Koorana
Child & Family Services

# 50 Years

# Acknowledgements

**Koorana Child & Family Services** gratefully acknowledges the invaluable contributions of **Morgan A. Fitzpatrick**, Chief Executive Officer, and **Vicki Battisti**, former Chief Executive Officer, whose leadership, knowledge and personal reflections have helped bring Koorana's 50-year history to life.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the families, employees, volunteers, Board members and community partners, past and present, who have contributed their stories, photographs and memories to this commemorative publication.

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Koorana
Child & Family Services

# From community roots to shared possibilities

**Koorana 1976–2026**

*50 years of creating possibilities*
*for children and families*

***What began as a local response to families in 1976 has grown into an organisation supporting children and young people across early childhood education, early childhood intervention and allied health, and child and family supports.***

***The programs, places and systems have changed many times. The belief underneath them has endured: every child should have the opportunity to belong, participate, learn and discover all of life's possibilities.***




Preschool Community Centre, Canterbury, c. 1980

# 1976–2026

We have spent **50 years** creating a more inclusive and welcoming community, where every child and family is supported to thrive and celebrated for their unique abilities and backgrounds.

# Contents


6 **INTRODUCTION**

7 A message from our CEO— **Morgan A. Fitzpatrick**

8 A message from our former CEO — **Vicki Battisti**

13 1976–1986 — **Before Koorana was an organisation, it was a community response**

16 1987–2001 — **A community service becomes an organisation**

18 **1995 Vicki Joins Koorana**

23 2002–2008 — **Bringing families together**

39 2009–2015 — **New programs. Changing practice**

41 2018 — 2019 — **Growing with Families**

45 **25 Years of Change: A Special Tribute to Vicki Battisti**

52 **2020: New leadership in an extraordinary year  Voices across Koorana**

57 **2025–2026: Building the foundations the next chapter**

59 **2026 and beyond: A bright future ahead**

60 **Voices across Koorana**

62 **Part of the Koorana story**

64 **Partnerships made possibilities practical**

65 **50 Years. 50 Stories. The next fifty years.**

# Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge the traditional owners of the land in which we work and deliver services across metropolitan Sydney. We pay our deepest respects to Elders past and present.

At Koorana, we are grateful for the opportunity to walk alongside First Nations peoples, to listen, to learn, and to honour their enduring cultures, languages and traditions.

For thousands of generations, First Nations peoples have held rich practices of caring for children—through family, storytelling, play, and deep connection to Country.

These are traditions that continue to guide and inspire us in our work, and that we seek to respect, learn from, and embed for future generations.

We thank the traditional custodians for their generosity of spirit, their culture, and their ongoing truth-telling. We commit ourselves to building respectful partnerships and contributing to a future grounded in recognition, inclusion, and shared responsibility.

**Koorana's RAP Artist:**
**Bianca Caldwell**



SPECIAL FEATURE

# A story of connection, Country and community

**An artwork gifted to former CEO Vicki Battisti at her farewell tells a story of Koorana's growth and the relationships that made it possible. Vicki recalls that an Aboriginal early childhood educator from the Roselands Preschool team arranged for a local Aboriginal artist to create the painting, drawing on Koorana's history and the memories of long-serving colleagues.**

The central circle represents the original Koorana community. The surrounding yellow dots evoke the local community, while pathways extend outward towards further circles and gatherings, representing Koorana's growth into new suburbs and communities.

Handprints around the edges bring people into the story. The painting's warm ochre, brown and yellow tones give this history a powerful visual expression.

Created as a personal farewell gift, the artwork captures a significant chapter in Koorana's history. It reflects the connections formed over many years between children, families, educators, staff and the communities they served.

More than a record of organisational growth, the painting is a reminder of the people and relationships behind Koorana's journey. It remains a meaningful tribute to Vicki's contribution and the shared history of those who helped shape the organisation.

A REFLECTION ON OUR JOURNEY

**“Our growth is not simply measured by the number of services we provide, but by the relationships we build and the communities we connect.”**



Artwork was commissioned as a farewell gift for Vicki and represents Koorana’s growing community connections.

INTRODUCTION

# 50 years of possibilities

**In this book, we celebrate the people, moments and partnerships that have shaped Koorana since 1976.**

Koorana's history is not only a record of programs, buildings or dates. It lives in the children who found new ways to participate, the families who felt understood and supported, the dedicated team members who kept asking what their community needed next, and the partnerships that helped ideas become a reality.

Our story began in 1976 when local women came together to create a place for play, connection, information and support. What followed was not one fixed model, but fifty years of adaptation — from a small community response to inclusive preschools, early childhood intervention and allied health, supported playgroups and child and family support across Greater Sydney.

This book brings together annual reports, archival records, oral histories and the voices of people who have been part of Koorana across generations. Some stories are well documented; others are still being rediscovered. Together, they show how Koorana changed as families, communities and service systems changed around it, and the enduring legacy Koorana has left across thousands of lives.

***At the centre is a belief that has remained remarkably consistent: every child should have the opportunity to belong, participate and discover what is possible.***

### Morgan A. Fitzpatrick | CEO | February 2020 - present

# A message from our CEO

**To everyone who has been part of Koorana's story — thank you. This anniversary belongs to you.**



**Morgan A. Fitzpatrick**
*Chief Executive Officer*
*2020 - present*

Fifty years is a remarkable milestone, but Koorana's story has never been about time alone. It is about people — the families who trusted us, the children who showed us what participation can look like, the employees who kept asking how we could do better, and the community partners who helped turn ideas into action.

Our organisation began because a group of local women saw a need and responded. That instinct still feels familiar today. We continue to listen closely to families, challenge barriers to inclusion and build practical responses when systems do not work as well as they should.

As we celebrate what has been built since 1976, we are also looking forward. Inclusion cannot simply be an aspiration. It must be visible in classrooms, community programs, policy and everyday life.

Our responsibility for the next fifty years is to keep strengthening what works, share what we learn and create more opportunities for children of all abilities to belong and thrive.

### Vicki Battisti | Former CEO | March 1995 - February 2020

# A message from our former CEO

What an absolute delight and thrill it is for me to celebrate this wonderful milestone!  It's given me the opportunity to reflect on what was the most exciting time of my career and the deep love I developed for "everything Koorana."

The organisation has had a lasting impact on my life. I fondly remember the countless moments that shaped continuous change, the innovative Koorana team, an astute and insightful Board of Directors and most importantly the very many families who always were, are and will continue to be at Koorana's very core. They have all walked alongside me and remembering their support ideas and participation warms my heart.

My tenure at Koorana was at a time of continuous change. Internal government departmental adjustments, shifts into whom and how Koorana needed to report, tight funding and stronger accountabilities, all necessary and welcomed but challenging, nevertheless.

With the changing operating environment came many opportunities to increase service provision, develop new programs and adjust service delivery to better support the families in ways that suited them best.

Now in 2026, to witness Koorana's strong outward thinking stewardship, continued growth and development, unwavering child and family focus and an ongoing commitment to maintaining 50 years of its core values is indeed, inspirational.

**Congratulations to Morgan, the Board of Directors, staff and families.**



***Vicki Battisti***
*Former Chief Executive Officer*
*1995 - 2020*

Key moments | Our Journey

# Fifty years at a glance

**1976** — **A place for play, connection and support:** Local women respond to what families need and begin the community effort that becomes Koorana.

**1987** — **A community service becomes Koorana:** Formalisation provides a foundation for growing programs, employing staff and planning for the future.

**2002** — **Support moves further into the community:** Ten Supported Playgroups bring early learning, family connection and practical support closer to families across Canterbury and Bankstown.

**2009** — **Services become more connected:** Education, therapy and family support increasingly come together around children's participation in everyday settings.

**2014** — **Families gain one connected team:** The Key Worker Model gives families a main point of contact supported by the expertise of a broader transdisciplinary team.

**2016** — **A new service system:** The launch of the NDIS brought new supports and ways of working to families, and Koorana adapted to the new environment. In line with this, Koorana expands its age range to 18.

**2026** — **Inclusive preschool reaches a new community:** Bass Hill Preschool opens, expanding Koorana's inclusive early-education footprint in its fiftieth year.



Children playing with a puzzle at Koorana Phillip Street Preschool, c. 2007.

# Before Koorana was an organisation, it was a community response.

In late 1976, a group of local women came together around a simple but powerful idea: families needed somewhere to connect, children needed opportunities to learn through play, and parents needed practical information and support.

What began as a playgroup grew from the experiences of families themselves. The group wanted more than somewhere for parents to bring children. There was an ambition for a resource centre where families could find information about children's development, play and available supports.

There was no large organisation, established service system or long-term blueprint. There was a need, and a group of people willing to act.

Those beginnings established a pattern that would continue throughout Koorana's history: listen to families, recognise what is missing and work together to create a practical response.

**"It was not only a place for children to play. It was also a place where parents could find information, connection and support."**



Children enjoying sandpit play at Koorana, c. 2003.

1976 — 1986

## The women who started Koorana

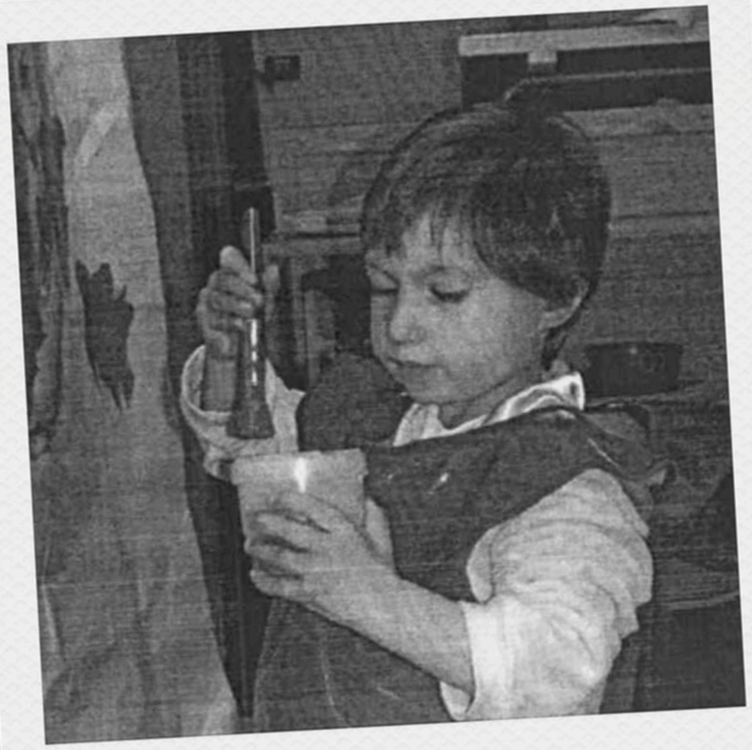
Koorana's public history records a group of local women who recognised the need for a formal centre focused on playgroup activities. Their initiative was practical, but it was also forward-looking.

There was a member of that early group that had a child with disability and became a strong advocate for parents and inclusion. At a time when children with disability were often separated from community life, even the expectation that families should have greater support and children should have broader opportunities challenged the assumptions of the day.

The founding group organised, sought funding and built a case for premises as its playgroup and emerging preschool activities grew.

## A house becomes a place for community connection

The founding group approached the federal government for support to establish a preschool and community centre.



Child participating in the home base program, c. 2006.

Because the group was not yet incorporated, Canterbury Council played an important role in auspicing the emerging service.

Koorana's current public history records that, once funding was secured, a house in Belmore became the new centre.

The modest premises gave a grassroots community effort a visible home — somewhere families could return to, relationships could grow and new programs could take shape.

**The first home represented an important shift: an informal community response was becoming a service with a place of its own.**

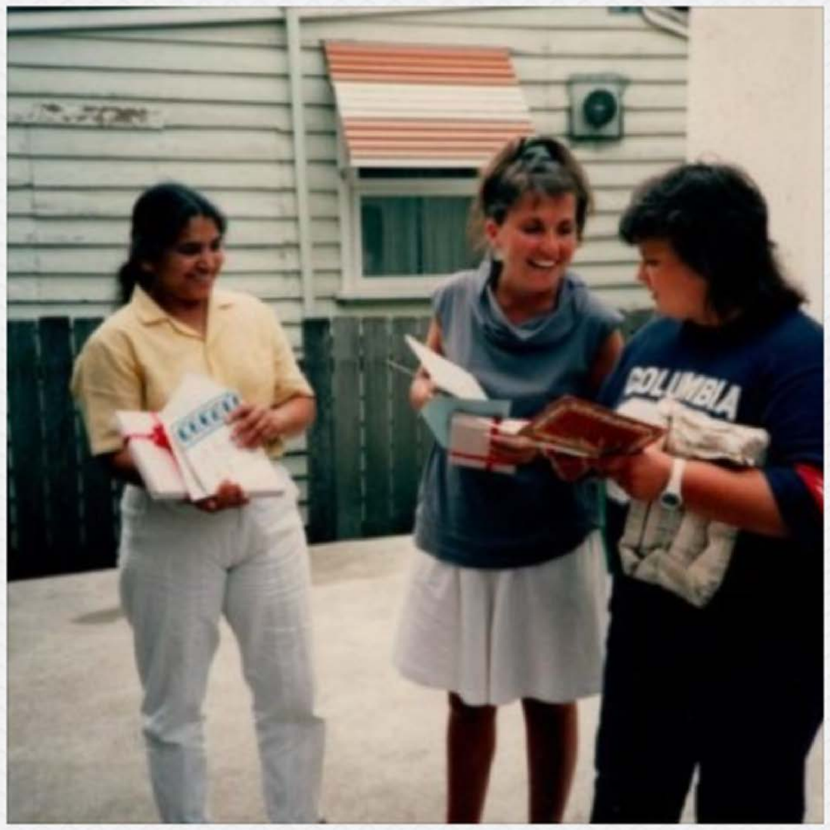


Early Childhood Educator
practising everyday skills at
Phillip Street Preschool, c. 2005

## A story that almost ended

Community organisations are rarely built in a straight line. The early committee eventually lapsed and the service closed for a period before the community effort came together again around 1979 or 1980.

Koorana's survival was not inevitable. The organisation continued because people were prepared to regroup, take responsibility and keep responding to local need.



Early Childhood Educators
Croydon St, c. 1980

## The beginnings of inclusion

Inclusion was not yet the established language of early childhood and disability services, but Koorana's history suggests the idea was present early.

Families wanted children to have opportunities within their community, and the organisation increasingly connected play, preschool and support rather than treating disability as a reason for children to be separated.

Over time this became one of Koorana's defining characteristics: additional support was brought into everyday environments so that children could participate alongside their peers.

The model would continue to evolve for decades — from early playgroups and preparation programs, to inclusive preschool places, transdisciplinary practice and today's integrated model and team-around-the-child approach.

1976 — 1986

## Key moments | Our Journey

# 1976–1986: The first decade

Local women identify the need for a playgroup/community centre and seek federal funding. — Late 1976

A house in Belmore becomes the early centre. — 1978

Part-time preschool activity develops alongside playgroup/resource support. — 1979

Temporary closure followed by renewed activity. — 1979–1980

Koorana approaches a new phase of formalisation after a decade of community-led work. — 1986



Growing to support more children and families, c. 2005.

# A community service becomes an organisation

**The next chapter brought a formal identity, growing services and an increasingly intentional commitment to inclusion.**

Koorana's public history records 1987 as a defining year. After approximately ten years of operation and close collaboration with Canterbury Council, the Canterbury Municipal Preschool Community Centre was formed.

Later that year the service became an Incorporated Association and was renamed Koorana Child and Family Centre Inc.

Formalisation gave a growing community service a structure capable of holding greater responsibility: employing staff, managing funding, operating programs and planning for the future.

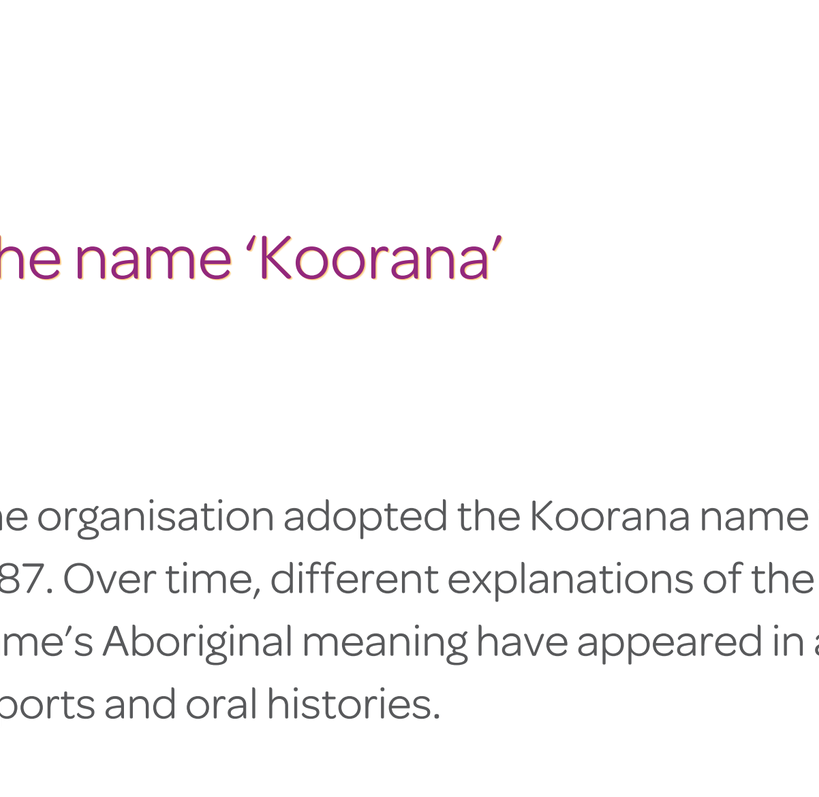
The legal structure would change again three decades later, but 1987 marked an important transition from a community initiative into the organisation recognised as Koorana.

1987 2001

## The name ‘Koorana’

The organisation adopted the Koorana name in 1987. Over time, different explanations of the name’s Aboriginal meaning have appeared in annual reports and oral histories.

We understand that at its core, the term ‘Koorana’ means to **‘bring forth the young.’** This reflects Koorana’s vision of welcoming all children, regardless of ability or background. All children are welcome to participate.



Planning, supporting and growing together, c. 2007.

## A small team with a broad brief

By the mid-1990s, Koorana was still a small organisation, but its brief was already broad.

Staff at the time recall a preschool operating alongside a disability-focused playgroup, home-based education, a preparation group and a small occasional-care activity. Staff were part-time, resources were limited and roles often overlapped.

The organisation worked with what it had. Relationships, creativity and persistence filled many of the gaps that today would be covered by larger teams and more formal systems.

**Importantly, children needing additional support were increasingly connected with the preschool environment. Koorana’s inclusive philosophy was being translated into everyday practice.**

# 1995: Vicki joins Koorana

**A new chapter of leadership, growth and inclusion.**

Vicki Battisti recalls joining Koorana in 1995 and finding a small, resourceful organisation with significant potential.

She remembers roughly seven part-time employees and a service that needed stronger infrastructure if it was going to grow. The premises were modest and funding could be difficult to piece together, but the commitment to inclusion was already visible.

Vicki's leadership would span approximately 25 years, through growth in preschool, disability support, playgroups, therapy, family services and major funding reform.

Her detailed personal story appears later in this book. Here, her arrival helps mark the beginning of a period when Koorana's small-team model started developing into a broader community organisation.



Vicki Battisti, whose arrival in 1995 began around 25 years of leadership at Koorana.

> ***Koorana has always been about the people, the dedicated staff who go above and beyond to create opportunities for every child, and the families who discover their strength and confidence to advocate for their children. That is the heart of Koorana, and it always will be.***
>
> ***- Vicki, Former Koorana CEO***



Child learning through play c.2002

## Making room for inclusion

As demand increased, Croydon Street became increasingly constrained due to its size. Vicki remembers advocating repeatedly for better premises and additional funding because the organisation could not keep expanding within the available space.

The opportunity to amalgamate with McCallums Hill Child Care Centre created a path to Phillip Street in Roselands. Historical financial notes record an amalgamation on 8 May 2001, followed by transfer of the property on 4 April 2002.

Vicki recalls redirecting a $50,000 renovation grant and receiving a further $50,000 interest-free loan from Canterbury Council to help prepare the site.

Phillip Street gave Koorana room to strengthen an inclusive preschool model built around smaller groupings, additional staffing and gradual participation for children who needed more support.

1987

2001

# Two preschools. One philosophy.

By 2002, Koorana operated Croydon Street Preschool in Lakemba and Phillip Street Preschool in Roselands.

Annual reporting described play-based programs, active family participation and inclusive environments where children were treated as individuals and supported to feel valued within the group.

For children who needed additional support, inclusion was not an add-on to the preschool day. Specialist educators and, increasingly, therapy professionals worked with preschool teams so that support could be connected with play, communication, relationships and participation.

The sites were different in size and history, but they reflected a shared belief: children learn best when they are welcomed as part of the group.



Every child welcomed, valued and included, c. 2002.

1987 — 2001



Bringing stories to life through puppet play at Koorana's Phillip Street Preschool, c. 2007.

## Key moments | Our Journey

# 1987–2001: Becoming Koorana

Formalisation, incorporation and adoption of the Koorana Child and Family Centre Inc. name.

1987

Preschool, home-based learning, preparation and disability support develop within a small-team model.

1990s

Vicki Battisti formally joins the organisation.

1995

Growing demand puts pressure on Croydon Street capacity.

Late 1990s

Historical financial notes record amalgamation with McCallums Hill Child Care Centre.

2001

Property transfer associated with Phillip Street is recorded.

2002

# Bringing families together

A new decade brought rapid community expansion: more playgroups, a broader age range, a larger workforce and services delivered closer to where families lived.

Beyond its programs, Koorana strengthened community connections through parent support groups, annual Family Fun Days and end-of-year excursions. Families, staff and Board members came together for shared experiences, from visits to the zoo and pony rides at Centennial Park to drumming activities at Carrs Park, where 100 drums were provided for children to enjoy.

Made possible through donations and support from local clubs, these gatherings created opportunities for families to connect, build friendships and develop a sense of belonging.



Families at the heart of Koorana, c. 2003.

> ***Some of the most meaningful connections happened beyond our programs, when children, families and staff came together to share experiences, build friendships and create a real sense of belonging.***

2002 — 2008

# 2002: Responding across two communities

In 2002, Koorana secured Families First funding to establish ten Supported Playgroups across the Canterbury and Bankstown local government areas.

The funding represented more than a new program: it expanded Koorana significantly into Bankstown and created a new way of connecting with families in familiar community settings.

Supported Playgroups combined early learning with practical family support. Children could learn through play while parents and carers built relationships, asked questions, received information and connected with local services.

The model echoed Koorana's original community roots: meet families where they are, make support approachable and build connection before problems become crises.



Supporting children and families across two communities, c. 2002

# 2003: Ten playgroups begin

After months of preparation, the ten Supported Playgroups began operating in early 2003.

Annual reporting recorded around 150 families and 210 children participating, with groups quickly reaching capacity and developing waiting lists.

Schools, neighbourhood centres and community organisations provided venues and practical support. The growth also created new staffing, transport and administration needs.

Koorana secured office space on Canterbury Road to support the expanding team. What had once been a very small centre-based organisation was developing a much wider community footprint.



**Bringing children and families together through play c. 2003**

> ***"Koorana was built by people who believed we could always do better for children and families. It was never just about programs or buildings. It was about people who cared enough to make a difference."***
>
> ***- Vicki, Former Koorana CEO***

# 2004: Support extends to age 18

In 2004, Koorana received funding for case management and brokerage support for families of children and young people from birth to 18 years with disability.

This was an important shift. Koorana's roots were in early childhood, but families' needs did not end when a child left preschool.

Case management helped families navigate services, information and practical supports during periods of change or complexity. It also widened Koorana's understanding of the family journey across childhood and adolescence.

The expansion foreshadowed the broader 0–18 service model Koorana would later develop under the NDIS and allied health programs.



Extending support to more children and families, C. 2004

HISTORY FEATURE

# Supported Playgroups and Families First

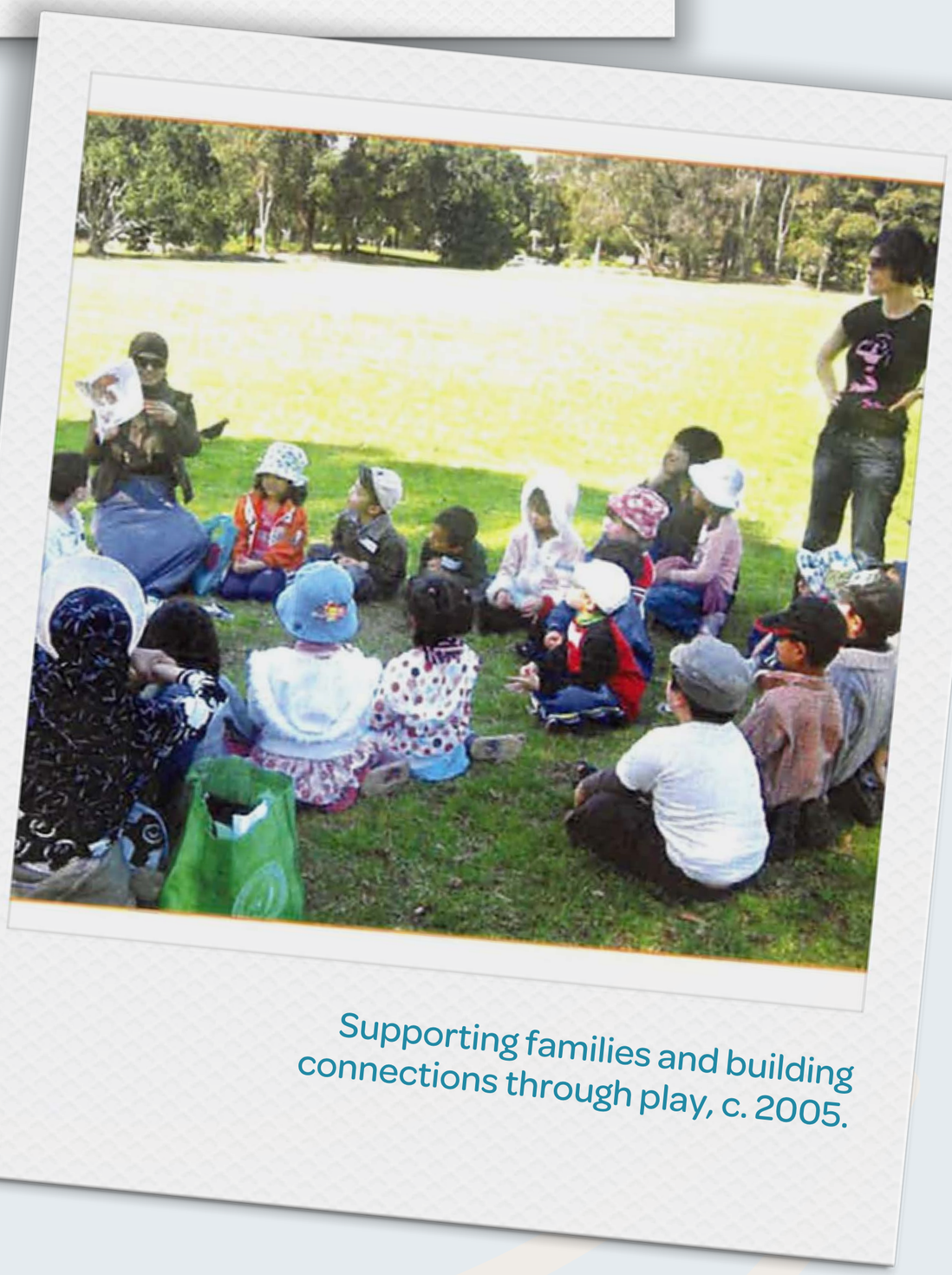
Supported Playgroups marked a significant expansion in Koorana's reach beyond its preschool walls. Vicki remembers being invited to contribute to local consultation and planning associated with the Families First initiative. Families connected to Koorana were consulted about their needs, and the work helped shape locally relevant family-support responses, including Supported Playgroups and Schools as Communities.

Vicki describes Koorana successfully applying to deliver ten Supported Playgroups across Canterbury and Bankstown, creating more opportunities for parents and carers to connect, share experiences and support children's early learning. She recalls the approach as a commitment to early intervention: working alongside families before difficulties escalate, rather than waiting until crisis point.

The story also has an important distinction. An earlier disability-specific playgroup operating in shared premises was an independent parent-led group, not a Koorana program. Vicki recalls the sometimes difficult work of creating opportunities for children with and without disability to participate together.



Family at Playgroup. c, 2004



Supporting families and building connections through play, c. 2005.



Thirty years of connection, inclusion and community, c. 2006

## 2005: A much larger organisation

Annual reporting in 2005 described an organisation that had grown substantially across centre-based, home-based and Supported Playgroup services.

By May 2005, Koorana reported around 35 staff — a striking change from the small team a decade earlier.

Growth brought opportunity, but it also required stronger systems, supervision and organisational infrastructure. The challenge was no longer only how to secure another program or another grant. It was how to sustain quality while supporting more families across more places.

That tension — growth without losing the relational heart of the service — would remain a recurring theme throughout Koorana's history.

## 2006: Thirty years of community

Koorana marked its 30th anniversary in 2006. The celebration looked back to the original community group and recognised how far the organisation had travelled.  Andy Sammut (council member at the time) addressed the AGM, reflecting on early challenges and the transformation of modest beginnings into an organisation supporting children of all abilities and their families.

The anniversary also reflected the cultural diversity of the communities Koorana served. Flags, including those created by children, became a visual expression of the nationalities, memories and identities represented across Koorana families.

Thirty years in, Koorana was no longer a single local centre. It was a growing community organisation shaped by many languages, cultures and experiences.




Exploring colours and textures through hands-on play at Koorana Croydon Street Preschool. c, 2008

## 2007: A central base and a mobile service

In 2007, Koorana's head office and Canterbury Road staff relocated to Cleary Avenue in Belmore, giving the expanding organisation a stronger central base.

In the same year, Koorana and the Canterbury Child and Family Interagency piloted a mobile Play Bus. The two developments tell the story of Koorana's growth from opposite directions. One created a more stable organisational home.

The other deliberately moved beyond buildings, taking play, early learning and family connection into parks and community spaces.

The Play Bus reflected an idea that would become increasingly important: services can be more accessible when they travel towards families rather than expecting every family to travel towards a service.



Sharing smiles and discoveries during play at Koorana Phillip Street Preschool. c, 2008

2002 — 2008



Early Childhood Educator supporting a child's fine motor skills, c. 2009

## *2008–09: Preparing for a new phase*

By the end of this period, Koorana had two preschools, a strong community playgroup network, family support and early intervention activity across a much broader geographic area.

The organisation also changed its annual reporting from a calendar-year cycle to a financial-year cycle.

A major practice development was on the horizon. Approval under the Commonwealth Helping Children with Autism initiative opened the way for targeted autism programs, multidisciplinary home visiting and expanded therapy from 2009.

The next chapter would see Koorana's early intervention model become more specialised, more multidisciplinary and increasingly connected with evidence-based practice.



Building the foundations for the future, c. 2009



A growing team, united by a shared purpose, c. 2005

# New programs.
# Changing practice.



Finding new ways to support every child, c. 2008




Child at Koorana Preschool, c. 2007

**As services expanded, Koorana increasingly connected education, therapy and family support around the child's everyday life.**

2002 — 2008

## *2009: New autism-specific supports*

Following approval under the Helping Children with Autism program, Koorana introduced new autism-specific early intervention supports from 2009.

Programs included PlayLinks, multidisciplinary home visiting and other early intervention options. Annual reporting also records speech pathology and the development of therapy capacity at Belmore.

Historical documents from this period use terminology that reflects the language and frameworks of their time. In this book, we want to preserve this record, without repeating deficit-based descriptions as contemporary language.

What matters in the longer story is the direction of practice: increasingly multidisciplinary support, closer collaboration with families and more attention to participation in everyday settings.



Expanding support for autistic children and their families, 2009.

# 2011–12: A connected mix of services

By 2011–12, Koorana's annual report described a broad service mix: ten Supported Playgroups, four park and Play Bus locations, parent training and education, case management, early diagnosis support, two preschools and early childhood intervention and therapy.

At Phillip Street, PREP and PlayLinks provided small-group early intervention supported by special educators, speech pathology and occupational therapy. Home-based early learning reached families whose young children were not enrolled in other early childhood education or intervention.



Different services, one shared purpose, c. 2012



Working together to support every child c. 2012

The organisation was increasingly working across settings rather than expecting all support to happen in one place.

Preschool, home, playgroup and community were becoming connected parts of the same child-and-family experience.

## 2012–13: Inclusion becomes more intentional

The 2012–13 annual report described PREP and PlayLinks as small-group intervention programs operating within Phillip Street Preschool and supported by a specialist team.

Koorana explicitly described a transdisciplinary approach: different professional expertise was blended around each child's learning goals rather than operating as disconnected services.

The location of the programs within the preschool also created natural opportunities for children to join wider preschool play and learning when ready.

This was an important step in the evolution of Koorana's integrated practice. Inclusion was not simply a place offered to a child; it increasingly required professionals to plan together and adapt environments around participation.



Inclusion becoming part of everyday practice, c. 2013

## 2013–14: Playgroups reach more families

By 2013–14, Koorana was operating 14 Supported Playgroups across Canterbury and Bankstown, in both parks and community venues.

The move of some groups into parks increased visibility and accessibility. Some sessions grew to regular attendance of up to 50 children.

The playgroup team worked alongside community health, schools, family-support services and youth organisations, connecting families with information and support while children learned through play.

Across the year, Koorana reported services to more than 700 clients, over 9,300 hours of individual early intervention and more than 3,500 hours of group education and early intervention.

The figures show scale. The model still depended on something much simpler: familiar places, trusted relationships and practical support.



Bringing more families together through play, c. 2014




## 2014–15: One family, one connected team

In 2014–15, Koorana implemented a Transdisciplinary Key Worker Model across its intervention services.

A Key Worker became the family's main point of contact while drawing on specialist knowledge from the wider team. The approach was strengths-based and focused on supporting the child in natural environments.

During the year, Koorana's two preschools enrolled 158 children, including intervention support for 32 children with additional needs. Home and community-based early learning and therapy supported 128 children. More than 650 families attended Supported Playgroups.

Family services also included Early Connections, Early Links, case management, MyTime, SIBs Club and the SPOTTED inclusion-readiness project.

The service names varied. The direction was increasingly consistent: work with the family, connect expertise and support participation across everyday life.

# 2015–16: Forty years — and a new system ahead

As Koorana approached its 40th anniversary, the organisation was preparing for one of the largest funding reforms in Australian disability services. The 2015–16 annual report identifies preparation for the NDIS rollout in South West Sydney on 1 July 2016 as a major organisational focus.

Koorana refined its service model, strengthened its online presence and continued expanding early intervention to now support children and young people beyond the early years and to age 18. This intentional shift allowed the organisation to support children in the transition of broader system reform and to ensure they and their families were well supported on that journey.

It reported 996 individual therapy sessions, support for families of children up to 15 years, further implementation of the Transdisciplinary Key Worker model and development of a Behaviour Support Framework.

Forty years after a local playgroup began, Koorana was entering a national individualised-funding system. The challenge would be to adapt our operations without losing the collaborative practice that had developed over decades.



Forty years of growth, inclusion and connection, c. 2015

**Key moments | Our Journey**

# 2009–2015: How practice changed

Across this period, the shift can be seen in the way Koorana described its work.

From isolated programs **towards** coordinated child-and-family support.

From discipline-by-discipline intervention **towards** transdisciplinary collaboration.

From service-centre delivery **towards** homes, preschools, parks, schools and other natural settings.

From supporting the child alone **towards** building the confidence and capability of families and educators.

From a primarily early-childhood organisation **towards** support that increasingly reached school-aged children and young people.

Building connection through moments of care and encouragement. c, 2017

# Growing with families

## Navigating the NDIS transition: Choice, transition and complexity.

As the NDIS rolled out across South West Sydney, families began moving from block-funded services into individual plans.

Koorana served as an Early Childhood Early Intervention transition provider across South West and Inner West Sydney, helping families understand eligibility, planning and community connections.

Vicki Battisti remembers the change as difficult for services and staff. Billable hours, registration, audits and individual funding required new systems and new commercial discipline.
She also saw an important gain: families had greater choice about where they received support.

That choice made it even more important for Koorana to be clear about its own practice — family-centred, inclusive, collaborative and grounded in natural environments — rather than allowing a funding model to become the model of care.



Supporting families through the NDIS transition, c.2015

# 2018: Changing structure, protecting purpose

In 2018, Koorana completed its transition from an Incorporated Association to a Company Limited by Guarantee.

The governance change positioned the organisation for a more complex and competitive environment and strengthened the structure supporting future growth.
It was a legal and organisational change, not a change in purpose.



**Helping children and families find their own ways to participate, c.2018**



**Supporting families through the NDIS transition, c.2018**

Koorana's 2018 reporting still centred on inclusive preschool, community support and intervention. The organisation was adapting its structure so it could continue the work that had begun in 1976.

# 2018: Many ways to participate

The 2018 annual report shows the breadth Koorana had reached by this point.

Across a twelve-month period, the report recorded 3,613 children and young people supported across 84 suburbs. It documented two inclusive preschools, 801 families in 14 Supported Playgroups, and a wide intervention mix including transdisciplinary support, occupational therapy, speech pathology, physiotherapy, psychology and behaviour support, multidisciplinary services for older children, support coordination and school assessment clinics.

The numbers tell a story of scale, but the service mix tells another story: families rarely experience needs in neat organisational categories.

Koorana's model increasingly linked education, intervention and community support around the child and family.



Creating opportunities for every child to participate, c. 2018

# 2019: Widening the map

The 2018–19 year marked the completion of a three-year strategic plan and a five-year business vision.

Following market research, Koorana expanded its reach into the Georges River and Sutherland Shire areas and opened a Miranda office for onsite clinical work, group activities and as a base for mobile staff.

Start Strong Pathways and the Sector Capacity Building Program had also been established following funding agreements finalised in October 2018.

The 2019 annual report recorded 3,435 children and young people supported across 84 suburbs, alongside two preschools, intervention services, Supported Playgroups and capacity-building programs.

For Vicki, who was approaching the end of her 25-year tenure, it was a moment to look back at a vastly changed organisation and forward to what might come next.



**Reaching more communities and connecting with more families c.2019**

# 25 Years of Change
# A Special Tribute to Vicki Battisti

When Vicki joined Koorana, it was a small community organisation with a handful of part-time employees working across preschool, early intervention, a small preparation program and family support activities.

Resources were limited and the organisation was still finding ways to grow sustainably. But one thing was already firmly established: a belief in inclusion.

For Vicki, that belief became a guiding principle throughout the next 25 years.

During her time at Koorana, services expanded, locations changed, early intervention evolved and the disability sector underwent enormous reform. Yet through every change, she returned to the same idea: children have a right to be included.



A small team with a big commitment to children and families, c 2016

## A SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO VICKI BATTISTI

# Belonging in everyday moments

One of Vicki's most moving memories concerns a young child with profound medical and developmental support needs whose family wanted her to experience preschool alongside other children.

The team arranged additional staffing to support the whole centre. Educators shared responsibility for helping the child experience the ordinary life of the room: listening to music, being close to artwork and watching other children play. They learnt the care routines required to make her participation possible.

For Vicki, the memory captures inclusion not as a slogan, but as a daily choice made by a whole team — and a reminder that belonging is not measured by what a child can independently do



Inclusion in action across our community, c.2018

## A SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO VICKI BATTISTI

# Belonging in everyday moments

Some of Vicki's strongest memories are not of buildings or funding agreements, but of families. She remembers parents arriving uncertain about what the future might hold for their child — navigating diagnosis, disability and systems they had never encountered before.

Over time, she watched many of those parents become powerful advocates for their children. Vicki is cautious about the word 'empowerment'. She believes the strength already belongs to families. The role of professionals is to listen, share knowledge, provide support and help create the conditions in which that strength can emerge.

That philosophy became central to how she understood Koorana's work.

> **"Everybody has the capacity within themselves. What we do is scaffold you a little bit for a while. It's about drawing out that strength."**



Families at the heart of Koorana's journey, c. 2024

## A SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO VICKI BATTISTI

# Growing without losing the purpose

Across Vicki's leadership, Koorana grew from a small local service into a much larger organisation working across preschools, community settings, homes and disability services.

She advocated for better premises, helped guide the development of Phillip Street, saw Supported Playgroups expand into local communities and led the organisation through increasingly multidisciplinary early intervention.

The NDIS brought perhaps the most difficult operational transition. Staff had to adapt to billable services, new systems and a more commercial environment.

Vicki remembers using humour during one particularly tense period: at a Christmas gathering she brought a piñata bearing her own face and invited the team to take a swing.

Behind the joke was a serious leadership task — changing the organisation enough to remain viable while protecting the values that made Koorana distinctive.



A growing organisation with a shared commitment to inclusion, c. 2018

## A SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO VICKI BATTISTI

# What never changed

Across 25 years, almost everything around Koorana evolved. Services grew. Buildings changed. Teams became larger. Professional disciplines expanded. Funding models changed.

But when Vicki reflects on Koorana, she continually returns to children, families, inclusion and people prepared to advocate for what they believe is right.

For her, the essence of Koorana was never a particular program or building. It was the relationships between families and professionals, recognising the strengths already present within families, and continuing to ask how Koorana could create greater opportunities for children to participate, learn and belong.



Children, families and inclusion at the heart of Koorana, c.2019



**“Those things to me were the absolute essence of Koorana. It was about staff who would fight no matter what to get us where we needed to go.”**

PRACTICE MEMORY

# Family coaching beyond the therapy room

Vicki recalls an occupational therapist arranging online sessions with a family travelling overseas for an extended period. Relatives abroad joined the activities, helping the child continue familiar play and learning opportunities while away.

The experience demonstrated that early intervention is not confined to a weekly appointment: families and everyday relationships are essential to sustaining children's participation.

Without knowing it at the time, this family-centred practice model laid the foundations that would be instrumental in supporting Koorana in later years when COVID-19 required rapid change to service delivery.



Supporting children and families through everyday moments, c. 2019



Children playing together, c. 2020

# 2020: New leadership in an extraordinary year

February 2020 marked a major leadership transition as Vicki Battisti retired after 25 years and Morgan A. Fitzpatrick became Koorana's CEO.

Within weeks, COVID-19 transformed everyday life. Most Koorana employees moved to working from home overnight, while the preschools continued operating as essential services. Families received fee assistance and preschool teams adapted drop-off, pick-up and daily routines within rapidly changing health requirements.

Intervention, Supported Playgroups and community services shifted online where possible. Telehealth, digital resources and new ways of maintaining connection moved from optional tools to essential parts of service delivery.



Early Childhood Education during COVID-19, c. 2021



Morgan A. Fitzpatrick and Vicki Battisti at Vicki's farewell, c. 2020

The pandemic disrupted familiar routines, but it also accelerated Koorana's ability to work flexibly across physical and digital environments.

Where the preschools were able to continue operating, Koorana began integrated therapeutic services within the preschool environment, beginning the development of a new approach to our integrated practice model.

Through this period, the organisation navigated a significant change of leadership amongst the global pandemic. The leadership and resilience of Koorana's team during this period were defining features of an organisation that was determined to find solutions so that no family would be left behind.

# 2021: Connection in a digital world

COVID-19 continued to shape Koorana throughout 2020–21. The organisation developed digital models for NDIS and other services, and the experience expanded its ability to provide telehealth and online playgroups, even as face-to-face services returned.

Supported Playgroups and Start Strong Pathways were delivered online for approximately six months of the year. The report recorded 520 children attending playgroups, 157 Start Strong Pathways participants and 1,269 children and young people supported across 62 suburbs and 20 local government areas.

Our preschools continued to operate as essential services for most of the year, and continued to evolve our integrated therapeutic model.

The year demonstrated that connection could take different forms — and that flexibility itself was indeed a core strength of our organisational capability.

**Through uncertainty, Koorana kept caring and connecting.**

Through this period, the National Disability Insurance Agency also began reviewing the model for support children in early childhood through the NDIS. Koorana began reconnecting with other similar organisations to consider the proposed reforms, family needs and how the service system must evolve to meet those needs.



Finding new ways to connect and support families, c.2021

# 2022: Reconnecting in person

The 2021–22 year captured the transition from lockdown back into community life.

Supported Playgroups began the year online, then progressively returned to park and venue-based delivery as restrictions eased. Koorana used online groups, school-readiness sessions and a growing digital parent community to keep families connected during disruption.

Koorana's preschools continued to refine our integrated practice model – reducing the number of educators involved to increase connection and consistency. Further, with the support of The Smith Family, we expanded the model into public primary schools across the Canterbury Bankstown LGA with a new program called Foundations for Growth.

The annual report recorded 1,423 children and young people supported in intervention and disability services, 668 children attending playgroups, 175 children in preschools and 149 parents participating in Start Strong Pathways.



Reconnecting with children, families and communities, c.2021

Later in 2022, Koorana launched a new head office at Canterbury Road in Belmore, including a sensory gym — a new physical base after two years that had reinforced the importance of both digital flexibility and face-to-face connection.

Our outward facing advocacy continued to evolve as we deepened connections with other early childhood intervention providers with similar values around inclusion, best practice and championing family voice.

## 2023: Services grow and connect

By 2023, Koorana described its work through three clear service streams: Early Childhood Education; Early Intervention and Allied Health; and Child and Family Support.

The year included settling into our new Belmore office and sensory gym, recruitment of physiotherapists and a psychologist, the development of Psychology and Behaviour Support services, and further expansion towards the Sutherland Shire.

Within the preschools, teams reviewed Koorana's integrative approach, strengthening induction and collaboration between educators and early intervention professionals to develop shared strategies of support and clear working arrangements.

The annual report recorded 2,106 children and young people supported and 648 families supported through Child and Family Support services.

In addition, Koorana continued its advocacy focus. By this juncture, a national review of the NDIS was underway with the final report released in December 2023. With growing disconnect on the ground between the services families need and reality of what was available in the system, Koorana built on its partnerships in the sector to co-establish the *Early Childhood Intervention Best Practice Network* with other not-for-profit providers. This network provided collective voice in an environment of emerging reform.




Growing our services and strengthening connections, c.2023

# 2024: Inclusion, advocacy and a new preschool takes shape

During 2023–24, Koorana continued building new services and a stronger public voice.

By this stage, The *Early Childhood Intervention Best Practice Network* grew, and Koorana helped develop wider alliances focused on the future of child and family supports including the *Child and Family Supports Alliance NSW* (CaFSA NSW) and the *Australian Child and Family Supports Alliance* (ACaFSA). Active participation was underway with government to inform the recommended reforms from the NDIS Review Final Report and establish new service systems which fill the gaps for many families.  Koorana was steadfast in its advocacy for an improved family journey and the need to fill gaps to access for families who require early developmental support for their child.

Internally Koorana continued to grow and evolve its supports for families.

Psychology and Positive Behaviour Support became established service offerings. Supported Playgroups operated across eight locations in Canterbury-Bankstown.

The annual report recorded 1,947 registered clients attending 336 sessions across 42 weeks.



Breaking ground on the Bass Hill preschool, c. 2024

The organisation also strengthened its child-safe framework, publishing its Statement of Commitment to Child Safety and continuing work against the Child Safe Standards.

At the same time, Koorana began the process of building its third inclusive preschool at Bass Hill, in partnership with the NSW Government, to respond to needs in the local community.  Building works for Bass Hill Preschool commenced in August 2024 and became one of Koorana's largest community projects.

# 2025–2026: Building the foundations the next chapter



Bass Hill Preschool Launch Event, 2026

In this period, Koorana strengthened its Diversity and Inclusion Framework and advanced its Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan.

On 8 July 2026, Koorana officially opened Bass Hill Preschool — a 40-place inclusive preschool developed with government, philanthropic, business and community support. Twenty-five per cent of places per day are reserved for children with disability or high learning support needs.

The 2025 Annual Activity & Impact Report recorded 2,294 children and young people supported across 126 suburbs, 778 children and young people supported through Early Intervention and Allied Health, and 1,909 registered clients attending Supported Playgroups across eight locations.

Koorana also launched a free monthly webinar series and professional service offerings – recognising that our experience in children's development and inclusion must be shared with the wider community.



Looking ahead with purpose, connection and possibility, c. 2026

# Strengthening practice, shaping the future of inclusion

And, in addition to this, Koorana began rolling out an evidence-based model for social emotional development across all services streams – The Pyramid Model – and documenting its own model to allow it to be shared with more services across Australia.

And, our early childhood intervention and allied health services continued to adapt to a changing environment. However, Koorana remained committed to core principles of our work – delivering supports in everyday environments so that no child misses out, supporting families to feel confident and capable to support their child, and collaborating as a team through transdisciplinary and Key Worker models.

Further, through this period, Koorana and its partners continued to inform reforms through advice to government regarding NDIS reforms and the development of the new Thriving Kids program. Koorana's CEO, Morgan Fitzpatrick, participated as a member of the Commonwealth Thriving Kids Advisory Group, NSW Foundational Supports for Children Advisory Group and the NDIS Children's Expert Advisory Group.

These appointments provided critical opportunity to elevate the voice of our families and our expertise in the sector to inform the next chapter of services across Australia for children and families.

In its fiftieth year, Koorana again followed a familiar pattern: **identify a barrier, gather a community and build a practical response.**



Dr Mary Louise Hemmeter visit to Bass Hill Preschool. 2026

# 2026 and beyond: A bright future ahead

As Koorana enters its next chapter, we are eager to take our commitment to inclusion to new places:

- More early childhood centres;
- More schools;
- More community settings;
- More professionals;

so, that more children, young people and families, can find settings they belong and feel truly supported.

We have built models that we know work and it is time to share them.

**More than**

**20,000**

**family participations has been recorded across our last 13 reporting periods.**

Our commitment to best practice early childhood intervention and inclusive practice remains steadfast. And, as we enter this next chapter, we are committed to retaining that focus in what we do.



Continuing to create opportunities for every child to belong, learn and grow, c. 2026

## Kathy Canty

# Voices across Koorana

Looking back on my 24 years at Koorana, what stands out most is the genuine care, commitment and personal connection staff share with children, families and our community. Having worked across centre-based and management roles, I've seen how important it is to build trusting relationships, listen to families and understand their individual needs. Although Koorana has grown and evolved, our commitment to supporting children and families, empowering parents, working alongside our community and providing dedicated staff has remained at the heart of everything we do. What makes Koorana truly special is the way these connections come together to create a place where every child, family and staff member feels valued and supported.

***— Kathy Canty, Koorana Team Member***



## Lee-Anne Taybr

# Voices across Koorana

As I enter my 20th year at Koorana in the Playgroups Team, our commitment to supporting and walking alongside families, as they navigate parenting, understand child development and build connections, continues to be our guiding objective.

As an organisation our core values and dedication to the community remain steadfast. We continue to offer families and children a welcoming place to learn and grow together.

***— Lee-Anne Taylor, Koorana Team Member***



# Part of the Koorana story

Koorana's history does not belong only to the people who worked here.

It lives in former preschool children, parents and carers, people who received early intervention, siblings, volunteers, former Board members, community partners and people who once walked through a Koorana program and carried something from it into the rest of their lives.

Together we have created impact, possibilities and brighter futures for so many.





# Partnerships made possibilities practical

Koorana's reach has never depended on buildings or staff alone.

Across five decades, councils, schools, community centres, clubs, government agencies, health services, funders, businesses, donors and local organisations have provided venues, referrals, expertise, funding and practical support.

The Supported Playgroups could not have grown without community venues. The Play Bus depended on interagency collaboration. Service expansion required government funding and professional partnerships. Bass Hill Preschool became possible through public, philanthropic and community investment.

Partnership has been one of Koorana's quiet forms of infrastructure — the network around the organisation that helps an idea become a service.



Bass Hill Preschool Partners visit before launch 2026




Children learning through play at Bass Hill Preschool 2026

# 50 Years. 50 Stories. The next fifty years.

Koorana's fiftieth anniversary is not only an opportunity to look back. It is a chance to ask what children and families will need next.

Through 50 Years 50 Stories, families, former preschool children, people with disability, staff, volunteers, Board members, partners and supporters will add their own voices to the public record.

Together, the stories make one thing clear: Koorana's impact is not one story told fifty times. It is many different experiences connected by relationships, inclusion and a willingness to respond.

The questions for the next chapter are already emerging. How can we support families earlier? How can early education, schools and communities remove more barriers? How can children's voices shape the services designed around them? How can inclusive practice become ordinary rather than exceptional?

Koorana's history suggests a place to begin: listen closely, work together and act.



A Koorana family ambassador with her child, who attended Koorana Preschool, 2025.



Koorana Team Running for Inclusion City2Surf 2026

## Our story continues.

With every child discovering new possibilities.
With every family finding connection and belonging.
With every educator and professional championing inclusion.
With every community growing stronger together.

## 50 years of connection.
## A future of endless possibilities.

## www. koorana.org.au/50-years

***All children.***
***All abilities.***
***All possibilities.***

