



Annual Report  
2023-2024



## 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.

## Our Board Members

Dr Victoria Whittington (Chair)  
Ms Lynne Rutherford (CEO)  
Dr Yasmin Harman-Smith (Deputy Chair)  
Mr Julian Belatti  
Ms Nanette Allen  
Dr Brigid Mahoney  
Ms Alycia Mead  
Mr Ben Rogers  
Ms Natalie Natsias  
Dr Laura Fazzari (resigned November 2023)  
Marcus Pearse (appointed December 2023)

## Leadership

Chief Executive Officer, Lynne Rutherford  
Children's Program Leaders: Lyndsay Healy and Krystal Kimble, and Assistant Directors Sally Braddy, Eleanor Forndran and Kate Stone  
Professional Learning Program and Registered Training Organisation Leader, Mary Scales  
Inclusion Agency Leaders: Laura Chamings and Christina Moutos  
Parenting Program Leaders: Pam Murphy and Christina Moutos  
Aboriginal Consultant, Kauwanu (Uncle) Tamaru  
Finance and Administration Team Leader, Sandra Greco  
Project Officer, Naomi Ford



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Kaurna miyurna ngadlu Kaurna yarta tampinhi.  
Yaintya miyurna ngadlu, ngaitalya.  
Kaurna people we acknowledge, Kaurna land we recognise.  
All Aboriginal people we acknowledge with our respect.  
We also acknowledge Ngangkipurka and Purka (Elders) past, present and emerging.  
Our organisation welcomes all Aboriginal and Zenadth Kes peoples, acknowledging they are the traditional owners and custodians of the unceded land and waterways throughout our Country.



# CEO and Chairperson report



Gowrie SA has taken a new approach this year to bring you our first joint Chairperson and CEO report. It represents the Board and Chief Executive's unified vision for the organisation and the alignment between our operations and strategic direction.

We aim to be recognised as a trusted source of pedagogical knowledge and evidence-based practice in early education. We have had several opportunities to share our knowledge and expertise through various Australian and South Australian government inquiries into the sector. We welcome the increased focus on quality and accessibility in early childhood education and care and support government's planned investment and efforts to address the sector's workforce crisis. Gowrie SA has been actively working with the South Australian government as it begins implementing the Royal Commission recommendations, including meeting with Kim Little, Chief Executive of the Office for Early Childhood Education (OECD) and her team, and participating in the OECD's co-design workshops and stakeholder meetings.

Gowrie SA has a long history of supporting service leaders, teachers and educators to strengthen their teaching practices. Our work is improving outcomes for children and families, supporting reflective practices and upskilling educators in areas of leadership and pedagogical practices. Mentoring and coaching have been integral parts of Gowrie SA's Professional Learning Program for many years, playing an important role in enhancing capacity and raising quality across the sector. Ongoing professional learning across the sector and within our organisation is one way of ensuring educators stay in the sector, while increasing educator and teacher knowledge and professionalism.

Our CEO Lynne's appointment to the Teacher's Registration Board of South Australia is providing an early childhood birth to five years lens to the Board that will continue to enhance teaching standards and contribute to improved outcomes for children. This appointment is of particular importance given the introduction to our state of birth to five-year early childhood education degrees, alongside the current birth to eight-year degree programs.

Utilisation and engagement continue to be high in our Thebarton and Underdale Children's Program. Our program has an excellent reputation within and across the community, reflected in the lengthy waiting list. As part of continuous quality improvements, we have expanded the leadership team at both sites to include a new trauma-informed role, dedicated hours for an assistant director role at Underdale, and educational leader roles that focus on the infant-toddler and kindergarten rooms separately.

The Inclusion Agency is thriving with even higher levels of sector engagement, requests for service, and service visits year on year, exceeding the Australian Government KPIs for this program. Thanks to additional funding from the Department of Education, we have expanded the team to meet this demand.

Our Parenting Program continues to operate in Whyalla and Seaford, and Circle of Security Parenting is offered twice a year at Thebarton and Whyalla. The Teach-Do-Learn program in Seaford, funded by Communities for Children provider Anglicare SA was extended for another two years and we are delighted with this news. The Whyalla program has been operating for eight years and has become well-embedded in the local community. Across all areas our programs operate, we are receiving very positive feedback from families and word-of-mouth recommendations to other families.

*We believe Gowrie SA is very well-placed to support the implementation of the Royal Commission recommendations regarding access to three-year-old preschool. Children in this age group have been accessing preschool programs since 1997 through Gowrie SA's integrated kindergarten program for three-to-five-year-olds. The integrated model recognises that, for young children, care and education are inseparable and the quality of the relationships children experience in a program is significant to their development. Our long-standing experience and success in operating an integrated kindergarten program will ensure that our transition to offering high-quality three-year-old kindergarten under the government's program for three-year-olds will be seamless.*



We completed our third Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan with the guidance of the Aboriginal and Zenadth Kes Reference Group, who continue to provide a wealth of knowledge, support and advice to Gowrie SA. Kauwanu (Uncle) Tamaru, a member of the Reference Group, is also working as Gowrie SA's internal Aboriginal Consultant. A core part of Kauwanu Tamaru's work is to provide us with appropriate cultural guidance, teach us warri Kurna warra (wind Kurna language), and to support us in our work.

Last year Adelaide hosted the 2023 Early Childhood Australia national conference. We were excited to connect with our colleagues from around Australia and globally and to share an exhibition stand with our Gowrie Australia counterparts. Gowrie SA had four presentation proposals accepted, demonstrating our depth of knowledge and expertise. Please take the time to read this Gowrie SA annual report, which showcases some of the learning we shared in these presentations and the work of our programs.

Our ongoing commitment to quality improvement saw our Children's Program join the Restacking the Odds project, a new approach to sharing and understanding data to support quality improvement. Gowrie SA is the first South Australian early years' service to participate in the project. We have been focusing on strengthening our internal transition procedures to increase family engagement. Collected evidence will enable us to measure how improved family engagement in transition processes influence program quality against the National Quality Standard, and if it strengthens the levels and quality of family participation in the program. Findings from the data will support the development of continuous improvement goals and actions that can feed into Gowrie SA's Quality Improvement Plans.

Several teachers and educators also began participating in the three-year deLissa Trust-funded culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy (CLRP) research project in collaboration with UniSA and Western Sydney University early years academics. Teams decide their research focus, develop new ways of working, and then collect and analyse data before presenting their findings. In 2023, participating staff used critical action research to develop improved ways of engaging

with families and presented their findings to project participants from other SA early years settings and a broader audience in December last year. That work continues. In 2024, participating staff are focusing on employing culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogies with children.

In closing, Lynne and I remain impressed with our staff's ongoing commitment to quality and innovation: we are proud of the positive feedback received from many families and clients. We both wish to thank all who have made this possible. We particularly extend our deep thanks to our Gowrie SA leaders and the many project and administration staff who support them. Leadership is a vital yet challenging role in early childhood education and care settings. We also sincerely thank the more than 100 other staff who make our programs possible – your work with us is recognised with gratitude. Thank

**Dr Victoria Whittington**

*Adjunct Associate Professor of Education, UniSA  
Chairperson Gowrie SA Board*

you to parents and families for all you contribute to Gowrie SA. You are our heart and soul. You trust us with your children and work with us to make our programs the best they can be.

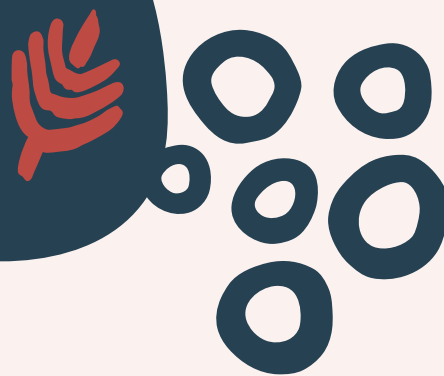
We would also like to thank our Gowrie Board members, acknowledging our newest member Marcus Pearse who joined the Board since the last AGM. Attending evening meetings and participating in the associated activities that support the functioning of the Board requires time and ongoing commitment. We appreciate the efforts each member makes in their voluntary commitment to Gowrie SA.

**Lynne Rutherford**

*Chief Executive Officer*



# Financial report



Our audited financial results reflect effective financial management, with no issues of fraud and financial risk identified and strong financial processes in place. The timing of grant payments this past financial year has led to a deficit, as grant funding received in the financial year 2022-23 was applied to financial years 2023-2025, and has been partially expensed in 2023-24. The federal Department of Education has approved for carryover of the remaining unspent grant funding to 2024-25 for full expenditure.

Wages and associated oncosts remain our largest budget expense and these continued to increase in the past year, partly attributed to the increase in grant funding, and an increase in leadership roles as well as relief staff costs. As an organisation, we have continued to invest in staff development and learning, which includes attendances at conferences, professional learning days and study opportunities.

Our Children's Program has been well utilised with both sites returning a surplus. We continue to invest in property improvements to maintain our facilities, which this year included internal and external renovations and repairs, plant and equipment purchases, and fire pit installations. The surplus will be available to support further reinvestment in facilities to enhance the appeal of our program for children, educators and families. Over the past five years we have allocated funds to social justice initiatives, and this year supported eight families to continue to attend the Gowrie SA Children's Program.

Our fee for service program continues to feel the effects of the early childhood workforce crisis as organisations have been unable to send staff to professional development sessions, or have reduced spending in this vital area, leading to lower bookings and a smaller surplus than budgeted. We continue to promote our program to the sector and are pleased to see that there has been an increase in services accessing in-centre professional development including educator and early childhood teacher coaching and mentoring, and longer-term projects. The organisation has also been able to provide policy support to several services and our consultancy work has been increasing. We consistently receive positive feedback on our delivery.

Grant funded programs, including the Inclusion Agency, Whyalla Parenting Program, and Teach-Do-Learn Parenting Program, remain on track, with positive feedback from families, and exceptional community engagement. To sustain appropriate staffing levels in the Inclusion Agency, we achieved a budgeted underspend for carryover into the 2024-2025 financial year. The Whyalla grant funding was fully expended, with a further two years of funding remaining. The Teach Do Learn program also required carry forward funding through a small underspend for its next two years.

As at 30 June 2024, liabilities represented 5% of net assets, indicating a healthy financial position.

Cash and cash equivalents continue to be a significant component of the balance sheet, supported by strong returns from our financial investment portfolio, which provides a foundation for pursuing future strategic objectives.

Gowrie SA continues to use reserves to fund reconciliation activities, which have included professional learning activities for educators working in Aboriginal early learning services, subscriptions with organisations that support cultural learning and activities (such as Supply Nation, Reconciliation SA, SNAICC and the Turkindi network), grants to early childhood services for reconciliation activities through Reconciliation SA, and procurement of goods or services from Aboriginal controlled businesses. This year we also participated in the Tix for Nix program and purchased reduced cost tickets to Adelaide Festival programs that we offered to Aboriginal staff and Gowrie SA families.

It is the Board's opinion that Gowrie SA remains in a healthy financial position and will continue to invest in our employees, facilities and educational resources into the future, while exploring additional income generating options as they arise.

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**Julian Bellati**

*Board financial advisor*









# Our people

## Milestone celebrations

Two staff shared significant career milestones this year. We celebrated Mary's 30+ years with Gowrie SA at the end-of-year staff event by gifting a beautiful piece of artwork painted by artist Shialea Brodie. The artwork, titled 'Marnkuirka' (thirty), tells the story of Mary's time with Gowrie SA. From preschool teacher to leading the Professional Learning Program, Mary has had a remarkable impact on the early childhood education sector. As Gowrie SA's Reconciliation Action Plan champion from the time our journey began in 2010, Mary is creating a legacy of positive change and meaningful connections with her unwavering dedication and passion.

Cecilia also reached the 30-year milestone, with a small celebration in the office with colleagues. Cecilia has inspired countless children, colleagues and professionals with her warmth and exceptional knowledge and skills. We will celebrate Cecilia's 30 years at an upcoming staff event.

We are incredibly fortunate to work with Mary and Cecilia, who are tireless in their commitment to the early childhood education and care sector.



## The ultimate end-of-year amazing race

Gowrie SA staff celebrated the end of 2023 with an amazing race! Beginning at the Adelaide Botanic Gardens, staff formed teams, raced to checkpoints, solved puzzles and answered questions about Gowrie SA's 80-year history before meeting for lunch. It was lovely to hear the laughter and the good-natured competition on the day. Several wonderful local businesses generously donated items and vouchers to supplement our prize pool, including Mister Sunshine's, The Nest, Happenstance Gin, Drakes Torrensville, Beerenberg Farm, Ricca Coffee Company, Wohlers and Bellbird Kid-Z Educational Resources.

## Our Team

(as at June 30 2024)

136 staff

12 employees completed or are studying towards higher qualification

4 traineeships

*'The CEO actually says hello to you – I've valued the culture the most – you are valued here as an employee – employees are valued more than making money – Gowrie SA wants you to learn and develop – they listen to you – it's a person centred place to work' – Gowrie SA employee*

## New trauma-focused role creating improved outcomes for children

We have a long history of advocating for children's rights, including every child's right to access safe and supportive education and care. 'Our work is underpinned by the principles of valuing diversity and inclusion, demonstrating our commitment to the right of every member of our community to belong, to participate and contribute' - Gowrie SA Philosophy.

A recent key initiative has been to increase educators' knowledge of and confidence in working with children who have experienced trauma. One of our qualified early childhood teachers undertook further qualifications in trauma and moved into a new trauma consultant role within the organisation.

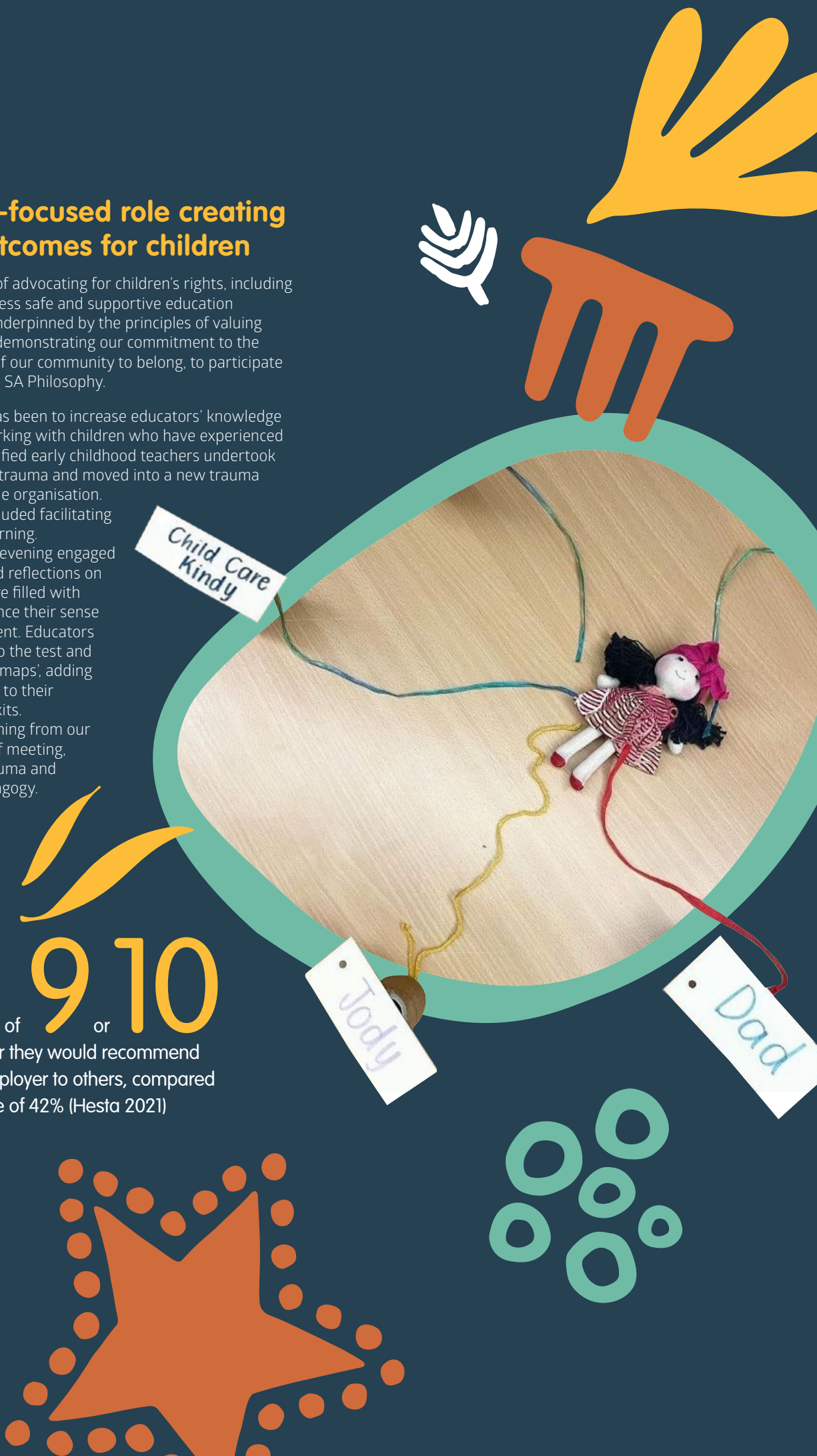
Part of the work has included facilitating internal professional learning. Our educators spent an evening engaged in hands-on learning and reflections on how children's worlds are filled with relationships that influence their sense of safety and development. Educators put their crafting skills to the test and made unique 'relational maps', adding a fabulous new strategy to their trauma-responsive toolkits. This built on earlier learning from our whole-organisation staff meeting, where we discussed trauma and trauma-responsive pedagogy.

77% of staff gave a rating of 9 or 10 when asked whether they would recommend Gowrie SA as an employer to others, compared to the sector average of 42% (Hesta 2021)

Child Care  
Kindy

Jody

Dad



# The bigger picture



## Submissions

- The Australian Institute of Teachers and School Leaders (AITSL) consultation regarding professional experience guidelines for teaching students (both early childhood and school). Gowrie SA's response emphasised the need for consistent language use inclusive of early childhood settings and the importance of ECEC student placements in good quality settings, along with cultural considerations
- Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC) Childcare Inquiry
- Gowrie Australia collaborated on a response to the Productivity Commission report 'A Path to Universal Early Childhood Education'

## Forums, advisory groups, committees and workshops

- Ministerial Early Childhood Advisory Forum (representing the Early Learning & Care Council of Australia)
- Special Ministerial Early Childhood Advisory Forum
- Office for Early Childhood Development workforce co-design workshops
- TAFE course advisory group offering advice on matters including course content, work placements, professional development for TAFE SA educators, and graduate opportunities
- Preschool leading practice paper on inclusion, prepared for the Department for Education
- Ongoing participation in the Thrive by Five SA subcommittee

## Highlighting pathways to an early childhood education and care career

The Industry Engagement Team from the South Australian Department for Education, Gowrie SA educators and our colleagues from other services created a video at Gowrie SA focusing on career pathways for early childhood education and care. This video emphasises the potential career opportunities in early education and care, highlighting the various entry points available.

We hope it inspires students to consider studying early education and care as part of their SACE and to explore options such as traineeships and further education in early childhood studies. The goal is to attract more people to the sector.



Gowrie SA CEO Lynne Rutherford's appointment to the Teacher's Registration Board of South Australia will provide a valuable early childhood lens to the Board



▲ View the career pathways video on the Department for Education's YouTube channel by scanning the QR code



## Career immersion visits with Gowrie SA

Gowrie SA recently partnered with Findon Technical College to organise career immersion visits for their early childhood and education students. We were delighted to host the students at our Children's Program for an observation visit. It was rewarding to learn about their positive experiences, as featured in Findon Technical College's newsletter (excerpt provided below).

During their visit, the students actively participated in conversations and asked insightful questions related to their learning. We were impressed to discover that they had prior knowledge of concepts such as 'connection seeking,' as well as Circle of Security, and the Reggio Emilia approach.



Gowrie SA also continues to offer career immersion visits in partnership with the Workabout Centre, hosting students from the South Australian Aboriginal Secondary Training Academy. The ACE Industry Immersion Week supports year 10 Aboriginal students visit Gowrie SA and observe children in play-based learning, engage in hands-on activities and hear from an educator about their career journey in early childhood education and care.

**'Gowrie SA visit** - Year 10 and 11 Early Childhood Education and Care team visited Gowrie SA for an observational tour during Reconciliation Week. Students explored areas of relationships with children, pedagogy (teaching methods), the role of an Early Educator and saw firsthand the high quality First Nations perspectives embedded within the curriculum. Whilst going through the tour students practiced jottings. A jotting is usually short details of significant events, behaviours or conversations. It can be a couple of sentences to no longer than a paragraph at most. Jottings are a quick and easy way to record significant events and behaviours. Gowrie SA members Sally and Mary then visited us all at the college, we look forward to future collaborations with Gowrie SA.'



Findon Technical College, *Early Childhood Education and Care Newsletter, Term 2.*



# A trusted source of pedagogical knowledge and evidence-based practice

## Ongoing expert consultancy supports the unique needs of a service

For the past several years, Gowrie SA facilitator Jess has worked alongside the dedicated and enthusiastic educators of a regional ECEC centre. Jess regularly visits the centre, providing professional learning services and engaging the educators in meaningful conversations, reflective practices and continuous learning. The feedback from the centre emphasises the positive impact of our consultative services on both the centre and the educators, highlighting the valuable relationship established between the centre and Jess.



We have provided intensive policy support work to 4 services, admin support to 1 service, and a comprehensive website review for Community Children's Centres SA

## TESTIMONIAL

*'[Our service's] connection with Gowrie for training and development has flourished over many years now, with the support of Gowrie facilitator Jess, we have been able to create a unique mentoring program to cater for the specific needs of the site and Educators who work at [our service]. Jess and Gowrie have been so supportive in designing a program and training and development to suit our unique site and location, and so when Jess visits we definitely like to include as much professional development as possible both through a staff meeting but also in her working alongside Educators, providing support, guidance, linking approaches and programming cycles to practice. The Educators have developed a professional rapport with Jess as she is able to provide feedback in real time whilst being alongside the Educators. From an Assessment and Rating perspective, the experiences Educators have had from the*

*mentoring program helped them to be comfortable with being observed, receiving feedback, using approaches to meet children's needs and learning and adjusting practice in the moment. Directly prior to Assessment and Rating, Jess and I planned a mentoring visit with a staff meeting just before A&R which gave the team some insight into how the day would go, the Quality Areas that may be asked about, we were [asked] by her to think about our strengths and exceeding themes and to ensure this came through in the Quality Improvement Plan. It was also an opportunity to discuss and clarify policies, procedures, practices and language that would support us on the day of assessment.*

*We are yet to get our rating, but Educators entered Assessment and Rating day with enthusiasm, confidence and a sense of normalcy. Whatever the outcome, Educators found the lead up and the day to*



*be a positive experience. From my perspective as Director, my discussions with Jess helped me to clarify ... my thoughts, provide informative evidence for Assessment and Rating and the QIP, a lot of which was around the mentoring program and staff meetings which demonstrated our ongoing commitment to improvement. We really thank Jess for her support and guidance over the years, but in particular the lead up to our Assessment and Rating.'*

## Closure day success with Early Learning Centres

'On behalf of Early Learning Centres, I wanted to say a HUGE thank you for your ... session at the ... Summit.... The material and insights shared in the session were not only enlightening but practical, and ... staff ... will take the skills, tools and knowledge learnt and implement them into the everyday practices within the centres'



## Professional learning support for Libraries SA

Libraries SA approached Gowrie SA as they were seeking to provide professional learning opportunities for their librarians involved in delivering programs for young children and their families across the state. Together we designed a program of events that were offered online and face to face across the year.

Across several professional learning sessions with the Libraries SA staff, we explored new resources and ways to incorporate diverse perspectives in their planning to enhance their programs. With our guidance and support, Libraries SA staff are incorporating sensory learning, loose parts play, and Aboriginal and Zenadth Kes cultures into children's library programming.

We look forward to continuing to support Libraries SA and their incorporation of aspects of the Early Years Learning Framework within the library environment.

## Empowering families and strengthening the early childhood sector

Our team has worked closely with Emerging Minds Families to share Gowrie SA expertise and knowledge as guests on Emerging Minds podcasts:

- Thebarton Children's Program director Lyndsay Healy shared her insights on responding to children's needs and building strong relationships between family members (*Building a strong and positive relationship with your child*, released 3 July 2023).
- Assistant director Sally Braddy shared her tips and strategies on finding the right early childhood service (*Finding the right daycare, kindergarten or preschool for your child*, released 14 August 2023).
- Early childhood educator Justin McArthur shared his insights and strategies on supporting children who have experienced trauma (*Understanding how early childhood educators can support children who have experienced trauma*, released 20 November 2023).

Lyndsay contributed content to the Emerging Minds online course *Practice strategies for formulation: infants and toddlers*. This course was released in December 2023.

Our professional learning team also provided content for the Words Grow Minds professional learning modules.

## Conceptual PlayWorlds in practice

We continue to embed Marilyn Fleer's Conceptual PlayWorlds within our Children's Program - a play based, intentional teaching approach that brings adults and children into an imaginary world together. Two videos published by the Conceptual PlayWorld Lab at Monash Education capture an example of this in practice at Gowrie SA. In the first video Gowrie SA early childhood teacher (and Monash STEM Champion) Vittoria transforms our Children's Program garden into an imaginary play area using The Magic Hat story, embedding Kaurua language with Kauwanu Tamaru, before becoming a character from the story in video two.

Educators and children have also entered into the magical worlds of Peter Rabbit, Possum Magic, and Who Sank the Boat, brought to life by Mr McGregor's garden, Grandma Poss' bike, and a boat yard.

View the Conceptual Playworlds videos by scanning the QR Code:



Video 1 - Teachers take on a role



Video 2 - Creating an imaginary situation



# Reconciliation



Twice a year we publish our Reconciliation in Action newsletter. What began as a small publication has become a pages-long newsletter packed with inspiring actions and events across Gowrie SA programs, sharing how we are taking meaningful steps to support reconciliation. The newsletter is published on our social media channels and emailed to community. All issues are available to read on the reconciliation page of our website.

Gowrie SA continues to award funding to Aboriginal early childhood organisations each year to support their NAIDOC week events. This year we awarded funding to three Aboriginal early childhood organisations, whose activities included an Elders morning tea and family afternoon that enabled children and families to yarn and spend time with Elders. We also spent time with Elders for our own NAIDOC Week celebrations. Educators and children continued their learning of Kurna language with Kauwanu Tamaru, and Awa (Uncle) Eddie sang traditional Zenadth Kes songs. Several staff joined Kauwanu Ivan to cook whiting in damper, sweet potatoes and squid. As custodians of their cultures, each Elder brings invaluable knowledge and richness to our programs and relationships.

Cook-ups are becoming regular events within Gowrie SA with the launch of our new fire pits designed by both Kauwanu Ivan and Tamaru at Thebarton and Underdale. The fire pit area is a place to gather with children, educators, families and visitors for special occasions, and children can help with food preparation and cooking. During National Reconciliation Week, Brenda and Mark Matthews from the documentary *The Last Daughter*, and Simon and Brendon from Gravity Films, joined us to share in damper by the fire pit where Kauwanu Tamaru (cultural advisor to the film) provided a Welcome to Country. An Acknowledgement of Country by the children in Kurna language followed. Several staff and families had an opportunity to hear Brenda's story, which was a moving experience.



Scan the QR code to find our newsletters



## Making Kurna history more visible in the community

We were pleased to receive additional funding from the West Torrens City Council to support the second stage of the Kurna mapping project. Kauwanu Ivan and CEO Lynne completed the first stage, which involved interviewing Kurna Elders who shared stories and histories connected to the local area, including Karrawirra Pari (River Torrens). In the second stage, Kauwanu Ivan and Lynne spent time researching State Archives, the State Library, History Trust, Heritage SA, and Hamra Library for any additional historical information on the local area to affirm the oral stories shared by the Elders during the project's first stage. Sites of significance are now marked on a master map. Kauwanu Ivan and Kauwanu Tamaru shared their knowledge and engaged us in truth telling from the Kurna history project findings as we walked together on Country for our annual reconciliation walk.

'Prior to European settlement, there were many family groups that understood the lore for caring and nurturing the land (Yerta) and waterways in cultural ways. Understanding and recording these facts is important, so that future generations of Australian people within the council area and surrounds have a clear understanding and factual record of the history and the ancient culture on the land they live on prior to and after settlement, including campsites, Reserves and interactions that changed the landscape'

– Kauwanu Ivan



## Building respect and pride for Kurna language - Yellaka Warra

Language is such a key part of cultural identity and we recognise the need to revive and preserve Kurna language to ensure Kurna culture remains strong in the future. Learning and using Kurna language is a strong commitment throughout Gowrie SA's Reconciliation Action Plan. Our language lessons with Kauwanu Tamaru began with CEO Lynne and RAP Champion Mary approximately two years ago, extended to senior leaders soon after and recently extended to all Gowrie SA staff and families. Kauwanu Tamaru introduced basic Kurna language concepts and words specific to early childhood at a whole organisation staff meeting and we have been incorporating Kurna language in our email and phone greetings. With Kauwanu Tamaru's guidance, staff are encouraged to write a personalised Acknowledgment that reflects their learning to include with their email signatures.

Children have also been learning Kurna language with Kauwanu Tamaru. The growth in their Kurna vocabulary has been strong, with Kurna words used in their day-to-day routines and transitions, including signing in and washing hands. The teaching and learning of Kurna warra (language) have evolved naturally from their engagement with tiati (truth telling). The children's respect for Kurna history has become embedded. Children have become empowered ambassadors and advocates, equipped to teach their families and broader community.

In response to requests from the sector, and Gowrie SA families, Kauwanu Tamaru developed a Kurna language course, Yellaka Warra, which has had great participation and feedback. Throughout these sessions, participants learn correct protocols and engage in tiati (truth telling). By the time they complete the six-session course, they have good knowledge of common phrases and the confidence to share an Acknowledgement of Country in Kurna language.

We aim to walk alongside Kauwanu Tamaru to build pride and respect for Kurna language. This includes understanding cultural protocols. Kauwanu Tamaru has been supporting staff in his role as Aboriginal consultant, and his oversight ensures we consider when it is appropriate to use Kurna language and that we write and speak Kurna language consistently across the organisation. We work with his permission and encouragement, and Kauwanu Tamaru's approach to teaching Kurna language provides us with opportunities to learn, listen and understand the complexities and uniqueness of the language by listening to recordings and engaging in role-play and practice.

The Turkindi Network Board held two meetings at Gowrie SA, with our staff joining to share information, and provide a tour of our programs. The Acknowledgement of Country given in Kurna language by Lynne, as well as the presentations about the programs we offer impressed the Turkindi members

### Since our reconciliation journey began in 2011, we have

provided **13** cultural respect and safety training sessions to over

**200** new and existing staff (facilitated by beyond .. Kathleen Stacey & Associates)

held **6** annual reconciliation walks for staff and families





# Walking together and learning through deep listening

(Ivan-Tiwu Copley, Gloria Lalor-Mundine & Mary Scales, 2023 ECA presentation summary)

Developing respectful, reciprocal relationships with Elders and community members and walking alongside them to ensure we are listening deeply and being culturally responsive about their aspirations for their children, our community and their future is an essential part of Gowrie SA's work. We each have our truth, and we need to develop an Aboriginal cultural lens to improve our ability to see outside our own perspectives.

The National Quality Framework asks us to value Aboriginal and Zenadth Kes cultures. Gowrie SA's history of working with Elders and forming an Aboriginal and Zenadth Kes Reference Group with cultural authority has provided a pathway for deep listening and two-way learning. Our responsibility is to honour and incorporate where possible Kurna culture while connecting with Aboriginal and Zenadth Kes peoples represented at our service.

By honouring Aboriginal and Zenadth Kes peoples as knowledge holders and providing the structures that enable narrative ways of deep listening,

we can hear and plan for their priorities for children, families and our community. Two-way learning means we are influenced by knowledge. It influences our philosophy, vision, programs and ways of working.

Behind Aboriginal and Zenadth Kes educational practices is an understanding that a fabric of knowledge is built through the collection and connection of everyone's life experiences. This is also true for Gowrie SA as we build networks, connections and reciprocal relationships. Kurna Elders have responsibilities to this Country. They were the first peoples here, and strong relationships ensure we respect Kurna history, knowledge and connection to Country.

We learn about the ways, language and knowledge of the people and of Country when we sit and listen deeply using stillness. This enables us to learn with respect and integrity, and to listen with our heart, not mind.

When we listen to Elders and community, we create a ripple effect: we send information out and connect and listen to what is coming back. The ripples begin to multiply with our reach, influence and knowledge.

Structures, systems, processes and protocols within Gowrie SA support deep listening.

- The Aboriginal and Zenadth Kes reference group (comprised of Elders and community members) provide cultural advice and insights, ways of knowing and seeing.
- A dedicated budget is set for reconciliation work.
- Scheduled visits by Elders and community members support children and adults to learn about culture. The visits have a variety of foci and ensure that our staff build strong relationships with community, can ask questions and deepen their knowledge. We have created structures that help us have meaningful dialogue and learning. This two-way knowledge sharing and learning informs and influences our philosophy, vision and our programs.
- Cultural protocols build staff knowledge and provide a reference point as they work with community (e.g. practices surrounding Welcome to Country, Acknowledgement of Country, roles of Elders and culturally respectful environments).
- Relationships are reciprocal rather than transactional (e.g. taking part in community events, and giving back to community).
- Privilege is understood, as is the need to create space to listen, learn and unlearn.

We encourage the sector to connect to the Country they are on, expand and grow their knowledge and network, and begin creating their own ripple effect.

I know you are listening, but are you really listening deeply?

Are you only looking through your own cultural lens?

- Kauwanu Ivan





# When educators and infants play

(Erin Reith & Sally Braddy, 2023 ECA presentation summary)

What we do as educators, our intentionality, can influence children's play and its outcomes. We can expand children's thinking and enhance their desire to know and learn. Play is a priority at Gowrie SA. We are thoughtful and purposeful in our actions and decision-making, about how we live our philosophy, the role of our environments, the planning of our emergent curriculum and the role we take on as teachers and educators of infants and young children.

Our intentional actions that support educators to engage in play include:

- our integrated infant and toddler model, which affords long-term primary caregiving relationships that provide a platform for long-term respectful, trusting and collaborative partnerships where information sharing is integral to children's belonging (Department of Education 2022)
- the practice of stillness, a circle of security construct that ensures educators are available to children both physically and emotionally as a predictable base to return to as necessary (Dolby 2017)
- the development of rituals, which provide children and families with a sense of belonging through meaningful and predictable times of connection
- our environments, which contribute to the atmosphere of a room and in turn effect the way children, educators and families interact and learn within.

'We believe that children have the right to secure relationships and this belief arises from our understanding of attachment theory and is realised through our commitment to primary caregiving practices that preserve continuity of relationships in our children's program'  
– Gowrie SA Philosophy

With dramatic changes to the sector over the last 3 years, we have noticed differences in how educators value and engage in children's play. Creating a theme, *The Power of Play, How can play strengthen relationships*, we began to research the barriers for educators engaging in children's play, exploring lifeworlds, and the practices that support these. We also considered specifically the influence of relational pedagogies and the environment on children's play in the infant and toddler environment.

We used a mixed methods approach to gathering data, including educator interviews and observation of practice over time. The barriers identified by educators included:

- routines and children's needs (nappy changing, cleaning, meal times, scheduled group times, time in general, emotional support and expectations of their role)
- experience and confidence (how long they have worked, their level of training, who is present in the environment)
- team (comfort levels within the team, support, what the team values)
- values (the value educators place on play, influenced by culture, lifeworlds and training)
- inclusion (inclusion rights and needs of children in the environment).

Gowrie SA's team of infant and toddler educators critically reflected on the importance of educator presence to build relationships with children, and challenged themselves to confront barriers to engaging as co-players to create shared positive experiences. We trialed different styles of play invitations in the environment to build educators' confidence to engage with children in genuine ways, where children feel safe and cared for and the pathway for engagement in learning becomes enjoyable for both educator and child. The team challenged themselves to develop dramatic play scenarios, creating pathways for educators to actively engage in children's play.

Educators rediscovered the power of play to deepen their ability to listen to children's interests and wonderings, to deeply know children and their families and to gain insight into their lifeworlds (Rigney & Hattam 2020). Facilitating extended play episodes became a moment for enacting anti-bias curriculum, consider inclusive practice, and scaffold children's emerging understanding of their own and others' rights.



# How inclusion professionals drive positive change in services

Gowrie SA's Inclusion Agency has a diverse team of 25 inclusion professionals who work closely with eligible services to provide tailored inclusion advice and support. There is no one-size-fits-all approach; the scope and scale of their work require specialised knowledge.

The work of inclusion professionals (IPs) is complex. An internal evaluation<sup>1</sup> of our work as the South Australian Inclusion Agency reveals that IPs greatly influence the early childhood education and care sector. With significant numbers of children and young people facing developmental vulnerability and accessing NDIS provisions, inclusion support is a critical and growing component of our community, and its ability to thrive.

Key findings from the internal evaluation revealed a steadily growing engagement with early childhood services (12% over 5 years), driving 'nation-leading rates of uptake of the ISP', with one of the highest rates of innovative solutions support usage in Australia. Support most frequently occurs through visits by IPs to individual services, enabling IPs to develop collaborative relationships and have meaningful conversations with educators.

The evaluation used narrative inquiry to document the nuances of the IPs' work and impact on the children, families, and communities they support, revealing that the IPs:

- positively build educator capacity through deepening educators' learning, strengthening their practice, and improving their motivation, critical thinking, and relationships with children
- engage in conversations about children's progress and planning, balancing advice-seeking and strategy-exploring empathy work in partnership with service educators
- become attuned to services' interests and concerns, knowing when to listen and empathise, how to share practices to build educator capacity, and ways of using strategic inclusion plans as tools for crafting a shared focus (educators and IPs can openly discuss children's inclusion needs and confidently decide what sorts of supports and strategies may be most appropriate)
- challenge educators to consider who is advantaged in their practice, how to elicit stronger child agency and voice in their programs, and to consider alternate practices that build from the child's perspective.

The evaluation revealed how the work of IPs is deeply relational, highly practical in focus and necessarily time-intensive for reflective conversations (coaching and mentoring) and capacity building. While inclusive education work is resource-intensive (in terms of time, funding, and effort), it is outcome-rich and of critical importance considering recent calls to improve child outcomes and reduce developmental vulnerabilities in our communities.

## Equity, inclusion and high expectations: Children as capable and competent – Inclusion Agency webinar

Christina Moutos, Inclusion Agency and Programs Manager and Benjamin Goudie, Inclusion Agency Team Leader held a free webinar for early childhood education and care services. The webinar, *Equity, inclusion and high expectations: Children as competent and capable*, supports educators to think about ways to embed inclusion practices and make links to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and My Time, Our Place (MTOP) Principles. This webinar, as well as webinars from previous years, is available to watch on the Gowrie SA YouTube channel.



Scan the QR code to watch the webinar

4,436

service visits



708

strategic inclusion plans developed



2,485

support calls made

51

Inclusion Aware certificates issued

<sup>1</sup> Dr Jessie Jovanovic (2023) Inclusion Agency five-year evaluation report for July 2018-June 2023, Gowrie SA.



# Supporting families with young children



## Teach-Do-Learn early learning initiative

Teach-Do-Learn, a Gowrie SA-designed program, is an effective multidisciplinary early learning and parenting program that is responsive and adaptable to community needs and can support positive development outcomes for children. It has been welcomed by families in the southern suburbs since it began in late 2022, experiencing increased participation each term as more families become aware of the program. Family feedback about the program is overwhelmingly positive.

Qualified and experienced staff with expertise in early childhood development design the program in collaboration with allied health professionals, and work in partnership together with families to support children's growth and development across the five Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) domains, with a particular focus on AEDC data relevant to the local community.

This program shows great promise and aligns well with specific recommendations from the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care on supporting vulnerable families.

Evaluations of the program's operation within this community reveal that parents/carers:

- feel that their knowledge about childhood development is increasing by being actively involved in learning and deciding what is important to them
- are using the resources and ideas shared with them by educators and allied health professionals to replicate activities at home and feel more confident in their ability to meet their child's development and learning needs
- are reporting improvements in their child's communication, language skills, physical, emotional and social wellbeing
- are engaging with visiting allied health professionals to talk about their concerns with their child's development in a safe, non-medicalised setting
- are benefiting from educator referral to other supports within the community.

'Opportunities to engage with other parents and children. Great ideas for activities and for children to learn skills. Renee and Suzi have created an amazing learning environment here for mums and kids. Thanks for being so welcoming and inclusive. We have loved the sessions and will be back next term!' – Teach-Do-Learn participant

## Whyalla Parenting Program

The Whyalla Parenting Program is well-established within the community. Family participation is strong and government and non-government agency confidence in and awareness of the program has led to their promotion of the Whyalla playgroup and Circle of Security Parenting program to their clients. Families are enjoying our take-home resources that support their child's development, and many comment on our high standard of physical environments for children's safe and creative play.

## Reading with children

Gowrie SA educators were recorded reading with children for several videos for our Whyalla parenting program, funded by the Australian Department of Social Services. The videos offer families valuable insight on how to create meaningful literacy experiences while reading with their children. These videos are wonderful resources that we promote within our parenting program and are accessible to the public through the Gowrie SA YouTube channel.



Scan the QR code for our YouTube channel





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