

FLYING START

EARLY CHILDHOOD AWARDS
2026 Finalists



Government of
South Australia

Flying Start

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY



From the heart:

We acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples as the First peoples of South Australia and as custodians of the lands, waters, skies and Communities where we live, learn and raise children.

We recognise Aboriginal peoples as having the longest living Culture, raising children safe and strong in their identity, Community, Culture, and connection to Country.

We pay our deep respects to Elders past and present, and their role as the first knowledge sharers for children. We follow in their footsteps.

Aboriginal peoples, working with and for children, are central in shaping our work. Their wisdom, advice, and guidance enriches our practices, creating a more inclusive and Culturally safe environment for children and families.

We respect Aboriginal peoples' ways of being, doing and wise practices guiding our continual learning. Together we walk and build stronger, more supportive Communities for all children.



WELCOME & THANK YOU

Minister's message

Hon Lucy Hood MP, Minister for Education, Training and Skills

Welcome to the inaugural Flying Start Early Childhood Awards.

These awards were launched to shine a spotlight and share the stories of outstanding educators, leaders, professionals and services shaping the future of early learning in South Australia.

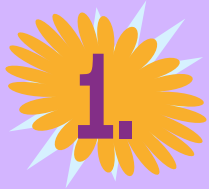
The response was nothing short of overwhelming. More than 180 nominations were received from throughout the state across 7 individual and service categories, highlighting the passion, dedication and impact early childhood professionals and services are clearly demonstrating.

Congratulations to all those who submitted an application and the 21 finalists for the positive impact you are achieving at your service, in your community and for the lives of children.

I'm sure tonight will be a fantastic event and that these awards will be successful in the years to come. Thank you for continuing to give South Australia's youngest learners the very best start in life.



AWARD CATEGORIES



Warm & Welcoming Award



Uplifting Quality Award



Outstanding Partnership & Collaboration Award



Aboriginal Early Childhood Award



Early Childhood Educator of the Year Award



Early Childhood Teacher of the Year Award



Excellence in Early Childhood Leadership Award

WARM & WELCOMING AWARD

Finalists



Ardtornish Children's Centre Kaurna Country

Ardtornish Children's Centre offers families a place to connect and engage with services and other families from birth including through CAFHS mothers' groups, playgroups, occasional care and preschool. Children and families are engaged in decision making and held at the centre of everything the service does.



Kadina Child Care Centre Narungga Country

Kadina Child Care Centre clearly demonstrates the positive impact of the service's family and community engagement practices over time, with strong examples of improved inclusion, cultural understanding and confidence for children and families. The use of parent perspectives adds credibility and effectively demonstrates the difference these practices have made.



Lockleys Child Care & Early Learning Centre Kaurna Country

Lockleys Child Care & Early Learning Centre has created a culture where families feel genuinely welcomed, valued and supported, particularly those navigating additional challenges. The centre demonstrates a commitment to inclusion, family partnership and individualised support with the nomination being from a parent noting Lockleys has become a trusted village for the family.

UPLIFTING QUALITY AWARD

Finalists



Campbelltown Community Children's Centre

Kaurua Country

Campbelltown Community Children's Centre demonstrates a genuine commitment to continuous improvement, fostering a positive workplace culture, consistency in practice, and excellence in outcomes for children, families, and educators.



Goodstart Early Learning Burton

Kaurua Country

Goodstart Early Learning Burton has demonstrated sustained growth in quality through a strong focus on staff development, continuity of care, shared learning, and meaningful everyday interactions that enhance outcomes for children and families.



Prospect Community Early Education and Care

Kaurua Country

Prospect Community Early Education & Care has implemented quality improvement through upgrading an outdoor space to create a community garden and using the space in a way that fosters collaboration, and supports learning, wellbeing and inclusion.

OUTSTANDING PARTNERSHIP & COLLABORATION AWARD

Finalists



Goodstart Early Learning

in partnership with Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS)

Kaurna Country

The partnership between Goodstart Early Learning and CaFHS has made a significant impact on children, families, and the community by increasing participation in 3-year-old health and development checks and supporting early identification and intervention for children who may benefit from additional support.



Murray Bridge Education Office

Calm, Capable, Curious and Connected (C4) Partnership
Ngarrindjeri Country, Narungga Country and Meru Country

The Calm, Capable, Curious and Connected (C4) Partnership was established in response to shared workforce challenges across 17 rural and regional preschools in the Murraylands, Waikerie, the Coorong and the Mallee. The partnership has demonstrated positive changes in educator confidence and practice when supporting children's regulation needs. Educators report significant benefits from peer support and collaboration, particularly given the isolated communities they serve.



Novita Let's Chat program

in partnership with Reynella Community Children's Centre
Kaurna Country

Novita's Let's Chat program, in partnership with Reynella Community Children's Centre, strengthens children's communication skills and confidence while building educator capability in delivering effective multimodal communication strategies. Through collaboration and shared expertise, the service is creating positive and lasting outcomes for children and educators alike.

ABORIGINAL EARLY CHILDHOOD AWARD

Finalists



Crystal Brook Kindergarten Nukunu Country

Crystal Brook Kindergarten demonstrates a strong commitment to embedding Aboriginal culture, identity and Community in everyday practice. Through partnerships with Aboriginal families, the Nukunu Board, cultural advisors, artists and Aboriginal young people, Community knowledge informs curriculum, environments and decision-making.

Port Lincoln Children's Centre Incorporated



Port Lincoln Children's Centre Barngarla Country

Port Lincoln Children's Centre demonstrates a strong commitment to Aboriginal family and Community leadership. Aboriginal Elders play an active role in supporting families, while parents and carers contribute to governance, planning and decision-making.



Port Pirie West Children's Centre Nukunu Country

Port Pirie West Children's Centre demonstrates a strong whole-service commitment to Aboriginal culture, identity and Community. Aboriginal perspectives are embedded in everyday practice, with Community voices influencing programs, environments, professional learning and future planning.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

Finalists



Marie Flomo

Highway Child Care & Early Learning Centre
Kaurna Country

Marie creates an inclusive environment where every child feels valued, heard, and supported. Through her nurturing relationships and genuine care, she fosters a strong sense of belonging, making a lasting difference in the lives of children and their families.



Michaela-Anne Michie

Whyalla Early Learning Centre
Barngarla Country

Michaela-Anne creates inclusive, sensory-rich learning experiences that support children with diverse needs. Her innovative use of educational resources, commitment to continuous professional learning, and dedication to improving outcomes for children make her a highly valued educator who fosters participation and wellbeing for all children.



Rebecca Shillabeer

Port Lincoln Children's Centre
Barngarla Country

Rebecca is a passionate advocate for Aboriginal children who has made a lasting contribution to children, families, and educators through her dedication and commitment to high-quality early childhood education. Her collaborative approach to child-led, play-based learning continue to inspire positive outcomes across her learning community.

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Finalists



Qiaoyun Dai

Forbes Children's Centre
Kaurna Country

Qiaoyun inspires children to lead their own learning through inquiry-based experiences and thoughtful teaching while supporting diverse learning needs. Her commitment to Kaurna language and Country, combined with reflective practice, mentoring, and continuous professional growth, exemplifies excellence in early childhood education.



Rosina Rawlings

Park Holme Community Children's Centre
Kaurna Country

Rosina demonstrates outstanding intentional teaching, creating meaningful learning experiences that build strong relationships, foster collaboration, and evolve from children's interests. Her thoughtful practice extends learning beyond the classroom, delivering positive outcomes for children, families, and colleagues.



Shani Stoeckel

Diagonal Road Community Children's Centre
Kaurna Country

Shani skilfully balances child-led play with intentional teaching, supporting diverse learners through strong family partnerships and inclusive practice. As a valued mentor and reflective educator, she makes a positive impact on children and families.

EXCELLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP AWARD

Finalists



Emily McNair

Trinity College Kindergarten / Pre-School
Kaurua Country

Emily shows leadership through an evidence-informed, coaching-based approach that strengthens educator capability and promotes sustainable improvement across three preschools. Emily's leadership is characterised by collaboration, psychological safety and a strong focus on developing educators as confident and independent professionals.



Jane Parolin

Bower Education—Cranley House Nursery School and ELC
Kaurua Country

Jane excels at building shared frameworks that strengthen educator decision-making, reflective practice, and professional judgement. Through a strong coaching approach, she develops the capability of others and supports continuous improvement in teaching and learning.



Kellie Bails

Port Pirie West Children's Centre
Nukunu Country

Kellie demonstrates authentic, relational, and strategic leadership that drives capability building, service improvement, and positive outcomes for children and families. She leads with purpose, fostering strong relationships while creating sustainable improvements across her service.

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