

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

To begin to address the needs of women with young children, we invited a few people around to the Brothers' house for morning tea to discuss the idea of establishing a local playgroup. Three women attended and, with a little prompting from us, decided to hold a first playgroup at Margie's home on the next Wednesday morning. Armed with this information, we all went out and encouraged other women to come along to playgroup. It was a great success. The group decided to meet weekly, each person taking turns at hosting the playgroup in her backyard.

We realised that, in many ways, playgroups were an easy way of bringing women together, particularly when it was in response to an expressed need. Playgroups had a well-defined objective, but they needed no financial outlay, formal venue, special equipment, or special skills. The informal, friendly atmosphere amongst a small group of women meeting in their own backyards fostered many new relationships and opened up opportunities for further activities.

Although the women came to the playgroup for their children's benefit, they found themselves making new friends and fulfilling some of their own needs for friendship and social activity – going shopping together, babysitting each other's children, forming a tennis group and encouraging each other to attend the Positive Parenting course at the Woodridge Community Health Centre. When the women wanted to purchase playgroup equipment or when they needed money to put on a small Christmas party, they organised a fund-raising event themselves.

Like any new group, the playgroup had its ups and downs. Sometimes the children fought, other times attendance was low, and a couple of times it rained. Initially the women depended on us to invite new members and organise activities, but gradually they began to feel that the playgroup belonged to its members, so they felt encouraged to bring their friends along or suggest activities.

At the same time as the playgroup was becoming established, other people were talking to us about the problem of finding affordable family entertainment in the local area. One of the neighbours, Gloria, was very keen to do something about this problem. Together we came up with the idea of having a 'Family Fun Day' at the local football oval, Meakin Park. By this stage we had begun to feel frustrated with the slowness of door-knocking as a way of meeting people. We hoped the Fun Day would provide us with the opportunity to meet a large number of people and to show what could be achieved using local resources.

We organised the Fun Day in two frantic days with an outlay of only \$20. We were able to borrow an earth-ball and parachute from the Woodridge Police Citizens Youth Club, begged potato sacks from a local fruiterer and face paint from Kate, a local teacher. We made playdough, bought clay and materials for kite-making, borrowed a large tent and prayed for a fine day! Our only form of advertising was by letter dropping 450 houses, a task completed with the aid of Gloria's children. Walking the streets delivering our leaflets, we were amazed at how many houses there were in our small locality. We only

covered twelve streets, and could have delivered twice as many leaflets if we had been trying to contact all of East Kingston.

To our delight (and momentary terror) over one hundred people took up the invitation to join us in the Park on Exhibition Wednesday for a BYO picnic lunch. Once again, everything didn't go exactly as we'd planned. The Brothers had promised to help us set up, but were called away at the last minute. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as people immediately became involved in helping us put up the tent and organise the activities.

The Fun Day gave us the chance to renew contacts we had already made as well as to meet many new faces. However, we were so busy running the various activities that we barely had time to answer people's questions about how the day was organised. Luckily for us, Gloria spent most of the day talking to people, explaining our ideas and encouraging them to think about becoming involved in organising their own activities in the future.