

Annual
Report
2022/2023





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Our Board

Peter Withy
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Matthew Holden
Treasurer and Deputy Chair

Melvin Mansell
Board Member

Juliette East
Board Member

Jonathan Bands
Board Member

Our Team

Kate Ellis
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Julia Jones
Director of Operations
& Early Childhood

Abbey Belton
Project Officer

Dr Sarah Wight
Director of Professional Learning

Bec Hughes
Professional Development
& Training Officer

Brodie Evitts
Professional Development Officer

Janet Leske
Manager, Read to Me
& Community Programs

Alyson O'Brien
Publishing Director,
Little Book Press

Cathy Beckwith
Graphic Designer

Nathalia Veras
Digital Marketing Officer

Joe Cook
Stock and Distribution Manager

Bianca Watson
Business Support Officer

Who is Raising Literacy Australia?

Raising Literacy Australia (RLA) is a not-for-profit organisation committed to enriching children's lives through literacy. It promotes and helps to develop early childhood literacy right across Australia.

RLA supports families to read, talk, play, and sing with their children from birth through

bespoke targeted programmes. This is achieved by providing books, resources and activities to nurture the development of young children, providing information for parents to encourage rich home learning environments.

In 2023, RLA celebrated its 18th birthday. Over this time,

it has established picture book libraries in vulnerable communities, created new picture books for its literacy programmes, gifting over 2 million books to South Australian families.

RLA aims to nurture children's literacy development and help to establish a love of books.

Our Vision

Enriching children's lives through every day literacy practices.

Our Mission

Develop and implement multi tiered programs and services that support families to positively engage with their children every day through reading, talking, singing and playing from birth.



Chair's Report

I am very proud to report that the Business Plan signed off by the Board some 2 years ago has moved from words to action, mostly over the course of 2022/23. This is due to the efforts, energy and expertise of our new-look team led fearlessly by the current CEO, Kate Ellis.

The Business Plan comprised of three areas of concentration: book giving and distribution, professional learning and book publishing/retailing. The last two are designed to generate revenue for the organisation with any profits used to expand our book giving programmes and cover administration costs.

This revenue generation not only assists with our financial security but also takes the pressure off existing solely on grants and donations. The South Australian Government, in particular Education SA, has been a loyal and generous partner over the years along with donors like Variety SA, the Carthew Foundation, News Corp, the James and Diana Ramsey Foundation and many private and corporate donors. The funds from these sources underpin our activities and are much valued, especially now we can maximise every single dollar because of our supplementary revenue raising.

In the CEO's report, Kate will outline in more detail how Professional Learning and our refreshed Publishing arm, Little Book Press, are operating.

As I write this, the final negotiations are happening regarding our new home at 148 Sir Donald Bradman Drive, Hilton; a home with a street presence, light-filled and spacious with a secure, dry warehouse capable of housing 57 pallets of books.

One member of our team won't be found at our new location. Alyson O'Brien is our new creative and publishing director working from home in Melbourne, a key centre for children's book publishing in Australia. Her first task is to connect us with a book distribution organisation which will open up new markets for us.

We also added some real firepower to our Professional Learning with our programme director, Doctor Sarah Wight, and our programmes continue to be supported by Victorian Early Learning organisations.

A special mention must also go to Janet Leske, whose tireless work on giving personal libraries to children in Child Protection has seen that programme secured for the next three years.

The amazing Julia Jones heads up the giving programmes and is our lead in creating a movement, a movement for sharing of time and fun with kids, a movement supported by every organisation that has contact with children under 3, a movement with its own song and animation that will burst onto television this summer as a major campaign.

It's been an amazing year, and I would like to applaud the courage and collaboration of my fellow Board members; Matthew Holden (Vice-Chair and Treasurer), Juliette East, Melvin Mansell and Jonathan Bands.

Getting this Business Plan moving was not without a few bumps in the road and I thank them sincerely for their support.

Finally, thank you to everyone that has helped us on our journey of seventeen years, and we hope you will be with us for the next exciting decades.

Peter Withy
Chair

CEO Report

It's fair to say that 2022/23 was a massive year of change for Raising Literacy Australia.

I sit here today surrounded by many new faces, we are working on new and expanded programs, and we do so whilst located in our new premises. It has undoubtedly been a time of great transition.

I came on board as Chief Executive Officer in November 2022 as the very lucky recipient of all of the amazing work, dedication, and vision that previous staff put in to build this wonderful organisation. I want to place on record my appreciation to Raising Literacy's former staff for the remarkable job that they did to create this amazing charity. We are all committed to build on this excellent legacy and the inspiration that it provides.

My appointment was far from the only personnel change. Julia Jones was promoted to the position of Director of Operations and Early Childhood in recognition of her expertise and competence. We successfully recruited picture book specialist Alyson O'Brien as our new Publishing Director of Little Book Press.

Dr Sarah Wight and Bec Hughes joined our Professional Learning team and took little time to get to work expanding the great array of courses on offer. We also hired Cathy Beckwith as our in-house graphic designer and pre-print book designer.

One of our major projects this year was as lead agency behind the South Australian Early Years Taskforce's trial program, "Words Grow Minds". A coalition of organisations who each work with young children and their families united to work together towards improving South Australian children's early development; increasing the population's knowledge of the brain development that occurs during a child's first few years and encouraging better support and positive interaction with children during the early years. We trialed this program in both Mount Gambier and Port Augusta with the program achieving such powerful results that the SA government has set us a new challenge for next year- scale up the project to roll out across all of South Australia. It is a challenge we are hungry to succeed at.

As an organisation Raising Literacy always strives to ensure that each and every one of our programs is achieving against its goals and delivering its intended outcomes. To measure this, we recently commissioned Professor Grant Banfield to undertake independent evaluations of both our Read To Me Out of Home Care Program and our Preschool Pack Program. These evaluations provide a very clear evidence base to show the meaningful difference these programs are making.

A main key finding shows parents report they read, talk, play, and sing with their child more often since participating in the preschool program. When educators were asked if the preschool packs promoted families to read more often with their child, 91% of educators indicated that parents 'read with their child more frequently'. Similarly, the evaluation shows that our Read To Me program increases the frequency and quality of meaningful literacy time shared by carers and their children. It is important that we regularly test the effectiveness of each of our programs and heartening to see such positive results.

What continues to make Raising Literacy Australia unique is that we run our own not for profit Publishing House, Little Book Press. Whilst Little Book Press is a small publisher we certainly bat above our weight when it comes to awards and recognition. Earlier this year The Children's Book Council of Australia announced that *The Garden on Red Gum Road* by Phil Cummings and Danny Snell had made the "notables" list for the prestigious Book of the Year Awards. *Bev and Kev* by Katrina Germein and Mandy Foot went on to be awarded Honour Book in these

respected awards. We are delighted that two of our titles have received this wonderful acknowledgement. We congratulate Katrina, Mandy, Phil and Danny and hope that they long continue to be covered in praise, awards, and sales!

Once again, I want to thank our funders and founding partners, News Corp Australia and the South Australian Government as well as the incredible generous program partners who support us, Variety SA, Carthew Foundation and Cochrane's Transport.

The support given to our organisation by these kind-hearted South Australians is so incredibly important and appreciated.

It been a huge year, but we are excited for an even bigger one coming up. Stay tuned as we roll out our plans to diversify our funding base, form new partnerships and expand our existing successful programs. We have no plans to slow down anytime soon.

Kate Ellis
CEO





WORDS GROW MINDS

The Early Years Taskforce is a coalition of South Australian organisations who provide services to children aged 0-3. Led by Raising Literacy Australia it includes Libraries SA, CaFHS, Playgroup SA, Novita, The Smith Family and many other South Australian organisations. The main objective of the Taskforce is to increase coordination among services and consistency of early childhood development messaging, to help parents and caregivers in their role as first teachers.

Research shows that nurturing, positive early interactions build brain development and the foundations for all the later learning and successes, but are parents aware of this important information? Do parents and caregivers know about the direct correlation between using words in positive interactions and brain growth? Are they aware that every time they talk, read, sing and play with their child they are supporting their child's development and that the early years is the right time to do it, with up to 85% of a baby's brain developing in the first three years?

The Taskforce examined these questions in detail and reviewed past and current research to identify the key issues for families and the sector. We identified that:

- In South Australia, according to the Australian Early Development Census, 23.8% of children are not reaching their developmental potential by the time they start school. SA results are higher than the national average.
- South Australian Children and their families have fewer interactions with organisations that are there to support them, compared to some other jurisdictions.
- Some parents believed that children's genes determined how their brain developed and that they could not make a difference.

The Taskforce agreed on the key messages that were important for families to understand. We wanted to convey these key messages in language that was easy for families to understand.

Our next step involved a competitive process between advertising agencies. We put a brief to three advertising agencies, each given the underlying research and elements to include.

We referenced the success of the Slip Slop Slap campaign. Could they come up with an accessible, catchy ad and 3 word slogan that put the serious issue



of children's neuroscience and early brain development into a catchy jingle which busy parents could easily absorb?! We thought it may be an impossible task, but we were soon shown the possible by Showpony Advertising.

The campaign was developed into Words Grow Minds, an innovative early childhood messaging campaign, that gets straight to the heart of how parents and caregivers can help babies and young children thrive - it's as simple as talking, reading, playing and singing together from birth.

Talk, Play, Read and Sing is the campaign's call to action. These strategies are the vehicle for early childhood development. They create opportunities for connection, conversation and serve and return which are ways

to form strong connections in the brain.

The Early Years Taskforce understood the project is about more than advertising, and instead about building a community campaign.

We further developed a campaign tripartite strategy and trialled it across two regional areas for a 6 week period. The first launch kicked off in Mount Gambier on Sunday 16 October and by the Whyalla trial on 16 Feb, 2022.

The three main components of our strategy included:

- A public media campaign via TV, radio, newspapers and social media, that delivers clear messaging for parents on the importance of talking, playing, reading, and singing with young children for their brain development.

- Free professional learning for participating organisations to increase networking, collaboration and consistency across services
- Free Words Grow Minds packs to families via local early years services to reinforce the campaign messages and increase parent-child engagement in the home.

An animated ad with adorable characters and a catchy jingle was developed to run across television, radio, social media platforms, highlighting the importance of talking, playing, singing and reading with babies. To wrap around the media campaign, a Words Grow Minds website was launched to provide further information, with downloadable tip sheets, short videos and helpful links to early years services.

wordsgrowminds.org.au

Our Professional learning included a pre-campaign information session and campaign guide, providing professionals and practitioners with knowledge of the campaign's key messages and understanding of ways they can consistently communicate the campaign with families.

We delivered 500 Words Grow Minds Resource packs to each region and these were given out to families, via the local early years programs. Each family received a resource pack containing everything required to help their child's brain to develop through simple activities. The contents included picture books, a walk and talk activity, a nursery rhyme booklet, a parent and carer information pamphlet with a directory of services and a pack of conversation cards.

We believe what is markedly different and most powerful about Words Grow Minds is the way it can be reinforced by local service providers on the ground, who

already have trusted relationships with families. Our regional trials of Mount Gambier and Whyalla saw local services all supporting the campaign by working directly with families to consistently deliver the messages, role model the call to action, host local events and provide the free resource bags for parents to use with their children.

Whyalla PlayConnect Plus Playgroup shared how they incorporated Words Grow Minds content into their program.

*'For the **Talk** week, we invited along Libby Sarre, our Local Community Speech Pathologist. She gave a brief explanation of her role to families and then spent the rest of the session mingling with families and talking to them about any speech concerns they had.'*

*For **Play** we invited Jackie Golding, the coordinator of Play Together. She runs a playgroup on Monday mornings for special needs much like ours. She spoke about the importance of play during the early years.*

*This week we had **Read** and we invited Chris Barsby from the Whyalla library to read to us and to tell us some of the services that the library has to offer. We also had a book swap.*

*Next week for **Sing**, we have members of the Church Choir joining us to sing nursery rhymes. We will also be placing prompts around the room to encourage families to sing while playing with their children'.*



Here is what some of the parents had to say about the Words Grow Minds campaign.

I think the campaign helped me because it gave me that message about how important it is.

Female, 2-year old, 3 children, Mount Gambier

I think maybe promoting it that way through simple activities is really handy. Because even if we are time poor, there are things that we can do around a mealtime and around breakfast time, and around a playtime that we might have.

Female, 18 months, 1 child, Whyalla

I thought it was a good, positive reminder. Life is so busy now and we struggle to make time for our kids, but it's nice to have a little reminder to take some time to read to them and do things like that. A little push is always good.

Female, Newborn, 4+ children, Mount Gambier

It definitely makes me feel guilty when I hear and see things, particularly around devices. I found that I'm talking more and more about what we're doing and what's going on next now.

Female, 3-year-old, 1 child, Mount Gambier

I thought it was quite useful. I feel like that information was a good prompt for me. I think it prompted me to remind me to do a bit more songs and music with my daughter.

Female, 18 months, 1 child, Whyalla

Repetition of baby makes you think not just kids but little babies as well and I think can sometimes be overlooked in early years stuff.

Female, 1, 4, and 13 year old, 3 children, Whyalla

It made me think about some of the things that I was talking to my child about, like to be a bit more intentional.

Female, 18 months, 1 child, Whyalla

McGregor Tan conducted an independent evaluation of the trials in Mount Gambier and Whyalla/Port Augusta. The trials have shown remarkable results, with a significant shift in perceptions and attitudes about the importance of early childhood development and positive interactions; and an increase in the frequency of interactions with their children. Results also indicated that the resource packs actively engaged parents with the campaign's messages. Importantly, we also received fabulous feedback from services across both communities, about increased program attendance from families, increased borrowing from the children's library and strengthened service provider partnerships across communities.

Following this hugely successful roll out of our Words Grow Minds project, in Mount Gambier and Whyalla, we are thrilled to announce that the South Australian Government have now funded Raising Literacy Australia to roll out the Words Grow Minds campaign and program across the state, due to formally launch in March 2024.

“Increase the quality and quantity of interactions between child and caregiver to have an immediate, profound and scalable impact that improves outcomes for children”

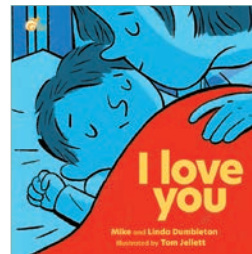
(Inside Early Talk, 2021)

Little Book Press

In February 2023, RLA appointed Alyson O'Brien as publishing director of Little Book Press. Alyson has worked in children's publishing for 15 years, across both the editorial and commissioning departments. She has published a wide range of beloved titles, such as *Our Home, Our Heartbeat* (Briggs, Kate Moon and Rachael Sarra), *The Boy Who Tried to Shrink His Name* (Sandhya Parappukkaran and Michelle Pereira), *Jetty Jumping* (Andrea Rowe and Hannah Sommerville) and *Come Over to My House* (Eliza Hull, Sally Rippin and Daniel Gray-Barnett).



Little Book Press was thrilled to release seven new titles this year. The books were well received throughout our RLA networks and have also had great success in the trade. Three of these titles - *I Love You*, *Dance in a Ring* and *Baby Lou* were also shortlisted for this year's Speech Pathology Awards.

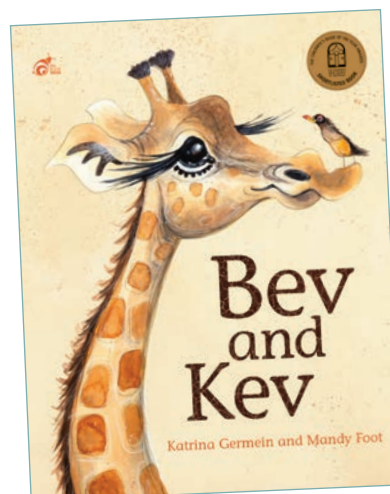


LBP also celebrated its first CBCA shortlisted title! We couldn't keep *Bev and Kev* in stock long enough, with schools, bookshops and libraries all clamouring for copies. Judging from online reviews and social media posts, *Bev and Kev* was a standout for readers this year and is fast becoming a firm favourite in households across the country.

2023 saw a major development for LBP with sales and distribution moving over to Affirm Press. Affirm Press is an independent Melbourne publisher dedicated to publishing books that influence by joy and that leave an impression.

With a newly appointed national sales team, Affirm is one of Australia's fastest growing publishers, and LBP is thrilled to be represented by such a passionate team. Since the partnership was announced, we have seen a significant increase in trade sales, with our first ever bulk sale into a national DDS (Big W).

2024 is going to be an exciting year for LBP as we continue to grow in the trade and explore opportunities further afield in international territories.



Professional learning

We provide professional learning through a series of learning modules which integrate literacy rich practices. All our workshops are evidence based and incorporate practical hands-on methods. We expanded our workshops in early 2023 and now offer;

- Building Foundations for Early Learning
- Inclusive Literacy Practices
- Developing Oral Language
- Social and Emotional Language
- Language, Literacy and Critical Thinking

In 2022/2023 we delivered 30 sessions which were attended by over 500 participants.

To support professional learning, we implemented a new student management system, Axcelerate to streamline processes and enhance student's experience.

Building Home Libraries

The Building Home Libraries Program is an early years multilayered literacy program. It aims to build children's learning capacity, oral language and literacy development. The programs focus is to gift books over a year to support families and give guidance for their child's early literacy development. The program is delivered through the child's education setting building the link between home and school.

We expanded this program to now offer a 3 year old and a 4 year old program using our publishing house - Little Book Press, titles.

Throughout 2022-2023, kindergartens across Victoria selected the Building Home Libraries program as part of their school readiness funding. We have reached 1500 children and their families, giving them books and resources to establish and build a home library of books.



Read To Me

The Read to Me program continues to underpin Raising Literacy Australia's belief that all children in our community deserve universal access to quality books no matter what their individual situation in life may be.

The Raising Literacy Australia Board unanimously approved the continuation of the Read to Me Program without the underpinning funding from the Department for Education. Reserve funds were committed to not only deliver the highly valued program but also fund an Independent Evaluation of the Read to Me program to secure funding into the future.

The Read to Me program recognises that children in out-of-home care often have limited access to quality age-appropriate books that encourages positive adult-child interactions to support healthy brain development. The program is a vital source of information and resources for carers across our state.

Each child until they turn 7 years of age automatically receive free books and resources, to create their own home library that they can keep and enjoy for many years to come.

A start-up library launches each child's reading journey, featuring:

- 10 age-appropriate picture and board books
- A Read to Me library bag
- Carer resources, including an activities and role-modelling DVD.

Home library packs are then sent direct to the child every 3 months in March, June, September, and December. The books are specially selected based on each child's age.

In the past year over 6,200 reading packs have been sent to directly to these children in care

providing them quality, engaging books, and resources to contribute to their developing literacy skills and improve their chances of lifelong learning.

Since the program commenced in October 2015 over 164,000 books in homes have been gifted to children in out-of-home care. This project has been made possible with thanks to the invaluable support of founding partners Variety SA – the children's charity, Cochranes and the Department for Child Protection who directly distributes these packs.

Key Achievements of the Read to Me program.

- Over 164,000 books in homes since the start of the program in 2015.
- Carers are now engaging more readily with their children.

98% of carers agreed that the Read To Me books are enjoyed by the child/ren.

88% of carers agree the Read to Me book packs have meant I spend more 'together' time with my child/ren.

- 88% of carers read (Read to Me or other) books to their child/ren at least once a day. 39% of these Carers read (Read to Me or other) more than once a day.

** September 2023, Carer feedback survey on the Read to Me program.*

- Book routine developed from the child's earliest days with care families.
- It is a significant reminder to engage daily with their care child through the ongoing regular receipt of books and activities into the home.
- Connection with carers through relationships developed with the sector.

Independent Evaluation of the Read to Me Program by Dr Grant Banfield – March 2023

This valuation was tasked with assessing the effectiveness of the Read to Me program against its stated aim: **To build the learning capacity, oral language, and literacy development of children in out-of-home care via the provision of portable, age appropriate, literacy resources to children 0 to 6 years.**

The evaluation data is clear that the Read to Me Program is effective against its stated aim.

It:

- Offers literacy resources to children in out-of-home care that are age appropriate and developmentally appropriate. The direct delivery of its resources to children is a significant factor in encouraging not only book ownership but also the building of personal and portable libraries.
- Raises and reinforces carer awareness of the importance of regularly engaging in multiliteracy activities with their children.

It is successful in increasing carer knowledge of the developmental benefit of reading, showing carers how imagination and curiosity are expanded through reading, and building carer capacity to identify quality literacy sources for children.

- Increases the frequency and quality of meaningful literacy time shared by carers and children by
 - facilitating carer capacity to read with their child and
 - developing a child's reading confidence through the nurturing of a sense of belonging and self-worth. The supply of Read to Me Out-of-Home Care literacy resources free to all identified Out-of-Home Care families, irrespective of need, is important in overcoming barriers to children's literacy development presented by socioeconomic disadvantage and the stigma of charity.



Feedback from carers through the Evaluation process.

My child is excited to get books in the mail and this helps motivate them to read and seek out previous ones. These represent a consistent message from the interviews of the joy children experienced by receiving a gift in the mail.

Kinship Carer

As numerous interviewees explained, a child living a transient life comes to value something that they identify as theirs. As one kinship carer confided: “When the books arrive, he takes them away to his room and won’t let me anywhere near them. They are his. After a while he will bring them out and we’ll read them together. But he lets me know they are his. He loves them and guards them.

Kinship Carer

We are short term carers. We are very grateful of the books and the labels. The children come with no possessions and the books are often their first nice possession with their name on and they are treasured. They often have not had a story read to them so by the time your books arrive they know what enjoyment they can receive, they proudly take all their books with them to their forever homes or back to their own home.

Short Term Carer

I think the age appropriateness of the books they select is spot-on. Of course, some books interest them more than others. It might be the storyline that captures their attention. The books are well chosen in terms of how they can engage children. The stories are interesting. They are relatable to them – age appropriate. You can talk to them about how the story might unfold. This makes the books really good for speech development.

Foster Carer

I think this is a fantastic program. A lot of our children are developmentally disadvantaged right from the word go. In the families I work in, a lot of the children who are seven years of age haven’t been to more than a couple of weeks to school. Our children are behind right from the start. So, simply receiving a book as a present in the mail is positive. It’s not the academic side of things but the feeling that “This is something I have got. This is for me.

Kinship Care Worker

Read to Me is such an amazing program, recently one of our babies was reunified with her birth Dad and it was great to be able to send her with a big bag of books.

Foster Carer

Whether you are a short term or long-term foster carer the Read to Me books are a connection between you and the child. For our kids, who will have many challenges throughout their lives, being literate is going to help them through all those challenges. Books open possibilities. Even if you think of just getting through the school system. If they haven’t got the basics, they are going to be further disadvantaged.

Foster Carer

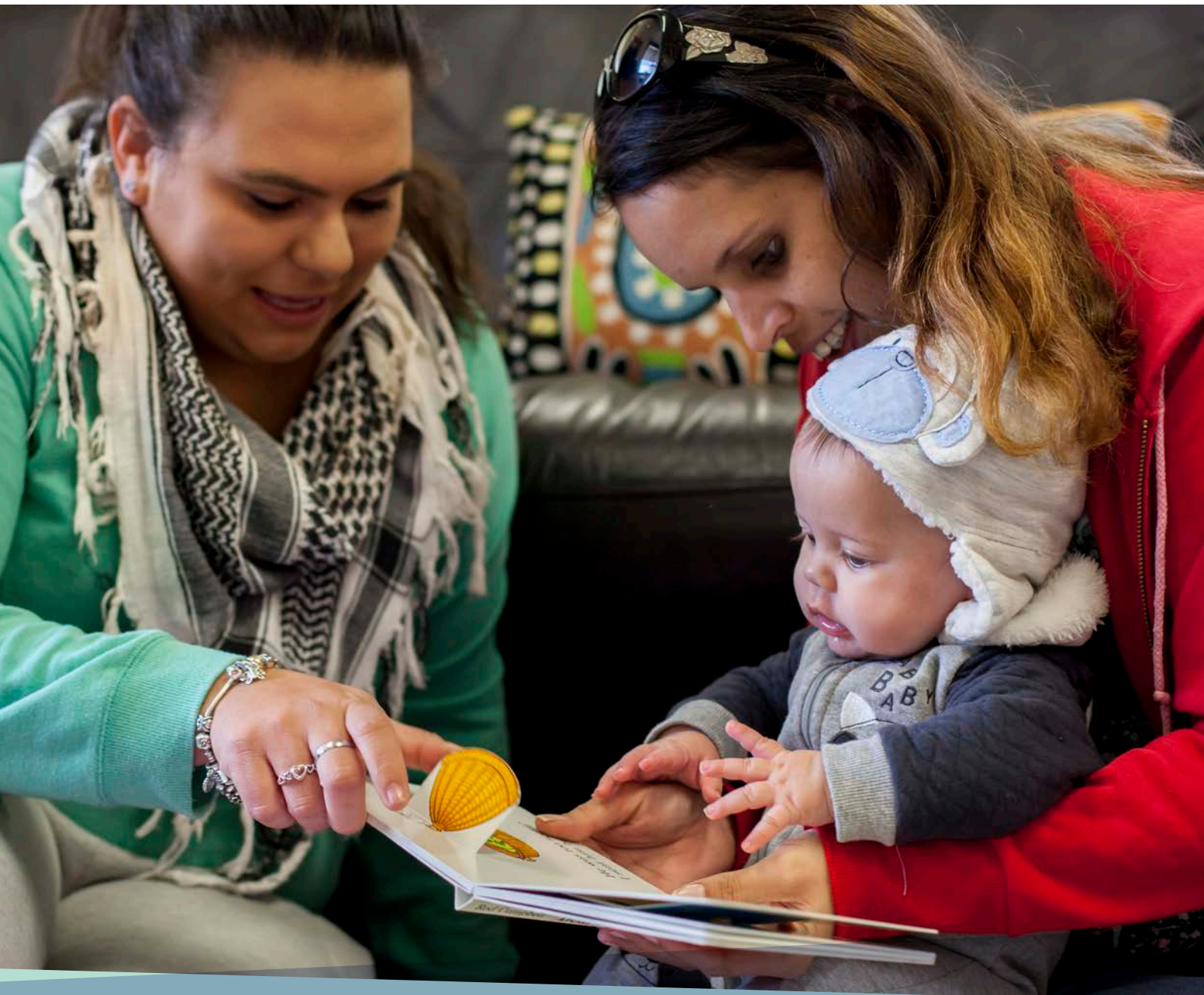
I love that my grandchild receives these books. It truly fosters a love of books. Children learn to read on the laps of parents and grandparents.

Kinship Carer

The Independent evaluation was critical in Raising Literacy Australia's ability to seek ongoing funding for the coming years. We were thrilled when the Department for Child Protection committed to funding the program for the next three financial years.

It takes universal and targeted projects to effect positive change. Our aim is to continue to deliver a sustainable program with consistent messaging to families and their children to effect generational changes in carer and child engagement. Through the Read to Me program, we now have kinship families, foster carers and residential support workers who are reading, singing, talking, and playing with their children every day.

Janet Leske
Read to Me Program



Let them talk, play, read and sing every day

The research is clear. Not only do genes matter and provide the blueprint for early childhood development, but so too are the earliest interactions and experiences which young children live and come to know in their everyday.^(1,2) Children's experiences in the years before school are every bit as diverse as they are themselves. These experiences are shaped by the child, parents/carers and families, community and the context and time in which a child is born and lives. Families are children's very first educators. We know that every family is unique and different; and so too are the ways in which they are equipped to support children's earliest development and to establish a nurturing home learning environment. Where families receive relevant and timely information and are supported with access to services, children benefit.

Young children need to participate in frequent, high quality experiences - talk, play, read and sing every day. The simplicity and everydayness of such experiences sometimes translates to their power and impact being underestimated.

We know that many Australian children are tracking well developmentally, however it is well-documented that there are some who are not.⁽³⁾ The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a national data collection taken in children's first year of school. The last collection last took place against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. The next AEDC in 2024 will be of interest for a number of reasons; one of which is to explore the potential impacts on early childhood development for children born during the global pandemic, a time when familiar rites of passage for young children were absent or coloured by the experience of health restrictions; such as maternal health checks, library visits, attendance at playgroups and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings, visits with grandparents and families, and trips into the community. Perhaps surprisingly the 2021 AEDC collection showed limited impacts on children's development. What might we see in this next dataset? Will we see that families and service providers adequately buffered the disruption to the lives of young children and

their families, or will we see enduring impacts on the developmental outcomes of this cohort of children?

Even if we see no significant change, nationally we are still likely to find 1 in 5 children commencing school developmentally vulnerable, in some parts of Australia, such as South Australia, this is 1 in 4.⁽³⁾ 1 in 4 children commencing school developmentally vulnerable is a shocking statistic, yet this has seemingly been normalised that some children will struggle due to circumstance. Developmental vulnerability on one or more AEDC developmental domain has been shown to correlate with poorer performance in literacy and numeracy (as per standardized measures at Year 3, 5, 7 and 9).⁽⁴⁾ This means that for children at school commencement with developmental vulnerability, these same children are likely to struggle in ways that their peers do not, and not just initially but throughout their schooling.

In 2019, Australia's Education Ministers came together in 2019 as signatories to The Alice Springs (Mpartntwe) Declaration (5, p, 4) which sets out 2 goals for Australia's children.

Goal 1: The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity

Goal 2: All young Australians become:

- confident and creative individuals
- successful lifelong learners
- active and informed members of the community.

This commitment was not made for some Australian children and young people; this commitment was made for every child and young person. So, what can be done differently? How can we disrupt these seemingly predetermined developmental trajectories for our youngest Australians? Some of whom our most vulnerable.

There is a change in the air, a sense of goodwill across government and non-government organisations alike, to do more, to do different, to do with more intentionality, and to positively impact the lives of every young child in Australian society. The National Early Years Strategy will soon be released. In 2023, the South Australian Government accepted from Commissioner, Hon Julia Gillard AC, the delivery of the Final Report of the South Australian Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).⁽⁶⁾ State and territory and national education discussions include initiatives; such as 3 year old preschool; changes to preschool funding to follow the child; renewed focus on the delivery and compliance of the universal

health checks; and what feels a greater willingness to step out of silos and promote greater collaboration across organisations who provide services to and for children and families.

One such coalition of like-minded organisations driven with shared focus is the South Australian Early Years Taskforce; an exceptional collaboration of expertise, education and enduring commitment. The call to action for the general public, service providers and families for the Words Grow Minds campaign, professional learning package, and resource packs, is rooted in current research.⁽⁷⁾ Yet the simplicity of the message underpins its success; talk, play, read, sing every day.





Still though, there is much to do as simple daily experiences, such as talk, play, read and sing, are not always well-understood for just how powerful they are in promoting children's early development. Research supports the importance of play as a vehicle for children's learning and development and where there is a decline in play, such as less time to play; developmental impacts become apparent (8, 9). There are many reasons why children's play may be eroding, lack of understanding of its value to children's learning and development and intrinsic value to the child, pressure on families, screen time usage, isolation or displacement from family and friends to name

but a few. Play provides rich opportunities for children to engage in sociodramatic play, to tinker, develop and test theories, to develop gross and fine motor skills, to make choices about things which interest them, and to interact, talk and build vocabulary. Play is rich with opportunities for children to develop and learn. Play can look and sound different, in different contexts and it has meaning for children.⁽⁹⁾ We can understand that play also provides opportunities which support early childhood development, such as the development of physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; and communication skills and general knowledge.^(8,10)

Childhood is precious and finite. Every child deserves no less than rich early experiences with the people who love them best, which support their early brain development, laying down the foundation for what follows. For some families, guidance and support may be needed as they begin to navigate the service system and everyday life as their children's first educators. By supporting families, we support children. By enabling and equipping dedicated grassroots providers who enjoy the trust of the communities in which they work, the coordinated effort is long lasting and builds on, instead of replicates or displaces existing programmes and initiatives.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child speaks to children's rights amongst the signatories from OECD nations. Of note here perhaps is the child's right to play, to maintain and learn in language, to be safe and their culture respected, and to have say in decisions which impact them.⁽¹¹⁾ Children's access and participation is built on being seen and heard and their needs met. We know the importance of being a literate and communicant member of society to be able to participate completely. For every child, the effort is worth it.

The recent South Australian Royal Commission in Early

Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) articulated the aspiration to reduce developmental vulnerability from 23.8% in South Australia to 15% within 20 years⁽⁶⁾

Shifting the dial on entrenched disadvantage and vulnerability will take courage and a sustained appetite by South Australia and other jurisdictions. The status quo has taken time to reach this point, it will take time, discernment and intentionality to make inroads into highly complex and interconnected issues which impact families, which impact children. The investment isn't just in who today's children will become, but in who they

are now, their experience of now, and their entitlement to excellence and equity, opportunity and promise regardless of the numbers which make up their post code. Raising Literacy Australia as the lead agent for the South Australian Taskforce is proud to partner with the dedicated coalition of government and non-government organisations in this endeavour which matters completely for our children.

Dr Sarah Wight
Director, Professional Learning

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Financial Report

Raising Literacy Australia Inc saw a remarkable increase in overall Income earned for the 2023 financial year, with increases predominantly in Product Sales as well as Projects Commissioned.

Total Revenue of \$2,038,220 increased from the previous year's total of \$1,531,294, an increase of \$506,925 (33.1%). This represents the highest

revenue generated by the organisation since inception.

Grants continue to provide the vast majority of income, being \$750,024 or 34.3% of the total overall revenue. Previously Grants accounted for well over 50% of our Revenue.

Projects Commissioned was now the greatest source of revenue, with \$704,255, or 34.6% of total revenue. This has been assisted

largely by the income from the Words Grow Minds project.

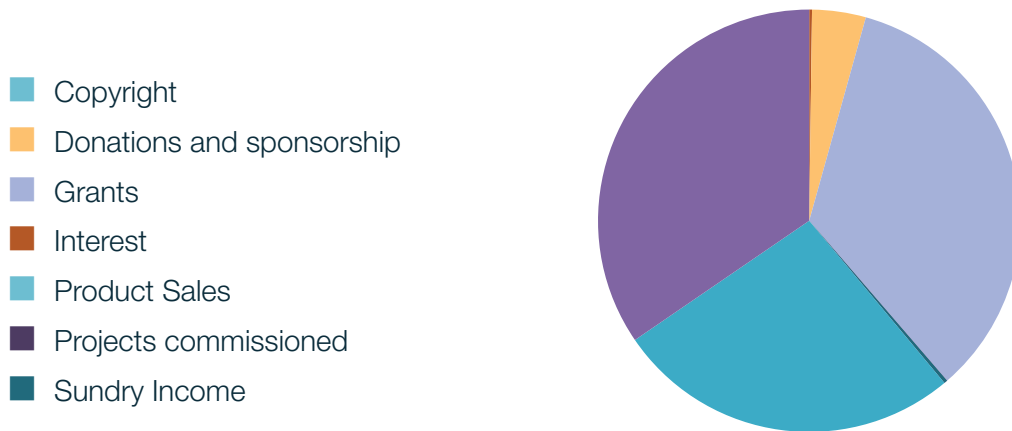
Product Sales also increased considerably, now accounting for 26.5% of our income, which includes income from Little Book Press sales, and also VSRF Sales which all increased this year.

Revenue

A breakdown of the categories of Revenue follows:

INCOME	2022	2023	Variance
Copyright	4,363	4,394	(31)
Donations & Sponsorships	83,843	70,926	12,917
Grants	700,024	660,452	39,572
Interest	5,327	207	5,120
Product Sales	540,408	386,656	153,752
Projects Commissioned	704,255	407,993	296,262
Sundry Income	-	666	(666)
Total	2,038,220	1,531,294	506,926

Breakdown of 2023 revenue



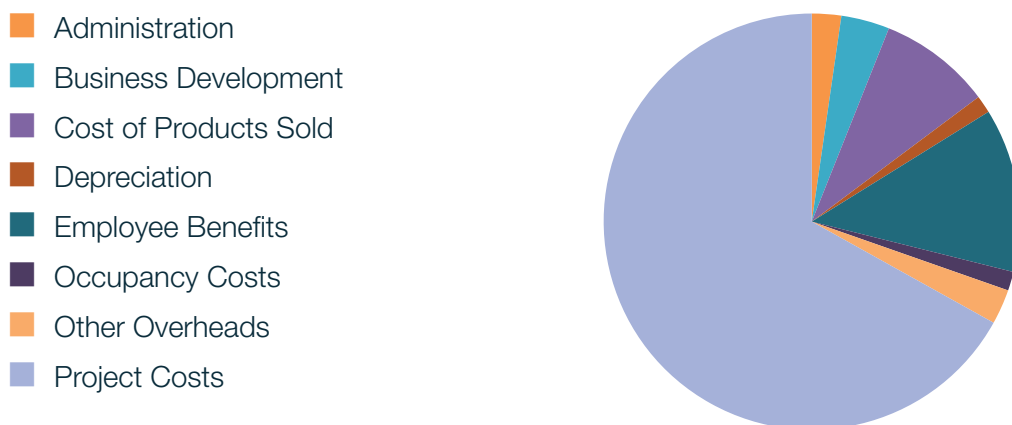
Total Revenue for the organisation in the 2023 financial year exceeded \$2million for the first time. This has largely been due to the efforts of the team to secure funding related to the Words Grow Minds project, DECD pack funding and the Victorian School Readiness Funding.

In addition, there has been positive contributions from Little Book Press book sales, as well as continuing support from sponsorships and donations.

Expenditure

Expenditure increased for the year by \$283,085, with this increase largely due to an increase in Project Costs.

Breakdown of 2023 expenditure



EXPENDITURE	2023	2022	Variance
Administration	44,428	35,648	8,780
Business Development	73,288	97,991	-24,703
Cost of Products Sold	170,284	117,935	52,349
Depreciation	26,611	26,638	-27
Employee Benefits	248,120	155,349	92,771
Occupancy Costs	28,617	25,604	3,013
Other Overheads	52,844	51,572	1,272
Project Costs	1,303,203	1,153,573	149,630
Total	1,947,395	1,664,310	283,085

Summary

Total Revenue for the organisation in the 2023 financial year exceeded \$2 million for the first time.

This has largely been due to the efforts of the team to secure funding related to the Words Grow Minds project, DECD pack funding and the Victorian School Readiness Funding.

In addition, there has been positive contributions from Little Book Press book sales, as well as continuing support from sponsorships and donations.

Founding and Program Partners

We couldn't do what we do without a range of founding and program partners:

Founding Partners

State Government of South Australia

News Corp, Australia

Program Partners

Department for Education

Department for Child Protection

Variety SA, the children's charity

Carthew Foundation

Cochrane's Transport

Lang Family Foundation





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