

Celebrating  
**80 years**

## Annual Report 2020-2021



## Our Vision

Gowrie SA is a progressive organisation that builds on our history to lead learning and inclusion with children, families and communities.



## Our Purpose

At Gowrie SA we support children's learning, wellbeing and development by providing and advocating for safe and inclusive environments for all children and their families. We work in partnership with families and the community and build leadership capacity in the sector.



*'Community Driven,  
Inclusive Learning'*



## Our Board Members

- Dr Victoria Whittington (Chair)

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- Ms Lynne Rutherford (CEO)

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- Dr Yasmin Harman-Smith (Deputy Chair)

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- Mr David Muller (Financial Advisor)

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- Ms Catherine Peacock (retired November 2020)

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- Dr Anne Glover (retired November 2020)

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- Ms Debbie Smith

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- Ms Alicia Pike

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- Ms Nanette Allen

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- Ms Alycia Mead (appointed November 2020)

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- Dr Brigid Mahoney (appointed November 2020)

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- Mr Tristan Kennedy (appointed November 2020, resigned June 2021)

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Gowrie SA is on Kurna land. We acknowledge the Kurna people as the Traditional Custodians and Native Title Holders of this land and waterways. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present, and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples across the State and throughout Australia.

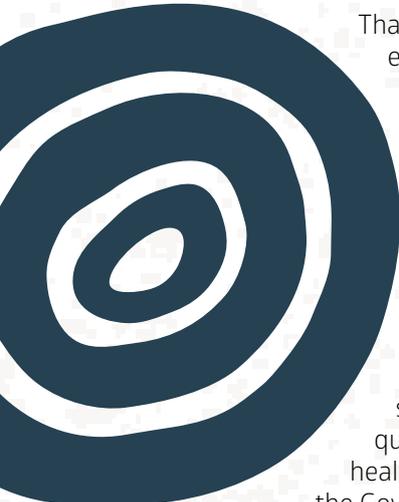


# Chairperson Report



I commence my report by acknowledging a significant milestone for Gowrie SA - our 80<sup>th</sup> year of providing high quality, evidence-based early learning to children in South Australia, marked in 2020. The Lady Gowrie Child Centre in Thebarton was officially opened in August 1940 as a model and demonstration centre, setting standards for educator qualifications, child-educator ratios and pedagogical knowledge and practice. These high standards remain key to Gowrie SA's operations today.

Gowrie SA's 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations were curtailed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the frequently changing restrictions on large gatherings. We were fortunate however to be able to welcome six former Gowrie SA alumni for lunch, who had been here as children in the 1940s and 50s. They shared their stories and positive memories, which we captured on video. They also enjoyed a tour of the Thebarton campus.



Thank you to our families, and to educators across the sector who participate in our programs for their patience and understanding throughout the year as we continued to respond to changes in COVID related restrictions, particularly during the short November lockdown.

The organisation has a strong risk management framework so our control measures were quickly put in place to ensure the health and safety of our staff and the Gowrie SA community, while limiting disruption to our operations.

Despite these periods of change, Gowrie SA's four programs – Children's Program, Professional Learning, Parenting Program and Inclusion Agency continued to report strong outcomes.

We were delighted that Lynne Rutherford accepted the role of Chief Executive Officer with Gowrie SA. Lynne is a passionate advocate for early learning, social justice and equity. From the time that Lynne stepped into the role of Interim Chief Executive and

steered us through the continuing challenges of COVID, she has shown exemplary leadership and foresight. Lynne's appointment came at the end of an open and competitive national recruitment process, demonstrating to the Board that she has the skills and experience to continue to advocate for early learning and lead a progressive, thriving organisation.

Gowrie SA continues to take part in sector-leading research. The organisation has participated in a national research project led by Macquarie University, and funded by the Medical Research Futures Fund. Professor Sheila Degotardi is the Chief Investigator, alongside a team of internationally recognised early childhood, health and Indigenous education researchers, and in partnership with influential early childhood education, workforce and health organisations. This project examines how early childhood services accessed and shared health information during the pandemic. We hope in the near future to be able to share the results of this project.

At Gowrie SA we regard a well-educated and qualified workforce as central to our programs. I am pleased to report that four staff members continue their study towards their four year university level early childhood education degrees.

Gowrie SA made genuine progress delivering the key result areas set out in the 2017-19 strategic plan: children's learning and wellbeing, leadership, professionalism, and advocacy. This progress is reflected throughout the annual report. Considerable consultation and planning occurred throughout 2020 to build on the momentum gained through this work to identify new strategic priorities that will sustain the existing work of the organisation, build on its strengths and put Gowrie SA in a strong position to create new growth. The Board has endorsed an ambitious new five-year strategic plan that will drive innovation and growth across Gowrie SA's programs and further our vision as a progressive organisation that leads learning and inclusion with children, families and communities.

There is growing momentum for change and a shift in perception of the importance of early learning in early childhood. Gowrie SA will continue to engage with



government departments and policy makers to stress the importance of high quality early childhood education and care and ensure that early learning strategic plans reflect evidence based practice.

Over the last year, three positions on the Board were filled, with one resignation during the reporting period and we now have nine Board members. We welcome new Board members Brigid Mahoney and Alycia Mead. Unfortunately, one newly appointed member, Tristan Kennedy, was unable to take up his position. The addition of an online option for Board meetings has supported consistent meeting attendance. I would like to thank all Board members for their hard work and support of Gowrie SA.

*Reinvigorated with new leadership and strategic plan goals, I am confident that Gowrie SA will continue to grow and strengthen its role as South Australia's leading provider of early learning, professional learning and inclusion support.*

Before closing, I would like to thank children and families for their support and ongoing role in the successful programs offered by Gowrie SA. Our staff team, those in leadership roles, our teachers, educators, inclusion support staff, facilitators and administrative staff, thank you for your commitment to Gowrie SA. We know we have a special staff team and are very grateful for all you do. Particular thanks to Lyndsay Healy and Krystal Kimble who manage our children's program, and Mary Scales who leads our professional learning and Reconciliation Action Plan work, and Pam Murphy who leads our parenting programs. Finally, thank you Lynne for your role at the helm of Gowrie SA. You have been a steadfast leader of this organisation for many years, finally now appointed as Chief Executive Officer. The Board and I most sincerely thank you for all you have done and continue to do to maintain what is important and is treasured at Gowrie SA.

**Victoria Whittington**

Associate Professor of Education, UniSA  
Chairperson-Gowrie SA Board



# Chief Executive Officer Report

In the role of Interim Chief Executive, then CEO, I continued to work with our staff team to face the challenges to the organisation from the pandemic that continued into 2021. Gowrie SA's philosophy of cultivating strong relationships and partnerships has enabled us to work together and support our community during these times. Staff, children, their families and our community have managed the challenges with remarkable strength.

The health of our staff team is a priority. Staff in some of our programs are able to work flexibly, including working from home, with the support of Gowrie SA. Our Employee Assistance Program has changed to a new provider, based on feedback from staff, and a culturally safe option is now available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

Implementation of our 2017-19 strategic plan established a solid foundation for our future work, with significant advancement made on strengthening the link between children's relationships, wellbeing and learning. We have also streamlined some of our systems, such as families signing in electronically, and all Gowrie SA staff have now moved to a digital rostering platform.

Despite the continued uncertainty of COVID-19, we have forged ahead with an extensive new strategic plan that will focus our organisation over the next five years. The strategic plan sets out four priority areas: Reputation, Sustainability, People, and Connection.

## Key 2017-19 strategic outcomes:

- A comprehensive induction process for new employees that supports learning about attachment theory, Circle of Security and Marte Meo
- Continued focus on critical reflection and program improvements in our work
- A strengthened integrated children's program through development of stronger partnerships between infant-toddler and kindy educators
- Prioritised opportunities that support reconciliation, including a focus on employee cultural learning
- Strengthened relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and community members who are supporting our work and learning
- Increased bookings from the early education and care sector in our professional learning program
- Increased engagement by eligible services with the Inclusion Support Program through our work as the Inclusion Agency



*Over the next five years Gowrie SA will implement new initiatives and projects that will strengthen our programs, maximise our impact and ensure that the innovative work of our employees and knowledge is supported and shared widely across the sector.*



Fundamental to our strategic direction is the use of storytelling to share our experiences, ideas and knowledge. This idea was developed in 2019 and a planned whole-organisation closure day for April 2020 was rescheduled to an online event in 2021. We have used staff professional learning to further our understanding of the power of storytelling and the art of capturing and sharing stories to ensure that our important messages are heard and remembered.

We are pleased that we can continue to provide reputable training on behalf of the Department for Education following a successful application to supply the new Responding to Risks of Harm, Abuse and Neglect (RRHAN-EC) training. Gowrie SA has been a provider of mandatory notification training for over twenty years. No doubt this was a factor in the department's invitation to Gowrie SA to provide input on the new RRHAN-EC content, materials, and delivery, and the transition to the new booking system. At the request of the department Gowrie SA also nominated a facilitator for the train the trainer sessions. We feel this is testament to the strong stakeholder relationship developed with the department and the strength and experience of our professional learning team.

I'd like to acknowledge the wonderful working relationships and friendships we have developed with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group have provided immeasurable guidance and support to Gowrie SA, particularly in the development of our second Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan, and their contribution to cultural learning within the children's program. We continue to invite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as teachers and visitors to our programs, and the children respond particularly well during these visits. We have been very fortunate to have employed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who are committed to the organisation and willing to share their knowledge and cultural expertise with us. We thank them for this work and look forward to exploring further how we can continue to work together.

I would like to thank the Board members for their continued commitment to Gowrie SA. The investment of their time and knowledge not only contributes to the ongoing success of Gowrie SA but to the strength of the early learning sector more generally. The Board also provides strong support to myself through their advice and analysis of risks and opportunities, and I am grateful for this. It is quite a responsibility to take on this type of role in a voluntary capacity and we are fortunate to attract a range of Board members who are current family members, past family members and community members who bring with them a range of expertise and experiences. Particular thanks go to Victoria, the Board Chair, who is always available by phone or email and has provided strong and ongoing support to both the organisation and myself over many years.

Due to the purpose of our organisation, expectations on our leaders are high. I would like to thank the Children's Program Directors, Lyndsay Healy and Krystal Kimble, the Professional Learning Program Leader, Mary Scales, the Parenting Program Leader Pam Murphy, and the Inclusion Agency Leaders, Leanne Coveney until January 2021, and then Antek Benedyka. Our program leaders not only work with leaders and staff in their own programs to provide responsive and well-regarded programs which meet the needs of their clients, including children, families, educators, leaders, and stakeholders, but they also work together to support myself with broader organisation initiatives.

We also have an amazing staff team who work together within their programs and across programs, learning from and with each other, and we thank them for their generosity and engagement to their work. In particular, our educators and teachers, who are considered to be essential workers, have had a challenging year with ongoing pandemic-related restrictions and concerns, and we are grateful for their commitment and dedication.

All our programs revolve around children and their families, and we are constantly listening, learning and questioning to bring about improvements to our programs and practices. Thank you to our families and clients who support us, give us feedback, and recommend us to others. We are humbled by the role we have in your lives and workplaces. **We all know that early learning matters and it is a privilege to be involved in the education of children, both learning from and with them in the process.**

**Lynne Rutherford**  
Chief Executive Officer

# Our story

**1940**

Lady Gowrie Child Centre (LGCC) for 2-5 year olds opens as Resource Advisory and Demonstration Centre staffed by teachers, with doctors and allied health professionals on site to improve children's wellbeing as an integrated service. Commonwealth funded. Responsible to the Minister of Health.



**1957** Students from Kindergarten Training College, Adelaide Teacher's College and the University undertake comparative studies in the centre. Teachers make home visits.



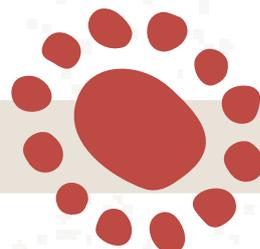
**1965-70** Responsibility for LGCC shifts to Minister for Education and Science.



**2013** Gowrie SA offers Certificate III in Children's Services, Diploma of Children's Services (Education and Care), Diploma of Children's Services (Out of School Hours Care), and develops the Advanced Diploma of Community Sector Management which is offered nationally.



**2011** Integrated infant-toddler program implemented.



**2010-2011** First Reconciliation Action Plan developed.



**2013-16** Strengthening Universal Preschool Access project begins in partnership with DECD and UniSA.



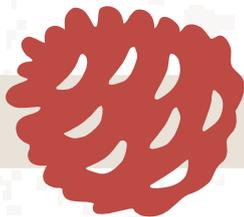
**2016** Gowrie SA successfully wins federal tender to become the Inclusion Agency for South Australia delivering the Inclusion Support Program.



**2017-19** Gowrie SA participates in the SA Collaborative 'Re-Imagining Childhood: The rights of children birth-3 years' research project.



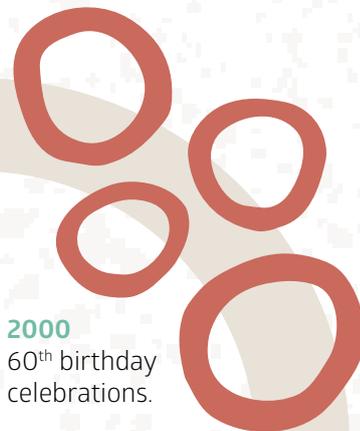
**1972-77** Arrangements made with the Kindergarten Union on employment conditions.



**1980-85** A bus is used to support Aboriginal children to attend the preschool. New service for 0-2 year olds. Kindy program for children with ESL or language development difficulties. OSHC program opens (ceased 1995 due to shift to school-based OSHC programs being offered).



**1991-95** Under 2 years care and demonstration facility opened. Children's Services Skills Training Centre opens on site in a joint initiative with DECS in push for sector qualifications in child care. Resource centre and training room opens with Commonwealth funding. Integrated 3-5 year old program.



**2000** 60<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations.



**2007** New Resource Centre and Training room is built. Formal evaluation of TtLG project reveals significant positive outcomes for mothers and children. Graduate Certificate in Early Childhood Leadership developed in collaboration with UniSA.



**2005** Funding received to expand TtLG in a national project. Gowrie SA wins tender for Professional Support Coordinator for SA.



**2001-3** Extensive professional development opportunities available to staff. Training videos developed for attachment and primary caregiving. Through the Looking Glass (TtLG) project developed in collaboration with the state education department and Child and Youth Health. Circle of Security program introduced into LGCC programs. Motherhood Matters group funded by LGCC.



**2018-19** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group established and Aboriginal Cultural Practitioner position created. Pedagogical Leadership project undertaken internally.



# Today at a glance



## Programs



### Children's Program

- Birth to three
- Integrated kindy



### Professional Learning

- Calendar sessions
- In-service sessions
- Mentoring
- Innovative solutions provider
- RRHAN-EC



### Inclusion Agency

- Statewide Inclusion Agency
- Inclusion Professionals working with service educators and leaders
- Specialist Equipment Library



### Parenting Program - Whyalla

- Two weekly supported playgroups
- Monthly pop up playgroup 'out and about in Whyalla'
- Circle of Security Parenting course

## Team

118

employees (educators, team leaders, program leaders, inclusion professionals and support staff)

5

employees studying towards higher qualification



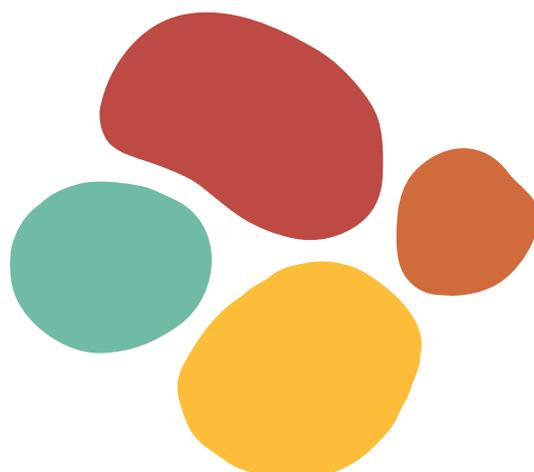
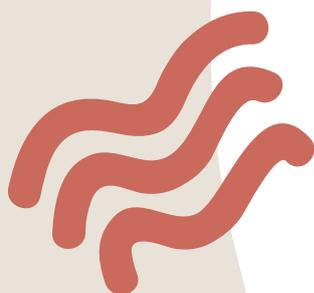
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traineeships



**excellent** work conditions including above-Award salaries, good educator/child ratios, frequent professional learning opportunities, flexible work practices or generous annual leave provisions, opportunities for study leave, opportunities to contribute to published articles and/or facilitate professional learning sessions





## Our Reach

308

children within the children's program



2575

service visits and support by phone/ zoom calls completed for 850 eligible services

4328

educators and others took part in RAN-EC training



74

children supported via loan of Specialist Equipment; 67 services access the Specialist Equipment

156

services received in-centre professional learning and mentoring



557

Strategic Inclusion Plans completed



478

participants attended professional learning calendar sessions

# Finance Report



Despite the continuing pandemic, Gowrie SA has been in a strong position to meet any challenges. We have been very grateful for the continued loyalty of families and clients, allowing our programs to operate as close to 'business as usual' as possible. We have also been grateful for the support provided by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment for their ongoing flexibility with the work of the Inclusion Agency, which for periods of time was online rather than our usual face to face visits. The children's program retained above-budgeted utilisation for all but the short November lockdown period, and a brief period in early 2021 as current families moved onto schooling and new families commenced. The availability of JobKeeper and the Early Childhood Education and Care Transition payment for a short period in the 2020-2021 financial year supported the underlying position of our programs, which ended the financial year in surplus. We are pleased to report that the education and care sector engagement in our fee for service professional learning program has increased, resulting in a modest surplus.

As a not for profit organisation our main expense has been wages. There is a national workforce shortage and this has impacted on our programs, with an increase in recruitment expenses as it has taken longer to recruit suitable staff. Ongoing concerns about the pandemic has also meant higher levels of staff absences due to illnesses with a subsequent increase in relief staff costs, as well as consumables expenditure such as hand sanitiser, and cleaning costs.

Given the age of our buildings and the increased competition with new child care centres, we have invested in capital upgrades to keep our indoor and outdoor spaces looking appealing, both for the children and educators, but also for new families as they look for attractive and natural environments for their children. There have been some additional maintenance costs to repair leaking roofs with the wet weather highlighting the need for longer term repairs. Due to the advice of an energy specialist, as well as the implementation of some work from home arrangements, we have been able to reduce expenses in energy and gas costs, and some travel expenses across our program areas.

Gowrie SA has invested money and resources under our Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan commitment this year. This includes the role of Aboriginal Cultural Practitioner, sponsorship of NAIDOC week activities in Aboriginal services, two Aboriginal traineeships, and relevant memberships which support relationship building, and procurement of goods and services.

We have been fortunate during 2020-2021 to have avoided some of the challenges in other states with continued and extended lockdowns. Our results demonstrate sound financial management and positions Gowrie SA well, providing a platform to continue to invest in our facilities and educational resources into the future.



# Leadership



## Gowrie SA continues to work collaboratively with staff and other professionals and stakeholders to build leadership internally and across the sector

Being an early childhood director, educator or teacher is more challenging in today's climate than it has ever been before. Staff are managing the practical and emotional strain placed on services and families due to the pandemic, continued increased competition from existing and new services, increased accountability in how programs are delivered and the varying and increasingly complex needs of families and children.

Our work in the sector recognises that the quality of leadership provided to staff is directly connected to the quality of education and care offered by a service. We are supporting the sector and stakeholders by sharing information and practical ideas that can be implemented and aim to connect staff in the education and care sector to resources that will make managing their responsibilities and demands more achievable. We do this work through our professional learning sessions, which are linked to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, and through our social media channels, networking opportunities and commitment to building a network of stakeholders. As an organisation, we practice what we preach and support our staff internally, adding currency and credibility to our external work.

Gowrie SA senior leaders have worked hard to build a network of strong professional stakeholder relationships across the education and care sector. Gowrie SA staff participate in a variety of stakeholder forums and consultation opportunities, showing leadership in advocating for the rights of children and educators. This has included working with the Education and Standards Board and consulting with the Department for Education on the new Responding to Risks of Harm, Abuse and Neglect – Education and Care training materials and online platform. We create formal

Memorandum's of Understanding with organisations for ongoing work, recognising the important reciprocity of shared relationships.

An example of reciprocal relationships is the collaborative partnership with Community Children's Centres South Australia (CCCSA). We are working together to build the knowledge and confidence of new directors entering the sector, to ensure they are equipped to start their new journey with success. Gowrie SA developed a leadership series which is subsidised for CCCSA members:

- Becoming a new Director Part 1
- Becoming a new Director Part 2
- Getting your systems organised (HR focus)
- How's your utilisation?

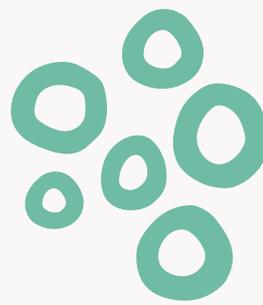
To date this has attracted great support and interest from CCCSA directors, with 34 participants across 14 centres participating throughout the 2020/21 year. We look forward to continuing this worthwhile collaboration with CCCSA.

### Advisory Group/Committee participation

- OSHC Quality Improvement Group
- Preschool Directors Association
- Australian Community Children's Service
- UniSA Early Childhood Reference Group
- Early Education for Sustainability SA
- Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange
- Community Children's Centres of SA



# Professionalism



## Reflective practice and inquiry learning forms part of our professional practice and we continue to share our knowledge across the sector

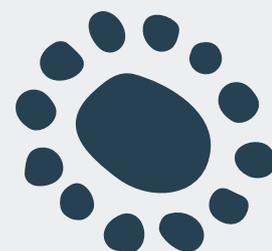
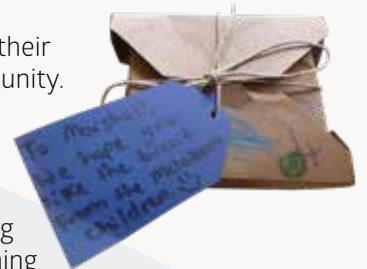
Each year, the directors work in collaboration with team leaders to identify areas of strength and challenge within the children's program and plan for professional learning. This year, the children's program identified two priorities that were the foci of professional learning: documentation of children's learning, and understanding anti-bias approaches to strengthen partnerships with families and enrich learning opportunities for children.

We have continued to embed a systematic pedagogical leadership model to ensure we cultivate professional knowledge assets across the team. To do this we have woven our two foci through a lens of critical reflection into various forums we hold through the year with our teams. These include monthly team collaborative planning meetings, team leader meetings and children's program specific staff meetings so that our learning builds on itself over time. Our reflective approach has enabled us to improve practices with children by deepening understandings of theory and innovate new practices.

### Inquiry-based learning in action

The kindergarten children and educators in Melaleuca engaged in an inquiry around the neighbour's dog after children became aware that the dog would become distressed when there was loud noise and banging on the fence. Faced with a problem they needed to consider, the children and educators came together to critically reflect on their role and how they can support their community, learn and share empathy and build connections. The educators engaged in thinking with the children during meeting times and discussed further planning in collaborative meetings. This work led to the children writing letters to their neighbour and finding the name of the dog to be Marshall. They organised a visit to meet Marshall and created a visual banner on the fence to remind all children he lived there. They also made treats to deliver to him. This work highlights the importance of critical reflection and using knowledge and theory to support children in their learning, as well as strengthening this by sharing their learning with our wider community.

The teacher in Melaleuca had an opportunity to share this inquiry with the sector through a professional learning session on inquiry based learning in Kindergarten: *Kindy program in action – engaging children in projects.*



## Using the language of play to support children

As our programs grow from strength to strength, we continue to share new learnings with the early childhood education and care sector. Two staff from our children's program presented on 'Holistic Approaches and Supportive Practices' at the National Foster and Kinship Care Conference. This presentation shared the story of an innovative project the kindergarten team engaged in to support children who were exhibiting challenging behaviours.

'Right from the beginning there were things that we knew about Sam\* that we needed to plan for. We knew he was a child who was in foster care and we knew he was a child who had experienced trauma. Right from the beginning we started planning with Sam's mum to wrap strategies around him to help support his transition into the kindy space.'

*\*name has been changed*

Gowrie SA has a core philosophy of relationship based approaches to working with children. Part of this is working within a primary care model where a child is assigned a primary caregiver who is one of the regular educators in the room. The primary caregiver is responsible for ensuring they build a relationship of safety with their primary care children and work in partnership with families to plan for their child's learning. From transition visits we intentionally paired Sam with a primary caregiver who had rich knowledge of attachment theory and trauma informed practice.

An additional strategy to support Sam and other children involved working in partnership with a play therapist to learn about Filial Therapy. Filial therapy is a special type of play therapy that strengthens connections between children and caregivers and provides a vehicle for children to process past experiences. Each educator facilitated weekly filial therapy sessions with a selected focus child under the supervision of the play therapist. **Filial therapy empowers children to use the language of play to process moments and struggles in their lives.**

By the end of the filial play therapy sessions, the children showed significant progress in their ability to regulate their emotions, could tolerate limits from adults and could engage positively in play and meaningful social interactions with other children for longer periods of time.

### Published articles

Renee Kemble and Lyndsay Healy 2020, 'Children's learning in social settings: Insights from educator research' *Reflections*, Issue 3.

Renee Kemble and Rachel 2021, 'Nurturing a love of cultures' *Reflections*, Issue 2.

## Inspiring new ideas – Gowrie SA Programming Expo

Gowrie SA's professional learning team continues to provide the sector with varied opportunities to participate in learning and leadership, aimed at supporting high quality education and care. Our calendar sessions, in-service sessions and mentoring promote collaborative critical reflection and dialogue that fosters professionalism within the sector.

Our increasingly in-demand Programming Expo provides a wonderful opportunity for educators across the sector to come together to share real-world practices and ideas alongside the requirements of the National Quality Framework. In a forum where services showcase their programs, participants hear how these services program for children and demonstrate the cycle of planning, and learn what needs to be done within a service to meet the requirements of the National Quality Framework.

Our first Programming Expo of 2021 was headed by guest speakers from early education and care settings, out of school hours care and preschool. Participants were also able to hear from KESAB about how to improve systems to reduce waste and recover resources to foster sustainable behaviour. This particular expo considered how services can demonstrate the three themes in service practice for Quality Area 1 to be rated as 'exceeding'. Practical examples were shared with educators and time was given to brainstorm ideas during table discussions and to network with others across the sector.

We are looking forward to hosting another Programming Expo later in the year on the back of this year's booked out event and requests for future sessions. Participants noted the value of the expo, to be able to meet with others in the sector to share ideas and create a community of educators.

Our participants said:



**'We loved being part of this! Was great to network and hear all of the amazing ideas. Very inspirational'**

**'A lot of great ideas and different perspectives! Really inspiring networking opportunity!'**



# Children's learning and wellbeing

Strong relationships that support children's wellbeing have been more important than ever during the pandemic. Gowrie SA has a rich history of relationship based practices that provide the foundation for children to be able to engage in meaningful learning.

## Understanding 'lifeworlds' to plan more meaningful curriculum and practice

A major focus of our professional learning in the children's program in the first half of this year has been to deepen our understanding of the values, practices, rituals and cultures of the children and families who make up our Gowrie SA community.

We have used the concept of 'lifeworlds' to support us with this work. A lifeworld is *'that site in time and space in which we all live, sometimes referred to as 'everyday life'*. In a similar vein, Roche (1987) defines the lifeworld as *'the social world as subjectively experienced, and communicated, as acted in and acted upon'* (p. 283).

By developing a deeper understanding of the lifeworlds that make up our community and how they interact with one another, we are able to plan more meaningful curriculum and practice for and with children. Information was shared with families through surveys and cuppa 'n' chats to delve deeper into children and families lifeworlds beyond culture. This information was then used to plan deeper inquiry learning for many rooms. This learning supports educators and children to see their own and others' cultures as a learning strength.

All staff undertake an 8 week Circle of Security course and this is also offered twice per year for free to our families. This provides us with the opportunity to develop a shared language, and to come together with educators and families to discuss children's wellbeing and learning.



## Connecting with community

Although fortnightly visits to the Society of St Hilarion Aged Care by our children's program have been prevented by pandemic-related restrictions, we have found creative ways to remain connected with the residents.

The kindergarten children were invited to participate in St Hilarion's gratitude tree by developing their own messages of gratitude and making trinkets to hang from the tree. They took great pleasure in emailing us photographs of the children's creations in the tree. In a gesture of thanks for the children's contributions, the residents came for a visit on their bus to share gifts they had made for the kindergarten children.

.....  
**'Our residents were so excited as we were able to drop off knitted teddy bears and wooden toy cars both of which were made with love by our residents' – The Society of St Hilarion Aged Care.**  
.....

Although the residents were unable to leave the bus due to the restrictions, the children were still able to engage in meaningful connections in the car park with them.

## Taking a trauma-informed approach in early childhood

**'A trauma is a psychologically distressing event that is outside the range of normal childhood experience and involves a sense of intense fear, terror and helplessness.' Perry 2002**

Trauma has the potential to affect children's development, regulation, learning, relationships, physical health and self-esteem. Bushfire-related trauma associated with devastating loss and destruction, and Covid-19 related trauma arising from uncertainty in family and home environments is leading to emerging behavioural challenges among children.

Gowrie SA recognises that families and educators can play a key role in assisting children to heal from trauma in the context of a secure relationship and has taken an increased focus towards a trauma-informed approach in program development. We are becoming increasingly aware of a generalised heightened anxiety amongst the broader cohort of families attending services we support through the Professional Learning Program and Inclusion Agency, with patterns of increased complex behaviours amongst children, as well as reduced utilisation in many services.

### Circle of Security for Kangaroo Island families

Gowrie SA was aware of the positive impact the Circle of Security program could have in helping children in Kangaroo Island heal from bushfire-related trauma through the development of secure attachment relationships.

With Innovative Solutions funding from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Gowrie SA delivered the program to families and educators in Kangaroo Island. In collaboration with Parenting KI, the program was provided to families in Kingscote and Parndana, and to staff teams within Kangaroo Island Children's Services in Kingscote.

Circle of Security is presented as a visual diagram of attachment theory that supports reflection by adults of a child's attachment needs that looks beyond their immediate behaviour. It was important to contextualise and leverage emerging bushfire trauma specific resources to add value and supplement the Circle of Security. By doing so we could provide participants in the program with more information and understanding about trauma, trauma responses, community resources and the role of the adult. Extended facilitation time also allowed participants to talk about their experience and fears.

Inclusion Agency service requests linked with child trauma increased by 117

'...quite simply, without the professional experience and skill offered by the Inclusion Professional, this proposal would not have been successful. The IPs commitment, enthusiasm and guidance steered this proposal which was approved by IDFM.' - service provider



### Circle of Security – a highly successful program for the Kangaroo Island community

The family survey results at completion of the program indicated that 10/13 surveyed participants noticed a decrease in their parenting stress levels since undertaking the course.

All participants indicated an improved ability to notice when they had 'stepped off the circle' and felt they could repair their relationships with children and 'step back on the circle'.



While the recovery process for these families will be long and varied, the group of parents who participated in the Circle of Security program demonstrated such strength and determination.

The contextualised sessions held for the Kangaroo Island Children's Services staff teams were paired with mentoring of the leadership team. Our mentoring focussed on how to embed reflection on trauma and attachment concepts into the services in order to sustain the learning and thinking.

## Supporting families in the community

### 'Read to Me - Enjoy with Me - Be with Me'

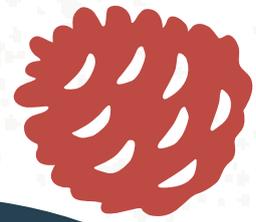
Our Whyalla families participated in the 'Read to Me - Enjoy with Me - Be with Me' program, a partnership between Gowrie SA and Raising Literacy Australia. 50 young children within 34 families received a starter reading library box with 10 books and an additional book with activity was provided each month across a six-month period. Each family was delighted with the resources and were very positive in their feedback each month they received a new pack..

During this six-month period many parents noticed their child begin to initiate story time by finding their own books to read and asking for the story to be read to them. Reading a story during the day became part of everyday play. This was wonderful feedback, as our aim was to support parents in reading to their child as an everyday activity and to increase the time parents spend singing, talking and having conversations with their child as a way of being in relationship with and feeling close to their child. **Parents revealed they were making more time each day to do this as they began to understand how important these times are, not just for supporting language, but for building a strong close relationship with their child.**

Gowrie SA also incorporated a structured 'Read to Me - Enjoy with Me' activity into the weekly Whyalla playgroup sessions. Our educators demonstrated reading to children, as did a member of the Raising Literacy Australia team. Families shared with us that our weekly reading demonstrations were very helpful and children enjoyed the familiarity with the story read by others.

Our focus on reading and literacy was supported by our newly established and popular community children's story book library, where families could 'take one, leave one, share one'. During the program we became aware that while our families who participated had discovered the value of playgroups, they had not considered visiting the local library as a source of support with their very young child. Libraries were considered by families as more for the pre-schooler aged four years and older. We plan to address this by having some special focussed sessions in partnership with the Whyalla Library staff and a supported visit to the library.

An analysis of the program and family feedback has been shared with the Raising Literacy Australia team to enable exploration for a possible formal presentation of findings to a conference in the future.



Six Whyalla families enjoyed a 4 session introductory kindergym parent/child course that supported child development and engaged parents in their play. This course had a focus on using Circle of Security concepts.



### "If you really knew me..." - inclusive practices

Every single child has a different range of abilities and strengths, and every child can succeed if the right support is provided. There is often a misconception that inclusion is about accepting enrolment of children with complex needs or disabilities. Yet inclusion is so much more than just accepting enrolment. Inclusion is about all children being supported and developing with the support of educators. The approach is not to see the child as the problem or that something is wrong with the child, but to identify the barriers the child has and the difficulties the child is experiencing to overcome those barriers (for example, both communication difficulties and sensory sensitivities have a huge impact on child behaviour). It is when we consider the strengths and qualities of the child that we develop a greater understanding and consideration toward all children and their families and can look for ways to support and include them.

Behaviour is often the outcome of communication and connections between educators and children. This was highlighted in a service staff meeting attended by an Inclusion Professional from the Gowrie SA Inclusion Agency. The Inclusion Professional led an activity where paired educators shared safely with each other something about themselves that the other may not know using the phrase "if you really knew me..." (e.g. if you really knew me you'd know I slept in this morning and was late getting the children to school so I came to work really stressed and annoyed; If you really knew me you'd know I'm looking after a depressed partner and some days are tough, that's why I'm not always feeling like making small talk). Educators were then asked to consider the children they worked with and what those children might say if asked this question. The educators' faces and body language changed as they thought about the child's perspective and it was an 'aha' moment for many.

When educators consider children in the context of their family and lives, inclusion progress is achievable.



# Reconciliation

Reconciliation remains a core priority for Gowrie SA. Our actions towards reconciliation are crucial in our position as educators of young children and as a model for reconciliation within the early learning sector and broader community.

Our reconciliation journey continued in 2020-21 with endorsement of our second Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan by Reconciliation Australia, and development of a Narragunnawali (RAP), which outlines actions specific to the children's program in our Thebarton and Underdale sites. **Gowrie SA was pleased to grant \$1000 each to Gabmididi Manoo Children and Family Centre and Minya Bunhii to support their NAIDOC week celebrations.**

Of particular importance for the organisation has been ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff have a safe and culturally-appropriate workplace. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, including two new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees, have formed Tiddas group, meeting regularly to provide cultural support to one another. They also support the organisation by offering cultural guidance and leadership.

We are working closely with Reconciliation SA to facilitate information sharing across both organisation's social media platforms

Our ongoing work with Elders and community members was wonderfully captured in an article written by two of our staff (Renee and Rachel) for the Gowrie Australia publication *Reflections*. In that article they wrote that **'inviting our Elders to engage in the children's program strengthens both child and educator understandings of Aboriginal peoples and cultures. This ultimately nurtures a love for cultures, positioning future generations as informed and active citizens in human rights and Reconciliation.'**



## External Consultations

- Reconciliation Industry Network Group - Education meetings
- National RAP Leadership Gathering (Reconciliation Australia), documenting ideas for National Reconciliation Week and to discuss the Uluru Statement
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership teaching standards consultation on cultural competence
- Adelaide City Council RAP development



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group members provide guidance and advice on our reconciliation actions and ways we are aiming to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into our programs. We are very fortunate to be able to engage in deep conversations with this group who provide guidance about cultural respect and safety and minimise cultural risk within and for our organisation. Our learning, thinking and planning as an organisation is much richer due to their invaluable advice. This year we welcomed Rosemary Wanganeen and Karri Tamaru Smith to the Reference Group.

Gowrie SA also continues to take action for reconciliation by supporting staff attendance at reconciliation events, including attending the National Reconciliation Week breakfast, Anniversary of the Apology breakfast and the Lord Mayor's NAIDOC morning tea. We were also thrilled to host the Early Childhood Organisation (ECHO) sector-wide special twilight event 'Supporting the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan'.



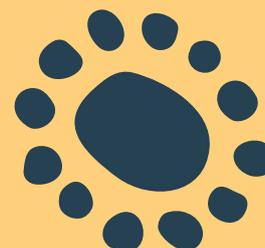
### 'We are the Elders of Tomorrow, Hear our Voice'

We were fortunate to have Uncle Ivan-Tiwu Copley visit to lead a Smoking Ceremony with the children to celebrate National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day 2020. In the lead up to the event educators in the children's program shared the book 'Baby Business' with children. Educators also provided materials and images for children to engage with pretend fires to further support their emerging understanding of the meaning and importance of ceremony. We worked collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in the lead up to and on the day and Uncle Ivan provided cultural knowledge on the benefit risk assessment conducted in preparation for the event.

**'A Smoking / Cleansing Ceremony is an ancient Aboriginal custom in Australia that involves burning various native plants and specific gum leaves to produce smoke, which has cleansing and healing properties with the ability to provide a pathway for spirits from the people and the land to be released to the place they should be. In many cases it marks a point in time for a new, clean start.'**  
Ivan-Tiwu Copley 2020

After introductions, the children sang Niina Marni to welcome Uncle. Uncle Ivan began with a Welcome to Country in Karna language, he told us about the meaning behind the Smoking Ceremony and talked about the tools he would be using. We learnt the smoking vessel is named a Coolamon and Uncle's is 300 years old! Uncle spoke of the plants used, bullrush, saltbush and redgum chips. A flint was used to create a flame and once the fire was burning, fresh gum leaves were placed on top to reduce the fire to smoke. Uncle used the feathers of his totem, the red tailed black cockatoo and gently waved the smoke, surrounding the ceremony. Uncle spoke of special fungi that grows high up the gum tree, that once alight, can last up to 24 hours. The fungi can be carried in a Coolamon from campsite to campsite, to start new fires. Lemon myrtle and saltbush native herbs sourced from Something Wild were shared, along with recipes for families to take home.

**Gowrie SA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group members** Ivan-Tiwu Copley, Eddie Peters, Nicole Gollan, Rodney Welch, Rosemary Wanganeen, Karri Tamaru Smith.



# Advocacy



## Being involved, sharing our expertise and keeping children's rights prominent

**It is imperative that Gowrie SA continues to respond to government consultation on matters affecting the early education sector and to advocate on behalf of children and families where necessary.**

New immunisation legislation known as the 'No Jab, No Play' policy prevented children who are not immunised or not on a recognised and documented catch up schedule from attending early learning services. The implications of this legislation were far reaching, denying some children the opportunity to participate in an early learning setting that supports their ongoing development and wellbeing, based on the impact of underlying health conditions. Gowrie SA effectively advocated for change to the new legislation to support additional exemptions.

Gowrie SA has remained active in key consultations relevant to the sector:

- ACECQA consultation on the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*. Our submission shared stories of families who have experienced discrimination and perspectives on how sector knowledge and support for the Act might be strengthened
- Contributing to Reimagine Australia's submission for the Early Childhood Early Intervention Consultation from the National Disability Insurance Agency
- Submission on the National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Submission on the Draft National Principles for the Child Safe Organisations Resource
- Responding to the Indigenous Voice Co-design Interim Report, guided by Statement from the Heart advocates



'Gowrie SA works in collaborative partnership with allied health professionals and families to ensure that responsive strategies and reasonable adjustments are implemented to maximise the participation of every child in our programs' – Gowrie SA submission on the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*







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I: <https://www.instagram.com/Gowriesa/>

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L: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/Gowrie-sa>

**Thebarton Children's Program,  
Professional Learning Centre and Inclusion Agency**  
39A - 43 Dew Street, Thebarton 5031

**Underdale Children's Program**  
10 Arthur Lemon Avenue, Underdale 5032

**Children's & Community Programs**  
08 8352 5144  
[info@gowriesa.org.au](mailto:info@gowriesa.org.au)

**Professional Learning Program**  
08 8234 5219  
[train@gowriesa.org.au](mailto:train@gowriesa.org.au)

**Inclusion Agency**  
1800 129 606  
[inclusion@gowriesa.org.au](mailto:inclusion@gowriesa.org.au)