



Toddler  
Kindy **GymbaROO**

Director: Margaret Sassé  
ANZAC AWARD Winner

## Toddler Kindy GymbaROO Pty. Ltd.

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### Toddler Kindy GymbaROO P/L submission to Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family.

GymbaROO was founded in Melbourne 23 ago years by Margaret Sasse. The business has steadily grown with enrolments increasing at around 5-10% per annum. Our reputation drives this growth as we are able to deliver what we promise in terms of early childhood development and parent education. Typical parent experiences can be found on our web site [www.gymbaroo.com.au](http://www.gymbaroo.com.au) under title "more GymbaROO testimonials".

Every week, over 10,000 children aged between 6 weeks and 5 years attend a 45 minute GymbaROO session in Australia. A parent attends with each child. There are nearly 70 centres across Australia. In recent years GymbaROO has also expanded into the international market, with programs now running in NewZealand, China, Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Turkey and Hungary. The international growth is a response to the recognition that the GymbaROO program provides children with essential opportunities to develop cognitive, social, literacy and educational skills in the years leading up to school attendance.

GymbaROO is founded on a neurophysiological approach to early childhood development. I.e. Brain development is enhanced if the right stimulatory activities are frequently performed in the right time relative to the development stage of the child. Recent research confirms that children who are given opportunities to engage in activities that stimulate neurophysiological development in their early years will be more successful academically, emotionally and socially (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

GymbaROO also focuses closely on the role of the parent in enhancing their children's developmental opportunities. In fact, the real audience of GymbaROO's specifically designed, highly structured, programs, is the parent. In the acknowledgement that children's development is constant, taking place 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, GymbaROO has specifically designed their program to help parents understand how and why every activity undertaken at GymbaROO helps their children's development. Parent education pamphlets, magazines and booklets are an integral part of the program, encouraging parents to engage in the same, or similar, activities at home. The education takes place in an environment where children spend enjoyable one on one time with their parents partaking in the specifically designed activities such that both enjoy partaking on a weekly basis.

GymbaROO's success over the past 23 years is attributable to the fact that parents do see positive changes in their children, tell other parents who then try and so on. Today many professionals such as Paediatricians, maternal and child health nurses, general practitioners, etc are happy to suggest parents review the local GymbaROO program.

GymbaROO teachers are tertiary qualified and are required to undergo ongoing professional development in the area of neurophysiological (and related areas) development of children (0-5 years). They are encouraged to network with other related professionals in the early childhood development field, such as maternal child nurses, and paediatricians. Our experienced teachers command a position of respect and trust with parents.

Teachers and assistants are usually mothers who are looking for part time work while children are at school. GymbaROO experiences a very low turnover of staff as teachers and assistants are very often

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mothers who have attended GymbaROO with own children, and they enjoy, and believe, in their roles and the value that the GymbaROO program has to offer.

Teachers are supported by GymbaROO head office which coordinates ongoing education and provides updates on latest developments. Margaret Sasse, the director, and Jane Williams (Ph D) Manager for Research and Development, attend and contribute to the annual international conference of the Institute for Neuro-Physiological Psychology in Chester UK. GymbaROO is also currently engaged in a government approved, privately funded research project relating to the application of its rationale and program to primary school aged children and literacy.

In today's world parental input is still the key ingredient in how children develop. Parents are the only ones who can provide the loving one on one time with their child. We also know a lot more about how we can maximize children's potential. Parents would like to learn but cannot find the time or energy to individually research or attend "parent education" classes. However, many are very happy to take their children to GymbaROO because they have heard children enjoy it and that it is beneficial to their development. Once the child enjoys the session the parents are happy to be "dragged along" to GymbaROO by their children, and while there the parents learn highly specific information relevant to their child's stage of development, that they can immediately apply at home.

At GymbaROO we feel we have evolved a business model for parental education that enables parents to receive current information that can be applied immediately to their child, where positive feedback can be achieved quickly, and where parents are motivated to make the sacrifices (often significant) to attend with their child.

In relation to the enquiry GymbaROO would like to address the following area:

1. The financial, career and social adjustment to starting families.

A relevant question maybe: how do you motivate parents to undertake the self education required to minimize risk and to maximize their child's potential? GymbaROO offers one model for consideration.

2. Making it easier for parents who wish to return to the paid workforce.

GymbaROO would like to see a model where parents of children zero to five years are encouraged to spend one on one time with their child attending GymbaROO, swimming and other such beneficial activities that stimulate cognitive and social developmental skills that will enhance later learning and literacy.

3. The impact of taxation and other matters on the families in the choices they make in balancing work and family life.

GymbaROO is a privately run organization which does not fall under the auspices of medical or educational authorities. The program is most successful where there is a high density of middle, or higher, income families. Attempts to operate centers in low income and low density (ie rural) populations are marginal or unsuccessful. To reach these populations the program would require financial assistance. This could take the many forms, for instance GST exemption (as educational), enabling low income participants to claim under health benefits, child rebate program (as per child care) and other such mechanisms.

### Reference

Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (Eds.). (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development* (2nd ed.). Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

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