



# THRIVE: INSPIRING SUSTAINED EXCELLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

When: 15 May 2024, 9am-4pm followed by networking event 4pm-5.30pm

Where: Melbourne Connect - 700 Swanston street, Carlton

TIME	CONFERENCE PROGRAM	SPEAKERS
9.00 AM	<b>Welcome to Country</b>  Wurundjeri Elder: Tony Garvey	
9.10 AM	<b>Importance of inclusive practice</b>  <b>Speaker: Matt Connell - General Manager People &amp; Culture, Cultura</b>  Matt will discuss important topics that we as a sector need to understand, such as cultural awareness, cultural humility, intercultural communication, cultural bias and lack of cultural acceptance. Understanding the importance of cultural sensitivity in the workplace and fostering meaningful relationships to ensure a positive experience for all.	
9.45 AM	<b>Improving outcomes through effective use of evidence</b>  <b>Speaker: Dr Zid Mancenido - Senior Manager, Research and Evaluation, Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)</b>  Greater use of research and evidence provides the opportunity for positive change across Early Childhood - for service leaders, teachers, educators and policymakers. This session will provide an opportunity to explore evidence-based resources recently published by the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) related to family engagement, belonging and connectedness and discuss how best to support sustainable improvements in practice. By the end of the session, participants will have been introduced to AERO and had the opportunity to reflect and discuss on the importance of fostering effective use of evidence, so that children can achieve their best possible outcomes.	
10.45 AM	<b>Morning Tea</b>	

## TIME

## CONFERENCE PROGRAM

## SPEAKERS

11.15 AM

### Government perspectives

**Moderator:** Andrew Cameron - CEO, ELAA

**Speakers:** Bronwen FitzGerald - Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood Education, Victorian Department of Education

Rhonda Livingstone - National Education Leader and General Manager, Leadership, Quality and Regulatory Support, ACECQA

Greg Norton - Executive Director, Quality Assessment and Regulation Division, Victorian Department of Education

In this panel we are joined by representatives from the Victorian Department of Education and the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), and participants will be able to post questions about the National Quality Framework and Victorian ECEC policies.



12.00 PM

Lunch

1.00 PM

### Growing and retaining a workforce panel through a broadened lens

**Moderator:** Sage Michaels - Director Strategy, ELAA

**Speakers:** Susan Anderson - CEO, Gowrie Victoria

Mike Barker - Member Experience Consultant, HESTA

Russell Green - Treasurer, Yarra Preschool

Stephanie Simopoulos - Team Leader, Anzuk Education

During this workforce panel, we will showcase varied perspectives and provide interesting and reflective insights into continued exploration of workforce challenges and solutions.



## TIME

## CONFERENCE PROGRAM

## SPEAKERS

2.00 PM

### **Best Start, Best Life: How do we prepare?**

**Moderator:** Leanne Rodriguez - BSBL Reform & Engagement Advisor, ELAA

**Speakers:** Mandy Baxter - Director Children's Services, Meli

Sue Knowles - Educational Leader & Teacher, Waverley Meadows Preschool

Melissa MacMaster – General Manager, Operations, Education & Pedagogy, Glen Education Inc.

During this panel session, we will hear from our members on how they have successfully implemented 15 hours of a funded 3 year old kindergarten program, how they are preparing for the Pre-Prep rollout implementation and any potential barriers they are facing.



2.45 PM

### **Afternoon Tea**

3.15 PM

### **Exceeding National Quality Standards**

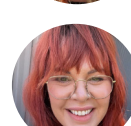
**Moderator:** Stacey Fox - Board member, ELAA

**Speakers:** Sean Bundy - Early Childhood Teacher, Kinglake Ranges Children's Centre

Shelley Fallowfield - Early Years Model Lead, Kids First Australia

Hayley Gerber - School Readiness Training Coordinator, Kids First Australia

The Exceeding National Quality Standards panel will showcase ELAA members rated 'Exceeding' or 'Excellent' under the National Quality Standards. Our panellists will present on the work they are doing to achieve this rating and share how their methods can assist other service providers working towards a higher rating.



3.45 PM

### **Closing Remarks: Thank you from ELAA's CEO, Andrew Cameron**

4.00 PM

### **Networking Event**

5.30 PM

### **Close**

## OUR SELECTED SPEAKERS



### **Susan Anderson**

Susan Anderson has been the CEO of Gowrie Victoria since 2020. She is a strong advocate for greater recognition of early childhood professionals and is passionate about fostering inclusive learning environments where everyone is able to thrive. Prior to joining Gowrie Victoria Susan was the Deputy CEO of Beyond Blue. Susan has degrees in education and psychology, along with an MBA and is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Gowrie Victoria and ELAA are current partners, working together to strengthen the workplace skills, capabilities, and career pathways of early childhood educators.



### **Mandy Baxter**

Mandy is a dynamic sector Leader with 20 years' experience as a Senior Manager/Executive in a range of settings including early childhood learning, early intervention, youth services and disability. Mandy's professional and personal acumen is to work towards enabling systems to afford children every opportunity towards full participation in all aspects of life, early learning being a critical pillar in creating pathways for lifelong learning. Mandy firmly believes this creates equitable and inclusive communities for all children, their families, and their natural networks.

Mandy is the Director of Children's Services at Meli. The Division holds responsibility for the delivery of 30 Kindergartens across the Barwon region (the largest Early Years Management organisation in the region), alongside the Early Childhood Approach (NDIS) and Early Years. In her spare time, you will find Mandy enjoying the sun with her husband Simon, daughter Scarlett and their two dogs, Dash & Hotdog. Mandy lives and works on Wadawurrung Country.



### **Mike Barker**

Mike is an insights and member experience lead and segmentation specialist. With over 25 years' experience in market research prior to joining HESTA, his experience spans many different categories. Having spent many years working on segmentation and modelling projects across multiple industries, he has a passion for customer segmentations and determining what decisions and factors drive different pockets of a population. Mike is currently part of the Member Experience Team at HESTA, looking after the Voice of Member program, Insights Community and ad-hoc strategic research.

## OUR SELECTED SPEAKERS



### Sean Bundy

Sean Bundy is an inspiring Early Childhood Teacher at Kinglake Ranges Children's Centre with a spanning career of over 16 year's experience in education and leadership having taught here in Australia and internationally across New Zealand in various early childhood settings and schools. He is also an strong advocate of the education sector with a passion for unionism and social justice for staff wellbeing. His continuing reflection on early childhood learning and practices, motivates his drive for nature play, multi aged learning spaces and risky play which is evident in his ongoing work in the sector.



### Andrew Cameron

Andrew is ELAA's CEO. Andrew brings broad knowledge and experience in the not-for-profit sector and extensive executive leadership experience. Andrew's most recent position was CEO at Youth Enterprises Australia, an NFP that enables disengaged young people to successfully transition from school to work. Prior to this Andrew has held CEO, General Manager and Director roles across the Commonwealth public service, a representative organisation associated with the University of Melbourne and a youth development and outdoor recreation service provider.



### Matt Connell

Matt is the General Manager People & Culture of Cultura and the Victorian State President and Board Director for the Australian HR Institute (AHRI). After completing a degree in Management (majoring in HR), Matt has worked in Community Services/Not-For-Profits, Local Government, Travel, and Hospitality in various head of HR roles. During this time, he has started HR/OD and People & Culture functions in medium to large organisations leading highly engaged teams to manage complex IR/ER issues in challenging industries and environments.

An experienced speaker and presenter, Matt is passionate about developing constructive leadership capabilities in others so they may better empower, engage and enhance performance in their own team members. Matt has been a Councillor of AHRI in Victoria since 2015 and was nominated by his peers as Victorian State President role since the start of 2019. As a certified HR practitioner Matt is a passionate advocate for the industry in this volunteer role.

## OUR SELECTED SPEAKERS



### Shelley Fallowfield

Shelley is the Early Years Model Lead at Kids First Australia. Shelley has worked supporting parents' and their children for over 25 years. Spanning mental health, drug & alcohol, family violence, parenting assessment and skills development, correctional services, and primary prevention and intervention programs Shelley demonstrates a broad experience across multiple sectors. Shelley has an ongoing commitment to supporting families and their children to reach their full potential.



### Stacey Fox

Stacey is ELAA's board member. Stacey has significant experience in research and policy development, and has worked within and across government, universities and the not-for-profit sector. Stacey is a strategic thinker adept at applying evidence to policy and practice and grappling with complex challenges. She has worked on a range of public policy issues including early childhood education; integrated service delivery; maternal and child health; system design for prevention and early intervention; family support program design; the development and embedding of outcomes frameworks; and systems change.



### Hayley Gerber

Hayley joined Kids First Australia as School Readiness Funding Training Co-ordinator in February 2024, facilitating workshops and providing consultancy on range of subjects including trauma informed practice and working with vulnerable families. Hayley brings with her over 16 years of leadership experience in the Early Years Sector as well as professional learning facilitation and design, coaching for performance, project management and research.

Hayley has a special interest in effective leadership behaviours, learning through inquiry, relational pedagogy, and trauma informed practice. Hayley collaborates closely with services to understand their challenges and create objectives that lead to meaningful change. Hayleys work is strongly grounded in her personal ethos for humanism, equity and social justice and through these tenets advocates for positive organisational and systemic change.

## OUR SELECTED SPEAKERS



### **Russell Green**

Russell Green is the Treasurer at a stand alone community operated kinder called Yarra Warra Preschool in Melbourne's east. Yarra Warra has capacity for 84 students and offers 2 streams of 3 and 4 year old classes, along with a dedicated bush kinder area. Russell is passionate about the value of early learning and accelerated the introduction of 15 hours for 3 year old in 2024, which required significant planning and recruitment in 2023. Russell is now focused on setting the kinder up to aspire to an Excellent rating (currently Exceeding). Outside of kinder, Russell works at Deloitte to support management teams develop strategic and operational value creation programs. Russell is an accountant by trade and holds an MBA.



### **Sue Knowles**

Sue is the Educational Leader & Teacher at Waverley Meadows Pre School. Sue has been teaching for many years and has enjoyed her choice of career immensely. The centre has expanded its program significantly over the last ten years to incorporate Nature Kinder programs for both three and four-year-old programs, The Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden program, a Pet therapist as well as an association with Seeing Eye Dogs Australia where we care for a puppy in training each year as part of our program.



### **Greg Norton**

Greg Norton is the Executive Director of the Quality Assessment and Regulation Division (QARD). QARD is located within the Early Childhood Education Group of the Department of Education, the Victorian Regulatory Authority. Since July 2021, Greg has focused on leading QARD's strategic vision and purpose to encourage the delivery of high-quality education across 5,000 early childhood education and care services and ensuring the safety, health and wellbeing of children using those services across Victoria.

Prior to working in this role, Greg was the Executive Director of Training Market Services within the Higher Education and Skills Group in the Department of Education and has previously worked in national policy development and negotiation, including the development of the National Quality Framework.



## OUR SELECTED SPEAKERS



### **Rhonda Livingstone**

Rhonda is the National Education Leader and General Manager of ACECQA's Leadership, Quality and Regulatory Support Group. Rhonda brings a wealth of experience to this role, having worked in preschools, long day care centres and as an assessor, developer and deliverer of programs and services for both government and non-government organisations.



### **Melissa MacMaster**

Melissa is a dedicated and transformative leader of people, who is driven to motivate and inspire those around her through strong relationships built on trust and transparency. Melissa endeavours to find the uniqueness in each person and to assist them to appreciate it in both their own work and the work of others. She believes in life-long learning and that building the capacity of both individuals and teams, as well as fostering creative problem solving, to promote best outcomes for all. Melissa is a strong advocate for the importance of high-quality early childhood education and care and works tirelessly to ensure that all children have access to high quality, inclusive programs regardless of their background. Equity is at the forefront of her work with children, families, and teams, to bring about positive change.

Melissa has worked in early childhood for over 20 years and is a visionary in her field. She is an innovative and influential thinker and someone who continuously exceeds National Early Years standards. Melissa has a Masters in Leadership, a Bachelor in Multidisciplinary Studies, majoring in Psychology and Women's Rights and is a qualified Trainer and Assessor.



### **Dr Zid Mancenido**

Dr Zid Mancenido is the Senior Manager, Research and Evaluation of the Australian Education Research Organisation where he leads a team of practitioners, researchers, and policy analysts to generate high-quality evidence, make high-quality evidence accessible, and enhance the use of evidence across Early Childhood Education and Care services and schools across Australia. Having started his career as a teacher, he has experience across research, policy, and practice in Australia, Singapore, the Philippines, and the USA. He holds a PhD in Education Policy and Programme Evaluation from Harvard Graduate School of Education, where he is also appointed as a Lecturer on Education teaching courses in education policy and teacher education.



## OUR SELECTED SPEAKERS



### Sage Michaels

Sage has over 10 years of experience working in strategy, projects, business development, member and stakeholder engagement roles. She is a values-driven leader and transformation specialist with extensive experience delivering digital and service transition projects. Sage leads ELAA's Strategy and Projects teams, ensuring ELAA remains sustainable whilst delivering quality and valued solutions. Sage builds effective relationships with multiple stakeholders including ELAA members, government departments, contractors, and commercial partners.



### Leanne Rodriguez

Recently joining ELAA as the Best Start - Best Life Reform and Engagement Advisor, Leanne brings over 20 years of experience in Early Childhood Education and Care settings, as well as a recent focus on youth mental health. Throughout her career, Leanne has held diverse roles encompassing leadership, management, teaching, and educational leadership across various settings including long day care, sessional kindergarten, profit, not-for-profit, stand-alone, and EYM settings. Leanne is a passionate advocate for quality education for all children in the two years prior to school, as well as for educator wellbeing and mental health.

Additionally, Leanne is trained in trauma-informed practices and embraces relational pedagogy, emphasising the importance of building meaningful relationships and connections in early childhood education and care settings. Leanne also serves as a child safety and quality advisor, contributing her expertise to ensure the highest standards of safety and quality in early childhood programs.



### Stephanie Simopoulos

Stephanie started in the sector in 2008 as an Educator before growing and becoming a Centre Manager in 2013. She worked across a number of different services, with varying socioeconomic needs and philosophies. At the end of 2022, Stephanie made the decision to step away from Centre Management but wanted to stay connected with and support the sector, which is what she has found within anzuk. Stephanie loves working with like minded people who are passionate about progressive and contemporary themes in early education. She loves knowing every day that the Educators that they place in services are positively and thoughtfully impacting children's lives.

## OUR PARTNERS



ANZUK EDUCATION –  
Early Childhood Education and Care  
sector workforce recruitment services



BUNNINGS TRADE –  
hardware, landscaping, and  
infrastructure improvement supplies



ENROL NOW –  
digital enrolment management  
platform providers



HESTA –  
superannuation fund and advice



OFFICEWORKS –  
business equipment, technology,  
office, and art supplies

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact [memberships@elaa.org.au](mailto:memberships@elaa.org.au) or call 03 9489 3500

[www.elaa.org.au](http://www.elaa.org.au)



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