

# The Northern Bay Journey



Northern Bay  
College



Education  
and Training



Families,  
Fairness  
and Housing



**Commitment to Inclusivity and Reconciliation**

Our Place welcomes families and children of any background, culture, language, religion, ability, gender and sexuality. We acknowledge the First Nations people of Australia and Traditional Custodians of the lands that we live and work on. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.



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## **This report describes the origin of the Our Place initiative in Northern Bay and documents the story of Our Place in Northern Bay so far.**

The Northern Bay Our Place site is located at Northern Bay College's Wexford Campus in the Geelong suburb of Corio, 10km from the centre of Geelong and 70km south-west of Melbourne. Wexford caters for children in Prep to Year 8 and is one of five Northern Bay College campuses located in the 3214 postcode.

Northern Bay Our Place became operational in January 2020 with the completion of the City of Greater Geelong's Korayn Birralelee Family Centre on the Wexford site, and the construction of the school's new administrative offices and reception area connected to the new Centre. It is one of ten Our Place sites to be established since the demonstration site at Doveton College in 2012.

Northern Bay's journey towards being an Our Place site commenced back in 2013 when the College Principal visited

Doveton College, followed by a meeting with the Chair of the Colman Education Foundation, at his quest to provide an optimal school experience to his students and break the cycle of disadvantage.

Prior to this, a long-standing commitment to building integrated child and family centres existed within City of Greater Geelong, alongside a number of government initiatives undertaken in the Corio/Norlane area to improve child and family outcomes, including a long-running Best Start partnership.

Corio is an area that has experienced long-term, significant disadvantage. In 2016 it had a low Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage score of 832 (compared to an average of 1,000), an unemployment rate of 12.5% (compared to 6.6% for Victoria) and an average weekly household income of \$914 (compared to \$1,419 for Victoria)<sup>1</sup>.



# PURPOSE OF THE Journey Report

Many families experience high levels of socio-economic disadvantage as well as other vulnerabilities such as disability, refugee status, single-parenting, unemployment and children living in out of home care. The population of Corio is diverse with a significant proportion of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander residents, as well as a high number who have recently arrived from a range of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, in particular from Southeast Asia Myanmar (formerly Burma).

The Wexford campus of Northern Bay College and City of Greater Geelong's Korayn Birralee Family Centre together make up the Northern Bay Our Place site. 'Korayn Birralee' means 'Corio children' in the local Wadawurrung language, a name chosen to recognise and celebrate the region's Aboriginal heritage.

The Centre features the latest in early childhood facilities and environmental design. It includes a shared entry and reception with Northern Bay College and offers long day care, kindergarten, Maternal and Child Health (MCH), playgroups, parenting programs, five consultation rooms for allied health services, a specialist family support program room, toy library, multipurpose/community room, parent lounge and an extensive, nature-inspired outdoor play area.

The Journey Report describes the involvement and contribution of the key partners at Northern Bay, the series of events leading up to the establishment of the site and the early progress of the implementation of the Our Place approach. Throughout the report, the key steps, learnings and partner aspirations for the Northern Bay site are outlined.

## CONTRIBUTORS AND SOURCES

A total of 13 key stakeholders involved in the establishment of the Northern Bay Our Place site were consulted in the development of this report. Those consulted included representatives from the Northern Bay Site Implementation Group (SIG), including Department of Education and Training (DET) – Barwon Region and Central, Northern Bay College, City of Greater Geelong, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS, now Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, DFFH) and Our Place, Colman Education Foundation.

In addition to the stakeholder interviews, information for this report was drawn from other sources including school documentation, meeting minutes, photos, community consultation reports, demographic information, educational attainment and early childhood data.



SECTION 1

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**Evidence indicates that education is the key to lifting the aspirations and improving the lives of children and their families. Our Place facilitates partnerships that enable the school to be the central place for learning and support services that overcome barriers to educational achievement.**

June McLoughlin, Executive Director -  
Services, Our Place

# UNDERSTANDING THE concept of Our Place

**Our Place is a holistic place-based approach to supporting the education, health and development of all children and families in disadvantaged communities by utilising the universal platform of a school.**

The Our Place approach is built on the strong body of evidence from international research and experts, and the translation of learnings from its lighthouse site at Doveton College, which commenced operation in 2012.

The evidence indicates that education is the key to lifting aspirations and improving the lives of children and their families. The approach seeks to overcome the barriers to educational achievement by focusing on:

- Supporting high-quality learning environments for children – at home, in early learning settings and in schools.
- Supporting the service system to better address known biological and environmental risks, allowing for prevention and early intervention.

## WHY IS IT NEEDED?

In Australia, the benefits of economic growth are not shared as evenly as they once were, and the equity gap is widening between the wealthy and the poor. For example, in Victoria just 11 postcodes (1.6% of total) account for 13.7% of the most disadvantaged rank positions (Yule, 2015<sup>2</sup>).

Our Place's approach is based on the premise that improved access to high-quality education for all is key to addressing the equity gap.

- Complex and entrenched disadvantage is concentrated in certain postcodes – where you are born shouldn't determine your opportunities in life.

- Children need supportive environments to thrive, which is especially important for children facing challenges that arise from social and economic disadvantage.
- While there is a wealth of resources and services available, often these are not of adequate quality to make a difference and/or are not accessed by the people that need it the most.

When schools in disadvantaged communities act as community hubs they have the potential to create powerful change. Our Place facilitates partnerships that enable the school to be the central place for learning and support services that overcome barriers to educational achievement.

## WHAT ARE THE DESIRED OUTCOMES?

The vision is that all children and their families succeed in life. To reliably measure the impact of Our Place, our objective is to achieve positive change in the nine key areas that form the Outcomes Framework.

The nine Outcomes have been carefully chosen to enable the effective evaluation of clear conditions of wellbeing under the three major domains. The most critical domain focuses on outcomes for children, while the other two domains are outcomes for their families and the communities they live in.

There are a number of indicators across these nine outcome areas. The indicators provide a meaningful understanding to the extent that Outcomes are being achieved. They can be measured in a timely manner and reflect reliable, robust indicators of community level change. >

<sup>2</sup> YULE, A. 2015. Dropping of the Edge (DOTE) 2015: Key Findings. Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia.



### Children

- Happy, healthy and develop well
- Engage in learning and social opportunities
- Achieve as learners

### Families

- Happy, healthy and well with strong self-worth
- Confident as parents/ carers and engage in their children's learning
- Engaged in learning, are skilled and are employed

### Community

- Connected and feel socially included
- Having a sense of pride and belonging
- Actively contribute skills and knowledge to community productivity

#### › HOW ARE THESE OUTCOMES ACHIEVED?

The Our Place holistic approach includes five core Elements that describe the evidence-based strategies that contribute to achieving Outcomes for children, families and communities. The Elements are:

##### **High-quality early learning, health and development**

Support early learning from birth as well as playgroups, child health and parenting support on site.

##### **High-quality schooling**

Support high-quality teaching and learning environments that ensure each child receives the support they need to achieve and thrive.

##### **Wrap-around health and wellbeing services**

Support access to effective health and wellbeing services.

##### **Engagement and enrichment activities for children**

Create affordable, on-site opportunities for children to develop an interest in sports, arts and hobbies with others.

#### **Adult engagement, volunteering, learning and employment**

Support opportunities for families to engage in volunteering, formal and informal learning, and link them into employment pathways.

#### HOW DOES IT COME TOGETHER?

Our Place facilitates partnerships that enable the school to be the central place for education and support services that are known to improve the lives and aspirations of children and their families. Our Place refers to this role as being 'The Glue'.

The Glue is made up of the people, partnerships, knowledge and infrastructure that are essential to successfully improving outcomes for children through a place-based approach. The key ingredients are:

##### **1. Space and infrastructure**

A single, shared entrance to early learning, school, health services and community facilities, with welcoming and appropriate space for families.





## 2. Facilitation, leadership and partnerships

People in place to build commitment, drive action and outcomes, connect people with other resources and encourage a culture of mutual respect and questioning.

## 3. Collaborative governance

Shared commitment to collaborative governance and innovation to develop solutions that achieve impact.

## 4. Data-informed decision-making

Skills and capacity to identify, collect, analyse, interpret and understand data from available sources.

Our Place does not deliver or fund any services or programs, rather it assists in reshaping the service system by providing essential resources to drive action, impact and innovation.

Its expertise building meaningful relationships and facilitating lasting partnerships with local leaders and the community to create opportunities for participation. The people resources Our Place provides are:

### Community Facilitators

Front-line staff who implement evidence-based strategies, working on-site with the local community and service providers. This role leads and undertakes the bulk of the

work in the implementation process, with an emphasis on engaging with the school and key partners and connecting with the local community and understanding and responding to local community needs.

### Partnership Managers

Lead and drive the partnership between the school, the early learning provider, state government and local government at each Our Place site. This role is involved in overseeing and supporting the implementation process, with an emphasis on building relationships, creating a shared commitment and vision.

### Research and Evaluation Team

Provide advice, resources and support to Our Place sites in initial planning, data collection and ongoing reporting. The team leads baseline data collection and works closely with those involved in implementation to support the collection and analysis of process and outcome data.

### Subject matter experts

Our Place engages consultants with expertise in a number of areas to assist in designing and implementing strategies in each site, such as specialists in early learning, adult education, principal support, employment pathways, paediatric health and data and evaluation.





## TRANSLATING THE CONCEPT to Northern Bay

**The original concept envisaged for the Northern Bay Our Place site was driven by a long-standing commitment to building integrated child and family centres by the City of Greater Geelong and Northern Bay College's vision of supporting its students and families to aspire for positive outcomes.**

### THE CORIO COMMUNITY

Corio is located in the northern suburbs of Geelong in the local government area of the City of Greater Geelong, Victoria. It is a diverse and growing suburb which has attracted a great deal of interest from government and community initiatives wishing to address local issues and improve the lives of its residents.

While it is characterised by long-term, significant disadvantage, Corio is currently serviced by many agencies, as well as having a large shopping centre, local library, sporting and leisure facilities, and two neighbourhood and community centres.

Corio shares the same postcode (3214) with Norlane and North Shore, however each suburb is quite distinct with its own Northern Bay College campus and early years centre located within it. In recent years the closure of several large local industries (including Ford, Alcoa and Shell) has resulted in significant negative impacts on the community, especially in terms of unemployment. >

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**We wanted to give a promise to our community. Our community have been let down so many times, and so many times they've had to tell their story. We said let's make a promise to people here that if they work with us and stick with us and believe in us, then we will ensure that we can make a successful outcome for you, which could be as simple as getting a job or getting further education.**

Inaugural Northern Bay College Principal

› Many families across the region experience high levels of socio-economic disadvantage as well as a range of other vulnerabilities such as disability, refugee status and children living in out-of-home care. Of the 3,797 families in Corio during the 2016 ABS Census<sup>3</sup>, 1,154 (30.4%) were single-parent families. Of the 2,584 families with two parents, 785 (30.4%) had both partners unemployed.

The population of Corio is diverse. There are approximately 300 people (2% of the population) from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background and there have been a high number of children and families moving to the area from a broad range of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Within Corio, 17.5% of households speak a language other than English, with Karen being the most frequently spoken (3.1%).



The Wexford Campus of Northern Bay College (henceforth referred to as Wexford) and City of Greater Geelong's Korayn Birralelee Family Centre together make up the Our Place site.

Wexford is the largest of five College campuses in the 3214 postcode with 100 staff and 544 students in 2021. Northern Bay College (P-12) was formed in 2011 as a result of a merger of nine schools into one multi-campus College.

At the commencement of 2011, there were seven campus sites, which eventually reduced to five campuses; four of these are Prep-Year 8; one is a senior campus with Year 9-12. Wexford caters for children from Prep to Year 8, many of whom are considered vulnerable, particularly when starting school<sup>4</sup>. Over one-third have a language background other than English, and there is a significant minority of 50 (or 9%) from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, making it the most diverse of the five College campuses.

A number of early learning facilities existed within Corio in close proximity to Wexford prior to the construction of Korayn Birralelee Family Centre. One of these was a Council run long day care centre and integrated kinder which transitioned to the new site, while another was a well-established, parent-led kindergarten operating in a Council-owned building that was demolished as part of the development.

While fostering a strong community around them, these facilities were aging and neither provided the opportunity to link directly to a school on school grounds as with Korayn Birralelee Family Centre.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) Census of Population and Housing.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Early Development Census (2018).

## ORIGINAL CONCEPT

Prior to the introduction of Our Place, the areas of Corio and Norlane have been the focus of a number of initiatives to improve outcomes for children and families, including the state government's Best Start partnership which has been operating in the area since 2001, and a Neighbourhood Renewal program since 2003. These initiatives have brought with them a long history of investment and innovation, as well as sound platforms of networking and collaboration across the many services operating in the area.

Despite this, one of the remaining challenges in Corio to emerge from Our Place agency consultations is the coordination of the vast number of organisations and projects concentrated in the area, along with a perception of unnecessary duplication of services on offer. These factors have reportedly contributed to confusion amongst families trying to navigate the system. More streamlined referral pathways and better communication between service providers is required. Given the number of initiatives preceding Our Place, there is a degree of skepticism about new projects amongst certain professionals.

The original concept of having a 'full-service school model' at Northern Bay, which ultimately led to the introduction of Our Place, was imagined some ten years ago by the Principal at the time after the merger of Northern Bay College in 2011. The Principal at the time had been at Northern Bay for over a decade, which included being in the role throughout the merger, before retiring in 2018. His vision to develop a school that would cater for the needs of local families, not just their children, drove the initial concept:

"I liked the notion that the school could be more than just an education facility for kids aged five to 12 or 18. It really appealed to me that we could be a fully serviced school that could provide all the health and wellbeing needs of that community." (Inaugural Northern Bay College Principal)

The beginning of this work took place in 2011 and was named the 'Northern Bay Promise' which later became the 'Northern Bay Challenge'. Its aim is to support the school to identify and remove barriers to successful student pathways to further education and/or employment. The Challenge supports students by providing various scholarships and connecting students with a wide network of industry and business leaders across Geelong.

The Challenge Board comprises many high-profile Geelong leaders and is proud to also have former students as Board representatives who all work together to provide these positive connections for the students of NBC. It has a vision for 'a community that is proud of their 3214 postcode and sets and achieves high standards for all students in terms of wellbeing, health, nutrition and education and employment'. The Northern Bay Challenge has continued to the present

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*I became really interested in the work that was happening at Doveton. I thought, YES! That's the sort of model that I envisioned the school should be.*

Inaugural Northern Bay College Principal

time. A number of like-minded services and agencies came on board with the notion of the 'promise', and one of them had a link with the Colman Education Foundation. A connection was made and soon after the Principal visited Doveton College in 2013 and organised a meeting with the Colman Education Foundation Chair.

Alongside this was City of Greater Geelong's work in setting up a number of integrated child and family centres, located either nearby or adjacent to primary schools. When Colman Education Foundation became involved with Northern Bay College, City of Greater Geelong became interested in the potential to all work together to build on the previous work carried out in this area by Council.

From a Council perspective, the discussion around the potential development of a service hub or a community hub goes right back to 2006 when the schools in the north went through a regeneration and consolidation process and they nominated what was then four key primary school sites.

## SITE SELECTION

After the connection was made between the Colman Education Foundation, Northern Bay College and Council, a group of local stakeholders met to explore the possibility of what they termed 'doing Doveton in Corio'. A key consideration at this point was whether the Council would be able to build a community facility and early learning centre physically attached to the school, on state government land.

In 2009 City of Greater Geelong nominated the Wexford site as a priority and it was included in the Corio-Norlane strategic plan published in 2012, reinforcing the intent to build the joined-up facility. It was again published in the Council's 2013/2014 children's services infrastructure plan as a future development priority for an integrated children's center.

A round of consultations was conducted by Council with service providers in the area, including the kindergarten, childcare center and schools, which indicated support for the join-up concept at Wexford. By 2015/16 Council began discussions with the Colman Education Foundation and the Department of Education and Training (DET) in earnest around a potential partnership and the opportunity for collaboration. >

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**When I first started in the role, I joined in with the Bethany playgroup and the ‘coffee club’. This was a great opportunity to meet families from different cultural backgrounds, through links with service providers who already had established relationships with those parents. This set me in good stead because when we moved into the new space, I was familiar to these families. Making those early connections provided a great basis for ongoing relationship building onsite.**

Community Facilitator, Northern Bay – Our Place

› In 2016 a number of Council staff visited Doveton College to learn about the school and how it had evolved over time. Following this, Colman Education Foundation representatives were invited to visit Council’s recently completed centre at Ocean Grove. The centre in Ocean Grove was state-of-the-art and incorporated many attributes in line with Doveton College, however, there were concerns that the centre was not built in the ideal place: with its back to the school and no physical connection between the two buildings.

Similarly, two of the Northern Bay College campuses were fortunate to have child and family centres built nearby (one

next to Tallis P-8 campus and one at Goldsworthy senior campus), however neither of these were connected as one building. One was built next to the campus on the same piece of land but with the school and centre facing opposite directions and a carpark between them. A second was built next to the campus but with a demarcation zone between them.

Wexford presented an opportunity to connect an early learning facility directly with the school, which was appealing to both Council and the school. The Colman Education Foundation worked with DET to allow a Council building to be built on state government land and enable a combined, shared entrance to be built for the school and early learning and community centre. This was a ground-breaking decision wholeheartedly supported by Council and the school, which was enabled by the involvement of the Colman Education Foundation, who as an objective outsider was able to encourage discussions across the two levels of government to reach this decision:

“It used to be that you’d never allow a Council building on school land. DET started to realise that there might be a better way of doing things, and this was an example of what was a better way. Council couldn’t influence this on its own, they needed a middleman to broker the deal and have those conversations.” (Julius Colman, Chair - Colman Education Foundation)

As a consequence of the decision to allow the child and family centre to be built on DET land and connected to the existing school, the early stages of planning towards this direction began in alignment with this vision.

Besides the fit of Corio in terms of its socioeconomic disadvantage, the area was also home to a number of existing Council-run early childhood services with aging facilities designed around a bygone era with a single service focus. The conceptual design provided an opportunity to consolidate several existing buildings, each delivering different early childhood services.

Previously the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) service was located half a kilometer away from the childcare centre and kindergarten. This set up was quite fragmented and Council had been actively moving towards a more integrated and consolidated service platform in terms of its future development and infrastructure.

## PARTNERSHIP FORMATION

Prior to the introduction of Our Place, strong and positive relationships already existed amongst City of Greater Geelong, Northern Bay College and DET, with a common vision to improve outcomes for children in Corio and aspirations to build a joined-up school and family centre.

The introduction of the Colman Education Foundation's Our Place approach was seen as a useful addition to this existing partnership, bringing with it the capacity to turn that vision into a reality and take it beyond what was originally envisaged. In particular, the reciprocal visits to Doveton and Ocean Grove led to an increased level of enthusiasm about how this could be realized and the possibilities of working together. The involvement of the Colman Education Foundation was particularly helpful in developing inroads with DET:

"I think what's exciting is for the first time we're able to form a strong partnership with DET and school provision. It is something that's being talked about for a long time." (Coordinator Community Infrastructure Planning, City of Greater Geelong)

The Our Place partnership was helped by the pre-existing positive relationships formed over the past decades amongst services within the Corio area, including City of Greater Geelong, the School and DET:

"I think one of the exciting things about working in that group was actually the synergies that were there. There was absolutely no doubt that everybody was striving for the same goal and had the same vision. I never got a sense that there was anybody sitting around that table that wasn't 110% on board and excited; for me that was a really exciting experience." (Early Childhood Coordinator, City of Greater Geelong)

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***From the outset it was clear that the school, Council and DET were all passionate about improving children's lives. They already worked very well together as a partnership and warmly welcomed the Our Place team, embracing its philosophy and vision.***

Partnership Manager, Northern Bay – Our Place

In July 2019 an Our Place Partnership Manager and Community Facilitator were appointed to the site, some six months before the opening of the new building in January 2020. This was a deliberate attempt to allow time to get to know the school and local community and conduct an intensive series of consultations with both professionals and families, while also strengthening the partnership's collective vision around the purpose of Our Place.

The Community Facilitator had previously worked for City of Greater Geelong for 15 years and was already well-known to local partners and agencies alike. The Partnership Manager was also a member of Our Place's Research and Evaluation team and had a mixture of research, evaluation and implementation experience from involvement in a range of place-based initiatives. Originally the Our Place team were based in the community building at Wexford, sitting in a shared office alongside two other community services, Bethany and Community Hubs Australia. Being located on school grounds in the existing community area created opportunities to get to know families the agencies were working with right from the beginning.

By September 2019 a Manager of Korayn Birralelee Family Centre was appointed by City of Greater Geelong. Having previously worked at City of Greater Geelong's innovative Ocean Grove integrated child and family centre, and previous to that the education sector, she brought sound knowledge and experience to the partnership about connecting early years services and school. During the same year, a number of changes took place within Northern Bay College and Wexford. A new campus Principal was appointed in November 2019, and following a restructure of the College, a new College Principal was recruited in December 2019 and appointed in January 2020.

The Our Place team worked closely with the new principals to ensure a solid understanding of the Our Place approach was maintained, something that is evident today. >

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**I saw Our Place as an opportunity to increase the connection between the community and school and really promote that idea that learning starts at birth, which starts within the community. My understanding was that if we could better connect our community programs and facilities to our schools, then that would definitely have a positive impact on the transition of kids through those early years and into school, and also having a positive impact on the way that education would be viewed by families.**

Northern Bay College Principal

› A new Partnership Manager was appointed one year later in July 2020 after the original moved back into the Our Place Research and Evaluation team at full capacity. Like the Community Facilitator, the new Partnership Manager was local to the area with in-depth local service knowledge, as well as previous experience in the not-for-profit sector managing complex initiatives.

“Having the opportunity to work in the Geelong region where I grew up is exciting and the Our Place approach presents a really unique opportunity to work innovatively while still maintaining a strong framework around our practice.”  
(Partnership Manager, Northern Bay – Our Place)



A second Community Facilitator joined the Our Place Northern Bay team in April 2021. Having worked locally at a range of community and Aboriginal services, the second Community Facilitator brings new and complementary skills and experience to the team.

### THE FIT WITH OUR PLACE

The values of Our Place and its place-based approach to improving outcomes of vulnerable families resonated with both City of Greater Geelong and Northern Bay College from the outset. In terms of the College, a number of initiatives aligned to the Our Place approach were already embedded, including the implementation of the Berry Street Education Model since 2017 (a trauma-informed education approach aimed at increasing student engagement), and play-based learning (specifically the evidence-based Kathy Walker Learning approach) since 2017.

Great efforts have been made throughout Northern Bay College to create a positive environment which supports and fosters effective learning and improves long-term outcomes for children and families in the Corio community.

At the time of Our Place joining, Wexford campus was a Community Hubs Australia (CHA) site, had the Geelong English Language Centre (GELC) and a robust English as an additional language (EAL) program. All have been instrumental in engaging and supporting CALD children and their families. There was also a Social and Emotional



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*Play-based learning didn't start with play-based learning, it started with: look at the child and see what they're bringing with them; identify that this child can already do this; what is that child's starting point? It was a model of looking at each student when they came in the door, looking at what our kids can and will do and what their strengths are. That's the basis for engaging them in learning.”*

Previous Wexford Principal

Wellbeing (SEW) team, 'theraplay' programs and initiatives that support the development of social skills and self-regulation, as well as a broader focus on prevention and early intervention. This includes State-wide Positive Behaviours (SWPB) and Respectful Relationships. There are also supplementary timetables such as the extended school day, ASPIRE, 'Hands On Learning' and the Tertiary Futures program which offers students across the College a wider range of subject choices, learning options and pathways opportunities.

While other Northern Bay campuses had different supports at the time to Wexford, the College as a whole was also supported by many agencies, initiatives and charitable organisations such as Bethany Community Services Connect Up program, The Smith Family, The Geelong Project, Kids Thrive and Ardoch, who are all working collaboratively with the College in working towards improved long-term outcomes for children and families in the Corio community. >



## SECTION 2



› In terms of the local Council, City of Greater Geelong has had a strong interest in service integration for many years, developing indicators based on evidence and existing models as a checklist for assessing whether it has been achieved and to what extent.

Key considerations include whether there are common recording systems, single governance structure, service spaces and places that are collectively shared and owned. In addition, significant professional development has been undertaken with staff on these topics.

Part of this work around service integration was a strong belief in a seamless transition for children from early learning to school, and like the school, an understanding of the importance of play-based learning:

“We support the notion of the continuum of learning and the understanding that children are not necessarily needing to be ready for school – schools need to be ready for children. We know from research, play-based learning is so important, and that doesn’t stop when children leave an early years space. They need that transition.” (Early Childhood Coordinator, City of Greater Geelong)

Despite City of Greater Geelong being involved in a number of other initiatives aiming to improve outcomes for children in the early years and school years, the benefits of the

Our Place approach stood out as unique:

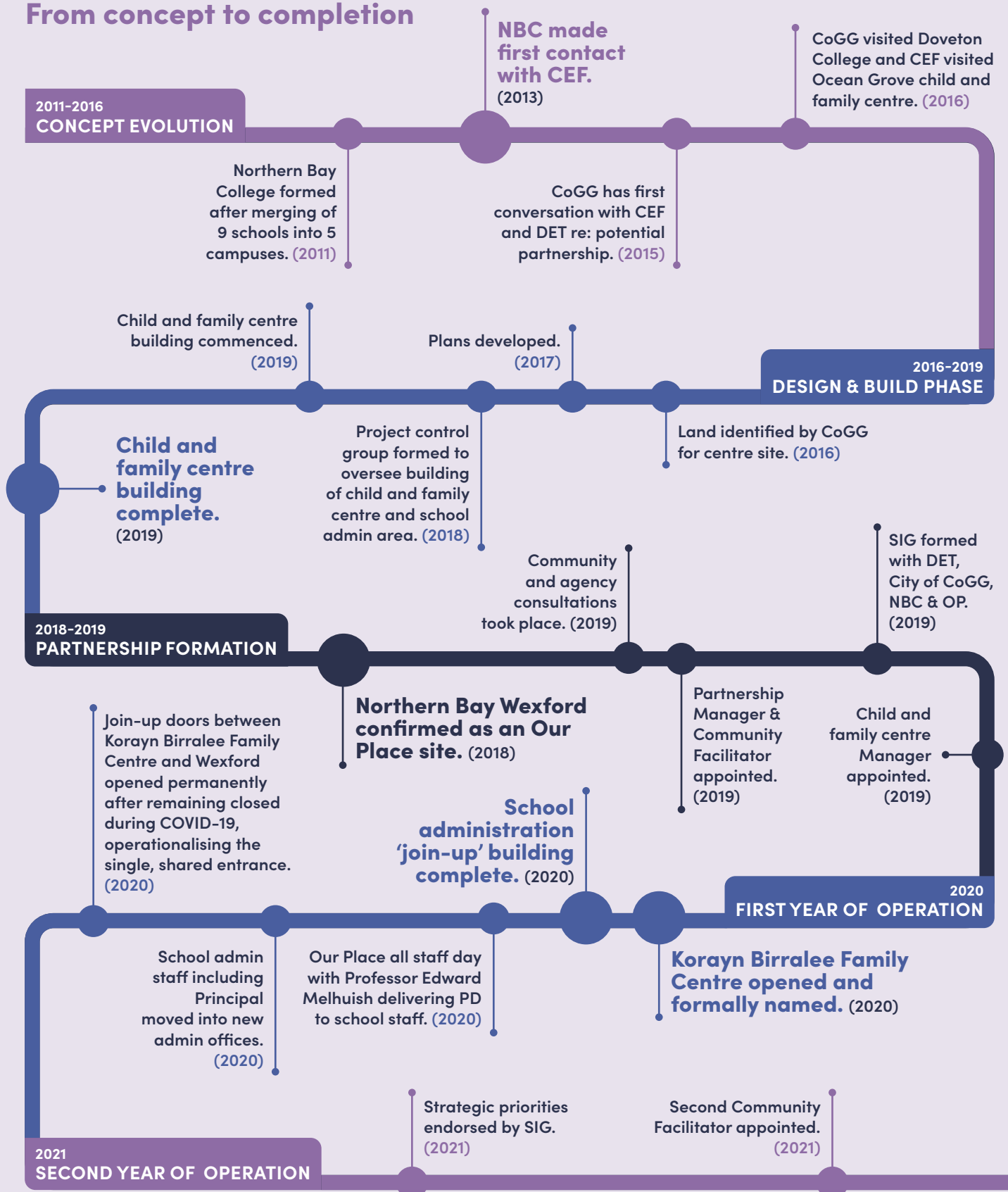
“The value of Our Place is that it’s sustained over a good duration of time. Added to that is the fact that it is site-based and specifically connects primary education with early childhood.” (Coordinator Community Infrastructure Planning, City of Greater Geelong)

The inclusion of DHHS into the Our Place partnership came later in mid-2020. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS, now Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, DFFH) representative at the time shared a similar view on the strength of the Our Place approach in terms of investing for the long-term, but also because of its independence from government (while working alongside government in partnership):

“I think there has been a lot of focus and investment over the years but maybe some of those investments haven’t quite hit the mark because they’ve been government led. I think that where Our Place has a great opportunity is that it is separated from government in a way, but it’s that philanthropic trust foundation working. I think that the ability to really embrace the community’s feedback and to be able to take a non-bureaucratic approach around some of the solutions, and to really look at how the community can drive some of those solutions, means it can be more creative.” (Advisor, Population Health & Community Wellbeing – Barwon Area DHHS)

# TIMELINE

## From concept to completion



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**It was fairly late in the piece when the idea of connecting the school and the early childhood center actually started to emerge. It was a consequence of the Colman Education Foundation’s advocacy and intent about having a single entry and a physical connection between school and early learning that we’ve been able to achieve that. It opens the door to a wonderful opportunity that we haven’t had anywhere else previously until now.**

Coordinator Community Infrastructure Planning,  
City of Greater Geelong



## BUILDING FROM **the ground up**

**The new Centre was designed to be a state-of-the-art integrated facility for local families. Both Korayn Birralea Family Centre and the ‘join-up’ administration office building were built throughout 2019, costing \$14.8 million in total.**

The implementation of Our Place at Wexford did not require a whole new school to be built, but it did involve some modifications.

Efforts were concentrated on building a new integrated child and family centre, later named the Korayn Birralea Family Centre, that was connected to the existing Wexford school campus on school grounds by a new school administration building, including a new school main entrance.

### THE DESIGN

Our Place has placed high importance on being involved in the design and build phase of all its sites, contributing to ideas and discussions to ensure evidence-based elements are incorporated that will support the aims of the Our Place approach.

In the case of Northern Bay, Our Place joined the partnership after the design of the new child and family centre had been completed, therefore limiting the ability to shape design features. However, much of Council’s approach was in keeping with Our Place’s best practice design elements, including a single, shared entrance designed to be welcoming for families with access to early learning services, Maternal and Child Health and other family supports. >

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**I think we engaged some really good architects with Brand. I think it was an important step in the process to get the right architect that understood and appreciated what our critical objectives were.**

Coordinator Community Infrastructure Planning, City of Greater Geelong

› This is, in part, due to the longevity of prior conversations and visits to Doveton College and Council’s own work in building integrated centres providing seamless access for parents. Our Place was, however, instrumental in advocating for the join-up of the new building with the school.

Designing a new school administration area and moving the main school entrance to the entrance of Korayn Birraleee Family Centre enabled a single, shared entrance to the site ensuring all families, regardless of their children’s age, would enter the site and access all services from the same starting point.

Once the idea took hold, Our Place partners were convinced of the benefits of having a single, shared entrance. Advantages such as increasing the ease of access to



otherwise unknown services and providing a stigma-free environment when accessing them were noted.

“The ability to have one entry allows for incidental things to happen. It allows people to be able to come in through a door and no one quite knows why they’re there, it provides a level of confidentiality. You don’t know if they are there to drop their children off or if they are there to see a specialist or to find out about early years programs. It also provides the opportunity for people to see other services that they may not be aware of. By dropping their primary school children off they might find out that there is a service that could help them with another challenge they’re experiencing.” (Advisor, Population Health & Community Wellbeing – Barwon Area DHHS)

Significantly, the name ‘Korayn Birraleee’ for the child and family centre was created, agreed upon and approved by Wadawurrung Traditional Owners (Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation) from the Wadawurrung Aboriginal Corporation in early 2020 before it officially opened. The name translates to ‘Corio Children Family Centre’ in Wadawurrung traditional language.

In addition to the name, Council staff had a number of conversations with Wadawurrung Aboriginal Corporation

to ensure the design of the building would feel culturally safe for the local Aboriginal community. This led to the incorporation of a number of design features, such as the rammed earth walls with the colour and texture of natural earth. Colours were also chosen that represent ochre and the colours of the Aboriginal flag. An Acknowledgement of Country is printed on Wathaurong glass.

There is a metal tree sculpture in the entrance which was commissioned based on hearing the children's voices of what they liked about the Centre, which included the natural outdoor spaces, big and mature trees, the gardens, the outdoor play equipment, the canvas covered shelter and a representation of an 'eel trap' in the entrance designed by a landscape architect in consultation with the Wathaurong traditional owners which the children can walk through.

The decision around choosing the preferred architects was well thought out. Before appointing Brand as the architects of the Centre, City of Greater Geelong took a long time to consider its preferred design approach and assessing the architects work elsewhere before appointing them.

The process included developing an initial design then going out to tender with specifications, appointing the architect and developing the plans. Council engaged a number of stakeholders in the development of the plans. Before it was confirmed that Our Place was going to be implemented, Wexford had to secure additional funding to build on their administration wing.

While the plans were being developed it became apparent that Our Place would become part of the setting, which led to an increased focus on where the reception should be located in relation to the entrance, so that the College and child and family centre could be accessed at one point.

Once Our Place involvement was confirmed, a slight re-design of the reception desk layout occurred so that it would directly connect the College through the double doors at the Centre's reception. Fortunately, Brand was the architect for the Wexford wing as well and was able to effectively amalgamate with the new centre building seamlessly.

Some of the design elements of the new administration building and the main entrance were decided upon as a partnership between the College and Council.

It was the campus principal at the time who chose the colours in the foyer. The intention was to be able to have colour representation moving from the foyer into the other rooms, including the school. There are purple tones that head through to the school because that's the school colour; while the other way heading to the early learning centre there are little circles on the floor and colourings that move down into the other areas that also reflect the colour tones

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***It all just came together beautifully as the architects had the layout and the understanding of how the Council building was designed. This resulted in the architects being able to design the administration wing of Wexford to effectively amalgamate with our building seamlessly. You walk through the buildings now and it's like they were built together.***

Early Childhood Coordinator, City of Greater Geelong

in the early years rooms and the MCH rooms. The colour choices were very intentional to lead people into the spaces based on colour.

"If someone came in and was looking for the school, we could easily say 'just follow the spots.'" (Early Childhood Coordinator, City of Greater Geelong)

The other subtle change that was made to the building design once Our Place was confirmed was the opening to the parent lounge. Originally the opening to the parent lounge was off towards the side and facing more towards the new build, however this was changed so that it was wider and more open, giving the appearance of it being available for everybody, including school families, rather than being put off to one side for the early years component.

"The final product looks amazing. It's a really open and welcoming space." (Service Support Manager, Barwon DET)

What particularly impressed Council was the architects' consultation with children during the design phase, something they had worked to in principle for many years:

"We were really committed to good design and I think one of the early testing things for us was when they nominated the importance of consulting the children about the design. That's a rare thing in my experience. There are not too many architects who choose of their own accord to navigate that sort of process with a really thoughtful and innovative approach. Having conversations with children about the design has been embedded in our earliest program for the best part of 10 years, but I think it's the first time we've actually seen that happen in practice. So as a principle, I think it's always been there but it's about translating good >



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**To have these lovely new, well-designed facilities can really help the community a lot. When everything is old and tired and not accessible and poorly designed that can really be challenging for people. There is some really good new infrastructure going in Corio and Norlane and getting it up to where it should be.**

Advisor, Population Health & Community Wellbeing – Barwon Area DHHS

› intentions, good policy, good practice into actual practice which is the really important.” (Coordinator Community Infrastructure Planning, City of Greater Geelong)

According to the community consultations undertaken by Our Place throughout 2019 and 2020, much of the local infrastructure was viewed as dated and rundown. By Council building a number of attractive, well-designed, child and family centres, such as Korayn Birralelee Family Centre, this helped to give the area a lift and enhance community pride in their local area.

### THE BUILD

Korayn Birralelee Family Centre building commenced in August 2019 and was completed in December 2019. Before the establishment of the Our Place Site Partnership Group in

July 2019, a state government led Project Control Group was set up in late 2018 to oversee the building phase of the site, which included representatives from Council, DET, VSBA, Our Place, the College and the architects. Working well together to problem solve issues arising, many discussions were had about barriers and blockers.

One of the main practical issues discussed was the the sticking point around how to build the buildings on two titles so that they are joined but not physically crossing each other's title.

While frustrating at times, the College Principal at the time remembers thinking ‘well you just do it!’ Instead a solution was to have it so that the buildings do not actually touch each other; there is a false wall on the outside of each one.





The Wexford Principal at the time was involved in early discussions and was a key partner in the Our Place work throughout 2019:

“I saw the potential and was very excited about it. I knew what it could do. I knew that if you were on the same land, that means there are no fences. And the kids are in school the day they start at a playgroup. There is no such thing as transition.” (Previous Wexford Principal)

Much of the work of the Project Control Group was concentrated on the operational complexities surrounding the plan to build across two land titles and landowners. The group persisted until there was a solution found in what was groundbreaking work:

“Historically when we've talked about connecting buildings across two titles, the normal response had been – ‘you can't do that, it's impossible’. So, what we're now starting to see over the course of time, is regulation change, and all sorts of contributing factors. However, with some persistence you can make the impossible possible and that the issues of building across titles with two different landowners, two different operators, two quite different focuses in terms of a primary

education, early childhood, Maternal and Child Health can actually be linked together quite successfully, so that's been really quite exciting.” (Coordinator Community Infrastructure Planning, City of Greater Geelong)

The join-up administration building was completed in February 2020 and operational from March. Despite the challenges of building across different titles, the build remained on track and on time throughout the process.

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***The fundamental way of turning a community around is to basically do what has never been done – to create an early learning centre/community facility located within the primary school. We strongly advocated for this to happen in Corio.***

Julius Colman, Colman Education Foundation



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**I just love this job because I feel we are making a difference in the lives of children and families in the local community.**

Community Facilitator,  
Northern Bay – Our Place



# OPENING THE DOORS for operation

**The opening of the Korayn Birralelee Family Centre with its first families was on 6 January 2020. College staff moved into the new school administration building two months later in March.**

The opening of the doors connecting the Centre and school, creating the new single, shared entrance, became operational in April before closing again temporarily in August due to COVID-19 restrictions. The doors were permanently opened in October 2020 following the end of remote learning in Victoria.

## THE SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

Throughout the process of becoming an Our Place site, including the building phase, the College has remained largely the same in terms of size, structure, family composition and philosophy. Despite undergoing its own leadership and structural changes throughout 2019 resulting in a new College and Campus principal commencing in 2020, Wexford has continued to offer education to its Prep to Year 8 students as before.

The biggest transformation for the College was the relocation of its main entrance and the school administration offices, including the Principal's office, to the new 'join-up' building connected to Korayn Birralelee Family Centre late in Term 1.

A great deal of effort was put into communicating to existing school families know about the new entrance. Families were regularly updated via their online school portal and Facebook page so to minimise confusion. During this time, school administration staff adapted to their new environment and relationships began to form with Council staff employed at Korayn Birralelee Family Centre. >

## SECTION 4



› The initial plan was to open the connecting doors between Korayn Birralelee Family Centre and Northern Bay College to families in Term 2 2020. The doors opened for a short period of time during the term, however, due to a second COVID ‘lockdown’ and a need to reduce virus transmission following some positive cases at Wexford, the doors reclosed. The doors remained closed until October at the end stage 4 restrictions and remote learning. They have remained open ever since, providing families with a single, shared entrance to the site.

Initial offerings by Our Place through the partnership was for College staff to take part in two early years seminars run by visiting international experts Professor Jane Bertrand and Professor Edward Melhuish. The first was run in July 2019 on the importance of play-based learning, while the second was held in February 2020 and focused on the importance of quality early learning experiences in determining school outcomes. Both sessions provided an opportunity for College and early learning educators to hear about the latest research evidence together, increasing the understanding of each other’s sectors and forging a collaborative approach.

There was negotiation between the VSBA, DET and the College around relocating the school administration offices to their new location. There were a number of requirements for how the entrance should look from a Department’s perspective, including rules around fire doors and safety precautions. As such, the Joint Use Agreement between DET and Council was a long and complex process. It was finalised in late 2020, almost one year after the buildings were complete.

Despite these initial difficulties, the College remained very supportive of the joined-up entrance and Our Place vision

for a single, shared entrance. As noted by the new College Principal, having a welcoming environment with the supports needed by families was a strong visible and concrete example of what the Our Place approach was trying to achieve: “People generally will connect with a facility rather than a concept and it’s really important that the facility can actively promote or reflect what the concept is and I think that’s been key to the early success.” (Northern Bay College Principal)

### EARLY LEARNING CENTRE ESTABLISHMENT

Korayn Birralelee Family Centre is a large integrated child and family services centre designed, built and delivered by the City of Greater Geelong. It includes the following services and facilities:

- 99 long day care spaces (including integrated kindergarten).
- 66 sessional kindergarten places.
- A two room Maternal and Child Health consulting suite and dedicated waiting room.
- Five flexible consulting rooms and waiting area.
- A multi-purpose room and toy Library.
- Specialised family support facilities/suite (PASDS or Parent Assessment and Skills Development Service).
- Community meeting room and informal parent lounge.
- Shared staff facilities and amenities, a manager’s office and an interview room.
- External playgrounds, deep verandas for all weather use, a large central foyer, gathering space, public toilets and off-street carparking.

The development of the Korayn Birralelee Family Centre replaces and consolidates six separately located and ageing Council facilities in the Corio/Norlane area, including City Learning and Care Child Care Centre – Corio, City Learning and Care Child Care Centre – Norlane, Corio Kindergarten, Family Access Centre – Norlane, Corio West Maternal and Child Health Centre and Cheshire Recreation Reserve Pavilion.

Some challenges emerged during the closure of one of the local standalone kindergartens. Operating in a Council-owned building which was 50 years old for close to 30 years, the kindergarten was operated by parents and had approximately 50 children enrolled. Council staff had some discussions with kindergarten management early on in the planning process for Korayn Birralelee Family Centre about the direction and the intention of the service which was to be integrated with other services and the College. Council had, for the past ten years, been working with its early childhood educators around the concept of integration.

Council has had close to 30 years of experience with co-location; however, this is different to service integration. Integration is more than simply putting services together under the one roof, or side-by-side on neighbouring titles. Professional development on the topic of integration has been conducted throughout Council, bringing staff along to have the mindset and the openness to embrace a different way of thinking and working, and importantly, being prepared to start to modify their practice.

The original kindergarten objected to the integrated approach and preferred to remain a separate, standalone service on the same site in the original facility. Following discussions with Council, the kindergarten was presented with an opportunity to provide a submission to Council's panel who were responsible for making the final decision around the proposal. The panel provided full backing for the plans to proceed in the new site, based on the premise that the local community would benefit more from a separate, single service approach to service delivery. This decision led to the lease on that building being withdrawn and the kindergarten closing, and ultimately the building being demolished at the end of 2019.

The Department worked with the parent committee about how to go about closing down their organisation and supporting them in the transition to school and the new site as much as possible. However, some parents attending the kindergarten chose not to send their children to the new centre. In contrast, Council staff who had operated the childcare centre nearby Korayn Birralelee and were transferring to the new centre were 'absolutely delighted', as was the Maternal and Child Health nurses.

Towards the end of 2019, prior to the opening of Koryan Birralelee, the new Centre Manager was eagerly monitoring kinder and long day care expressions of interest for the

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***It was an emotional time for that community and Corio kindergarten. They had a parent committee who were really committed to the kindergarten, however the facility was in need of an upgrade and the new facility has provided state of the art early education facilities.***

Service Support Manager, Barwon DET

following year. Time and effort were spent on promoting the new centre including information sessions, walk throughs and tours for new families and those already attending other services. This happened alongside setting up rooms with furniture and equipment, organising the licence agreement, developing new policies and procedures and going through a final inspection.

The recruitment of a Lead Educator and Administration Officer (or LEAO) followed soon after, and a particular strategy to recruit staff to the new centre was employed. Council's Early Childhood Coordinators began working with teams in the existing services that were going to amalgamate into the new service some twelve months before it opened. They explained to educators the importance of integration, what it was going to look like, and the changes they would need to consider in terms of their own practice, especially around working together and changing expectations.

"We were saying, this is what our expectations are, this is going to be really different, you're going to have to start thinking about this. So by the time we got to the new build, they had the mindset that they knew this was going to be changing and this was going to be different." (Early Childhood Coordinator, City of Greater Geelong)

Council allowed early years staff to select whether they wanted to move to the new service or not. Reflecting on this approach, Council Early Childhood Coordinators believe this was a better way to approach staff transition for successful change management process. A lot of opportunities for connection between existing and the new service happened throughout the build, with many opportunities for staff to visit the new centre as it was being built. They also took part in helping to set up the rooms before it opened. "It wasn't like they moved from an old centre from the 1970s that they were used to for so many years into a brand-new building. >

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**Our Centre Manager was very comfortable that if someone came to the door, she would just show them through the building. We wanted to give the feel that it didn't matter when you came, you were very welcome.**

Early Childhood Coordinator,  
City of Greater Geelong

› Going in early during the building phase to help set up meant there was a real connection made so when the day the doors opened, they felt connected already and were able to concentrate on welcoming families. We were trying to achieve familiarity and a real connection to them being a part of the transition; and not just us transitioning them but actually being part of the transition themselves.” (Early Childhood Coordinator, City of Greater Geelong)

Council was cautious with language and opted not to use words like ‘closure’, instead using terms such as amalgamating or transitioning. In terms of family recruitment, a lot of effort went into promoting the services. This was somewhat challenging given the number of existing services available in the local area, which meant a level of competition. Once families visited the new centre in person, it became a much more attractive notion.

Over time, places began to fill after a downturn during the COVID-19 lockdown period in 2020. By the end of 2020, the Centre was at 73% of capacity. The sessional kindergarten groups and one integrated kinder/childcare group received a great deal of interest and filled up quicker than the long day care places.



## COMMUNITY SERVICES

The community services currently on offer at Korayn Birralee Family Centre include Maternal and Child Health and the Parenting Skills Development and Assessment (PASDA) service, with dedicated spaces for each. There are also some allied health professionals using the consulting rooms on an ad hoc basis. An expression of interest process was developed in 2020 to help guide decisions around what other community, health and wellbeing services should be offered onsite, in line with Our Place evidence-based strategies and elements. This work is still ongoing and is being led by City of Greater Geelong in partnership with the Site Partnership Group.

The process places the needs of the community first and is informed by the work of Our Place in terms of identified service needs and gaps. Taken into consideration are the many services already connected to Wexford. While the process was put on hold due to COVID, a great deal of planning and scoping existing services are available and community need has taken place. In terms of interest, a number of health and community services have already shown an interest in becoming involved in the site and operating out of the consulting rooms. In 2021 the Our Place team have played an important role in advocating for the inclusion of a playgroup onsite at Korayn Birralee Family Centre. Working with the College, Council and the local community service provider running an existing playgroup on school grounds, Our Place supported the transition of the playgroup into the new centre.

## THE PARTNERSHIP ROLE IN ACTIVATION

The work of the Our Place Partnership Group in establishing the partnership, orienting to the Our Place approach, and the introduction of the child and family centre on school grounds has formed the basis of activation. The Our Place

partnership has continued to remain strong despite multiple staff changes, including the departure of many of the original visionaries from Northern Bay College, Wexford and City of Greater Geelong.

The Our Place implementation process calls for engagement with families and community as well as service providers. The work of the partnership was significantly interrupted by the pandemic during the 2020. Northern Bay College, City of Greater Geelong and DET adjusted their operations to interact with community in alternative, remote ways.

For the Our Place team this meant that the face-to-face interactions with community were not possible for most of the year, so it was necessary to find different approaches to site implementation work. Alternative means for face-to-face community consultations were created, and the Our Place team were able to re-orient their focus to the local community remotely, while maintaining and strengthening contact with local agencies.

The site data and consultation report was completed in late 2020. The findings will assist the Partnership with their strategic planning in 2021, and this will guide the priority actions of the group in coming years. The strength in hearing from the community firsthand and using this to shape strategic priorities has been applauded by the Site Partnership Group. "It's a good model that puts the community at the forefront rather than the government." (Advisor, Population Health & Community Wellbeing - Barwon Area DHHS)



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**Building on existing foundations of good connections and engagement, the people in this area are very passionate and usually very committed. It is a really strong team of people on the partnership for that reason.**

Manager, Early Childhood Improvement Branch - Barwon Area DET



A woman in a blue uniform and hat is holding the hand of a young child. They are walking on a wooden stump in a garden. The woman is wearing a blue hat, glasses, and a blue vest over a blue shirt. She has a stethoscope and an ID badge. The child is wearing a grey jacket, dark pants, and a colorful hat. The background is a brick wall and green plants.

## SECTION 5

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**When you've got committed people in a group and then organisations or people change within an organisation, that's always a challenge and it's not something you can necessarily do anything about. It's just keeping the energy up and the commitment. I think if you have got a clear and solid plan, everyone knows their role in that, then it does make it a bit easier.**

Manager, Early Childhood Improvement  
Branch - Barwon Area DET



## LEARNINGS

# two years on

### **Our Place Northern Bay has demonstrated adaptability throughout its first years of operation despite challenges in relation to leadership changes, the campus structure and the COVID-19 pandemic.**

#### ADAPTING TO LEADERSHIP CHANGES

The Northern Bay Our Place Site Partnership Group has seen numerous leadership changes throughout its existence. The original College Principal who had been with Northern Bay for ten years and first met with the Colman Education Foundation and held the vision for 'doing Doveton at Corio' retired in 2018.

Passing on his vision for the site to the Wexford principal who had been at the school since 2016, this work carried on throughout 2019 until November when she also left the school. A major change to the way the College was structured across the five campuses, including leadership changes at each campus designed to bring the College together as a whole.

An acting Wexford principal participated in and supported the Our Place partnership group throughout 2019, before a permanent principal was appointed in 2020. The new Wexford campus principal had been involved in the partnership group since it began but became an active member once appointed to the role in late 2019, before leaving in October 2020. The current Wexford campus principal commenced in November 2020.

In addition to these changes amongst the Site Partnership Group, there was also a change in Our Place Partnership Manager after 12 months. From a Council perspective, the original coordinator involved in the initial plans for Korayn Birralee Family Centre also retired in mid-2020. The early childhood coordinator from Council changed over as well

during 2020, but continues to work closely with the original coordinator. The recent addition of new representatives from DET and DFFH have presented positive changes. While not unique to the work of Our Place, all of these changes to the Site Partnership Group has required additional work to maintain momentum and keep passionate about achieving the vision, while deepening the understanding of the Our Place approach. Having the Community Facilitator as a key and consistent Our Place representative since the beginning has helped enormously. This has been particularly helpful in consistently assisting the school and other services that are busy delivering their day-to-day education and support.

"Competing demands and priorities for all schools and services exist and so it's great that you've got [the Our Place team] who can drive it. Sometimes if you're asking schools or services to drive the work, they get lost in their business-as-usual work. The fact that you've got key workers there that can keep people checking in and motivating people and keeping the work moving. I think people want to but if they've got someone to draw them in...if they've got to choose between their class or their other meeting commitment by themselves, sometimes their commitment can be difficult to maintain." (Manager, Early Childhood Improvement Branch - Barwon Area, South Western Victorian Region, DET)

The Our Place Research and Evaluation team conducted a partnership assessment with the partners in March 2021. Results indicated a high level of satisfaction with the Partnership and its work to date, especially in terms of having a clear purpose and how it functions as a collective. >

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**I think the major challenge for us, and what is unique to us, is that we've got one facility that sits on one campus. No matter what we say and how much we get it to be reflective of the entire College, that's going to be an ongoing challenge. It's going to need continual reaffirmation. The way the three key stakeholders - Our Place, Korayn Birralea and Northern Bay College - have all started in their work with that focus has ensured that we can move forward positively.**

Northern Bay College Principal

### › BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS MULTIPLE CAMPUSES

One of the unique challenges facing Our Place at Northern Bay as opposed to other sites is its multiple campus structure. While wholeheartedly supportive of implementing the Our Place approach at Wexford, the College has expressed concern that only one of its five campuses gets to benefit from this and a new facility.

The College has a 'one campus, one community' ethos which supports the belief that opportunities provided to any part of the school should be offered to all of its families across all sites. The Our Place team has worked closely with the College Principal to extend opportunities to enable this to happen wherever possible. For example, offering College-

wide staff access to professional development opportunities and international expert visits organised by Our Place, as well as inviting families from across the campuses to participate in the community consultation process in 2019. Learnings from Wexford's Our Place journey around connection with early years services will also be shared, ensuring other campuses and their adjoining child and family centres are not treated as second rate, but instead collaborated with wherever possible. Despite all of these efforts, the issue will remain as a challenge.

Much work has also been undertaken by the Our Place team to build relationships with the Northern Bay Family Learning Centre and other standalone kindergarten, reassuring them that the partnership with Our Place exists is for the whole College.



## RESPONDING TO COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic came just as the new Korayn Birralelee Family Centre was opening its doors to families and building its enrolments in kindergarten and long day care. After first opening in January, the lockdown and restrictions in March meant that parents and carers were no longer welcome to congregate in the facility when dropping off their child, which went against the aim of creating a welcoming environment.

The pandemic also had consequences for the activation of the connection between the Centre and the College. Not long after the double doors were opened between the two schools in April 2020, these needed to close again in July 2020 as a social distancing measure.

This was not a smooth introduction for the College's new front entrance and added to families' confusion about where to access the College. The introduction of wrap around health and wellbeing services in the consulting rooms was also halted. Despite these challenges, having a first year of operation with limited service provision meant there was time to dedicate to developing new processes and procedures.

"It has given us a year to really identify what some of the key issues might be. It has been a bit of a blessing. We've

all actually settled in for a year and we're raring to go. And we've got a range of other internal projects, including school readiness funding, to work on." (Manager, Korayn Birralelee Family Centre)

The opportunity for the Partnership Group to bond and problem solve about the issues presented by the pandemic has helped forge strong connections.

"The fact that we could sit around the table and talk about something as unpredictable as COVID has helped with the presenting issues. For instance, the ability of parents to continue to access the school, and whether students would be accessing the school through Korayn Birralelee. It presented some operational issues for the City of Greater Geelong and the school, but we could work around that and still ensure that the facility was going to be used the way it was intended. There was a common understanding that through the pandemic that access needed to remain available. This is a testament to the fact that those partnerships and relationships are working well. The fact that we were able to come up with an understanding of how to operate differently is a good example of the confidence that there will be some really positive outcomes from the working partnership." (Northern Bay College Principal)



NEXT STEPS IN

# continuing the journey

**The Northern Bay partnership focus in 2021 is to work together on the initial three-year strategic plan.**

## STRENGTHENING THE PARTNERSHIP WITH FAMILIES

Many of the children attending Northern Bay College over the years have come from families facing significant disadvantage.

Many of the parents themselves have had negative experiences of school and education. Developing trust and a partnership with some of these families takes time and is challenging work but something leadership and staff at the College have been working on.

The introduction of Our Place and the Korayn Birralelee Family Centre has the ability to extend and further support the work already done at Wexford, assisting not only the children but also their families.

“It’s about the impact that you can have, not just on individual kids in the classroom in front of you, but across a whole community. When you get a village culture with the adults in it, you get this huge wraparound model where everyone’s looking after everybody, with all the kids in the middle; it’s really powerful.” (Wexford Principal)

Developing parent engagement with school is something the College is still focused on. Community consultations undertaken by Our Place confirmed parents' have high expectations of their children and their education. The College Principal sees this area of work as something able to be directly influenced by Our Place.

"I'm really hopeful that the Our Place approach will increase parents' capacity to have a positive impact on the way that our kids are supported, and that families are supported to be positive stakeholders in their kids' learning. If we can have Prep to Grade 2 parents feeling more engaged and connected to their child's education, then I would feel that would come from some of the parent work that's been done through Our Place.

It is important to capture what it is that Our Place has contributed to the fabric of the school or the way kids present for their first day of school. Parents here definitely want to be involved and have an impact and they want their children to value education and get a good education; I think sometimes they feel that they might not have the capacity to make this happen." (Northern Bay College Principal)

Getting in early and encouraging parents to support their children's learning in early learning is one way the Northern Bay partners are hopeful they can make inroads. While for many parents, their own experiences of school were negative, however the preschool years is more likely to have been a more positive experience.

"Once their children hit primary school age, the desire amongst parents to engage with school is challenging because they see it as an education space that many have had a bad experience with.

Whereas for the early years space, parents may still see it as an opportunity to come and enjoy children and their playing. Then it's about helping parents understand that early learning leads onto school learning as one long education journey." (Early Childhood Coordinator, City of Greater Geelong)

## INTRODUCING MORE SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES ONSITE

Introducing a range of community, health and wellbeing services onsite at Korayn Birralelee Family Centre is one of the main steps in taking the site forward. A range of services and activities have been explored and some have already commenced, including playgroups, a collaborative story time with guest speakers, a parents' and carers' walking group, an immunisation clinic, speech screening for children in the early years, adult learning coaching support and onsite workshops, as well as information sessions designed to equip service providers with the right knowledge to be able to navigate local services.

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***I would love to see the site thrive and grow and be one of the leading services of integration. This shows how it can be done in a very vulnerable community where it shows it doesn't matter where we come from, what we do, our backgrounds; if you feel connected, you will join and what comes from that is obviously the wellbeing of the community.***

Early Childhood Coordinator, City of Greater Geelong

A scoping exercise is also being undertaken to inform decisions around the delivery of allied health services onsite. Alongside this hope for the future is the development of a sense of safety and security at the Our Place Northern Bay. "My hope is that the site is seen as a safe, supportive and inclusive place for children and families to access." (Partnership Manager, Northern Bay – Our Place)

A focus on community inclusion has emerged with a particular emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities.

Creating environments and interactions that are able to do this authentically was a gap. The Our Place team has been working closely with working closely with a range of representatives to meaningfully build this connection locally and will continue to do so.

## IMPLEMENTING THE EARLY YEARS QUALITY PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

In 2019 the opportunity to take part in the Early Years Quality Practice Framework Project with Our Place was provided to the Northern Bay site and was enthusiastically taken up. With grant funding from the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, the project translates research into practice through the implementation of the Early Years Quality Practice Framework (EYQPF) in five Our Place sites for three years.

The EYQPF seeks to increase educator's knowledge and capacity, support practice change and service quality and most importantly, improve child outcomes. The project is due to commence in Korayn Birralelee Family Centre in Term 2 2021. Prior to the commencement of this project, the site has maintained a strong focus on the connections between early years and schooling.

## CONCLUSION

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**I think it will be awesome in 20 years' time when all the little people that are in our services now are driving past with new partners or families of their own and they say, hey, I went to that Centre and it was awesome; that centre made a difference to my life! That centre changed my life, made an impact, that centre made a difference to me and my family.**

Early Childhood Coordinator, City of Greater Geelong



# JOURNEY REPORT

# conclusion

**This report describes the Our Place Northern Bay site's journey from its original conception to the end of its first two years of operation. The journey is still underway, and it is important to recognise that it takes considerable time to make progress in the different Our Place elements and outcome areas.**

The Our Place Northern Bay site comprises early years and schooling provision, as well as Maternal and Child Health, playgroup and parenting programs. Future work will involve an expression of interest process to recruit a range of allied health services into five consultation rooms. "It is a great opportunity to have partners working together in this vulnerable community and finally put our money where our mouth is and actually do the integration and work collaboratively with a bunch of services to get the best outcomes for our families." (Manager, Korayn Birralelee Family Centre)

Supporting these achievements has been a long-standing vision and commitment from both Northern Bay College and the City of Greater Geelong. A strong partnership has been formed which will continue to strengthen and guide the implementation of the Our Place approach at Northern Bay. In working towards its next steps, the Northern Bay Site Partnership Group has a clear plan forward for the next three years and beyond and is beginning to reflect on its progress to date.



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Our Place's vision is that all children and their families succeed in life.

**ourplace**  
education is the key to the door

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