

# Annual Report 2024







### **Acknowledgement of Country**

ECMS acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the first inhabitants of the nation and the traditional custodians of the lands on which we live, learn, work, and play. Aboriginal people have a long tradition of teaching and learning through sharing their connections with country, community, language, and culture. They were the first teachers and the first scientists.

We recognise their continuing connection to the Country and pay respects to elders past and present.

ECMS operates on the lands of the Wurundjeri, Boonwurrung and Wadawurrung people.





# Contents

A message from the Chair and CEO	03
Our purpose	04
Moments we are proud of	06
Key drivers	08
Our anti-bias journey at ECMS	10
Showcasing our leadership	12
Our commitment to Best Start, Best Life	13
Creating inclusive celebrations with an anti-bias approach	14
Better outcomes through traineeships	16
Supporting provisionally registered teachers	17
A great place to work	18
Leaders leading leaders	19
Becoming with place: our commitment to place-based pedagogy	20
Starting Strong at Macleod Preschool	22
Research	24
Our research partners	25
Working together	26
Thank you	27
Our team	28
Financials	30
The joy of early learning	32

# A message from the Chair and CEO



## 2024 - growing our future

This year we continued our drive for quality at scale. This saw us invest in our team, follow the evidence base to create good learning outcomes, and grow our future impact through new services.

Our commitment to Victoria’s Best Start, Best Life reforms saw us add eleven new services while continuing the move toward 15 hours Free Kinder for 3-year-olds. We also initiated key work to build capability for the roll-out of Pre-Prep.

Our emphasis on quality teaching and learning is underpinned by strong investment in our people and positions us well to meet future opportunities. Investment in developing our people included continued support for our service leaders, expanded traineeship and Provisionally Registered Teacher (PRT) programs, Leadership Forums and an increase in practice coaches. We saw the benefits with excellent results in engagement surveys.

We connected our work to developing good learning outcomes, from sector-leading research partnerships with Ngarrngga, and Dr Katherine Bussey to awards and our ongoing anti-bias journey. With our presentation at the European Early Childhood Research Conference, we grew our international awareness and network and continued our reputation as a partner of choice.

This year, we farewelled Andrew Hume, and we thank him for leading ECMS in meeting our strategic goals during this period.

Thank you to everyone in our team for your unwavering commitment to fostering lifelong learning and to our families and children, who are at the centre of everything we do.

**Vanda Fortunato**  
Board Chair

**Kieren Kearney**  
Chief Executive Officer



# Our purpose

## We foster lifelong learning.



**We will show consistently good learning outcomes and be a place where the best early years people choose to work.**

In 2024, we ignited meaningful learning journeys by seamlessly weaving together pedagogy and operations, ensuring every experience delivered real impact. This dedication strengthened our reputation as a trusted partner of choice for families and educators and expanded access to the transformative practice happening across our services, such as critical inclusion and the anti-bias approach.

At the heart of our success was our unwavering commitment to our people. Through deep investment in team conditions and continuous learning, we empowered our teams to grow, thrive, and inspire-driving engagement to new heights and reducing team turnover.

Together, we continue to make lifelong learning a reality.

*“Every child deserves a champion—an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection, and insists they become the best they can possibly be.”*

*— Rita Pierson*



Early Childhood Management Services (ECMS) is a for-purpose organisation that fosters lifelong learning by providing high-quality early learning and care for children, families, and communities across Greater Melbourne. We reach over 6,500 children weekly across our 69 kindergarten and childcare centres.



# Moments we are proud of

At our ECMS 2024 Conference four of our teams presented their approaches to embedding Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. We celebrate Renae Giannaros from Doncaster Park Kindergarten, Dimitra Gibbs from Keilor Park Kindergarten, Colleen Owner and Tarryn Ramsbotham from Bridgewood Integrated Child and Family Centre and Archi Walia and Josie Rigby from Bulldogs Community Children’s Centre, for bringing their teams’ outstanding work to the stage. We heard examples about learning with and through Indigenous ways of being, the importance of an authentic Acknowledgement of Country, intergenerational practice and developing a culturally safe and inclusive environment.

Our work with Ngarrngga - the University of Melbourne Indigenous project – also continued. Ngarrngga is a collaboration between the Faculty of Education, Indigenous Studies Unit and Indigenous Knowledge Institute. We’re partnering with Ngarrngga to explore ways of strengthening the embedding of Indigenous Knowledge within everyday early childhood education pedagogy and practice.

**Advancing reconciliation**



**Social justice and equity: a journey toward ‘flourishing with difference’ \***

Our commitment to critical inclusion brought us closer together as we worked to reshape how our organisation operates. This collaborative work was recognised at the Social Justice in Early Childhood Conference when we were celebrated nationally, winning the Anti-Bias Award. We began this adventure in 2022, recognising that embracing an anti-bias approach was anchored by our ECMS Pedagogical Framework.

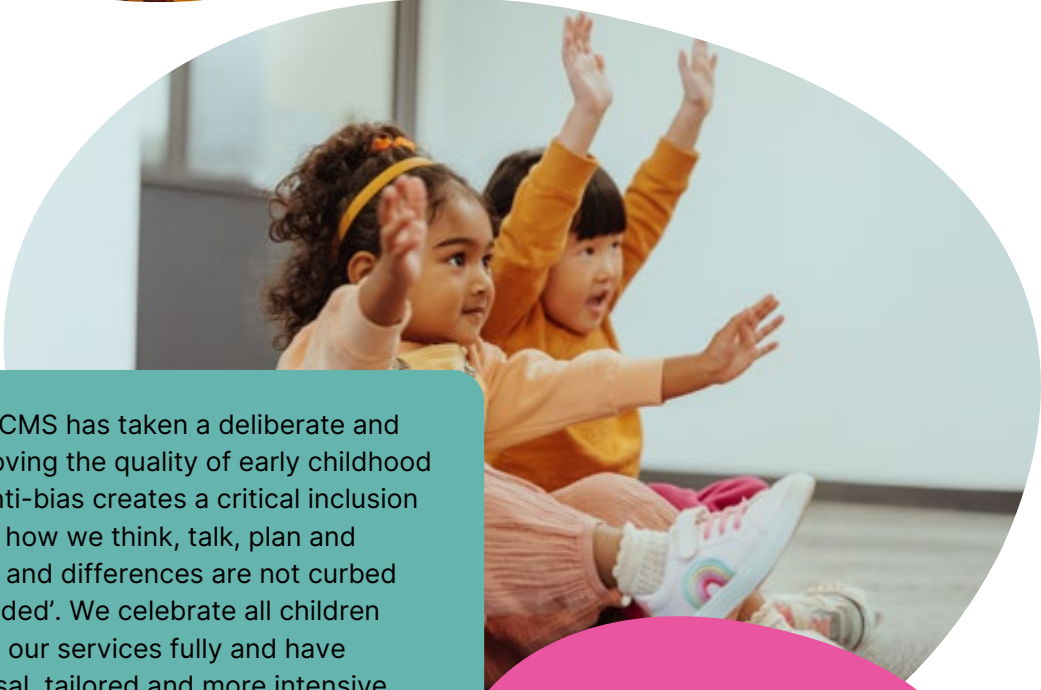
\* Taylor, A. & Giugni, M. (2012). Common worlds: Reconceptualising inclusion in early childhood communities. Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 13 (2), p. 108 - 119.

**Aiming high**



Our continued commitment to developing good learning outcomes was reflected in 10 services who underwent Assessment and Rating in 2024 and achieved Exceeding, taking our total services rated Exceeding to 32% higher than the national average.

The teams at Altona Early Years Hub, Arnolds Creek Kindergarten and Lakeside Children’s Centre moved from Meeting to Exceeding - a fantastic achievement. We also celebrated the teams who maintained their Exceeding rating at Alamanda Kindergarten, St Albans West Preschool, Tarneit Central Kindergarten, Patterson Lakes Kindergarten, Brookside Preschool, Keilor Park Preschool and Seaholme Kindergarten.

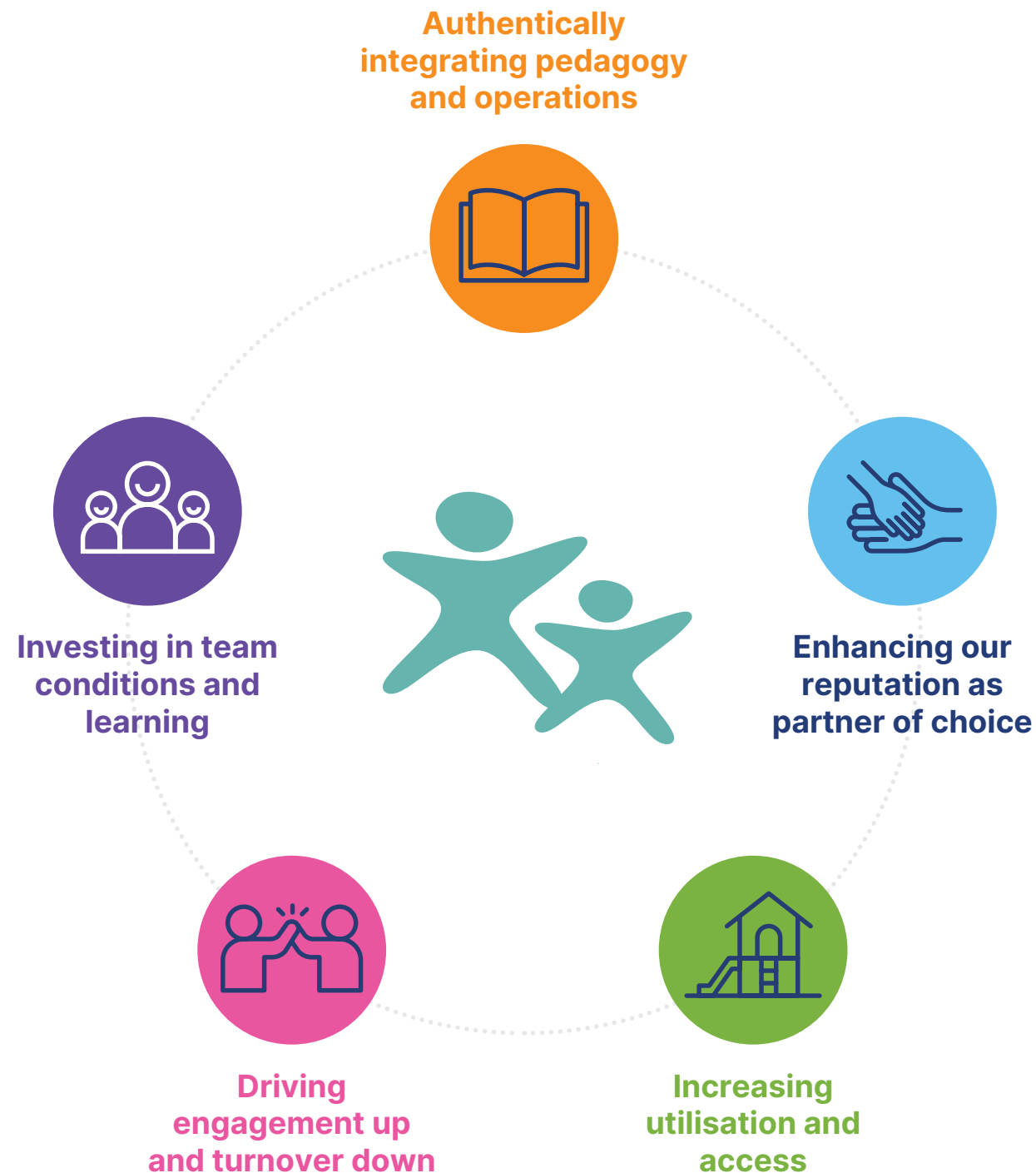


Over the past few years, ECMS has taken a deliberate and focused approach to improving the quality of early childhood education. Our focus on anti-bias creates a critical inclusion that prompts us to change how we think, talk, plan and practice so that diversities and differences are not curbed through simply being ‘included’. We celebrate all children being able to participate in our services fully and have developed a strong universal, tailored and more intensive multi-tiered support system.

In 2024, we commenced our ECMS, Noah’s Ark and Quarters Kindergarten partnership to learn more about practice coaching through a multi-tiered support system. This work, alongside our expanded interdisciplinary team, practice coaches and area manager support, will strengthen the learning outcomes for all children.

**Deepening our commitment to critical inclusion**

# Key drivers



## Authentically integrating pedagogy and operations



Our pedagogical framework and place-based approach led us to explore anti-bias goals and the work of Dr Red Ruby Scarlet. To make our anti-bias goals work across the organisation we developed the concept of Pedaration, which uses our pedagogical framework to inform both teaching and learning and operations. We applied this approach through our research partnerships, in supporting our leaders and attuning it to meet the specific characteristics of each ECMS community.

## Enhancing our reputation as partner of choice



Our partnerships are crucial in delivering consistently good outcomes. We continued our focus on fostering strong partnerships with federal and state government through our commitment to Best, Start Best Life reforms and our alignment to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), through our highly impactful research partnerships and with local government, working closely to deliver services that meet the changing needs of local communities. We enhanced our partnerships with our teams and families by developing a new, more user-friendly website, and more streamlined enrolment processes. Our presentation at the European Early Childhood Research (EECERA) Conference enhanced our reputation and networks on a global scale.

## Increasing utilisation and access



Increasing access to quality education is an outcome we continue to drive, aligning us with the government's Best Start, Best Life reforms. In 2024 we added 11 new services, providing quality early learning to new families and establishing stronger connections within the community and local governments. To enable us to continue achieving quality outcomes at scale, we enhanced our kinder and ELC enrolments processes, giving families a better experience.

## Driving engagement up and turnover down



Along with our commitment to supporting our leaders and teams, we developed and embedded a workforce plan to help support a strong pipeline of educators and enable us to meet future Best Start, Best Life initiatives. We enhanced our traineeship program, resulting in more trainees and a higher retention rate and provided dedicated support to provisionally registered teachers. We also continued to offer above-award pay increases to ELC teams and registered improved engagement survey results from our people management teams.

## Investing in team conditions and learning



To be a place where the best early learning people work, we strongly invested in developing our teams. We provided more access to the learning and development needed by our people to do their job well. We reinvigorated our Leadership forums, offered sector-leading time to support our service leaders and employed a dedicated practice coach to continue the expansion of our Birth to Three partnership with Dr Katherine Bussey. Engagement survey data indicates that our people believe learning and continuous improvement are valued at ECMS.



# Our anti-bias journey at ECMS



At the 2024 Social Justice in Early Childhood Conference, ECMS was one of four recipients of the Anti-Bias Award. We were humbled by the recognition, especially as our journey in exploring anti-bias approaches began just two years ago.

In 2022, ECMS strengthened our pedagogical framework, privileging a place-based approach to teaching and learning. This commitment led us to centre anti-bias principles and a research partnership with subject matter expert Dr. Red Ruby Scarlet.

### Working together

Through Dr. Scarlet’s Anti-Bias Approach professional learning series, we engaged all 69 teaching teams and 55 support staff in critical discussions on bias, prejudice, and racism. These conversations were sometimes challenging but led to greater cohesion across teaching and operational teams.

### Building a framework

We needed to make our anti-bias goals work across the organisation, not just in teaching and learning. To do this, we aligned our thinking with the updated Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF V2.0) and developed an ECMS-specific approach. We called it Pedaration: a concept that integrates pedagogy with operations to advance anti-bias goals across ECMS.

### Prioritising Indigenous perspectives

Crucial to both our anti-bias goals and our place-based approach to teaching and learning was an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, doing, and being. Inspired by the work of Indigenous scholars, we prioritised Indigenous perspectives and explored how inclusion and exclusion manifest in early childhood spaces.

### Making it work

The next step in our journey was to apply our understanding in a place-based way, recognising the unique characteristics of each ECMS setting. This has reshaped our relationships, interactions, and ways of being, and it’s a continuing process which will adapt to meet the needs of changing communities.

*“Diversity is not about how we differ. Diversity is about embracing one another’s uniqueness.”*

*— Ola Joseph*



### Looking Ahead: A Lasting Commitment

Our commitment to anti-bias education is ongoing. By embedding these principles into both pedagogy and operations, we continue to cultivate inclusive environments where every child, family, and educator is valued. Guided by the Early Years Learning Framework V2.0, we remain dedicated to fostering equity and social justice-because true change is both a journey and a responsibility.



# Showcasing our leadership



## The European Early Childhood Research (EECERA) Conference 2024

EECERA's Annual Conference is the largest early childhood research conference in Europe, and we are strongly aligned to its ethical principles. We were proud to stand with a global community, increasing our opportunity for international research partners and enhancing our reputation as a partner of choice.

Our presentation, World Making and Mattering, demonstrated our drive for quality at scale by taking a whole-organisation approach to achieving the goals of the Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood, which are directly aligned to the five learning outcomes for children within the Early Years Learning Framework. Our presentation gave a global audience a clear example of our commitment to promote social justice and equity within communities and societies.

## Early Childhood Australia Conference 2024

ECMS presented on a range of subjects, showcasing our in-house learning and capacity building and how we bring to life EYLF V2.0 principles such as critical reflection, ongoing professional learning, collaborative leadership and teamwork, equity and inclusion. We also demonstrated our support for the Federal Government's Preschool Outcome Measure and our two-year commitment to relational practice.

## Meeting You Where You Are – The Joy of In-House Professional Learning

ECMS Head of Pedagogy Emma Forsyth and Practice Coach Gracie Pupillo highlighted the impact of reflective practice, storytelling, and meaningful connections.

## Embedding Transdisciplinary Practice

ECMS Head of Practice Kathryn Main and Kathy Warwick from the Alannah and Madeleine Foundation presented on the importance of relational-based pedagogy and trauma-informed practice within ECMS' SRF transdisciplinary coaching approach.

## Progress in Early Learning: Embedding Assessment Practice

Emma Forsyth and ACER's Dr Sandra Knowles shared findings from a research partnership with ACER, showing how assessment tools help educators refine practice and communicate progress.

## Pedaration: Mattering and World-Making

ECMS Director of Early Childhood Education Rebecca Hand and Dr Red Ruby Scarlet discussed ECMS' organisational change journey, focusing on equity and social justice through Indigenous scholarship and anti-bias approaches.

## Macquarie University Infant and Toddler Conference 2024

We co-presented with our Academic Mentor-in-Residence Dr Katherine Bussey, sharing Oakhill Family Centre's transformative journey through in-residence visits. Educators in Oakhill's Bilby room had deepened attuned relationships with children and families, enhancing interactions during daily routines.

This focus has enriched children's language, social-emotional growth and overall well-being. Educators also felt empowered, with some pursuing further studies to specialise in Birth-to-Three education.

Our work in Birth-to-Three reflects ECMS leadership's commitment to strengthening pedagogy for infants and toddlers, fostering change across services.



# Our commitment to Best Start, Best Life



The Victorian government's Best Start, Best Life reforms are the most significant change to the sector in a generation, giving children two years of free quality early learning and moving toward 30 hours of kindergarten in the year before school. At ECMS we continue to support the reform agenda, with almost all our services offering 15 hours of free kinder for 3-year-olds in 2024.

We continued to meet the Best Start, Best Life growth reform agenda by welcoming 11 new services to ECMS in 2024, including 5 brand new services and 6 transitioning from other providers. This continued our commitment to providing greater access to quality education and strengthened our crucial partnerships with local government.

Workforce development is a key part of the reform, and 2024 saw ECMS develop a multi-year Workforce Plan, in consultation with the Department of Education, that will set us up to successfully meet the future demands of, and for, educators working in our services.

Our commitment to Best Start, Best Life is ongoing. We are looking ahead in the reform agenda, preparing our workforce capacity and capability to enable the most vulnerable cohort of children to access up to 25 hours of Pre-Prep a week in 2026 and further roll-outs from 2027. Children deserve high quality access, inclusion and participation, and our planning in support of the reforms will hold children's learning outcomes in the centre of everything we do.

## At ECMS we continue to support the reform agenda, with almost all our services offering 15 hours of free kinder for 3-year-olds in 2024.





# Creating inclusive celebrations with an anti-bias approach



The EYLF tells us that educators create inclusive learning environments by “making reasonable adjustments to optimise access, participation and engagement in learning. This supports wellbeing and positive outcomes for children in all their diversities.”\*

Early Childhood Teacher and Nominated Supervisor Louise Vuk shares how the Mt Atkinson Children’s and Community Centre team creates inclusive, child-centred celebrations that prioritise meaningful connection over traditional rituals like Christmas or graduations.

Louise explains, “We hold close celebrations that foster learning around planning, literacy, and numeracy. As we plan, we involve the children in the process. We talk about what the end of the year means to them and ask for their input. By creating a ‘mud map’ with them, we work together to plan everything from decorations to food, games and music. This way, our celebrations reflect the diversity of their ideas and preferences, not what the

calendar tells us we should be celebrating. This takes the pressure off families who may have different traditions.”

Using an anti-bias approach, questions like, “Who will be impacted by this event?” guides their inclusive decisions. They communicate with families in conversation and through regular newsletters. To make gatherings accessible to as many families as possible, the Mt Atkinson team hold events outside regular hours. These include informal picnics, with links to what children are learning about at kindergarten.

By holding inclusivity at the heart of everything they do, Louise and her team have built a nurturing environment where every child, regardless of background or ability, feels seen and valued. In this space, children are free to be themselves knowing they are part of a supportive, inclusive community today and for years to come.

## About us

Mt Atkinson Children’s and Community Centre is a 4-room kindergarten on Bunurong country in the western suburb of Truganina.

\* Australian Government Department of Education. (2022). Belonging, being and becoming - the early years learning framework for Australia.



*“Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone.”*

*— George Dei*





# Better outcomes through traineeships



In 2024 we piloted a new traineeship program, for the first time recruiting and commencing a cohort of trainees with a different model of support around them. The program was designed to build an ongoing talent pipeline, supporting the sector for forecasted significant growth, raising the quality and retention of trainees and Certificate III Educators and building the capability of current staff through mentoring and leadership experience.

**One of the program's architects was ECMS Head of Talent and Workforce Planning Louise Moxom:**

"Thirteen trainees commenced the program in 2024 and were given a blend of central induction and place-based induction within each service. For the first 12 weeks, they were not included in the ratio to provide them with the holistic support they needed to thrive and to influence capability through our Pedagogical Framework and build belonging and knowledge of the ECMS way."

"We gave our onsite mentors training to help them conduct fortnightly mentoring with each trainee, providing relational support, observing practice and connecting each trainee to the teaching profession through pedagogical conversation, reflection and role modelling. Feedback for the trainee was important to support and track progress."

Trainees also received one day per month for Communities of Practice and group study time, which is unstructured, building self-efficacy across the cohort.

The support trainees receive through the process meets the short-term goal of addressing vacancy rates and the long-term benefits of a more capable, more engaged workforce. The program continues to evolve and will incorporate feedback to fine tune how we can grow the program in future.



# Supporting provisionally registered teachers



In 2023 we identified a gap in the way provisionally registered teachers were supported in the process of moving to full registration. In 2024, a support program run by Provisionally Registered Teacher (PRT) program coach-mentor Katie Berryman gained such momentum that it's beginning to change career choices of pre-service teachers.

Katie's role was created to offer program-wide mentorship and to ensure that every PRT had access to the same opportunity for support.

Checkpoint triadic meetings were established, including a pre-panel, so that there was absolute surety of a positive outcome for all PRTs. But more than just ensuring a successful panel outcome, it's a wrap-around graduate support program.

The program fosters greater understanding of what it is to differentiate learning for individual children, and the planning cycle to support individual children's learning. It's also about early years teachers developing their sense of professional identity as ongoing learners themselves – to view themselves as always on an inquiry journey towards continuous improvement.

The program went from having just a few PRTs being supported towards their panel to 15 commencing the program in 2024 and 23 ready to start in 2025. Katie has seen the benefits immediately:

"We've found that PRTs completing the program are sharing their experience with others and now there's a lot more confidence that this isn't a scary process,

they trust they'll receive the same level of support and that in turn creates greater interest among others."

There was a perception among dual stream pre-service teachers that there wasn't a lot of graduate support available to them in early years education, leading to a shift towards working in schools. Anecdotal evidence suggests this is changing. As awareness of the support offered by ECMS grows, more pre-service teachers will be re-affirmed in their desire to work in early years.





# A great place to work



**Our focus on maintaining a well-supported and engaged team is a key driver in better outcomes for children. 87% of our people regard ECMS as a great place to work.**

## **Our commitment to learning and development**

Our purpose is to foster lifelong learning, and at our core we are a learning organisation. We expanded our traineeship program and experienced a higher retention rate than the previous program. We also provided a more supported, expanded program for provisionally registered teachers. We ran 10 Educational Leader Forums to build connection and engagement, increased our support for Practice Coaches and provided organisation-wide learning and development support through our VECTEA PD day and 2024 Conference.

## **Powering our people**

We successfully implemented a major upgrade to our IT people support platform by creating a dedicated project team, training people well and creating efficiencies through self service and better access. The new system increases our ability to invest in people and deliver better service and ultimately, outcomes for children.

## **Pay rates continue to rise**

We continued to offer above-award pay increases and the Federal government-funded Worker Retention Payment effective in December 2024 ensures ELC pay rates will continue to increase.

# Leaders leading leaders



Last year ECMS re-invigorated our support for leaders, with the re-introduction of Educational Leader Forums, run by Head of Pedagogy Emma Forsyth and Head of Practice Kathryn Main. While Emma and Kathryn's expertise guided the sessions, they gave our leaders the opportunity to lead each other, sharing experience and insights, and developing the all-important skill of critical reflection.

Kathryn explains the aim of the program, "We know that time for leaders is divided across many priorities, responsibilities and relationships and the curriculum aspect often gets missed. Creating a dedicated space of reflection about educational leadership leads to better outcomes for children."

Emma and Kathryn ran regional forums in both terms 3 and 4, 2024.

To foster an atmosphere of critical reflection, Emma and Kathryn used the Circle of Security, an attachment model for children, adapting it to help develop openness and the courage to be vulnerable.

Bringing people together through shared experience had strong impact. There was a feeling of facing similar challenges or wondering about the same things. Contexts were different but working through things together, the leaders felt a powerful sense of 'I am not alone'

Emma described the effect on teaching practice, "Forums have been seen as a pivotal resource for professional development. Our leaders have expressed profound gratitude for the leadership and organisation of these reflective spaces. As one leader beautifully stated, 'Every time I attend one of these sessions, my passion for learning and leading is ignited.'"

Kathryn saw a clear transformation, "Our people matter. The work that we do here actually changes people and that leads to the change in practice. That's why it's so deeply important and fulfilling and keeps us so close to our purpose."



# Becoming with place: Our commitment to place-based pedagogy



**At ECMS our place-based approach is a core tenet of our pedagogical framework. How does this work in the everyday life of a service?**

Sometimes it happens in incremental ways and always directed by the wonderings of children.

At Bulldogs Community Children's Centre, a simple, everyday observation of a bird commonly found in that area led to a deeper exploration of place – of Country, of the Bunurong people and of indigenous languages. And all of it was led by the observations and reflections of children.

"It came from the children", Service Leader Archi Walia explains. "We were sitting outside with a book called *The Art in Country* by Bronwyn Bancroft. We were exploring the illustrations in it, how Country was represented, and looking at our garden. At that time, a bird landed on the sunshade where we were sitting, and a child started talking about the bird."

This moment gave Archi opportunity to purposely explore the children's understanding of Country, beginning with a conversation about taking care of the birds and how they're a part of nature.

"And that led us to a conversation about what is nature – are we part of nature, the land part of nature,

the Bunurong people part of nature? So it started a whole lot of conversation about Bunurong country."

The journey has only just begun.

"We talked about birds being represented as black in indigenous art, and we know there'll be future conversations to be had about the words 'black' and 'dark'. It's going to be an ongoing process."

Becoming with place embraces not just an understanding of where we came from, but also where we are today – the local community in all its richness.

"And that's part of our anti bias approach – we've got so many different family structures here in our learning environment. We talk with the children about diversity and everyone's social environments. And they're ongoing conversations."

One child spotting a bird can lead to so much.

*"The best teachers are those who show you  
where to look but don't tell you what to see."  
— Alexandra K. Trenfor*





# Starting Strong at Macleod Preschool



## About us

Macleod Preschool offers 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten programs in the heart of Macleod Village

Starting Strong emerged in 2001 as a key policy priority for OECD Member countries, emphasising quality and accessibility in early childhood education and care. Research confirms that the early years lay the foundation for lifelong learning and play a crucial role in shaping educational, social, and family outcomes.

At ECMS, we build these insights into our daily practice, ensuring every child and family experiences the benefits of strong early learning foundations. Relationships are at the heart of what we do, reinforcing the importance of connection, security, and support in a child's first five years. And these strong foundations create a ripple effect for years to come!

Cathryn Christelow, Educational Leader and Early Childhood Teacher at Macleod Preschool, shares a lovely story that highlights this impact:

"Earlier this year, a past grandparent visited, bringing craft materials and a special message. We taught her four grandchildren—twins now in Year 6, and others in Year 4 and Year 2. She said the twins had just been named school captains, along with two other children who had been in our class at the time. She told us, 'The foundation you built and the values you instilled contributed to and led to this moment. We wanted to say thank you.'"

While we don't always see the long-term effects of our work, moments like this reaffirm the power of high-quality early education. They remind us that Starting Strong isn't just about the beginning of a child's journey—it's about fostering lifelong learners and building meaningful, lasting connections.

*"Data informs, but relationships transform. The greatest impact comes from the connections we build."*

*— Dr Brad Johnson*





# Research

## Our research partners



### **Birth to Three - Academic Mentorship** - Dr Katherine Bussey

Beginning in 2023, this research partnership is co-located in two ECMS Early Learning Centres. With academic mentor Dr Katherine Bussey, the aim is to build internal capability to assess and improve birth to three practices.



### **Ngarrngga Project - University of Melbourne**

This is an Indigenous-led research project with a vision of connecting every child in Australia with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems, histories, and cultures.

Based on the needs of our people, and in partnership with the Ngarrngga curriculum team, this research will produce resources and professional learning for teaching teams across the country.



### **The Gift of Place - Anti-Bias Approaches** - Dr Red Ruby Scarlet

Beginning in 2022, this project engages with anti-bias approaches to reconfigure how our organisation can become 'critically inclusive'. This whole organisational change research project begins 'with place' and is led in partnership with Dr Red Ruby Scarlet.



### **The EDGE Study** - The University of Melbourne / The Front Project / Victorian Department of Education

The Educational and Developmental Gains in Early Childhood (EDGE) study was a five-year evaluation of the state-wide rollout of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten in Victoria between 2020-2024. Its findings on the impact of kindergarten on children's outcomes will inform how to achieve an equitable and impactful system.



### **Australian Council of Education Research (ACER)**

This research project aims to create assessment tools, including a learning progression, for teaching teams to use in their day-to-day practice. This will help them better understand children's development, support teaching teams, and communicate children's learning and growth.

This research is an essential part of the lead-up to the Preschool Outcome Measure (POM), which is due to be released in 2025.

#### **Our purpose**

Through our ECMS pedagogical framework, all aspects of our work across our organisation are research informed and underpinned by evidence.

As a lifelong learning organisation, research and project partnerships provide opportunities for ECMS to delight in the practices of our teaching teams, grow our collective thinking, and contribute to the evidence base that various stakeholders can draw upon to influence policy, decision-making, and future initiatives.

#### **Strategic Research Partnerships and Projects**

Our approach to research and project partnering aligns deeply with our commitment to social justice and our ECMS Pedagogical Framework. In 2025, we have deliberately and purposefully partnered with projects that connect to our purpose and enable our people to contribute to aspects of practice and pedagogy that matter to them.



# Working together

In addition to our research partners, we partner with local and state governments, peak bodies, transdisciplinary partners, and other organisations.



### Local Governments

We continue to work closely with local governments in the communities we serve. We collaborate on session modelling to accommodate family needs. This ensures families have equitable access to places in sessional kindergarten throughout enrolment.



### The Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE)

The Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE) is our professional development partner for implementing CLASS, an internationally accredited program that measures the effectiveness of educator interactions with children.

CLASS enables targeted improvement plans for educators and for ECMS to monitor our improvement over time in the domains of intentional teaching, responsiveness and emotional support.



### Melbourne City Mission

Melbourne City Mission continued to be our partner of choice for the delivery of allied health supports for services under School Readiness Funding. Our work together continues to evolve, with increasing levels of sophistication and responsiveness.



### The Alannah & Madeline Foundation (AMF)

2024 saw the continuation of our partnership with AMF for building trauma-informed practice and well-being capability across our teaching teams. A highlight was sharing our work together at the ECA conference in Brisbane. This partnership has enabled us to learn and see the impact of the investment across time which has led to the decision to bring this work in house. This partnership will cease in 2025 with four Social Workers/Trauma Consultants now part of our multidisciplinary team.

# Thank you

We recognise our work is made possible through Government funding, grants and subsidies.

We'd like to thank the Victorian State Government and the Commonwealth Government for their continued recognition of the invaluable impact of early childhood education and care.





# Our Team

## Our Board Members

### Vanda Fortunato

Board Chair  
Governance & Remuneration Committee Chair  
Finance Committee  
Risk Committee

### Charlotte Rendle-Short~

Deputy Chair  
Finance Committee  
Governance & Remuneration Committee

### Linda Weatherson

Risk Committee Chair  
Governance & Remuneration Committee

### Celia Pollard

Governance & Remuneration Committee

### Jason Talbot

Finance Committee Chair

### Amanda Watkinson

Risk Committee  
Finance Committee

### Ryan Mistry

Risk Committee

### Ellen Hooper

Finance Committee  
Risk Committee

### Jenny Mikakos\*

Governance & Remuneration Committee

### Peter Lewinsky\*

Finance Committee

~ finished Board term May 2024  
\* new appointment 2024

## Our Executive Team

### Kieren Kearney\*

CEO

### Donna Geraeds

Director of Risk and Compliance

### David Soboh\*

Chief Financial Officer

### Rebecca Hand

Director of Early Childhood Education

### Kate Smith

Director of Marketing and Communications

### Stu Braganza-Travis

Director of Strategy

### Amanda Hughes

Acting Director of People\*

\* new appointment 2024

Board member	Board	Governance & Remuneration Committee	Finance Committee	Risk Committee
Vanda Fortunato	9/9	4/4	5/5	2/3
Linda Weatherson	7/9	3/3		4/4
Celia Pollard	9/9	4/4		
Jason Talbot	8/9		7/7	
Amanda Watkinson	9/9		2/5	1/1
Ryan Mistry	5/9			4/4
Ellen Hooper	8/9		3/3	3/3
Jenny Mikakos	5/5	1/1		
Peter Lewinsky	3/5		3/3	



# Financials

## Statement of profit or loss for the year ended 31 December 2024

	2024 (\$)	2023 (\$)
Revenue	72,102,032	60,333,889
Revenue from investments	1,405,535	1,342,024
Total Revenue	73,507,567	61,675,913
Administration expenses	7,780,942	6,057,841
Depreciation and amortisation expense	1,196,633	1,317,254
Employee benefits expense	61,007,919	48,905,258
Fair value (gain) loss on financial assets	352,243	331,809
Property expenses	2,645,888	1,761,567
Other expenses	49,965	293,988
Finance costs	121,494	109,574
Total Expense	73,155,084	58,777,291
Net surplus for the year	352,483	2,898,622

2024 Total Revenue

74million

Revenue Growth

19%



# The joy of early learning

There are magical moments happening every day in our services, where the smallest discovery of a child or interaction with others can transform their early learning journey. We asked our team to describe a moment during the year which demonstrated the joy of early learning.

"At the end of the year we invite families along to celebrate their child's growth. We begin by greeting everyone in their various languages, then we sing a song and invite the families to sing along with us. The entire large room was filled with enthusiastic singing, clapping and arm swinging from the children and their families. A grandparent who doesn't speak any English at all was grinning from ear to ear while doing the actions. The beauty of music is how it can bring people from all backgrounds together. This special time of year is all about making these connections, offering a sense of belonging and being valued as well as making positive lasting memories."

**Jo Clarke**  
Macleod preschool

"Examining mini-beast specimens encased in resin blocks ignited a child's curiosity, sharing his enthusiasm with his peers and educators. "That one looks like a ladybug." "Ms. Kellie, that's a big one and that's a small one." "This one looks like a spider. I see them in the garden." His peers joined in and discussed their observations. What a wonderful opportunity for collaborative learning! The mini-beast reference book sparked more questions and together we expanded our vocabulary. Later the child invited me to join him at the art and craft table to make a bug, and we worked together on our very own bug hotel - how lucky was I? It was amazing to observe him bring his idea to life. He concentrated, problem solved and put his prior knowledge to work. The smile on his face was a clear indicator of his sense of achievement. How is that for his emotional wellbeing and sense of self? I was privileged to be a part of his learning journey."

**Kellie Kovacevic**  
Epping Preschool

"A boy arrived from a war-torn battleground in Ukraine, being exposed to bombings and violence and hiding in bus shelters waiting to leave there. With parent support and guidance from kinder, I was able to connect services, provide literature and engage many strategies to assist him to progress. This work was ongoing and took time and sensitivity. Everything was foreign, scary and overwhelming. Slowly but surely kinder enabled transformation across all developmental areas. It became his happy and safe place and enabled purposeful and fun exposure to his learnings. He can now regulate himself, communicate and achieve things that once he could not even understand. He has become connected, trusting, engaged, has friends and arrives and leaves each day with a hug and a smile. He is emotionally calm, cognitively alert and academically improved. Our work has proven heart-warming and worthwhile, making a difference to a little boy and family that has overcome such horrendous barriers before coming to kinder. He is now ready and prepared for attending school and his lifelong journey."

**Julie Kavanagh**  
Melton Central Kindergarten

"We discovered that if we planted seeds in a low tray, grass would grow and then we could give it to our pet rabbit. After the rabbit has eaten most of the grass, we put the tray out in the sun and rain and it grows again! What a great way to see the plant cycle and to care for another living creature!"

**Shelli Giosis**  
Delta Road Preschool

"It all started with an impromptu baking session. During this activity, teachers noticed children working as a team, collaborating and showing patience. To foster these dispositions in the children, the teaching team offered various sports activities like basketball, cricket, team races, yoga and other physical and active play. The children responded well and to our surprise, started playing games on their own, like musical chairs. It didn't take long for them to realise that they need to work collaboratively to play games like running, cricket and basketball. They not only learned how to play together but also skills like how to invite others in play and listen to each other as they made their own rules in the play."

**Poonam Jain**  
Warreen Primary School Kindergarten



