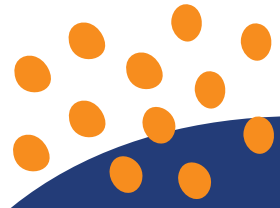


# Annual Report 2023





### **Acknowledgement of Country**

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

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

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





# A message from the Chair and CEO



## Everything coming together

2023 saw Victoria's Best Start, Best Life begin to take shape with free kindergarten offered for the first time, the option to expand three-year-old kindergarten hours and an injection of new kindergartens from local governments and on school sites from the Victorian government.

ECMS was ready to play our part and doubled the availability of three-year-old kindergarten and added ten services in communities where children will benefit most from access to high quality education.

2023 saw the fruits of our hard work realised across all areas of our strategy.

Our staff engagement continued to raise and our turnover in services continued to fall, despite the well-publicised work force challenges.

Our quality ratings continue to improve year on year, and in 2023 a quarter of our services were eligible to apply for Excellent ratings. The recognition of our work culminated in receiving the Emeritus Professor Collette Tayler Award for Excellence in Early Childhood Education at the Victorian Government Early Childhood Education Awards.

Our research partnerships continue to flourish. In 2023, we commenced work with the University of Melbourne on the Ngarrngga Research project, which

will create teaching resources to help children across the sector deeply connect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

The continued improvement in our financial position allowed us to invest heavily in the conditions for our team, their continued learning and the systems that support them.

We were pleased to see the continued focus on early childhood at the federal level and hope that our advocacy is reflected in the outcomes of the Productivity Commission and ACCC inquiries. A government-funded increase in wages through the Multi-Employer Bargaining process will be an important step forward for the sector.

Thank you to our team of dedicated lifelong learners and to the children, families and partners who make our collective achievements possible.

**Vanda Fortunato**  
Board Chair

**Andrew Hume**  
Chief Executive Officer

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# Our purpose



# We<sup>1</sup> foster<sup>2</sup> lifelong<sup>3</sup> learning<sup>4</sup>.



## Early Childhood Management Services (ECMS) is a for-purpose organisation

that fosters lifelong learning by providing high-quality early learning and care for children, families, and communities across Greater Melbourne. We reach over 6,000 children weekly across our 68 kindergarten and childcare centres.

1

'We' includes children, families, carers, partners and us.

2

Foster means supporting society's youngest as they make sense of the world. We collaborate to create nurturing environments and are deliberate in our interactions.

3

Our work ripples beyond the early years and establishes an enduring foundation for learning.

4

A continuing cycle of building human and social capital; we learn from and with children, families, communities, partners, and each other.

# Moments we are proud of

## Award-winning coaches: building organisational capability

We were honoured to win the Emeritus Professor Collette Tayler Excellence in Educational Leadership Award at the 2023 Victorian Government's Early Years Awards.

The Victorian Early Years Awards celebrate educators who improve the health, development, and well-being of Victorian children and their families.

Since the inception of our coaching program in 2019, our practice has modelled a way of being and doing through intentional deep listening, reflection and review. This coaching program provides many benefits, including one-to-one learning from deeply experienced early childhood education leaders and learning circles with our partners and in-house coaches.

This model helps our service teams create contemporary education opportunities for children, and this impact flows out to local communities. We are proud to create this impact using School Readiness Funding from the Victorian Government and our investment.



Dr Katherine Bussey



The Ngarrngga Project



Dr Red Ruby Scarlet



## Research partnerships: building organisational and sector insights and knowledge

We believe our responsibility to children, families, and communities can enable excellent pedagogy and practice across the sector. Our approach to research partnering aligns deeply with our pedagogical framework. In 2023, we purposefully partnered with projects connecting to our purpose and enabling our people to contribute to aspects of practice and pedagogy that matter to them.

These research projects include an academic mentorship supporting birth to three years practice with academic mentor Dr Katherine Bussey.

Another research project includes the Ngarrngga Project with the University of Melbourne. This Indigenous-led research project aims to connect every child in Australia with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems, histories, and cultures. Based on the needs of our people, this research will produce resources and professional learning for teaching teams across the country.

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

## Trans-disciplinary partners: helping build our in-house expertise

Our communities are diverse, and we see more children with various vulnerabilities at our centres. To support the ecology of our children fully, we're building our in-house expertise to help educators give them the strongest start possible.

Partnering with people who have this expertise is crucial, and our teams are working with seven key Australian organisations and experts: Alannah & Madeline Foundation, Melbourne City Mission, Brotherhood of St. Laurence, University of Melbourne, Dr Katherine Bussey, Dr Red Ruby Scarlet and Ngarrngga.

We aspire to be the partner of choice around place-based pedagogy, and these innovations help us respond holistically to children's needs.



## Exceeding is a point of pride: services achieving strong recognition

73% of our services rated received a quality score of Exceeding. At a time when the sector is facing a downward trajectory in Exceeding ratings, ECMS is bucking this trend.

Our services and Support Services teams work hard at individual and organisational levels to embody quality standards.



# Meeting you where you are: Pedagogy and practice within ECMS

**At ECMS, the place where a child learns and grows and who else is with them is important to us.**

We know that everyone comes from someplace and that someplace matters in the context of who they are and their relationships. Within place-based and relational pedagogy, we begin by anchoring ourselves to underpin all practice and pedagogy at ECMS.

Research tells us that when children are afforded opportunities within meaningful interactions to feel seen and heard truly, magic happens. The magic of learning in safe places and spaces where they can be themselves, knowing that the exploratory nature of learning through play in the early years will be fostered in a way that honours the whole child. At ECMS, knowing a child's interests, abilities, skills, and existing knowledge is key to a quality relationship.

Learning at ECMS happens through play. Shared and sustained playful experiences for young children

have the potential to meet children 'where they are' and provide the conditions for a love of learning.

Our teachers are experts in child development theories and prior-to-school curriculum delivery, which means they guide children's learning based on what they already know and can do while also introducing opportunities through play to stretch and grow children's skills and knowledge. Skills and knowledge growth are planned, and teachers assess learning to ensure children have the foundation skills to transition to school well and be lifelong learners.

The joy and delight of meeting children, and therefore their families, 'where they are' and creating environments where 'being with' people in our Early Childhood settings are prioritised ensures endless opportunities for lifelong learning are created.



## **Pedagogy - From birth to age 5**

Pedagogy simply means the theories, research, and teaching methods that result in the best learning for children from birth to age 5. It describes the professional knowledge, practices, and creativity that educators use to make judgements in setting individual child learning goals and to foster and nurture children's learning, development, well-being, and love of learning.

# “Learning is about living, and as such is lifelong”

- Bente Elkjaer



## Age is no barrier to connection



St Helena Preschool is a small community-based 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten in the leafy north-eastern suburb of Eltham North.



For some of St Helena’s youngest and oldest residents, Tuesday might be the happiest day of the week.

Each week during term time, the team from St Helena Preschool (Fatime, Lidia and Cathy) walks their pre-schoolers to Liscombe House aged care for a morning of singing, dancing, painting and interacting with the residents. On alternate Tuesdays, the residents visit the community preschool for more fun for 3- and 4-year-olds!

“It’s magical,” says Nominated Supervisor Fatime Mustafovski. “Most residents have Alzheimer’s, but children don’t judge. They’re innocent and curious; they ask questions, and the residents love it. You can see their faces light up when the children arrive.”

The change in one nonverbal resident sticks with Fatime. One of the children asked, “Why is that man

so grumpy?” We explained that everyone’s brain works differently, so she got to work chatting with him, and he opened up. Now, he beams when we arrive and loves drawing with her.

Feedback from the residents’ carers is also positive. “They see behavioural changes because of these connections, and families are in awe” says Fatime. “The children love Tuesdays and have formed strong connections with these older folks.”

Fatime hopes more centres introduce similar programs into their curriculum. “It took a lot of planning and risk assessments, and managing so many children can be stressful, but the benefits are huge for the whole community. At the end of the day, everybody needs somebody regardless of age, colour or culture.”

# Our commitment to our team

Last year, we continued our commitment to invest in our team conditions and learning. When our team is engaged and happy, we know it allows a powerful experience for the children within our services.

We continue to see an uplift in our teams' engagement with learning and development. We invested a further \$1m in improved conditions and further learning opportunities.



## Above award pay rates in ELCs

All roles in our ELCs are now paid above award rates. This has contributed to a 9% point increase since 2022 in people feeling their remuneration is fair.



## Increased access to learning and development

83% of our people say they have access to the learning and development needed to do their job well, up five percentage points since 2022. This includes increasing access to our all-team conference and VECTEA PD Day.



## Sector-leading service leadership time

We now offer, on average, 10X the VECTEA provision (1 hour) of service leadership time for our sessional kindergarten leaders. Our larger services now have a full time off-the-floor service leader.

# Giving graduates a strong start



***“From the Early Childhood Educator social networks that I’m part of, it’s obvious that the support that ECMS provides its graduates is not a common experience for all.”***

Supporting our newest educators and boosting their confidence and skills is something Brooke Fisher, in our People Team, has been thinking about in terms of investment in time and funding. Working alongside Brooke, Provisionally Registered Teacher (PRT) program coach-mentor Katie Berryman explains why this is so important.

“What commonly prevents graduate teachers from recognising their potential is a lack of confidence in their skills. Our goal is to build their capacity to critically reflect on their strengths and build confidence to grow their skills and practice. Working as a support team, we all understand the needs of our new teachers and celebrate their achievements collectively. Knowing they have that cohesive support makes them feel like arms are wrapped around them.”

Recently achieving her full teaching registration, Early Childhood Teacher (ECT) Seema Lal says the PRT

inquiry process can be daunting for new graduates, but the support ECMS gives is outstanding. “It assures graduates that you are already doing most of the work in your everyday teaching. Not having to worry about details such as finding a mentor and understanding what is actually expected from the project was amazing.”

Working with the support at ECMS has deeply impacted Seema personally and professionally. “I began to understand it was not about completing an assignment; it was a journey and exploration into ways I could positively grow my teaching practices.”

This program approach is not standard. Seema observes, “From the Early Childhood Educator social networks that I’m part of, it’s obvious that the support that ECMS provides its graduates is not a common experience for all.”



# Superheroes come in small packages



Oakhill Children's Centre is a 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten and long-day care childcare service located in the northern suburb of Reservoir.

Whatever our age, we all need friends, and Oakhill Children's Centre has introduced a simple approach to teach children effective ways to manage relationships.

Meet the Oakhill Super Friends! The program was initiated four years ago by centre educator Bek Taylor in response to the empathetic learnings of Fiona Robertson's *A Tale of Two Beasts*. Her original idea has evolved and is now deeply embedded into Oakhill's language and relationships. "We chat about perspective and ask the children, "How did you experience it? How did the creature experience it? What could they have done?" This is the framework we jump off from."

Bek says often, when people talk about friends, it's what they want and what they don't do. "If there's

a situation, we ask the child what a Super Friend would do and shift focus. For example, if one child isn't helping at pack away time, we might ask, "What would a Super Friend do?" and typically, they'd respond, "A Super Friend would be helping". By asking questions, children are problem-solving on the spot." Bek says that because the question isn't directed at the child ("Why aren't you helping pack up?"), it replaces blame with encouragement.

"We see kids struggle every day, and we support them. If a child has significant behavioural problems, we recognise them and ask the other children, "What would a Super Friend do? Because we know our friend is still learning." They do have the answers and know what's the right thing. Often, they just need permission and explicit modelling of these resolutions."

# A heart for place



## Our educators take pride in the impact their work makes.

At ECMS, we talk about world-making. This endeavour is no small feat – we understand what we do impacts children, families, and communities.

Our NQS ratings represent the heart our team brings to work. 73% of ECMS rated services have received an Exceeding rating. Fifteen of our services have rated a perfect Exceeding – Exceeding in all seven quality areas – and are eligible to apply for an Excellent rating.

Alongside our service and educational leaders, the work of our Support Services teams supports the work in our 68 services. Our Area Managers and Practice Coaches work with the service leaders to support continuous improvement.

All our services apply an anti-bias approach, building capability in place-based pedagogy.

We support our teams with learning circles and forums to further their professional identity and development. In 2023, we ran 25 learning circles, with 314 educators participating to build place-based approaches.

We have eight certified CLASS trainers and five accredited Circle of Security trainers to help create the right conditions for reflective practice, responsiveness to children, families and communities, and high-quality, consistent teaching.

# Research

## Our purpose

Through our ECMS pedagogical framework, we look for evidence bases to inform all aspects of our Early Childhood Education and Care work.

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

### Strategic Research Partnerships

Our approach to research partnering aligns deeply with our pedagogical framework. In 2023, we have deliberately and purposefully partnered with projects that connect to our purpose and enable our people to contribute to aspects of practice and pedagogy that matter to them.



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

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



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

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



### Ngarrngga Project - University of Melbourne

This is an Indigenous-led research project with a vision of connecting every child in Australia with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems, histories, and cultures. Based on the needs of our people, this research will produce resources and professional learning for teaching teams across the country.



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

The Educational and Developmental Gains in Early Childhood (EDGE) study is a five-year evaluation of the state-wide rollout of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten in Victoria. It will provide much-needed evidence and research on the impact of kindergarten on children's outcomes and how to achieve an equitable and impactful system.



### Australian Council of Education Research (ACER)

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

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



### Early Childhood Professional Practice Partnership Project (ECPPP) - Deakin University

A longstanding research partnership, beginning in 2019 and concluding in 2024, this research will significantly impact the way professional teacher placements are conducted and how, as a sector, we can support both Mentor Teachers and Pre-Service Teachers to ensure best practice and positive outcomes for children.

# Tiny team, giant steps

Monmia is a single-room preschool for 3—and 4-year-olds in the outer northwest suburb of Keilor Downs.



Melbourne is home to people from more than 200 countries who follow different beliefs and ways of life. The families at our centres reflect this rich cultural diversity, and we're privileged to connect with and learn from them daily.

Building strong connections with families is critical to Monmia Kindergarten educators Jennifer and Melissa. In 2023, the dynamic team of two decided they needed help finding better ways to understand and work with their community in a deeper and more meaningful way.

"Cultural experience is completely individual, and our families come from different faiths and backgrounds. This can present challenges that sometimes we don't see," says Jennifer.

With the support of Practice Coach Emma Forsyth, the team signed up for cross-cultural training with the Brotherhood of St. Laurence. What they learned was life-changing.

"It's reset everything," says Jennifer. The visuals in the room, the conversations we have with the children, and how we look at families and even each other have changed."

Critical reflections are crucial to their everyday work. "For example, the Muslim families at our centre felt uncomfortable buying Hot Cross buns that the local baker was donating as a fundraiser. So, after reflection, Melissa and I asked him to bake a batch without crosses that we renamed 'fruit bread'. The baker was happy to do it, and the uptake was fantastic!"

Changing language at the centre has also worked. "We acknowledge rather than celebrate", Melissa explains. "This has taken the pressure off because we don't try to celebrate every important cultural occasion. In the past, this meant some children were excluded. Now we can expose children to new knowledge without them having to 'celebrate' it."

Jennifer and Melissa passionately believe that every educator should do cross-cultural training. "It has opened our eyes to identity; what's on a family's paperwork shouldn't pigeonhole them. Wherever we're from, we're all the sum total of many parts."

# We are better together

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



## Local Governments

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



## The Alannah & Madeline Foundation (AMF)

AMF is our professional development partner in building trauma-informed practice and well-being capability. This support is available to families, educators and children. AMF works with ECMS at a universal service delivery level and in a targeted and intensive way when needed.



## The Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE)

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

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



## Brotherhood of St. Laurence

In response to our teaching team's need for guidance around cultural responsiveness, we partnered with the Brotherhood of St. Laurence to deliver training across all ECMS services in 2023. We want to elevate this work and align it more closely with our organisational strategic direction and commitments.



## Melbourne City Mission

Melbourne City Mission is our partner for coordinating our access to a suite of allied health professionals used for our School Readiness Funding program.

# Better together, Monmia's multi-age program



## Research by government and education bodies shows that two years are better than one for a child's early learning.<sup>1</sup>

Monmia Kindergarten educators Jennifer and Melissa believe integrating these first two years of learning has an enormously positive impact on a child's development. They say when children learn together, they progress faster, whatever their age.

Jennifer explains, "Three-year-olds will take direction from four-year-olds about how to use the bathroom and resources and how to share and take turns. The four-year-olds get re-enforcement and are much more settled and confident".

Melissa says there are always challenges when trying something new, but the benefits outweigh them. More children have greater access to quality local education and develop new skills by learning together.

"Children don't see any differences or distinguish by age. To them, you're all at kinder; you're all in the same group." She says watching children sit down and play and be together is joyous and works because "We scaffold wherever they are developmentally."

Jennifer explains how the centre's programs are carefully designed with every child's needs and abilities in mind. "We cater to differences and know every child is a capable learner who loves teamwork."

Monmia's parents and carers support the centre's multi-aged programs. "They're really happy. We had initial trepidation from some parents with three-year-olds, but once we talked to them about how it works, they realised how beneficial the program would be to their child, and they love it! Jen and I are completely sold; we're 150% behind it."

1. The Benefits of attending 2 years of kinder, Educational and social benefits, Victorian Government, Australia. <https://www.vic.gov.au/sending-child-kinder>



# “Play is our brain’s favourite way of learning”

- Diane Ackerman



## Thank you

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

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



Australian Government

We’d also like to thank our local councils.

Kindergarten needs to be financially sustainable and we are grateful for LGAs for providing us the community assets to work from.



# Our Team



## Our Board members

### **Vanda Fortunato**

Board Chair  
Governance & Remuneration Committee Chair  
Finance Committee  
Risk Committee

### **Charlotte Rendle-Short**

Deputy Chair  
Finance Committee  
Governance & Remuneration Committee

### **Linda Weatherson**

Risk Committee Chair  
Governance & Remuneration Committee

### **Celia Pollard**

Governance & Remuneration Committee

### **Jason Talbot**

Finance Committee Chair

### **Amanda Watkinson**

Finance Committee

### **Ryan Mistry**

Risk Committee

### **Ellen Hooper**

Risk Committee

## Our Executive team

### **Andrew Hume**

CEO

### **Rebecca Hand**

Director of Early Childhood Education

### **Stuart Brangaza-Travis**

Director of People and Strategy

### **Donna Geraeds**

Director of Risk and Compliance

### **Aisha Singh\***

Director of Corporate Services

### **Kate Smith\***

Director of Marketing and Communications

\*new appointment 2023

# Financials

## Statement of profit or loss for the year ended 31 December 2023

	2023 (\$)	2022 (\$)
Revenue	60,333,889	51,600,581
Revenue from investments	1,342,024	1,238,246
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>61,675,913</b>	<b>52,838,827</b>
Administration expenses	(6,057,841)	(4,976,247)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(1,317,254)	(1,385,541)
Employee benefits expense	(48,905,258)	(40,485,935)
Fair value loss on financial assets	(331,809)	(1,851,595)
Property expenses	(1,761,567)	(1,806,023)
Other expenses	(293,988)	(1,693,691)
Finance costs	(109,574)	(91,285)
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>(58,777,291)</b>	<b>52,290,317</b>
<b>Net surplus for the year</b>	<b>2,898,622</b>	<b>548,510</b>

# Building a welcome practice for Indigenous families

Pakenham Springs Children's Centre in Cardinia Shire is a double-unit kindergarten in Melbourne's east. It offers preschool, kindergarten for 3—and 4-year-olds, and multi-aged kindergarten.

The team at Pakenham Springs Children's Centre believes a welcome space is "an open place for people to talk, share, and feel safe." For the Indigenous families at the centre in Bunurong Country, feeling welcome and a part of the community is crucial. Nominated Supervisor Tanya Armstrong says to do this effectively, "we need to know who we are and where we are on the Land. Becoming with Place is central to our way of doing, and connecting with the right community partners is key."

Fostering a safe and welcoming space for families has always been critical for Tanya and the team. The work expanded in 2023 when Cardinia Shire's Best Start Facilitator, Emma Carter, contacted Area Manager Harshna Desai about including ECMS educators in the conversation.

"It's all about capacity building", Emma explains. "We identify small changes that make for big changes; it's forever a learning journey."

"Storytelling is central, and we take this knowledge into everyday activities using natural materials, symbols and celebrations", explains Tanya, reflecting a key message from our recent VECTA PD day to "think about Auntie Dr Sue Atkinson's Signs, Signals

and Symbols and ask questions that keep us in a curious space."

Emma introduced Pete Dye, Bunurong Wemba Wemba Man, and Cardinia's LGA Koorie Engagement Support Officer. Together, the team found ways to build relationships with Indigenous families at the centre.

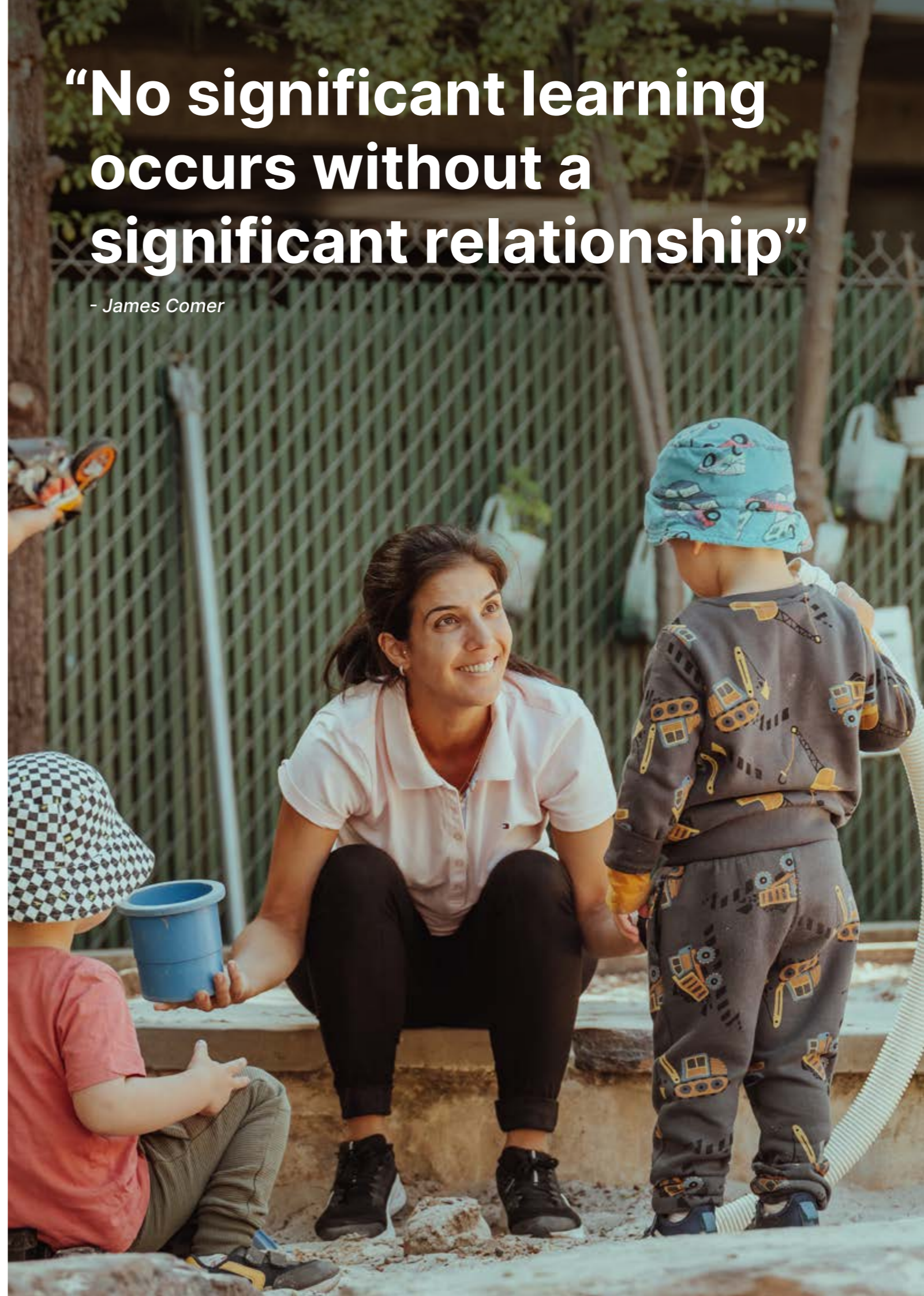
"When you ask questions and are genuinely curious, you make people feel culturally safe," says Pete. "When people feel accepted, they see the value of education. If we can start educational journeys early, it encourages young people to continue schooling and will make things better down the track."

Pakenham Springs Educational Leader Sue Stonyer says that Pete's encouragement to have open conversations with Indigenous families about Land and Culture has improved the team's confidence. "Developing these relationships impacts our families. We ask about the Land we're on, and if they're not Boonwurrung People, we ask them about their Country."

Working with local partners, the Pakenham Springs teaching team is building a safe and creative place where their community of children and families can feel truly welcome.

# "No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship"

- James Comer







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[ecms.org.au](http://ecms.org.au)

