

Retirement of Gowrie SA CEO, Dr Kaye Colmer

The Board of Gowrie SA wishes to acknowledge and celebrate the magnificent contribution of our Chief Executive, Dr Kaye Colmer, who is retiring after 25 years. This in itself is a remarkable record, however the achievements over those years without doubt comprise Kaye's most valuable contribution to Gowrie SA, to the education of young children in our state, nationally and also internationally.

Kaye understood that an educated workforce is a central element in providing children with rich learning environments and responsive interactions. Her dedication to her own and others' learning has ensured she kept up with the latest research and developments in the sector, and enabled the conduct of action research. Furthermore, she has conducted research herself, most notably in the area of leadership and its role in assisting educators to create rich and meaningful learning environments which impact positively on outcomes for children. With the support of the Board, Kaye enabled many staff to gain higher qualifications, to attend and present their work at local, national, and international conferences, and to inquire into their own thinking and practices.

Kaye challenged her staff, requiring high standards, supporting and challenging them to grow as teachers, educators and leaders. Kaye's leadership regarding the structure and training programs offered by the Gowrie Training Centre has been, over many years, critical to capacity building in the early years B-5 sector in our state and beyond. Children's rights and inclusion remain a key priority which has been supported through the creation of a multi-disciplinary team of professionals in the Australian Government funded Inclusion Agency. Kaye's work is built around a vision of an education system for our state and country that stretches from birth onwards, one she has worked to realise and from which she has never wavered. She has always been ambitious for the early childhood sector though her ambition concerned sector advancement, not her own.

Kaye's leadership extended beyond the children's programs, via relationships with the national Gowrie Australia Alliance, colleagues nationally, Early Childhood Australia, and further evidence of her influence includes her publications in national and international early childhood journals and of course the Gowrie professional magazine Reflections.

Under Kaye's leadership, there has been a history of successful applications for grant funding, which would benefit the education and care sector. Key ones have included the Commonwealth Professional Support Coordination role that offered professional development to child care and OSHC over many years, the Inclusion Support Agency, and the three-year Universal Access Project. Gowrie SA has also delivered fifteen years of funded parenting programs in SA and nationally.

Kaye always recognised the foundational role of parents in their children's education. A host of parenting programs of many kinds, including for fathers, regarding attachment and other initiatives have been offered. In particular, Kaye was instrumental, over many years, in the development and implementation of the 'Through the Looking Glass Program', an intensive parenting program that supported families in the development of secure relationships with their children.

Kaye led the decision to place primary care as the foundation of the Gowrie's operations and indeed led the building of the structures needed to support it. The primary educator model had real impact in the sector. Taking this work to a new level to enable better attachment between educators, children and their families, in 2011 Kaye led the restructuring of Gowrie SA by reducing the number of transitions children experienced. This initiative had enormous positive benefit for children and families, and also increased the work satisfaction of educators and teachers.

Kaye is a team player. She long recognised the key role of team building in creating a strong and highly respected early childhood lighthouse organisation. She worked closely with her staff, supporting them to be the best professionals they can be. She built a skilled, stable, up to date, and loyal team, many of whom have not known or remember any other leader. Each acknowledge, under Kaye's leadership, the immense professional opportunities that working at Gowrie SA has offered them

Those of you who know Gowrie programs well will know of Kaye's sector leadership role regarding Reconciliation. One just needs to enter a Gowrie site to see the extent of the work regarding reconciliation with the first nations of this country. At every level, daily programs, recognition of significant days and events, children's/ educator/ teacher knowledges about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories, the pedagogies employed, the Elder in Residence program, and the high esteem with which the Gowrie is held by Aboriginal communities all provide testament.

The Board and staff of Gowrie SA thank Kaye most profoundly for her service.

Excerpts from an address by Assoc Prof Victoria Whittington, Chair of Gowrie SA