

**MyTime**

*supporting parents of  
children with disabilities*



# The Right Time

Making time for parents of children with a disability,  
chronic medical condition or developmental delay



All parents thrive on catching up with others and sharing stories. This kind of peer support is even more critical for the many Australians who have a more intensive role of caring for a child with a disability, developmental delay or chronic medical illness.

Creating a time for parents and carers is at the heart of MyTime: a time and space to celebrate milestones and day-to-day achievements, and to support each other during stressful times. MyTime groups are for the mums, dads, carers, grandparents, aunts and uncles who do the caring.

MyTime is having a life-changing impact for families, as groups tell us of the tremendous pleasure and relief that comes with being able to share experiences, including a laugh, in an environment just for them.

We are delighted to be working with the national network of skilled facilitators and organisations bringing MyTime to parents and carers around Australia, underpinned by research-based information and resources about parenting.

We commend the Australian Government's vision in supporting this important network. And we thank the 70 organisations and more than 100 professionals around Australia who have already united to support this intensive parenting role.

MyTime is a major achievement in helping families and the community raise healthy, happy children. In fact, it's the first nationally-funded program of its kind in the world. Congratulations to all those involved.

Warren Cann  
Executive Director  
Parenting Research Centre

## key facts

- First MyTime group launched April 2007
- \$9 million contributed by Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
- 100 groups formed in first 10 months

## case study

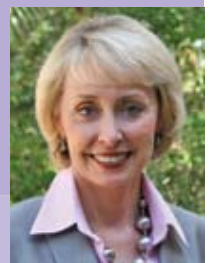
### A powerful healer

*'Talking to parents in the same boat as you is a very powerful healer,' says Liz Foy, General Manager, Service Development and Communications at The Spastic Centre, which runs a number of MyTime groups in New South Wales.*

*'Another powerful component is what parents experience by helping others. Being able to provide information and support to other parents can really affirm someone's identity as the parent of a child with a disability. It lets them know that they can help others in the same situation.'*

*According to Liz, 'Building networks is one of MyTime's great benefits. Unlike other groups with short life spans, MyTime will run for several years. More parents will join the program and as other parents leave, the networks of support they have built will be woven into their communities'.*

*The Spastic Centre gets the word out to families through other programs they run, and they emphasise that joining a MyTime group isn't just about getting help, it's about giving help too.*



Liz Foy

## parent profile

### What is MyTime?

- MyTime groups are for parents and carers of children with a disability or chronic medical condition.
- A group facilitator helps establish the group and guides discussion, support and activities.
- Parents choose topics and activities relevant to their needs.
- A play helper engages children while parents meet and socialise.
- Groups meet weekly, fortnightly or monthly.

## It's time for me

*'When we found out Hayley had autism,' says her mother Julie, 'I was devastated. We lost friends'. But since finding out about MyTime through her playgroup, Julie is forming new friendships with parents in her situation. 'I had a real opportunity to share problems with people who understand what I'm going through.'*

*She's found that spending time with the play helpers has been good for her kids as well. Julie says that Hayley is interacting more with the other children than she ever used to in playgroup. 'It's less overwhelming for Hayley,' says Julie, 'and she can do her own thing'.*

*'All sessions are great. It's time for me.'*



Julie, Haley and Heather

## Connections for life

'MyTime groups are helping more and more parents and carers build supportive relationships with each other and the community,' says Christian Thompson, Director of Community Programs at the Parenting Research Centre.

'MyTime is unique because it is focused on the carer. It gives them time to look after their own needs, build confidence and form friendships.'

'What distinguishes MyTime from existing programs,' says Christian, 'is how it complements the programs and services that families usually attend. Parents help other parents learn more about the range of services in their local area. Ultimately, peer support programs like MyTime can help families link into their community; through informal friendships and also through more formal avenues of services and programs'.

Christian also acknowledges the pivotal role of MyTime's partner organisations. 'You only need to

consider the fact that MyTime achieved 100 groups in its first 10 months to appreciate their tremendous contribution. It says a great deal about the cooperation

and collaboration right across Australia, including playgroup associations, early parenting centres, disability specific organisations and early childhood centres.'



# MyTime across Australia

## parent profile

### A group just for us



Christine and Daniel

From the moment Daniel was born ... we knew there was something that was not quite right. He was a very floppy and sleepy baby. The usual developmental milestones were not reached and we soon realised that he was more than 'just a bit slow' ... However, Daniel was mobile – scooting around on his bottom was very

amusing to watch ... Daniel eventually walked, unaided ... and what a celebration that was!

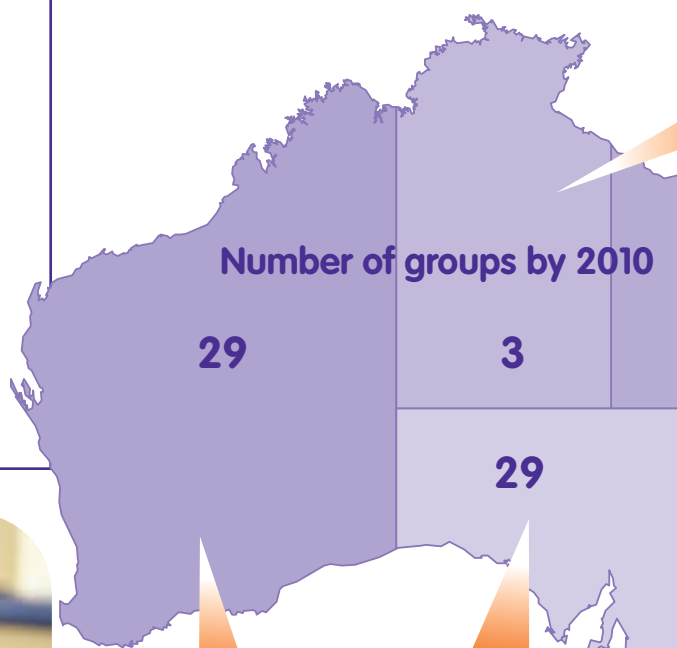
Having a child with special needs is extremely challenging, yet, at the same time, brings us so much joy and celebration. The love and affection that Daniel displays is amazing ... people who meet Daniel for the first time ... are charmed by his cute babbling and gorgeous smile.

MyTime ... has given me the opportunity to regularly meet with other mums ... and specifically speak about issues that are both important and relevant to us all. It's a group that's run just for us.

## Group activities

Parents decide what the group does each week and have all kinds of activities, including:

- formal and informal sessions: exercise, toilet training, transition to school, advocacy, respite
- time for carers: relaxation, pampering, manicures and massages
- discussions about relationships and parenting strategies
- professional guest speakers who provide information and link carers to services and resources
- excursions, pram walks, family fun days, visits to exhibitions.



'It's a way of taking care of yourself and being able to ask questions and relax a while.'  
Mum, WA

'It is good to be able to come somewhere that I know I will not be judged because of my child's behaviour.'  
Parent, SA



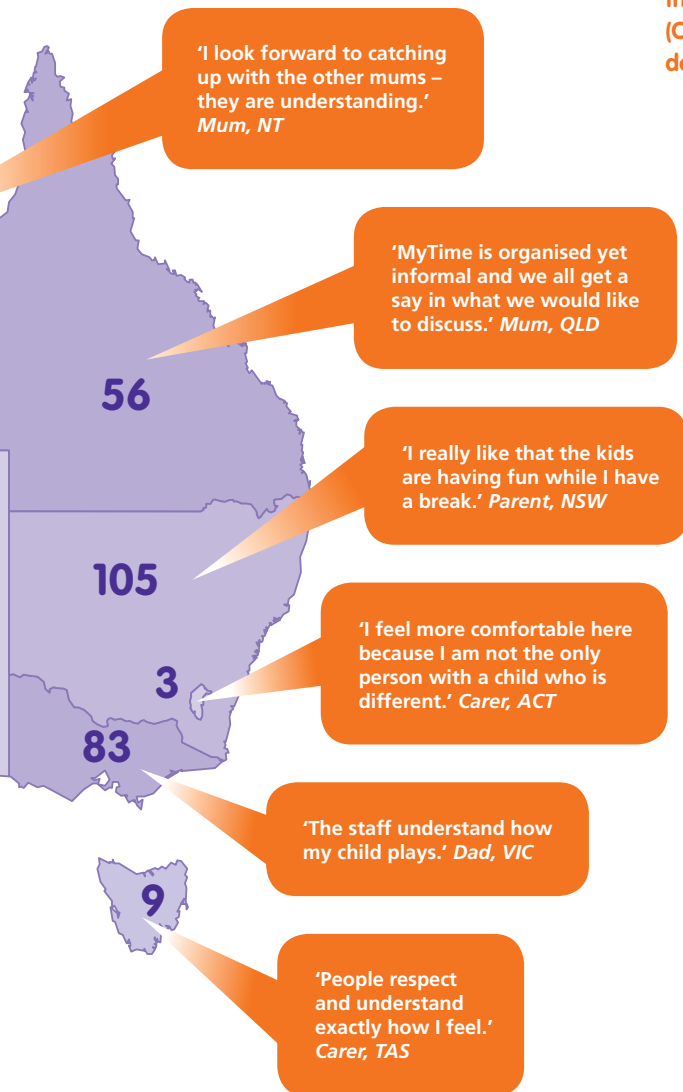


## by June 2010 ...

- Over 150 partner organisations
- Over 600 professionals
- 317 MyTime groups
- 2,500 parents
- 5% dads in groups
- 20% groups in rural areas
- 15% carers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

## Who is MyTime for?

Parents and carers – including mums, dads, grandparents and the principal carer – who are eligible for the Carer Allowance (Child) and are caring for a child under school age with a disability, developmental delay or chronic medical condition.



## Peer inspiration

Group facilitator Leonie White is well placed to understand the daily pressures that MyTime parents face: she is a trained teacher and is herself a parent of a child with a disability. 'It's usually so hard to relax in a social setting, but MyTime creates the opportunity,' she says. 'MyTime provides a tremendous amount of peer inspiration for these parents to keep doing what they're doing as a parent and to look after their general wellbeing.'

As a facilitator her main job is to help parents share their experiences, and source any information they may want, using [www.mytime.net.au](http://www.mytime.net.au), a quality-assured website managed by the Parenting Research Centre. 'For parents feeling the isolation of having a child with a disability, MyTime is a godsend,' she adds.



## A real break

*Play helper Raylene Cullen describes the MyTime group she assists as relaxed and informal.*

*And the most positive thing, she thinks, is that parents and carers get to take time for themselves. 'The parents are happy to sit back and have the time to chat between themselves and leave it to us to look after the children while they are here. It gives them a real break.'*

*'There is a higher percentage of autism with the children in this group, and usually they would have an issue with change and separating from their parents. However, they seem to feel happy and enthusiastic in the comfortable environment we create for them'. In Raylene's experience, 'The children are happy and they're not judged. The parents don't have to explain anything to anyone here'.*

## A team effort

'Our facilitators are highly skilled at ensuring that parents lead the way,' says Tony Robinson, Senior Program Advisor at the Parenting Research Centre. 'They guide and support the group.'

Facilitators come from diverse professional backgrounds, including early childhood, family support, social work and teaching. They help set up the group, bring parents together and encourage them to support each other. Parents decide what they want to cover in each session – it's a flexible, open-ended arrangement.

Taking the cue from the parents, facilitators provide the group with quality-assured evidence-based content from the MyTime website. Facilitators also communicate online with other MyTime members throughout Australia using MyTime HQ, a wiki-based website.

Tony says, 'With MyTime HQ we keep building resources for the program based on facilitators' experience and insight'. And it's making a difference for facilitators who can bring these skills to all their work with parents of children with a disability.



## MyTime research

'MyTime was built from the ground up to give parents and carers the chance to build relationships and support each other,' says Robyn Mildon, Knowledge Transfer Manager at the Parenting Research Centre. 'It is based on research demonstrating the unique benefits of peer support, particularly in reducing parent stress levels and reducing feelings of isolation,' Robyn says. 'It's information they can trust.'

According to research, when parents feel more resilient, their child has better outcomes in areas such as general health and wellbeing, and this is key to the value of MyTime. 'Simply being together with people who are also experiencing the same intense day-to-day challenges of looking after a child with a disability can enhance the wellbeing of parents and carers,' says Robyn.

Jan Matthews, Director of Research and Practice at the Centre, supports this process: 'Gaining evidence about what best meets the needs of families, and developing resources for families and professionals based on evidence and evaluation, is a key part of our work here. And evaluating MyTime enables us to identify the tangible difference that MyTime is making for families, as well as to learn more about how peer support works'.

## About MyTime

'MyTime has an amazing impact on the lives of parents and carers,' says Melissa Coutts, Manager of MyTime. 'This is underpinned by the strong collaborative effort between the agencies involved.'

MyTime groups are hosted by local agencies in all states and territories across Australia. As national coordinator, the Parenting Research Centre provides resources and support to providers and facilitators. While parents meet and talk with others, a play helper leads children in activities such as drawing and singing.

Melissa is particularly pleased with the way MyTime provides opportunities for families to get together and explore their local community. This enables families to learn to build connections outside of the group time, broadening their knowledge and enriching their lives.



The Parenting Research Centre is the national coordinator of MyTime on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Contact details for further information,  
or to link parents with MyTime:

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*Thank you to the families and friends of MyTime for sharing these wonderful photographs and stories.*