



Enriching children's lives through learning

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

RESPECT • COMPASSION • COURAGE • COLLABORATION

ECKA acknowledges Wadawurrung and Dja Dja Wurrung as the Traditional Owners of the land, water and resources of the countries that ECKA resides upon. We thank them for sharing their connections and pay respect to their elders past, present and emerging. ECKA pays respect to the central place in education that Aboriginal culture holds and says thank you.



**Indigenous Preschool Advancement Strategy (IPAS) Artwork
“Cared for”**

Painting created by Albert Fagan, Wadawurrung Traditional Owner

Painting description:

The lines within the painting represent the individual journey the children and teachers have taken to get here today. In the middle of the painting is a campfire where the teachers provide food and water for the children. The symbols on either side represent the teachers and the learning that occurs with the children.



ORGANISATION REPORT

We are pleased to present the 21st annual report to our members, parents and carers, staff, partners, and stakeholders.

In 2023, our organisation continued to enhance its services, creating positive outcomes for children, families, and staff alike. Fifteen of ECKA's twenty-eight kindergarten services underwent the National Quality Standards assessment and rating (accreditation) process in 2023, with exceptional results: 60% were meeting all of the standards and the remaining 40% were rated as exceeding the standards. Additionally, we prioritised the professional development of all staff, ensuring that everyone had the opportunity to achieve their personal goals.

We successfully obtained approval to become the provider of Napoleons Kindergarten, a significant addition to our organisation. Also, in collaboration with the Golden Plains Shire, we supported the process for the demolition of the Haddon kindergarten facility and the development of a modern two-room structure, enhancing our capacity to serve the community.

A pivotal accomplishment in 2023 was the completion of the initial phase of the ECKA Action Research Project – “Enhanced outcomes for children’ a deeper examination of the planning cycle in our local context”, supported by the invaluable guidance of our consultant, Catharine Hydon. This endeavour led to the creation of resources to facilitate high quality curriculum planning and documentation processes, support beginning teachers and educators, reduce workloads and promote high quality documentation that can be shared with parents. An important focus in our curriculum planning is to embed children’s participation and voices in curriculum design.

In response to the introduction of new standards, we diligently implemented the 11 Child Safe Standards, conducting thorough assessments across all services and devising comprehensive improvement strategies. Our management team worked tirelessly throughout the year to ensure seamless integration of these standards into our operational practices, prioritising staff training and awareness.

Securing a workforce grant from the Department of Education was instrumental in creating a comprehensive five-year workforce plan. This plan is strategically designed to address our evolving needs and guide us through an upcoming growth phase, including the ambitious initiative to implement 30 hours of pre-prep between 2026 and 2032.

A focal point of our efforts in 2023 was the cultivation of partnerships with educational institutions and advocacy for our workforce. By strengthening ties with schools and universities, we promoted careers in early childhood education and facilitated numerous training opportunities and practical placements for aspiring educators. Furthermore, our advocacy initiatives targeted government attention to critical areas such as teacher workload, coordination time, and collaborative planning, aiming to create a conducive environment for our workforce to thrive.

In 2024 the Board will revise and refresh ECKA’s strategic plan to ensure we continue to deliver on our purpose of *enriching children’s lives through learning* and are well prepared for the roll-out of pre-prep commencing in 2026. This will include the development of robust key performance indicators to measure our progress in delivering on the new strategic plan.

On behalf of the Board, I thank Jo Geurts, our CEO, and all members of the Management team for their hard work and effort in 2023. We also thank the members of the ECKA Board for their enthusiasm, commitment, and collaboration. A particular thanks to all our ECKA staff both in the services and in the administration team for your flexibility, care of one another, and your commitment to ensuring the delivery of quality services to children.

Finally, to the parents and carers of children who attended our ECKA services we say thank you, for allowing us at ECKA to contribute to the enrichment of your child’s life through their early years journey.



Katherine Cape, Chair



Jo Geurts, CEO



OUR ORGANISATION

Since its foundation, ECKA has strived to support the learning and development of children in their early years. In this strategic plan, ECKA confirms this commitment to delivering on its purpose - Enriching children's lives through learning.

Our Guiding Principle

In order to deliver on our purpose, ECKA is committed to being a sustainable organisation that maximises its impact on the lives of children.

Our Strategic Priorities

The development of strong partnerships and collaboration on innovative projects will enhance the educational and social outcomes for pre-school children in our care, including those experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage. Our educational programs will continue to be based on robust and effective educational approaches utilising the latest research and evidence, resulting in improvements in teaching and learning. Our long-term sustainability and impact will be achieved through investment in our people, systems and structures. Strengthening our identity and increasing our engagement with key stakeholders and partners will enhance our impact on the lives of children.

Our Board

NAME	BOARD MEMBER SINCE
Katherine Cape (Board Chair)	November 2015
Katherine Rickard (Deputy Board Chair, Chair People & Governance Committee)	May 2022
Sharon Fecteau (Chair Quality & Risk Committee)	December 2020
Ron Jennings (Chair Finance & Audit Committee)	August 2022
Nicole Finn	December 2021
Laura Bradmore	May 2021
Felicity Christian	May 2021
Sarah Riches	May 2023
Jo Geurts CEO (Secretary)	



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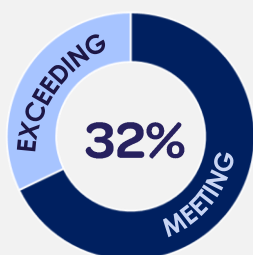
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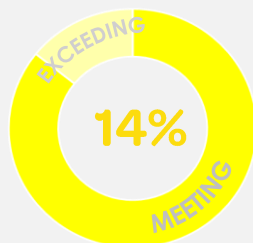
2023 SNAPSHOT

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS



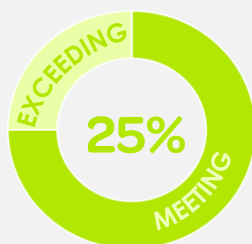
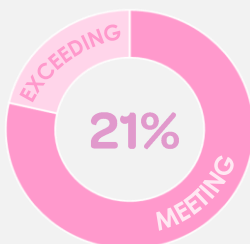
In 2023 **32%** of ECKA's Services were rated as **EXCEEDING** National Quality Standards

Area 1:
Educational
program and
practice



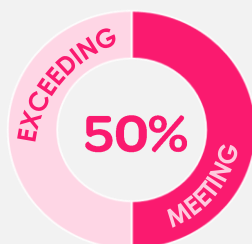
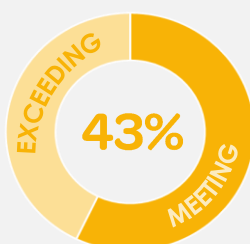
Area 2:
Children's health
and safety

Area 3:
Physical
environment



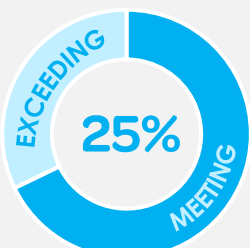
Area 4:
Staffing
arrangements

Area 5:
Relationships
with children



Area 6:
Collaborative
partnerships

Area 7:
Governance and
leadership



ENROLMENTS

590
3yo Enrolments

855
4yo Enrolments

50
Early Start
Enrolments

WEEKLY SESSIONS OF EDUCATION & CARE

4yo kindergarten

112

3yo Kindergarten

93

After Kinder Care

7

Long Day Care

5

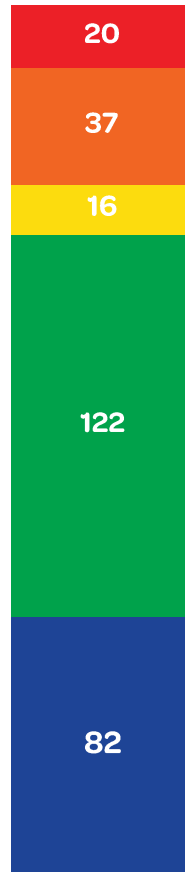
Occasional Care

2

In 2023 ECKA provided over **1015** hours of education and care each week to **1495** children.



OUR TEAM



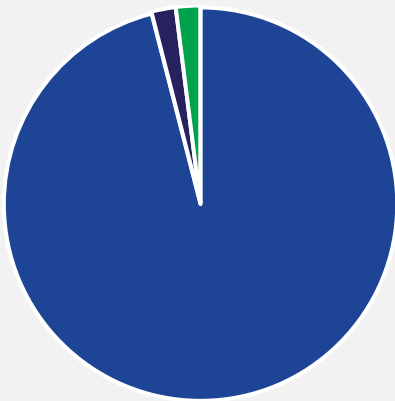
- Administration & Executive Staff
- Casual Staff
- Certificate III Educators
- Diploma Educators
- Bachelor Qualified Teachers

In 2023 ECKA employed approximately **277** casual and permanent staff members.

In 2023 ECKA supported:

13 Staff to undertake Bachelor studies
4 staff to upskill to a Diploma
2945 hours of staff professional development.

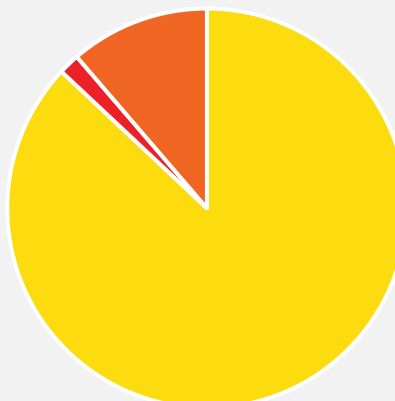
2023 FINANCES



2023 Income

Government Funding 96%
Investment Income 2%
Other Operating Income 2%

Total Income: \$13,000,737



2023 Expenses

Staff Expenses 87%
Depreciation 2%
Other Operating Expenses 11%

Total Expenditure: \$12,359,184

Total Assets	\$10,289,301
Total Liabilities	\$2,478,773
Operating Surplus	\$641,553
Total Income	\$13,000,737
Total Expenditure	\$12,359,184

Total liabilities of ECKA at the 31st of December 2023 are \$2,478,773 which is 25% of total assets, resulting in the association being in a good position to meet all of its current obligations.



Indigenous Preschool Advancement Strategy (IPAS)

In 2023, The IPAS Program funded 188 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children across 83 kindergartens in Western Victoria. The grants enabled these kindergartens to establish bush tucker gardens, provide meals, cover transport expenses, support transition to school, and purchase resources to integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture into their curriculum planning.

One of the key objectives of the IPAS program in 2023 was to support kindergartens and schools in facilitating children's transition to school. Parents used some of the IPAS funding to purchase school uniforms and resources, while educators were supported to develop transition plans for children who were to enrol to attend school in 2024. According to a survey conducted among parents, 99% believe that the kindergarten program significantly fostered their child's interest in learning, encouraging them to explore new activities and do things independently.

Intensive Teaching

In 2023, we continued to fund and support the intensive teaching model at the Mt Pleasant Kindergarten, emphasising collaborative planning to strengthen relationships with children and families. Documented observations indicated that children formed secure attachments with staff. This was facilitated by employing an additional qualified teacher and educator, resulting in significant growth in children's learning and development throughout the year.

The Educators regularly engaged with families in person, via phone, and through the Storypark App to develop tailored support plans for each child's learning and development needs. Parents received literacy and numeracy resources as well as video communications through the Storypark platform.

Collaborative planning time allows the education team to work together under a unified philosophy, empowering each member to advocate for community change and focus on meeting the needs of children and families effectively.



BUSH KINDER

In 2023, many ECKA kindergartens focused on nature pedagogy to enrich children's learning and development in natural environments. Several kindergartens embarked on bush kinder programs at offsite bush locations while others integrated nature programs within their kindergarten grounds.

Educators have reported numerous benefits from these nature programs, including assisting children in emotional regulation, creating a sense of calm, and fostering social connections with other children and staff.

The participating children in the Bush Kinder programs experienced rich learning and development outcomes, including increased confidence in exploring the environment, developing gross and fine motor skills, and taking calculated risks while playing in the bush setting.

Furthermore, the bush settings provided opportunities for foundational literacy and numeracy activities, such as counting and sorting natural objects, engaging in conversations and learning new words, and even incorporating Wadawurrung language when naming birds and objects found in the bush environment.

2023 PARENT FEEDBACK

"...all the educators are amazing, always free for a chat and my kids always come home excited and full of stories of their learnings."

"Thanks so much to the team. I really felt my son was in safe hands, learning, and growing."

"My child has absolutely thrived at...Kinder. The staff understood her sensory and emotional challenges, and supported her to grow and learn when she was ready. They are incredibly playful and kind and developed wonderful relationships with my child. She is well prepared to head to school next year because of her experience of kindergarten. We are incredibly grateful."

"Always friendly and available to families while providing great educational opportunities"

"The most wonderful year of learning and growing."

"Through the exceptional care they provided my daughter in helping her settle in and transition to kinder but also the excellent learning opportunities provided throughout the year. We valued the regular feedback about her progress, and updates on Storypark, as well as the special events outside normal hours."

"This has been a great year, and I'm so thankful for everything...the team have done to prepare my son for school. He is now ready to go more confidently than I ever had hoped, and I'm so thankful for that."

"The staff all do an amazing job at making the children and families feel so welcome... All of the staff do so well at meeting all if the children's needs and their patience is just beautiful to see. I cannot be happier with how [my child's] first year of kinder has gone."

100%

agreed that their kindergarten was friendly and welcoming to family's friends and visitors.

96%

would recommend the service.

99%

were satisfied with the quality of Education provided by the kindergarten.

91%

believe their child's views, interests and family were considered.

97%

felt confident their child had been adequately prepared for school in 2024.

CHILDREN'S VOICES



What do you like about kinder?

"Waterplay! And I like the dolphins"

"I like the slide out the back and the little boat out the front"

"Making new friends"

"Going outside and going on the trampoline"

What should next year's children know about kinder?

What would you like to learn at kinder?

"About the Dja Dja Wurrung"

"The days of the week"

"How to write my name"

"To show respect"

"Singing Jingle Bells"

"The trees and the sandpit"

"You should play with the dolls"

"I would ask them their name and play with them"



OUR COMMUNITY

We acknowledge the important contribution that all parents and friends bring to the development of our kindergarten programs and delivery of our services. The online Storypark platform enabled parents to contribute to their child's education and provide insights and information about activities or aspects of their community which assisted us in building these vital connections. Parent feedback has been invaluable in assisting us to identify changes and improvements to our services.

OUR PARTNERS

Thank you to our key partners and funders. Our partnerships with local and state government are critical to ensure all eligible children are identified and supported to access early education services.

Some of our collaboration includes; Best Start programs, Access to Early Learning, Central Kindergarten Registration schemes, engagement with Maternal Child Health Services, planning and implementation of government reforms, planning and delivery of new buildings and other identified joint projects.

We also acknowledge our partnerships with local schools and universities, as we support their students to commence careers in early childhood education and care.





Enriching children's lives through learning

