

Our Place Quarterly Wrap

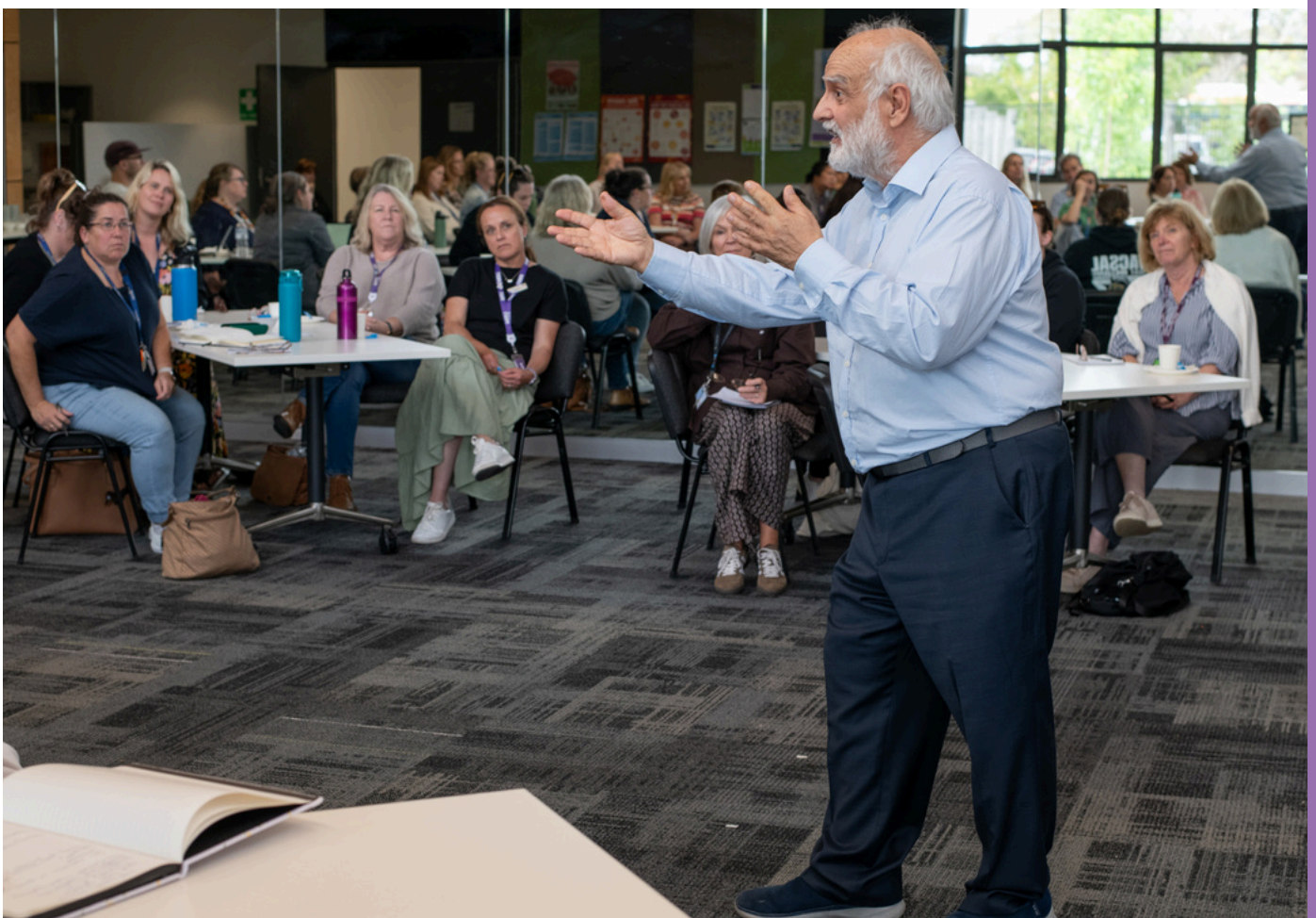
December 2025



Department
of Education



Families,
Fairness
and Housing



Professor Ted Melhuish engaging partners in a conversation about the importance of the home learning environment.

Welcome to the Our Place Northern Bay Quarterly Wrap of Term 4, 2025

Thank you for an incredible year!

As the year comes to a close, the Our Place team would like to extend our sincere thanks to our incredible partners for their continued support throughout 2025.

Partners commitment to our on-site working groups, along with contributions to programs, activities, and services, has made a meaningful difference for children and families across our community.

Over the past 12 months, we have welcomed new partnerships, expanded the range of services and programs on offer, and seen strong engagement from families. This growth reflects both the strength of our partnerships collaborative efforts and our shared dedication to creating a supportive, thriving environment for families.

As we look ahead to 2026, our focus remains on improving outcomes for children and families by working closely with our partners.

Together, we will continue to deliver strategies aligned with our three key site priorities:

- 1.Children access support for healthy development and wellbeing.
- 2.Children engage and connect to high-quality learning.
- 3.Parents and carers are confident, capable, and connected.

We look forward to another year of collaboration. If you are interested in exploring partnership opportunities in 2026, we'd love to hear from you!

Feel free to drop by and say hello to Bec, Tanya and Karen at the Korayn Birralelee Family Centre or contact Bec directly at rebecca@ourplace.org.au.

The Our Place team wishes all our partners a safe and restful holiday break and we look forward to reconnecting in 2026!

Our Place Northern Bay team



Rebecca Hickey
Partnership Manager



Karen Butterworth
Community Facilitator



Tanya Kane
Community Facilitator



What happens in the home matters most!

Professor Ted Melhuish presenting to partners.



The session brought research and practice together, reinforcing that early investment works and that what happens at home matters most. As we look toward 2026, Our Place and its partners hope to continue strengthening initiatives that support families to create rich, engaging Home Learning Environments.

Dr Melhuish's presentation highlighted the power of everyday interactions at home, the value of quality early learning, and the importance of joined-up systems in giving every child the best possible start.

We asked some of our partners their reflections on the session:

In Term 3, Our Place Northern Bay was pleased to welcome Dr Ted Melhuish to the site to deliver a session for partners on the importance of the Home Learning Environment.

Dr Melhuish is a member of the Our Place International Expert Advisory Group and is recognised as one of the world's leading voices in early learning, brain development, and social policy. He has led major international studies exploring how family life, community, and early education shape children's outcomes, and his work continues to inform national policy on early education and child wellbeing.

More than 30 attendees joined us from across the sector, including representatives from City of Greater Geelong Family Services and Early Years, Meli, Corio Library, the Department of Education, and Wathaurong.

"One of the most powerful reminders from Prof. Ted Melhuish's session was the vital role parents and carers play as a child's first educator. It reinforced how deeply children learn through everyday interactions, those simple meaningful moments that shape their understanding of the world. It's a call to honour and uplift the role families play in lifelong learning."

"The session highlighted to me that families' financial wealth and level of education are not barriers or guarantees to achieving positive Home Learning Environments. Rather it is access to quality information and tools that support families to build on their strengths in a culturally appropriate way that can optimise their unique HLE"



The Toy Library turns one!

Toy Library volunteer Kylie welcoming families to the open day.

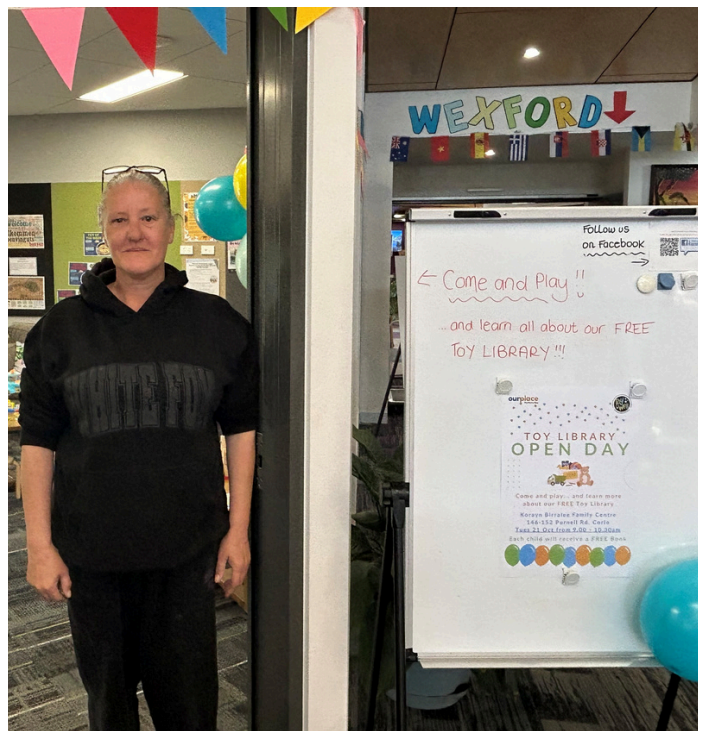
To celebrate the first anniversary of our free onsite Toy Library in partnership with Toywell, an Open Morning was held whereby our wonderful volunteers set up an inviting space for children and families to 'come and play' and learn about the wide range of toys available to support their child's development and the importance of the home learning environment. Several families took advantage of this opportunity, resulting in a boost in toy library memberships on the day.

Our volunteers are continually seeking new ways to promote the toy library – whether that be through the distribution of flyers, highlighting a “Toy of the Week,” offering free books or building strong connections with onsite partners such as Meli playgroups and Maternal and Child Health.

With 50 active members at Korayn Birralee, many of whom are from a CALD background and 77 families accessing the library over the past year, the success of the site Toy Library was further reflected in the recent Toywell Annual Survey, completed by families, volunteers and hub leaders from across the site.

Respondents highlighted affordability and accessibility of toys as key benefits, along with opportunities for children to develop their skills and imagination through diverse play experiences. Many stated that their children were excited and looked forward to each visit to the toy library, reinforcing a sense of belonging and the importance of routine.

93% of Korayn Birralee members said they'd made changes to their home learning environment since joining the toy library. This included 'more play time together' and greater connection between parent and child.



Real benefits to the volunteers were also identified such as confidence and personal growth, contributing to the local community, communicating with different cultures, meeting new people and social skills.

“We recently had a mum say that she has noticed that the child's dad is playing more with the child. They are bringing home new toys; the dad is curious what the toy is and is sitting down and exploring the new toy with the child”.

Toy Library Volunteer



Strengthening connections through the Koori Education Workforce Focus Group

KESO's Shantelle and Uncle Richard, Senior Mingo Waloom & Wayipungitj Facilitator Hayley and Wexford Campus family.



The Koori Education Workforce (KEW) focus group meets twice each term with a shared commitment to amplifying family voice, supporting self-determination and responding to what families tell us matters most.

The group focuses on three goals: understanding child and family perspectives, working collaboratively across Early Years services, schools and Aboriginal community supports, and strengthening support for children transitioning into school.

Recently, three First Nations students from Northern Bay College – Wexford Campus joined the group. They led our Acknowledgement of Country, shared student perspectives and showcased their projects. Their involvement inspired the planning of “Cuppa with the KESO,” (Department of Education Koorie Education Support Officers) an informal gathering connecting families with School and Early Years KESOs, NBC staff, Korayn Birralelee, Our Place, Wathaurong and Meli Early Help.

The students helped design the event, created flyers and supported activities including damper-making and Indigenous games. The afternoon strengthened relationships and highlighted the power of student voice.

Parents and Staff shared their reflections of the afternoon:

“Thank you so so much for having me, it was a beautiful day, it was great to meet the KESO and community and have conversations and get to know you all, what a magnificent program I thoroughly enjoyed it.”

Parent participant

“It was a great afternoon of connecting with each other and our Culture. It was a great opportunity and can't wait to see if this becomes a more regular thing.”

Shantelle – KESO

“Cuppa with a KESO Uncle Richard and Shantelle together with the Wathaurong support staff Hayley and Ben may become a regular event. Our Koorie students were taught to bake beautiful Lemon Myrtle Damper with Hayley and some “Deadly” activities with Ben. The parents who attended were greeted by the KESOs and together they enjoyed a Cuppa and a slice of damper.”

Uncle Richard – KESO

“Getting our mob together to share culture through damper-making and games was deadly. It's always a privilege to connect with kids and families in this way.”

Hayley - Senior Mingo Waloom & Wayipungitj Facilitator



Foundation House Community Voice Group

Participants of the Foundation House Community Voice Group in traditional dress.

This year we partnered with **Foundation House, Our Place Northern Bay** and the **City of Greater Geelong** to deliver an Early Years Community Advisory Group. Foundation House facilitates one group nationally each year, and we were delighted they chose to host the 2025 group in Geelong.

These groups aim to strengthen service accessibility and cultural responsiveness through guided dialogue, shared learning and peer engagement. They ensure refugee families have a meaningful voice in shaping early years and school services, while informing professional learning and practical resources for educators.

The Geelong Your Voice group brought together **14 parents and grandparents from the Afghan and Karen communities**, all with lived refugee experience and children in early years or primary school. Meeting fortnightly across eight sessions from August to November at Our Place Northern Bay, the group was supported with interpreters, childcare and a \$50 participation voucher.

Each session began with a shared meal before participants engaged in discussions and activities. Strong connections formed quickly—one member reflected, **“We started off as strangers and now we are friends.”** Participants shared valuable insights into what supports their families and what could be strengthened in local services.

The group is now collaborating on an animation video that will capture these messages and share practical guidance for early years and school staff on how to better engage and support refugee families. This resource will be released early next year.

The project was a great success, with participants valuing the experience and choosing to stay connected.



Below are some comments from participants:

“Heard – my voice. This is the first time I have had the opportunity to share my experience, challenges I've been through in helping my child. I felt safe to open up and share what needs to improve.”

“My culture and values have been acknowledged. I haven't been able to provide input / feedback before. This has been a wonderful opportunity for all of us to share what is important for us and what will help with the education of my children.”

“I am of Karen background and generally we are quiet and conservative people and don't speak up but here we were given equal opportunity to share our experiences.”

Article by Catherine Foreman, City of Greater Geelong, CALD Outreach Worker



Wrap-around
Health and Wellbeing

Working together to support families through Paediatric First Aid

Margie, Northern Bay College Practice Nurse instructing First Aid.



From there, the support of **Cultura Early Help Bi-Cultural Workers, Mana and Corina**, helped bring the idea to life. They worked alongside Margie to deliver a tailored session for a group of Karen and Karenni parents who meet each Monday morning at Korayn Birralee. Mana and Corina's cultural knowledge and language support made a significant difference, ensuring the information was easy to follow and genuinely helpful for families.

To reach more parents/carers, a second session was held on site for the broader school community. Both sessions drew strong interest, with families asking thoughtful questions, sharing experiences, and building confidence in how to respond during emergencies.

These sessions not only strengthened parent/carer's knowledge but also highlighted how valuable it is when we work together in ways that are culturally informed and community focused. Through these partnerships, we're continuing to build stronger connections and support the wellbeing of children and families across our community.

Reflections from Margie:

"In my role as the Northern Bay College Practice Nurse it is wonderful to be able to work collaboratively with the families and staff from Our Place. I love the opportunity to teach the parents/carers some basic first aid and hopefully help them gain confidence while doing it."

Partnerships play a big part in how the Our Place approach supports families. When staff, community members, and health professionals come together, we're able to respond to what families really need and create opportunities that feel welcoming, practical, and connected. This was exactly the case with a recent Paediatric First Aid initiative held at Korayn Birralee

The idea first emerged through early conversations with **Margie, Northern Bay College Practice Nurse**. Margie's strong commitment to child safety—and her passion for giving families confidence in those tricky, unexpected moments—sparked the plan to offer accessible Paediatric First Aid sessions.



Children's Voice partnership with National Child and Family Hubs Network

Capturing Children's Voice through drawing



"The red chairs are a safe place for me to wait for my nan after school."



"I like doing Mini Movers in the holidays with my dad."

Our Place Northern Bay is part of the [National Child and Family Hubs Network Community of Practice \(CoP\)](#) which provides an opportunity to connect with others from across the country but also be exposed to learnings and opportunities at a national level.

Most recently Our Place Northern Bay volunteered and was supported by Korayn Birralelee Family Center leadership and kindergarten teachers to be involved in 'testing and trialing' a project focused on capturing children's voice and feedback through drawing.

The Project Lead from the [Murdoch Children's Research Institute](#) visited us where resources based on their 'toolkit' were shared including a drawing sheet designed for the kinder children and a card for the older children that offered space to draw as well as respond to questions such as what they enjoy doing at Korayn Birralelee Family Centre and 'If you were the boss, what would you do or change?'

One of the main learnings was the prominent inclusion of family in their drawings.

There were also some challenges around timing, expectations and the need to reframe certain questions i.e. several of the Kinder children started drawing pictures of ghosts, which initially seemed unrelated until it was determined that Halloween had recently been a major focus in their learning.

The children's drawings were displayed at a mini art showcase during the inaugural [National Hubs Conference in Melbourne](#).

This Northern Bay 'Children's Voice' pilot project is now being integrated into their future planning, with the potential of a broader rollout and larger scale offering through the network.

We look forward to ongoing opportunities to learn, connect, collaborate and work in partnership with others within this national CoP, whose members are committed to fostering more equitable outcomes for all children and families across Australia.

What's on in Term 1, 2026

Programs and services operating from Korayn Birralee Family Centre.

To keep up to date with programs and events go to:

www.ourplace.org.au/events/#northern-bay

www.facebook.com/OurPlaceNorthernBay

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
High-quality Early Learning and Schooling	Long Day Care, Kindergarten and School All day, on-site				
		Toy Library 9.00am - 10:30am		Toy Library 9.00am - 10:30am Storytime 9:10am - 9:30am Community Lounge	Toy Library 10:15am - 11:45am
		Meli Playgroup - Dari Bicultural Support 9:30am - 11:30am Multipurpose Room	Reading Cafe 3.15pm - 3.45pm Multipurpose Room	Meli Playgroup - Karen Bicultural Support 9:30am - 11:30am Multipurpose Room	Meli Babies Playgroup 9:30am - 11:30am Multipurpose Room
Adult Engagement and Learning	Chat with Corina & Mana - Group and Individual Karen Support 9.00am - 12.00pm Community Lounge	Barwon Community Legal Service Consulting Room 1	My Time Parent and Carers Group 9.00am - 11.00am Community Lounge (4 Feb -1st April)		Coffee and Chat 9:00am - 9:30am Community Lounge (Fortnightly)
		Give it a Go - Social Connection 9:00am - 10:00am Multipurpose Room			Carers Connect 9:15am - 10:15am Community Lounge (Fortnightly)
Wrap-around Health and Wellbeing	Parent Pathways Consulting Rooms				
	Early Help Family Support Consulting Rooms				
	Maternal and Child Health 8:30am - 4:30pm Consulting Rooms				
			Barwon Health Immunisation Clinic 9:30am - 11:30am Multipurpose Room	Meli NDIS Drop - In Support 9:00am - 10:30am Foyer (TBC)	