The logo for the Victorian Early Years Awards 2023 is a dark blue circle containing a stylized 'V' made of colorful dots and the text 'Victorian Early Years Awards 2023'.

Victorian  
Early Years  
Awards  
2023



# Northern Schools Early Years Cluster

Annual Report  
2023





## Acknowledgement of Country

The Northern Schools Early Years Cluster acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we deliver our services, the Wurundjeri People, and their continuing connection to land and community.

We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to their Elders both past and present. We recognise and respect Aboriginal cultures and their unique place in Victoria's past, present and future, and believe that learning about and valuing Aboriginal cultures enhances all children's sense of place in our community.





## Message from CEO and Chair

After several years of planning, renovations, expansions, large-scale recruitment, and workforce development, 2023 is the year when we've been able to consolidate our efforts and really started to see all the hard work over the past years paying off. It was wonderful to see the outcomes of the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan come to life where we were able to deliver on our commitment to roll out funded three-year-old kindergarten across all of our services.

This body of work included the development and implementation of an infrastructure plan, workforce plan and program review, and could not have been completed without the dedication of our Board, Principal Executive group, staff, families, children and our stakeholders. By the end of 2023 we upgraded and/or extended 10 of our kindergartens and grew our services to 15 services: 13 kindergartens on school sites, one nature play kindergarten and one long day care and integrated kindergarten. Huge thanks to all involved; it truly does take a village to deliver these kinds of projects and quality educational programs.

We were thrilled to be awarded the Victorian Early Years Award for Access and Participation in Early Learning. This award was in recognition of our initiative rolling out funded three-year-old kindergarten well before the Victorian Best Start Best Life reform timeline, which has promoted access and ongoing participation and engagement in early learning, particularly for families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.

Delivering 15 hours of free kindergarten for both 3 and 4-year-olds is making a real difference in the lives of children attending our services. In 2023, our multi-disciplinary teams were able to work with families to identify where 3-year-old children need additional support for their learning and development, make referrals, apply for Kindergarten Inclusion Support funding, and develop individualised learning support plans. This means that when children start 4-year-old kindergarten, referrals and supports are already in place for children to continue their learning journey, and children experience a much smoother transition.

We have a strong commitment to improving access and participation and to continuity of learning for children who attend our high-quality early learning services. Our governance model includes oversight and involvement with our local primary school partners, board and other key stakeholders that support our Kindergarten to Grade 6 model. Most of our kindergartens are located on school sites and this, together with our strong partnerships, enables our kindergarten and school teams to share information and practices that support children's transition from 4-year-old kindergarten to Prep/Foundation.

In recognition of the success of our K-6 model, we were awarded the Ministers Award at the Victorian Early Years Awards, a special commendation that is selected from the pool of finalists across all seven categories and selected by the Minister for Children.

Some specific highlights for 2023 include:

- **Opening our new Molesworth Street Kindergarten** in the new state of the art vertical campus of North Melbourne Primary School. Our first kindergarten located in a multi-storey building with a rooftop garden.
- **A successful bid to manage a new kindergarten** at Roxburgh Park Primary School.
- **Finalising our building projects** and hosting numerous official openings at all of our upgraded and expanded services, attended by Ministers and local members of parliament.
- **Increasing 3-year-old program delivery** with a 53% increase from 2022 to 2023 in children attending and a 200% increase from 5 to 15 hours at all services.
- **Winning two Victorian Early Years Awards**, including the Access and Participation Award for our fast-tracking of 15 hours of kindergarten for 3-year-olds, and the Minister's Award for our innovative Kindergarten to Grade 6 model in partnership with primary schools.
- **Recruiting 51 new staff** to increase our delivery of both 3 and 4-year-old programs, and successfully introducing blended 3/4 groups and longer day session times at some of our services.
- **Undergoing Assessment and Rating** at 2 services, with Broadmeadows Primary School Kindergarten achieving an Exceeding result in all 7 National Quality Standards.
- **Commencing a re-branding project** to reflect the growth and future directions of the organisation.
- **Finalising our 2023-2025 Strategic Plan** that includes commencing planning for the introduction of Pre-Prep from 2026, including the development of a Workforce Plan, program review and infrastructure plan.

In 2024 some of our key priorities will be:

- Continuing to deliver high quality education and care.
- Planning for the roll out of Pre-prep (30 hours of funded kindergarten), including our workforce plan, infrastructure plan and program review.
- Onboarding Roxburgh Park Primary School Kindergarten and Coolaroo South Primary School Kindergarten.
- Considering future opportunities with new kindergartens on school sites.
- Investigating the establishment of Parent Advisory Groups.
- Reviewing and updating the Northern Schools Early Years Constitution.
- Developing new branding to reflect the growth and evolution of Northern Schools Early Years.
- Developing School Readiness Plans with a focus on strengthening communication and wellbeing to enhance the trajectory of learning and communication for children.
- Development of a workforce plan to support the roll out of pre prep and ongoing 3 year old kindergarten.

Reflecting on the year that has been and all that we have achieved makes us incredibly proud to lead this organisation. We thank every single educator and staff member, board member, Principal and our stakeholders for their contributions to these achievements and dedication to the work that we all do with children and families.

Thank you, Val and Sigi.



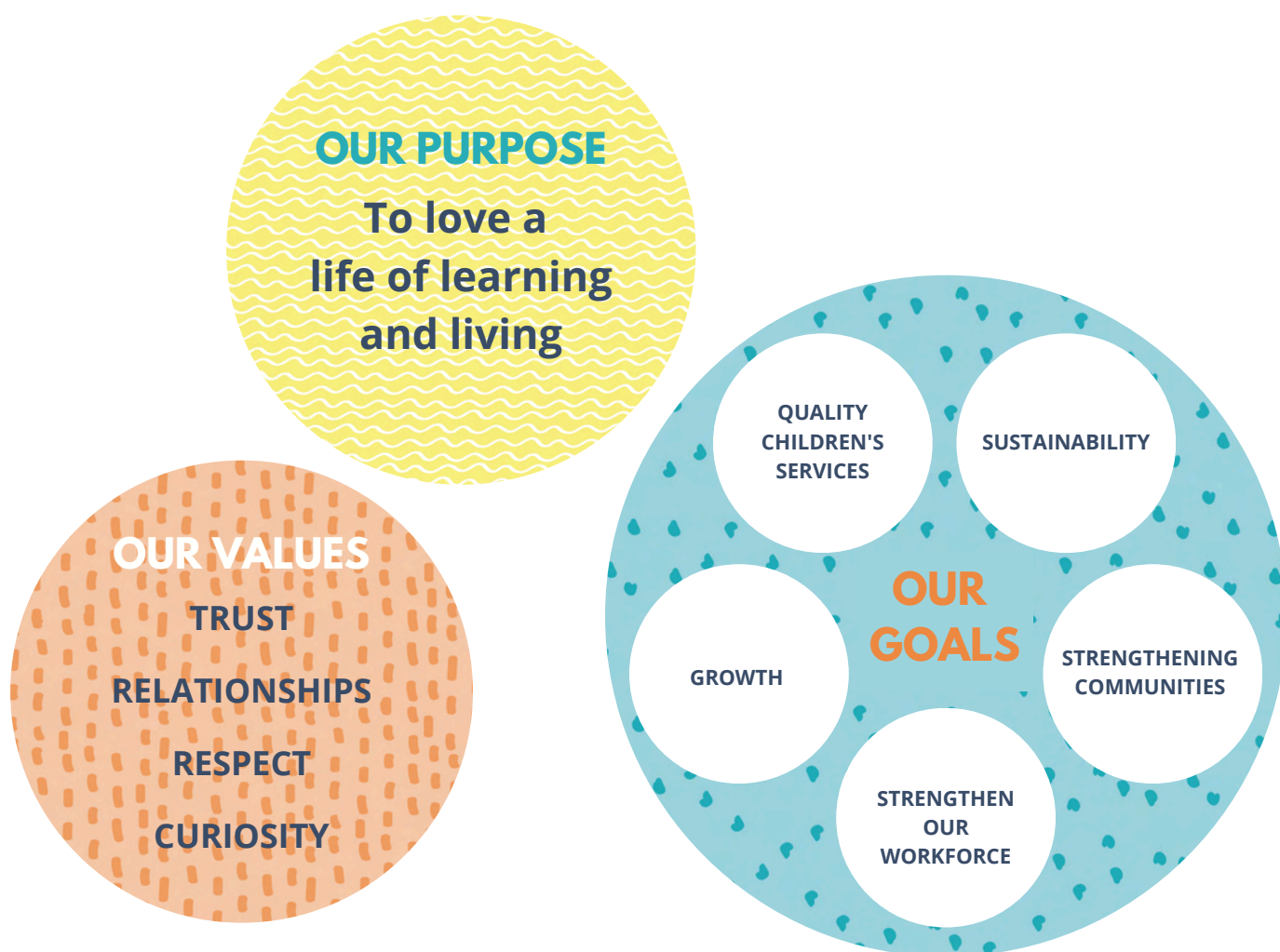
Valerie Karaitiana  
Chair



Sigi Hyett  
CEO



# NSEYC Strategic Plan 2023-25



## Our purpose, values and strategic goals

The NSEYC Board and Management recognise that good governance enables the NSEYC to operate in a manner that meets ethical, legal and business expectations and at the same time fulfill its commitments to funding bodies and staff who work at the services, and most importantly the children and families attending the services.

With 2022 being the final year of our 2020-22 Strategic Plan, we concluded that year with an implementation review and the development of our plan for 2023-2025 to guide us over the next 3 years. This included seeking input from children, families, staff and key stakeholders, resulting in some slight revisions to our overall goals and values. A new value of 'curiosity' was adopted, to replace 'learning', which reflects that curiosity is the necessary disposition for lifelong learning.

The organisation's sole purpose is to improve outcomes for our children, families and communities by strengthening a love of learning and living and working in close partnership with our families, communities and stakeholders.

Our core values of trust, respect, relationships and curiosity are underpinned by a strong commitment to integrity, respect for and compliance with the law, an emphasis on best practice and a caring spirit. Having this agreed purpose and framework in place enables the organisation to grow and evolve in line with our priorities, and to adapt and respond to sector challenges while still working towards our agreed goals.

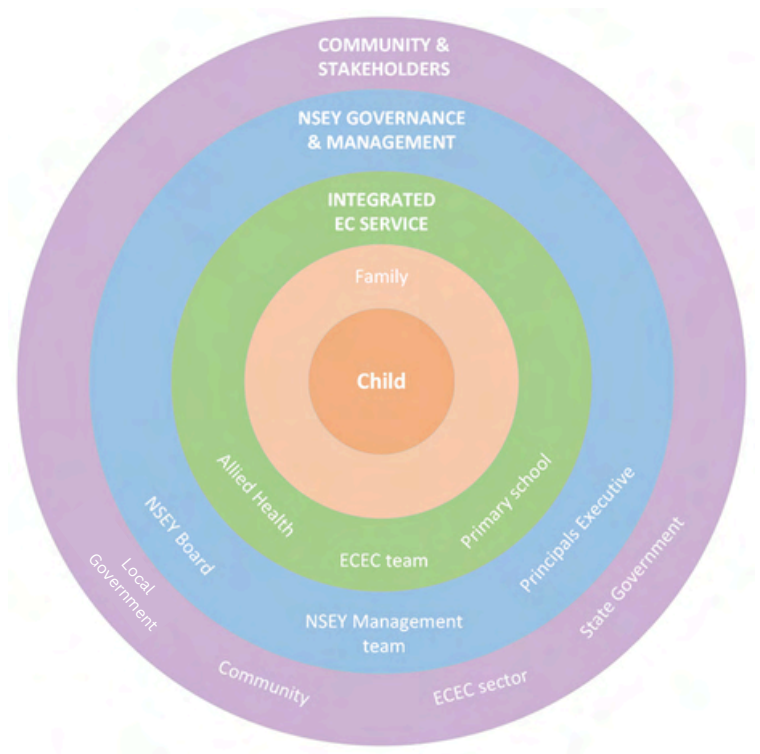
## Our model

The NSEYC is a community-based, not-for-profit organisation that was originally formed in 2011 by a group of primary school principals in the Broadmeadows area to provide Early Years Management for 5 kindergarten services on their school sites. Their aim was to better support local families and meet changing community needs, while providing a platform to support the implementation of early childhood sector reforms.

The NSEYC has grown over time and now manages 15 early childhood services (as of 2023), 13 of which are located on school sites. Our governance and management structure has changed to adapt to the needs of a larger organisation; however, the original intent remains at the core of our purpose: to Love a Life of Learning and Living. Our educational philosophy includes a focus on authentic relationships to support individual children's wellbeing and development, with a strong emphasis on learning through play in nature.

The NSEY model is based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model, adapted for the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, which places children at the centre with family, early childhood services, schools and allied health professionals working together with the support of our governance and management structures, as well as the broader ECEC and government sector.

Partnerships are central to the way we work. Our collaborative governance model features strong oversight and involvement of local primary schools and other partners. The NSEYC Board of Directors includes local government and community sector representatives, as well as school principals, supporting genuine connections with our local communities. Our point of difference to other EYM groups is that our governance model includes a Principal Executive group consisting of our school principals who support continuity of learning and delivery of our integrated programs.



Our services operate as a Kindergarten to Grade 6 (K-6) model, where the kindergarten is considered part of the school community. This has enormous benefits for children and families, including:

- making it easier for families who have children at kindergarten and school
- providing the opportunity to develop connections and familiarity with the school environment and teachers, which supports a positive transition when children commence their formal schooling
- giving children access to a broader range of facilities and programs (such as a library, gymnasium, kitchen gardens, music and language programs etc.)
- supporting continuity of learning for children from early childhood into Foundation/Prep.
- supporting shared professional development opportunities and teaching strategies between kindergarten and school teachers that enhance continuity of learning for children.

## Our Board & Executive Group

We recognise that having a central body with a robust governance structure and expertise in managing early years services is essential to our ongoing operations and delivery of quality education and care. The Board of Directors oversees the strategic direction of the organisation. It comprises representatives from local government, the community sector, early childhood experts, and school leaders. School Principals are part of an Executive Group that supports networking, collaboration and information-sharing between sites, and continuity of learning for children between kindergartens and schools.

The Board, Executive and Management teams work in partnership to:

- create attractive employment opportunities,
- support effective links between existing services,
- promote the benefits of kindergarten within the local area,
- provide coordinated professional support and development for continuous improvement, and
- support effective collaboration between kindergartens and primary schools.



Valerie Karaitiana  
Chair



Lynne Gunning  
Member



Suzie Mansell  
Secretary



Felix Ohle  
Treasurer



Pamela Streete  
Vice Chair



Leanne Giardina  
Assistant Treasurer



Kathy Townley  
Member



Maureen Campbell  
Member



**Paul Kenna**, Belle Vue Park Primary School  
**David Warren**, Bethal Primary School  
**Leanne Lewis**, Broadmeadows Primary School  
**Valerie Karaitiana**, Dallas Brooks Community Primary School  
**Roger Pell**, Fawkner Primary School  
**Joanne Money**, Glenroy Central Primary School  
**Pam Streete**, Glenroy West Primary School  
**Alan Smith**, Holy Child Primary School  
**Anthony Potesta**, Meadows Primary School  
**Maria Giordano**, Moreland Primary School  
**Rynn Anderson**, Willowbank Primary School  
**Sarah Nightingale**, North Melbourne Primary School

Executive Principal Group

**Valerie Karaitiana**, Chair, Principal Executive  
**Pam Streete**, Vice Chair, Principal Executive  
**Suzie Mansell**, Secretary  
**Felix Ohle**, Treasurer  
**Leanne Giardina**, Assistant Treasurer  
**Lynne Gunning**, Member  
**Kathy Townley**, Member  
**Maureen Campbell**, Member

Board Members

**Sigi Hyett**, CEO  
**Elicia Napoli**, Operations Manager  
**Bec Howell**, Communications and Engagement Manager  
**Melanie Peters**, Area Manager (from Aug 23)  
**Linda Hyett & Deanne McMillan**, Teaching and Learning Facilitators (Deanne from Oct 23)  
**Ivette Castillo**, Finance Manager  
**Linda Burns**, Accounts Officer  
**Matthew Shehata, Kirti Crute & Corina Ross**, Enrolment Officers (Matthew from July 23)  
**Amira Mourad**, Administration Officer

**Wellbeing team:**

**Rebecca Sica**, Family Support Worker  
**Cathy De Bono**, Family Support Worker (from June 23)

Management & Administration

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## Our Management team

In 2023, the NSEY increased service delivery hours by 200% (5 hours to 15 hours) for 3-year-old children. There was an increase of 53% of 3-year-old children attending kindergarten compared to the previous year and 12.5% increase of four-year-old attending kindergarten from the previous year.

Accordingly, during 2023, our Management and Administration team continued to grow and evolve to provide effective support for our expanding service delivery.

The Management team includes our CEO, Operations Manager, People and Culture Manager, Communications Manager and Finance Manager. The Operations Manager, plus an Area Manager and Teaching and Learning Facilitators (T&LF) provide on-site leadership and support to service teams through service visits, coaching and mentoring, pedagogy and practice, compliance and facilities management.

The Management and Administration team also provide other 'back-of-house' support functions including:

- Enrolment support
- School Readiness Funding coordination
- Communications

- Staffing and human resources
- Finance
- Information Technology

Nominated Supervisors are responsible for the day-to-day running of their individual service and program in line with regulatory requirements, with regular support and guidance from an Operations or Area Manager, focused on compliance and leadership and facilities maintenance. The Educational Leader is responsible to lead the educational program with coaching and mentoring provided from a T&LF (focused on pedagogy and practice). The Operations/Area Manager and T&L Facilitators regularly spend time in services to support these functions.

We continue to develop the capacity of our people, implement and consolidate improvements to our systems and processes, facilitate continuous quality improvement and best practice compliance with regulations, and support the implementation of school readiness plans.

In 2024, we will appoint an additional Area Manager to further support our continuous quality improvement and service delivery as we grow. As a result, the Operations Manager will provide direct support to fewer services, enabling a stronger focus on organisation-wide operations, compliance and support.

## Our Senior Management Team:



Sigi Hyett  
Chief Executive  
Officer



Elicia Napoli  
Operations Manager



Bec Howell  
Communications and  
Engagement Manager



Ivette Castillo  
Finance Manager



Gaganpreet Sandhu  
People & Culture  
Manager

## Organisational growth

With each year, our Kindergarten to Grade 6 (or birth-6) integrated service delivery model becomes more relevant and attractive to early childhood providers and funding bodies. As the Victorian Government builds more kindergartens on school sites, there is increased recognition of the potential benefits for children and families of co-location, but also, an understanding that co-location on its own does not reap those benefits unless it is underpinned by collaborative partnerships between early childhood providers and schools. Our winning of the Minister's Award at the 2023 Victorian Early Years Awards for our K-6 model is further recognition of the importance of our approach.

The growth of the NSEY has been steady over the past 12 years, expanding its platform from five to 15 services in 2023 (including one long day care centre), with a further expansion to 17 services in 2024. Our new Roxburgh Park Kindergarten will open in Term 1 2024, and Coolaroo South Kindergarten (an existing kindergarten on the site of Coolaroo South Primary School) will join us in Term 3 2024.

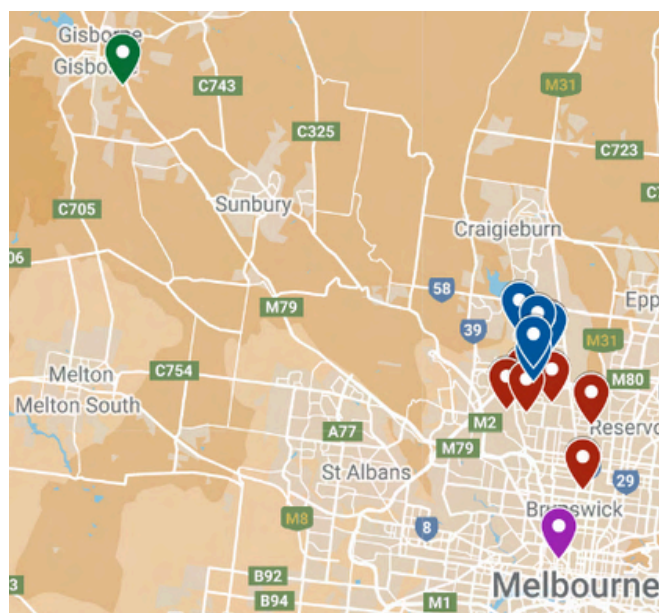
## Our services & programs

Each of our childhood education and care services is unique, reflecting the schools and communities where they are located, but with a shared purpose and overarching educational philosophy.

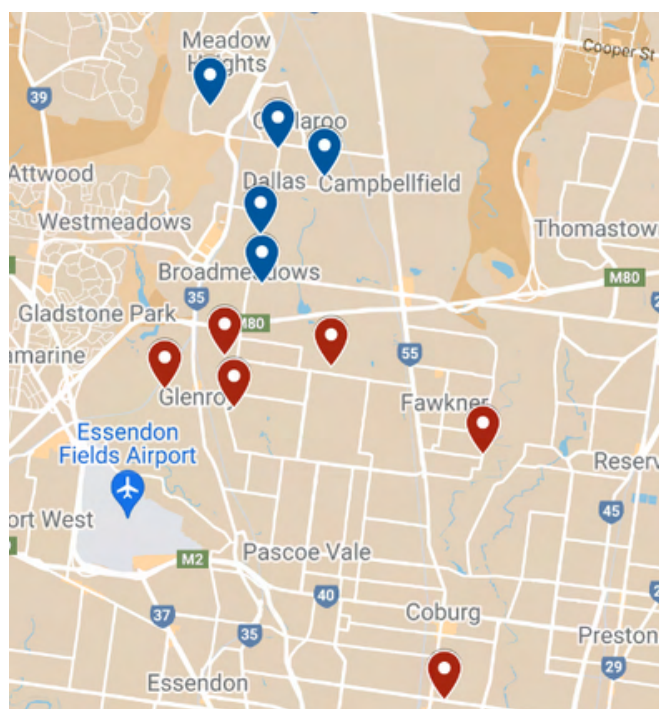
Thirteen of our 14 kindergartens (as at 2023) are co-located on school sites enabling the kindergarten programs to be integrated with the schools, providing a Kindergarten to Grade 6 model at each site and in some cases, where we have community hubs and maternal child health services co-located, a birth to Grade 6 model. Each early years team comprises at least one Bachelor-qualified Early Childhood Teacher and at least one qualified early childhood educator. We value ongoing professional learning and collaboration for our teams, where the sharing of knowledge and skills strengthens staff capabilities, and ultimately provides better outcomes for children, families, staff and communities.

After expanding our facilities in 2020-22 and significant workforce planning and program development, we were able to deliver 15 hours of free 3-year-old kindergarten at each of our kindergarten services – well ahead of the policy mandate.

The Kindergartens on School sites initiative means there is no shortage of opportunities for the NSEY to expand its delivery in line with our model, purpose and strategic goals. Future growth of the organisation will be incremental, with a focus on alignment with our K-6 model and in communities where we can have the most impact. This may include a shift to an area-based model, where services and school partners are grouped into networks (such as Northern Hume and Southern Hume), to support the place-based partnership approach that is central to our operating model.



All NSEY service locations



NSEY services in Merri-bek (red) and Hume (blue)



In 2023, we provided 3 and 4-year-old sessional kindergarten programs for 850 children across our services, an increase of 53% 3-year-old children attending and 12.5% 4-year-old children attending from the previous year. We also delivered a Long Day Care service for 110 children at the Glenroy Hub Children's Centre (an increase of 35% from 2022), including an integrated kindergarten program for 25 children.

Hume services	Enrolments 2023
<b>Bethal Primary School Kindergarten</b> , located at Bethal Primary School, 26-52 El Dorado Crescent, Meadow Heights	3yo: 33 children 4yo: 31 children
<b>Broadmeadows Preschool</b> , located at Broadmeadows Primary School, 62-79 Blair St, Broadmeadows	3yo: 26 children 4yo: 49 children
<b>Dallas Kindergarten &amp; Upfield Kindergarten @ Dallas Brooks Community Primary School</b> , located at 24-36 King St, Dallas	3yo: 43 children 4yo: 62 children
<b>Holy Child Primary School</b> , located at Holy Child Primary School, 227 Blair Street, Dallas	3yo: 20 children 4yo: 13 children
<b>Meadows Primary School Kindergarten</b> , located at Meadows Primary School, 41 Gerbert Street, Broadmeadows	3yo: 33 children 4yo: 62 children
<b>Merri-bek services</b>	
<b>Belle Vue Park Kindergarten</b> , located at Belle Vue Park Primary School, Morell St, Glenroy	3yo: 26 children 4yo: 31 children
<b>Glenroy Central Kindergarten</b> , located at Glenroy Central Primary School, 10 Logan St, Glenroy	3yo: 30 children 4yo: 39 children
<b>Glenroy Hub Children's Centre</b> , located at the Glenroy Community Hub, 50 Wheatsheaf Road, Glenroy	110 enrolments 95% occupancy rate
<b>Lorne Street Kindergarten</b> , located at Fawkner Primary School, 40 Lorne St, Fawkner	3yo: 22 children 4yo: 47 children
<b>Moreland Kindergarten</b> , located at Merri-bek Primary School, 157-163 Moreland Rd, Coburg	3yo: 22 children 4yo: 27 children
<b>Will Will Rook Preschool</b> , located at our bush kindergarten site, 208A Hilton St, Glenroy	3yo: 13 children 4yo: 17 children
<b>York Street Kindergarten at Glenroy West Primary School</b> , located at Glenroy West Primary School, 60 William St, Glenroy	3yo: 30 children 4yo: 31 children
<b>Rothschild Road Kindergarten @ Willowbank Primary School</b> , located at 72 Rothschild Road, Gisborne	3yo: 49 children 4yo: 43 children
<b>Molesworth Street Kindergarten</b> , located at North Melbourne Primary School, Molesworth Street, North Melbourne	3yo: 28 children 4yo: 23 children

## Our educational philosophy

Our educational philosophy includes a focus on authentic relationships to support individual children's wellbeing and development, with a strong emphasis on learning through play in nature. Our programs invite children to explore, discover, create, investigate, wonder, be spontaneous, be curious, take supported risks, make mess and noise, and be wholly engaged in learning through play.

Although there are some common expectations across our services, each individual kindergarten team develops and regularly reviews its own philosophy to reflect the children, families, community and context of the service. The NSEY Purpose, 'To Love a Life of Learning and Living', overarches all individual service philosophies.



## Integrated service delivery

Our teams work with a range of other professionals to deliver the kindergarten program and provide holistic support for families, creating a 'team around the child'. By building trusting, respectful relationships with families, EC teams learn about children and families' unique circumstances and strengths, and where they might need extra support. Our teams help families connect with parenting services and programs, community health services, supported playgroups, Maternal and Child Health, Orange Door, Family Violence support, etc. The team around the child is involved in planning for transition to school with Foundation teachers and school Wellbeing staff, including considering what assessments and supports may be required.

A Family Support Worker (FSW) is appointed to some services through School Readiness Funding. The role of the FSW is to provide holistic, individual and group-based support to families and children with ongoing or emerging vulnerability, based on their needs and in a culturally safe manner, in collaboration with our kindergarten teams and primary school wellbeing teams. The FSW also works with ECTs and educators to strengthen existing skills and knowledge.







*The Glenroy Hub Children's Centre team at our End of Year Celebration 2023*

## Our people

Our dedicated teams are committed to providing opportunities for children to learn, thrive and reach their full potential. This shared common purpose is crucial to the overall NSEY culture.

Our teams have developed a shared understanding of our purpose, both within their own immediate working group and of our whole organisation. This has enabled our everyday work to be aligned to our purpose, as well as the National Quality Standards and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, creating a strong sense of connectedness across the organisation.

The values of the whole organisation are demonstrated within our teams daily. Trust, respect, and strong relationships encourage our curiosity, as a necessary disposition for ongoing learning.

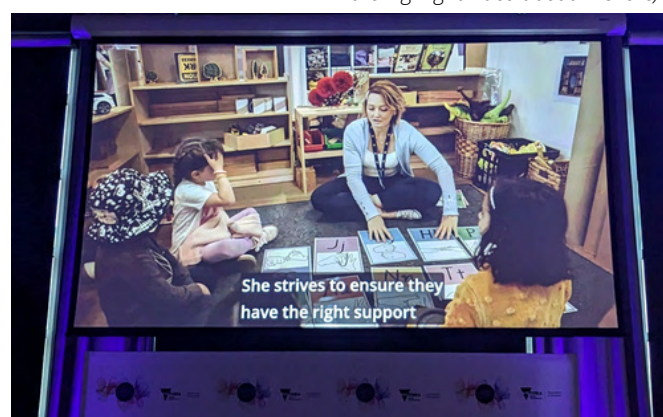
In 2023, our teams continued to expand their knowledge, skills, and capabilities through professional learning, as part of the School Readiness Plans and the NSEYC professional learning calendar. This included a focus on Communication supported by tailored professional learning provided by Catharine Hydon and Kerrie O'Neill of Circularity Consulting and Heather Barnes.

The NSEY undertakes a staff culture survey three times per year to assess how we are tracking as an organisation, and to identify strengths and areas for improvement. In the October 2023 survey, the NSEY Purpose - 'To love a life of learning and living' – was

assessed by staff as the organisation's greatest strength. Our staff also highlighted the statement "There are positive working relationships across staff members within my kinder/team", and this has been a consistent trend since March 2022.

During 2023, our average result of 78% indicates that 'good' culture exists across our organisation, however there is room for improvement as this is a slightly lower result than we have achieved in previous years. In 2024 we will convene a Staff Culture Working Group with representatives from each service to develop a Staff Culture Action Plan, to help ensure we maintain our good culture in the context of organisational growth and sector reforms.

*Michelle Ives, ECT at Glenroy Central Kindergarten was a finalist for Early Childhood Teacher of the Year at the Victorian Early Years Awards 2023 (pictured: a still from the highlight video about Michelle)*



*She strives to ensure they have the right support*



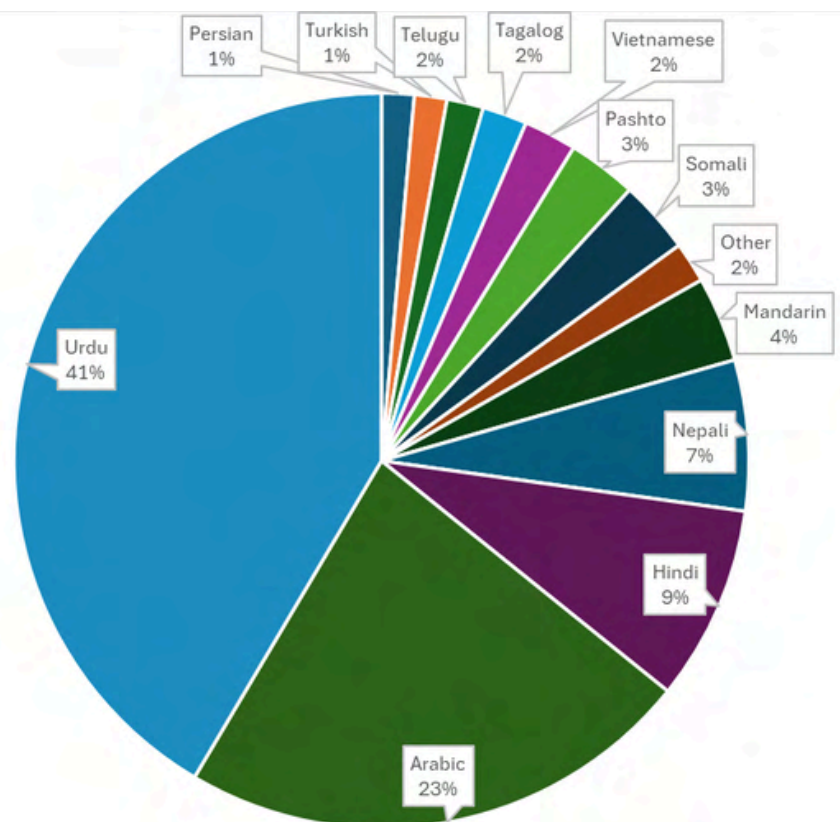


## Our communities

The NSEY services are mostly situated within the northern suburbs of Melbourne, with 12 of our early years services located across the municipalities of Hume and Merri-bek, in the suburbs of Glenroy, Fawkner, Coburg, Dallas, Meadow Heights and Broadmeadows. We also have one service in North Melbourne (City of Melbourne) and one in the town of Gisborne (Macedon Ranges Shire).

The communities we work within are vibrant and richly multicultural. Our families and children speak many languages, with the most predominant being Arabic, Urdu, Hindi and Nepali, with an increasing number of Samoan, African, Chinese and Vietnamese families. These diverse cultures are also reflected amongst our teams and within our programs.

There are also high levels of vulnerability and disadvantage amongst many of our communities, which is why it is so important that we work with our communities and partners to provide the highest possible quality early learning experiences in these most formative years. This empowers children in their learning journey, and supports families as their first and most important educators to advantage children entering their formal school years.



Languages spoken at home, 2023

## Our partnerships

Partnerships and collaboration are central to the governance and integrated service delivery model of the NSEYC. We could not achieve what we do without our partners; from our Board members, school principals and local councils, Department of Education, through to on-the-ground professionals (such as Allied Health) and support providers who work with our teams every day.

The NSEYC is unique in that we employ a collaborative governance model with strong oversight and involvement of local primary schools and other partners. The NSEYC Board of Directors includes local government and community sector representatives, as well as school principals.

At the organisational level, we work closely with the Hume/Merri-bek, Western Melbourne and Loddon Mallee Areas of the Department of Education, and with Merri-bek, Hume, Melbourne and Macedon Ranges Councils. This includes representation on the following groups for each council:

- Merri-bek Children, Young People and Families Plan Governance Group; Glenroy Community Hub Partners Group; the Merri-bek Central Enrolment Reference Group; the Merri-bek Early Years Network Group; and the Merri-bek Educational Leaders' Network Group.
- Hume Access to Early Learning Governance Group; Best Start Executive Group and Working Group; the Hume Early Years Partnership; the Hume Early Years Network Group; the Hume Educational Leaders' Network Group; and the Hume Central Enrolments Reference Group.
- Macedon Ranges Shire Council Early Childhood Education and Care workforce group; Early Childhood Network group and the Approved Provider Network group.
- Western Metropolitan Early Years Leaderships group; Western Metropolitan Early Years network group; City of Melbourne Early Years group.

Our early years staff work in partnership with multi-disciplinary professionals and schools to support children and families to fully engage in early learning and improve their health and wellbeing. This includes our Family Support Workers, Allied Health professionals from Merri Health and DPV, Co Health, Cobaw Community Health and Brotherhood of St Laurence, Kindergarten Inclusion Support workers, Preschool Field Officers, Child First and primary school teaching and support staff.

In 2023, we partnered with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation on a number of projects, including community events and planning for the future of the Ballerdt Mooroop cultural site where our head office is located.

We continue to strengthen links with other organisations such as specialist schools, community health services, early childhood intervention services, family services, refugee and migrant support services and neighbourhood houses.



*Uncle Jim and Aunty Kylie Berg shared the significance of their possum skin cloaks with the children at Will Will Rook Preschool*

## Achievements in 2023

**Our focus for 2023 has been to consolidate the considerable growth, change and improvement achieved over the previous few years.** This included finalising (and celebrating) the many facility expansion and improvement projects we undertook, embedding best practice at our services, and supporting our teams with the expanded 3-year-old program delivery. Some key achievements against our strategic goals are outlined below.

### Goal 1: Provide a quality children's service

#### Fast-tracking 15 hours for 3-year-olds

We are extremely proud to be among the first Early Years Management organisations to deliver the full 15 hours of funded kindergarten for 3-year-old children across all of our services from Term 1, 2023, well ahead of the reform schedule (which requires full implementation by 2029). This is the result of a huge amount of work by the whole of our organisation, including our board, management team, educators, support staff and stakeholders over the last 5 years, from early infrastructure and workforce planning, copious grant applications, simultaneous complex building projects, a huge recruitment drive, workforce development, program review and much more. It has also required great flexibility from our kindergarten teams, who have continued delivering programs throughout the building works, and have embraced the opportunity to deliver mixed-age groups and longer day sessions in order to provide more options for families and enable us to make best use of our facilities.

In November 2023, we won the Victorian Early Years Award for Improving Access and Participation for fast-tracking 15 hours of kindergarten for 3-year-olds experiencing vulnerability, a wonderful recognition of our organisation and teams' commitment to providing the best opportunities for the children in our communities.

#### Achieving a further 'Exceeding' rating against the National Quality Standard

Two more of our kindergartens underwent Assessment and Rating against the National Quality Standard during 2023.

- Broadmeadows Preschool was rated as 'Exceeding' in all 7 areas.

- Bethal Kindergarten was rated as 'Meeting' overall, with a rating of Exceeding in 2 areas.

This takes the total number of our services assessed and rated as 'Exceeding' during the last 3 years to 9 services, as well as highlighting some areas for improvement. This is a wonderful reflection of the high-quality learning that is provided at our kindergarten services, our commitment to supporting continuous critical reflection and improvement within our programs, and the dedication of our educators to providing the best start for children in our communities.

#### Implementation of School Readiness Plans

2023 was our fourth year of implementing School Readiness Plans across each of our kindergartens, with a continued aim of improving support for children in the areas of Wellbeing, Inclusion and Communication.

This has included:

- Implementing a Wellbeing Program at several kindergartens where families experience high levels of vulnerability and disadvantage. Family Support Workers support children and families and our teaching teams to address barriers to early learning including access, attendance and participation for children. Now in our second year of implementation, at the end of 2023 we were really seeing the impact of this program, due to the strong connections established with 3-year-old children leading to having relevant supports in place for the children as they enter into the 4-year-old program in 2024, as well as for children transitioning to school.
- A coaching and professional learning program delivered by Circularity Consulting (Catharine Hydon and Kerrie O'Neill), to provide teachers and educators with improved knowledge of dispositions and skills that are required for social and emotional literacy for children, and promote inclusive program planning that supports wellbeing and social/emotional development for all children.



- Intensive coaching and mentoring with early childhood consultant Kelly Boucher, to deepen educators' pedagogical practices that provide meaningful learning and development outcomes for children.
- Family sessions provided by BodySafety Superstars to provide educators, children and parents/carers with an increased body safety awareness by engaging them in body safety education as an essential component in primary prevention of child sexual abuse.
- Tailored, collaborative sessions delivered by Allied Health speech pathologists and psychologists from DPV and Merri Health, focused on communication and wellbeing.

**Goal 2: Operate a financially and environmentally sustainable enterprise**



*Top: Children leading the Acknowledgement of Country at Belle Vue Park Kindergarten's official opening event  
Below: Former Premier Daniel Andrews and former Minister for Children Ingrid Stitt visiting Will Will Rook Preschool*

## Achieving 95% occupancy at the Glenroy Hub Children's Centre

The Glenroy Hub has been open for almost two years now, and in that time the team led by Centre Manager Brinda Mootoosamy has achieved incredible things. The team has built strong relationships with children and families, as well as other partners at the Hub (including the library, Maternal and Child Health, Glenroy Memorial Kindergarten, CoHealth and others), and has already developed a reputation in the community for the high-quality education and care it is providing for our youngest children. This has led to the centre achieving a 95% occupancy rate in only its second year of operation, well ahead of schedule.

## Attracting grants to support program and service improvement

As a not-for-profit organisation, we rely heavily on grant funding to be able to improve our environments, resources, and programs. During 2023, we attracted grant funding of approximately \$280K including:

- Toys & Equipment Grants \$214,000, used to purchase high-quality learning resources and equipment to support inclusion for all of our services.
- Workforce Planning Grant (\$66,000), to assist with preparation for the delivery of 30 hours of Pre-Prep.

## Completing building upgrades and expansions

During 2023, we put the finishing touches on our building expansions funded through the Victorian Government's Building Blocks initiative (plus a contribution from NSEY of \$400,000 in 2021 and 2022). This was the culmination of several years' work for our management and service teams, and it was wonderful to finally see the impact of our efforts, with all of our services now offering 15-hour programs for 3 and 4-year-olds in contemporary, fit-for-purpose learning environments. We celebrated by hosting official opening events at each of the services, attended by Ministers and local members of parliament, Department of Education and local council representatives, as well as members of our Board and Principals Executive Group. It was evident that our children are learning about First Nations culture as they proudly led the acknowledgement of country at many of our openings.

We also commenced a new expansion at Lorne Street Kindergarten at Fawkner Primary School, in partnership with Merri-bek City Council, where a new modular kindergarten building is under construction and will commence operation in Term 1, 2024. This will enable us to increase our 3-year-old program offering at the service.

### Goal 3: Strengthen communities

#### Strengthening our K-6 model

We are constantly striving to find new ways to connect and collaborate with our primary school partners to further strengthen our Kindergarten to Grade 6 model and provide the most seamless learning journey for children. Some of our efforts this year include:

- Our Family Support Workers have worked closely with school wellbeing and foundation staff to ensure that appropriate supports are in place early for children with additional rights as they transition to school in 2024.
- Several of our early childhood and Foundation teams participated in joint professional learning on a strengthening transition and inclusion within the whole of school/kindergarten and broader community supporting children's wellbeing and learnings, led by early childhood expert Kelly Boucher.
- Our Principals Executive Group has taken a stronger focus on embedding shared pedagogy and programs across the kindergarten and Foundation settings. This includes structured language programs, buddy programs, regular library visits, Art, Physical Education, language and music programs and kindergarten and foundation teacher meetings. These specific timetabled programs are in addition to kindergarten children regularly visiting the school playgrounds, library, gyms and participating in school events such as book week activities, assemblies, Anzac day and Easter hat parades. Being on a school site alone is not enough to develop a strong connection to the school; our continuity of learning for children happens due to our strong partnerships between schools and kindergartens through our Kindergarten to Grade 6 model.

We were thrilled to receive the Minister's Award at the 2023 Victorian Early Years Awards for our K-6 model – a wonderful recognition of the impact of our work, and the leadership we are demonstrating in this space.

#### Intergenerational program pilot

We partnered with Merri-bek City Council to introduce an Intergenerational Program at our Lorne Street Kindergarten in Fawkner, which commenced in Term Two, 2023. The program brings the children together with senior members of the community to form fun and meaningful relationships, and provides opportunities to play together, share experiences, knowledge and skills that are mutually beneficial. The learning, one-on-one interactions and meaningful connections developed through the program have had many benefits for children and senior participants alike.

This type of opportunity is especially important for children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage, such as at Lorne Street Kindergarten (and many of our services), where many families have migrated from overseas and do not have extended family support from grandparents and other family or community elders. The program was a great success and we are looking to expand to other services in 2024.



Top: The Buddy Program in action at Dallas Kindergarten  
Below: Gardening as part of the Intergenerational Program visits at Lorne Street Kindergarten



## Building community connections at GHCC

During its second year of operation, the Glenroy Hub Children's Centre has made significant progress in establishing strong connections with the local community through its involvement in services and programs at the Hub. For example, children at the Centre participate in Rhyme Time at the Library, they regularly visit the Community Garden to learn about growing food, the Centre participates in the Food Bank program at the Hub, the Children's Centre team connects families with the Maternal and Child Health and CoHealth teams on site, and much more. As well as directly benefiting children and families, these connections are helping the Children's Centre build a strong reputation in the community and contributes to the high demand for places at the Centre (with an occupancy level of 95%).

## Improving cultural safety for First Nations families

In line with our strategic goal of achieving engaged communities that contribute to our children's learning and living and our Reconciliation Action Plan, we have worked with our local Wayipungitj, Sarah Rawley (formerly called a Koorie Preschool Assistant) through the *bupup balak wayipungang* initiative to undertake cultural audits at all of our Hume/Merri-bek kindergartens. This process identified a number of strengths and areas for improvement in our efforts to make our services welcoming and inclusive for all families, in particular First Nations communities. It has helped to deepen educators' understanding of how to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into the program and promote cultural safety.

At the organisational level, we are strengthening our links to the First Nations community through our involvement as a key stakeholder in the redevelopment of the Ballerit Mooroop cultural site, where our Head Office and Will Will Rook Preschool are located. We also provide in-kind support to the group by hosting regular meetings at our offices and contributing to community events at the site.



Victorian artist Emily Bell created this piece 'Life' for the *bupup balak wayipungang* initiative

## Goal 4: Strengthen our workforce

### Recruitment and workforce development to support 15-hours for 3-year-olds

Our program delivery has increased by over 200% since 2022. As of the beginning of 2024, the NSEY will employ 128 staff and deliver 31 kindergarten groups, compared to 80 staff and 27 groups in the previous year. Of these groups, 19 are 3-year-old (or blended) groups which have increased delivery from five to 15 hours per week. Accordingly, during 2023, our Management and Administration team has continued to grow and evolve to provide effective support for our expanding service delivery. We appointed a People and Culture Manager to oversee our human resources functions, an Area Manager to provide quality and compliance oversight for half of our services (with the remaining services being overseen by the Operations Manager), and an Enrolments Coordinator to meet increased demand.

In 2024, we will appoint an additional Area Manager to further to support our continuous quality improvement and service delivery as we grow. As a result, the Operations Manager will provide direct support to fewer services, enabling a stronger focus on organisation-wide operations and support planning for the roll-out of Pre-Prep.

*Celebrating the Glenroy Hub Children's Centre's first anniversary*





### Workforce Planning for the rollout of Pre-Prep

The Victorian Government provided workforce planning grants to support Early Years Management organisations to prepare for the staged implementation of Pre-Prep (30 hours of kindergarten) from 2026. We have engaged Community Child Care to undertake this work in close consultation with our team and stakeholders, which commenced in late 2023. The plan will have a broad focus on workforce development and retention, including career development, succession planning, workplace culture and capacity building of staff, and will be delivered in early 2024. A substantial cohort of our children will be able to access 30 hours of Pre-Prep when children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage become eligible for the increased hours. By 2028, this will increase considerably, when families with concession cards become eligible.

**Goal 5: Pursue growth opportunities to meet our purpose**

### New early learning services

The growth of the NSEYC over the last few years has been strategic, with a focus on opportunities that align with our model and enhance our ability to make a positive impact within communities.

In Term 2, 2023 we opened Molesworth Street Kindergarten at North Melbourne Primary School, after being selected as the Approved Provider by the Department of Education in 2022. Initially, we ran the program from the existing primary school building on Errol Street, while the construction of the new state-of-the-art vertical school campus was completed. The program commenced operating from the 5th floor of the new building in Term 3, 2023, and provides a modern and light-filled learning environment with a large rooftop outdoor play space. The two-room kindergarten has proved popular with the local community and will operate three groups in 2024.

We were successful in our bid to operate the new kindergarten under construction at Roxburgh Park Primary School, due to open in early 2024. The four-room kindergarten will be located at the rear of the school site and is expected to have a high demand for enrolments.

We are looking forward to partnering with the school and making new connections in the Roxburgh Park community, which borders our existing delivery areas of Dallas and Meadow Heights in the City of Hume.

We also partnered with Coolaroo South Primary School and undertook a due diligence process that identified that the kindergarten and school are well-aligned with the NSEY model. As a result, Coolaroo South Primary School Kindergarten will join the NSEY in Term 3, 2024.

### Rebranding of Northern Schools Early Years

Considering the growth and change we have achieved over the last 5 years, the NSEY Board decided to undertake a rebranding process, including identifying a new logo and overall 'look and feel' for our branding, to better align with the current and future directions of the organisation. The new design will reflect our ongoing focus on children, community, diversity, and our integrated K-6 model. Blick Creative has been engaged to do this work in consultation with our teams and stakeholders, with the project expected to be completed by early 2024.



Top: Molesworth Street Kindergarten  
Below: Sigi, Val and school AP Adrian at Roxburgh Park Primary School Kindergarten, under construction







## 2023 Financial Report notes

### Net Profit / Surplus (A\$)



Trading Profit represents turnaround of approx. \$478K from trading loss of prior year (\$172,242)

### Total Expenditures

# \$8,854,340

Increase by 55% on 2022 year  
(compared to 43% increase on prior 2021 yr)

Expenses include:

**Advertising & Promotion** \$74K (compared to \$17K in 2022 yr)

**IT Equipment & Support** \$61K (compared to \$20K in 2022 yr)

**Equipment purchases** \$44K (compared to \$40K in 2022 yr)

**External Grants** expended \$93K (compared to \$264K in 2022 yr)

**School readiness programs** \$388K  
(compared to \$380K in 2022 yr)

### Net Profit / Surplus (A\$)

Turnover now exceeds

# \$9.89 million

(includes all grants)

Increase by

# \$1.33 million

(increase of 16% on prior year)

Total turnover increase in last 3 years by

# \$25 million

Includes \$6.25M Building Block Grants received and expended over last 3 years

Historical note:

# \$249,369

Total Turnover in first year (2011)

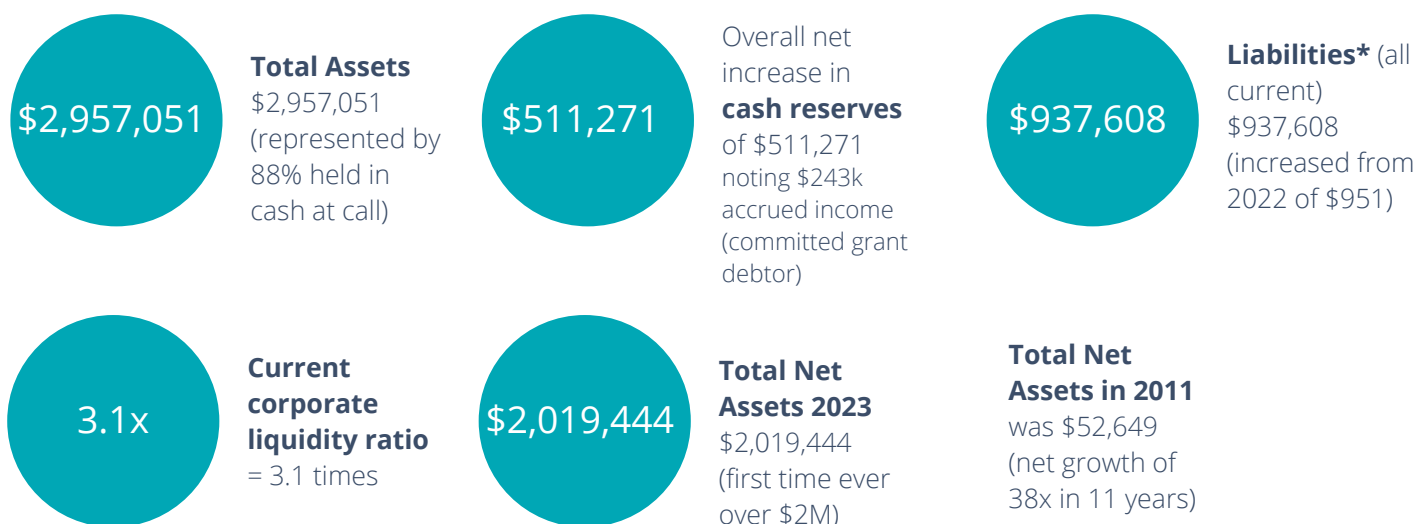


## Wages and on-costs

	2023	2022	2021	2020
Wages	\$5,532,177	\$3,493,048	\$2,553,767	\$2,293,551
AL & LSL	\$72,377	\$44,780	\$32,108	\$19,816
Relief Staff	\$931,594	\$324,174	\$145,623	\$141,435
Super	\$573,764	\$375,811	\$245,906	\$238,032
Work-cover	\$79,326	\$32,588	\$37,760	\$29,727
Total costs	\$7,189,238	\$4,270,401	\$3,015,164	\$2,722,561
As % of Turnover	78.47%	77.12%	76.0%	68.0%

Increase in labour cost of \$2.92M = 68%  
(indicates major increases in service delivery)

## Balance Sheet (Statement of Financial Position)



\* Liabilities

Note – All Leave Entitlements Provision (\$238K) fully funded by cash reserves

## The year ahead

Now that the wide-spread building upgrade works and implementation of 15 hours of 3-year-old kindergarten are behind us, our key priorities for the year will be:

- Implementing School Readiness Plans, including the expansion of our Wellbeing program.
- Establishing our new services and partnerships including Roxburgh Park Primary School Kindergarten and Coolaroo South Primary School Kindergarten.
- Implementing our Reconciliation Action Plan and building stronger connections with our local Aboriginal communities.
- Further embedding 'Exceeding' themes of the National Quality Standard within our kindergarten programs and across the organisation, strengthening our literacy and language programs, and applying for an "Excellent" rating for several of our services.
- Continuing our planning for the delivery of 30 hours of "Pre-Prep", including completing our Workforce, infrastructure and program plans, which will our guide next priorities.
- Reviewing and updating the Northern Schools Early Years Constitution.
- Developing new branding and a new website to reflect the growth and evolution of Northern Schools Early Years.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to all our stakeholders. We value the strong partnerships we have with our community and sector and acknowledge their commitment and role within our organisation. Thank you for your contribution to the NSEYC during 2023:

- Adma Group
- Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority
- Belle Vue Park Primary School
- Bethal Primary School
- Broadmeadows Primary School
- Circularity Consulting
- City of Melbourne
- Community Child Care Inc.
- Dallas Brooks Community Primary School
- Department of Education and Training
- DVP Health
- Early Learning Association of Australia
- Enterprise Care
- FKA Children's Services
- Fawkner Primary School
- Fleetwood
- Gardiner Architects
- Glenroy Central Primary School
- Glenroy West Primary School
- Heather Barnes
- Hume City Council
- Holy Child Primary School
- Jeavons Architects
- Kelly Boucher
- Macedon Ranges Shire Council
- Meadows Primary School
- Merri Health
- Michael Overman Accountancy
- Merri-bek Primary School
- Merri-bek City Council
- North Melbourne Primary School
- Willowbank Primary School
- Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation
- Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc
- Victorian School Building Authority



# Our early childhood education and care services



Molesworth Street Kindergarten



Bethal Kindergarten



Upfield Kindergarten



Belle Vue Park Kindergarten



Dallas Kindergarten



Will Will Rook Preschool



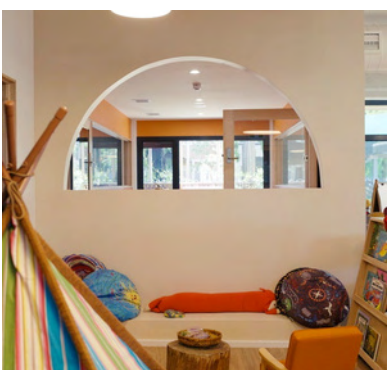
Holy Child Kindergarten



Meadows Kindergarten



Glenroy Central Kindergarten



Moreland Kindergarten



Lorne Street Kindergarten



York Street Kindergarten



Broadmeadows Preschool



Glenroy Hub Children's Centre



Rothschild Road Kindergarten





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and living!**

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