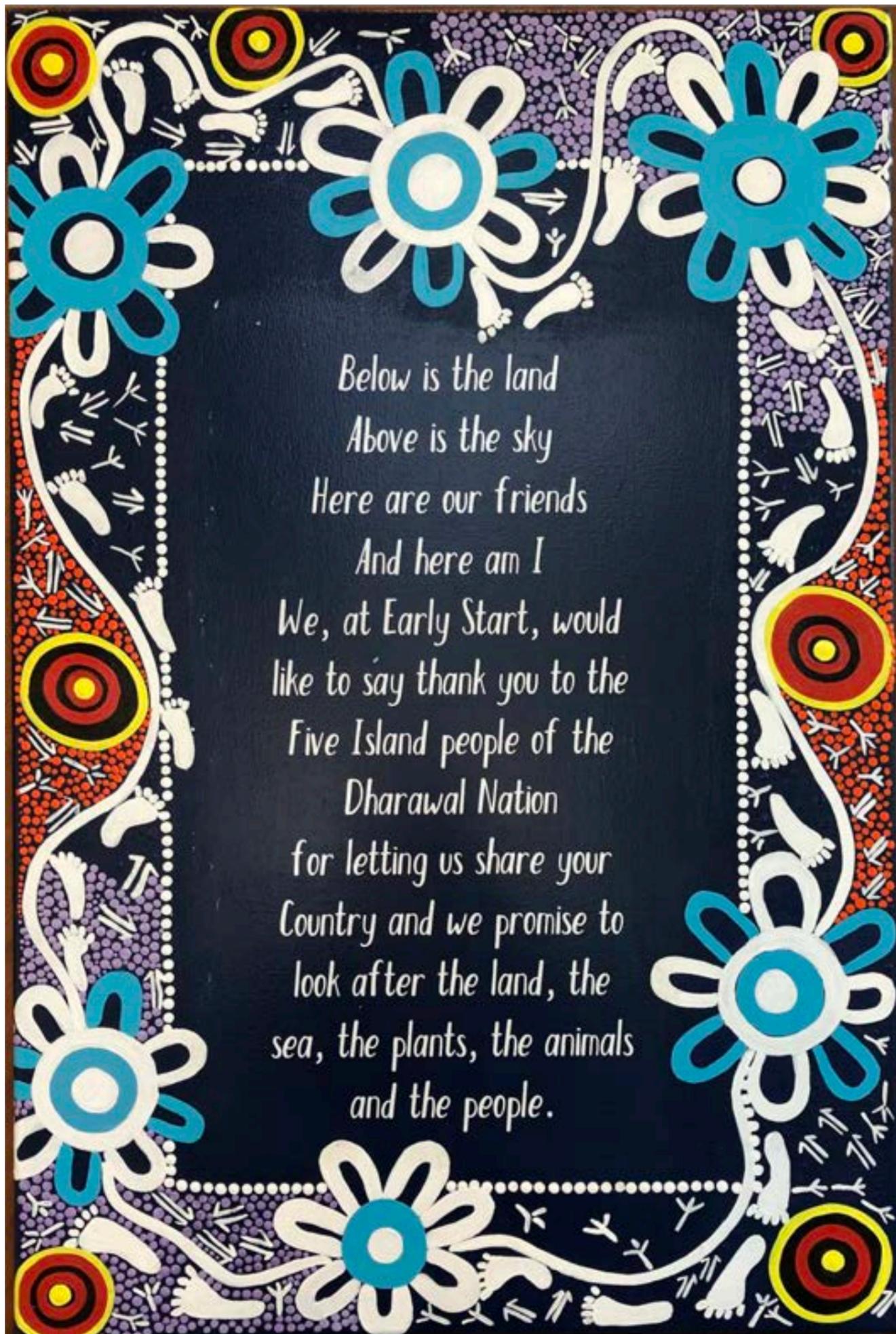


# ANNUAL REPORT 2021



UNIVERSITY  
OF WOLLONGONG  
AUSTRALIA



Below is the land  
Above is the sky  
Here are our friends  
And here am I  
We, at Early Start, would  
like to say thank you to the  
Five Island people of the  
Dharawal Nation  
for letting us share your  
Country and we promise to  
look after the land, the  
sea, the plants, the animals  
and the people.

## Acknowledgement of Country

The beautiful artwork by **Lorraine Brown** and **Narelle Thomas** from Coomaditchie United Aboriginal Corporation is displayed across *Early Start* and helps us share our Acknowledgement of Country with all visitors to *Early Start* and the *Discovery Space*.

See this Acknowledgement of Country as part of a Discovery at Home online educational experience presented by the Early Start Discovery Space: [Bridge Building for Reconciliation Week 2020](#).

*“The artwork shows the meeting places of communities.*

*The feet on the trails are showing how we walk together.*

*The blue in the symbols tell us of our coastal connection and the animal prints helping to show the land between the mountains and the sea.*

*The concentric circles show the special places of our coastal areas.”*

Aunty Narelle and Aunty Lorraine  
Coomaditchie United Aboriginal Corporation

# CONTENTS

**02** Acknowledgement of Country

**04** About Early Start

**05** Our Impact

**06** Reflections on 2021

**08** From our CEO and Chair

**10** Our Reconciliation Journey

## OUR WORK

**14** Our Work with Families

**16** Our Work with the Community

**18** Early Start Denver Model

**20** Our Work with Policy Makers

**22** Australian Centre for the Digital Child

**22** From Research to the Real World

## OUR PEOPLE

**24** Early Start Advisory Board and  
Committee Directors

**26** Leadership Team

**27** Research and Pedagogical Leaders

**29** Early Start Team Members

**29** Research Theme Leaders and Members

## OUR SUPPORTERS

**30** Projects & Funders 2021

**31** Profit & Loss Summary

## OUR MOMENTS

**32** Highlights

**33** Looking Forward



# OUR IMPACT



## DISCOVERY SPACE

An interactive children's play space that stimulates curiosity, nurtures creativity, builds confidence, and provides opportunities for hands-on learning, social connection, wellbeing and development.

**8,284**  
Individual Active Members

**61,168**  
Total Discovery Space visitors

**1,130**  
Virtual education experiences with children

**74**  
Free *Discovery to You* sessions supporting vulnerable children



## RESEARCH

Our world renowned, interdisciplinary researchers investigate areas of children's learning, health and development. We develop and advocate for evidence-based policies and programs to impact industry and practice.

**\$2.84 million**  
Research Income

**178**  
Peer reviewed publications

**8,978**  
Citations

**79**  
Higher degree research (HDR) students enrolled



## TRANSLATION

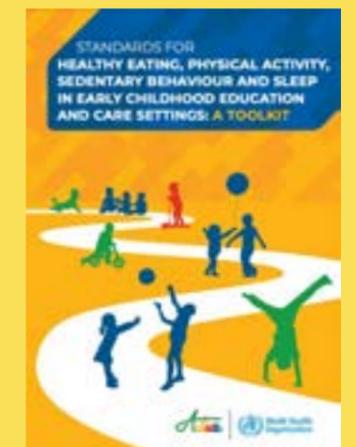
We aim to make a difference in the real world by turning our research into action. We do this at scale and in partnership with industry, government, philanthropists, corporations and the community.

**6**  
Translation Projects in operation in 2021

**SCALE**  
Projects impact children, families and communities locally, regionally, state-wide, nationally and internationally.

**PARTNERSHIPS**  
Impacts are amplified through broad-reaching partnerships with major industry, government and philanthropic organisations: World Health Organisation (WHO), NSW and VIC Departments of Education, Playgroup NSW, Illawarra Retirement Trust, Mater Dei, Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC), and the Parramatta Catholic Education Diocese.

**PUBLISHED REPORTS**  
Global Standards For Healthy Eating, Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour and Sleep In Early Childhood Education and Care Settings: A Toolkit, was published by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2021. See it [here](#)



# ABOUT EARLY START

At Early Start, we stand for children, no matter their background, or circumstance.

Early education is the critical first step to leading a full life, and Early Start is a leader in uniquely combining early childhood research, education, and community engagement to transform children's lives, particularly those in regional and remote Australia.

We achieve this with the support of our funders and partners through the dynamic interaction of our four pillars: Research, Translation, Engagement and the Discovery Space.

We work with children and families through the Discovery Space; early childhood educators through our engagement centre network; and aim to influence policy and practice through interdisciplinary research

and collaborations that improve knowledge and understanding of child development. Putting our research into action helps achieve real world impacts.

Early Start is a collaborative initiative between the Australian Government, the Abbott Foundation and the University of Wollongong (UOW) and is an entity of the Faculty of the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities.

Through collaboration with government, philanthropists, corporations, and policymakers, we facilitate positive developmental and educational outcomes for children, their families and communities.



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We support and collaborate with 50 early childhood services in regional and remote areas to enrich professional practice and strengthen outcomes for children, their families and communities.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**  
**50**  
Early Start Engagement Centres across NSW and ACT

**3,042**  
Total Professional Learning participants

**617**  
Early childhood teachers across NSW participated in NESA Accredited workshops

**86**  
Total number of workshops

**28**  
Topics covered

**EARLY START DENVER MODEL (ESDM)**  
**171**  
Total participants in ESDM programs to support children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

**85**  
ESDM Advanced Workshop attendees (47 from Australia, 38 from around the world)

**42**  
Attendees to ESDM for Educators and Therapy Assistants

**44**  
Parents, carers and professionals supported with ESDM early intervention coaching, mentoring, supervision and support



## Early Start and the Sustainable Development Goals

The University of Wollongong became a signatory to the University Commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2019, and through its global networks, works together with industry, research partners, governments, communities and other universities to provide solutions to society's critical economic, environmental, social and health challenges.

Early Start's work to overcome disadvantage and positively impact children, their families and communities is aligned with Sustainable Development Goal #4: Quality Education. Our achievements against SDG#4 are recognised in the 2021 UOW Sustainable Development Goals Report, p6

# REFLECTIONS ON 2021

*"I started giving to Early Start in 2016 to help provide a basis for children to learn and develop values as they grow older. Our children are not just our strength for the future but they're also particularly vulnerable if we don't provide them with the opportunities that they should have. The 'Discovery to You' sessions will give hope to children in hospital, reinforcing positive thoughts rather than focusing on their condition or disease."*

Graham Lancaster, AM

*"We had a countdown to our visit - it was like Christmas for our kindys"*

School Excursion Teacher  
visiting the Discover Space



**Professor Patricia M Davidson**  
Vice Chancellor

*"Early Start makes valuable contributions to both the community and the University of Wollongong. Whether welcoming children and families to our Wollongong campus through the Discovery Space, contributing to policy reform, or supporting professionals in the early childhood education and care sector (especially in regional and remote areas), Early Start is improving social and educational outcomes for children, their families and the communities in which they live."*

*"The complete course delivery was very detailed and valuable for educators working within early childhood. The opportunities to take notes, implement what we were learning with practical experiences, reflect how we provide mathematics within our preschool environment and plan was valuable."*

Early Childhood Teacher, Professional Learning attendee



## FROM OUR CEO: Anita Kumar

Success is not final, failure is not fatal,  
it is the courage to continue that counts  
– Winston Churchill

The adversity we have faced as a community and as a team throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on what matters most, and has helped us clarify and focus on how to best assist our community. The Early Start team harnessed this learning to develop targeted programs and more meaningful community engagement. We thank all our stakeholders, especially children, families and their communities for their ongoing trust and support.

Our Community Engagement team's collaborations with the Engagement Centre Network helped us rethink our professional learning programs. Over 3000 early childhood professionals accessed our professional learning programs nationally. Entire education teams participated in enhancing practice and implementing change. Funding from The Ian Potter and CAGES foundation helped us increase the depth and geographic reach of our work to assist families and educators throughout the lockdowns in innovative ways.

The team has gone above and beyond to make sure that the Early Start Discovery Space remained open or provided at home educational experiences every possible day during the pandemic, including to regional and remote, as well as vulnerable children and families. These online programs benefited children across the state that were isolated or did not have access to fun and engaging educational experiences. Our partnership with ABC KIDS allowed us to provide a unique, immersive onsite learning experience upon reopening.

The Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) program and team grew and strengthened. We expanded our training programs for professionals working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) which extended to Parkes, Wagga Wagga, Narooma, Condobolin, Cootamundra,

Camden, Albury, Kingscliffe, Coffs Harbour, Central Coast and Hunter Valley. Funding from the Royal Flying Doctor Service enabled a number of professionals in these regional communities to access our program. Similarly the program was accessed by professionals in Europe and Asia.

The translation and research team worked with many large and small providers to support their strategic, operational and sustainability initiatives including Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn (CECG), Mater Dei, Catholic Care Wollongong, the Illawarra/Shoalhaven Local Health District, Anglicare, Illawarra Retirement Trust (IRT), Playgroup NSW, and the NSW and VIC Departments of Education. We also had the privilege of extending our impact internationally through partnerships with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC).

*I want to thank* all the elders, community leaders, advocates and representatives who support and guide us in our journey in learning, understanding and working collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to acknowledge and recognise the injustices that have happened and continue to happen, and to pave a pathway, together, for a brighter future for our children.

*I would also like to thank* all our funders and supporters for their partnerships and commitment to helping create better opportunities for children, families and communities.

*Sincere thanks* to the Early Start team, an amazing group of people who are committed to the rights of children and families. Thanks to the Early Start Board of Directors and our Chair Melanie Kansil for their unwavering support, advocacy and guidance throughout this challenging period. A special thanks to Professor Paul Chandler, Phil Clarke AO, Prof Glenn Salkeld and Doreen Clark for their contributions since the inception of Early Start. It continues to be my absolute privilege to work alongside such a passionate group of people who want to see children flourish.

**Anita Kumar**  
Early Start CEO



## FROM OUR CHAIR: Melanie Kansil

2021 was another remarkable year. The Early Start team rose to meet challenges and redefined our work to ensure our efforts were meaningful and purposeful. Financial sustainability was high on our agenda, and most importantly, listening and responding to community needs. The purpose of Early Start is to have positive impact on the wellbeing of children, families and communities; **I am proud of the work of the team and the close collaboration with our partners and the community that has helped us reshape our programs to increase our positive impact.**

Early Start is a unique combination of community engagement, professional development support, early childhood research and translation projects. This happens through four pillars: Community Engagement, the Discovery Space, Research and Translation. Across all of these, we saw positive progress despite the challenges of COVID.

The Engagement Centre network grew from supporting 41 to 50 regional and remote services across NSW and ACT, including 19 Aboriginal Early Childhood Services. Our Community of Practice programs flourished with rich interactions, engagement, peer to peer coaching and mentoring. We are grateful to the Ian Potter Foundation and CAGES Foundation as faithful champions of these Early Start initiatives.

The Discovery Space continued to be a beacon of hope, providing much needed learning support for children and families during lockdowns, through face to face and online programs. Funding from the Foundation of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies and Fritz Family Foundation facilitated the provision of Discovery to You programs to families living in regional areas, and to chronically ill children and those affected by COVID-19 at Randwick Children's Hospital. Abiding support from our prime benefactor, the Abbott Foundation, enabled us to commence work on a new outdoor garden to help children engage in nature play.

The Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) team has had phenomenal success developing trainers regionally, nationally and internationally to provide early intervention support for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their

families. The team will continue to grow and expand its offering in response to community demand.

The enduring impact of the pandemic was felt by our academic team, who juggled online teaching across time zones and persevered with their research activities. Our translation and knowledge exchange team maintained their support for innovative initiatives both nationally and internationally. Two key examples of our research and translation impacts from 2021 are the Play & Learn Together and ARNEC projects.

None of this would have been possible without Anita Kumar, our CEO, and the exceptional team at Early Start, each of whom stepped up to take leadership, support each other and most of all, ensure that our community engagement was respectful and authentic.

Early Start has been fortunate to have received the guidance of elders and Aboriginal leaders through our journey of reconciliation. We continue to take small steps in making sure that our actions are genuine and considerate.

Thanks also to our Board Directors who continued to give their time generously to guide us through these challenging times. Last year, we saw Professor Paul Chandler, Founding Director; Phil Clarke AO, Chair; Professor Glenn Salkeld, Executive Dean Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences UOW; and Doreen Clark, AO all retire from our Board. We thank them for their leadership and strategic thinking which has been instrumental in shaping the foundations of the organisation. We welcomed Michael Betteridge and Professor Sue Bennett, Executive Dean Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences UOW, to our Board and look forward to working with them.

Our thanks also to the Faculty of Social Sciences and the University of Wollongong for ongoing financial and operational support to ensure that we continue to support our communities.

**Melanie Kansil**  
Board Chair



# OUR RECONCILIATION JOURNEY

Reconciliation Australia's theme for 2021 was *'More Than A Word, Reconciliation Takes Action'*. This recognises that reconciliation is a journey for all Australians; to work together to build relationships and communities that value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures, and futures.

This theme is reflected in Early Start's ongoing reconciliation journey to learn about and embrace our shared history and culture. Our mutually beneficial relationships with organisations to benefit regional and remote communities continue to gather momentum. Examples include:

- Authentic collaborations with local Aboriginal Elders, knowledge holders, organisations and artists to ensure regular creative and cultural learning experiences for children, families and the community in the Discovery Space.

- Embedding Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives across Early Start through our participation in University of Wollongong's Jindaola initiative.
- Partnering with Aboriginal organisations to develop and deliver pertinent professional development for educators in early childhood education settings in Indigenous communities, across the state and nation (see Early Start community engagement detail page 16).
- Leading collaborative, ambitious projects to strengthen the early childhood workforce and sector, and to provide specific support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities. (see the Workforce Development Project page 16).
- Translating world-leading research into practice to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups, including Indigenous communities.



*"Since its inception Early Start has committed itself to working alongside First Nation's communities and peoples to learn from its rich culture. The Early Start conferences over the years have provided an ideal gathering place for First Nations peoples from our Engagement Centres to share their successes and have provided a safe place for two-way learning. While we still have much to learn, we move forward with an open heart and genuine desire to learn about our shared histories, cultures, and achievements. Our work to date resonates strongly with the Theme for National Reconciliation Week. In all our words and actions, Early Start will continue to be brave and make change, for a vibrant and richer Australia."*

Professor Paul Chandler, proud Bidjigal man and Founding Director of Early Start

*"Early Start and Woolyungah Indigenous Centre have collaborated on a variety of partnership opportunities. We have built a relationship on trust and a passion for supporting entry points and pathways to University grounds. We quickly become excited at the innovative and inclusive opportunities that Early Start presents to us."*

Jaymee Beveridge, Executive Director (Indigenous Strategy), Woolyungah Indigenous Centre

## Jindaola

Developed by UOW with local Elders and knowledge holders, Jindaola is based on the principles of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity. Early Start representatives participated in this university-wide journey of reflection and discovery, and were guided by local Yuin men Anthony McKnight and Jade Kennedy through the 18-month program.

*"The Jindaola Program has had far reaching impacts at Early Start, not just with staff, but having children, families and our community involved in our programs."*

Anita Kumar, Early Start CEO

*"My involvement with Jindaola has provided an opportunity for me to explore Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives, and most importantly ways of thinking and embedding these into my teaching. Being a part of the Early Start Jindaola group has afforded me the time and space to hear the stories of, and connect deeply with Aboriginal people and Country, as well as to share and understand my own story as a 2nd Nations person living on Country."*

*This experience has enriched my knowledge and understanding, which I am able to share with other academics, researchers and pre-service teachers. The representation of our shared journey through the weaving demonstrated how we continue to build strength in connections and telling our story. As a group, and through immersion in culture and on Country we have developed a greater understanding, awareness and commitment to Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives."*

Karen Tonge, Early Years Lecturer, School of Education, UOW



# OUR RECONCILIATION JOURNEY

2015

## EARLY START OPENS ITS DOORS

Collaborations commenced with 41 ECECs in regional and remote NSW and ACT to help improve practice and enhance outcomes for children and families. Nine Aboriginal and family service centres are part of this Early Start Engagement Network.

## NAIDOC WEEK

The Discovery Space celebrated National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture by hosting a series of free activities to engage children in Indigenous arts and Dharawal Dreaming Stories. Workshops were facilitated by Val West (Law), Artist and Aboriginal Education Assistant, and the Coomaditchie United Aboriginal Corporation, and resulted in two beautiful artworks that are on permanent display.

2016

## KOORI KIDS CULTURE CLUB

This two-year initiative by Early Start researchers, Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre, and the Aboriginal community in the Shoalhaven was a unique after-school program that encouraged Aboriginal children to engage with Country, their culture and make healthy lifestyle choices.

## INAUGURAL EARLY START CONFERENCE

More than 600 delegates from 11 countries gathered to focus on the theme of Improving Children's Lives: Translating Research for Practice, Policy and Community. Indigenous ECE centres joined in the knowledge exchange.

2017

## NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN'S DAY

The Discovery Space ran Indigenous art experiences, and hosted the Illawarra Aboriginal Medical Services to provide free services to the community, supported by the St George Dragons. This collaboration with IAMS began in 2016 and continued to 2019.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Early Start's community outreach program was created to share Discovery Space learning activities for free at community events. The team took their Insect Hotel experience to the NAIDOC Week celebrations in Bellambi, organised by the Wollongong Northern District Aboriginal Cooperation.

2018

## NAIDOC WEEK

Early Start celebrated Indigenous history and culture with a selection of Aboriginal stories, games and art activities around the 2018 theme, Our Language Matters. The activities were made possible through a NSW Government Aboriginal Affairs NAIDOC Week Grant.

## INDIGENOUS LITERATURE

Teacher, author, artist and proud Gunia Woman Kirli Saunders launched her book *The Incredible Freedom Machines* at the Discovery Space with a book reading and signing.

2019

## CHILDREN HELP BUILD A BARK CANOE

Children from Noogaleek Children's Centre in Berkeley, an Early Start Engagement Centre, built a traditional bark canoe with the help of Aboriginal high school and UOW students, local community members, and Aboriginal knowledge holders John and Terry Kelly. The Roads and Maritime Services, Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation, UOW's Woolyungah Indigenous Centre and the Department of Education all came together to learn from each other.

## JINDAOLA IS LAUNCHED

See Jindaola details page 11.

## CULTURAL LEARNING THROUGH MUSIC, DANCE AND ART

A collection of Koori art, music and dance workshops ran throughout 2019 with creative duo Nin & Nate. These popular child and family programs resulted in an ongoing program to share Aboriginal culture and knowledge in Discovery Space daily activities. This includes an Acknowledgement of Country each morning, sharing stories, playing games and inviting local Aboriginal people to lead activities, including weaving experiences and bush tucker tours around campus.

2020

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY ARTWORK

An artwork (see page 2) was created by artists from Coomaditchie United Aboriginal Corporation to help Early Start share an Acknowledgement of Country with all visitors to Early Start and the Discovery Space.

## NAIDOC WEEK AND DISCOVERY AT HOME

The Discovery Space team pivoted in response to COVID-19 lockdowns by providing a series of Discovery at Home videos for children and families to continue learning experiences in the home environment. During NAIDOC week the team shared Indigenous cultural stories, arts activities and featured special guest Penelope Towney for a lesson on words in Wiradjuri and Palawa Kani. See it [HERE](#)

## JINDAOLA: SHARING OUR STORIES

Early Start representatives came together at the end of the program to reflect on and share their learning of Aboriginal knowledge and culture, and discuss how they could integrate and disseminate these at Early Start. They created a beautiful woven artwork, now installed in the Early Start building, as a symbol of how First Nation culture is integral to us all. Their journey has inspired the planning of a rich program of events to celebrate Indigenous Literacy Day 2022.

2021

## SUCCESS AND GROWTH OF ENGAGEMENT CENTRE NETWORK

Our work with the Engagement Centre Network of ECECs in regional and remote communities across NSW and the ACT included collaboration with 19 Aboriginal child and family organisations.

## STRENGTHENING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Early Start's collaboration with nine Engagement Centres located in Indigenous communities for the Workforce Development Project (2020-2022) continued. Supported by the CAGES Foundation, the project provides professional development for educators to ultimately improve social and educational outcomes for children, families and communities, as well as to support Indigenous students of early childhood education (see detail page 16).



*"It was really good to hear about the ways Indigenous communities connect and work in collaboration with community organisations."*

Engagement Centre Educator,  
Early Start Conference attendee

*"The workshop was a great way for us to learn about Aboriginal culture together. So welcoming and insightful."*

Parent, Weaving Workshop, 2019

*"Since the club, well, I am proud..."*

11 year old Shaylah



*"'Mina, Penelope', that means 'Hello, I'm Penelope' in Palawa Kani. I am a Palawa Wiradjuri kid living in the beautiful Illawarra"*



# OUR WORK WITH FAMILIES

## EARLY START DISCOVERY SPACE – WHERE CURIOUS MINDS PLAY

The **Early Start Discovery Space** is Australia's only dedicated children's museum and the first in the world based on a university campus. Its aim is to engage children and parents in quality play experiences and provide unique opportunities for interactions between and amongst people, objects and spaces. Collaborations with organisations, community groups and artists help us embed culture, art, inclusivity, diversity and sustainability.

### Discovery to You: Supporting Children and Carers Through Lockdowns



Discovery Space educators delivered high-quality, evidence-based online learning experiences to children and carers through the **Discovery to You** program, first developed in response to the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020.

A Forest Hill grant, established and endowed by the Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies, enabled delivery of free Discovery to You sessions for families living in regional and remote locations with limited access to interactive, high-quality early learning environments or virtual experiences. Sessions were offered to children attending Early Education and Care Centres within Early Start's Engagement Network located in disadvantaged and vulnerable communities across NSW and the ACT.

During the pandemic, chronically ill children were separated from their families and carers for extended periods and their education could not be supported by busy hospital health professionals. Rising to meet community need, the team reached out to the Sydney Children's Hospital Network, resulting in a program of customised, virtual one-on-one educational workshops provided free to children in COVID-19 wards at Randwick Hospital. This successful program, which has enormous potential for growth and scaling, has received philanthropic support to enable it to continue into 2022.

### ABC Kids and The Pod

In partnership with ABC Kids, we launched an updated experience for **The Pod** in October. Access to a selection of *ABC Play School: Stop, Look, Listen* films created opportunities for an ever-changing, multimodal play space with immersive experiences that encouraged children and families to think, feel and be present. This space is designed to embrace digital and non-digital play – children's play inspiring the construction of digital content and then reciprocally, digital content inspiring children's play! This partnership will continue to September 2022.

### World Antarctica Day

Educational resources and activities to commemorate *World Antarctica Day* (December 1st) included a pop-up experience in the **Puzzle Room** featuring real items used by Antarctic researchers, a photographic installation of Antarctic flora and fauna, and three live Q&A sessions for children with researchers from the University of Wollongong's School of Earth, Atmospheric and Life Sciences. Local early childhood education and care centres were also invited to get creative and share ideas on how to protect Antarctica.



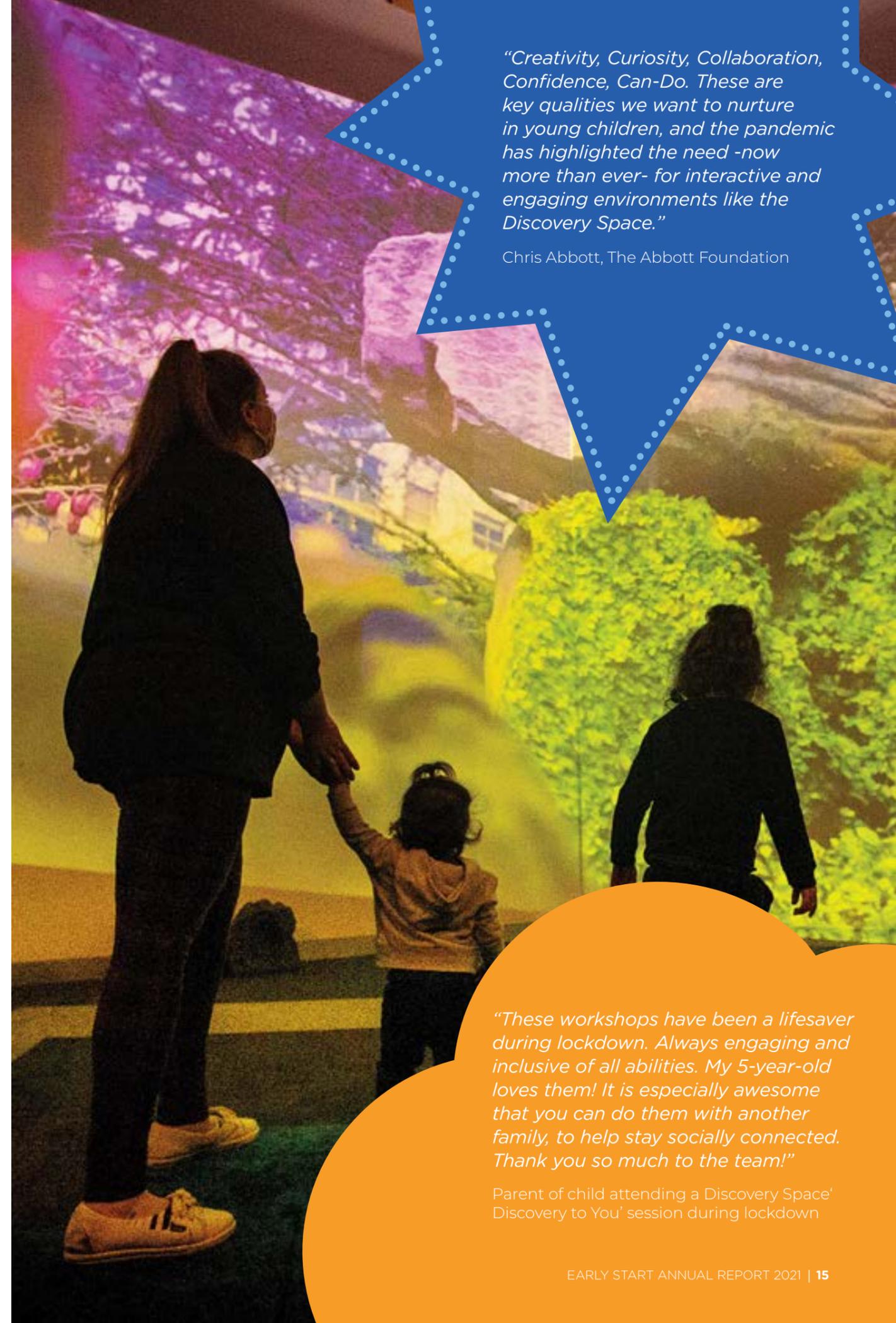
### The Sanctuary

The **Discovery Space** launched new experience area **'The Sanctuary'** as a place of quiet, sensory exploration. Research shows providing children with opportunities to use their senses is crucial for brain development as it helps to build nerve connections. Sensory play encourages children to use scientific processes while they play, create, investigate and explore.



*"Creativity, Curiosity, Collaboration, Confidence, Can-Do. These are key qualities we want to nurture in young children, and the pandemic has highlighted the need -now more than ever- for interactive and engaging environments like the Discovery Space."*

Chris Abbott, The Abbott Foundation



*"These workshops have been a lifesaver during lockdown. Always engaging and inclusive of all abilities. My 5-year-old loves them! It is especially awesome that you can do them with another family, to help stay socially connected. Thank you so much to the team!"*

Parent of child attending a Discovery Space 'Discovery to You' session during lockdown

# OUR WORK WITH THE COMMUNITY

The **Early Start Community Engagement** team partner with a range of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECECs) centres across New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory to inspire innovation in the early years and to translate research into practice. These collaborations help ensure high quality early education to positively impact the lives of children, their families, and the communities in which they live.

## Supporting Effective Service Integration (SESI)

This innovative project, funded by the Ian Potter Foundation, repositions early childhood services as a hub to provide strong pathways for children, families and communities to access health, early intervention, education and wellbeing services. In 2021, Early Start's Leading for Early Education and Advocacy (LEEDA) professional learning program of seminars, coaching and mentoring were delivered via a hybrid of online and face to face sessions, and a bespoke, interactive online resource platform was developed to support regional ECECs.



Early Start's Associate Professor Cathrine Neilsen-Hewett delivers professional development in Nowra

## Workforce Development for Early Childhood Education

Early Start collaborated with educators in nine ECECs in Indigenous communities across regional and remote NSW for this project, supported by the CAGES Foundation. Strengthening workforce capacity leads to high quality early childhood education and improved outcomes for children, and this project aims to support the workforce goals of existing educators, as well as supporting Aboriginal early years students with training and tools to strengthen their careers and the sector.

## The Early Start Engagement Centres

Our partnership with regional and remote ECEC services in NSW and the ACT grew from 39 to 50 in 2021, and the engagement team continued to pivot to respond to the complex needs of the sector as a result of COVID-19. This work inspired fresh thinking and the translation of research into practice through the delivery of professional learning and resulted in the creation of Communities of Practice.

## Early Start Professional Learning

Continuing to adapt to the 'new normal', the team provided evidence-based online Professional Learning for our engagement centres as well as educators across the sector, nationally and internationally. Despite the pandemic, this program network grew. Free professional development options, included NESA Accredited sessions, were tailored to content areas including maths, literacy, science, the National Quality Framework, Autism Spectrum Disorder and more. We offered support for regional NSW ECECs during lockdowns with customised sessions focusing on remote pedagogy and family connections.

*"What Early Start offer is above and beyond! Congratulations to the team behind the scenes working so hard to deliver the large variety of training you provide. I will definitely see you online in the near future, I value the work you (all) do and the past workshops I've attended have been nothing short of phenomenal in delivery, resources and practical applications in practice! With gratitude, Anil"*

International participant, Canadian educator

*"As the Covid Pandemic progressed and our preschool like every other service scrambled to ensure safety, wellbeing and education for children, staff and families it was through engaging with Early Start that this became achievable. Our team had the opportunity to participate in online professional development through Early Start. We are very experienced educators but we all agreed that it was unlike any PD we had ever undertaken. It is an understatement to say that our practice has dramatically changed due to our learning, sharing of knowledge and support from the incredible team at UOW. Today we are active participants in the Community of Practice and seek out all new PD along with often revisiting past webinars. A huge thank you to everyone at Early Start for enhancing our Pedagogical practice."*

Naomi Gates, Director, Kiama Preschool



## NESA Accredited Professional Learning

This year saw changes in the way professional learning was approved through the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), the accrediting body for teachers in NSW. Early Start adapted quickly, ensuring our evidence-based professional learning aligned, and 617 early childhood teachers across NSW participated in NESA Accredited workshops. Early Start will continue to strive to ensure all of our professional learning is NESA Accredited to support for early childhood teachers across NSW.

## Communities of Practice

Early Start adopted a Communities of Practice (CoP) approach for our network of Engagement Centres to help establish a collective learning environment of practitioners to connect, learn and grow together. CoP topics included: understanding and responding to challenging behaviours, bringing maths to life in our environments, working with children with ASD, and Leadership for Learning (LEEDA).

# Early Start Denver Model (ESDM)

## Support for Parents and Carers of Children Living with Autism Spectrum Disorder

This year (2021) marked the second year of delivery of the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) training program. Originating from the University of California Davis Mind Institute, ESDM training aims to improve the lives of children and families living with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Early Start's unique online approach, incorporating therapist, educator and parent workshops, was a world first and this program has received overwhelmingly positive feedback. The demand for ESDM training necessitated course and team expansion; Early Start appointed an Apprentice ESDM Trainer to assist with workshops in late 2021, and there are plans to establish an Early Start Autism Clinic to facilitate further training and support options for parents and all carers of children with ASD in 2022, with further enhancements to training and support to respond to professional and community need.



*"As parents, hearing that your child might have a developmental delay is frightening, and the possibility of Autism is devastating. That is why we were so grateful to the Early Start University of Wollongong Parent ESDM coach, who has not only guided us through one of the most challenging times of our lives but has also turned our son around. ....We have seen our own son go from strength to strength and have heard the same accounts from other families. We feel truly blessed and cannot thank Early Start and our ESDM coach enough for everything they have done."*

Parent, ESDM One-on-One Parent Coaching Program

*"This was the best professional development experience I have ever participated in and to be able to do this while living in rural and remote NSW by remote delivery, made it even better. The fact that (the course was spread) across 6 weeks of 3 hourly sessions enabled us to have a week in between each session to reflect on our learning and practice our new skills with children in our own workplace. I believe that this facilitated a far better learning experience for all of us and certainly removed all of the extraneous pressures that may have otherwise hampered us. ....It has changed the way I work forever and is already benefiting the children and families in this remote part of NSW."*

Educator, ESDM Advanced Workshop

*"My son was diagnosed with Autism in January 2020, and had selective mutism, cognitive and developmental delay, severe language delay as well as behavioural and emotional dysregulation. To say that ESDM has changed his life is an understatement. It has changed all our lives and given my son the skills that he needs to have an equal opportunity to a future, in the most naturalistic manner. All the while giving him the opportunity to develop his own personality. That is the advantage of following a child's motivation. I highly recommend the ESDM model for families who need the guidance, a supportive network, and techniques based on years of scientific evidence."*

Parent, ESDM for Parents and Carers of Children Living with ASD

*"My experience with ESDM and the Parent ESDM Workshop series run through Early Start at the University of Wollongong was one of the most amazing experiences of my life, an absolute godsend! Having your child hold her hands out for you to play ring a rosy was the most joyous experiences of my life, bringing tears to my eyes. This all started happening after 3 days...."*

Parent attending, ESDM for Parents and Carers 'ESDM for the Home' workshop



*"I was able to become fully certified and gain an identity for my profession and also connect with more people in the field; people from my workshop and all around the globe. I wanted to be as good as I could in what I'm doing, and it was one of the best experiences. The ability to self-reflect on your own work was necessary and really helpful."*

Georgianna Moraitopoulou, Therapist, international attendee of ESDM Advanced Workshop, undertaking Certification for Early Start Denver Model

*"The ESDM Educator workshop series has been one of our best investments in capacity building of our educators and working towards inclusive and respectful education and care. This has shifted the mindset of the educators and provided them with a research based and evidence-based lens to look at their everyday program as well as working alongside children with special needs."*

Educator, ESDM for Educators and Therapy Assistants Working with Children with ASD

# OUR WORK WITH POLICY MAKERS

## THE BRIGHTEST MINDS

**Early Start Research** brings together academics, practitioners, professionals and research students to advance the learning, development and health of children and those who work with and care for them. A team of 37 researchers and more than 79 higher-degree research students across education, psychology, public health and human geography work together with communities to investigate current and future real-world opportunities and challenges for children, families, and educators. Early Start researchers have made significant contributions to research, policy and practice at a local, national, and international level, and their collaborative work has a transformational impact on the lives of children and families in Australia and around the world. They have been awarded funding from the *Australian Research Council* and *National Health & Medical Research Council of Australia*, *World Health Organisation*, and other major industry and philanthropic organisations.

### WHO Guidelines

*Global Standards For Healthy Eating, Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour And Sleep In Early Childhood Education And Care Settings: A Toolkit*, was published by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2021. **Senior Professor Tony Okely**, **Associate Professor Bridget Kelly**, and **Dr Ellie Taylor** were key researchers. This toolkit supports countries to integrate healthy eating and movement behaviours into the daily practices of ECEC settings. The toolkit is for policy-makers, programme managers and those responsible for ensuring ECEC standards at different levels within government ministries.

### Sunrise

Led by **Senior Professor Tony Okely**, SUNRISE is an International Study of Movement Behaviours in the Early Years which brings together researchers from low, middle, and high income countries across the globe. The study aims to measure and map physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep for children under the age of 5 years in more than 40 countries.



Data collection training in India and Nigeria as part of the SUNRISE International Study of Movement Behaviours in the Early Years, led by Senior Professor Anthony Okely and his team.

### Global Impacts in Food Marketing

**Associate Professor Bridget Kelly** has directly contributed to global policy recommendations for restricting unhealthy food marketing to children. In 2021, she was engaged by the *Western Pacific Region of the WHO* to develop operational and training manuals to support Member States in our Region to implement the Regional Action Framework to protect children from the harmful impacts of food marketing. She was also commissioned to undertake a large systematic review and meta-analysis of food labelling to support the development of new *WHO Guidelines* on food labelling policies to improve population diets.

### The Fathering Project

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a unique family context and working structure for many parents. Led by **Associate Professor Jane Herbert**, **FLINT** research explored whether more time spent at home and shifts in working arrangements during lockdown effected fathers' thoughts about parenting and work-family life. After lockdown, many fathers reported a heightening of awareness about their importance in their children's lives. Fathers reported wanting to have a more active role in parenting and an interest in flexible working arrangements. Understanding changes in priorities and intentions through lockdown will enable healthcare professionals and workplaces to support fathers to make meaningful changes in their family lives.



#### EARLY START RESEARCH THEMES

-  Family Learning & Interaction (FLINT)
-  Self-Regulating & Cognitive Development
-  Food & Movement Research
-  Play, Pedagogy & Curriculum in Contemporary Theory & Practice

*“The World Health Organisation developed global standards for early childhood education and care settings, with an aim to maximise healthy eating and physical activity, and minimise sedentary behaviours and screen time. The Early Start team worked with WHO to review existing evidence, consult with experts and pilot test assessment and implementation tools for the global standards. The toolkit published as a result of this work is designed to assist families and educators across the world to support children’s growth and development during these critical early years. WHO is happy to have worked with Early Start on this important initiative, and trusts that it will result in positive outcomes for young children.”*

Juana Willumsen, World Health Organisation

# AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR THE DIGITAL CHILD

The University of Wollongong is privileged to be one of six research nodes in the *Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child* project, funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC). This seven-year, expansive project focuses on child health, education, and digital and social connectedness, to support young children growing up in a rapidly changing digital age. 2021 saw the establishment of a research space and living laboratory onsite at Early Start.

Located next to the Discovery Space, the new UOW Children's Technology Play Space was established in 2021 as a place for educators and industry partners to work with researchers, children and their families, offering an opportunity for interdisciplinary and intergenerational dialogue, and an inspiration to use technology in smart and innovative ways.



## FROM RESEARCH TO THE REAL WORLD

Underpinned by world-class multidisciplinary research, Early Start specialises in improving people's understanding of childhood development, learning and health, while also enhancing the ways professionals engage with children, parents and communities.

### Mater Dei: Foundations For Success

Early Start's collaborative project with Mater Dei aims to provide clarity on why, what, and how a new preschool should operate based on evidence, needs, policy and best practice. The project consists of four stages: (1) Service Delivery Model – suggested model, (2) Demographic study – geographical and demographic analysis, (3) Feasibility study – financial viable modelling, and (4) Operational and Governance model – system and practices. The project has a specific focus on high quality services and engaging staff to support children with mild to severe intellectual disabilities.

### Online Assessment Tool

Conducted for the NSW Government Department of Education and Training Early Start researchers led this project to develop a bank of multiple-choice questions for the Approvals assessment process for the Early Childhood Education directorate, the NSW Regulatory Authority of early childhood education and care services. The project was designed to test knowledge of early childhood education regulatory requirements determined by the National Quality Framework and the Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations. The Department has expressed interest in sharing this work with other jurisdictions with the hope of developing a national questionnaire.

### Intergenerational Playgroups

The Play Connections project sought to build the evidence base for supported intergenerational playgroup programs for older people, children (birth to five years) and their parents/carers. In partnership with Playgroup NSW, the Illawarra Retirement Trust and expert facilitators, Early Start researchers hosted playgroups in the Discovery Space's Playful Learning Space, looking at the Five Ways to Wellbeing - Connecting, Learning, Giving, Taking Notice, and Being Active. Interrupted by lockdowns, the team developed a playgroup resource book to be launched in September 2022.

### Our Place: Professional Learning and Practice Improvement

Early Start's long-term partnership with Our Place (previously Doveton College, Victoria) aims to break the cycle of disadvantage experienced by children and families by establishing systems and structures towards high-quality early education and community-based integrated service provision. This has been achieved by developing and implementing the Early Years Quality Practice Framework through best practice capacity building, professional development and cultivating a Community of Practice. This has also involved co-design and development of tools for Early Years educators to inform decision making in practice across key areas of learning, development and wellbeing.

### ARNEC

Internationally, Early Start has an ongoing partnership with the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC). Our work with this peak body focuses on supporting and enhancing ECEC practices to help address the challenges faced by many low-to middle-income nations including India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Malaysia, through implementation of the Nurturing Care framework for early childhood development, developed by the World Health Organisation, World Bank and UNICEF.

### Playful Learning Environments

Commissioned by the Parramatta Diocese of Catholic Education, The Playful Learning Environments project focused on analysing the learning environments of schools within the Diocese containing vulnerable student populations that may not have attended preschool. The project led to the development of a professional learning program for teachers to support students in their play-based learning, self-regulation, oral language, inquiry learning and sustained shared thinking in their early years of school.

*“Our work with Early Start has prioritised vulnerable communities across the Asia-Pacific during COVID-19 times, highlighting the efforts of early childhood educators and carers as they navigated the ‘new normal’ including home learning and its various stressors. Together, we’ve shared learnings from contacts across Cambodia, Indonesia, India, the Philippines, Bangladesh, China and Vietnam, in an effort to advocate for change and improved resourcing, and impact policymaking decisions. Likewise, our forthcoming work with Early Start prioritises children at a global level, placing them at the centre of climate change debates to ensure their voices are heard.”*

Evelyn Santiago, Executive Director, Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC)

# OUR PEOPLE

## Early Start Advisory Board and Committee Directors



**Professor W Steven Barnett**  
Board Member  
Research and Advocacy Member

Steven is a Board of Governors Professor and Senior Co-Director of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University. His research includes studies of the economics of early care and education. Steven earned his PhD in economics at the University of Michigan. He has authored or co-authored more than 300 publications.



**Senior Professor Sue Bennett**  
Board Member  
(Commenced July 2021)

Senior Professor Sue Bennett is an internationally recognised expert in the field of technology in education and society. Sue has extensive governance experience, and a strong track record in research capacity building and successful industry and community partnerships. She is currently Executive Dean of the Faculty of the Arts, Social Services and Humanities and Deputy Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for The Digital Child.



**Michael Betteridge**  
Board Member (Since July 2021)  
Discovery Space Chair

Michael is General Manager, Tourism Development at the NRMA. Michael brings more than 20 years' leadership experience in marketing, sales, business development and operations across a range of travel and tourism businesses. He is a committed family-man and is also a passionate long-distance runner, plays music with his bandmates in his spare time and has spent more than twenty years researching and reconnecting with his Aboriginal ancestry.



**Elaine Henry OAM**  
Board Member  
Inclusion and Outreach Chair

Elaine spent the last 25 years of her executive career in health and education as CEO of the Cancer Council (NSW) and CEO of The Smith Family. Elaine also chaired the Government's Stronger Families and Communities partnership. For the last ten years Elaine has continued her non-executive career on a myriad of boards mainly in the for-purpose and university sectors.



**Melanie Kansil**  
Board Chair (Since July 2021)  
Discovery Space Member

Melanie is an experienced corporate and start-up executive. Currently CEO & co-founder of Alyte, a social fitness app, Melanie was previously Chief Commercial Officer for The a2 Milk Company. She has an MBA from Stanford University and an AB in Physics from Harvard University. Melanie is on the Board of the Stanford Australia Association. She loves travel, reading, board games and time with her family – preferably all together.



**Lloyd Niccol**  
Board Member  
Finance and Fundraising Member

Lloyd is the Head of Product Development at the renewable energy powerhouse 5B and brings a wealth of experience in product development and sustainability. In addition, Lloyd is an Honorary Fellow with the Faculty of Engineering and Information Sciences and was an original Early Start Advisory Committee Member commencing in April 2015.

## OUTGOING BOARD MEMBERS



**Professor Paul Chandler**  
Foundation Director  
(Until March 2021)  
Board Member  
Research and Advocacy Member  
Inclusion and Outreach Member

Paul, a Bidjigal man was the first Aboriginal person to complete his PhD at UNSW in 1993. He is a former Australian Research Council (UNSW) Fellow and appointed an Honorary Professor at UNSW. He remains the most highly cited educational researcher in Australia for his research into cognitive science. Professor Chandler retired from UOW at the end of 2020 but maintains a relentless pace. Professor Chandler is in high demand sitting on numerous private, not for profit and government Boards. As the intellectual vision behind the \$44 million Early Start Project Paul remains the Foundation Chair of Early Start.



**Doreen Clark AM**  
(Until March 2021)  
Board Deputy Chairman  
Discovery Space Member

Doreen serves as Chair of the Board of Children's Discovery Museum Limited, an organisation working towards the establishment of a facility for children aged 3 to 12 years in Western Sydney. Doreen was made a Member of the Order of Australia in January 1997 for services to science and education. In 2003 she received a Centenary Medal.



**Philip Marcus Clark AO**  
(Until July 2021)  
Board Chairman  
Finance and Fundraising Chair

Philip is a member of the JP Morgan Australia Advisory Council. He chairs a number of listed and private company boards and government boards, including SCA Property Group, Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust and NSW Skills Board.



**Professor Glenn Salkeld**  
(Until July 2021)  
Board Member  
Research and Advocacy Member

Glenn is Executive Dean, Faculty of the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities with the University of Wollongong. Glenn is a health economist with over 30 years of experience in public health research and education. He worked for the World Health Organization, teaching economics and evidence-based medicine in countries including South Africa, India, Iran, Estonia, China and Hungary.

## ES COMMITTEE MEMBERS



**Professor Ellen Frede**  
Research and Advocacy Member

Ellen is Senior Co-Director at the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University and Research Professor at the Graduate School of Education. She holds a Doctorate in developmental psychology, a Master's degree in human development and a Bachelor's degree in early childhood education.



**Aaron Bilstrom**  
(Commenced March 2022)  
Discovery Space Member

Aaron's career has spanned numerous industries and countries including USA, Japan, Switzerland, Indonesia and The Philippines. As Chair of the non-profit ASIC registered Stanford Australia Foundation, he has supported capacity building of Australia's non-profit community.



**Megan Mitchell**  
(Until July 2021)  
Inclusion and Outreach Member

Megan Mitchell was Australia's National Children's Commissioner from 2013 – 2020. Megan holds qualifications in social policy, psychology and education and is currently undertaking PhD research with the Research Centre for Children and Families at Sydney University. Megan is on several boards and also a member of advisory groups for Westpac's safer children project and Global Access Partners, Early Childhood Education project.



# OUR PEOPLE

## Leadership Team



**Anita Kumar**  
Chief Executive Officer

Anita is a passionate advocate for the rights of children and families, especially those dealing with complex life issues or living in vulnerable circumstances. She has a strong track record of forging impactful strategic partnerships across government, corporate, philanthropic, agency and sector organisations to build a sustainable social enterprise.



**Professor Marc De Rosnay**  
Academic Director

Marc leads transformational early childhood initiatives, with the goal of improving developmental, educational, and social opportunities for vulnerable children in regional, rural and remote contexts. Marc works to translate current evidence on child development and early learning into the everyday care of children and professional practices. His research focuses on how children become socially and emotionally competent.



**Josef English**  
Manager, Discovery Space  
(Commenced July 2021)

Josef is a primary education professional with over ten years experience working in various education contexts. He is dedicated to constructing innovative and creative experiences that are relevant to the diverse lives of young people who visit the Discovery Space. Josef is passionate about working collaboratively with researchers, industry and partners to create programs and opportunities that support children and adults in learning through play.



**Martha Johnson**  
Manager, Discovery Space  
(On Secondment to the Australia Museum From June 2021)

Martha is passionate about making learning experiences fun, engaging and meaningful for children, while also finding creative ways to include adults in learning. Martha has over a decade of experience educating children and adults in various roles and is committed to working collaboratively across disciplines to share knowledge and provide learning experiences that are based on best practice and research.



**Professor Lisa Kervin**  
Research Director  
(Commenced March 2021)

Lisa is a Professor in Language and Literacy Education and co-leads the “Educated Child” strand of a national Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child. Her current research interests are focused on young children and how they engage with literate practices as well as research projects funded by the Australian Research Council focused on adult and child interactions when using technology, young children and writing, and digital play.

## OUTGOING LEADERSHIP TEAM



**Dr Leanne Gibbs**  
Senior Manager, Engagement  
and Translation  
(Left December 2021)

Leanne leads the work of the Early Start Engagement Team along with initiatives for translating research into practice, and sponsorship and funding. As an early childhood education professional she has led programs and organisations to advocate for children’s rights and to create opportunities for high quality early childhood experiences. She is also an author, podcaster and researcher with an interest in workforce development and the development of leadership in early childhood education.



**Brenden Logue**  
Snr Manager Operations and  
Business Development  
(Left January 2021)

Brenden is a skilled professional in both commercial business and government. His broad expertise includes operations management, human resources, accounting, marketing and stakeholder management. He is an effective manager who builds consensus and facilitates mutually achievable goals with staff, customers and stakeholders.



**Senior Professor Anthony Okely**  
Research Director  
(Until March 2021)

Anthony is a NHMRC Leadership Fellow. His research focuses on movement behaviours in children. In 2019 and 2021 he was recognized on the ISI Highly Cited Researchers list. He is ranked by Scopus lifetime metrics as #5 in the world for ‘physical activity and children’. Anthony has led development of national and global guidelines and standards. He is currently leading an international surveillance study of movement behaviours in the early years (called SUNRISE) which involves 43 countries, 28 of which are low or middle-income.

## Research and Pedagogical Leaders



**Dr Rachel Jones**  
Theme Co-leader Food  
and Movement

Dr Rachel Jones co-leads the Food and Movement research theme with Associate Professor Bridget Kelly. Rachel’s research is primarily focused on movement behaviours (physical activity and sedentary behaviour) for young children (3-5 years). Her main areas of research include prevention and intervention studies for young children. She has a particular interest in delivering and facilitating professional development for early childhood education and care educators, either face-to-face and/or online. In more recent years her research has focused on the importance of quality of early childhood education and care settings within the physical child development domain.



**Associate Professor Bridget Kelly**  
Theme Co-leader Food  
and Movement

Associate Professor Bridget Kelly co-leads the Food and Movement research theme with Dr Rachel Jones. Bridget’s research aims to influence the development of public policy that fosters supportive food environments in Australia and globally. In particular, her work in critical food marketing seeks to identify the extent that young people are exposed to unhealthy food promotions and the impact that this has on food preferences and consumption behaviours. She is keenly interested in collaborating with international researchers to build and support research in this field at a global level.



**Associate Professor Steven Howard**  
Theme Leader Self-Regulation  
and Cognitive Development

Associate Professor Steven Howard is a researcher at Early Start and Associate Professor in Educational Psychology in the School of Education at University of Wollongong. He is also an Adjunct in the School of Psychology. Steven leads the Self-Regulation and Cognitive Development theme. Steven’s program of research focuses on how to easily, accurately and playfully pinpoint children’s progress and needs in foundational areas of development (e.g., self-regulation), and leverage that information to support children’s continued development. This has culminated in creation of the Early Years Toolbox, which is in use in educational and research contexts internationally.



**Associate Professor Jane Herbert**  
Theme Leader Family, Learning  
and Interaction

Associate Professor Jane Herbert leads the Family, Learning and Interaction research theme. Jane is a researcher in the School of Psychology and director of the Wollongong Infant Learning Lab (WILL). Jane’s primary interest is in the first 1000 days, focusing on how maturation and environmental experiences impact on early cognitive abilities. She also leads research focused on understanding and supporting parental wellbeing from pregnancy onwards, parent-child communication, mindfulness, and the unique role of fathers in child development.



**Associate Professor Jessica Mantei**  
Theme Leader Play, Pedagogy  
and Curriculum in Contemporary  
Theory and Practice

Jessica Mantei is an Associate Professor in Language and Literacy for the School of Education in the Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities and leads the Play, Curriculum and Pedagogy in Early Start Research Group. Her research focuses on pedagogical practices for children’s literacy learning both as consumers and producers of text.





# OUR PEOPLE

## Early Start Team Members

In presenting this Annual Report, we wish to acknowledge the work of the **Early Start team** and the challenges experienced throughout 2021.

### PROFESSIONAL AND RESEARCH SUPPORT STAFF

Kar-Hau Chong	Anna Feggans
Fay Gowers	Michelle Christodoulou
Caroline Jones	Alysha Calleia
Lisa Kilgariff	Rebecca Calleia
Jacqui Nero	Penny Cross
Dr Ellie Taylor	Sarah Ryan
Anne-Marie Byrne	Dr Karel Strooband

### ENGAGEMENT AND TRANSLATION

Elizabeth Aylward	Sally Wilson
Jo Grimmond	Annette Heselwood
Kim Stouse-Lee	Matt Ball
Jasmine Holland	Liz Depers

### DISCOVERY SPACE

Carly Antonelli	The pandemic had various impacts on our staffing and we would like to acknowledge our team's commitment to Early Start and to the Discovery Space.
Larelle Bridge	
Liam Buckley	
Lynette Cantrill	
Vanessa Johnson	Hayley Borg (Departed October 2021)
David Leafe	Mitchell Crouch (Departed February 2021)
Sophie Murray	Sue Fletcher (Departed March 2021)
Rebecca Rivinoja	Caitlin Hofman (Departed January 2021)
Melissa Stanojevic	Bianca Holz (Departed August 2021)
	Claire Jones (Departed February 2021)
	Deepika Krishnan (Departed February 2021)
	Larissa Larkham (Departed October 2021)
	Jessica Malady-Hall (Departed April 2021)
	Stuart McNair (Departed May 2021)
	Mahime Watanabe (Departed October 2021)
	Dianne White (Departed February 2021)

## Research Theme Leaders and Members

Food and Movement	<p><i>A/Prof Bridget Kelly</i>  <i>A/Prof Rachel Jones</i>  A/Prof Dylan Cliff  Dr Megan Hammersley  Dr Katharina Kariippanon  Dr Byron Kemp  Dr Myrto Mavilidi  Senior Prof Tony Okely  A/Prof Anne-Maree Parrish  Dr Rebecca Stanley  Dr Ellie Taylor  Dr Karen Tonge</p>
Play, Pedagogy and Curriculum in Contemporary Theory and Practice	<p><i>A/Prof Jessica Mantei</i>  Dr Lyn Cronin  Dr Leanne Gibbs  A/Prof Sarah Howard  Dr Jan Hutton  Prof Lisa Kervin  Dr Gai Lindsay  Dr Kylie Lipscombe  A/Prof Cathrine Nielsen-Hewett  Dr Mitchell Parker  Dr Clara Rivera  A/Prof Irina Verenikina  Dr Jane Warren</p>
Self-Regulation and Cognitive Development	<p><i>A/Prof Steven Howard</i>  Dr Amy Chan  Prof Marc de Rosnay  Prof Stuart Johnstone  Dr Myrto Mavilidi  Prof Edward C Melhuish (Until end 2021)  A/Prof Cathrine Neilsen-Hewett  Prof Fred Paas (Until June 2023)</p>
Family Learning and Interaction	<p><i>A/Prof Jane S Herbert</i>  Prof Jacqueline Barnes  Dr Amy L Bird  Mark Donovan  Dr Elisabeth Duursma  Dr Judy Pickard</p>

*"I don't know about the kids - but I'm having SO much fun!"*

Parent visiting the Discovery Space

# PROJECTS & FUNDERS 2021

Early Start is grateful to **our supporters**, who make our work to help children, families and communities possible.

FUNDING BODY	PROJECT/ACTIVITY
GoodStart	<b>Early Years Toolbox (EYT)</b>
NSW Health	Prevention Research Support Program
NSW Health	Evaluation - healthy eating & active living support programs for parents of 2-6 year olds.
University of Newcastle	Co Collaborator Translation Research Grant Scheme NSW Health
VIC Government DET	Deploying the <b>MOVERS</b> program across 400 centres
World Health Organisation (WHO)	Develop a protocol re physical activity questions on the GSHS
Catholic Ed. Archdiocese Canberra & Goulburn (CECG)	Supporting research modelling and consultation, and Professional Development Program
Early Childhood Australia (ECA)	Review of the ECA Leadership program
Mater Dei	Foundations For success
Playgroups NSW	Evaluation of digitally-mediated Intergenerational playgroup
ARNEC	Good ECD Practices & innovations in the Asian Pacific Region
URBIS	Consulting - Department of Education VIC
Cages Foundation	Flagship Project 3: Building Educational Capital in Aboriginal Communities.
Colman Foundation and Dusseldorp Foundation	Flagship Project 3: Scholarships continue into 2021
Ian Potter Foundation	Flagship project 2: Supporting effective service integration
The Abbott Foundation	Flagship Project 1: Evaluation of Impact - Discovery Space
Patrick Thomas McMillan Bequest	FEEL Study/ ES Leadership Program
Ian Potter Foundation	Play & Learn Together
Colman Foundation Our Place	Professional Support & environmental scans to support Our Places services
Fritz Family Foundation	Early Learning at Home, especially for regional and remote communities.
The Abbott Foundation	Discovery Space Operations
The Abbott Foundation	Outdoor Circle Garden
Foundation of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies	Forest Hill Grant : Discovery to you
<b>THEME: Family Learning and Interaction</b>	
Criminology Research Council - Criminology Research Grant	Virtual Fathering: An assessment of the use and impact of video-communication tools on fathering from prison
University of Wollongong	(RITA) "Tuning in for transmission: Parental well-being and child development"
<b>THEME: Food and Movement Behaviours</b>	
Australian Research Council (ARC)	Discovery Grant - Identifying optimal levels of movement behaviours in early childhood.
University of Wollongong	(RITA) "Educational technology and movements during geography learning in preschool children".
NHMRC	Investigator Grant: Re Physical Activity in young Children T Okely. 2020-2024.
University of Wollongong	Major Equipment Grant; "ActiGraph Accelerometers".
University of Wollongong	PERL Fellowship
Australian Research Council (ARC)	Playing it Safe: Psychological Safety and Mental Health for Community Sport
<b>THEME: Play, Pedagogy &amp; Curriculum in Contemporary Theory &amp; Practice</b>	
Australian Research Council (ARC)	Quality in Adult Child Interactions
Australian Research Council (ARC)	Improving classroom writing by enhancing reflexive decisions & practice.
Australian Research Council (ARC)	Building on rural knowledges to unlock the potential of rural students.
<b>THEME: Self-Regulatory &amp; Cognitive Development</b>	
NHMRC Ideas Grant	Development and evaluation of a novel early language assessment tool to identify vulnerable children who would benefit from referral to Allied Health pathways
University of Wollongong	VC's Postdoctoral Research Fellowship Scheme
<b>ARC Centres of Excellence</b>	
Australian Research Council (ARC)	Australian Centre for the Digital Child

# PROFIT & LOSS SUMMARY

For the year ended 31 December 2021

	2021	2020	Variance
	\$000's	\$000's	\$000's
<b>INCOME</b>			
Fees, Charges and Other Income	1,007	839	
Project and Research Income	1,446	1,715	
Total Income	<b>2,453</b>	<b>2,554</b>	<b>(101)</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>			
Employee Related	2,802	3,345	
Operating	663	745	
Total Expenses	<b>3,465</b>	<b>4,090</b>	<b>625</b>
UOW Faculty Of Social Sciences Contribution	<b>1,012</b>	<b>1,536</b>	<b>524</b>

## Financial Sustainability

In 2021 Early Start continued to improve its financial sustainability in spite of many challenges. Our services continued to expand and meet the needs of our community while we continued to receive generous support by a number of donors and supporters including, The Abbott Foundation, The Ian Potter Foundation, CAGES Foundation, The Colman Foundation, Dusseldorp Foundation, Fritz Family Foundation, Foundation of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies, GoodStart and URBIS.

Research funding was also received for existing and new projects from: NSW Department of Education, Department of Education and Training VIC, NSW and Commonwealth Departments of Health, NSW Health, Australian Research Council (ARC), University of Wollongong (UOW), University of Newcastle, NHMRC, Patrick Thomas McMillan Bequest, Commonwealth Department of Industry, Innovation and Services, World Health Organisation, The Colman Foundation, and the Criminology Research Council.

We also worked in partnership with a number of organisations in the non-profit sector including Mater Dei, Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC), Early Childhood Australia, Catholic Education Archdiocese Canberra and Goulburn, Catholic Care Wollongong, the Illawarra/Shoalhaven local health district, Anglicare, IRG and Playgroup NSW.

## Financial Governance

Early Start was established as a collaborative initiative between the University of Wollongong (UOW), the Commonwealth Government and the Abbott Foundation. Early Start is an entity of UOW's faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities. Please refer to UOW's Annual Reports for full fiduciary information. Early Start's Governance is through an Advisory Board. The Early Start Chief Executive Officer reports to the Board and the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences.



# HIGHLIGHTS



## Buckaroo Belt Donation

Local tool belt manufacturer **Buckaroo** created and donated children's tool belts for use in the Discovery Space's Construction experience.



## UOW Council Dinner to Welcome New VC

The first face-to-face UOW Council meeting to welcome the new **Vice Chancellor, Professor Patricia M Davidson**, was hosted in Early Start's Abbott Gallery. Chris and Barbara Abbott, whose generous support made Early Start and the Discovery Space possible, joined our Chair Melanie Kansil and CEO Anita Kumar as hosts. The group toured Early Start to understand our work and impact.



## KidsWish

The Discovery Space hosted a special experience for children living with complex needs through **KidsWish** and the **Disability Trust**. Children got involved in excavation of dinosaur fossils as well as Indigenous and modern-day artifacts to learn about history and create a timeline.



## Expert Insights (with Big Fat Smile)

We continued to share expertise online via our **'Expert Insights'** YouTube videos on areas of child development and education. Hosted by Early Start's Leanne Gibbs, the research-based videos were accessible and conversational- useful for parents and educators alike. See them [here](#)



## Early Start 6th Birthday Party: Up, Up and Away!

Early Start celebrated our **6th birthday** over three Open Days in May. Themed activities included making paper aeroplanes, testing items in wind tunnels, bubbles in the garden, a Helicopter School and puppet show.



# LOOKING FORWARD

## Festival of Play: Saturday March 26, 2022!

The Early Start Festival of Play aims to showcase the importance of play in early childhood development. The free program of events will engage, educate and entertain with an expert speaker series, children's creative workshops, interactive family entertainment, educator workshops and more.

## Workforce Development Report

The result of a 2-year collaboration between Early Start and educators in nine ECECs in Indigenous communities across regional and remote NSW, this report will highlight challenges faced by Aboriginal children, services and communities to determine better ways of supporting and empowering them into the future.

## Play & Learn Together

To be launched in early 2022, Play & Learn Together is a new resource designed to satisfy a need for quality, evidence-based early childhood learning resources for use in the home environment for parents and carers, available freely and online. Developed by Early Start with our partners Early Childhood Australia and Playgroup Australia, this project has been made possible with generous support from The Ian Potter Foundation.

## Steam Room Launch

The Discovery Space team look forward to offering unique STEAM experiences delivered in a dedicated new, STEAM Room opening in 2022! These free STEAM programs will encourage children to think, create and work together to solve real-world problems by engaging with a range of tools, technologies and resources.

## Intergenerational Playgroup Resource

Interrupted by lockdowns, the team developed a support resource: *Playgroups for all ages: A Handbook for understanding and implementing Intergenerational Playgroups for Wellbeing*, to be launched in September 2022 for Intergenerational Awareness month.



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