EARLY START

Annual Report 2017

A place where research, education and community come together for all children especially those living in challenging circumstances or growing up in regional and remote Australia.

Mission

RESEARCH Influence policy and practice through interdisciplinary research and intersectoral collaborations that improves knowledge and understanding of child development.

EDUCATION Strengthen and support the ways people care for and work with children by increasing capacity and leadership.

COMMUNITY Enrich and support the environments in which children flourish by engaging with families and communities.

Values

LEADERSHIP Demonstrating leadership in strengthening communities for children and their families.

INTEGRITY Acting morally and ethically towards children, families and communities.

COURAGE Championing new and innovative ways to make a positive impact that is grounded in social justice.

COLLABORATION Embrace the diversity in people, culture and thinking to work in partnership to create opportunities for all children and their families.

About Early Start

IN 2017

119,684

Children and families visited the Discovery Space.

Vision

For children to flourish, be active learners and become engaged members of the society.

Our Work

Foster an environment for children to flourish

Discovery Space

Stimulates curiosity, nurtures creativity, builds confidence and provides opportunities for social connection, communication, learning and independent discovery.

Engagement Centres

Collaborating with services in regional and remote areas (virtually and physically) to increase capacity, enrich quality and support services to strengthen outcomes for children.

Research and Advocacy

Ask and explore what matters for children's development through community consultation and interdisciplinary research. Advocate for evidence-based policies and programs that address community needs.

Leadership and Learning

Increase professional capacity and leadership, and influence curriculum, to enhance contemporary knowledge and practice.

Discovery Space

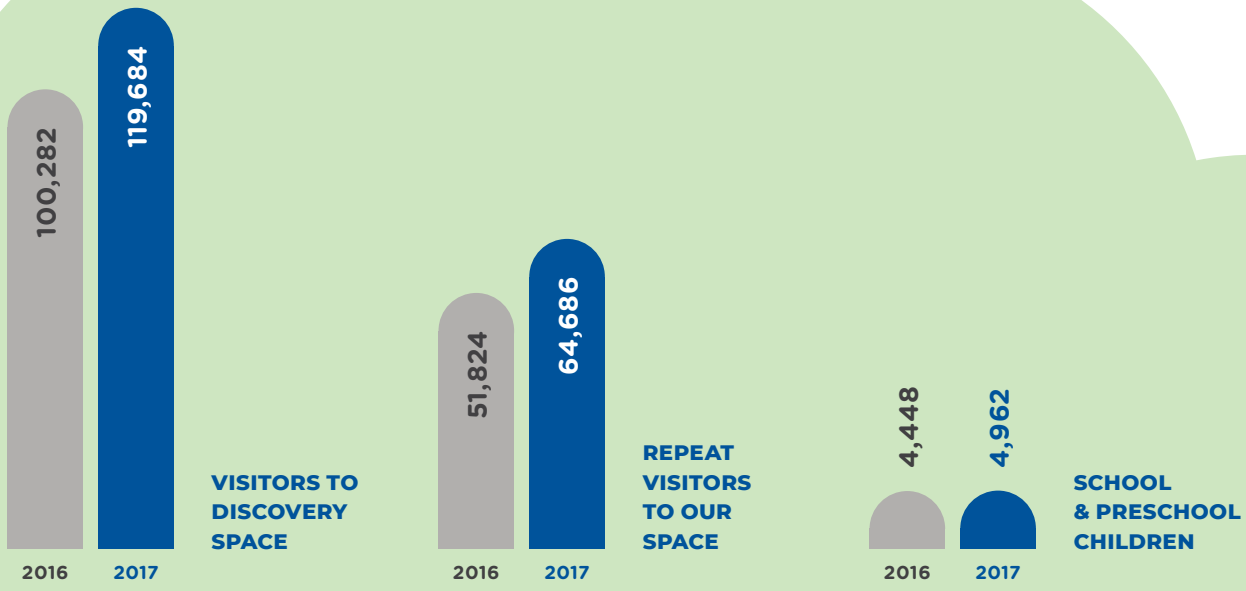
An environment that stimulates curiosity, supports independence, encourages social interaction, nurtures creativity and promotes a sense of community.

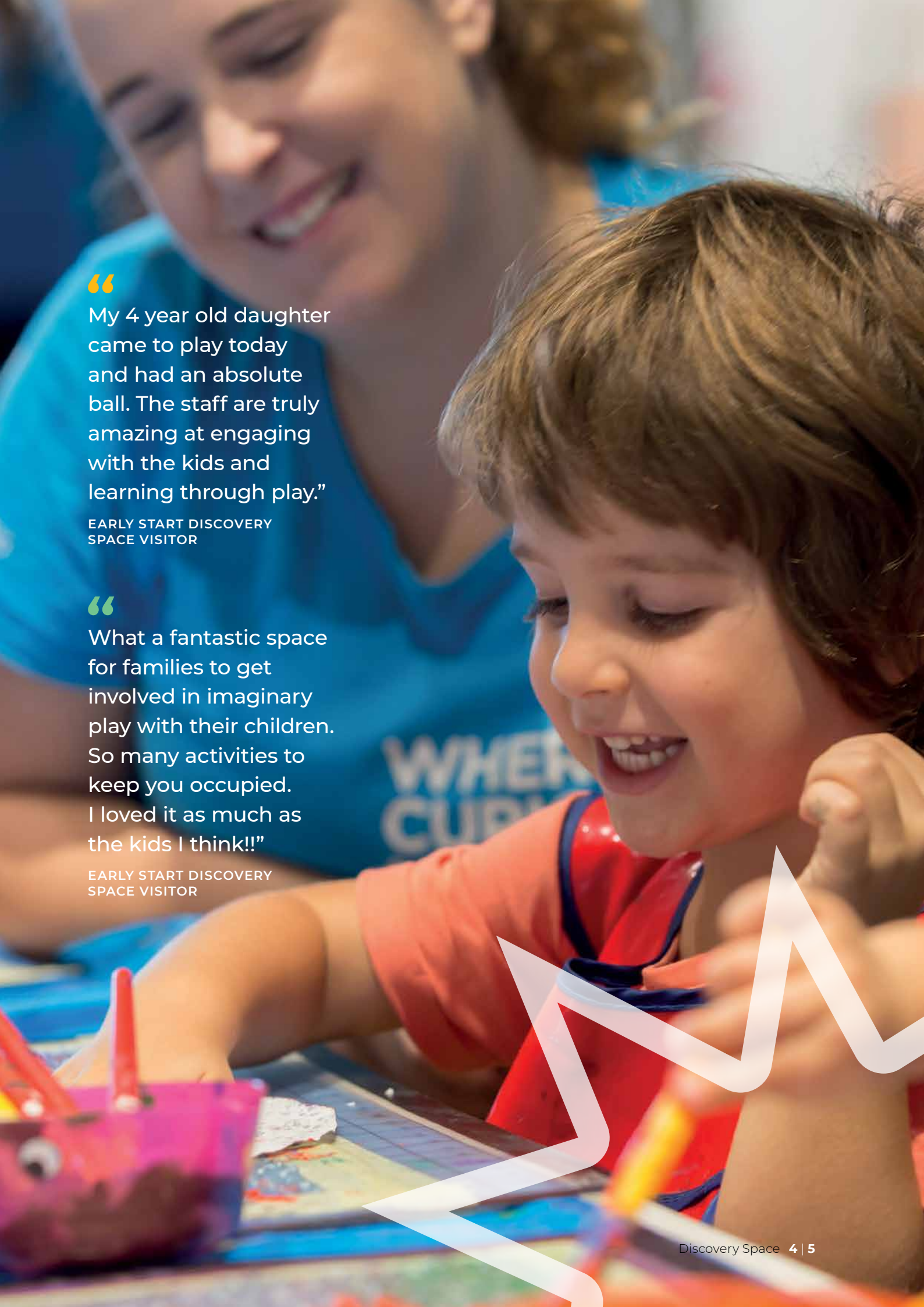
The Early Start Discovery Space is Australia's only dedicated children's museum and the first-of-its-kind in the world based on a university campus. It provides interactive experiences, stimulating educational programs and learning-through-play activities for children aged birth to 10 years and their families. The Discovery Space acts as a partner for families, early childhood centres and schools by enhancing the value that children gain through play-based experiences and is grounded in evidence.

Activities are designed to allow children to take control and share their imagination and creativity with others. The best-designed activities ensure accompanying adults have as much enjoyment as children, sharing the experience as co-learners and creators.

All the experiences have been designed to inspire and encourage meaningful play and, therefore, learning. Through a 'partnership of play' – between children, parents, educators and the Early Start Discovery Space team, we hope to enhance the enduring benefits that children receive from play.

Discovery Space Numbers





"My 4 year old daughter came to play today and had an absolute ball. The staff are truly amazing at engaging with the kids and learning through play."

EARLY START DISCOVERY SPACE VISITOR

"What a fantastic space for families to get involved in imaginary play with their children. So many activities to keep you occupied. I loved it as much as the kids I think!!"

EARLY START DISCOVERY SPACE VISITOR

Discovery Space

New Experiences on the Discovery Space floor

Trains

All aboard for a new interactive journey, the Critter Express. Buy your ticket, read the timetable and figure out your travel time, or become the driver, shovelling coal, blowing the whistle and taking your passengers to new lands.

Alongside the Critter Express sits the interactive diorama. This model hints at the local Illawarra scene with a mountain, coal mine, eucalyptus trees, a soccer field and farm land. Visitors can control the trains, moving them forward or backward, stopping at each of the stations with the use of an iPad. Visitors can also turn the lights on and off, play soundscape effects or simply watch others as they drive it around.

Crawlers beach

The Crawlers' Beach is our dedicated safe haven for visitors aged birth-2years. It supports young children with learning to lift their head, roll over, sit, crawl, stand and take their first steps. It features a jetty, submarine, mirrors, sensory beach towels and tummy time sea creature pillows all designed in consultation with researchers.

Bricks and Clicks

Enter the hub where builders, architects, designers and story tellers all come together. With over 10,000 LEGO bricks, visitors can use the vertical wall, or purpose built tables to build and create whatever they want to, their only limitation is their imagination.

Then turn your creations into a story with our Click, Click, Create station which allows visitors to capture their own video using stop animation and iPads.

> "Well we've been coming since you opened. The space itself has changed so much in that time. Every time we come, they play with something different to be honest and that's why we can come back every week."
>
> **EARLY START DISCOVERY SPACE VISITOR**

Over 450 discovery space visitors and members

participated through Focus groups, interviews and an online survey to provide feedback and help us evaluate the effectiveness of the existing experiences and education programs in the Discovery Space.

Over 90% of the responses from parents and caregivers

saw great value in the experiences in the Discovery Space and the environment that had been created. Many were repeat visitors and saw benefit in returning multiple times to see the changes in their child.

Engagement Centres

Early Start is connected with 41 Engagement Centres, early childhood education and care centres across NSW and ACT accessed by over 2300 children and their families.

Our work supporting the Engagement Centres is unique. Each centre is either community operated or affiliated with a non-profit organisation, and the majority are in regional or remote locations. The Engagement Centres provide a portal into these communities to redress social and educational disadvantage. Together with our partners we are working to create and enrich life opportunities for young Australians from regional and remote areas.

Thirty-two of the 41 centres are located in some of our most disadvantaged communities (Combined Socio Economic Indexes for Australia [SEIFA] decile between 1 and 4), and almost all of them support families dealing with complex issues or living in vulnerable circumstances. Further, over 35% of the children and families enrolled in the Engagement Centres are from Aboriginal backgrounds, and all nine Aboriginal Child and Family Services hubs established under the Indigenous Early Childhood National Partnership Agreement, in NSW managed by the Department of Family and Community services, are in the Early Start Engagement Centre network.

A dedicated team in Early Start and academics from a range of disciplines work closely with the centres. Strong relationships between UOW and our community partners

Supported over
2,300
children and their families in 41 Early Education and Care Centres in regional and remote Australia. Face to face and virtually.

Supported over 117 (2016) and
216
(2017) early childhood educators in targeted professional skills development and embedding of quality practices in the centre.

Observed over
1,500
children across 37 rooms during the quality ratings project, with 36 feedback reports facilitated.

Map of Centres

have allowed researchers in UOW to access individual child development data to support the quality of education in these settings.

Supported with technological interconnectedness, the Early Start Engagement Centres allow us to create new models to link research and practice, and bring about better outcomes for children.

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

> "Lisa's presentation was great. It gave me a positive perspective on technology to bring back to our Team. She gave us a criteria guide (which was very helpful) and explained that it is like any other resource/equipment that we provide for the children. We continue to encourage the social communicative side of its use and it opens up possibilities."
>
> **ENGAGEMENT CENTRE EDUCATOR**

Research and Advocacy

Early Start Research provides the primary vehicle through which academics, practioners, professionals and research students are advancing children's early learning, development, health and wellbeing of children and their families.

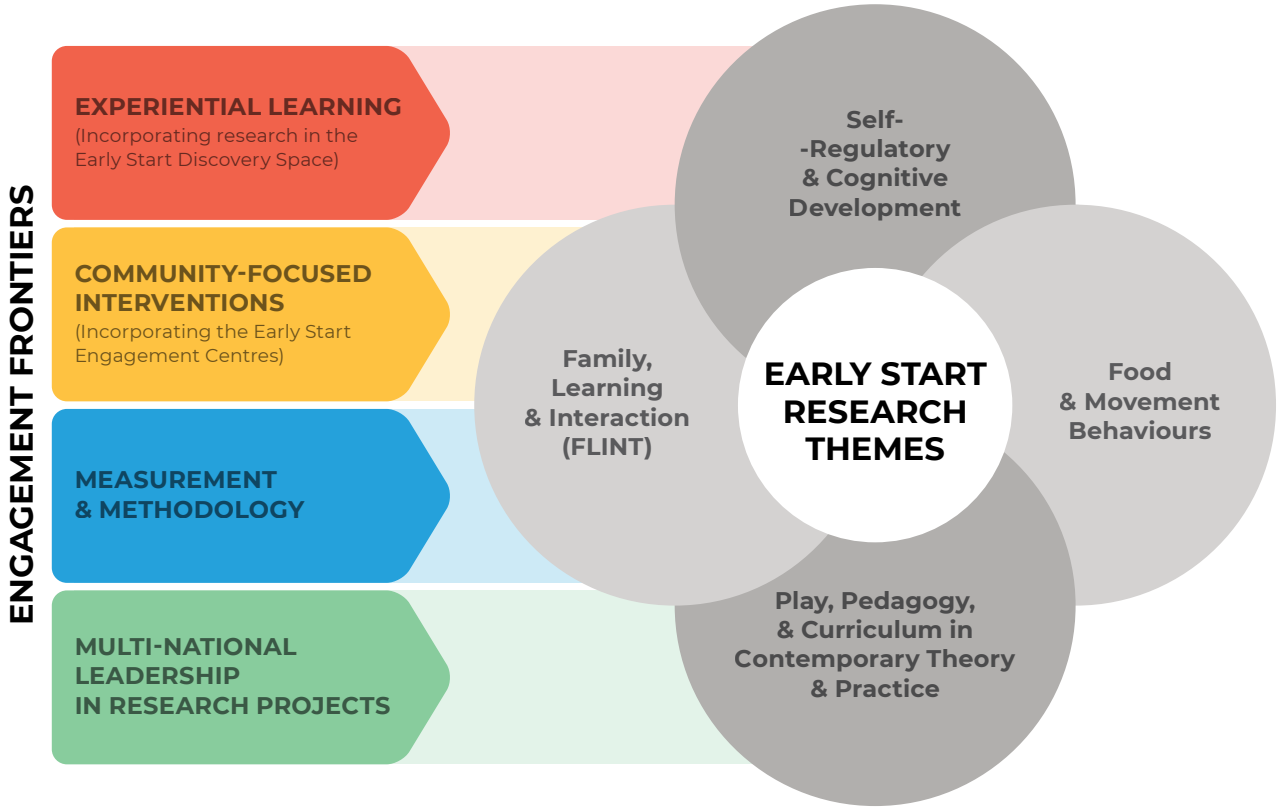
We ask and explore what matters for children's development through community consultation, interdisciplinary research and intersectoral collaboration.

We advocate for evidence-based policies and programs that address community needs and improve knowledge and understanding of child development.

We are focused on building a reputation locally, nationally and globally for leading research, and providing leadership to make a positive impact.

We want to create new knowledge and translate existing knowledge to influence contemporary practice & policy.

We aim to do this by linking academics, practioners and the wider community.



RESEARCH

$2,526,882
Research income in 2017,
2,736,277 in 2016 and
2,088,664 in 2015

Higher Degree Research Student (HDR) Completions in 2017, 5 in 2016 and 2 in 2015

HDR Enrolments in 2017,
52 in 2016 and 44 in 2015

Number of peer-reviewed Publications in 2017,
88 in 2016 and 58 in 2015

Number of citations in 2017, 4,408 in 2016 and
3,949 in 2015

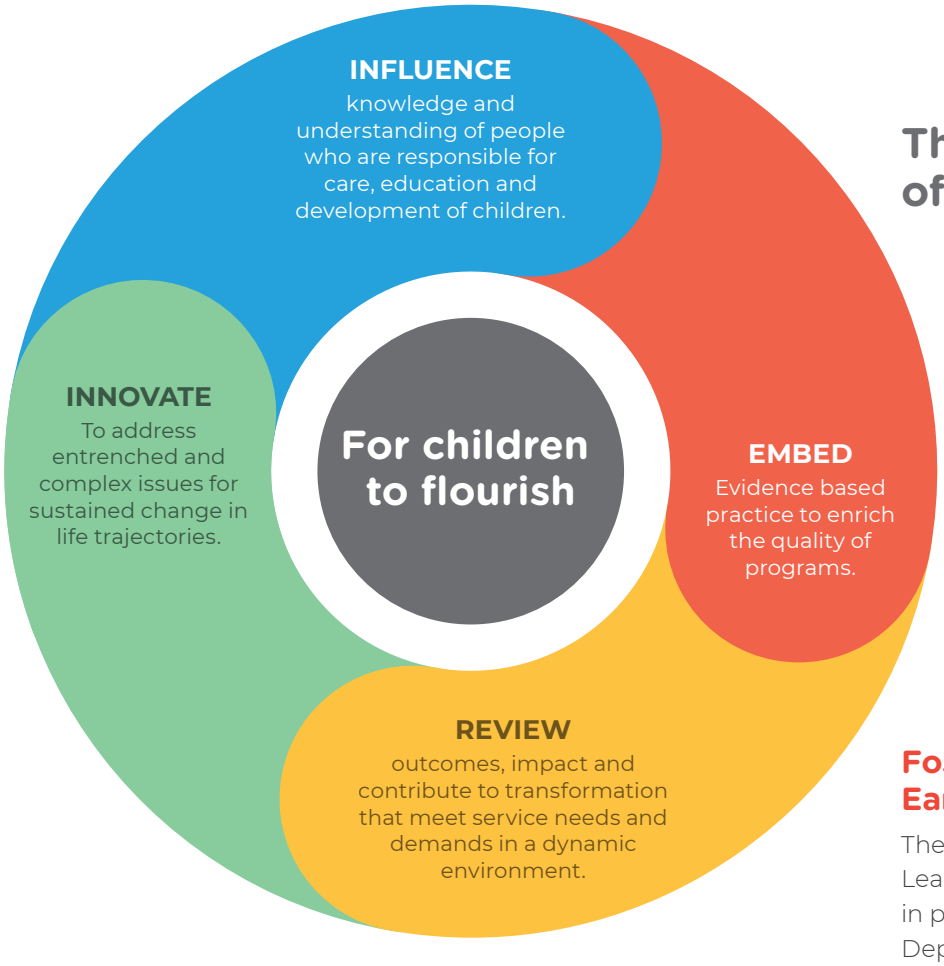
Social Impact and Leadership

Our work is underpinned by a world-class multidisciplinary research institute.

We specialise in improving understanding of childhood development, learning, and health, while also enhancing the ways people care for and work with children and engage with parents and communities. Our focus is on enhancing the everyday environment of child development, rather than just focussing on models of deprivation or deficit.

Our unique point of difference

- We are the organisation that delivers across the entire continuum of child development – research, education, program development, stakeholder engagement and service delivery.
- We train teachers who work within the whole continuum of education from birth to year 12.
- We have ongoing formal partnership arrangements with leading and large providers of early childhood education and care, early intervention, schools and clinical programs, as well as with Government Departments.
- We have direct connections with children, families and community, early childhood service providers, child focussed charitable organisations and Government Departments.
- We have an ongoing commitment to evidence based professional development through innovative in-service delivery models (face to face, online and mentoring).



Theory of Change

Our work is impactful and collaborative

Good Start Early Learning

Early Start researchers have been collaborating with Goodstart Early Learning since 2014 across a range of projects seeking to improve the quality of environments and experiences in early childhood education and care settings. This includes evaluating planned Goodstart initiatives (EChO evaluation, Practice Guide evaluation) as well as implementing initiatives developed at Early Start (e.g., REEL implementation and evaluation). The Good Start staff have received online, face to face and mentoring support to enhance and influence pedagogy and leadership to have positive impact on children's outcomes.

Doveton College

Our partnership with Doveton College (part of Our Place), is to develop, evaluate and disseminate innovative formative assessment tools that can be used by early childhood educators to gain information on children's developmental progress and individual needs. The first year of this arrangement has been successfully completed, yielding validated tools to assess early numeracy and self-regulation, and we continue to work with them.

Fostering Effective Early Learning

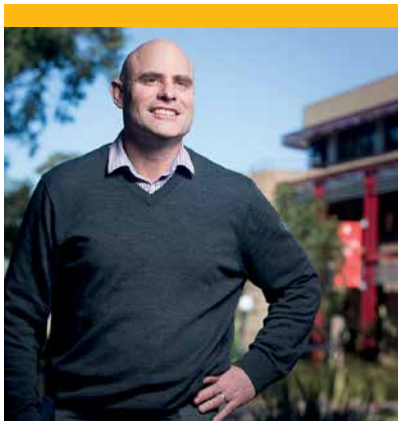
The Fostering Effective Early Learning project undertaken in partnership with NSW Department of Education involved up to 1,200 preschool aged children from 90 early education and care centres throughout NSW. The project used a rigorous randomised control trial to examine how enhancing specific early childhood teaching practices can have a measurable sustainable impact on improving children's outcomes. This is the first large scale intervention study in Australia that has led to improved child outcome. Key outcomes included, changes to pedagogical leadership a positive impact on child outcomes and engagement with families.

Working in partnership with NSW Office of Preventive Health and Early Childhood Australia to deliver professional development to the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector across NSW as part of the Munch & Move workshops.

Research Highlights

Early Start Researchers have made significant contributions to research, policy and practice at a local, national, and international level.

They have been awarded funding from the Australian Research Council and National Health & Medical Research Council of Australia and other major industry and philanthropic organisations.



Global Health Policy

Professor Tony Okely is appointed to the World Health Organization's Guideline Development Group for the WHO Guidelines for physical activity, sedentary and sleep behaviour for children less than 5 years of age.

Self-Regulation

Steven Howard, Senior Lecturer in the School of Education, was awarded a highly competitive 3-year ARC Discovery Early Career Research Award for his research project "An Early Start to Self-Regulation: Integration and Intervention". His was only one of two Education proposals funded by a DECRA fellowship in Australia in 2017. This project has led to the creation of a low-cost program of practices and child activities that support children's self-regulation development. In 2018, the program is being evaluated in 50 pre-school services and with more than 400 children in the year before school.

"Early Start has been instrumental in placing the University of Wollongong at the forefront of early childhood education and our commitment to supporting children and families realise their potential. It has been a pleasure to see the centre grow and develop, especially as it is now such a successful and well-established part of the university community."

PROFESSOR PAUL WELLINGS CBE,
VICE CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

Food Marketing

Associate Professor Bridget Kelly was awarded highly competitive ARC Discovery Early Career Research Award, for her project titled "Unhealthy food marketing to children: exposures, impacts & policy responses". Reducing children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing is a global health priority. This project is quantifying children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing online and identifying how online and TV food marketing influences food consumption and may affect death and disease. An outcome will be the development of a standard protocol for global monitoring of food marketing.

Koori Kids Club

A two year initiative between Early Start researchers, Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre, and the local Aboriginal communities in the Shoalhaven which led to the Koori Kids Culture Club continued in 2017.

The program operated in Nowra, Ulladulla, Culburra and Milton. This is an after school program aimed at encouraging Aboriginal children to engage with Country and their culture and make healthy lifestyle choices.

Sleep and screen time the focus in new physical activity guidelines for young children

Early Start researchers, led by Professor Tony Okely, led the project to update New National Guidelines on physical activity, sedentary time and sleep for young children. Australian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for the Early Years (Birth to Five Years): An Integration of Physical Activity, Sedentary Time and Sleep differs from the previous guidelines in covering the entire day, including recommendations on how to help children get good quality sleep. The guidelines was launched by the Federal Minister for Health Greg Hunt in November 2017.

A TEAM LED BY TONY OKELY being awarded $1M as part of the NSW Health Prevention Research Support Program to investigate ways to promote healthy eating and physical activity in early childhood and after-school settings. This research program is in collaboration with the NSW Office of Preventive Health, and South-Western Sydney and Illawarra-Shoalhaven Local Health Districts.

JANE HERBERT BEING AWARDED $237, 961 for her ARC Discovery Project titled "Ready, steady, go: Infant motor development and cognition".

TWO OTHER EARLY START RESEARCHERS (Ted Melhuish and Ian Wright) were Chief Investigators on two NHMRC Project Grants awarded to researchers at other institutions.

BRIDGET KELLY PROVIDING NUTRITION POLICY and Scientific Advice on nutrition labelling for the Department of Nutrition for Health and Development at the World Health Organization.

REBECCA STANLEY BEING AWARDED a NSW Health Early-Mid Career Research Fellowship for her project titled "Physical activity & sedentary behaviour among indigenous children".

Board and Leadership

Board Directors

Philip Marcus Clark AM

Chairman Board, Chair – Finance and Fundraising

Philip Marcus Clark, sits on a number of public and private boards. He has been an Independent Chairman and Independent Non-Executive Director of Shopping Centres Australasia Property Group RE Limited since September 19, 2012. He served as an Independent Chairman of Hunter Hall Global Value Limited since September 2013 and also served as its Non-Executive Director since July 1, 2013. He has served as an Independent Director of ING Management Limited since February 21, 2006. In additional he is also a Member of the JP Morgan Advisory Council. Mr. Clark holds a BA, LLB and MBA (Columbia University).

Doreen Clark OAM

Deputy Chairman, Member – Discovery Space Committee

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

Melanie Kansil

Chair – Discovery Space

Melanie is currently the General Manager, Roadside Operations with the NRMA. She has an MBA from Stanford University, and an AB in Physics from Harvard University; she is Secretary of the Stanford Australia Association and a Non-Executive Director of Heathley Asset Management Limited.

Dr Stuart McNaughton

Chair – Research and Advocacy

Dr. Stuart McNaughton holds a personal chair as Professor of Education at the University of Auckland, New Zealand and is the Director of the Woolf Fisher Research Centre at the Faculty of Education. He has been recently appointed to a visiting position of Distinguished Overseas Professor at East China Normal University, Shanghai.

Elaine Henry

Chair – Inclusion and Outreach

Elaine Henry has been the Chief Executive of the Cancer Council (NSW) which developed from a small statutory authority into a world acclaimed cancer control agency.

She now serves on more than ten Boards/ Committees in the non-profit and government sectors including the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, which has a membership of over 1500 organisations.

Lloyd Niccol

Member – Finance and Fundraising

Lloyd is a Building Products and Solutions Innovation Specialist and brings a wealth of experience in this area. In addition Lloyd was an original Early Start Advisory Committee Member commencing in April 2015.

Prof Paul Chandler

Member – Research and Advocacy, Inclusion and Outreach

Professor Paul Chandler is the Foundation director of Early Start and the Pro Vice Chancellor (Inclusion & Outreach) at UOW. Paul is a former Australian Research Council Fellow (UNSW) and Dean of Education (UOW). He sits on numerous private, not for profit and government Boards. He has recently been appointed on the newly formed board of NSW Educational Standards Authority.

Prof Glenn Salkeld

Member – Research and Advocacy

Professor Glenn Salkeld is currently Executive Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences with the University of Wollongong. Glenn is a health economist with over 30 years experience in public health research and education.

Leadership Team

Anita Kumar

Chief Executive Officer

Anita is a passionate advocate for the rights of children and families, especially those dealing with complex life issues or living in vulnerable circumstances.

Anita commenced with Early Start in March 2017. She brings a strong track record of forging impactful strategic partnerships across government, corporate,

philanthropic, agency and sector organisations as a means to build a sustainable social enterprise.

In her previous role as CEO of The Infants' Home, Anita was committed to developing quality services that support the wellbeing of children and their families, and building a socially cohesive community.

Prof Anthony Okely

Research Director

Professor Anthony Okely leads the Research at Early Start. He led the research team that developed the Australian Physical Activity guidelines for Children 0-5 years, and the Australian Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for Children and Young People and is an international expert on a number of working groups.

Okely's research focuses on physical activity, sedentary behaviour, and gross motor skills in children. He has been awarded over $10 Million in competitive funding, including being Principal Investigator on two National Health and Medical Research Council Project grants.

Prof Marc de Rosnay

Academic Director

Marc joined Early Start in 2014. He leads transformational initiatives involving the Early Start and the community with the goal of improving educational and social opportunities for young children in regional, rural and remote contexts. Marc's research focuses on social and emotional development in the early years, and the ways in which children's growing understanding of the world (cognitive development) affects their experience.

Martha Johnson

Manager, Education and Experience Discovery Space

Martha has a passion for influencing learning with young children. Martha leads a team who develop, design and implement new and engaging experiences and educational programs for children and families visiting the Discovery space. In her previous her previous role at Questacon she helped establish mini science centres throughout rural communities in the Northern Territory, Queensland, Tasmania and NSW.

Marina De Leva

Manager Business Services, Discovery Space

Marina is passionate about people and providing exceptional customer service at every touchpoint across all stakeholders. Marina has been working in the educational tourism, event and hospitality industry for over 25 years in a range of customer service, marketing, business and operations roles.

Marina is committed to ensuring the Discovery Space is sustainable and continues to provide families in the region, and across Australia with unique play based learning experiences.

Staff and Volunteers

An incredible team of highly skilled and experienced staff and volunteers support our operations. Early Start is an entity within the Faculty of Social Sciences. The ongoing support and commitment from the schools and the wider faculty has been critical to Early Start's success.

Over **98 volunteers** provided an average of **110 hours each** throughout 2017.

70% of the volunteers were UOW Students, the other **30%** are volunteers from the local community.

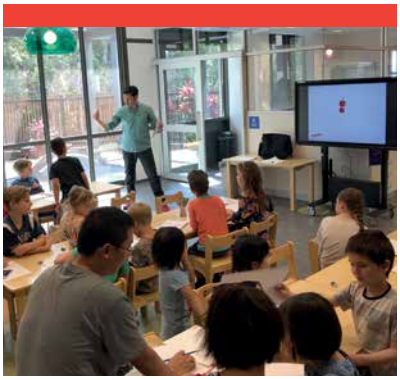
Honorary Visiting Professors

- **Prof Iram Siraj,** University of Oxford, previously University College of London
- **Prof Ted Melhuish,** University of Oxford
- **Prof Fred Paas,** Erasmus University Rotterdam
- **Prof Jacqueline Barnes,** Birkbeck, University of London

Highlights

Celebrating Our Birthday

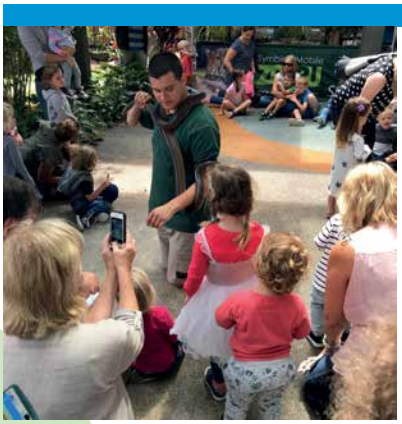
We celebrated our 2nd birthday with a gathering of members, special guests, local community groups and our major sponsors, Chris and Barbara Abbott. The Abbott foundation has provided the largest philanthropic gift to help establish the Discovery Space and their continued support contributes significantly to the experience of children and families.



Workshops

Thanks to the generous support of Lancaster Law & Mediation, talented illustrator Marcello Baez conducted workshops to share the joy of comic book illustration.

> "It has been a pleasure to see so many children and families enjoy and learn at the Early Start Discovery Space. It has been a positive force in engaging with children and families to influence learning through play."
>
> **THE ABBOTT FOUNDATION**



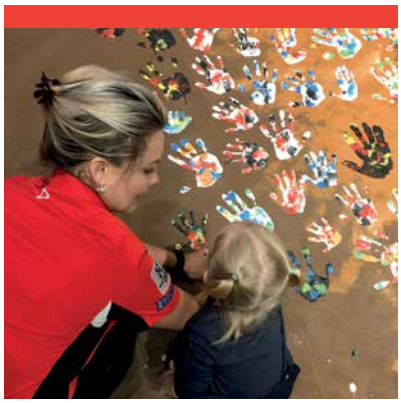
Community Events

We engaged an array of external providers to enrich the experience of the Discovery Space during 2017. Over 400 children sang and danced along to a live, interactive concert by *Lah-Lah & Buzz* and local wildlife facility *Symbio Zoo* brought an outreach show of native animals for children to experience first-hand.

Playschool at the Discovery Space

Australia's longest-running children's show Playschool, attended the Discovery Space to film new segments for 2017 with local children invited to participate.

> "We recognise the best investment is the one we make to support children, families and community. Our partnership with Early Start underpins our commitment to this community."
>
> **IMB BANK**



2017 Early Start Conference

The 2nd Early Start Conference hosted over 400 delegates. There was invitation-only roundtable discussion for policy makers from Federal, State and Territory Department of Education with eminent early childhood education and care key note speakers including Dr Andreas Schleicher, Prof Steven Barnett, Prof Iram Siraj, Prof Karen Thorpe, Prof Ted Melhuish, Prof Jennifer Sumsion and Prof Paul Leseman.

NAIDOC week

The Discovery Space provided free access to the Illawarra Aboriginal Medical Services to celebrate National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Children's Day 2017. Many children and families participated in the event, which was also supported by the St George Dragons.

EARLY START

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG AUSTRALIA

Building 21,
University of Wollongong,
Northfields Ave, NSW 2522,
Australia

earlystart.uow.edu.au