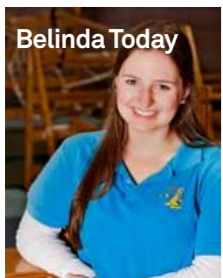


Thirty years on° the first GymbaROO babies have grown up.

What impact has GymbaROO had on their lives? **Robyn Floyd**



I wonder how many organisations and institutions that you attended as a child exist today? My daughters Kellie (29) and Belinda (26) take their sons Xavier (5 months) and Wills (2 months) to BabyROO at the Mooroolbark Centre where they started GymbaROO at 18 months and 3 months. I am so proud when they come home and show me what the boys have learned at GymbaROO discussing up-to-date information about neuro-development. What is more exciting, for me, as an academic and researcher, is that as more information on early

childhood neurological development and its connections to health, behaviour and the learning potential is available, GymbaROO incorporates this information into its sessions and makes it accessible to parents fulfilling Margaret Sassé's dream of 'helping the children of the world maximise their learning potential'.

Is there a connection between academic success and GymbaROO?

GymbaROO enables parent learning but is there a link between what GymbaROO offers and how it impacts on a child's later learning and successes? I was interested to find out what those first GymbaROO kids were doing now and whether their parents believed GymbaROO had impacted on their children's lives. After an overwhelming response, here are just a few of their stories and the comments from their parents. Our GymbaROO kids have excelled academically, accessed their career of choice, and in some form, continue to participate in physical exercise, at elite level or for pure enjoyment.

Why did parents join GymbaROO thirty years ago?

Many of those early parents of our grown-up GymbaROO kids, now in their late twenties, were looking for a way of ensuring that their children were meeting important developmental milestones and appreciated the guidance

of mature, professional staff trained in the neurological development of babies. Lyn Jarvis considers that as a first time mum, "the main long term benefit was an understanding on how important movement is for learning and to ensure my children had ample opportunity to move, play and develop".

She continues to explain that, "As a parent I learnt so much about child development that was not available elsewhere. There are so many books on toilet training, sleeping, tantrums and so forth, but very little information about how the brain and body develops. The bookshops are filled with books on behaviour management, and yet none cover the possible underlying issues such as diet that could affect behaviour. It was an avenue to understand the development of my children and so parent better. The handouts and expertise of the teacher allowed me as a parent to be very well informed. The classes were all age appropriate so allowed me to choose appropriate activities for the rest of the week".

Ros Littlejohn tells us that her son Dan, who began in GymbaROO when he was one, over twenty years ago, is an active person, playing many sports including tennis, soccer and indoor cricket. Ros also comments that the music, especially the musical instruments part, in the GymbaROO program aided both his maths and music.

There are many university graduates amongst our 'graduates'. Dan Littlejohn (Wheelers Hill, Glen Waverley) is 25

years old and is on his 3rd degree! Megg Rogan (Werribee) is also completing a degree. Belinda Jarvis (Ryde, Carlingford) also attended from baby years to school age. She now regularly goes to the gym, does pilates and dance lessons, coaches rhythmic gymnastics, and only recently gave up competing at a National level. Belinda is planning to become a Paediatric Occupational Therapist after she finishes her Arts Degree and believes that her choice of career (and choice of sport) was strongly influenced by GymbaROO. Belinda remembers ladders everywhere, dancing, climbing on the equipment, rhythm sticks and her teacher Frances.



Christine Shattock (Glen Waverley) tells us that her daughter Tyler-Rose thrived on the exploratory challenges and equipment circuits designed by teacher Joy and it could be suggested that her enjoyment of structured group activities to music which included dance and skill development laid the groundwork for her recent successes in calisthenics. Tyler-Rose participated in the Calisthenics Nationals in Darwin as a State Team Representative and a soloist where she placed third.

Kellie and Belinda Floyd continue to participate in a range of sports from basketball to gym and hiking. Kellie competed in School Aerobics winning a Silver Medal at State Championships and later completed Bachelor and Masters degrees. Kellie remembers the fun she had climbing on the equipment AFTER sessions that mum was teaching. Choosing a different pathway and with a passion for animals, Belinda's manual dexterity (hand-eye coordination!), when working with unsettled animals has been extremely useful. Interestingly at primary school, when a researcher commented incredulously that Belinda's perceptual-motor ability was well beyond that of students of her age, I simply replied, "GymbaROO".

A younger GymbaROO graduate (Ryde) is Hannah Arnold who as a budding primary school writer recently won a short story competition and was published in the Sydney Morning Herald. Her mother Nirusha emailed us with the comment, 'just further proof that "GymbaROO works!"

Second generation teachers

Our GymbaROO kids have also become GymbaROO teachers. Belinda Jarvis works in her mother's gym, while also following in mum's footsteps is Megg Rogan whose mother Tess has been the manager at GymbaROO Werribee for sixteen years. Megg has just completed her GymbaROO teachers training and we are so proud to have second-generation teachers.

This is a very small anecdotal sample of the number of students who have attended GymbaROO in the last thirty years and there are many more stories of success and how the opportunity to identify 'just noticeable differences' before they hampered school progress made a significant impact on school readiness. We know that through movement children develop better language, reasoning and problem solving skills but what has been highlighted

by parents who responded was their delight in having the opportunity to develop a strong learning partnership with their child, guided and supported by mature and knowledgeable staff to appreciate developmental milestones. Nirusha Arnold talks about the 'fun' of GymbaROO 'cherishing the opportunity to watch her children learn' while Lyn praises the 'valuable one on one time with your child, and allowing you to be a better teacher as a parent.'

Personally I was thrilled to read the emails that shared how some of the GymbaROO kids I taught (and many I didn't teach) have achieved the potential that we, as GymbaROO teachers, saw in them thirty years ago. I am sure in a couple of decades I will be a proud GymbaROO great-Granny/great-Aunt as will be many of those who have shared their stories on this page. Congratulations GymbaROO on your 30th Birthday.

Robyn Floyd is a teacher and researcher who was involved in the early years of GymbaROO as a mum and as a teacher. She continues to be involved in the GymbaROO family as a regular contributor to First Steps magazine, as well as being a very proud grandmother of two BabyROO stars.



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