

A photograph of two young people, a woman with pink hair in the background and a man in a black hoodie in the foreground, looking towards the camera. Behind them is a large boomerang with intricate white and blue patterns on a light background.

EDMUND
RICE
EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA

FLEXIBLE SCHOOLS LTD

END OF YEAR
REPORT 2023



WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES OF AUSTRALIA

as the Traditional Owners and
Custodians of the land of our schools.
We are inspired and nurtured by their
wisdom, spirituality and experience.
We commit ourselves to actively work
alongside them for reconciliation and
justice. We pay our respects to the
Elders; past, present and future. As we
take our next step, we remember the
first footsteps taken on this sacred land.

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Designs used throughout this report reflect elements of an artwork copyrighted to St Gabriel's School, and is represented in its entirety here. It was created by students in Years K-6 and the team from Dalmarri (dalmarri.com.au) as part of one of their school-based Indigenous Workshops.

MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON

On behalf of the Edmund Rice Education Australia ('EREA') Flexible Schools Ltd Board, I am delighted to present the 2023 Annual Report and the inaugural one for our new entity.

Along with our Board of Directors and CEO Dr Matt Hawkins, it gives me great pride to lead an organisation that is committed to the safety, wellbeing, and empowerment of young people who have been disenfranchised from conventional schooling due to their background, trauma or life circumstances. The work we do – and the unique methodology of teaching and pastoral support that underpins it – makes a life-changing difference to some of

the most marginalised young people in our society. Where others practice exclusion, we practice radical inclusion, living out our Catholic values and our commitment to social justice.

Since 2016, ERSES has grown by

60%

On paper, our fledgling entity EREA Flexible Schools Ltd was officially established in January 2023 – but we all know the Flexi legacy dates back much further than that. We can look back to 2007, when EREA took custodianship of the six Flexi Schools networks from the Christian Brothers. We can look further back to 1987, when our very first Flexible Learning Centre, the Centre Education Programme, was established in Kingston, South East Queensland, with just a handful of young people. And we can even trace our legacy

back tens of thousands of years; our schools stand on Country that has facilitated learning and knowledge transfer among First Nations custodians for millennia.

But the latest step in our journey – our incorporation as a truly national entity, with a united focus on the principles of Common Ground, and inclusive education for young people in the Edmund Rice tradition – has only just begun. The document you hold in your hands, or see on your screen, is a snapshot of the significant activity that has taken place this year to establish this new entity, comprised of Flexi Schools in six states and territories and two Special Schools, and set it on the path for continued success and longevity.

We finish 2023 with an experienced and committed Board, a skilled and enthusiastic National Leadership Team and National Support Team, a revised national structure, a strong financial position, and an atmosphere ripe for consolidation of our strengths and growth of our unique model. The future for Flexis is bright and I thank each and every one of you – including staff, stakeholders, community, Elders, and of course our valued young people – for getting us to this point.

As we look ahead to 2024, I am filled with optimism that – despite



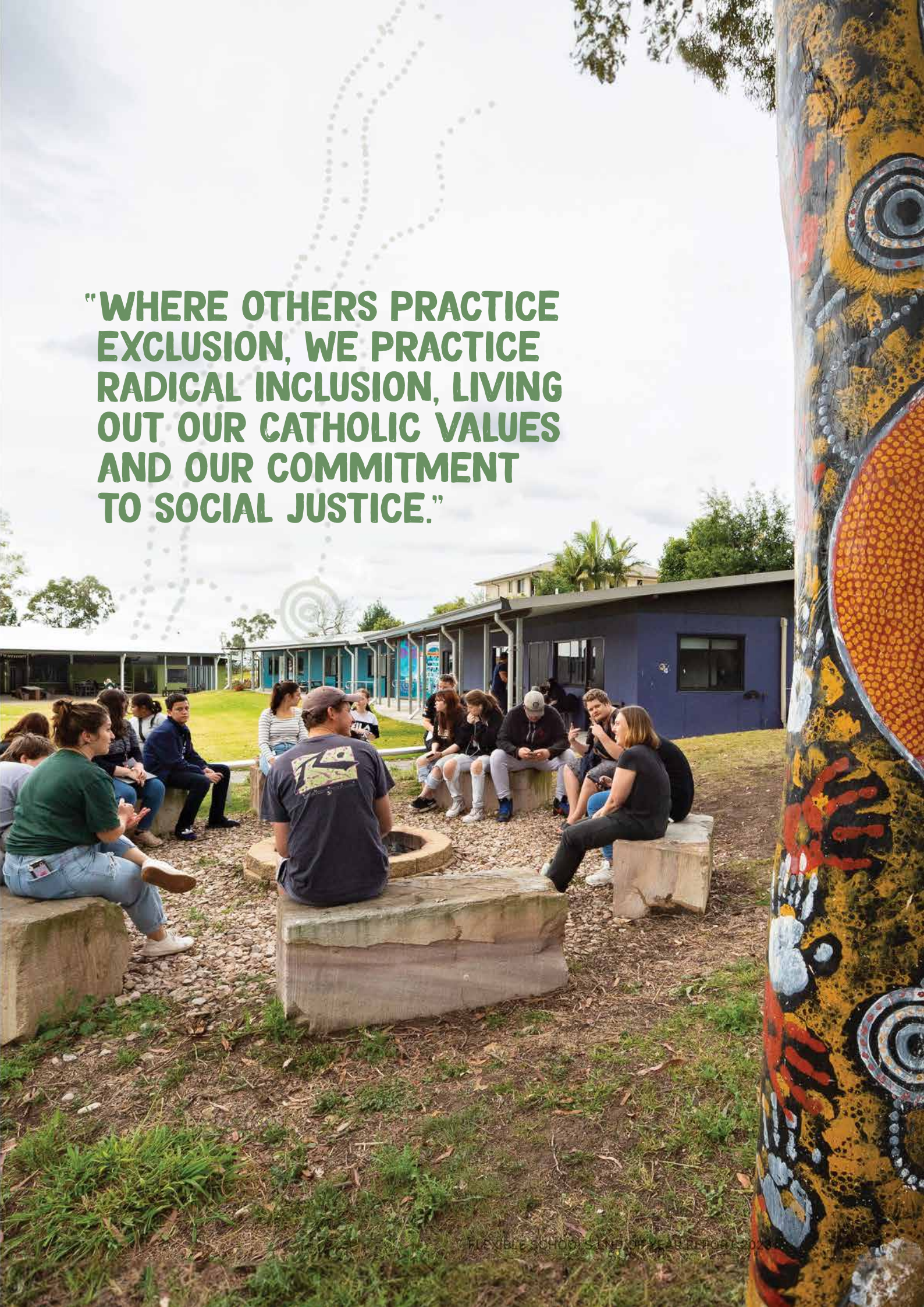
"The work we do – and the unique methodology of teaching and pastoral support that underpins it – makes a life-changing difference to some of the most marginalised young people in our society."

the inevitable challenges of moving from an establishment phase to the development and implementation of our inaugural strategic plan – we can not only continue the momentum of the past 12 months, but build on the legacy of our predecessor organisations to bring about even greater impact as a united national organisation. The future for Flexis is bright.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thelma Parker'.

Ms Thelma Parker
Chair, Edmund Rice Education Australia Flexible Schools Ltd

**"WHERE OTHERS PRACTICE
EXCLUSION, WE PRACTICE
RADICAL INCLUSION, LIVING
OUT OUR CATHOLIC VALUES
AND OUR COMMITMENT
TO SOCIAL JUSTICE."**





MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

It has been an amazing opportunity to be the inaugural CEO of EREA Flexible Schools Ltd, particularly at a time when we've experienced our most significant transformation to date: a new governance structure, a new formal entity and a new organisational structure, where we've strengthened our ability to deliver the highest quality education possible in the safest and most dynamic schools in the country.

The incredible privilege and responsibility of rebuilding our organisation so we can provide more relevant and responsive support for young people and staff is not lost on me. I have loved being able select the best of the best to contribute to our community, people who are

"Everywhere I go, I hear of a community need for an education approach like the one we deliver at Flexis."

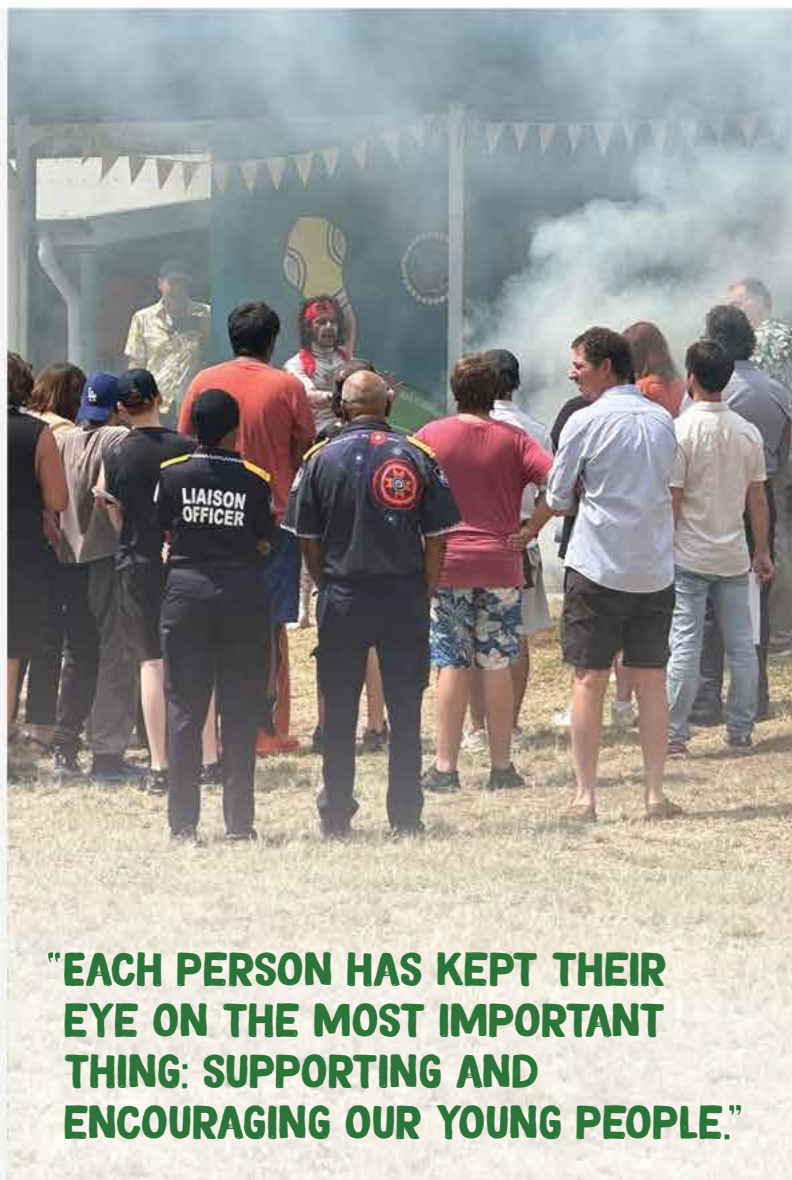
aligned in values and purpose, and who have unique skillsets that will magnify our ability to

engage our young people and set them up for success. Despite the significant changes we've experienced this year, each person has kept their eye on the most important thing: supporting and encouraging our young people. It has been inspiring, and a daily reminder of how special our Flexi community really is.

This year, I visited every Flexi school in our network. I wanted the chance to have meaningful, face-to-face conversations with Flexi communities across Australia, to build relationships and to really understand each school's

unique environment. From being welcomed by Arrernte (Alice Springs) Elders with a beautiful and personal smoking ceremony, sitting in a music room being interviewed for the Noosa Flexi Media Magazine, and doing tai chi with the staff at Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre, to listening to the stories of young people on a bus trip around Mount Isa, and being presented with the most beautiful cross, designed and created by staff and young people at St Joseph's Catholic Flexible Learning Centre, I will cherish these experiences for as long as I live.

Visiting each Flexi school has also shaped my long-term hopes for our organisation, as we look to



"EACH PERSON HAS KEPT THEIR EYE ON THE MOST IMPORTANT THING: SUPPORTING AND ENCOURAGING OUR YOUNG PEOPLE."



foster a sense of belonging within a national education movement, celebrate the impact we make, and nourish and expand our reach to benefit more young minds and their families. As we welcome the new year, my focus will be on building a truly responsive national team and structure to make the lives of our staff easier so they can concentrate on supporting our young people and creating the best possible learning experiences.

We are offering a unique learning experience that is making a profound impact on young people and their families, and everywhere I go, I hear of a community need for an education approach like

the one we deliver at Flexis. We have a model that has achieved real impact for people who have experienced trauma and disengagement, and while we can't help everyone, we can share insights and advice based on our decades of experience. In 2024, we will explore how to do this in the most meaningful way, and I look forward to updating you on this progress. Of course, we will continue to be guided by the Gospel messages of compassion, forgiveness and inclusion, and the Edmund story defined by innovation, determination and faith.

We have something truly special at Flexis, and the stories shared throughout this report, from

the resilience and dedication of students like Ashley and Shayne, to the passion of teachers like Kimberley and Jemma, provide an insight into what we get to experience every day.

I hope you all have a safe and joyful holiday season, and I look forward to welcoming you all back in the new year.

Matt Hawkins
CEO

OUR LOCATIONS



Queensland

- 12 The Centre Education Programme, Kingston *Jagera Country*
- 13 Deception Bay Flexible Learning Centre, Deception Bay *Gubbi Gubbi Country*
- 14 Gympie Flexible Learning Centre, Gympie *Gubbi Gubbi Country*
- 15 Hemmant Flexible Learning Centre, Hemmant *Turrbul Country*
- 16 Noosa Flexible Learning Centre, Sunshine Beach *Gubbi Gubbi Country*
- 17 Albert Park Flexible Learning Centre, Milton *Jagera and Turrbul Country*
- 18 Mount Isa Flexible Learning Centre, Sunset *Kalkadoon - disputed*
- 19 Townsville Flexible Learning Centre, Townsville *Bidal and Wulgurukaba Country*
- 20 Southport Flexible Learning Centre, Southport *Yugambeh Country*
- 21 Ipswich Flexible Learning Centre, Ipswich *Jagera, Yuggera, and Ugarapul Country*
- 22 Inala Flexible Learning Centre, Inala *Turrbul Country*
- 23 Rockhampton Flexible Learning Centre, Rockhampton *Darumbal Country*

New South Wales

- 1 ERSes St Edmund's College, Wahroonga *Ku-ring-gai Country*
- 2 ERSes St Gabriel's School, Castle Hill *Dharug Country*
- 3 St Mary's Flexible Learning Centre, St Mary's *Dharug Country*
- 4 Wollongong Flexible Learning Centre, Towradgi *Dharawal Country*
- 5 Pambula Beach Flexible Learning Centre, Pambula *Yuin Country*
- 6 St Laurence Flexible Learning Centre, Newcastle *Awabakal and Worimi Country*

Tasmania

- 7 St Francis Flexible Learning Centre, West Moonah *Palawa Country*

Western Australia

- 8 Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre, Geraldton *Yamatji Country*

Northern Territory

- 9 St Joseph's Catholic Flexible Learning Centre, Alice Springs *Arrernte Country*

South Australia

- 10 Edmund Rice Flexi School, Elizabeth and Davoren Park *Kaurna Country*
- 11 FAME (Flexible Accredited Meaningful Engagement), Christie Downs *Kaurna Country*



WHO WE ARE

Founded in 1987, EREA Flexible Schools (EREA Flexis) operates 21 Flexible Learning Centres (across 26 campuses) and two Special Schools around Australia in all states and territories except the ACT and Victoria*.

Each Flexible Learning Centre is a registered school and offers educational pathways for young people in years seven to 12 who have disengaged from more traditional, mainstream school settings.

EREA Flexis' approach to education is as unique as our community of young people, with strengths-based, trauma-aware learning at the core. Founded on concepts of radical inclusion and an unconditional positive regard for young people, we work on common ground where power is shared and everyone has voice and agency in decision making. Rather than relying on school rules and punitive consequences, we build relationships, and every member of the community commits to doing their best to work within our four principles of respect, participation, honesty and being safe and legal.



In 2023, EREA Flexible Schools Ltd became its own entity through a restructure of Edmund Rice Education Australia. Our new, aligned and unified approach helps to ensure that young people who attend Flexi Schools experience the highest quality education possible in the safest and most dynamic schools in the country.

*EREA also have Flexi Schools with multiple campuses in Victoria, however these operate under a separate entity.



THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

23 **SCHOOLS**

788 **STAFF**

2,260
YOUNG PEOPLE



137

**YOUTH WORKERS
& TEACHER AIDES**



100%

**OF FLEXI SCHOOLS PROVIDED DAILY
BREAKFAST, MORNING TEA & LUNCH
FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE & STAFF**



100%

**OF FLEXIS OFFERED STUDENT-LED
INITIATIVES TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE
THRIVE AFTER YEAR 12**

1

**YARNING
CIRCLE
OPENED BY
HEMMANT FLC,**

designed and constructed
by Uncle Ed Williams, a proud
Woppaburra and Mer Island man



2

**NEW
BUILDING
OPENINGS AT
TOWNSVILLE
FLC AND
INALA FLC**



**SINCE 2016, ERSSES
HAS GROWN BY**

60%

**...AND STAFFING
HAS INCREASED**

50%



FLEXIS IN 2023

We had a big year at Flexis, becoming a new entity and overhauling our structure to create the most aligned and unified approach possible.

To support this new structure, our team expanded to include new roles that would help to magnify our impact over the coming years, including leadership roles in the areas of Safeguarding, Risk and Compliance, HR, IT, Practice and Identity, Learning and Pedagogy and Finance.

We were also proud to launch our recruitment process for Flexis' inaugural Director of First Nations Education, who will bring a First Nations voice and lens to all organisational decisions. More than 30% of our students identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and while we have a strong First Nations

influence throughout Flexis, along with Indigenous representation at all levels of the organisation, it is crucial that our approach to supporting and encouraging First Nations students is grounded in lived experience.



23 SCHOOLS IN 6 MONTHS

Our CEO, Dr Matt Hawkins, embarked on a mission to visit every one of our schools, from Rockhampton on Darumbal Country (QLD) to Pambula Beach on Yuin Country (NSW), and Alice Springs on Arrernte Country (NT) to Geraldton on Yamatji Country (WA).

No stone was left unturned when it came to meeting with each of our unique school communities across Australia, as Matt learned about what each school needs to create the safest and most dynamic schools in the country. The creativity of staff was inspiring, with young people being engaged in entirely different ways depending on their environment.

This kind of place-based learning has been shown to strengthen connections between young people and their community, and engage young people in a way that motivates them and makes them feel a sense of ownership over what and how they learn. We love to see it!

OUR STORIES

Flexis would be nothing without the dedication and creativity of our staff and young people, and 2023 was defined by these kinds of stories – stories of our teachers, young people and schools doing extraordinary things, being recognised for their commitment to education and overcoming adversity to discover a new passion for learning and school.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: ASHLEY REYNOLDS

One of the most powerful attributes of Flexis is the ability to re-engage young people in their learning journey and provide a safe, supportive environment regardless of their personal circumstances.

For Ashley Reynolds, transitioning to a Flexi school marked a transformation in his educational journey – one that is set to have a lifelong impact. Reflecting on his experience, Ashley explained that school has "got much better, because there are teachers that understand and are more relaxed. We get lunch each day, and we can come later and do shorter days."

Ashley reflected on his new experiences, saying: "I really enjoy the cooking classes and would like to perhaps become a chef one day. I would also like to have more cooking classes". Ashley has really excelled in his cooking class and has been a driving force for this experience, often encouraging others to join in.

Amongst his favourite school memories this year, Ashley recalled his experience attending Threads, where students were provided with suits and shirts for the school formal. "I really enjoyed going to Threads together as a

group. Getting a suit and shirt made me feel great and gave me confidence," he explained.

When asked about his advice for young people facing tough times at school, Ashley advocated for the Flexi approach: "I think they should come to a Flexi school and leave where they are going, because it is more flexible, there are better teachers and there is not as much pressure as there is in mainstream schools."



Beyond excelling in cooking class, Ashley has actively participated in Reclink, exploring new sports and activities. He has also demonstrated a strong commitment to learning as he progressed through his Year 10 work, advancing through two classes in a single year.

Well done, Ashley!



ROCKHAMPTON FLEXI'S DARUMBAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT PLAQUE PROJECT

Since 2017, Rockhampton Flexible Learning Centre (FLC) has partnered with Darumbal Enterprises to create a Darumbal Language Program, developing a deeper understanding of the local Indigenous culture within the school community.

Transitioning from class-based programs, the school came up with an idea to create an acknowledgment plaque as a student-led project, guided by Language and Cultural Officer at Darumbal Enterprises, LeLarni Hatfield. We spoke with Rockhampton FLC's Head of Learning, Jemma Fuka, about this process and what it means for the school community.

"We aimed to engage young

people in an inquiry-based, project-centred approach," said Jemma. The driving question was: "How do we ensure Flexi's acknowledgment plaque reflects our connection to Darumbal Nunthi?"

To kick things off, our young people created a 'need to know' board of all the questions they had to find answers to in order to complete their project, exploring things like "what is the difference

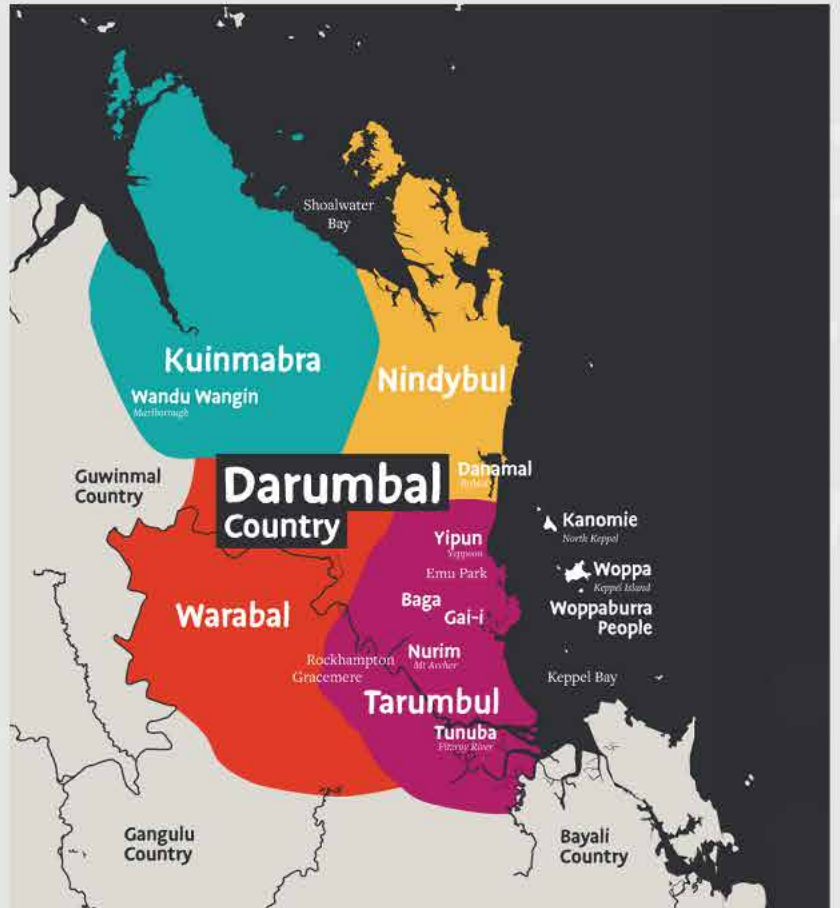


between a Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country?", "what art work do we put on it so it's relevant and meaningful, and how do we do that?" and "who do we talk to, to get more information about the history of Darumbal Nunthi?". The students then worked with local Indigenous experts to find the answers to these questions, and get feedback about the development of the plaque.

The project has had a real impact on each of the students involved. "Their confidence in asking questions, collaborating,

"Throughout this whole process, their knowledge and confidence to use Darumbal language has increased as they are dedicated to keeping the Darumbal language alive at Rockhampton FLC."





“We hope it becomes a respected symbol within our school, sparking conversations during welcomes for Elders, families and guests,”

and seeking answers has been inspiring,” said Jemma. “Throughout this whole process, their knowledge and confidence to use Darumbal language has increased as they are dedicated to keeping the Darumbal language alive at Rockhampton FLC.”

Feedback from Darumbal Elders and staff from Darumbal Enterprises reflected this too. “We received great feedback from the Elders,” Jemma explained, who emphasised the importance of the students’ respectful interactions and dedication to the acknowledgment.

“Watching the growth of the young people not only in their knowledge of Darumbal language, history and culture, but also watching their confidence grow in asking questions, problem solving, collaborating with each other and the experts. The questions they are asking all along in this process has been amazing and their motivation to seek answers and knowledge has been one of my highlights of the project.”

There is a huge amount of excitement surrounding the acknowledgement plaque’s unveiling in Term 1, 2024. “We

hope it becomes a respected symbol within our school, sparking conversations during welcomes for Elders, families and guests,” said Jemma. “We also hope it will be a great learning resource that will help educate our young people about our connection to Darumbal Nunthi and strengthen our relationship with the Traditional Custodians of Darumbal Nunthi.”

SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT: ELIZABETH AND DAVOREN PARK FLEXI SCHOOLS

FILOMENA SALESI

When deciding on the next step in your education journey, you want someone like Filomena Salesi in your corner.

Filomena works as a VET and employment pathways trainer at Edmund Rice Flexible Schools, based across two campuses in Elizabeth and Davoren Park on Kurna Country in South Australia.

The promise of working in an environment where everyone's voices are heard is what drew Filomena to Flexis in the first place. "Knowing Common Ground is the focal point of our school in creating a safe environment for our young people is what helped me secure my decision to work here," she said. "The focus is on our young people and a holistic approach where everyone's voices are heard."

An experienced trainer, Filomena's role sees her guide students into the next phase of their career and education journeys. "Our young people come to me regarding career pathways, short courses, work experience, employment opportunities and further training. Every day is different, but the one thing that is consistent is our young people needing my support."

It's a role where Filomena has seen a huge amount of success. Of the young people she has supported,

many have gone on to be offered employment or apprenticeship roles, an achievement Filomena is immensely proud of.

Working with young people, Filomena says sticking to your word is what's most important. "Getting the best out of our young people means following through with what you say and not making any promises that you can't deliver," she said.

"Having our young people attend Career and Employment Expos, participate in Try a Trade Programs and reminding them to always have a Plan B, C-F is crucial to their success."



IN 2023, FILOMENA HAS SUPPORTED:



32

young people to obtain their learner drivers licence



16

young people to complete work experience



17

young people to attend a Try a Trade program



25

young people to apply for their White Cards to work in the construction industry



28

young people to apply for Vocational Education and Training

SHAYNE HACKETT

When Shayne Hackett started his schooling journey, he never imagined he would be finishing it with an apprenticeship.

Shayne spent his early high school years in the mainstream schooling system before moving to an Edmund Rice Flexi School on Kaurua Country in South Australia. After a few short months in a Flexi environment, he said he could see a difference in his learning ability.

"My learning experience has changed very drastically compared to a mainstream school. I find it a lot easier to focus on my schoolwork, here we get our compulsories done and then I can focus on getting my apprenticeship," he said. "At school now, I find that the teachers and youth workers are more supportive, and they have our best interests at heart in wanting us to succeed."

Instead of being something he dreaded, school has now become a safe place for Shayne. "My favourite thing about school now is the environment and feeling safe. It's more relaxed and more open. I feel more independent, and the teachers focus on my needs."

"Us young people get a chance to have conversations with teachers naturally and it's not forced as they want our input," he said.

While Shayne has made some huge accomplishments in the last year, including being offered an apprenticeship with Reece Plumbing, he says it's his attitude that has had the biggest shift. "I have become so much more confident and am proud to say my engagement in school this year has been way better than last year. At the start of the year I never thought that my apprenticeship would be my pathway towards the end."

Admirably, Shayne isn't stopping there, already setting goals for 2024.

"My next step is to gain my learner license, continue with my apprenticeship, complete my Cert II Construction and Cert II Supply Chain and Logistics. I have big plans for myself next year - let's go!"



"I have become so much more confident and am proud to say my engagement in school this year has been way better than last year."



A TEACHER'S GUILD AWARD FOR OUR DIRECTOR OF INNOVATION

World Teachers' Day held special significance for St Gabriel's School, as Kimberley Hopkinson, the Director of Learning and Innovation, was honoured with a Recognition Award at the 2023 NSW Teacher's Guild Awards.

Kimberley has played a significant role in strengthening the impact of St Gabriel's School, developing eVET programs, presenting at national conferences on Special Needs Education and mentoring younger staff. Reflecting on the award, Kimberley said: "Receiving the NSW Teachers Guild Award for World Teachers' Day was deeply humbling and inspiring. It was a testament to the collective effort and commitment towards fostering quality education in a challenging educational landscape."

Kimberley emphasised the critical role of innovation in special education to maintain a holistic approach while incorporating new evidence-based practices. "Instilling high expectations and setting standards helps us tailor innovative practices to cater to each child's needs, ensuring equitable educational opportunities," she explained.


Discussing this year's initiatives, Kimberley highlighted the introduction of eVET and VET courses for students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities.

"Our Year 11 cohort engages in diverse courses like Hospitality, Animal Care, and Early Childhood Education," she said. "Additionally, our students access work placements, including one at Sydney Zoo."

Kimberley shared her excitement about the first Year 12 cohort graduate and their transition to post-school life. "I always try to ensure that any opportunities I currently introduce align with student interest and also have potential to open doors for further opportunities," she said.

"It is both daunting and exciting to think about our students graduating to the 'real world', but it is reassuring to know we are putting the right measures in place to provide access and opportunities for professional growth and development."





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A UNIQUE LEARNING
EXPERIENCE THAT IS
MAKING A PROFOUND
IMPACT ON YOUNG
PEOPLE AND THEIR
FAMILIES"**

**"WE BUILD TRUST WITH OUR YOUNG
PEOPLE AND IN DOING SO, COMPLETELY
CHANGE THEIR VIEW OF EDUCATION."**





STRENGTHENING VOCATIONAL SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

In 2023, Geraldton Flexible Learning Centre (GFLC) strengthened its support for young people seeking a vocational calling by adding a Transition Officer role to its dynamic range of staff.

At the heart of this approach is an engaging curriculum, which aims to create a responsive learning environment with opportunities for certificate-level courses and a diverse range of vocational-related programs. In 2023, courses included Industrial Skills, Conservation and Ecosystem Management, Pre-Apprenticeships in Building and Construction, Leadership and Civil Construction.

GFLC have also developed great partnerships with the Jobs and Skills Centre, Central Regional TAFE, Real Futures, Vocational Training Services, PCYC and more recently, the Mid-West Rangers. These partnerships have been able to provide pre-employment services to young people at GFLC, including career exploration, resume and cover letter development, acquiring bank accounts and birth certificates, interview skills and driver licences, all in preparation for employment applications.

The introduction of the Transition Officer role has been instrumental

in facilitating part-time, after-hours employment for our young people, allowing them to strike a balance between work and continuing their education at school or TAFE.

Thank you to GFLC's inaugural Transition Officer, Luke Kara, and Mike Panter, the Associate Head of Campus, for making this a reality!

“The introduction of the Transition Officer role has been instrumental in facilitating part-time, after-hours employment for our young people.”





FLEXIS IN 2024

While the first Flexible Learning Centre was established in 1987, EREA Flexible Schools is a new entity with a renewed vision: to become the leading, national provider of alternate education, ensuring that our young people experience the highest quality education possible in the safest and most dynamic schools in the country.

This year, we started to make changes that will help us to realise this vision, and in 2024, we will look to solidify these efforts and identify opportunities to deliver the most impact to young people and their families. As a priority, we will develop a national culture aligned with Catholic mission, Edmund Rice charism, and the authentic narrative of Flexi schools. We will implement fit-for-purpose structures, systems, and processes, and we will put steps in place to expand our footprint, scope, and influence.

We will also explore ways to deepen connections between schools, community service providers and government agencies. Our partnerships with external services, like government education services, youth justice and social services, community providers like

headspace and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services, are essential if we are to continue supporting the wellbeing of our young people. We will continue to prioritise ways we can strengthen and formalise these connections across each of our communities.

Of course, these efforts are nothing without our people. As we look to the future, we will continue to foster a sense of belonging within a national education movement, celebrate the impact we make, and nourish and expand our reach to benefit more young minds and their families.



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