



Annual Report

2021-2022



Our Vision

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

Our Purpose

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

*'Community Driven,
Inclusive Learning'*



Our Board Members

Dr Victoria Whittington (Chair)

Ms Lynne Rutherford (CEO)

Dr Yasmin Harman-Smith (Deputy Chair)

Mr David Muller (Financial Advisor)

Ms Nanette Allen

Dr Brigid Mahoney

Ms Alicia Pike

Ms Debbie Smith

Ms Alycia Mead

Contents



Chairperson Report	4
Chief Executive Officer Report	6
Working at Gowrie SA	8
Finance Report	9
Our accomplishments	10
Supporting educators	12
Supporting communities	15
Contributing to children's life outcomes	18
Reconciliation	20
Working sustainably	23

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

Chairperson Report



I am pleased to report that Gowrie SA programs continue to adapt and respond to the changing operating environment to provide the excellent services that children, their families and the early childhood and care sector expect from us.

Gowrie SA began the year with the renewed energy and focus that comes with implementing a new strategic plan with an exciting number of initiatives aimed at achieving our goals across four strategic priorities: Reputation, Sustainability, People and Connection.

An ambitious five-year strategic plan is not without its risks and the Board is overseeing its implementation by increasing its focus on risk oversight and management to support effective decision making. Refinements to the way in which reports are presented to the Board has also enhanced its strategic focus and ability to monitor the organisation's performance against key performance indicators.

Central to our efforts is continual engagement with government departments and policy-makers to advocate for the quality of education to which our children have a right. It is widely accepted that the first 1000 days of a child's life are crucial to their development.

Gowrie SA has extensive knowledge of, and experience in, offering innovative evidence-based programs to children, parents and caregivers, and in supporting the professional development of educators across the sector. We will continue to exemplify and advocate for early education and care to which all children are entitled and look forward to seeing strong investment in the sector.

Gowrie Australia joined the peak advocacy group Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA) to ensure that our experience, expertise and knowledge contributes to discussions and influence at national level early years policy development. Our membership of ELACCA also enables Gowrie SA to compare its performance to that of other large providers across the country through the availability of benchmarking data. These data provide an additional tool to assess our performance, and support our commitment to continuous improvement.

We continue to lead the sector with our reconciliation work. The Board proudly supported the virtual launch of Gowrie SA's second Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), its fourth RAP overall. Although we could not all be together to celebrate this important milestone, we were treated to an inspiring short film that beautifully captured the

organisation's reconciliation journey. I want to congratulate Gowrie SA's RAP Working Group for their continued commitment to, and championing of, reconciliation both within the organisation and across the sector.

The risk focus for the Board was heightened by the pandemic and the need for Gowrie SA to be prepared when the state borders reopened in November 2021. The phase of 'living with COVID' presented new challenges for the organisation. The Board worked closely with the CEO to put in place measures that balanced Gowrie SA's usual activities with the safety of our community. The Board considered whether to give a directed mandate to vaccinate staff, taking into account the many complexities this raised, however SA Health and the state government (through the Department for Education) made this decision, one which aligned with the SA borders reopening. We have sought regular staff feedback about COVID vaccinations and boosters, and did so again following the sudden removal of the state government's emergency mandate, acutely aware that the approach of the colder months could lead to higher rates of both transmission and illness. We recognise that choice is important to everyone. Our decisions have been made to balance staff preferences, including the needs of health compromised children and educators, with ongoing health measures including fresh air ventilation, mask wearing and physical distancing where possible. Staff have been provided with additional meal spaces and those whose role can be performed from home have that option. We also sought legal advice to ensure we are doing all we can to provide a safe and comfortable education and working environment for everyone.

A change in government at both federal and state level now presents opportunities to focus on improved outcomes for South Australian children through implementation of policies that support early education and care that is accessible to all children.



Our core programs remain relatively unchanged from last year. We have our Children's Program with sites at Thebarton and Underdale. Both have maintained consistently high enrolments, well above the utilisation reflected in other centres in the local community. The Inclusion Agency has been running for six years and has now been re-funded for a seventh. This program has a reach across the entire state and is having a positive impact in meeting government key performance indicators. The program supports children's inclusion in mainstream eligible long day care, out of school hours care and family day care services. The Professional Learning Program offers both fee for service training and services as a registered training organisation. This program has been affected by the brunt of the pandemic, with fewer services able to find the relief staff, time or money to invest in professional development and learning for their staff. We also have the Department of Social Services funded program in Whyalla, comprising weekly playgroups and regular delivery of Circle of Security – Parenting. This program continues to connect with local stakeholders and is managing the challenges posed by the pandemic.

I am proud of Gowrie SA's work across its programs. This work ensures that the organisation continues to provide children, families and early education and care services across the state with the support they need. We are well on our way to achieving the first year objectives of our five-year strategic plan. Some of this work includes the commencement of an innovative online e-kindy program developed by educators wishing to remain connected with children unable to attend face to face, the use of a digital communication tool, and commencement of an Early Learning Initiative Playgroup (on hold

during winter). Each of these initiatives has been designed to improve the inclusion of children and families in learning and connection opportunities. Both the remote e-kindy program and Early Learning Initiative Playgroup draw on evidence-based research and practice and provide opportunities for further organisational growth.

In closing, I would like to offer thanks to so many across Gowrie SA. First, thank you to children and families for your support and ongoing role in the successful programs offered by Gowrie SA. Second, our staff team, those in leadership roles, our teachers, educators, inclusion support staff, facilitators and administrative staff, thank you for your commitment to Gowrie SA. You continue to work above and beyond to ensure that Gowrie SA continues as a lighthouse early years education setting in our state. We know that the third year of the pandemic is testing the stamina of you, our valued educators in continuing to manage the changes required to keep children, their families and each other safe. I thank you for your ongoing commitment to children's learning, wellbeing and continuing professionalism during these more difficult times. Particular thanks to Lyndsay Healy and Krystal Kimble who lead our Children's Program, Mary Scales who leads our professional learning and Reconciliation Action Plan

work, Laura Chamings who leads our Inclusion Agency, and Pam Murphy who leads our Whyalla Parenting Program.

I would like to thank my colleagues on the Board, whose breadth and diversity of skill, knowledge and experience continues to guide us through the complexities of COVID and keep the organisation on track to meet the first year objectives of the 2021-26 strategic plan. Your commitment to Gowrie SA, to making it the best it can be, is outstanding. Special thanks to David Muller and Alicia Pike who have made valuable contributions to our Board and thus Gowrie SA over several years. You have both made the difficult decision to stand down due to other pressing commitments.

Finally, thank you Lynne for your fine leadership of Gowrie SA. Over the past year you have been a respected and diligent Chief Executive Officer, continuing an enviable record of performance over many years. On behalf of the Board, children and families, and staff, I thank you for all you have done and continue to do to maintain what is highly valued at Gowrie SA, while building the organisation into the future.

Dr Victoria Whittington

*Adjunct Associate Professor
of Education, UniSA*

Chairperson Gowrie SA Board

Chief Executive Officer Report



Much work has been done this year to realise our vision to be a progressive organisation that leads learning and inclusion with children, families and communities. We began the year with a clear focus on our new strategic priorities and put in place a plan to implement new initiatives, build on existing ones and track our performance. In doing so we also considered our position as an organisation within a global community, and ensuring that many of our strategies align with, and contribute to, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

We have continued to manage COVID well, especially when hearing about cases in other early childhood services and schools across South Australia. We have heard that in other services, rooms or entire services have had to close, and sometimes on more than one occasion since December 2021.

South Australian Office for the Early Years. I have also had the opportunity to meet with the new South Australian Minister for Education Training and Skills, the Hon. Blair Boyer MP, and a key early childhood advisor to discuss state priorities, which include preschool for 3 year olds. A welcome letter was sent to the Hon. Anne Aly, federal Minister for Early Childhood Education, who took the opportunity to visit Gowrie SA with the South Australian education minister. Both ministers were provided a tour of our Children's Program, and engaged in a discussion about our long history, current challenges and continuing and past programs. Minister Aly and Minister Boyer were impressed with what they saw and heard. Both seem very committed to early childhood as a priority for their portfolio and governments. We are certainly keen to see if funding opportunities may arise to increase our

parenting program offerings, as well as watching with interest measures to address workforce issues and what this may mean for our registered training organisation or professional learning program. Gowrie SA has for many years supported three year olds to access early childhood teachers as part of our integrated kindy program and we are hopeful state government funding for this in the future will support better affordability for families.

We have been increasing our understanding of how we can apply Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) results in our work to provide targeted support to vulnerable children and improve their development across the five AEDC domains. We have been collaborating with others and actively applying for funding to support the implementation

It is thanks to our staff in managing the changed conditions that we remain in a good position as an organisation, able to run all our programs with minimal disruptions.



We have had feedback from several families and staff who have expressed gratitude for how we are managing the balance between health, safety and regular practices.

An invitation to attend the Early Learning and Care Council of Australia South Australian subcommittee on behalf of Gowrie Australia provided an opportunity to discuss state specific issues and share information alongside the Education Standards Board and

Key outcomes

We contributed our expertise on the use of evidence in planning with birth to 5 year olds, in video interviews with the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) and have two staff on AERO working groups.

We implemented a new digital platform to connect with families. Our digital communication supplements children's hard copy learning portfolios, which remain an important tool for children to view and share their learning with others.

We took a novel approach to staffing by inviting some families to contribute ideas to what values, attitudes, and skills they hoped for in a new educator.

We implemented a new succession planning tool to identify critical roles and future leaders, and support the development of these staff in preparation for leadership roles.

We paid particular attention to monitoring, evaluating and documenting the activities of the Inclusion Agency and promoting storytelling to better engage the broader sector. This work strongly connects with sharing outcomes for children, educators and eligible services.

We continued to support staff to undertake further education and training. Our professional learning facilitators have upskilled in Circle of Security Classroom, Circle of Security Parenting and Trauma Responsive Practice Supervision Training.





We continue to have discussions at senior leadership level regarding social justice and equitable decision making which support children, parents, clients, and staff.

of evidence-based programs so that all children have the opportunity to have the best start in life. We will look at recommencing our internally funded Early Years Initiative Playgroup, which was designed to support families with no, or limited, connections to early childhood programs to learn more about the benefits of early learning, what this looks like in practice, and what options are available in the community.

Gowrie SA was asked by Early Childhood Australia to contribute an article focusing on how we induct new staff into organisation reconciliation initiatives. This article will be published in their inaugural national reconciliation newsletter. Along with our regular contributions to Gowrie Australia Reflections articles and our own social media platforms, it is a good opportunity to share our work with a national audience.

We continue to have discussions at senior leadership level regarding social justice and equitable decision making which support children, parents, clients, and staff. We are working with Nik&Co Consultancy to review our policies with a cultural lens including creating overarching reasoning to support equitable decision making and cultural leave policies, referencing Closing the Gap initiatives. This work has been invaluable as we continue to learn and grow as an organisation and create meaningful reconciliation initiatives. Nik&Co are also reviewing and updating the cultural protocols document that we use to guide our work.

Our inaugural Reconciliation in Action newsletter was also published late last year at the suggestion of Rosemary Wanganeen, a member of the Gowrie SA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group. This biannual newsletter reflects on our relationships, learning and achievements and is shared broadly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and across the sector. We are very grateful to members

of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group – Ivan, Tamaru, Eddie, Rosemary, Nicole and Rodney. Their support, advice, challenges and guidance remain invaluable as we strive to create culturally safe, responsive and respectful programs and working conditions.

As an organisation, we work together as a team. I want to thank the Board members who are part of the Gowrie SA team. They meet every six weeks, out of hours, to support our work and organisation voluntarily. They give their expertise and advice while also juggling their own work, family and life commitments. I express my sincere gratitude to Victoria, who has chaired the Board with an unwavering commitment and focus. To David who provides a level of financial knowledge that helps us to understand and evaluate the bigger picture for the organisation. To Yasmin in her role as Deputy Chair for keeping us on track and sharing her evidence-based expertise. And to Debbie, Bridgid, Nanette, Alicia and Alycia who each contribute to the sound management of our not for profit, community based programs, holding us accountable and offering support and advice. Our Gowrie SA team also includes about 120 staff and relievers. To all our staff and team leaders, your efforts do not go unrecognised. My thanks go to all of you for your contributions and ability to work together and support each other while carrying out such important societal roles through your programs. I work with a strong senior leadership team who contribute in so many ways – including the occasional

sleepless night! Thank you Mary, Lyndsay, Krystal, Laura and Pam for your leadership of our key programs, and Sandra, Amy and Naomi for your tireless efforts which contribute in major ways to our work together.

Children and families are both the focus of our advocacy and programs and the core of our work. We learn so much as we work together and truly appreciate the privilege of being in your lives, whether through our work in the Children's Program which has an 82-year history, through our Parenting and Professional Learning programs which have a 25-year history, or through our Inclusion Agency which has a six year history. We have a genuine respect and appreciation for families and the educators who work with them and hope to continue to build these relationships for many more years to come.

Finally, we have a very large support crew who often do not get the recognition they deserve. Our thanks go to our responsive IT contractors (Steve), gardeners, maintenance (Josh), electricians, plumbers, and cleaners (Margaret and Naina).

I will finish with a quote: 'There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about' (Margaret J Wheatley). Let's look forward to doing just that together.

Lynne Rutherford

Chief Executive Officer

Working at Gowrie SA

The rich organisational knowledge and experience of our team strengthens our reputation and sustainability

Our Team

125 staff

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

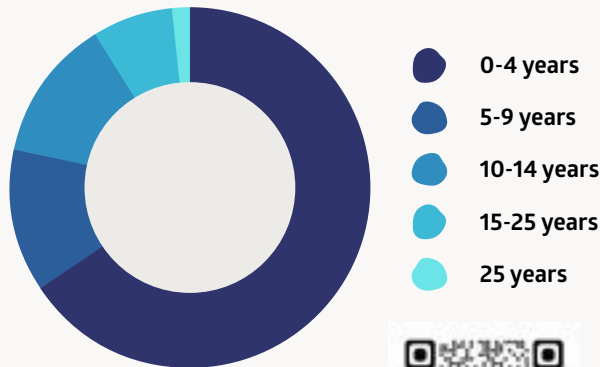
5 staff studying towards higher qualification

3 traineeships

94% of staff agree that workforce diversity is valued at Gowrie SA

86% of staff agree that the work atmosphere is good

27 staff members have worked at Gowrie SA for 10 years or more!



What our staff say

Stepping away from a high-stress management role in the disability sector during the pandemic, I knew I wanted to work somewhere where inclusion and diversity are not just words on a report; they are lived and breathed. I could not have chosen a more supportive, open-minded and accepting workplace. Everyone from the CEO to my fellow Inclusion Professionals have been incredibly welcoming, and my managers have been supportive and patient as I learn my new role. The trainings I have had the privilege of attending so far will be put to use as I support services along their journey towards inclusive and best practice."

Inclusion Professional, Inclusion Agency

"The best work culture and ethics I have ever experienced over 13 years in education sector itself...It's the best place to work, where we do everything in an elegant way and to the best interest of children and families."

Educator, Children's Program



hear more by scanning this code



Financial Report

Gowrie SA exercised good, prudent financial management in the 2022 Financial Year, a constant approach over a long period of time. Despite many external challenges all programs were able to operate close to business as usual. In the absence of government special measures such as JobKeeper, and the timing of grant payments for this past financial year, the overall surplus for the organisation has reduced.

The borders reopening in December 2021 had a negative impact. The Children's Program utilisation was slower to return to budget after the usual dip over January, with utilisation targets not met until late March 2022. From late March, the Children's Program stabilised at these target levels. In particular, the fee for service Professional Learning Program felt the impact of increasing numbers of COVID cases as many early learning services in the state faced staff shortages and closures. The ongoing early childhood workforce crisis also had an impact. This reduced enrolments in fee for service professional development and training and this reduction continued for the remainder of the financial year, resulting in a small loss.

Gowrie SA delivers the Responding to Risks of Harm, Abuse and Neglect (RRHAN-EC) course and has a strong reputation of consistent, high quality delivery of this course. This was reflected in consistent bookings throughout the year, once new processes for delivery were finalised

from July 2021, resulting in a moderate surplus at the end of the financial year.

Investing in our employees and the delivery of our programs to a high standard is a key goal. Our main budget expense is wages and oncosts (minimum 80% expenditure across all programs). Employee illnesses has meant higher levels of absences with a subsequent increase in relief staff costs, particularly in the Children's Program.

Over the past financial year, the Board approved capital investment to increase the size of the Mallee and Kurrajong indoor spaces and renovations to Underdale outdoor spaces. We are using the services of an energy specialist to regularly review energy usage and cost, implementing recommendations to support environmental sustainability commitments and cost reductions. Gowrie SA annually invests cash and resources for reconciliation initiatives in our Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan.

We have again been fortunate during the past financial year to have avoided the challenges of room or service closures, thanks to the proactive COVID-safe planning and implementation of identified measures. Our financial results exhibit sound management and processes with the appropriate checks and balances in place to address fraud and financial risks. As at 30 June 2022 liabilities represented 7% of net assets, which is a very healthy and conservative position to be in.

It is the Board's opinion that Gowrie SA is in a sound financial position and we will continue to invest in our employees, facilities and educational resources into the future, while reviewing further income generating options as they become available.



Our accomplishments



2,583



educators and leaders were supported with professional learning and mentoring

Our RRHAN-EC masterclass received outstanding feedback from

3,576

professionals who participated in our training

A session on preparing a pandemic policy and forum on managing COVID cases was held for the sector,

in conjunction with Australian Child Care Services, Community Children's Centres SA, Gowrie Victoria, Clarendon Children's Centre and Community Child Care Association Victoria

Our second Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan was launched

with an online event and beautiful video that shared our story

Our social media presence increased,

supporting families and professionals across the sector with value-add content, and fostering truth telling, information sharing and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories

127

new Strategic Inclusion Plans developed

(a 23% increase on the previous financial year)



3104

service visits

2573

support calls made

49

Inclusion Aware certificates

issued to 22 services

Our administration

building was upgraded with

energy efficient LED lighting,

supported by responsible project waste recycling

Inclusion Agency service visits have been clustered geographically for inclusion professionals **to reduce the environmental impact of travel**

Sustainability initiatives implemented in our Children's Program were shared more broadly with the sector



403 families connected with our Children's Program,

including our new innovative e-kindy for families unable to attend face to face



Gowrie SA families were supported with fee payment plans, food, clothing and taxi vouchers to ensure children can continue to attend early learning

Our understanding of social justice and equitable decision making has been enhanced to better support children, caregivers and clients

In response to feedback from families in our Children's Program, **a new digital app has been implemented to facilitate regular communication with families**

The federal Minister for Early Childhood Education and South Australian Minister for Education were welcomed with a tour of our Thebarton Children's Program

Our knowledge and expertise was shared as a Gowrie Australia member of the Early Learning and Care Council of Australia to influence early childhood education policy and decision making

Published articles:

Lynne Rutherford and Krystal Kimble 2022, 'The Importance of Advocating for Children's Rights During a Pandemic at Gowrie SA' *Reflections*, Issue 2.

Rob Lister and Lyndsay Healy 2022, 'You have to concentrate really hard so you don't fall: children's capacity to assess and manage risk play at Gowrie SA' *Reflections*, Issue 1.

Free information sessions on supporting children's development and relationships were provided to families in the Children's Program

24 families participated in the 'Read to Me - Enjoy with Me - Be with Me' literacy program in our Whyalla Parenting Program

Senior high school students and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students interested in an early childhood pathway engaged with career immersion days which included a tour of the Children's Program, hearing from key staff about their study and work pathways and practical sensory experiences



Our expertise contributed to reviews and consultations, including with the Teacher's Registration Board, Education Standards Board, Hearing Australia, VET program and draft Early Childhood Education and Care Service Training package





Supporting educators

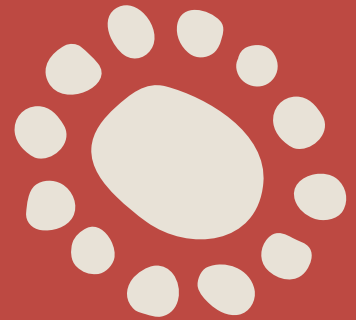
We continue to share our expertise in early education and inclusive practices with services across the sector and engage in continuous improvement in our own Children's Program

Being 'Inclusion Aware'

The Inclusion Agency revamped its Inclusion Aware certification this year, encouraging services to apply for certification in one or more of the six areas of inclusion: Strategic Inclusion Plan, Inclusion Support Project, Community and Culture, Relationships & Interactions, Environments & Educator Practices and/or Skills & Knowledge. The Inclusion Aware certificate is a South Australian initiative and our inclusion professionals work closely with services to help highlight and celebrate their successes in inclusion.

Our Inclusion Aware certification celebrates and acknowledges a service's commitment to increasing inclusive practice in their community. In addition, displayed certificates can be used to demonstrate service commitment to inclusion and their support for families of children with inclusion needs and rights to access mainstream services.

Two services received all six Inclusion Aware certificates. In one children's centre, with the support of the Inclusion Agency and the certification process, reflection on their inclusive practices became a strong focus. Leaders and educators reflected on their inclusion of diverse children, and identified a need for learning and a Reconciliation Action Plan. When thinking of the benefits of gaining Inclusion Aware certification, the service shared: *"It's a good reminder and celebration for the staff team on the job that they do. Moving forward, it may have an influence on professional development (PD) as it helps to have a focus on inclusion when choosing and organising PD... Needs to be driven by leadership to be successful but also needs to be a shared responsibility with the whole team"*.



Inclusion Agency holds "eye opening" inclusion strategies webinar for services

The Inclusion Agency delivered a webinar on embedding inclusion strategies, aimed at ensuring we could reach out to as many educators, team leaders and directors across the state and offer support with strategies for inclusion. It was a huge success with a large number of people in attendance.

One kindy service revealed afterwards that a video played during the webinar, which shared a child's perspective of constantly having an additional educator with them, was "eye opening".

In response to their learning from this video, the kindy educators are being mindful of how close they are to children who have inclusion funding and how they monitor needs through different times of day. They have now noticed the children have been getting to know other educators, and getting to know other children. They now feel they better understand the purpose of the additional educator.

A recording of this webinar has been made available on the Gowrie SA YouTube channel for educators and leaders to revisit, and for those who were unable to attend on the day.



Scan here to watch the webinar

"Excellent and very informative webinar."



"I found it really useful. I liked the input of other educators who shared strategies on the day."

Delivering Innovative Solutions with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

Gowrie SA Professional Learning Program was approached by a family day care provider wanting to learn about First Nations cultures and in particular Kurna culture due to her service location on Kurna Country. The educator was born overseas and was aware that it was important for her to build her own knowledge and cultural sensitivity in order to authentically incorporate Kurna perspectives into her program and environments. Gowrie SA's professional learning team worked collaboratively with the provider and the Inclusion Agency to develop strategies that would achieve the outcomes sought.

A wonderful relationship was established between the family day care service and Uncle Ivan-Tiwu Copley, a Peramangk and Kurna man. During the project, culture was explored in a variety of ways including: a weekend walk on Country for children and families at Karrowirra Parri (River Torrens), exploration of Kurna history, analysis of community connections, introduction of Kurna language, exploration and cooking with native foods, exploring artefacts and reflection on respectful and non-tokenistic ways to incorporate culture. The educator understood the vital importance of being connected to one's own cultural roots in order to have a strong sense of identity and wished to provide this to the children in care.

Testimonial

"It had been a great privilege working and learning with Uncle Ivan and Cathy, I can say, I had been very lucky to get this opportunity to enrich my knowledge about country, land and Kurna culture, Each and every session was so informative and Uncle Ivan's simple, natural and powerful way of connecting with the children and engaging them in each experience was amazing. Yes, that's right, I wish these sessions could go on forever as they hold so much value. My families were equally appreciative to observe children learning and participating in these experiences. We will all miss this time spent with Uncle Ivan and Cathy and the blessings he gave to me and my place. The story times, cooking, painting, singing, cultural walks and marching with clapping sticks, we will continue to bring those into regular practice.

I'm very grateful for your support in achieving the approval for this project. I can confidently say that now I have started embedding Indigenous culture in my service. I think this will be an ongoing process for me even when the sessions are over now... It's also about further delving deeper into the core issues where I could be able to gently support fellow educators, children and families to be more cohesive and compassionate with their growing understandings' pertaining to cultural competence."

Family day care educator



Circle of Security - Classroom, a new way to explore attachment

Two facilitators from the professional learning team completed Circle of Security - Classroom master course (COS-C) through Circle of Security International. This train the trainer enables facilitators to support educators and teachers and acknowledges the significant role they play in early attachment relationships for children.

While the concepts and content mirror those in Circle of Security - Parenting, the materials, discussions and reflections capture the complexity of classroom relationships. We promoted this opportunity throughout the sector. To date, two services (an OSHC and an early education and care setting) have offered the 8-week COS-C to their staff teams. Both services were highly engaged and shared their reflective conversations and the difference the course was making to their knowledge, practices and decision making.

Testimonial

"The Circle of Security Training that we have received from Gowrie has been so beneficial even at these early stages for the whole team. I can see evidence of the team implementing strategies to support children going out and coming back into the circle and the general 'being' with the children has increased as they are more aware and conscious of the children's needs around them. It has made the team more reflective of behaviours and how they can support the children and families and they are beginning to use the Circle of Security language in their daily tasks. General awareness has increased, reflective practice is being used and generally strategies are supporting the improved wellbeing of the children, families and themselves. Thank you so much. Very powerful training and valuable to all."

Participant, Circle of Security - Classroom

Supporting new educators – documentation

We welcomed new educators to our community this year and have looked at how to ensure a robust induction that conveys the heart and philosophy of Gowrie SA. An analysis of staff strengths and challenges revealed a need to support educators in their practice of documentation of children's learning. The position of Educational Leader - Infant and Toddler Programs has allowed us to scaffold deeper pedagogical understandings and support educator reflection on their documentation practices.

In January 2022, we commenced a documentation project group. The educational leader met fortnightly with a group of educators to engage with professional readings about critical thinking, then explored Learning Stories and Talking and Thinking Floorbooks more deeply. As trust built among the group, they began critiquing their documentation with one another as a way of strengthening narratives and improving the analysis of what learning was important and why. This has resulted in increased levels of confidence with documentation, development of richer learning environments and stronger educational outcomes for children in our programs. An unanticipated outcome of this group was that our new educators reported feeling more connected with other educators across rooms, building a stronger sense of belonging within our organisation. This work also provided foundations for our closure day in May with Wendy Lee. Wendy Lee has strongly influenced the research on learning stories and assessment in New Zealand and her perspective on documentation provoked both new and experienced educators to think differently.

The next step is the embedding of ongoing support and connection. Individual educators have now aligned their programming time so they are able to work as a group in a shared space to support each other and gain different perspectives. The educational leader of the infant and toddler programs is also available at this time as a critical friend to provide continuous feedback and mentoring. We look forward to seeing how this feeds back into our ongoing cycle of reflective evaluation and efforts towards continuous improvement.







Supporting communities

Strengthening parent/carer and child relationships in Whyalla

The parenting project in Whyalla, funded through the Department of Social Services, continues to deliver a number of evidence based parenting support activities within the community. We have a core group of families who are enjoying a new playgroup space that offers an indoor and large outdoor play area, which was upgraded to provide a more stimulating nature play space.

Our twice weekly supported playgroups provide an opportunity for parents and caregivers to explore attachment concepts in a supported environment and to strengthen building positive relationships with their children. Families can also join our innovative 'pop up' playgroup, 'out and about in Whyalla', which offers a seasonal program of fun activities for children with a different focus each month. Children and their parents can enjoy creative and stimulating activities at the same time as discovering child and family friendly, safe places across Whyalla. This is a popular activity within our program, attracting 15-20 families each session.

Twenty-four families are participating in the 'Read to Me - Enjoy with Me - Be with Me' program, a partnership with Raising Literacy Australia. Over 40 young children have received a starter reading library box with 10 books and an additional book with activity provided each month. A structured 'Read to Me - Enjoy with Me' activity has been incorporated into the weekly playgroup sessions, where our educators demonstrate reading to children. Families are encouraged to read together through a 'take one, leave one, share one' community library.

The Circle of Circle of Security - Parenting groups (COS-P) continued to be offered each term in collaboration with Mission Australia. On average 6-8 families took part each term. The program received many referrals and has also supported parents undergoing reunification processes with their children. Feedback from all our programs in Whyalla remain positive, demonstrating the need and value in this community.



Raising awareness of the importance of inclusion and cultural understanding for safer communities

Our Professional Learning Program was approached to assist a community centre in the southern suburbs, which had obtained a Safer Communities grant to engage in social cohesion projects aimed at reducing racial or religious intolerance within the local community. This centre offers services such as adult education, OSHC and under 5 programs, health and wellbeing services and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members. The centre and the Professional Learning Program have developed a collaborative partnership over the years, and we were able to present a successful proposal to work with the leadership, staff team, children and local community.

We facilitated sessions around cultural history, knowledge and understandings, unpacking bias and cultural competency. We also assisted by planning a community library and resources collection for their children's programs with a focus on diversity and inclusion and books that reflect the local community demographic. Customised book packs that focus on inclusion are used by staff to explore inclusion themes in their curriculum with OSHC and pre-primary children. Curriculum notes and plans were provided to support the use of these resources and enrich intentional planning about inclusion. This project also included consultancy on a diversity and inclusion policy and statement for the centre.

In collaboration with an Aboriginal facilitator, staff spent time discovering and reflecting on their own culture, what it means to be culturally competent when working with children and families and how to ensure the environments are welcoming and inclusive. They considered how culture is reflected in the physical space and in their programs.



Career immersion opportunities at Gowrie SA

Our professional learning team worked in partnership with the Department for Education Workabout Centre for Aboriginal students to provide career immersion opportunities. The Workabout Centre offers a range of programs and services that support Aboriginal students to successfully transition from school to higher education, further training, or work. A career immersion day for students provided an overview of Gowrie SA, and incorporated an observation tour of the Children's Program. Students heard from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members about their study and career pathways and also participated in practical sensory focused learning experiences. This opportunity led to our involvement at the Aboriginal Career Exploration Expo, attended by approximately 400 students. A Gowrie SA facilitator offered two workshops on working in early education and care and a stall that students could visit to learn more about our organisation and early education as a career pathway. The feedback from these events was overwhelmingly positive and dates are set for more visits and involvement in the future.

Gowrie SA also piloted a career

immersion day for senior high school students (year 10/11) interested in an early childhood career pathway. The VET in schools program provides students an opportunity to study the CHC30121 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care as part of their SACE studies. The career immersion day for these students also involved hearing about Gowrie SA, touring the Children's Program, speaking with key staff and taking part in practical sensory experiences.

This pilot session received promising results during evaluation: At the commencement of the activity, the high school only had 5 students interested in the Certificate III Early Childhood Education and Care program for 2022. Upon completion of the immersion activity 10 more students enrolled and filled the class for 2022. Plans have commenced for future immersion days, with promotion to other high schools across the state.





Contributing to children's life outcomes



We contribute to better life outcomes for all young children by integrating culturally based knowledges and perspectives

Cultures and lifeworlds

In our previous report we shared that we were deepening our understanding of the values, practices, rituals and cultures of the children and families who make up our Gowrie SA community.

We have continued our work around cultures and lifeworlds, with a goal to embedding this thinking into practice. Our educators have engaged in professional learning about anti-bias, anti-racism, and culturally responsive pedagogies to support their thinking about their own biases, but also how resources, room environments and interactions support or challenge biases in children.

An analysis was conducted on the resources within our rooms to see how many children's lifeworlds are evident and which children's lifeworlds

could become more visible. Rooms conducted surveys to gather a better understanding of what children and families do every day, which has supported the group inquiries. This work supports further decision making around pedagogical practices and resource purchasing.

Educators' shared their learning in this area with all Gowrie SA staff in a professional learning session on 'How can lifeworlds be used to support inclusion within our services?' They were able to disseminate their practitioner inquiries across the organisation, and seek further perspectives on how they are planning for and embedding anti-bias approaches into the program cycle.

Our work around cultures and lifeworlds recognises and respects children's connection with, and contribution to, their world. When children become aware of connections, similarities and differences between people, they are able to respond to this diversity with respect. We have noticed a key aspect of this work being the recognition of family funds of knowledge, and opportunities for family participation and shared research.

Caring for Country with our bush kindy

Gowrie SA has strong practices which prioritise nature play. Over the last few years all rooms have embedded local walking excursions into their programs, but in 2021 we extended this with a bush kindergarten pilot program. The bush kindergarten pilot provides opportunities to connect children and educators with caring for Country and being active participants within our local community.

The Early Years Learning Framework (2009) values children as capable and competent learners, as do we in our philosophy statement about child and adult learning. Repeated experiences to the same local community space was a key aspect of the planning that went into constructing the bush kindergarten pilot. Over 2021 and 2022, Thebarton kindergarten groups have explored sites in Tulya Wardli (Bonython Park), Morialta, and Narningga Urban Forest. Key learning outcomes were for children to develop a range of skills and processes such



as problem solving, experimentation, investigating and being exposed to varying levels of challenge and risk which they were encouraged to explore (EYLF 2009).

Nature offers a variety of textures and sensory experiences, and bush kindy was a moment for children, educators and families where these sensory-rich environments 'not only satisfied young children's need to smell, touch and taste everything but opened up an appreciation for beauty, wonder and marvelling' (Radich 2011, p. 8). Key outcomes from the pilot were: the visibility of kindergarten enrolment as an option within the Children's Program; shared engagement between kindergarten research and family participation; the reconciliation learning facilitated by Uncle Ivan-Tiwu Copley; and the confidence of bush kindy participants to share their research with their peers, and lead their own learning.

From engagement in wild, natural, low-landscaped environments, children can develop their emerging autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency. Educators support this when they provide children with strategies to make informed choices about their behaviours, and maintain high expectations of each child's capabilities (EYLF 2009, p. 22). We have established strong rituals with children for each visit into their bush kindergarten space that include:

- 'Go to the toilet' (Oren)
- 'Put on our vests' (Oren)
- 'Put on our bags' (Zara)
- 'We walk' (Winnie)
- 'Walk the boundary' (Adam)
- 'Make a stick line' (Winnie)
- 'Find seeds' (Jackson)
- 'Sitting spot' (Oren)

Our bush kindergarten children have been active protagonists in threading their learning back into the research that occurs in the room. This has provided continuity of learning across indoor, outdoor and 'wild' spaces and offered challenge for children in their year before school. The voices and perspectives of peers, and time to reflect and revisit learning through discussion, mark-making, construction and dramatic play has allowed children to delve more deeply into the key aspects being explored.

One example is the provocation of the "Elsa Batman tunnel" (as named by the children) at Narnungga Urban Forest. It has invited collaboration and sustained shared thinking about sculptures and land art; providing rich foundations for loose parts construction in the garden and indoor 'Loose Lab'. The bush kindergarten participants are now leading the way for all children to collaborate in designing an art installation for Gowrie SA's garden. We look forward to seeing what they create and how this will share their learning with future generations of Gowrie SA kindergarten children.

As Loris Malaguzzi (1988; cited in REAIE Online Piazza 2020) reminds us, when we take such approaches to innovate practice and connect children with community we foster 'human beings who are no longer separated, no longer opposed, no longer divided, but fused with the dimensions and meaning of nature'.



Change Makers

Through their research in the community, the Jacaranda children noticed a problem with rubbish being left at Tulya Wardli - Bonython Park. We asked the children to share their concerns with the community. This was done through pop art inspired posters with a big message!

Reconciliation



We began the 2021-22 year with a virtual launch of our second Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and moving video sharing the story of how we reached this stage of our journey. We received so many lovely comments about our launch from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, from across the sector and members of parliament. Our video reached over 3000 people on social media and is available to view on the Gowrie SA YouTube channel to inspire others to take action for reconciliation. We have been working on a number of initiatives since the launch of our second Stretch RAP, aimed at furthering our relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and community members, while continuing to increase awareness and understanding of the importance of reconciliation among our staff, families and broader community.

It is an exciting and promising time with new governments at state and federal level each committing to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, with an Indigenous Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution a real possibility. Here in South Australia, our state government has committed to implementing a state-based version of the Uluru Statement, a treaty process and truth process. Gowrie SA will continue to be a strong advocate in our sector and support young people in their learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, share significant events and learning with the community and demonstrate our commitment to the Uluru Statement of the Heart and truth telling.

We were fortunate to join Reconciliation SA for the 20-year anniversary of their tireless work towards a reconciled and just South Australia. We extend our congratulations to Reconciliation SA and appreciation of our ongoing partnership and opportunities to work together.



◀ Scan the QR code to watch our Stretch RAP launch

We spent a wonderful evening with Uncle Eddie Peters, supporting his Adelaide Fringe event, Island Night, in Iparrityi (Whitmore Square). This event was made possible by Adelaide City Council Quick Response funding, a Fringe grant, Gowrie SA funding and the voluntary efforts of #TeamEddie from Gowrie SA. We also joined Uncle Eddie at the Lord Mayor's Civic Reception at Adelaide Town Hall. It was a privilege to gather with the South Australian Torres Strait Islander community to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the historic High Court Mabo decision and the anniversary of the Torres Strait Islander Flag.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group

We are fortunate to receive cultural guidance and advice from members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group: Ivan-Tiwu Copley, Eddie Peters, Rosemary Wanganeen, Karri Tamaru Smith, Nicole Gollan, and Rodney Welch



Connecting children with community and culture

This year has seen us strengthen our ongoing relationship with Uncle Ivan-Tiwu Copley and Uncle Eddie Peters to support our work towards reconciliation in the Children's Program.

Uncle Ivan, Renee (Educational Leader (Infant and Toddler)) and Rachel (Banksia Team Leader) co-wrote a presentation for the national Early Childhood Australia conference that celebrates the partnership between Elders, educators and children in nurturing a love of culture with our youngest citizens. The abstract was accepted, and the presentation will be included in the conference program.

Each year the Children's Program celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day with a Smoking Ceremony led by Uncle Ivan. The ceremony supports Gowrie SA to engage with Elders in our community and recognises the role of Elders as leaders and holders of cultural knowledge. It has sparked thinking for children's research, particularly at Underdale where Melaleuca kindergarten children have been inspired to explore smoke and make links between their own lifeworlds of camping and cookouts.

On this day, dance group Kuma Kaaru (One Blood) also gave a Welcome to Country and performance at both Underdale and Thebarton. The children and staff were excited to join in and learn more about culture through dance and movement. New Kaurua words to include in our programs were learnt and the children were thrilled to watch one of their educators perform in the dance group.

In 2021-2022 we extended our exploration of Torres Strait Islander culture. We established a connection with Uncle Eddie, who shared traditional music experiences with children. His visits to Gowrie SA model for us the authentic traditional ways of knowledge sharing through song, dance and movement. He incorporates traditional dress and artefacts to bring Torres Strait Islander culture to life. Debbie Jose is the cultural practitioner from Tagai College (Thursday Island Secondary School) and has shared traditional children's songs like *Taba Naba* via Skype with us. We look forward to meeting Debbie in person when she visits Gowrie SA in December to share further cultural experiences.

Debbie donated resources which have enriched the discussions occurring in children's rooms:

- *Kulups* (traditional shakers)
- *Bernie beads* (materials used to make shakers)
- Brightly coloured turtle printed fabrics
- Traditional weavings (such as a coconut leaf fish)
- Woven coconut leaf headband
- *The Gab* art gallery brochure
- A marbled turtle (many provocations have resulted from this turtle)

Songs taught through these collaborations continue to be shared within the Children's Program and used within celebrations of culture. One such example is our explorations of the significance of Mabo Day.

We are currently extending our learning of Torres Strait Islander cultures into cooking and the sharing of foods, with a cookbook and recipes being translated into our monthly menus.

Supporting the reconciliation actions of other organisations

At the suggestion of Aunty Sharon Gollan, the Rural Support Service invited Gowrie SA to share our learning and to inspire others at the launch of their inaugural Reflect RAP. It was a privilege to be on Country in the beautiful Barossa Bushgardens building relationships and making connections with others who are committed to reconciliation.

Gowrie SA also took part in the City of Port Adelaide and Enfield Nunga Week celebrations with a presentation titled 'Reconciliation in Action'. We shared our reconciliation journey, beginning with Aunty Brodie as an Elder in Residence, and how our learnings have been threaded throughout our Children's Program and committed to in our RAP. This presentation gave organisations with a RAP, and those considering a RAP, an insight into how culture can have an intrinsic role in early childhood and the leadership required to embed reconciliation into an organisation. Shona Reid, Reconciliation SA's Chief Executive Officer, recorded a video to share during our presentation. In this video, Shona talked about how reconciliation requires us to explore and have conversations about our relationships with First Nations peoples, individually and as an organisation. If our relationship with First Nations peoples isn't one of trust and respect, or isn't healthy, how can we change this relationship? It is here that Shona states that RAPs can offer guidance and help us take action so there are meaningful outcomes for community. Shona summed up Gowrie SA's actions for reconciliation beautifully, describing it as 'bringing community and culture closer to kids'. In our position as an early education provider we work towards generational social change, with children taking their learnings about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and histories with them throughout their lives.

At the invitation of Reconciliation SA our Human Resources Advisor Amy spoke to 200 people in a breakout panel at the 2022 National RAP Conference 'Brave Together' in Sydney, to discuss: Beyond the tick-a-box: stories of RAP innovation. Amy shared our RAP journey over the last 12 years, what we have achieved and our challenges along the way. It was so wonderful to share our experiences with those organisations just starting their RAP journey or those wanting to move 'beyond the tick box'.



Increasing staff understanding, value and recognition of First Nations cultures, histories, knowledge and rights

All Gowrie SA staff take part in ongoing cultural learning. Our cultural learning strategies ensure our learning includes the true history of our nation, historical practices and policies, white privilege, racism, rights, cultural understandings, truth telling and contemporary perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We continue to hold our annual reconciliation walk during National Reconciliation Week. Uncle Ivan hosted two groups of staff and families on a walk along the banks of Karrawirra Parri, where we learned about the history, trees, plants and animals of the river and its importance to Aboriginal peoples.

Our closure day was spent with Rosemary Wanganeen from the Healing Centre for Griefology, who facilitated Aboriginal BiCultural Awareness Training - Safety for Inclusion. This was an incredible day of unlearning and learning for staff. Rosemary took us on a journey to connect emotionally with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, their experiences and to understand intergenerational unresolved grief, and in particular, 'grief fear'. During this session we were provided with strategies that we could practice to create culturally safe workplaces.



Working sustainably

Gowrie SA supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We have been working towards aligning our programs and activities with the SDGs, and giving consideration to them in our decision making processes. We do this to acknowledge that early childhood education and care services can contribute to sustainable development, and children, families and staff are global citizens in our world and broader work.

Gowrie SA's work across its programs aligns with SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing SDG 4: Quality Education; SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities; and SDG 13: Climate Action. While our core focus is on providing quality education, aligning and measuring our activities against other goals recognises that education is linked with many facets of sustainable development.

We are influencing change at the individual level, with children, their families, our staff and with educators and leaders across the sector who participate in our programs. Our programs are built on

principals of social justice, diversity and inclusion, safe environments, secure relationships and culturally responsive practices. The protection and preservation of our unique gardens, heritage buildings and natural resources is also a specific goal of our 2021-2026 strategic plan, ensuring the natural environment is conserved for current and future generations. We cannot do everything but we have a collective responsibility to make a meaningful contribution to the SDGs.

Over the coming year we will work toward mapping our programs against the goals and specific targets as they align with our strategic plan. Aligning with the SDGs will provide new opportunities to make an impact and increase our long term accountability and resilience in an increasingly global environment.





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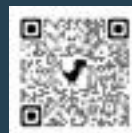
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