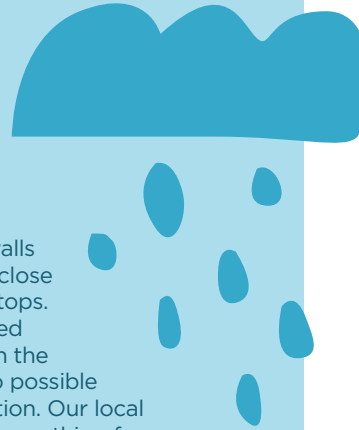


READY FAMILIES,
RESILIENT
COMMUNITIES

PLAYGROUP IN ACTION
**MAREE YAP'S
STORY**

CUBBY HOUSE AHOY!



In November 2022, safe on my own island, cut off and surrounded by flood waters, I was watching a social media reel posted by the local shoe shop. An old lace-up work boot floated by on the raging flood waters, as the local shoe store owner could be heard speaking about the irony of the happening. The boot had seen better days, but it had never seen a flood as big as the 2022 floods in Forbes, that was for sure. Gasping in disbelief I saw, floating in the background of the video, was Playgroups cubby house. The video captured the exact moment the cubby collided with the playground equipment, which is where it stayed, precariously perched, for the next four months.

The media images added to my sense of “survivors’ guilt”. My home and family were safe while so many were not. When I was able to get myself safely to work, others around me did not have the capacity to appreciate the value of Playgroup at such a time, providing me with the opportunity to do what was needed.

Floods, unlike other disasters, do come with some warning. Prior to the first and second flood I was able to access the Thursday Playgroup venue, in the flood zone, and put up as many fold out tables as possible and moved all the Playgroup equipment to higher ground. At the passing of the first flood all equipment was returned to the storeroom, only to be placed back on the tables a week later. I was as red as a beetroot and the sweat trickled down my nose and I worked hard with Stacey, an ex-Playgroupie to move the Playgroup resources.

The second flood damaged the brick walls of the hall and came close to reaching the tabletops. We were not permitted to enter the site when the water receded due to possible sewerage contamination. Our local Council staff moved everything from the Hall to a storage facility.

Having no idea when Thursday Playgroup could return to the Hall, and having access to the Forbes North School Hall, it seemed obvious to relocate and to share the School’s Playgroup resources to run Thursday Playgroup. Thursday Playgroup did not miss a beat, as soon as the town streets were open, Playgroup was available for families. As stories emerged of families travelling through flood waters on tractors to get to Playgroup, I did worry that re-opening so soon was encouraging some to take unnecessary risks. Putting this in context, for some isolated and farming families, every trip to town involved driving through flood water for six months.

I was constantly amazed at the stories families brought to Playgroup. During this time I met many families I had not met before or seen much since. Families were travelling distances just to come to Playgroup and to have an outing in a safe environment. Families came from villages from neighbouring towns because they knew Playgroups in Forbes were open. What a blessing it was to be surrounded by such wonderful people. I think I needed to listen to others as much as they needed me to hear their stories.

As years do, 2022 ended and we entered 2023 in an altered community landscape. Some community groups, having survived lockdowns and being faced with multiple obstacles including aging volunteers, did not re-open in 2023. Playgroup NSW groups continued the normal Forbes North and Thursday Community groups, but the focus shifted from predominantly children’s play to a more family inclusive focus. Most days I didn’t get to play with children as I spent most of my time listening to families.

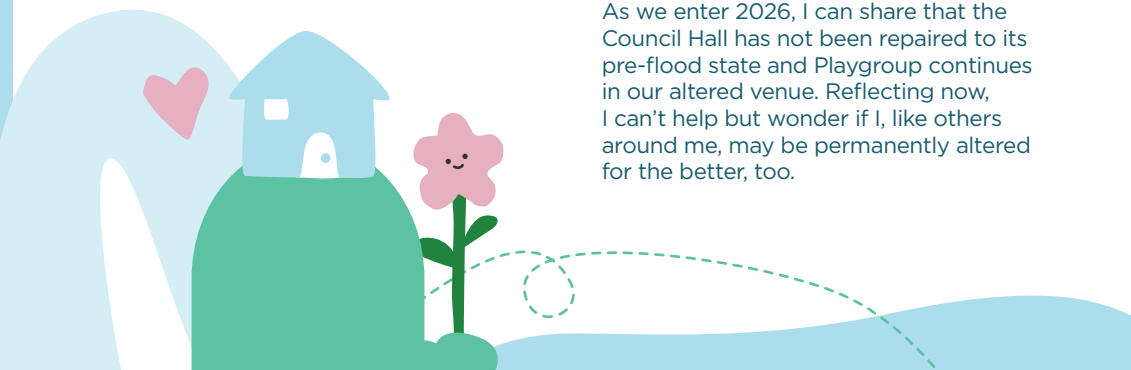
I did a couple of things to address the changing needs of families, always keeping the needs of children as my focus. I did seek out service provision in neighbouring towns and was able to refer families to a Playgroup, or groups, closer to home so families didn’t need to travel so far. I went as far as to give a Playgroup facilitator from a neighbouring town admin rights to my own Playgroup social media page so she could quickly post about her group without waiting for me to approve the post. I actively promoted other groups and Playgroups.

In response to the demise of a local music group, a working partnership with a local conservatorium of music was sought to provide “gold coin donation” music sessions each week for families. These sessions were charged minimally by the conservatorium and paid for by the School as Community Centres program and families could attend at minimal cost.

After 18 months Thursday Playgroup were able to access the Council Hall, and what a mess! The Council workers had delivered all the resources, from all user groups, back to the Hall and placed it into the middle for sorting. It took weeks to sort what was theirs, ours, mine, Playgroups and to this day we find something random and don’t quite know if it’s our or someone else’s. It took even more months before Playgroup could run from the Council Hall.

With the power of hindsight, I can look back and share how grateful I am for Playgroup NSW support through the regional worker and resources. I was able to attend the 2024 Playgroup NSW conference, what a fabulous event filled with research findings, ideas and information, and the opportunity to meet the staff. In 2025 it was an absolute delight to read the disaster response plans from Playgroup NSW as they provided such wonderful ideas and advice. Having survived a “once in a thousand year event” I can say I’m pleasantly surprised and impressed at the insight the resources show. I look to the AEDC data to provide an insight into where Playgroup will need to focus next.

As we enter 2026, I can share that the Council Hall has not been repaired to its pre-flood state and Playgroup continues in our altered venue. Reflecting now, I can’t help but wonder if I, like others around me, may be permanently altered for the better, too.





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