



EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION SERVICES & TRAINING



Annual Report 2025

Enriching futures together

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Acknowledgement of Country

ECTARC acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and to the children and young people who will become the leaders of tomorrow.

We recognise the significant role First Nations peoples of Australia play in the education and care of all children, in this Country we live in and share.

At ECTARC, we acknowledge the past and stand for a reconciled future.

Artwork: Lorraine Brown - Premier Artist, and Narelle Thomas, Artist, Commaditchie Artists Co-operative



The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.

- Franklin D. Roosevelt



15%
pay increase

Foreword

This powerful sentiment continues to echo through the heart of ECTARC's mission. For nearly forty years, we have partnered with regional communities to build meaningful relationships that ensure every child and family, regardless of circumstances, has access to high-quality early childhood education and care. Through our training services, we support students and educators in launching and growing fulfilling careers that strengthen communities and expand opportunities. Our purpose is anchored in equity, lifelong learning, and the belief that every child deserves the very best start in life.

Playing an essential role

This year marked a significant milestone in our sector. After years of persistent advocacy, the Commonwealth Government formally recognised the essential role of early childhood professionals by delivering a long-overdue 15% pay increase. While most educators, predominantly women, have never pursued this career for financial reward, they perform some of the most vital work in our society: nurturing young minds who will shape the future of our communities, our country, and our world.

We hope this recognition will encourage more passionate individuals to enter the sector and help us reach even more children and families in the years ahead.

Meaningful impact

Our Training and Development Officers continued to travel across regions, meeting students where they are, and tailoring resources to support their success.

Their dedication ensures that every graduate is equipped to make a meaningful impact, regardless of the service they join. This commitment to accessibility, inclusion and excellence remains a cornerstone of our work.

Trust and compassion

ECTARC's growth this year was guided not by ambition alone, it was shaped by the voices and needs of the communities we serve. We have expanded where we were invited to grow, and our services have flourished because of the trust placed in us. Our staff are the heartbeat of this organisation: innovative, compassionate, and deeply attuned to the aspirations of children, families, and students.

In a significant step toward evolving our service delivery, we temporarily closed our Clipper Road service to make way for a new, more holistic model of care.

This decision reflects our unwavering commitment to quality and community consultation to ensure our new service reflects the needs and hopes of those it will support.



Together,
we build futures,

one **child**,
one **family**,
one **student**,
one **community**

at a time

Commitment to reconciliation

Throughout the year, ECTARC has remained steadfast in its commitment to working respectfully and collaboratively with First Nations peoples. Children attending our services, alongside our dedicated staff, have continued to embrace reconciliation not just as a principle but as a practice. Their advocacy within the community continues to deepen our understanding of what true reconciliation looks like, grounded in respect, learning, and shared purpose.

A huge thank you

We extend our deepest gratitude to the families who entrust us with the care, well-being, and education of their children. To our students, thank you for choosing ECTARC as your learning partner and for your commitment to shaping the future of early childhood education. To our Board, whose vision, energy, and lived connection to ECTARC, many as current or former families, reflect the strength and integrity of our organisation, we are sincerely grateful. To our Executive Leadership Team, thank you for your strategic foresight and unwavering support of our people and programs. To our stakeholders, including local councils, state and federal government departments, service partners, and advisors, your collaboration has been instrumental to our continued success and growth.

And finally, to our extraordinary staff, your expertise, kindness, and respect for one another and for the communities we serve are what propel ECTARC forward. You are the soul of this organisation, and your dedication continues to shape a brighter future for all.

Anita Kumar

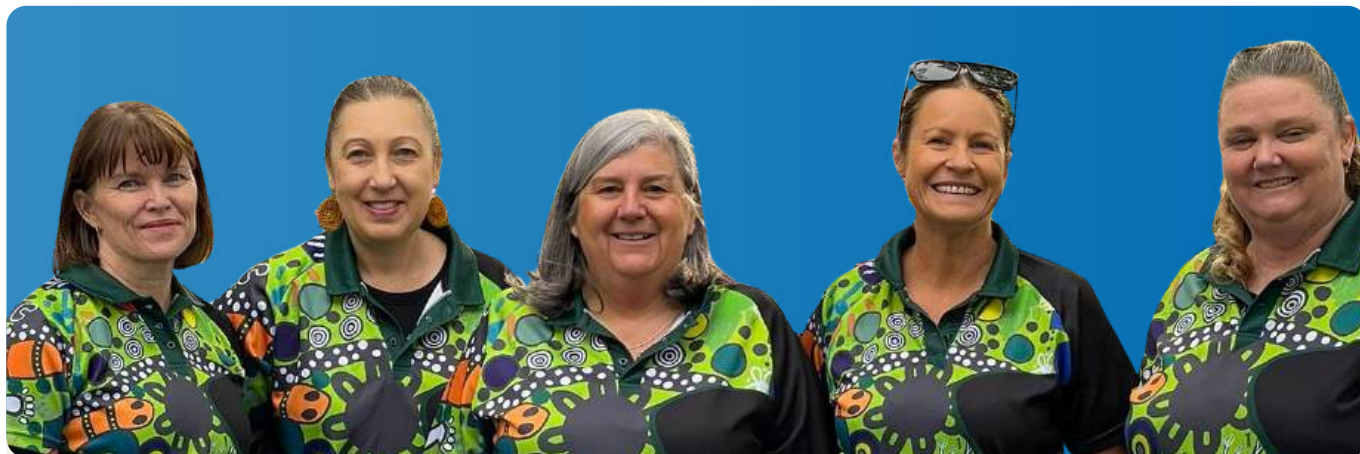
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
ECTARC



Kirsty Shee

BOARD CHAIR
ECTARC





Who is ECTARC?

For over 40 years, ECTARC has been a trusted provider of early childhood education and care across the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions, and is also a recognised leader in training and professional development for educators throughout Australia.

ECTARC's education and care services are regarded as leading examples of excellence in the sector, reflecting the organisation's commitment to delivering nurturing, inclusive, and enriching experiences for children. Our dedicated Training Service team supported thousands of students across Australia to achieve their goals and build rewarding careers in early childhood education and care, through flexible, high-quality training in a supportive and professional environment.



Early childhood training experts

ECTARC drives excellence across the early education sector through nationally recognised qualifications and professional development, including webinars and workshops. As the 2022 NSW Training Organisation of the Year, we are recognised for quality, innovation, and impact.



Working with government

We are a trusted NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) approved provider, collaborating with government, educators, and families to deliver innovative programs that enhance outcomes for children and strengthen Australia's early education workforce.



Supporting families

Across ten New South Wales centres, ECTARC supports thousands of families, delivering inclusive, play-based programs guided by the Early Years Learning Framework and evidence-based practices that nurture children's safety, confidence, wellbeing, and lifelong love of learning.

Empowering growth and excellence



Early Childhood Education and Care

We support families who entrust us with their children's care, well-being, and education through inclusive, play-based programs fostering confidence and lifelong learning.



Training Services

Through our nationally recognised training services, we empower students to build rewarding early childhood careers with flexible learning and expert guidance.



Professional Learning

Our professional learning programs strengthen capability through high-quality webinars, workshops, and mentoring that inspire excellence, innovation, and continuous improvement.



Our People

We invest in our people through professional growth, mentoring, and well-being initiatives that empower them to deliver exceptional education, care, and training outcomes.

Honouring our *communities*



Connecting with Country

We respectfully connect with Country by embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, fostering understanding, reconciliation, and belonging in our learning.



Connecting with Community

We work in partnership with communities to build strong, respectful relationships that support children, families, and educators to thrive and succeed together.



Celebrating Connection and Culture

We celebrate community events that bring people together, honour diversity, and strengthen connections between children, families, and the communities we proudly serve.



Planning for *our future*

ECTARC's future is defined by innovation, excellence, and our continued growth as a trusted leader in early childhood education and training.

We will drive innovation through evidence-based programs, emerging technologies, and modern training approaches that enhance learning outcomes and strengthen workforce capability across Australia.

As a recognised and award-winning training organisation, ECTARC will continue to deliver flexible, high-quality education that meets the evolving needs of the sector.

Our strategic focus is to invest in people, foster collaboration, and sustain a culture of continuous improvement.

Our focus on fostering integrity and community connection will ensure ECTARC remains a provider of choice that empowers educators, inspires children's well-being and development, and shapes a stronger, more resilient early education sector in Australia.



**Scan the QR code to
read the Strategic Plan.**

Early Childhood Education and Care



Learning

We inspire a lifelong love of learning through play, curiosity, and discovery, helping children develop confidence, creativity, and essential skills for the future.



Thriving

We empower children to thrive by fostering resilience, well-being, and confidence through caring relationships and environments where children feel valued.



Belonging

We foster belonging by creating inclusive environments where every child feels seen, respected, and connected to their peers, educators, and community.

Focus on *excellence*



National Quality Standards

ECTARC Jerry Bailey Education and Care Service achieved an Exceeding National Quality Standard rating following a partial reassessment and rating visit in May 2025.

This exceptional result reflects the service's strong and consistent commitment to quality outcomes for children, families, and the broader community.

The assessment highlighted excellence in key areas, including children's health and safety and collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

ECTARC commends the Jerry Bailey team for their professionalism, dedication, and alignment with ECTARC's organisational values of quality, care, and continuous improvement.

Other ECTARC services rated Exceeding NQS

- ✓ ECTARC Alunga Education and Care Service
- ✓ ECTARC Keiraview Education and Care Service
- ✓ ECTARC Sanctuary Point Education and Care Service
- ✓ ECTARC Smith Street Education and Care Service
- ✓ ECTARC Jerry Bailey Education and Care Service
- ✓ ECTARC The Basin Education and Care Service





Child *safety*

ECTARC is a child-safe organisation committed to embedding the Child Safe Standards across all aspects of our operations.

Our Child Safe Commitment Statement:

At ECTARC, we are committed to the safety and well-being of all children and young people across the organisation and communities we work with. We promote a child-safe culture where keeping children and young people safe is everyone's responsibility. We provide safe, child-friendly environments where all children and young people are respected and heard, and their rights and safety prioritised.

Our focus this year included:

- + Upskilling educators through CHCPRT025 Identify and Report Children and Young People at Risk.
- + Ensuring all staff know what to look for, how to respond, and how to report concerns appropriately.
- + Reviewing and strengthening our child safe policies and procedures to reflect current legislation and best practice.
- + Educating children about their right to feel and be safe at all times.

Beyond early childhood care

At ECTARC, our connection with children and families extends well beyond the early years.

We take great pride in fostering relationships that continue as children move into new stages of their education.

At ECTARC Smith Street, this commitment comes to life through their School Leavers Reunion, where children who have started school return to visit the centre.

Dressed proudly in their school uniforms, they share stories about "big school" with current preschoolers, helping ease their transition and build excitement for the next step in their learning journey.

These reunions are a celebration of belonging, continuity, and the deep, lasting relationships that make ECTARC services so special.



**Scan the QR code
to watch the video.**

what our *parents say*



A lovely centre with friendly and dedicated staff. So happy that we are a part of this little community now.

- PARENT FROM KEIRAVIEW EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICE



Best childcare centre ever! Amazing staff, amazing centre. My kids are thriving and love coming here.

- PARENT FROM SMITH STREET EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICE



Thank you for giving my boy the best possible start in life - for taking the time to truly get to know him.

- PARENT FROM SANCTUARY POINT EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICE

Every child, every *opportunity*

Growing together

850

Children are proudly supported across our 10 facilities in NSW.

Equitable learning

572

Children receive Strong Start Funding to reduce the cost of fees.

Inclusive access

123

Children identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent.

Supporting all abilities

40

Children with disability are supported, included, and valued every day

Training services



Accredited training

We deliver nationally recognised qualifications that build knowledge, confidence, and capability, preparing educators to make a meaningful impact in early childhood and school-aged care.



Flexible learning for every stage

Our flexible study options, including traineeships, EVET HSC courses, and distance learning, make quality education accessible to learners and services across Australia.



Specialised short courses

We provide targeted short courses that support compliance, safety, and professional growth, ensuring educators uphold best practice across early childhood services.



Trainees from the Grow Your Own program celebrate their completing their traineeship.

FOCUS ON OUR TRAINEES

Grow your own

In partnership with the NSW Department of Education and Illawarra Wingecarribee Alliance Aboriginal Corporation, five trainees completed their Grow Your Own traineeships in Early Childhood Education and Care.

The pilot program supported Aboriginal trainees to gain an education and care qualification through mentoring, scholarships, and guaranteed employment.

The program was created with a powerful vision: to build a stronger, more culturally rich early childhood education workforce by increasing the number of qualified Aboriginal educators in our sector.

Our trainees were supported by our families, our communities and partners Curijo and Barranggirra.

GROWING THE NEXT EDUCATORS

Launching our EVET program

This year marked an exciting milestone for ECTARC as we welcomed our first students in our EVET (Externally Delivered Vocational Education and Training) program.

Through this initiative, senior secondary students can begin their journey toward a career in early childhood education while completing their HSC.

In 2025, five students from schools across the Illawarra became the first to enrol in the program, undertaking the CHC30121 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care.

This program provides students with practical, nationally recognised training and valuable experience in the sector, creating strong pathways into further study and employment.

ECTARC is proud to collaborate with schools and the NSW Department of Education to nurture the next generation of early childhood educators and strengthen the future workforce.

FOCUS ON DEADLY CONNECTIONS

Walking together through learning



The change for the educators themselves is a change in confidence - being able to say they're now qualified is really exciting and drives their willingness to keep learning.

- PRU RITCHIE GENERAL MANAGER BOURKE AND DISTRICT CHILDREN'S SERVICES



Students from the Deadly Connections program in Bourke who have completed the CHC30121 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care, with many now taking their next steps in work or further study.

The ECTARC Deadly Connections Training Program is creating new opportunities for educators in regional Australia.

The program delivers flexible, culturally responsive training that strengthens both professional skills and community connections.

General Manager at Bourke and District Children's Services, Pru Ritchie said ECTARC's adaptable approach has been key to supporting her team's professional development.

"What was important for us was having a training provider willing to offer a face-to-face element. Our trainees respond best to hands-on learning, and ECTARC made that possible," she said.

The program blends in-person learning blocks, often held during school holidays, with flexible entry points throughout the year.

This approach supports both mature-age and school-based trainees, many of whom are Aboriginal and have faced barriers within traditional education pathways.

ECTARC's culturally responsive and relationship-focused model is helping trainees rebuild confidence, form strong connections with trainers, and achieve meaningful qualifications.



Scan the QR code
to [watch the video.](#)



Daniel Pullen is the first ECTARC student to achieve a Certificate III in Outside School Hours Care.

BREAKING NEW GROUND

Outside school hours care

In September 2024, ECTARC celebrated a significant milestone with our first student to complete the Certificate III in Outside School Hours Care qualification.

Congratulations to Daniel Pullen (pictured left), whose commitment and dedication have set a new benchmark for learners pursuing this specialised qualification.

The Outside School Hours Care qualification equips educators with the skills and knowledge to provide engaging, safe, and high-quality experiences for children in before and after-school settings.

Inspiring Career Growth



Congratulations to Tamika Dykstra from ECTARC Smith Street, a finalist in the Trainee of the Year category at the 2025 Illawarra North East NSW Training Awards.

Tamika began her journey with ECTARC by completing a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care at ECTARC Short Street. She continued her studies through a Diploma traineeship at ECTARC Smith Street, where she was nominated for this prestigious recognition.

Her dedication, professionalism, and commitment to quality education have since earned her a permanent Diploma Educator position at the service.

Tamika's success reflects ECTARC's strong focus on nurturing talent, supporting learning pathways, and developing the next generation of early childhood educators.



ECTARC Training Services proudly supported Samantha Zannes on her remarkable learning journey, completing her Education and Care qualification in just over 12 months.

This achievement enabled Samantha to be recognised as an early childhood teacher, a milestone that would have taken years through a university pathway.

Samantha's success highlights the quality and accessibility of ECTARC's nationally recognised training.

She has since progressed to become the Assistant Director and Educational Leader of an early learning centre.

In December 2024, Samantha represented ECTARC Training Services as a state finalist for the Vocational Student of the Year at the Australian Training Awards, proudly receiving runner-up honours.

Proudly *representing* ECTARC



ECTARC Training Services was proudly represented across multiple regions at the 2025 NSW Training Awards, highlighting excellence in both learners and trainers.

The successful students in their regional heats in June 2025 were trained by Natalie Kent, Kim Dias, Lyndsey Beveridge, Michelle Duncan and Jessica Page.

The NSW Training Awards recognise excellence in vocational education and training, celebrating outstanding students, trainees, apprentices, and trainers across New South Wales.

Celebrating our finalists

- ✦ **Western NSW Regional Finalist**
Trainee of the Year – Amanda Jackson.
- ✦ **Illawarra and South East Region Finalist**
VET Teacher/Trainer of the Year - Larissa Balson
- ✦ **Illawarra and South East Region Finalist**
School-Based Trainee of the Year – Emily McLeod.
- ✦ **Illawarra and South East Region Finalist**
Vocational Student of the Year – Donna Sweatman.
- ✦ **Illawarra and South East Region Finalist**
Trainee of the Year – Tori Bass.
- ✦ **Illawarra and South East Region Finalist**
Trainee of the Year – Tamika Dykstra.
- ✦ **Illawarra and South East Region Finalist and Winner**
Trainee of the Year – Elouisa Monaghan.



What our *students say*



Larissa was a fantastic mentor during my Cert 3 studies/traineeship. As someone with no prior experience, I found Larissa to be patient, reassuring and easy to talk to. I can't recommend ECTARC and Larissa enough.

- GRACE



Carlie was so easy to talk to and made my learning journey feel stress-free. Her support made a big impact on me in a short amount of time working together. I appreciate every bit of guidance she gave me.

- MAGGIE



From the very beginning, Cindy has been a beacon of support and knowledge. Her passion for early childhood education inspired me and made learning such an enjoyable and enriching experience for me.

- ANNIE

Our *numbers*

**Students Studied
with ECTARC
Training**

2,396

In 2024, hundreds of students studied with ECTARC with 456 course completions.

**Identifies as
Aboriginal and/or
Torres Strait Islander**

11%

ECTARC serves regional students, with 6.6 per cent of those studying coming from remote areas.

**Students
recommend
ECTARC Training**

98%

We are proud that so many of our students said they would recommend our training to their friends and colleagues.

Professional *learning*



Flexible learning for professionals

We offer accredited and non-accredited webinars, workshops, and in-service training that provide accessible, high-quality professional learning tailored to the needs of every educator.



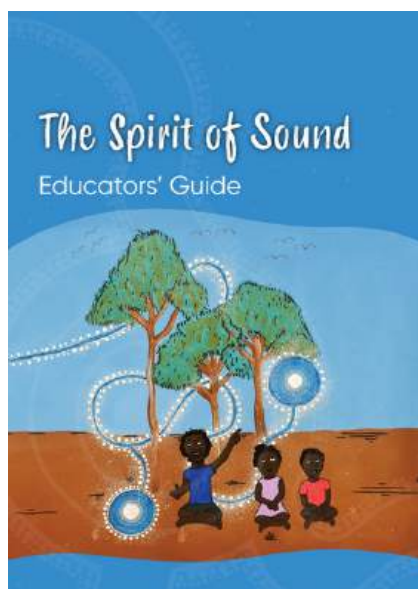
Growing *future leaders*

Our Leadership programs empower educators to deliver excellence in early education by providing leadership skills, confidence, and professional capability to support them in guiding their teams.



Supporting lifelong learning

We empower educators with access to quality professional learning and practical resources that support continuous growth, reflective practice, and improved outcomes for children.



By combining ECTARC's deep understanding of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and early childhood pedagogy, and Hearing Australia's expertise in hearing and sound, together we have created a resource that equips educators with practical strategies to help every child explore, engage with, and enjoy the world of sound.

- JENNIFER WOOD, ECTARC

FOCUS ON SPIRIT OF SOUND EDUCATORS' GUIDE

Where sound *inspires learning*

ECTARC Training Services was thrilled to collaborate with Hearing Australia on the new Spirit of Sound Educators' Guide, a practical, play-based resource designed to support early learning services in promoting healthy hearing and strong communication skills.

The guide supports The Spirit of Sound storybook, created by Noongar artist Davinder Hart.

The story celebrates the importance of sound through cultural traditions and connections, inspiring children, families, and educators across Australia.

Designed with early education experts and grounded in culture, the educators' guide helps early learning services explore sound, story, and connection in everyday learning.

Each learning experience has clear links with the Early Years Learning Framework V2.0 and can be modified to suit different ages and abilities.



Scan the QR code to **find out more.**





FOCUS ON MUNCH AND MOVE

Healthy Children, Strong Futures



1,903

Participants signed up for
the Munch & Move online
learning program

ECTARC plays a key role in supporting healthy practices across NSW early childhood education and care services through our partnership with the NSW Ministry of Health's Munch & Move program.

Across the year, our training team processed registrations for 1,903 participants for online learning, where educators, cooks, and service leaders were equipped with the knowledge and confidence to promote children's wellbeing through active play and nutritious food.

Our team also presented a 3-hour Fundamental Movement Skills workshop for participants in Broken Hill.

The Munch & Move e-learning program concluded in June 2025 and was put on pause as the government updates the initiative.

We look forward to future collaboration as these new resources are developed and released.



Number of trainees who were
from employers who previously
trained with ECTARC

97%

From Trainee to *Leader*

ECTARC is proud to support a strong pipeline of emerging early childhood professionals through our traineeship program across ECTARC-managed education and care services.

This year, 16 trainees successfully completed their Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care, demonstrating commitment, skill, and a passion for quality learning.

In addition, four educators achieved their university degrees, marking an exceptional milestone in their professional journeys.

These achievements reflect ECTARC's ongoing investment in staff development, mentoring, and career progression.

Of particular note is Carly Dean, now Director at ECTARC The Basin, who began her career at ECTARC Sanctuary Point, completing her Certificate III traineeship in 2015. Carly went on to complete a Diploma and later a Teaching Degree, and in October 2024, her dedication was recognised with her promotion to Director.

Investing in Our People

We are proud of all our ECTARC staff who completed professional certifications this year. These included:

Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care

- ✦ **Tiggy Covey** – ECTARC Alunga
- ✦ **Zara Usher** – ECTARC Clipper Road/Jerry Bailey
- ✦ **Dearna Burchell** – ECTARC Clipper Road/Sanctuary Point
- ✦ **Chloe De Freitas** – ECTARC Jerry Bailey
- ✦ **Lucy Brown** – ECTARC Sanctuary Point
- ✦ **Monique Ahearn** – ECTARC Short Street

Early Childcare Diploma

- ✦ **Kimberly Holm** – ECTARC Keiraview
- ✦ **Kiara Crowe** – ECTARC Short Street
- ✦ **Ella Misztal** – ECTARC Smith Street
- ✦ **Tamika Dykstra** – ECTARC Smith Street
- ✦ **Sara Khadaied** – ECTARC Wallaroo
- ✦ **Alyssa Neden** – ECTARC Keiraview
- ✦ **Olivia Logan** – ECTARC Wallaroo

Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood)

- ✦ **Hope Claussen** – ECTARC Keiraview ECT
- ✦ **Jessica Heath** – ECTARC Short Street Director
- ✦ **Mei Xian Son** – ECTARC Smith Street/Keiraview ECT
- ✦ **Carly Dean** – ECTARC The Basin

School-Based Traineeship

- ✦ **Makayla Jackson** – ECTARC The Basin

Our People



The dedication, expertise, and passion of our 241 members of staff are the foundation of ECTARC's success and our ongoing commitment to excellence in early childhood education and training.

As a leading employer across the Illawarra, Shoalhaven, and Brisbane regions, ECTARC fosters a professional, flexible, and supportive workplace where team members are united by shared values and a commitment to quality.

This year, ECTARC strengthened its focus on staff wellbeing with the establishment of a dedicated People and Culture team, incorporating the Wellbeing and Engagement Coordinator role.

The Coordinator visited every service, providing personalised, on-site support and ensuring consistent implementation of wellbeing and engagement initiatives across the organisation.

135

Early Education
and Care services
employees

56

Early Education
and care services
casual employees

28

Training and
development
officers

22

Administrative
and Leadership
employees



ECTARC's wellbeing champions from across Australia came together to discuss ways to support the health and happiness of their teams.

Empowering staff

ECTARC is committed to empowering our people through professional growth, recognition, and wellbeing.

We know that when our teams feel supported and valued, children, families, and communities thrive.

This year, ECTARC launched several key initiatives to strengthen staff engagement and development.

The Equity & Innovation Fund supports staff-led ideas that enhance inclusive practice and professional learning, and our Staff Excellence Awards celebrate outstanding achievements in leadership, collaboration, and innovation.

Both programs will be awarded for the first time during ECTARC's 40th Birthday Celebrations.

We also introduced a new Employee Assistance and Wellbeing Program in partnership with Kinex Health, designed to support the physical and mental health of our workforce.

Insights from a staff wellbeing survey informed the creation of the Thriving Teams Workshop, which is now being rolled out across all services, equipping our teams with the tools to flourish personally and professionally.

Investing in our people



At ECTARC, we believe our people are our greatest strength. We invest in every team member by offering above-award wages, ongoing learning and development opportunities, and clear career advancement pathways across our services. Staff also benefit from accredited training and professional development, discounted childcare fees, and paid parental leave with a six-week top-up.

Our inclusive and supportive workplace culture is built on family-friendly conditions, a strong focus on wellbeing, and access to employee assistance programs. Our dedicated central office teams provide expert, ongoing support, helping every staff member thrive both personally and professionally.

Celebrating shared journeys

43%

Staff have been employed for **more than 5 years**

At ECTARC, we are immensely proud of the dedication and loyalty shown by our employees, many of whom have been with us for over a decade.

Each year, we celebrate years of service milestones to recognise the invaluable contributions of our long-standing team members.

Their commitment, expertise, and care underpin the quality of our education and training services and strengthen the relationships within our organisation and communities.

Retaining experienced, passionate staff is central to our success and a reflection of the supportive, inclusive, and rewarding workplace culture we have built together, and we love to celebrate with our staff as they reach years of service milestones.

Years of *dedication*

10 years

- ✦ Alexandra Griffin
- ✦ Angelene Savage
- ✦ Nicole Thompson
- ✦ Rialyn Catap
- ✦ Tina Simmons

15 years

- ✦ Emma Fisher
- ✦ Hayley Markham
- ✦ Heather Bennett
- ✦ Kate Haydon
- ✦ Lauren Guevara
- ✦ Megan Hili

20 years

- ✦ April Parsons
- ✦ Kim Rooding

25 years

- ✦ Lisa Booth

35 years

- ✦ Michelle Sowden

Retirements

- ✦ Julie Cassar
- ✦ Jenny (Janice) Garrett

In *tribute*



Catherine Taufu

ECTARC The Basin and Jerry Bailey
May 8, 1973 - July 20, 2025

Catherine Taufu was a respected and cherished member of our team. Known for her unwavering dedication, warm smile, and generous spirit, she was always ready to lend a helping hand. She brought positivity to every interaction.

Her commitment to her work and the friendships she nurtured leave a legacy. She will be deeply missed by all who had the privilege of working alongside her.

Connecting with Community



FOCUS ON LANGUAGE CONNECTIONS

Nurturing language and learning



Between July 2024 and June 2025,
the program engaged

99 children & their families

37 educators

across 8 early childhood
services

The Language Connections Project, delivered in partnership with Communities for Children Shellharbour, continues to strengthen early language development across the Shellharbour region.

Using the evidence-based 3a Abecedarian Approach, the project supports educators to create rich, engaging environments where communication and connection thrive.

Between July 2024 and June 2025, the program engaged 99 children and their families and 37 educators across eight early childhood services, including ECTARC Warilla, Alunga and Wallaroo.

Educators enhanced their understanding of the 3a strategies, which include Conversational Reading, Learning Games, and Enriched Caregiving, and successfully embedded these into daily practice, resulting in improved communication skills and stronger relationships between children, families, and educators.

A highlight of the program was the story of one educator who created family literacy bags to extend Conversational Reading at home.

One family shared how their child, once reluctant to read, now asks to read together every night.



Surf Life Saving Australia visited ECTARC Jerry Bailey Education and Care Service to teach the children about beach and pool safety.

Where Learning Connects with *community*

ECTARC continues to strengthen partnerships that enhance outcomes for children, families, and educators across our communities.

ECTARC was proud to collaborate with the Regional Industry Education Partnerships (RIEP) Program, which creates tailored opportunities for employers to engage with secondary schools and showcase real-world career pathways.

Across the Shoalhaven, Goulburn, and Warilla regions, ECTARC trainers connected with scores of students, engaging them in hands-on activities that explored what it means to work with and support young children.

Through creativity, self-expression, and storytelling, students gained an authentic glimpse into early education as a career that changes lives and strengthens communities.

Research that informs practice

Through our collaboration with the University of Wollongong, we participated in the SPROUTS Project, a longitudinal study exploring how children develop self-regulation as they transition from preschool to school. This research will inform educators, families, and policymakers on practices that best support children's well-being and learning.

Supporting vulnerable families

Our Inclusive Engagement Project in Warilla has further strengthened community support by adopting a trauma-informed, transdisciplinary model to help vulnerable children build resilience, relationships, and life skills.

Connecting with Country



Our Commitment to Reconciliation

ECTARC remains deeply committed to advancing Reconciliation by embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and languages throughout our programs, curriculum, and everyday practice. Our services actively participate in Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education, a national program that supports early learning services and schools to develop Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs).

Across our organisation we identify meaningful actions that contribute to Closing the Gap initiatives and strengthen relationships, respect, and opportunities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community.

ECTARC teams continue to deepen their understanding of culture and build strong, reciprocal relationships with local Aboriginal communities. Programs are developed to respectfully and truthfully reflect the history and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, ensuring that children see themselves represented and grow a strong sense of cultural identity.

Our progress so far:

- ✓ Developing our third Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), to be endorsed in 2026.
- ✓ 2.5% of total procurement came from Aboriginal businesses and sole traders.
- ✓ 92 employees took part in face-to-face learning or cultural immersion activities.
- ✓ Proudly participated in National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC events across all three LGAs where we operate.
- ✓ Expanded community engagement, with greater participation in local events, continued AECG membership, and support for reconciliation initiatives in our region.
- ✓ Undertook a meaningful review of cultural protocols, with staff reporting greater confidence in delivering acknowledgments from the heart.
- ✓ Every ECTARC early education and care service is advancing on its Narragunnawali journey, with either a draft or published RAP in place.



Members of the ECTARC team attended the Illawarra Reconciliation and Truth Telling Conference at The Grange, Kembla Grange.

Illawarra Reconciliation and Truth Telling *conference*



Children from ECTARC Smith Street opened the second day of the Illawarra Reconciliation and Truth Telling Conference with an Acknowledgement of Country and Aboriginal songs.

In 2025, ECTARC proudly participated as a lead partner in the Illawarra Reconciliation and Truth Telling Conference, where 19 staff attended the two-day event.

The conference featured keynote speakers, including award-winning journalist Stan Grant and Blake Cansdale, National Director at ANTAR.

ECTARC staff members served as table facilitators, leading meaningful discussions with delegates, while 46 Elders joined the Yarning Circle sessions, sharing their stories, knowledge, and hopes with generosity and openness.

Children from ECTARC Smith Street opened the second day with an Acknowledgement of Country and Aboriginal songs, demonstrating the authentic inclusion of culture within our educational programs.

ECTARC Training and Development Officers Kim and Larissa also presented a snapshot of our Deadly Connections program, highlighting our work in supporting cultural awareness and engagement across the sector.

Delegates and Elders shared overwhelmingly positive feedback, commending ECTARC's leadership, professionalism, and deep commitment to Reconciliation.



ECTARC team members took part in a cultural immersion at Mount Keira (Geera) Summit Park with Aunty Shas as part of National Reconciliation Week.

National Reconciliation Week

As part of National Reconciliation Week, 25 ECTARC team members took part in a cultural immersion at Mount Keira (Geera) Summit Park with Aunty Shas.

It was an opportunity to gain a deeper insight into local culture and to strengthen our collective commitment to Reconciliation.

Celebrations



ECTARC Wallaroo Education and Care Service welcomed mothers, grandmothers and aunts during a Mothers Day afternoon tea.

ECTARC embraces a vibrant culture of celebration, recognising that shared experiences build stronger connections across our services. Throughout the year, our educators, children, and families come together to mark important cultural and educational occasions that foster inclusion, respect, and joy in learning.

From Harmony Day and NAIDOC Week to National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day, we celebrate the rich diversity of our communities and the stories that shape them.

Events like Book Week, ANZAC Day, and Children's Week spark curiosity and connection, while Early Childhood Educators Day and birthdays provide moments to honour the people who make our services thrive.

These celebrations reflect ECTARC's belief that community and culture are at the heart of quality early education, nurturing a sense of belonging, identity, and pride for every child and educator.

Our Financials



The dedication, expertise, and passion of our 241 members of staff are the foundation of ECTARC's success and our ongoing commitment to excellence in early childhood education and training.

This year, ECTARC strengthened its focus on staff well-being with the establishment of a dedicated People and Culture team, incorporating the Wellbeing and Engagement Coordinator role. The Coordinator visited every service.

The improved surplus result for the 2025 FY is driven by the continued expansion of our Training Services division in both depth and reach, especially across regional and remote communities of need.

All surplus funds will be reinvested in communities, better-resourced teams, and expanding our footprint to provide early childhood services to more areas of need.

Income Breakdown

	2025 FY	%	2024 FY
Children's Services	\$12,402,984	65%	\$11,859,836
Training Services	\$5,962,163	31%	\$4,548,283
Investment Income	\$373,429	2%	\$232,383
Other Income	\$299,187	2%	\$1,968,350
	\$19,037,762	100.00%	\$18,608,851

Expenses Breakdown

	2025 FY	2024 FY
Staff Costs	\$13,161,177	\$13,186,863
Operating Costs	\$2,989,313	\$3,032,865
Depreciation	\$291,265	\$294,598
Lease Costs	\$179,503	\$146,299
	\$16,621,258	\$16,660,625

Investing in Safe and Inspiring Spaces

This year, ECTARC invested in a major yard upgrade at ECTARC Sanctuary Point, creating a safer, more resilient, and engaging outdoor environment for children.

Over recent years, the service has faced repeated flooding and weather-related damage caused by extreme conditions. After extensive collaboration with Shoalhaven City Council, the project team implemented critical drainage improvements and reshaped the landscape to better manage future floodwaters.

To complete the transformation, new soft fall and synthetic grass were installed, turning the yard into a vibrant and purposeful learning space. Today, children enjoy a beautifully designed environment that encourages exploration, creativity, and play.

Backing *quality* and care

ECTARC secured significant funding to strengthen our workforce, improve service quality, and enhance community support.

ECEC Worker Retention Payment Grant

ECTARC's successful application for the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Worker Retention Payment grant recognises the vital role educators play in supporting children's learning and family wellbeing.

This national initiative will fund a 10% wage increase above the award in December 2024 and 15% in July 2025, acknowledging the sector's contribution to Australia's economy and communities.

Community Child Care Fund (CCCF) Round 4

ECTARC Clipper Road received \$387,727 over two years for the Positive Communities Project, part of a \$1.7 million federal investment in the Gilmore electorate.

The funding, announced by Fiona Phillips MP, will support new roles including a child and family practitioner, psychologist, and key worker to assist children and families experiencing vulnerability.

NSW Community Building Partnership Funding 2023 (announced in 2024)

+ ECTARC Clipper Road:

Kitchen upgrade,

\$46,000

+ ECTARC The Basin:

Nappy change upgrade,

\$17,000

Leadership team



Board members



Kirsty Shee

Board Chair - since 2019

Kirsty brings over 25 years of leadership, corporate strategy, and human resources expertise, with a background in banking, financial services, IT services, and the not-for-profit sector. Known for her pragmatic and results-driven leadership, she specialises in organisational design, leading transformational change, and building high-performance teams. Holding qualifications in business and HR management, Kirsty has successfully led initiatives that strengthen organisational culture and drive strategic growth.



William Staples

Board Director - since 2024

William Staples is a solicitor with 15 years' experience in dispute resolution, insolvency and proceeds of crime litigation. William currently works for a government litigation fund with the aim of maximising recoveries in liquidations for the benefit of employees. William has two children who attend ECTARC Smith Street.



Elise Borgo

Board Director - since 2023

Elise is a qualified accountant with over 15 years experience in commercial, operational and management consulting roles. She is currently an executive within the healthcare industry and is passionate about solving problems, and catalysing change that will have broad impact on the industry. Elise has two children that attend ECTARC Keiraview Education and Care Centre.



Evan Morrisson

Board Director - since 2023

Evan has significant expertise in technology, financial services, and strategic management, with a proven track record in driving business transformation and operational efficiency. Currently Head of the Innovation Lab at Hub24, he is passionate about lifelong learning and designing bold, innovative systems that enhance communication and efficiency. Evan has three children with two attending ECTARC.



Eoghain Johnson

Board Director - since 2024

Eoghain Johnson joined the Board in 2024 as a parent representative. With a background in software development and digital innovation, Eoghain has led the creation of learning and compliance platforms in the Early childhood and education sectors in the UK. His technical expertise and experience in building scalable systems bring a valuable perspective to the Board.



Katherine Garisde

Board Director - since 2023

Katherine Garside is a senior in house lawyer with over 15 years legal experience. She has worked at law firms and global organisations in both the UK and Australia, primarily as a construction litigator but now in a more generalist legal role. Katherine has 2 children, one of whom attends ECTARC Sanctuary Point Education and Care Centre.



Kerry Stephens

Board Director - since 2023

With more than 30 years experience in the government and not-for-profit sectors, including registered training providers, Kerry brings skills in marketing, communications, government relations and change management to the role of community representative.



Kate McIlwain

Board Director - since 2024

Kate McIlwain is a media professional with experience in journalism, media management and design. Currently the Deputy Editor of the Illawarra Mercury, she has spent more than a decade covering the news, campaigning for the community, and helping to set the region's agenda. Kate brings strong communication skills and community insight to the role. Kate is a parent at ECTARC Smith Street.

Leadership team



Anita Kumar

Chief Executive Officer

Anita is a social entrepreneur and a passionate advocate for the rights of children and families, especially those dealing with complex life issues or living in vulnerable circumstances. She has a strong track record of forging impactful strategic partnerships across government, corporate, philanthropic, agency and sector organisations as a means of building a sustainable social enterprise. Anita was previously the CEO of Early Start at the University of Wollongong. She also sits on a number of Boards, committees, reference and task force groups .



Andrew Clarke

General Manager – Finance

Andrew joined ECTARC in July 2024 and oversees all financial functions for the organisation. His focus is on ensuring strong financial governance, maintaining best accounting practices, and the continued growth and sustainability of ECTARC. Andrew has been a member of CA ANZ since 2018. Prior to joining ECTARC he was a Director of Business Services and Tax at a prominent local accounting firm.



Kathryn Barker

General Manager – Early Childhood Services

Kathryn serves as the leader for ECTARC's 10 Education and Care Services, bringing a wealth of experience as a manager, mentor, and advocate for early education and the wellbeing of educators. She is deeply committed to fostering strong partnerships with families, engaging with the community, and advancing reconciliation initiatives. Kathryn holds a Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood) and boasts over 30 years of valuable experience in the early childhood sector.



Melissa Wicks

General Manager – Operations

Melissa has over 30 years of experience in the early childhood education and care sector. She started as a teacher and director with ECTARC, transitioning to senior management 15 years ago, and this diverse background makes her an asset when contributing to operational effectiveness and strategic growth. Melissa also serves as Company Secretary, supporting organisational governance.



Natalie Fernandes

General Manager - Training Services

Natalie has worked at ECTARC Training Services for 24 years, first as a training and development officer and now in management. Natalie oversees all aspects of funded training in NSW, QLD and ACT, and works closely with government departments, employers and key stakeholders to ensure there is a focus on building a sustainable workforce for education and care. Natalie manages the team of training and development officers working with students and manages the operations of the QLD office.



Sarah Mezedi

General Manager - Learning, Development and Quality Assurance

Sarah has 28 years of service with ECTARC, with extensive qualifications and experience in early childhood and vocational education. Sarah oversees compliance and quality assurance for ECTARC Training Services, including the VET Quality Framework and state funding contracts, and contributes to organisational governance. Sarah also leads the Professional Development and Resource Development unit, and Training and Development Officers and Administration staff.



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