Dear Friends and Colleagues.

Welcome to our fourth newsletter – how the months fly past.

In this special issue, we will be profiling two of our researchers, Dr Amy Conley-Wright and Karen Tonge. We will talk about our new flexible options for studying early childhood at UOW regional campuses. We are proud to announce four additional centres which have joined our Early Start network including Gudjahgahmiaminia at Wreck Bay on the South Coast. We pay tribute to Christopher Abbott AM who has been a major driving force behind Early Start and catch up with our Project Coordinator, Adam Selinger working with children and families on an archaeological dig at Killalea State Park.

We round off the newsletter with a thank you to Alumni contribution towards Early Start and kindly thank Monique Harper-Richardson and her staff.

BUILDING BLOCKS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Christopher Abbott AM has not only contributed $7M to Early Start, but also provided the materials and labour for the wood building blocks to the Early Childhood Centres in the Early Start network.

In 2014 we know that children are highly capable learners. Preschoolers can navigate their way through an iPad and can probably help you solve IT issues on your own laptop, but some learning tools never go out of style.

Wooden building blocks are in every early childhood centre. They are a timeless classic – teaching children many skills and are often a child’s first introduction to numeracy and mathematics.

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Block play has the following benefits:

• Increases hand-eye coordination;
• Develops an understanding of cause and effect;
• Enhances logical thinking and problem solving skills;
• Enhances creativity;
• Enhances language skills;
• Provides ability to sustain interest, increase concentration and overcome frustration.

Gudjahgahmiamia Early Learning Centre at Wreck Bay and Jervis Bay Preschool are lucky enough to have a set of building blocks with a difference. Both services received a set of blocks made from wood from Mr and Mrs Abbott’s property at Jamberoo. Sustainability is a hot topic in early childhood education and what a wonderful addition to these centres to have a set of blocks from wood sourced less than 100kms away. The Abbotts are an integral part of the Early Start initiative and provided the biggest single philanthropic gift of $7 million to the University for the support of Early Start.

Leon Hallam, property manager at the Abbott’s Jamberoo property, cut the blocks to size and finished them to be smooth for little hands.

Thank you to Mr and Mrs Abbott and Leon Hallam, for your generous donation of materials and skills. Blocks are timeless learning tools.

EARLY START ENGAGEMENT CENTRE NETWORK GOES FROM 38 TO 41!

Our Early Start Engagement Centre network continues to grow, with 15 of our centres receiving their technology bundle and a further 13 ready for installation in the coming months. Recently, we have been fortunate enough to add four new early childhood services to our Early Start Network:

**Gudjahgahmiamia Early Learning Centre, Wreck Bay**

On Thursday, 8 May 2014, members of the Early Start team visited Wreck Bay to meet the staff at Gudjahgahmiamia ELC and formally welcome them to the Early Start Engagement Centre Network. The centre is a community based service with children aged 0-5 from the Wreck Bay community.

The opportunities that Early Start can offer to the children from this small community are endless and will help to improve the quality and standard of the already great work the staff are doing.

**Kids Uni South, Kids Uni North and South Coast Workers Child Care Centre**

As a key component of the University community, the on-campus and off-campus early education and care services operated by UniCentre have also formed a partnership with Early Start as Engagement Centres. The Centres already have access to very similar technologies in their everyday practice, however staff are very keen to form relationships across the Early Start network through the sharing of resources, professional development ideas and more.
Supporting and empowering parents of young children with special needs

All families need support, but this need can be particularly acute for parents of young children with special needs. Given the unique experiences associated with raising a child with disabilities, it can be helpful for parents to talk with other parents who have the same 24/7 lived experience. Parents can offer each other emotional support, affirming triumphs and challenges and providing a safe space to confide worries. Parents can also offer each other informational support, sharing about local resources and helping each other become better advocates for their children. For these reasons, parent peer support has been used as a programme model to support and empower parents of children with special needs.

Dr Amy Conley Wright, Senior Lecturer in Social Work and member of the Early Start Research Institute at the University of Wollongong, is working with Noah’s Ark of the Shoalhaven to design research on how peer support and advocacy training impact parental stress, empowerment, and advocacy on behalf of their child. She has previously published research on peer support for parents in the child welfare system and advocacy by parents of young children with special needs. She is also co-author of the book Six Steps to Child Advocacy: Changing the World for Children (Sage Publications, 2013), which presents practical knowledge and skills for engaging in child advocacy.

On the initiative of a parent, Noah’s Ark is developing a new parent-to-parent peer support programme. This programme will provide the following for parents of children with special needs: structured peer support group meetings, mentoring by parents with disability services experience, and training in child advocacy. With the understanding that distance, lack of transportation and other logistical issues may prevent some parents from attending in-person meetings, technology-mediated methods of providing support and training are also being explored.

Programmes such as this one are increasingly important due to changing policies and programmes in the disability sector. The upcoming implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme will give parents more control over choosing services for their children. This will necessitate that they have skills and knowledge to advocate for the best interests of their children. Children are also increasingly being mainstreamed in early childhood and other educational programs. In mainstream environments, parents can feel isolated and miss opportunities for informal interactions with other parents of children with disabilities.

The programme will be open to parents at Early Start Engagement Centres; parents do not have to be clients of Noah’s to participate. More information will be distributed via the Early Start website and email lists once the programme is launched.
RESEARCHER IN PROFILE – KAREN TONGE

Using engagement centres to get educators on their feet

What does a corporate office in London have to do with a preschool in New South Wales? Karen Tonge visited the University College London in April to see how they were using activity and location monitors in offices around the city to map workplace activity, and now she is using the same technology in Early Start engagement centres across NSW to see if physical educators influence the physical activity of their children.

“We’re certainly looking for an active educator being involved with children, following the child’s prompt, being physically active, and just getting in that moment with children, engaging with children in that learning and physical activity,” says Karen.

“From my experience I have found that if educators are more involved in children’s play and activity, children are more inclined to also become involved - particularly those children that aren’t as confident in those areas.”

The study will measure how the educator’s involvement with their children affects how active or sedentary they are using radio frequency devices and ActiGraph monitors, comparing the educator’s activity and location with the children.

“By combining these two sets of information we will actually be seeing where children are most active and where they’re least active, and where the educator is at those particular times,” says Karen. “And on the other side of that where the educator is most active and least active, and how that is measured against the activity of the children.”

Karen believes that while educators are engaging with children with literacy and numeracy, often they disengage with physical activity. “Educators assume that children are physically active, particularly when they are outside, that children are naturally just playing, running, sustaining physical activity levels that are sufficient, and so often educators are sitting back, particularly in an outdoors environment and allowing children to just play,” says Karen.

This research will take place in around six of the 38 engagement centres across NSW. The advantage for UOW is that Karen and researchers like her have already been able to build a rapport through constant interaction with the centres, and can easily continue to build up the knowledge of research that’s already occurring and improve engagement centre practices, as well as practices throughout all Early Childhood Education and Care Services. “We’re also hoping that data that has already been collected in these services can potentially be used to support some of my research as well,” says Karen.

“What we’re doing is new to this area of children’s physical activity. We know how physically active or inactive children are in services, we have seen a little bit of research into the role that equipment and programs play, but what we’re not seeing is the role of educators.”

“The big picture for me is that I may be able to establish some recommendations and programs that will very specifically support educators in their role with children and physical activity. Hopefully we’ll be able to support these services and give back to educators.”
EARLY YEARS DEGREE – BLENDED DELIVERY

Keen to gain qualifications in early childhood education in a flexible way and still have a life... then read on!

If you are passionate about early childhood education and care then the Bachelor of Education – The Early Years is for you. As part of the Early Start initiative the B. Education - The Early Years will be offered along the south coast from 2015, making the degree available at Shoalhaven, Bateman’s Bay and Bega campuses as well as the Wollongong campus.

The course has been re-designed to meet the needs of students across UOW’s campuses. Whilst retaining its original structure, content and integrity, a more flexible approach balances reduced face-to-face requirements with ‘hands on’ workshops. Experienced lecturers, tutors and guest expert practitioners ensure learning activities, whether online or on campus, provide enriched educational experiences for all students.

This course may be taken on a full-time basis over four years or part-time and provides an exciting approach to achieving a recognised professional qualification. It is open to school leavers and those who have been out of school for a while. Credit is provided for relevant qualifications and can reduce the number of subjects that have to be taken.

Connections across UOW’s campuses through the new Early Start facility and network of Early Start Engagement Centres will provide students with authentic learning experiences.

Flexible learning activities allow students to access information in different ways and from different locations . . . although the ‘home’ campus in each area will be important for face-to-face workshops and learning activities, students may also ‘connect’ for learning via their computers, tablets or phones whilst at home, at work or on location in early childhood education and care services.

The B. Education – The Early Years is an innovative teacher education program with a strong emphasis on practical community engagement and professional experience that recognises the importance of enriched educational opportunities for young children. Also important is the focus on young children being connected to family, community, culture and place, ensuring their health, development and wellbeing. A number of key features add to the distinctiveness of the B. Education – The Early Years:

Professional Experience (PEX) – scheduled placements are organised in a range of settings in each year of the four years of the course.

Professional Partners in Practice (PPP) – this professional mentoring program involves each student working with an experienced mentor in an early childhood education and care service throughout the course.

International Opportunities – students may participate in exchange and study abroad programs, international cultural immersion programs and international early childhood teacher education programs.

Professional Recognition – the degree is recognised by the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) and is an approved early childhood teaching qualification for the purpose of the Education and Care Services National Law Regulations.

Subjects in the course include approaches to child development, educational and developmental outcomes for children, cultural and social diversity, early intervention and transition to school, leadership and advocacy, and curriculum development. Employment opportunities are extremely good and a career as an early education teacher is recognised as being exciting, demanding and rewarding.

Staff at each of our campuses will also have specific information - don’t forget to look out for the Open Nights at the south coast campuses:

Bega Tuesday 19 August
Batemans Bay Wednesday 20 August
Shoalhaven Wednesday 27 August

Or come to our huge University Open Day on Saturday 14 August at the Wollongong campus - register to attend and talk to our Education staff: www.uow.edu.au/openday

If you are a Year 12 school leaver and would like information about Early Admission check out our site at: www.uow.edu.au/future/early-admission

Online applications open at 9.00am Friday 1 August and close by 5.00pm Friday 29 August 2014.

Interviews for the B. Education –The Early Years are held at the Wollongong campus or you can book a telephone interview. Interviews for Education are on Monday 29 September, Tuesday 30 September and Wednesday 1 October – don’t forget to submit your online application!

Contact details for more information about the B. Education – The Early Years or any of our other courses:

Faculty of Social Sciences
Student Services
+61 2 4221 3981
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www.uow.edu.au/future
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YENU ALLOWAH OPEN DAY – 27 JUNE 2014

After 40 years in the making, Yenu Allowah, an Aboriginal Child & Family Centre, officially opened on Friday, 27 June in Mt Druitt. The Early Learning Centre will become an active participant in the Early Start Engagement Centre network at the University of Wollongong.

Yenu Allowah means ‘walking together’ and this is exactly what is planned for this service – early childhood professionals, allied health professionals and a family links coordinator are all working together to provide a welcoming environment for local Aboriginal children and their families.

As you walk into Yenu Allowah’s centre, you immediately feel a sense of belonging and pride in the community. Private meeting rooms, open spaces and a beautifully landscaped outdoor area, along with an inspiring Early Learning Centre offering many opportunities for engagement.

We are very much looking forward to being part of Yenu Allowah’s journey into the future and are honoured to have Allowah as an Early Start Engagement Centre.
KIDS DIG DEBUTS EARLY START DISCOVERY SPACE EXPERIENCES IN THE ILLAWARRA

The proof is in the pudding, as they say, and so from 18-24 May 2014 Early Start successfully staged its first portable family learning experience during KidsFest Shellharbour. Hundreds of Illawarra children and families became time detectives as they participated in Kids Dig - a simulated archaeological dig involving real tools and ‘grown up’ equipment. Many participants also enjoyed the opportunity to also speak with working archaeologists – alumni from UOW - about their jobs, and what inspired them to ‘take up the shovel’.

Early Start and UOW’s In2Uni Program collaboratively staged Kids Dig, with further support from the Faculty of Social Sciences (Marketing), the Office of Advancement (Alumni) and UOW Strategic Marketing (Media). Community supporters included Ki lalrea Stage Park (venue), Tongara Museum (artefacts and historical context) as well as several individuals who combed local antique shops and markets for suitable ‘artefacts’ for our dig.

During the week-long event Kids Dig was visited by over 500 children and adults donning high visibility vests to excavate buried items, identify and document their finds and participate in discussion around using recovered artefacts as evidence for the historical human occupation of a site. We adopted the code of the traditional landholders, and that of archaeological best practice in asserting, “what’s found in the ground stays in the ground”. In other words, once artefacts were uncovered and documented in the ID Tent they would be returned to where they were found, so that others who came later could find. This principle of respecting culture, and being sustainable, is very much at the core of the Early Start authentic learning experience philosophy.

The dig site in Killalea State Park featured an on-site, interactive museum, which housed genuine artefacts that could be handled by our visitors. Many of these objects were on loan to Early Start from the local Tongarra historical museum. Part of the Early Start vision is to establish and sustain linkages to other community learning and cultural resources (museums, art galleries, historical and natural sites, etc) and this was a good example of the potential for such relationships to benefit each other.

We used the opportunity to also play with our iPads by using them to create a virtual excursion for three of our Early Start Engagement Centres; Northside Moruya, Barrack Heights and Bellambi Point pre-schools joined Michelle Gregory via their interactive whiteboards as she took them around the dig site. They saw our site office where visiting children received their safety vests, before following them into the dig. They could speak to Michelle, and the children as they uncovered items form the sand. This will be the kind of activity we hope to share with all our other ESECs when the Discovery Space is up and running next year.

So, why a kids dig? Well, everyone loves to dig; and the experience of undergoing a safe and authentic archaeological excavation means everyone from young children to adults can have fun while sneakily learning about history, culture, science and art. This activity also serves as a great example of the design philosophy for all the interactive experiences currently planned for the Early Start Discovery Space, which when it opens in January 2015 will be Australia’s only example of a USA-styled ‘children’s museum’. This approach is supported by evidence that learning through play has the greatest impact on young minds.

Imaginative play is a crucial component of a child’s healthy development. It might look simple and uncomplicated but children’s play is actually a complex process that affects all aspects of a child’s life. Play shapes how children make sense of their world, how they learn thinking skills, and how they acquire language.

When the Early Start Discovery Space opens it will have more than a dozen interactive experiences. Visitors will be able to take a tour of a tummy (complete with full anatomical sound effects), crawl through a cave, create a masterpiece in the Art Precinct, barter in the Marketplace, and discover the genius of Galileo from his study.

We look forward to participating in KidsFest Shellharbour in 2015 – what will we dig up then?!
ALUMNI ANNUAL APPEAL

Shannen Matrini can remember the excitement in the voices of parents on the other end of the phone when she called to speak with them about the University of Wollongong’s new Early Start Discovery Space for young people.

Shannen was part of a team of student callers who were instrumental in generating funds to help get Early Start up and running as part of the Office of Advancement’s annual phone appeal. The 44 student callers spent five weeks phoning Alumni and other generous supporters of the university to inform them of Early Start and ask for their continued support in making sure this new addition to the university would continue to grow.

“There were a number of people who had children and were extremely excited once I started talking to them about Early Start. A lot of people thought that the activities sounded really exciting and the whole concept of learning and exposing their children to university at a young age was a fantastic idea,” Shannen says.

“The majority of the people who decided to donate were happy to do so as they supported their own children’s education, and believed that it would encourage the children in pursuing tertiary education later in life. I had a good conversation with a few people about myself and how I had never been to university prior to age 17 (when I went to university on my first day), and how I would have loved to have that exposure early on in life. They were shocked, and it put things into perspective for them and really encouraged them to consider supporting.”

From the calls made between March 3 and April 3 this year the student callers were pledged $33,920 from 138 supporters and 99 committed supporters.

“I decided to help out with the calls because I basically live and breathe UOW! I love university and I just wanted to give back and help spread the word and encourage people to support passionate students like myself. University can really change a person’s life and I just wanted the Alumni to hear that from a current student,” Shannen says.

“Talking about Early Start [to people] is a great way to get the word out as it not only gets you [the student caller] excited, but it gets other people excited as well. It’s a really exciting project and by talking to people and communicating this excitement it gets them more involved. It’s good to talk about the importance of education as well, specifically as Early Start caters to all different age groups, the different activities are a great way of explaining how Early Start will really have an impact on a child’s life.”
NEW ADDITIONS THE EARLY START TEAM:

Learning Technologist
Jane Morgan from Bellambi Point Community Preschool will be working with us until Michelle Gregory returns from maternity leave.
Jane is an Early Childhood Teacher with current experience in various early education settings, from preschool to long day care both in Australia and overseas. Her interest is in early childhood leadership and partnering with educators to have high expectations for children and to realise children's potential, while reflecting their culture and individual needs.
Jane is also proficient in multitasking – along with her full time role as a Learning Technologist she is kept busy at home with 2 children, 2 dogs and 3 cats.

Educational Designer
Cecile Bower is an Educational Designer within the Early Start Project whilst Lisa Carrington-Long is on maternity leave.
She holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours); a Diploma of Education (Secondary); and a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (Adult Education). In her role, Cecile will be redesigning courses aligned with the Early Start project for blended delivery at UOW and its South Coast campuses.
Cecile has over 25 years' experience in designing learning for distance and online education. Over this time she has worked with a range of educational technology tools and mediums including television. However Cecile believes that pedagogy should always guide the selection of these tools.
Cecile values working collaboratively with educators to achieve blended learning solutions that both engage learners and are sustainable for the educators who deliver them.
# The Team

**Professor Paul Chandler – Executive Director**

Professor Chandler holds a Science (Honours) from Sydney University and a Master of Science in Psychology and PhD in Education. In 1993, for his research in human cognition and learning, he became the first person to ever receive an Australian Research Council (ARC) Fellowship in education. Professor Chandler completed two terms as Head of School of Education at UNSW before being appointed Dean of Education at the University of Wollongong in 2007. In 2008, he was officially awarded as one of Australia’s ten most prominent researchers and to date is the most cited educational researcher appointed at any Australian University. In 2012, Professor Chandler was appointed the Executive Director of Early Start and Pro-Vice Chancellor (Inclusion & Outreach) at University of Wollongong.

**Associate Professor Pauline Lysaght – Associate Director**

Pauline Lysaght is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Wollongong. Her background is in educational psychology and her research interests focus on narrative, visual literacy and social justice. Following a successful application by the University of Wollongong for Federal Government funding through the Education Infrastructure Fund, the Early Start concept is becoming a reality and Pauline is very excited to be working as the Associate Director on this important project.

**Mr. Peter Maywald – Senior Project Officer**

Peter Maywald holds a Bachelor of Arts from University of Wollongong. Peter is a highly experienced Higher Education manager and has previously held the positions of Faculty Executive Manager, Deputy Director – Human Resources and Manager Employee Relations. He is a member of the NSW ACT Region Committee of the Association for Tertiary Education Management.

**Mr. Adam Selinger – Project Officer, Early Start Discovery Space**

Adam has been designing and staging educational programs for over 20 years, from science centre exhibits to stage shows and workshops at children’s festivals and community events. Adam has produced educational programs across the UK, New Zealand, Indonesia, China, the UAE and South Africa. He is looking forward to working with the community to realise the vision of a venue that inspires a child’s lifelong love of learning and creative thinking.

**Ms. Tanya Nikolic – Executive Assistant**

Tanya has worked with Professor Chandler since he was appointed as Dean of Education and was involved with the successful application for Government funding for the Early Start Project. Prior to UOW, Tanya spent a number of years overseas working in the Middle East and for the United Nations in administrative roles. She has a wide range of experience in commercial and public enterprise organisations including engaging with people from diverse backgrounds.

**Michelle Gregory – Learning Technologist**

She is a qualified Early Childhood teacher with teaching experience in various early education settings, as well caring for her own nine month old son at home. Michelle joined the higher education sector in 2008 and has lecturing/tutoring experience in areas of early years child development, philosophy, management, leadership and ICT. Her particular interest in ICT and early education forms the basis for her current PhD research, investigating ICT perspectives of in-service and pre-service early childhood educators.

**Dr Lisa Carrington-Long – Educational Designer**

Lisa holds a Bachelor of Teaching (Primary); Bachelor of Education (Honours); Graduate Certificate of Research Commercialisation; and Doctor of Philosophy. In her role, Lisa is redesigning courses aligned with the Early Start project for blended delivery at UOW South Coast campuses. She is also looking at options for technology-based delivery in ways that will enhance learning experiences for students. Lisa is a qualified primary school teacher and has tertiary lecturing/tutoring experience in the areas of educational technology, adult learning/teaching, and educational research methods. Lisa’s current interests include blended delivery methods using technology to enhance learning.