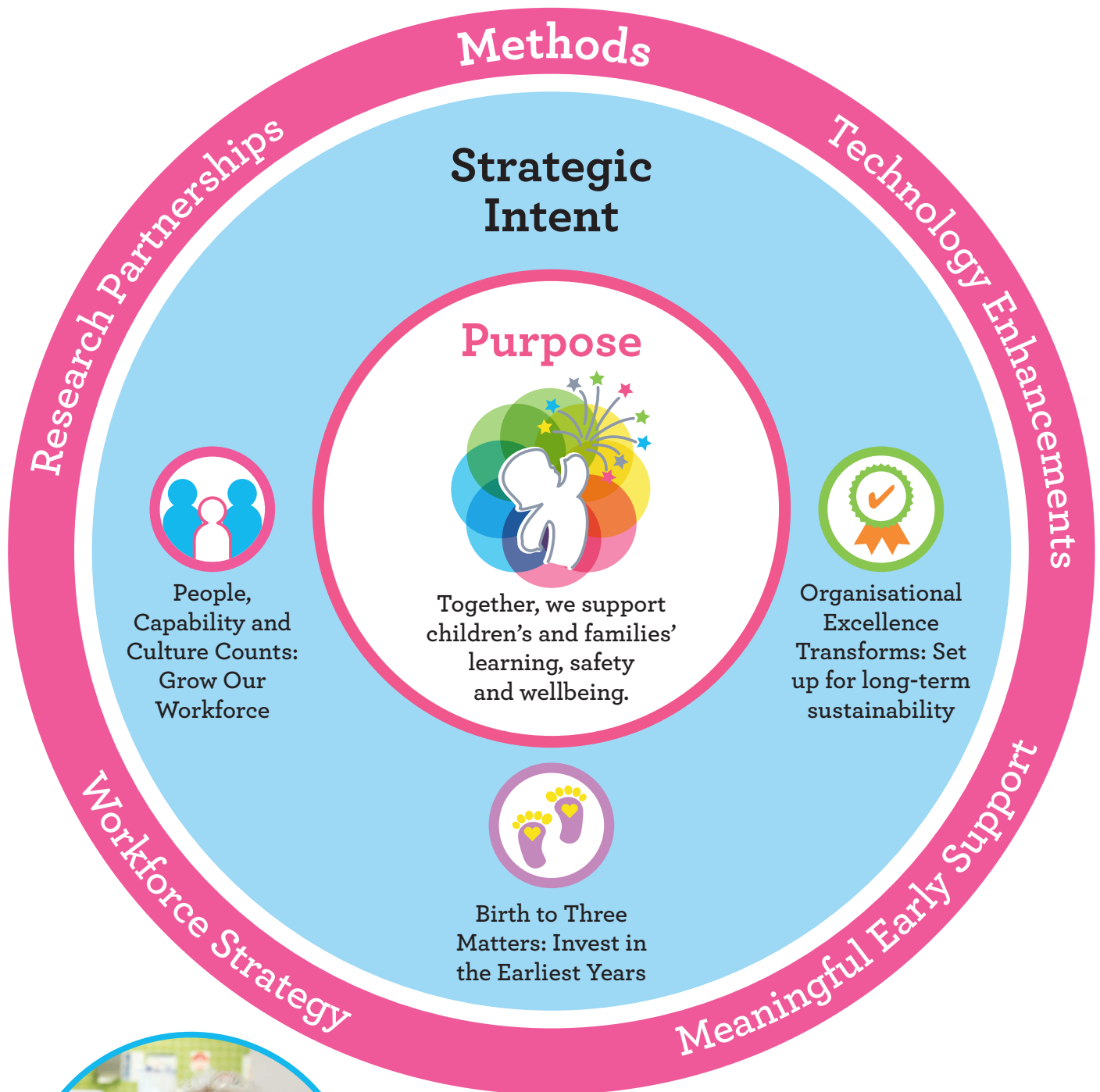




connect
Children and Families

Strategic Plan FY24-FY26



connect

Children and Families

Strategic Plan FY24-FY26



Celebrate Every Child



Social Justice



Walk Together



Tune In



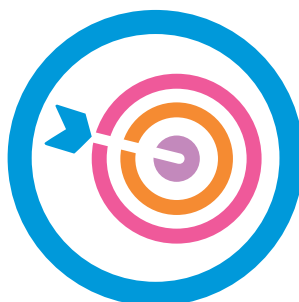
Kindness



Connect



Our Vision



Our Purpose

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1. Our Vision and Purpose

Our vision is for children and families to thrive in safe, connected communities. To achieve this, together, we support children's and families' learning, safety and wellbeing.

Our services exist to create positive changes for children, families, and community. Children's safety is always our priority. Our services are available to children and families in their home, in early childhood education centres, in community spaces and schools, and other family-centred services.

We support families to access services that respond to their needs, creating pathways both across our services, and to other community agencies that can support them.

2. Our Values

Our work is driven by our values: we tune in, connect and are kind, strive for social justice, all walk together and celebrate every child.



3. Our Children and Families

Our reach

We are committed to providing tailored support to meet the unique needs of families and children in the communities we serve, spanning from Western Sydney to the Blue Mountains and Nepean region, up to Lithgow. Our services aim to facilitate safe and affordable, high quality early education, as well as provide social connections and additional support where needed.

Community profile

Our community is diverse, with both affluent and lower socio-economic areas spread across our footprint. In Western Sydney, there is a larger community of families who speak English as a Second Language, while the Blue Mountains region has a smaller population of families from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. As a result, there are fewer support services available to meet their needs in the Blue Mountains region.

Children in our community

There are over 4,232 children under the age of six in the Blue Mountains and 15,000 in Penrith. We currently can offer 930 early education places each week, meeting the needs of 316 children from 290 families. Every year, more than 1,000 families utilise our Connect Early services to access playgroups and support their children's transition to school.

According to the Australian Early Development Census data (2021), nearly 20% of young children starting school in the Blue Mountains are vulnerable across one domain of development, with 7.8% vulnerable on two or more domains. In the Penrith area, children vulnerable across one domain of development is 24% with 12% vulnerable on two or more domains.

Our Connected Abilities services (multidisciplinary team of allied health and education professionals) support 165 children, while there are at least 100 more waiting to receive additional support funded through NDIS. We know that 9.2% of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island community is under five years of age. Our organisational value of 'We walk together' drives us to increase the number of families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in our services. We will do this by continuing to build our Cultural Safety Practices and by increasing our representation from this community in our workforce.

KEY FACTS - 2022/23

Coverage	Western Sydney – Blue Mountains/ Nepean – Lithgow
4,232	Children aged under six in Blue Mountains
316	Children we serve from 290 families
930	Early education places offered each week
1,000+	Families using Connect Early Services each year
1 in 5	Children starting school in Blue Mountains are vulnerable across one developmental domain
1 in 4	Children starting school in the Penrith area are vulnerable across one developmental domain
7.8%-12%	Children are vulnerable on two or more domains across our footprint
165	Children supported by Connected Abilities
100+	Children waiting to receive additional support



“
Everything for young children is about relationships. It is our reason and means for being together.”

Robyn (playgroup facilitator)

4. Our Work

We believe in celebrating every child. We provide a wide range of services that support children's learning and development in their early years, while also assisting families in managing their work, study, or caregiving responsibilities. Our community services are designed to cater to families with babies, children who need social connections and support, and parents who want to connect with other families.

Transition to school

We prioritise successful transitions to school and offer ongoing support to families throughout this significant milestone. Our committed workforce is continuously improving, utilising evidence-based approaches. We work in partnership with families and with colleagues to ensure the best possible outcomes for every child. We understand that every child is unique, and we celebrate their individuality, gifts and diversity in our inclusive, culturally safe and supportive environment.

Early intervention and disability support

We understand that some families may require additional support for their children's learning and development. We acknowledge the importance of early supports and the impact it can have on a child's future success. Our services are evidence-based and personalised to meet the unique needs of each child and family. Our team of qualified professionals works closely with families to identify any developmental concerns and provide the necessary support and capacity building. We offer pathways both within our organisation to more intensive early support programs and disability services and out to other agencies, for families who require them.

We empower families to make informed decisions about their child's development and believe that every child has unique strengths and abilities, and that with the right support and resources, every child can make progress and achieve their potential.

We prioritise successful transitions to school and offer ongoing support to families throughout these significant milestones.



“

“Babies love playing. They need their teachers to play with them.”

Makayla (4)

5. The Challenge

The importance of the early years

The first three years of a child's life are crucial for their lifelong health, wellbeing, and learning. Positive experiences and connections during this time can build a strong foundation for their future. Negative experiences can have long-lasting effects on their brain development and success in school and beyond. It's important for parents, caregivers, and educators to create a supportive, nurturing environment that promotes healthy development and learning for children.

Lack of access to places and support

In our community there is an acute shortage of early education places for children under three and a significant waiting list for all early education places. Access to early support for children with developmental delays or disabilities is essential for changing their trajectory. Waiting times to access specialist support are growing and are further exacerbated by the workforce challenges in our sector.

Workforce needs

We are focusing our efforts on attracting and retaining talented and diverse professionals. We are building the diversity of our workforce so that we can show our community a representation of their identity.

Infrastructure needs

We have grown significantly over the last 10 years and our infrastructure has not kept pace. Improving our systems and processes will confidently position us as a best-practice organisation across all areas. We need tools that embrace automation to minimise our time spent on administration, and that can maximise our learning. Documenting and evaluating our progress will provide valuable insights to improve our services and better respond to community needs.

Access to early support for children with developmental delays or disabilities is essential for changing their trajectory.



6. Strategic Intent

For 2024-2026 we will focus on three priorities:

1. Birth to Three Matters:

Invest in the earliest years

- Identify areas of unmet need and implement meaningful early support.
- Establish a Babies, Toddlers, and Family Centre.
- Commit to research our Infant and Toddler Pedagogy approach and share our learning.

The first three years of a child's life are critical for their growth and development. During this time, their brain is rapidly growing and developing, and the experiences they have can affect their learning, behaviour, and health for life.

Research shows that when children have positive experiences, nurturing relationships, and opportunities to learn and play during their early years, they are more likely to develop strong cognitive, emotional, and social skills. This can help them succeed in school and in life.

We recognise the importance of these early years and will support families in giving their children the best start in life. We will provide additional support for families who need it in all of our services. We will create a positive environment and practices that help babies, toddlers, and their families grow and thrive.

We will also establish an Infant and Family Pedagogy Practice Centre that focuses on helping families with young children. We will emphasise playing, connecting, and creating language-rich environments. This centre will be unique in our community, so we will conduct research and evaluations to ensure we are providing the best possible support. We will share what we learn to help other organisations too.

2. People, Capability and Culture Counts:

Grow our workforce.

- Implement robust systems to support the full employee journey.
- Create a culture of accountability, recognition and supportive leadership.
- Empower employees to enhance their professional capabilities through learning opportunities.

Our team aims to do best job possible for children, families, and funders. To consistently achieve this, we need to use everyone's strengths and talents, and we need to bring in more professionals to join our team.

To make this happen, we need to make our organisation a great place to work. This means we will focus on being accountable, recognising good work, and having supportive leaders who help us grow and work well together. We want everyone on our team to feel like they're doing important work in a respectful and caring culture. We will provide opportunities for professional growth, so everyone can develop their skills and feel valued.

We will also invest in leadership and management training, so everyone can get feedback and learn how to be the best they can be. We will strive to ensure that everyone is recognised and rewarded for their hard work.

As well as retain our great staff, we want to attract new talent so that we can meet the demand for services in our community. This means focusing more on our recruitment strategies and tuning into the aspirations of potential candidates. We will collaborate with education and training institutes so that we can bring in trainees and new graduates who are keen to access a supportive learning environment.

3. Organisational Excellence Transforms: Set up for long-term sustainability.

- Implement and optimise technology to improve governance and family experiences.
- Cultivate consistent standards and monitoring and evaluation frameworks across our teams.
- Become a Learning Organisation.¹

We will make sure that our team members have the tools they need to work effectively with children and families. With enhanced technology, we can facilitate better two-way communication and information sharing between our teams and families, resulting in improved outcomes for children. We will use our professional standards to guide everything we do and use accurate and timely data to inform our decisions. We will test new ways of working, developed around the expressed needs of children and families.

We will invest in technology to improve how we work and make sure our governance systems offer transparency and accountability. This will help us manage our resources in a safe and responsible way.

By using consistent standards and monitoring what we do, we can learn from our successes and mistakes. We will share what we learn with others in our community who are working to help families.



7. Key Result Areas

INPUT AREAS	ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES
1. Birth to Three Matters: Invest in the earliest years.	1.1 Identify areas of unmet need and implement meaningful early support. 1.2 Establish a Babies, Toddlers, and Family Centre. 1.3 Commit to research our Infant Pedagogy approach and share our learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our workforce feels supported, valued and reflects our diverse community. • Our systems and processes ensure compliance and good governance of organisational resources. • Our services are inclusive and accessible (without barriers of cost and available places) and are designed around the expressed needs of families and children. • Our services offer a point of connection for families to access other community services. • Relationships with children are respectful and playful and enhance their development. Children form secure attachments within their family and with educators. • Families are confident in their parenting. • Childhood is cherished and children's time to play, be in nature, and with others is prioritised.
2. People, Capability and Culture Counts: Grow our workforce.	2.1 Implement robust systems to support the full employee journey. 2.2 Create a culture of accountability, recognition and supportive leadership. 2.3 Empower employees to enhance their professional capabilities through learning opportunities.	
3. Organisational Excellence Transforms: Set up for long-term sustainability.	3.1 Implement and optimise technology to improve governance and family experiences. 3.2 Cultivate consistent standards and monitoring and evaluation frameworks across our teams. 3.3 Become a Learning Organisation. ¹	

¹ A learning organisation is an institution that has developed the capability to continuously learn, adapt and innovate in response to changing external and internal environments. It is characterised by a culture that encourages and supports ongoing learning and development for all employees, as well as processes and systems that facilitate the acquisition, sharing, and application of knowledge and expertise throughout the organisation. In a learning organisation, individuals and teams are empowered to take ownership of their own learning and development, and to continuously improve their skills, knowledge, and performance in order to achieve the organisation's goals and objectives. A learning organisation values collaboration, experimentation, and risk-taking, and is constantly seeking to improve its products, services, and processes based on feedback and new insights.