

Sing & Grow

Fact Sheet



Program Description

Sing & Grow is a national music therapy project that aims to improve outcomes for young children, through prevention and early intervention work with families identified as at risk of marginalisation. Sing & Grow aims to strengthen parent-child and family relationships and enhance child development by providing age-appropriate stimulation, promoting positive parent-child interactions, modelling positive parenting behaviours, and building social support networks.

The quality of family life has been found to directly impact upon child development with risk factors including family conflict, marriage breakdown, low socio-economic status, parental psychopathology, lack of emotional warmth and support and parental criminality. The Sing & Grow project targets families experiencing these and other pressures, and builds on their existing strengths to enhance attachment and bonding between parent and child. The program is structured in a way that lends itself to modelling, peer learning and facilitated learning for the parents involved through encouragement of their skills and strengths.

Sing & Grow is a strengths-based, holistic approach to early intervention and prevention and is informed by contemporary Australian and international literature in the field.

Music Therapy

Music therapy is the planned use of music to achieve therapeutic goals with people who have been assessed as having a special need. These needs may be identified as cognitive, physical, social, emotional and/or behavioural (Australian Music Therapy Association Inc.). Music therapists are required to complete a minimum of 4 years tertiary training and have expertise in at least 3 instruments, in addition to studying aspects of mental health, sociology, psychology, gerontology, paediatrics and special education. Music therapists can be found working across the life span including work with children. For more information, please see the Australian Music Therapy Association website at www.austmta.org.au

Service Delivery

Sing & Grow programs are held in community venues for families with children aged birth to three years. Weekly music sessions (usually 10 weeks) allow families to participate in hands-on activities that assist children with developmental skills, and extend the repertory of parenting skills in relating to children through interactive play. Families sharing positive experiences is a focus of the group.

Sessions are designed and facilitated by trained and qualified music therapists registered with the Australian Music Therapy Association and bound by their Code of Ethics. A range of interactive, nurturing, stimulating and developmental music activities provide the framework for parents to interact and play with their children, and promote child development.

Known song material, original compositions, singing, movement to music, relaxation and instrumental play are all incorporated into an established session plan. This has allowed a consistency in implementation and evaluation, while providing freedom within each session structure to meet the individual needs of the parents and children attending each specific group. The standard session plan includes:



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Activity	Addressing
Hello song	Greeting & social skills
Action songs	Fine motor skills, parent facilitation
Small instruments/ concept songs	Fine motor skills & concept comprehension, parent sharing and facilitation
Dancing (including balls)	Gross motor skills, body awareness, parent interaction
Large instruments	Sharing, turn-taking, peer interactions
Prop dancing (parachute, ribbons etc)	Self-expression, movement, sharing with parent
Quiet time	Relaxation, cuddling, bonding
Goodbye song	Closure & social skills

A resource CD and booklet is also made available to each family and the host organisation, to further support families' capacity to use the musical activities at home.

After Sing & Grow

To assist families in building their own capacity to use positive play experiences at home, session leaders may suggest a range of strategies for use when Sing & Grow has finished. These may include referral to playgroups or back to the referring host organisation for further support and follow up; assistance in finding other music programs; advice in using music at home; and skill and capacity building in community workers in relation to using music with families.

Evaluation

In accordance with the national funding (in place since December 2004), Sing & Grow is now evaluated by an external, independent research team from the Queensland University of Technology. Families are asked to participate in a voluntary evaluation process that involves them completing a short survey in the first and final weeks of the program. Host organisations will also be asked to complete a post-program survey. Other evaluation methods include observation ratings by session leaders, quality assurance checks, and follow up surveys posted to families who give consent.

Each program conducted is thoroughly evaluated using established and specially designed measures. Best practice outcomes have been further contributed to by the process-oriented, action-research paradigm used within the project. Project staff attend several peak conferences each year to share information and network with other service providers, and several articles have been published (see publications list below).

History

Sing & Grow was established in July 2001 in partnership with Playgroup Queensland following a successful funding application submitted under the Department's Child Abuse Prevention program. The project has been running continuously and successfully since this time in South-East



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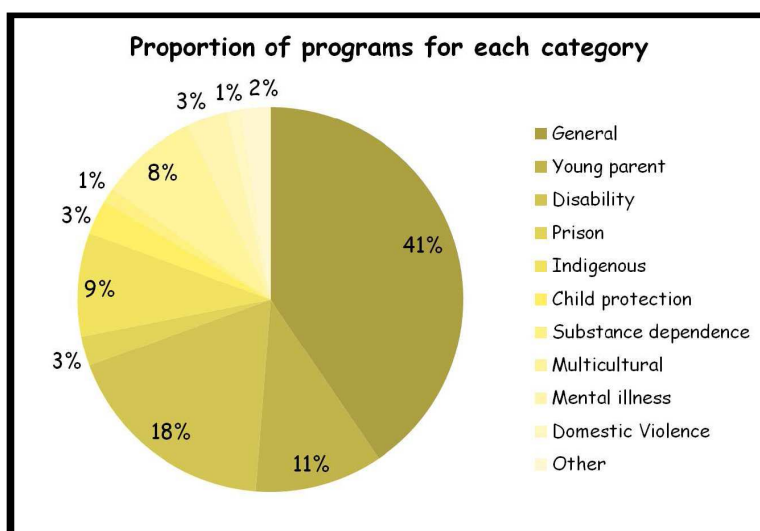
Queensland, northern NSW and targeted regional areas of Queensland, expanding to cover all states and territories nationally in 2004. As well as direct service delivery, the project has promoted and informed the community on the importance of appropriate stimulation and strong family relationships in early childhood and has built capacity in local communities to develop and continue with similar work themselves. It has also developed the *Sing & Grow CD and booklet* for the use of families and community groups and a resource book: *Making music time a success: A Guide for Using music to engage families with young children* for use by community workers.

Sing & Grow programs are now run throughout Australia in collaboration with Playgroup Associations and community organisations, through the FaHCSIA Invest to Grow and REACH funding packages. Families are referred to Sing & Grow through their supporting organisation and we encourage community organisations to ring their relevant Sing & Grow State Director (see below) to discuss the possibility of receiving a program for their families. Program allocation is based on the needs of families, the wait list, locality and time.

Client groups

The Sing & Grow program aims to be accessible to all families with children aged 3 years who may be experiencing disadvantage, marginalisation or an additional need or risk factor of some kind. A strong focus is placed on equity of service and so a wide range of families have participated in the program, many with multiple areas of identified or potential need. The following chart shows the main risk factors that participating families presented with from July 05 - Sep 07.

In addition, data from 2006 programs nationally indicated that:



- 55% of parents had not completed high school;
- 39% of main family income was sourced from benefits;
- 28% were single parents;
- 18% of parents had first language other than English (19% of children);
- 10.2% of parents were Indigenous (15% of children);
- 43% of parents reported depression in the last 2 years;
- 5% of parents were under the age of 20.

Outcomes

Of the final week surveys completed by participating parents in 2006, data also indicated:

- 81% were very satisfied with the program
- 96% would like to do it again
- 99% would recommend it to other parents



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Parent self-report measures indicated from pre to post:

- A reduction in angry-coercive parenting
- An increase in parents undertaking activities with their child at home
- A reduction in parent mental health symptoms
- An increase in child communication and social play skills

Publications

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Docherty, L., Nicholson, J.M. & Williams, K. (2007). Sing & Grow: The co-existence of evaluation research and clinical practice in an early intervention music therapy project. *New Zealand Journal of Music Therapy*, 5, 1 – 16.

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Contact Details

National Director:	Toni Day	Ph (07) 3855 9600	Email tday@playgroupqld.com.au
Deputy National Director & Director, VIC/ TAS:	Kate Teggelove	Ph 0404 099 747	Email kteggelove@playgroupqld.com.au
Director, QLD/NT:	Lorna Sherwin	Ph (07) 3855 9600	Email lsherwin@playgroupqld.com.au
Director, NSW/ACT:	Allison Fuller	Ph 0414 850 317	Email afuller@playgroupqld.com.au
Director, WA /SA	Catherine Wilmot	Ph 0417 095 345	Email cwilmot@playgroupqld.com.au



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