



**Gowrie.**  
New South Wales

# CHILDREN'S VOICES

Annual Report 2021







## OUR ARTIST

Eve is 5 years old, and has attended Gowrie Erskineville since she turned 1. She likes to sing, dance, draw and paint. She loves learning Aboriginal songs and culture, climbing outside and putting on shows with her friends at Gowrie.

Eve has two mums, a baby sister, a dog called Fraggie and a cat called Cat Stevens.

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### Acknowledgement of Country

Gowrie NSW acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the traditional custodians of all lands on which we work. We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as enduring, living cultures and pay respects to Elders, past, present and future.



# ABOUT GOWRIE

**Caring for Children. Caring for Families.**

Gowrie NSW is proud of our long history of providing diverse education and care and professional development services to the early and middle childhood sector across NSW and the ACT.

Our focus on research and contemporary pedagogical methodology demonstrates a strong leadership commitment and supports our vision of working in partnership across generations to provide programs and resources that support children, families and education professionals.

*“We believe every child should have access to quality education and care.”*



## OUR VISION

Gowrie NSW is committed to excellence and strives to make a lasting impact on children's lives.

It is our vision that children are active participants in society, their voices are heard and they are empowered to make a positive contribution in their community and make a difference in the world.

## PROGRAM FOUNDATIONS

Gowrie NSW has a long tradition of providing education and care that considers the whole child in the context of their family and community.

For more than 80 years we have played a pivotal role in shaping the early education sector that you see today. Gowrie NSW programs are built on the strong foundations of respectful relationships, intentional play-based teaching, empowerment and practitioner inquiry.

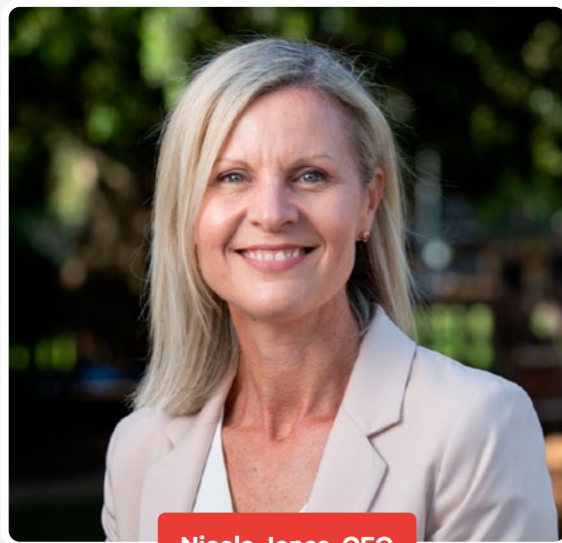
You will see, hear and feel these foundations in practice in our centres every day.

Empowerment  
 Play based Learning  
 Respectful Relationships  
 Practitioner Inquiry





# CHAIR AND CEO REPORT



**Nicole Jones, CEO**



**Sean Parker, Chairperson**

## ANNUAL REPORT 2021 CHAIR & CEO OPENING

The past year has once again highlighted the courage, care and commitment demonstrated by all of the wonderful people across Gowrie NSW. The experiences of the last 12 months have challenged us all in varying ways with the threat of COVID-19 and the effects this continues to have across our communities. We are incredibly grateful to all our staff who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic. With most of our programs deemed essential services, they therefore remained open throughout the period. This brought about many operational challenges; however, we are proud that our strong focus on safety and core values guided our work.

The connection and support for continuity with children and families were also important during this time. Changing restrictions, lockdowns, centre closures and people needing to self-isolate caused great disruption to our programs. Our AMEP program was closed across many sites for the most part of the year. Despite this, we saw many ways in which staff strengthened their relationships with children and innovatively engaged through on-line meetings, cards, letters and virtual pizza parties to nurture the sense of community.

Whilst it was a challenging year, we are proud of the work in progressing key initiatives on our strategic plan, underpinned by our people, our striving for excellence, strong connection to community and sustainability. Whilst some initiatives were paused, others forged ahead.

The launch of our second Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) was one of those that went ahead. Our RAP signifies our commitment to Australia's First Nations Peoples. We thank the Gowrie NSW Aboriginal Reference Committee for their continued guidance and the internal working group that is focused on how we authentically breathe life into the plan and embed the deliverables in our everyday work.

This year, we continued to recognise that our staff are the cornerstone of the organisation and as such we were excited to launch our first employee led Advisory Committee, Safety Committee & Wellbeing Working group. Our focus on all staff having a say and participating in key initiatives has been well received with high engagement scores across the organisation and driving a culture of democracy. Growth in our services was also a key highlight, with the purchase of a historic landmark property in Orange - Newstead.

The vision for this service is to create a demonstration centre and precinct for early childhood education in the Central West. The refurbishment of this rare gem is well underway, with expected completion in early April 2022.

We also welcomed Shirley Rd Preschool in Crows Nest to the Gowrie community. This is the first dedicated preschool operated by Gowrie NSW, and we were delighted to get to know the staff team and families, with the centre well-entrenched in the local area, as it has operated for over 40 years.

In addition, we have opened a new OSHC service on the grounds of Orange East Public School. This strengthens our commitment to this area and with Newstead opening in the new year will see a continuum of early and middle childhood services across the region.

We thank the members of our external Pedagogical Advisory Group for their continued guidance and contemporary thinking. This group offers insight and provocation to support an authentic strive for excellence in pedagogical practice.

We acknowledge the critical work of our management team this year. This team has worked tirelessly throughout – always keeping children, families and our staff at the centre of all decisions.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank our voluntary Board of Directors. Your dedication to our social purpose was highlighted throughout 2021.

Finally, to our staff – you make the difference every day. Your unwavering commitment to children and families has shone through this year in so many ways and we are very proud of the professionalism showed by all teams in unprecedented times. The collective work happening across the organisation creates a very bright future.

## THANK YOU to our volunteer board members



**Sean Parker,  
Chairperson**



**Rodney Timm,  
Vice Chairperson**



**Aaron Canning,  
Non-Executive Director**



**Avryl Lattin  
Board Member**



**Johan Palsson  
Board Member**



## STAFF THANK YOU

Gowrie NSW teams remained resilient and steadfast during another year of uncertainty, and we are eternally grateful for their service and commitment. Considered an essential service, we remained open to support the needs of our children and families, and our educators and support staff were agile and responsive to the changing regulations from NSW Health.

While this unprecedented level of disruption and uncertainty tested teams, we saw a rise of the human spirit, with children always front of mind.

We can never underestimate the impact 2021 has had on our staff, families and children. Memories were created, which will resonate for a very long time. We are immensely proud of our network of educators and support staff, and we are grateful for their dedication to helping us fulfil our strategic intent of Greater Reach with Greater Impact.

## 2021 AT A GLANCE

### New centres

While 2021 presented some challenges for the sector, we continued with our strategic plan of Greater Reach with Greater Impact with the opening of two new centres – Shirley Road Preschool (our first dedicated preschool service) and Orange East Outside School Hours Care. We also started a major renovation at Newstead, Orange, due to open in early 2022.

### Innovate RAP launch

The launch of our second Innovate RAP strengthens our vision for reconciliation and our commitment to an Australia that respects and celebrates Australia's First Nations Peoples.

### Leadership program (OSHC and EEC)

A significant focus of 2021 was people accessing professional development across the sector. Our Education Hub did a wonderful job supporting Gowrie educators and external teams.

### Partnerships

As we reflect on the third year of our five-year strategic plan, it is clear how our strategic initiatives and organisational values have allowed us to develop, align and strengthen our partnerships with our external stakeholders. It is with these partnerships we deliver on our commitment of 'Greater Reach with Greater Impact'.

### Capability building and professional learning during COVID

During 2021 we were able to successfully deliver...



1858  
CLIENTS

Total number of external educators who attended sessions



504  
EDUCATORS

Total number of Gowrie NSW Educators who attended professional development and training in 2021



101  
WEBINARS

Total number of webinars facilitated across the year



1200  
HOURS

Total hours of training provided



485  
COURSES

Total number of services that have accessed Education Hub courses





## A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR...

### Pedagogical Advisory Committee

- Wendy Shepherd
- Janet Robertson
- Elena Marouchos
- Katherine Bussey
- Kirsty Liljegren
- Leonie Arthur

### Reconciliation Action Plan Reference Committee

- Michelle Hamilton
- Fran Grant
- Judith McKay-Tempest

### External partners

- KU Children's Services
- TAFE NSW
- Big Fat Smile
- Include Me





# PEOPLE AND PLACE

Our Gowrie teams continue to exemplify our values and spirit of the organisation as we strive for excellence in all that we do. This year was another difficult 12 months due to COVID, where services remained open, however operated under complex restrictions and changing circumstances. The Gowrie NSW staff are to be commended for their work and efforts throughout this period – for unwavering commitment to children and families and the care and connection that they nurture.

We acknowledge just how tough this year has been and are very grateful to all of our staff who contributed to building the Gowrie community. We recognise that as the world continued to change, our teams had to adapt, sometimes on a daily basis.

To thank our teams, all staff were gifted with wellbeing days to ensure they could take some time off to look after themselves. Additional support was also offered, focusing on mental health, including webinars, lunch box talks and even a step challenge. The staff-led wellbeing committee has also seeded exciting initiatives to come in 2022.

## Professional Development Opportunities

Our teams were kept engaged with a number of professional development opportunities, making the most of lower attendances and closures. As an organisation, we also invested in a range of high-quality professional learning opportunities for our staff across all programs to ensure we continue to build capacity of our workforce and their funds of knowledge.

### These included:

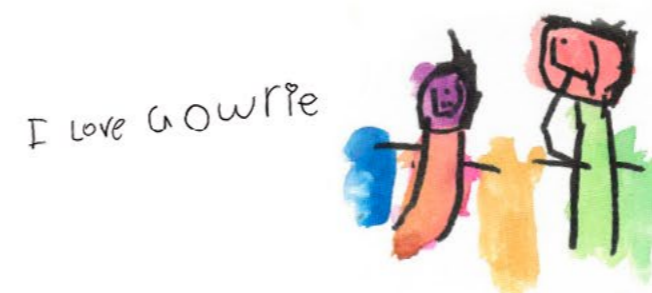
- The RIE Foundations Theory and Observation course
- Learning Circle Integrating Technology into Children's Programs
- A range of workshops with Hilltop Children's Centre in Seattle USA

Our centre and program leaders participated in an external leadership series with professional coaching, designed to grow their on-going capability and skills in a changing environment. This will be extended to our developing leaders in the new year.

It was great to welcome some people into new roles in the organisation, including our new WHS Manager, amplifying our focus on safety. Centre Administrators have also been introduced to reduce the burden on our Centre Managers, so they can continue building on relationships with families and supporting the curriculum at the service.

A renewed focus on the experience of our staff as they commence their journey at Gowrie has resulted in a re-design of our on-boarding and induction process. The organisation's values of authenticity, care, inclusion, integrity and purpose are evident in our approach to induction and on-boarding and central to who we are.

Our people are valued and their sense of connection to the organisation is of prime importance to enable them to thrive in their work.





# OUR VALUES



## CARING

Respect and care for children, our people and the communities we support are fundamental to our culture.



## PURPOSEFUL

A proud surplus-for-purpose organisation, we are committed to achieving the highest quality outcomes, innovation and research.



## INCLUSIVE

Through diversity, trust and collaboration we find our strength and can fulfil our vision.



## INTEGRITY

We are guided by high ethical standards and are transparent in everything we do.



## AUTHENTIC

We are genuine and accountable; we do what we say we do.

Our growing culture of democracy and participation at Gowrie NSW saw a number of staff-led committees formed to ensure our people 'have their say' and contribute to a place where people get involved in big and little initiatives that make a difference to programs and community. These included the establishment of:



- Reconciliation Action Plan – Working Group**  
 This dedicated group of staff across the organisation led the reconciliation journey work at Gowrie and represent our strong commitment to Australia's First Nations Peoples. This group was responsible for the endorsement of our second Innovate RAP and continuously works to ensure our focus and achievement on deliverables.



- Gowrie NSW Advisory Committee**  
 A formal committee with representation of staff across all programs in the organisation comes together to provide voice and advice to the leadership team on key issues and initiatives. This group also explores innovative 'seed' ideas.
- Gowrie NSW Wellbeing Committee**  
 This committee plans, promotes and implements a range of wellness initiatives for employees to improve their mental and physical health.
- Gowrie NSW Safety Committee**  
 Led by our newly introduced role – Work Health & Safety Manager – and reflective of Gowrie NSW's ongoing commitment to safety, a consultative forum of staff members reviews preventative safety matters to ensure they can be effectively addressed by the people who have the most experience and knowledge about their place and their people.



## Newstead Orange - A place for children and childhood

*“Newstead will be a place to gather, connect and build relationships.”*

Newstead Early Education and Care Centre in Orange is due to open in early 2022.

The beautiful historic building and grounds align perfectly with our pedagogical philosophy and vision for early childhood.

Newstead will be a place to honour children and childhood. It will be a space for children to enjoy their early years in established gardens and a park like environment, within walking distance of the town centre and Cook Park Botanical Gardens. Newstead provides us with the opportunity to breathe life into our philosophical belief that children are active participants in society and are seen and heard in the community.

The children, families and educators of Gowrie NSW Newstead will become an integral part of the vibrant Orange community.





## EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING PRECINCT

Gowrie NSW's footprint is growing solidly in the Central West region, with Early Education, Care and preschools in Mudgee, Lithgow and Dubbo, as well as Outside School Hours Care in Bathurst, Orange and Kelso. We have successfully onboarded a new OSHC program at the Orange East Public School, which sits within our Central West geographic footprint. A new role of Regional OSHC Coordinator was created in the Central West region to further support the growth and continued quality education and care in our regional programs.

We are working hard to ensure these services are deeply embedded in the community. We are committing resources to establish an early childhood precinct in the Central West. This will focus on partnerships with universities and TAFE as well as ongoing professional development for the sector in this region. We will also embark on research and practitioner inquiry to evidence our work.





# EQUITY AND INCLUSION



Gowrie NSW recognises the right of every child to participate meaningfully in all aspects of community life. We value human diversity and view each child as unique.

## Programs making a difference:

### Inclusion Agency

Gowrie NSW is a proud partner with KU Children's Services and Big Fat Smile - Include Me in delivering the NSW/ACT Inclusion Agency as part of the Inclusion Support Program. The program aims to build the capacity and capability of educators to address participation barriers for all children through implementing quality inclusive practices.

Gowrie NSW Inclusion Agency hubs have achieved a 100% contact rate for all 400 services across the region with hubs in regional and rural NSW: Bathurst, Dubbo, Port Macquarie and Armidale. This means every single service in these areas has received a face-to-face or virtual visit. COVID has meant our Inclusion Professionals for the second year running have had to work very differently and think out of the box to deliver the program and support positive outcomes for children.

As a result, our staff have provided 915 hours of online support and 347 hours of face-to-face visits. This level of engagement has ensured that any barriers for children with additional needs were addressed and enabled children's full participation in early learning experiences.



### The Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Inclusion Hub

As part of the Inclusion Agency, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Inclusion Hub works closely with Inclusion Hubs across the state.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Manager Michelle Hamilton, a Wiradjuri woman, directly mentors, supports and guides NSW/ACT Inclusion Professionals in their work to include Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander perspectives and to ensure long day care services across NSW are culturally aware and inclusive. This year Michelle has worked closely with Inclusion Professional teams to build their capacity and their confidence in connecting with local services in ways they can meaningfully engage local community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. We have 6052 children from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background enrolled in 2179 ECEC services across NSW. This is a 41% increase on the prior year.



### The Specialist Equipment Library (SEL)

The SEL provides resources to eligible ECCCs to enable the participation of all children. The library provides specialised items to services across NSW for children who may require unique pieces of equipment to enable their participation in the program. The library catalogues over 600 individual pieces that can be on loan at any given time for the purposes of supporting children's inclusion in preschool programs.

Inclusion Professionals, as part of the NSW/ACT Inclusion Agency, support teachers and Centre Directors to work with individual families and therapists to identify what specialist equipment may be best suited to the child's needs and the environment. The COVID environment has resulted in additional complexity in relating to cleaning, couriers and lending. We were so proud to see our staff who support this program work through these issues and see the full positive impact this service makes in the lives of young children and their families.

*"At pick-up time, one of the dads was looking through the day-book and found a photo of his child, who is using a standing frame, engaging in an activity with peers. With a tear in his eye, he told the Centre Director that he was so happy seeing his son play with friends, something he did not think his son would experience. He expressed gratitude and said it would not have happened without the centre taking the time to source specialised equipment for his son."*

## TESTIMONIALS

*"Our IPs are there to support us when no one else is there. Our IP helps me to reflect on practice, my personal bias and ensure that I am being respectful to all. From this reflection my practices continue to grow and develop."*

– Catherine, Regan Park

*"Through the development of a 'whole of service' strategic Inclusion Plan, we learn more about and understand the needs of others, which informs our practice and ensures as a service we are all on the one page. This ensures better outcomes for ALL children."*

– Justine, Regan Park

*"IPs know who we are and offer opportunity for real discussion about the issues in our community. They help us change the little things to make our day easier."*

– Peppercorn ELS, Dubbo

*"We would be lost at Peppercorn if we did not have inclusion support."*

– Peppercorn Educators





## AMEP

The Australian Government's Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP) is a free education service to help eligible migrants and humanitarian visa holders learn and improve their English language skills, assist with settlement into Australia and increase employment opportunities. Gowrie NSW is proud to work in partnership with TAFE NSW to deliver the early learning component for families – which includes providing services at 15 TAFE NSW sites as well supporting the enrolment of children in a long day care or preschool setting.

### A celebration of diversity

5000  
CHILDREN

78  
COUNTRIES

64  
LANGUAGES

In total, Gowrie NSW successfully placed (enrolled) approximately 5000 children across the state in an Early Learning setting, LDC or PS. The children enrolled were from 78 different countries, speaking 64 different languages.

#### 66 WHAT DOES INCLUSION MEAN TO YOU?

*"It means being nice, and inviting people to my house."*

– Amity, Aged 5



#### 66 WHAT DOES INCLUSION MEAN TO YOU?

*"Inclusion means letting them help, letting them play with us, being kind and being helpful."*

– Harry, Aged 5

Our staff have done an amazing job in celebrating the diversity of children and families in this program. Many of our staff, reflective of the community, speak the children's home languages and are able to support children's language development. As an organisation we have a strong commitment to equity and inclusion and ensure the families in our AMEP program are supported beyond the service and in the community.

Whilst this year has been highly disrupted with closures, lock downs and uncertainty, there are many examples where our staff have gone above and beyond to stay connected throughout. This has included sharing in cultural celebrations via Zoom, extra resources to help learning in the home and phone calls of support.

Whilst closures of the programs occurred, we engaged staff in frequent catch ups and professional learning to build their knowledge and capacity. One such example included working with external consultants to deliver Trauma Informed Practice sessions to develop a greater understanding of the impact of interpersonal trauma on behaviour.

#### 66 WHAT DOES INCLUSION MEAN TO YOU?

*"Inclusion means adapting so no one misses out."*

– Amy, Aged 5

## Providing opportunities for individuals and families

Equity and inclusion historically underpin our philosophical approach at Gowrie. Our actions in practice through the AMEP program complement our value of inclusion by encouraging and providing opportunities for individuals and families to reach their potential.

It was so wonderful to see the Armidale Early Learning & Care truly live these values. Su Pancaldi, Early Learning Care Coordinator assisted Hiyam Ahmed, one of the lovely parents studying in the AMEP program, to also complete a Certificate III in Children's Services. Hiyam not only successfully completed her certificate, she was also employed by Gowrie NSW as an educator and is a trusted member for families of the Yazidi community.





# SECOND INNOVATE RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

In August 2021, Gowrie NSW launched its second Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), strengthening the organisation's vision for reconciliation and its commitment to an Australia that respects and celebrates Australia's First Nations Peoples to create an equitable and just society.



This continues our commitment to bringing about positive social change and authentically supporting children to lead this change. We recognise that to achieve this vision, we need to acknowledge past injustices to move forward together.

Since our first Innovate RAP, we have worked hard to support reconciliation and, importantly, how this work is reflected in our educational programs with children. We understand the critical role we play in providing opportunities for our youngest citizens to develop a rich understanding of Australia's First Nations Peoples' perspectives, cultures and knowledge.

To celebrate the launch of our second Innovate RAP, we hosted a virtual event, bringing together educators, children, elders and members of the support teams from across the organisation. The virtual launch was celebrated on Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Children's Day, with this year's theme 'Proud in Culture, Strong in Spirit'.



Artwork by Michelle Hamilton for Gowrie NSW's Innovate RAP 2021



# PEDAGOGY AND EXCELLENCE



A commitment to excellence and demonstration is infused in Gowrie NSW's heritage. Our promise to children and families continues to be of exceptional quality every day, including strong recognition of children's rights of citizenship. Pedagogy at Gowrie NSW is shaped by our Program Foundations, valuing the wonderment of childhood and honouring children as skilful, competent meaning makers.

To ensure practice continues to be authentic and sustainable, we know that teachers and educators must be supported in their own professional growth. The foundations of empowerment, relationships and inquiry shaped our approach to professional learning this year.

We were excited to work with a range of consultants and international experts, who contributed to the professional learning program offered to the early and middle childhood sector through the Gowrie NSW Education Hub. The program was diverse, offering a rich variety of knowledge, expertise, perspective and insight to support the sector workforce and development of educators, teachers and leaders.

## With special thanks to

- Julia Manning-Morton (UK)
- Elena Marouchos (NZ)
- Beth McGregor (AUS)
- Hilltop Institute (USA)
- Catharine Hydon (AUS)
- Naomi Abbott (AUS)
- Alana Evans (AUS)
- Daniela Falecki (AUS)
- Robin Christie (NZ)
- Jodie Dickinson (AUS)



## Pedagogy and Excellence in Early Education and Care

Building on the previous year's work, a selection of learning circles and practitioner inquiry groups continued, deepening understandings and challenging assumptions. By creating opportunities for educators, teachers and teams to come together to build knowledge and network together, our teams have reimagined their pedagogical practice, drawing inspiration from their learnings to inform future improved practice.

Our preschool teams integrated a range of new technologies into children's programs, enabled by NSW Department of Education Start Strong funding. Increased access to BeeBots, Code a Pillars and Prowise technology boards for preschool children resulted in additional opportunities for children to engage in literacy and numeracy, negotiating and cooperation, planning and problem solving, experimenting and questioning and loads of peer collaboration.

Across the early education centres, educative teams focused intensely on children's experiences during mealtimes. Educators reconstructed intimate dining spaces, which promoted a sense of connection and relationship, valuing mealtimes as time to be together. Mealtimes cater for the capacity of all children to self-select, serve, pour and connect with one another in a pleasurable dining experience, promoting our foundation of empowerment for all children, regardless of their age.





## A Deep Respect for Children

Our infant educators were immersed in a full year of intense mentorship, training and in residence with critical friend and expert Elena Marouchos RIE (Resources for Infant Educators Associate and Teacher from Auckland, New Zealand). This program has ignited critical reflection amongst our infant teams regarding daily practices with our youngest children.

The exceptional infant pedagogy which evolved as a result at Gowrie NSW Discovery House was recognised and received an 'exceeding' rating. In our commitment to widely share Gowrie NSW's expertise, we embarked on a demonstration and inquiry visit for the sector before the second wave of lockdown restrictions prohibited this from going ahead.

Our free 'educator stories series' through the Gowrie NSW Education Hub provided an additional platform for our educators to share specialised knowledge of infant pedagogy with colleagues across the sector. This popular series highlighted the importance of intentional and careful planning in infant pedagogy and practices. It also highlighted the importance of team consistency in caregiving practices, thinking critically together to ensure deep respect for children's daily rhythms, recognising children's subtle cues and cementing our foundation of respectful relationships.



*"Infancy is a vulnerable stage of development; therefore, it's not enough that babies receive good care, the care must be excellent."*

– Magda Gerber founder of RIE (USA) known for advocating for the importance of understanding infants and interacting respectfully with them from birth.

*"I became aware of the benefits of stopping and slowing down to be in the moment with the infants in our care, providing better moments of connection during nappy change and feeding. These moments are key care-giving moments. They help build a relationship and fill the child's emotional cup. Infants have new found confidence to express their wants and needs, with educators sensitively responsive to their cues."*

– Taylor Denton, Dubbo

*"The experience with Elena Marouchos has allowed me to find a deeper level of awareness... an awareness of possibilities and what care for infants could look like in a group setting. Giving competency back to the infant and allowing them to unfold naturally respects the infant."*

*The team at Gowrie Mayfield will continue to journey together to reflect on our practices. Together we hope to all gain a deeper level of understanding of respectful infant care and embed that within in our service, as it is something that all children deserve."*

– Emma Smith, Mayfield



## Toddler Learning Circle

After two successful workshop series on The Gowrie NSW Education Hub 'Leading best practice with two year olds', with Julia Manning-Morton, Early Years consultant, researcher and writer from the UK, a Toddler Learning Circle was set up to offer a dedicated time for Gowrie educators to engage in dialogue with colleagues, deeply reflect on practice in a year-long project to guide thinking and a change process.

Arising from our theoretical discussions on attachment theory, group members identified that they had developed a greater empathy and understanding of children's experience. Key themes of the work included pausing before taking action, stepping back and thinking about what is going on for the child.

Whilst building a depth of knowledge and expertise regarding this unique time of life for children, we also saw growth in educator confidence, leadership skills and professional identity, all of which have a positive outcome for teaching practice.

*"I have noticed that I am pausing and asking myself questions with the intention of trying to understand why a toddler may be reacting/responding in a particular way. I feel that I am becoming more attuned to the emotional needs of toddlers."*

– Bronwyn Perryman, Teacher, Erskineville

*"Being part of Julia's sessions have made me look at things differently and think outside the box about how children are thinking and learning. I ask myself now, 'Maybe this is what they are thinking?' and I am open to trying something new in my teaching approach. I have noticed a difference in how I interact with the children – I am now looking and considering, 'What's behind their thoughts?' and asking: 'What are they thinking and why?'"*

– Deb Pardy, Educator, Mudgee



## Practitioner Inquiry Project

This year we entered into our second cycle of Practitioner Inquiry Project (PIP) Shaping spaces: Speaking of the possibilities for pedagogy, play and relationships, facilitated by critical friends Janet Robertson and Wendy Shepherd. We concentrated on three curriculum areas: mark making, puzzling spaces and outdoor playground pedagogy.

### MARIE'S STORY

*"At Malabar this year we considered the role of the environment in fostering relationships by critiquing the visual calmness of spaces and focusing on environments where children were spending extended periods of time.*

*As teachers, we know the physical environment impacts the way children behave, engage and learn. The project has given me, and undoubtedly all the other practitioners and teachers, a space for deeper thinking on the importance of the environment. When we consider the way a room is set up, the ease of movement from one corner to the other and how welcoming a space feels, these can have a significant impact on children's engagement and learning. Children were more inquisitive, motivated, enthusiastic and were active co-contributors on this PIP journey.*

*Slowly but surely, we created a space that reflected our purpose of creating a 'second-home' for children, a place of sharing, a place of meeting and connection, which encouraged explorations and social interactions."*

**– Marie Deborah Francois, Malabar**



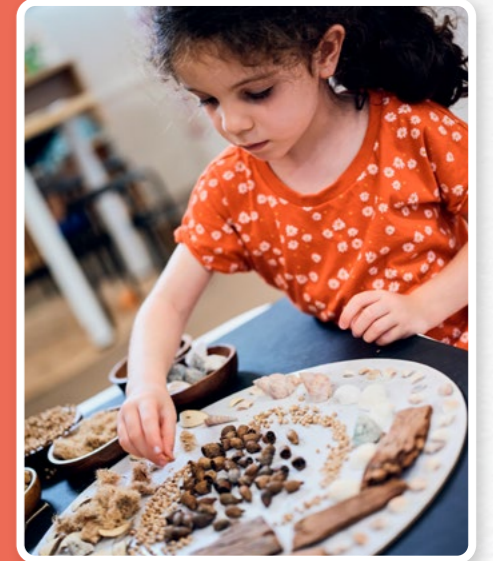
### MARIO'S STORY

*"When children mark make through play, the focus is on the process rather than the end product or attainment. It allows children to be self-motivated, engaged and free from the fear of making mistakes."* (Howard, 2002)

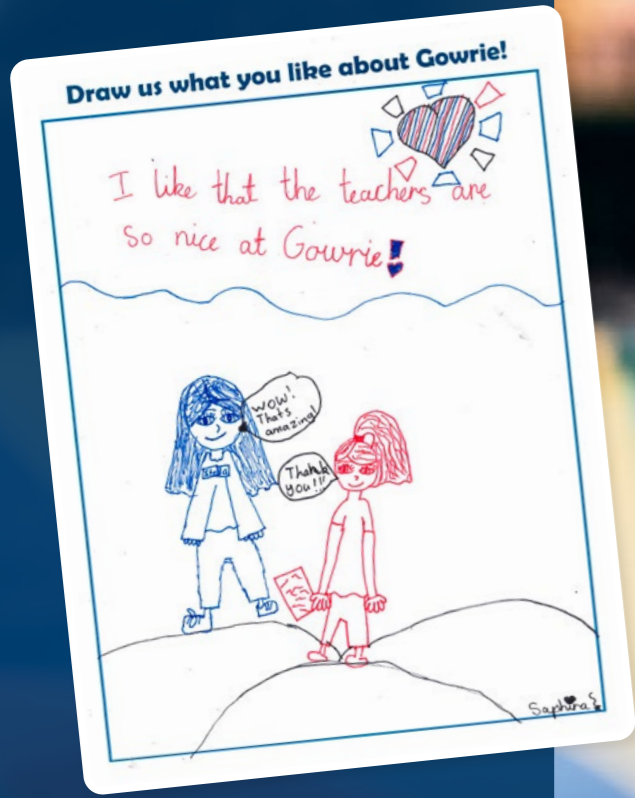
*Our Erskineville team took on a process of change... "When taking on mark making as part of the PIP, my understanding of mark making was associated with painting, drawing, colouring, craft and art.*

*Collaborating with children, we developed a mark making space, placed in front of a window for natural light and providing provocations from nature. When the new space was created, with refined drawing materials, children's attention to mark making changed and we could see sophisticated artistic patterns emerge. Children took inspiration from story books and put their representational thinking on paper. Drawings became detailed and conversations evolved about paper, usage and recycling."*

**– Mario, Erskineville**







*"A fantastic team of educators who facilitate a program that is child focused, safe and a lot of fun. Sustainable practices are a high priority, strong connections to community are developed and maintained and I particularly love the relationships between children and families."*

– Sharon Connors-Woodley

*"Gowrie OSHC Erskineville staff are super friendly and supportive. They have created a great educational and entertaining program, developing a new schedule every week with several activities to choose from on a daily basis (e.g., art, cooking, games, sport etc.). The team has provided amazing support during the COVID lockdown and a safe place for our kid to have a bit of a normal life. Our little one is so excited to go to Gowrie OSHC Erskineville every day."*

– Vanessa S

*"Very caring staff who go above and beyond for each child every day."*

– Mia

*"The Gowrie Team at Ryde are the kindest and most thoughtful group of carers that look after our children before and after school. Vanessa and her team take such good care of the children and have a fantastic range of activities to keep the children busy. We are very fortunate to have Gowrie Ryde for working parents. Their service is always professional and reliable."*

– Susan T

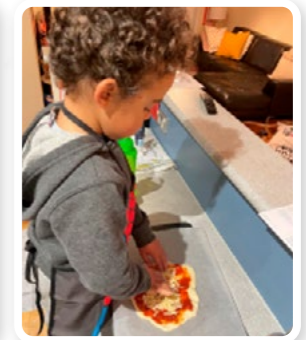
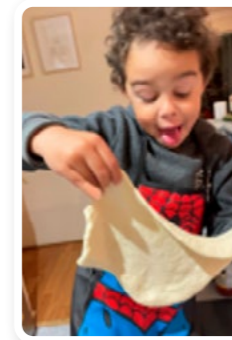
## EXCELLENCE IN OSHC

Our programs were faced with their greatest challenge to date, a second wave of COVID-19 and a second lockdown, this time harder and longer. We knew that for families and children the lockdown would present great emotional, financial and personal challenges.

Our OSHC teams thought deeply about what program excellence could look like throughout this time of adversity, and they developed a range of activities to enhance connection including the children cooking for the homeless, Zoom parties and family pizza parties.

While the pandemic delivered unimaginable challenges, we are proud of the way we were able to innovate to create connection.

Throughout 2021, opportunities were provided to educators in our OSHC programs to join different working groups that would directly impact them and the work they do. Opportunities were also given to Program Managers to lead these working groups, train and mentor peers and participate in organisational decisions. Extensive professional development was undertaken over the course of the year, driven by feedback and requests from the OSHC teams themselves.



## Conversations about Playwork

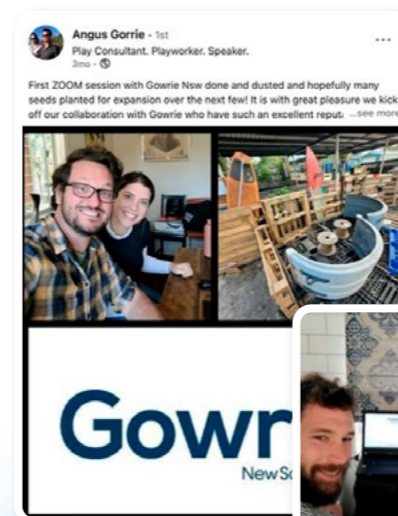
During 2021, educators working within Gowrie NSW OSHC Programs have participated in a series of three online 'Conversations about Playwork' with experienced Playworker Angus Gorrie and the team from The Outsiders Play Advocates (Brisbane, Australia). Through this partnership, Gowrie educators were provided with knowledge of the historical and philosophical foundations of Playwork in which to consider questions about their role as facilitators, the authenticity of loose parts and the way that children's strengths and capacities are highlighted through uninterrupted play. This valuable work marked the beginning of an ongoing long-term project within the OSHC environment at Gowrie NSW where in 2021, educators were mentored by Angus Gorrie and the Outsiders Play Advocates to translate their learning into practice.

*I Like playing on the red mat with my friends because they are nice and epic. -wylie 7RS8 YRS old*

## Educational Leader Reflection Circles

Fortnightly reflection circles have provided time for Educational Leaders from Gowrie NSW OSHC Programs to reflect with their colleagues about how the Program Foundations of practitioner inquiry, play-based teaching, respectful relationships and empowerment are embedded in a middle childhood care and learning environment.

A benefit of the reflection circles is the learning that happens through connection, collaboration and the sharing of stories about the day-to-day relationships with children and families. Through bringing questions and exploring these, practices are both strengthened and closely aligned with the vision and values of the organisation.





# FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

We thank the families of Gowrie NSW for your ongoing support throughout the year. We strive to work in partnership to build a sense of community at each one of our services. This partnership was even more important due to the changing landscape, which added complexity to operations such as simple routines like drop off and pick up, which became challenging. We thank every one of our families for your patience and kindness across the course of the year.



## Here's what some of our families have said:

*"Being aware how little things impact our kids' mental health is really important. They rearrange the rooms and their routines sometimes if they need to when they notice something is disruptive to the kids. Recently they moved the eating area, because it was near the front door. When kids and parents come and go, the kids seeing the parents or their friends leave can be emotion for the kids. So, they moved the lunch area and it made a big difference to their daily routine."*

*"What she's learnt at Gowrie is like nothing she could've experienced here at home. What they're doing is great, incorporating a multicultural program is fantastic."*

*"I think the staff are really intelligent, caring and intuitive. I can sit down and I can talk with any of them about my son and they all have these observations and insights they can share with me. My son has a speech delay, so for me, it's really important to be talking to his educators about his day."*

*"We felt the values matched ours and they provided high quality I guess philosophies, teachings, the pedagogy, it's professional; it's not just babysitting. They set their values around relationships and wellbeing and forming strong connections and I think for me that's really important."*

*"The system they have of having a lead educator for each child is really good. Everyone assists, but there is one main person your child makes a connection with who puts them down for their sleep and does all that stuff and they do form a really nice bond with that person. I think she really thrives on that. She goes to another daycare where they don't do that and you can see a difference."*

*"Her carer right now is brilliant; she's so caring and sweet with my child. They focus not just on the care but also the education, really helping the kids to explore their environment and what's going on around them. It's really amazing. You know, I think she's just being taken care of in a way that I couldn't, because I'm just not qualified."*

Reflecting on a year that required resilience, adaptability, perseverance and commitment, we found that connectedness was a contributing thread to our success. Deep connection with children and their families, with classroom and in-centre colleagues, and a strong connection to Gowrie's vision and values were the enabling factors to allow us to continue to grow our people and shift our practice through such a complex landscape.

As an identified essential service, early childhood education and care centres needed to be available to support the broader community at a time of distinct need and our in-centre teams really stepped up to the challenge, strengthening their commitment to the children and families, working in ways that were caring, purposeful and authentic.



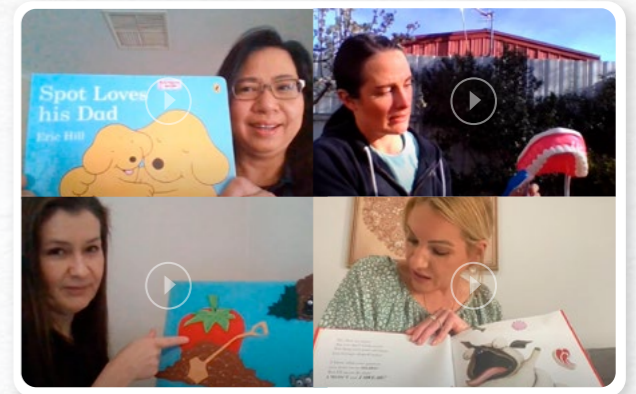


## AMEP

Nurturing strong relationships with families is of key importance in our AMEP Early Learning Centres. The Padstow ELC team went above and beyond to continue these strong connections whilst the environment changed with lockdowns and extended closures. Knowing they would not be able to connect face-to-face, the team Cindy and Annette led developed several initiatives including a series of YouTube videos, including reading stories, singing songs, play dough experiences and science experiments.

*"We started the videos because it was critical that children, families and educators were still able to have connection and continue with their valued relationships," Cindy says.*

*"I understood how isolating and difficult it was to be at home with children, balance the study and home life and wanted to share exciting ways families could engage and interact with their children," says Cindy. This valuable piece of work showcased a strong alignment with our team and our values of authenticity, caring and inclusion. At Gowrie NSW, we are proud to delight our families each and every day with genuine connection, even when not being able to be together.*



## OSHC

The children in our Ryde OSHC program knew hygiene was incredibly important as a way of keeping safe, particularly during the pandemic. Some active conversations about how this occurs in a hospital environment led children to think more broadly about how health workers and front line staff must be feeling during such a stressful period.

Growing their sense of citizenship, the children began to write letters to the doctors and nurses at the Prince of Wales Hospital, expressing their gratitude for all they were doing. Letters were based on a template to ensure all children could send through their wishes.

The staff at Prince of Wales were thrilled to receive the messages from the OSHC children. The hospital decorated their conference room that is shared by two wards so all of the nurses, doctors and allied health staff could see the beautiful pictures daily when they had their hand-over and multidisciplinary meetings. The program also received a letter of gratitude and acknowledgment from the General Manager of Prince of Wales Sydney Hospital.



### #kindnessinaction

**Letters to doctors and nurses displayed at the Prince of Wales Hospital conference room.**



## Start Strong Pathways EEC and ELC

NSW Department of Education Start Strong funding has enabled Gowrie NSW to work alongside families to promote the importance of the early years and home learning.

To raise awareness of this critical time in life, we designed and facilitated a number of parent workshops and webinars featuring a range of family and child psychologists. We also developed a take home pack of early learning resources to help each family engage in learning with their child. These resources supported families to build their confidence and communication with their children, acknowledging families are the 'first teachers'.



# FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

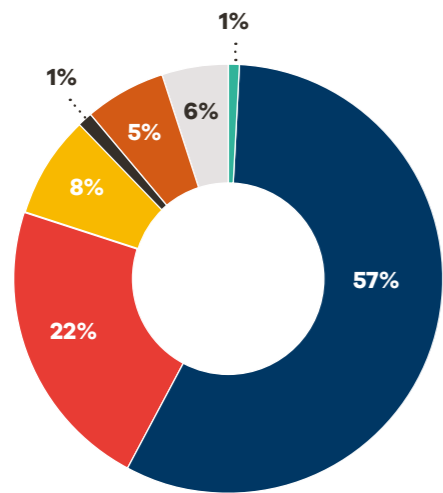
Gowrie NSW successfully navigated out of the first COVID-19 lockdown, with average occupancy in June 2021 in the Long Day Care centres being 9% up on the previous year.

The Out of School Hours business has been challenged in attendances, with many families continuing to work from home, leading to a decrease in occupancy of 4% as compared to the previous year.

The AMEP program took a while to return to pre COVID-19 enrolments, with revenues in the first six months being \$2,234,005 (53%) behind that of the previous year. JobKeeper income during this period enabled Gowrie NSW to support the Early Learning Centres as they gradually increased attendances. Revenues picked up in the second half of the year, finalising at \$6,135,321, ahead of the previous year by \$641,464.

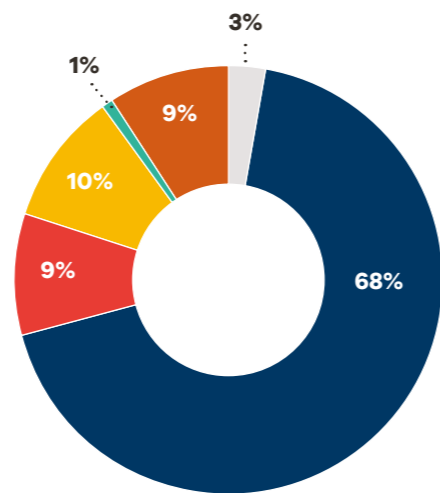
Careful financial management in this challenging year ensured the ongoing investment in our staff and their ongoing learning. The surplus for the year was \$1,869,086 as compared to \$470,299 in the previous year, benefiting from a significant investment portfolio return of \$1,481,266. This surplus will be reinvested in our services in the coming years.

Gowrie NSW is committed to excellence and strives to make a lasting impact on children's lives. With net assets of \$20.6m it is well positioned for future growth.



**Our sources of funding**

- Early Education and Care plus Outside School Hours Care programs
- Adult Migrant English Program
- Government support - COVID-19
- Professional learning and consulting services
- Inclusion Agency Program
- Investment Portfolio Returns
- Other Income



**How we spent our funds**

- Salaries and employee benefits
- Administration expenses
- Fee for service expenses
- Finance costs
- Depreciation and amortisation
- Occupancy costs







**Gowrie Annual Report 2021**