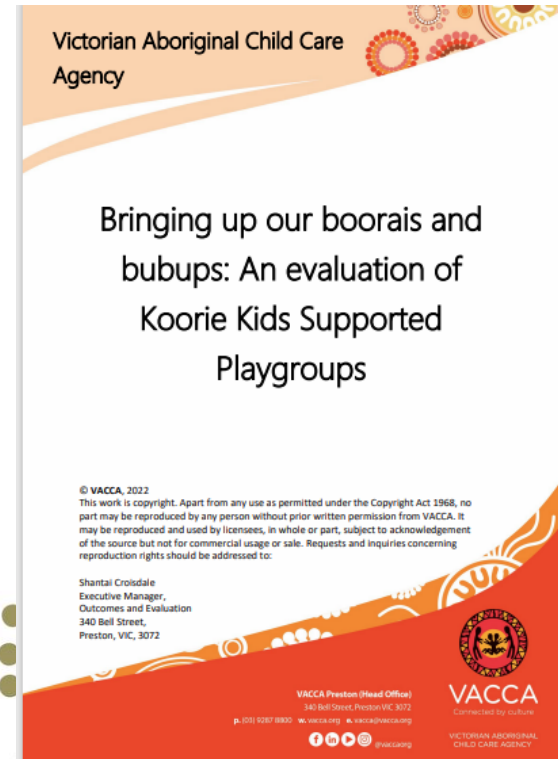
70 support programs, core program elements in each region as well as Statewide Programs

Programs include early help, family services, family violence, Care Services, Cultural Programs and supports



# Evaluation of Koorie Kids Supported Playgroups

- Purpose – to document the program logic, how the program is working and outcomes
- Internal evaluation conducted by VACCA - 2018 to 2021
- Three sites – Western, Southern and Northern metropolitan



# Evaluation questions

- What is the logic model underpinning the program?
- Is the program working as intended?
- Is the program achieving its intended outcomes? What is the parents/carers' perspective on outcomes?
- Have there been any unexpected outcomes (positive or negative)?
- What were the barriers and enablers to program delivery and achievement of outcomes?

An additional question regarding how the program adapted to COVID-19 was added to the evaluation.



# How we did the evaluation

- Implemented in three phases
- Phase 1 – participatory methods to document the logic
- Phase 2 – participatory methods to develop a data plan and data collection tools (parents/carers and Facilitators)
- Phase 3 – Data Collection – quantitative data from the program and qualitative data (interviews with 16 Parents/Carers, 10 staff and one group discussion of staff)
- Limitation – COVID impacts



# Key findings

**Critical early intervention** support for Aboriginal children and parents/carers as an entry point to services

Delivering intended activities

Contributing to **highly meaningful and significant outcomes** - school readiness, cultural and community connection, linkage and referral

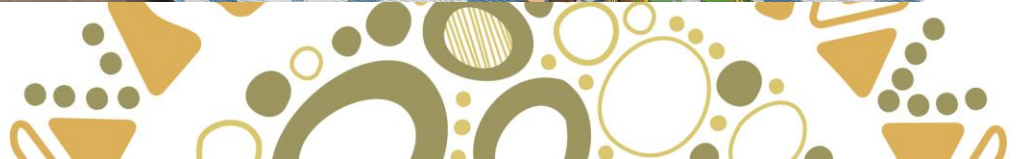
**Aboriginal Facilitators are necessary** to achieve outcomes

Not just Koorie Kids Supported Playgroups but **intensive supported playgroups**



# Who we are reaching

- Aboriginal Children, mostly two- and three-year-olds, living with Aboriginal parents, attending with mum
- **Parents/Carers – overwhelmingly Aboriginal mothers**, under 40 and attending with one child
- Connected to other VACCA programs – Kinship Care, Family Services, Family Violence Programs, Foster care programs





# Motivation for attending

Aboriginal parents and carers	Non-Aboriginal parents and carers
Desire for Aboriginal supported playgroup	Desire for Aboriginal Supported Playgroup
Cultural supports	Supporting child's Cultural connection
Social connection	Their own Cultural learning and access to Cultural resources for child
Non-judgmental supportive space	Learning about local Aboriginal Community



# Program Cycle – leaving playgroups

Stream  
1

- Kids who leave to attend kindergarten

Stream  
2

- Kids who attend kindergarten and stay at playgroups until school



# Facilitators

- Critical resource to achieve outcomes
- All Aboriginal
- Entry point for Aboriginal female staff
- Parents/carers want Aboriginal Facilitators
- Important and complex work
- Critical skills and knowledge - cultural and Community knowledge and connections; networking; early child development; facilitation and engagement; communications; trauma-informed understanding
- Attitudes - adaptive and flexible; build and maintain networks

The girls are just, for short of a better word, they're bloody awesome. They don't just care about our kids, they care about us, as parents, and as people as well which is huge to be able to walk into a place and just feel – I don't know what would you call it, bloody sunshine and brightness. You know what I mean? They're just such beautiful natured workers and they give a crap about us too as well as our kids.

[Client feedback]

# What's happening at playgroups

Active engagement and support for families attending

Welcome

Working with parents to prepare food

Yarning and Acknowledgement

Main activity

Structured play-based learning activities (arts and crafts; music)

Reading/story-telling

Cultural activities and cultural resources



# What's going on in the background

- Intentional observation of:
  - child/parent dynamic
  - child development
- Ensuring parents/carers feel included
- Visitors – talking to clients – opportunistic – asking if they want supports
- Parents/carers having a break
- Interaction –parents/carers; among children; within families
- Yarning
- Linkage to supports



# Connecting families with services

Regular visitors - VACCA programs and staff; maternal child health nurse; mobile libraries

Elders and Cultural experts and Artists

The fact that they've had other workers from other places come in, they're massive too, because even though somebody may not have been needed at that place at that time, they've had that reference, you know, like, that's helped heaps. [Client feedback]



VACCA EASTERN  
**KOORIE KIDS PLAYGROUP**  
TERM 3 2022

Come and join us at VACCA's Koorie Kids Playgroup in a culturally safe, fun and empowering environments. We support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in our community. Our playgroups are culturally safe, fun and empowering environment for families with children aged five years and under.

Term 3 playgroup sessions will commence from 19<sup>th</sup> July 2022

Tuesdays: 11am - 1pm Vermont South Learning Centre 1 Karobran Drive, Vermont South	Wednesdays: 11am - 1pm Chimside Park Community Hub 33 Kimberley Drive, Chimside Park	Thursdays: 11am - 1pm Upper Terra Family Centre 2442-2444 Warburton Hwy Yarra Junction
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**Beyond Playgroup**  
We also offer in-home supports to all our Playgroup families on a short-term basis to assist with a variety of parenting supports and linkages to community services. These service connections are aimed at linking key supports that would benefit the development of children aged five years and under such as health, social, education and cultural connections.

**Get started:**  
If you have a child or children aged five years and under and you are interested in knowing more, please get in touch today.

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#vaccaorg

This week

Maternal  
& Child  
Health



# Cultural Playgroups

- Parents and carers attend because they are Cultural Playgroups
- Specific cultural activities
- Culture embedded through sessions with resources, networks, knowledge, engagement approaches and participation of Elders



# What parents and carers said about their experience of Playgroups

It's non-judgmental

It's a safe space

Supportive space

Social connections

It's fun!

Want to come along because it's an Aboriginal Supported Playgroup

Want more cultural activities

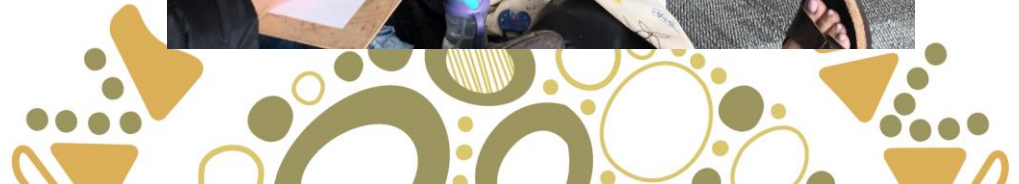
Feel heard





# Child outcomes found in the evaluation

- School readiness - prepared for structured learning, learning through play, socially prepared
- Connection with culture and strong sense of cultural identity
- Health and development needs (referral and linkage)



# Parent/carer outcomes found in the evaluation

- Increased social interaction and networks
- Increased understanding of how to support child's learning
- Increased parent/child bond
- Knowledge of – including how to support - child development
- Cultural and Community connection for self
- Supporting child's cultural and community connection



# Learning and adapting

- Key recommendations include:
  - That VACCA recognise the model is intensive supported Cultural playgroups
  - That regions set up coordination mechanism
  - Facilitators – review of PD, career path and support for qualifications
- Use of the evaluation in developing Early Help Program with Intensive Cultural Supported Playgroups in VACCA East



# Thank you

- Amie Porter, Program Manager, Community Engagement Programs, VACCA West - [amiep@vacca.org](mailto:amiep@vacca.org)
- Tori Brooks, Team Leader, Koorie Kids Supported Playgroups and Koorie Families as First Educators, VACCA North, [torib@vacca.org](mailto:torib@vacca.org)
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