



ANNUAL REPORT

2021







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CEO REPORT

As I reflect on 2021, there are so many words that come to mind. Successful, challenging, rewarding, exhausting, satisfying.....and I know that my sentiments are not dissimilar to so many of my valued colleagues. In the second year of a global pandemic, GEKA embraced the new opportunities that presented, whilst remaining true to our values. The beginning of the year saw our first service established in the City of Monash. With less than six months to make this a reality, the dedication and vision of our staff and the strong partnership established with Sacred Heart Primary School made this happen. The legacy of Emmanuel Kindergarten that closed at the end of 2020 was retained, whilst welcoming new families within the community. It has also enabled us to stay true to our commitment of education being a seamless journey for the children we have the privilege of educating.

The pandemic created challenges for so many of us, and kindergartens were not immune. GEKA was approached by many committees of management who wanted to hand over the governance and administrative responsibilities of operating a kindergarten to an Early Years Manager. Growth for any organisation is always challenging. GEKA made the considered decision to further expand its geographical reach in the middle of 2021 and welcomed Chelsea Kindergarten in the City of Kingston. This was followed a few months later as we welcomed St John's Kindergarten in the City of Bayside. We finished the year taking on the management of Caulfield Early Childhood Centre at Caulfield Primary School again reinforcing our commitment to education being a seamless journey. Whilst our growth was exciting, it was also a challenge to build relationships with staff and families, amidst lockdowns. Our staff showed great strength of character in being responsive and available, and they are to be commended.

With expansion beyond Glen Eira, we recognised that a new name is required to ensure inclusivity of our new services whilst retaining a connection to our foundations in Glen Eira. Throughout the year, we undertook extensive consultation with our key stakeholders, and are pleased to announce that we will have a new name for 2022.

Like many organisations, we embraced technology as a tool to continue the delivery of high-quality operations. The 2021 year saw GEKA's greatest investment in IT, and it has enabled a clear roadmap for the future of our business. This has seen a major shift for the organisation, and staff have embraced the investment and new ways of working which we will continue to build upon in the years ahead.

The State Government's commitment to the provision of free four-year-old kindergarten and subsidised three-year-old kindergarten in 2021 must be acknowledged. In a year full of uncertainty, it enabled families to attend kindergarten and not have to worry about the financial burden. Further, the implementation of funded three-year-old kindergarten in 2022 (initially for five hours) will provide a pathway for two years of high-quality education for children before they commence school.

I would like to sincerely thank the incredible staff at GEKA. Amidst uncertainty, exhaustion, changing Government policy, and heightened anxiety, you showed strength, courage, tenacity, dedication, and kindness. I appreciate all your efforts and work throughout the year. I further extend my thanks to the GEKA board for supporting our ideas and innovation. Your faith and trust have positioned us well as an Early Years Manager of choice, whilst remaining authentic and responsive.

Samantha Kolasa
CEO

BOARD CHAIR REPORT



What an incredible year! All year long, more than 1000 children participated in their early years education by attending a GEKA kindergarten service. The challenges of COVID meant navigating the programs online, with take-home packs and intermittent attendance. The children and families showed amazing resilience and adaptability, to get the most out of their kindergarten experience. Our gratitude goes to the GEKA educators and management team who supported the children in the challenging year that 2021 was.

In 2021 we welcomed the communities of Chelsea, St John's, and Caulfield Primary School kindergartens. Being able to share the GEKA expertise and knowledge with other kindergartens outside of our original Glen Eira area, allowed us to reflect on what we offer and how we represent ourselves to our communities. With the management of kindergartens in neighbouring council areas, we felt our name – Glen Eira Kindergarten Association – no longer represented who we serve.

To help us understand what was important to our communities, extensive consultation and research occurred. After many conversations we're pleased to announce our new name - Glen Education.

Glen Education is authentic to our roots and ambitions. We remain committed to the Glen Eira communities we have served for the last 10 years and look forward to the new communities we will serve in the future. We're excited to take you on our next evolution.

It's a new name, but you will receive the same high-quality education

As you will see in the coming pages, we firmly believe that the power of our organisation comes not from what we call ourselves, but from the passionate people who live and breathe our shared mission every day.

The 2021 year saw us conclude our current three-year strategic plan. The growth in services, professionalism and consistently high performance assessment ratings was commendable. We look forward to our next three year plan to continue the great work the team have in place.

I am most appreciative of the support and hard work of my fellow directors during another very challenging year. On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank Sam and the entire GEKA team for their continued dedication and commitment throughout the year. And to our families and external partners for your ongoing support. We look forward to many more years of playing, learning, developing and growing together.

Katie Frazer

Katie Frazer
Chair



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

SUPPORTING STAFF AND FAMILIES DURING COVID-19

The past two years of the COVID pandemic has impacted us all in a multitude of ways. While we had to adapt to a constantly changing environment, we have also been exposed to new ways of doing things, that perhaps we would not have prioritised if it were not for COVID. As an organisation that focuses on strengths, we reflect on the year with pride, knowing we have worked hard to ensure the very highest quality experience for our children and families.

As a community, we have come together to lift the spirits of the locals, by ensuring children and families had what they needed to continue learning – both at kindergarten and from home, when needed. We have refined new ways of connecting with each other, via 'teams' and 'zoom' platforms, which has strengthened the technological capabilities of our people and kept them connected with children and families, especially during the lockdown periods.

Our educational programs remained open throughout the year. Despite snap lockdowns, where access was limited to children of authorised workers (and where they are no alternative care arrangements available), children of vulnerable families, and children of single working parents/guardians, our educators have continued to put their heart into their work and give their all. Our sincere thanks go to our educators – they have developed and shown incredible resilience.

We developed clear and effective COVID safe protocols, to ensure our community remained as safe as possible, throughout the year. We had no significant outbreaks and limited closures, which is something to celebrate.



Cooper:

"This is the air (the purple dots), and this is the Corona (red dots). The blue dots pull the Corona in. It's invisible you know, it's invisible. It's in the desert - it's invisible in the desert."
Shared with permission from Cooper and his family. Thanks Cooper!

KEY COVID SAFE PROTOCOLS

100% vaccination of all GEKA employees, as a way of protecting the whole community

Worker permits for all staff so we could continue to operate

Masks worn at arrival and collection at the service – and whilst in the kindergarten environment

Social distancing between adults where possible

Temperatures of children and authorised visitors, taken on arrival and as needed

Only those that are well in health, permitted at the service

Strict hand washing protocols in place, including on arrival and departure

Sensory experiences and excursions into the community were limited

Deep cleaning for any confirmed cases and notification to all people potentially exposed

We have partnered with many organisations and promoted the many valuable resources that children and families have needed, to deal with the complexities of life. We acknowledge organisations such as Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA), Early Childhood Australia (ECA), the Australian Childhood Foundation and Beyond Blue, who have all developed valuable resources that we have shared with our community.

We have also engaged in the promotion of events to support our most vulnerable children and families, such as **R U OK Day** and the **Family Life Christmas Appeal**, that have had a positive impact on those that needed it most. Together with these initiatives, GEKA made the decision to offer partial refunds for families, whose children were not able to attend kindergarten due to the lockdowns.

Our children were supported to develop an in-depth understanding of the pandemic and the things that affected them. Cooper (4 years old), from GEKA Centre Road Kindergarten, used art as a tool for working through his understanding of Coronavirus, while engaging in conversations with educators.

Melissa MacMaster

General Manager, Operations, Education and Pedagogy.



GEKA SACRED HEART KINDERGARTEN SERVICE COMMENCEMENT AND RENOVATION

GEKA Sacred Heart Kindergarten, our first service in the City of Monash, commenced operations in term one for children and families, offering a kindergarten program for both 3 and 4-year-old children.

Positioned on the grounds of the Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School Oakleigh, adjacent to the prep classrooms, the children in the kindergarten now share some common areas with school children, to work play and explore the learning environments. GEKA have been innovative in our approach to sharing the outdoors and the sharing of the space with the prep children. While a fence would typically separate the prep children from the kindergarten children, GEKA challenged traditional thinking and worked with DET and the school to embrace an integrated space for all children, with no fences, that has seen all children learning together in the outdoors. GEKA developed the outdoor protocols and policy documents that ensure adherence to regulatory compliance regarding supervision.

We have been committed to working in partnership with the Sacred Heart Primary School team to develop authentic partnerships that support each child's ability to transition to school with an eagerness to learn more. We believe when children and families are valued for their knowledge, views and experiences, and are an active part of the learning environment, everyone will thrive within it. At GEKA, we believe true partnerships are created when you can build on the strength of each other's knowledge and are able to comfortably share insights and perspectives to enable shared decision-making among a wide range of stakeholders. Our new kindergarten, and the partnerships we have established to make it happen, are reflective of these principles.

The planning of the kindergarten on the school grounds, happened over just six short months, during COVID. While challenging, it was a testament to the partnership between GEKA

and the school. We were able to put plans in place to open the service at the beginning of term one, with a stage two plan to complete additional building works to further enhance the space, toward the end of the 2021 year. The upgrade of the kindergarten involved the installation of children's toilets and greater connection to the indoor and outdoor spaces. The project required significant investment by the school, as well as a major contribution from GEKA to achieve:

- purpose-built children's toilets adjacent to the outdoor garden
- replacement of the solid brick wall with custom windows and doors to enable visibility
- a large foyer
- additional storage for resources
- renovated staff facilities
- an accessibility ramp into the playground

Thanks to Sacred Heart Primary School Principal, Brian Martin and Assistant Principal, Jan Morice. Our thanks also to the team from Melbourne Archdiocese of Catholic Schools (MACS) for their ongoing support and leadership of the project. Thank you to members from the Monash City Council, including Mayor Stuart James, Manager of Children, Youth and Family Services, Chris Thompson, as well as unwavering support from the Department of Education and Training. We welcome the children and their families and thank them for being a part of our first year. Special thank you to parent and community member, Emma Saddington, for her drive and determination and for never giving up on the idea of establishing a new kindergarten in Monash in partnership with GEKA.



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

ASSESSMENT AND RATING FOR GEKA CENTRE ROAD KINDERGARTEN: Exceeding the Standard



The image shows a screenshot of an assessment report for GEKA Centre Road Kindergarten. At the top left is the logo for the Victorian Government Department of Education and Training. The title is 'GEKA Centre Road Kindergarten (SE-00003440)'. Below this is a list of seven Quality Areas, each with a colored bar and the text 'Exceeding NQS':

- Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice Exceeding NQS
- Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety Exceeding NQS
- Quality Area 3: Physical environment Exceeding NQS
- Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements Exceeding NQS
- Quality Area 5: Relationships with children Exceeding NQS
- Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships Exceeding NQS
- Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership Exceeding NQS

At the bottom of the list is a large rounded rectangle containing the word 'Overall' and a logo for 'NQS EXCEEDING 4'. Below this is the text 'Department of Education and Training', 'Date of issue: 10 June 2021', and 'Assessment and Rating ID number: ASR-00033464'.

GEKA Centre Road Kindergarten participated in the assessment and rating process with the Department of Education and Training, in May. The assessment involved the review of documentation, observation of interactions and an extensive discussion regarding practice. This was the first time the service was assessed under GEKA's Management, having previously been assessed in 2017.

GEKA Centre Road Kindergarten received a rating of EXCEEDING the National Standard for the delivery of high-quality programs in all areas of the National Quality Standard.

The GEKA leadership and educational teams were able to confidently demonstrate how practice was authentically embedded in service operations, informed by critical reflection, and shaped by meaningful engagement with families and the community. Of particular importance, was the assessor's feedback regarding the educator's intentionality in their practice and their genuine interactions with children, families, and the community. Feedback also included the recognition regarding how GEKA had built a positive organisational culture and professional learning community that supported all members of the service team to develop as professionals and contribute meaningfully to quality improvement processes. We are incredibly proud of the result, as it is reflective of the standard we work to achieve daily.



INCLUSION GRANT SUCCESS

In March, GEKA's Inclusion Manager, together with the GM Operations, Education and Pedagogy, submitted 11 Building Blocks - Inclusion grant applications, with the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA). This grant stream provided funding of up to \$10,000, to purchase equipment, provide safe and inclusive environments for children of all needs and abilities, including moveable inclusive education equipment, such as mobility stools and sensory equipment for kindergarten programs. The program principles enable services to:

- increase engagement and improve learning outcomes for children with disabilities or additional needs through strengthening inclusive early childhood learning environments.
- promote inclusion in early childhood learning settings and teaching approaches that tailor to the needs of all learners on the same basis, including those with disabilities or additional needs.
- create innovative early childhood learning environments based on inclusive best practice and universal design.

In September, we were informed that we had successfully been awarded all 11 grants for the full requested amounts, totalling \$101,707.62. The grant success will further strengthen GEKA's commitment to truly integrated and inclusive practice.

SCHOOL READINESS FUNDING

School Readiness Funding was implemented to children in all funded programs in 2021. The amount of School Readiness Funding each service receives is based on the level of need of the cohort of children at the service. This is informed by parental occupation and education data (Student Family Occupation and Education data), collected at the time of enrolment, and provided to DET. Funding for each service ranges between \$1,000 and above \$200,000, depending on the level of need with the aim of supporting communication (language development), wellbeing (social and emotional) and access and inclusion.

The 'menu' of funding options includes information on a range of programs and supports that have been externally validated for how well they support children's learning and development. The menu has been developed to help kindergartens to make informed choices on how to spend their funding to improve outcomes for children. It includes:

- programs and services that target speech, language, and literacy
- allied health supports (speech pathologists, psychologists, occupational therapists)
- programs and services that inform educators and families about trauma-informed practice, secure attachment, and mental health
- resources and programs to improve the social and emotional wellbeing of children
- support for culturally and linguistically diverse children, and families
- tools for parents to support their child's development.

With the funding received from DET, GEKA chose to deliver the **Resilience Project Early Years Program** to all funded 4-year-old groups, including to children that were in a multi-age group.

By pooling funding across our services to deliver the Resilience Project across all services, we were able to:

- access programs or supports that are beyond the reach of a single services allocation
- support a larger community-focused initiative that needs sustained support to result in long-term practice change
- strengthen connections and partnership between services enabling a more collaborative approach to identifying and meeting the needs of children and families in the local community.

The response to the program from children, families and educators was overwhelmingly positive and helped inform our School Readiness Plans for 2022.



"When we do relaxation, I like to lay down and close my eyes and do 'mountain breathing' with my fingers. It makes me feel a little bit tired and sleepy and calm"

Child from GEKA Brady Road Kindergarten

"My husband and I really liked it. It made for some good teatime conversations and increased our physical activity and mindfulness activities"

Family from GEKA Murrumbena Kindergarten

"Through the immersion in experiences such as Mindful glitter jars, Mindful Painting, Mindful Eating and Mindful Listening, the children have come to understand the language of GEM"

Educator from GEKA Benteigh East Kindergarten

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

WOOLWORTHS JUNIOR LANDCARE GRANT SUCCESS – GEKA Glover Street Kindergarten

GEKA Glover Street Kindergarten were selected as a recipient of a Woolworths Junior Landcare Grant of \$1,500 to re-establish the vegetable gardens at the service. The gardens enabled children to experience how plants grow and where food comes from, with a focus on cooking and enjoying the food we grow, alongside developing a deeper understanding of sustainable practice. The whole community, including families, were involved in the planting and maintenance of the gardens.

Landcare received over 2,300 grant applications and along with ours, 1,609 primary schools and early learning centres across Australia were awarded a Woolworths Junior Landcare Grant. This was the largest number of Junior Landcare grants ever given out in a single round.

Our front garden beds were transformed to a community herb garden and once established, families were invited to take home the produce, to incorporate into their meals.

We have a focus on sustainability within our project which has achieved the outcomes of:

- engaging children in real life learning experiences, that develop a love of the earth
- children taking responsibility for feeding the worms in the worm farm, and actively learning to compost
- supporting and attracting local pollinators, through planting and maintaining a variety of flowering plants within the garden beds, to support the bees and other pollinators to visit often
- understanding the life cycle of plants (seed, to growth, to harvest).

GEKA CHELSEA KINDERGARTEN

We welcomed the Chelsea Kindergarten to the GEKA Community in July 2021.

Chelsea Kindergarten, located in the City of Kingston, has offered both 3-year-old and 4-year-old kindergarten for over 60 years to the local community. At the beginning of the year, the Committee of Management reached out to GEKA after recognising that they were no longer able to continue managing the service into the future. For six months, we worked with members of the committee to ensure a smooth transition and to secure the kindergarten's future through GEKA. Special thanks to Emma Bryant and Hannah Hunt for their tireless efforts and humour throughout the process.

We have been fortunate to transition all educators across to GEKA. We have enjoyed getting to know the team and to understand the community in which the service is located. Educators have embraced the opportunity to learn from Early Childhood experts and to share their local knowledge, so we could continue to provide high quality programs to children and families. We also worked in partnership to upgrade many of the educational resources to the value of approximately \$40k, which ensures an emerging curriculum can be delivered, that accommodates the changing needs and interests of children.

GEKA ST JOHN'S KINDERGARTEN

GEKA welcomed the St John's Kindergarten to the GEKA Community in December 2021, after transitioning the service over several months.

St John's Kindergarten, located in the Bayside Council area, has offered both 3-year-old and 4-year-old kindergarten since 1954. Currently operating from a church building, the service is scheduled to relocate into a purpose-built facility in 2023-24, expanding the number of places they will offer (to a double room facility). In 2021, the service was assessed and rated as exceeding the National Standard, demonstrating a strong commitment to Early Years Education. We acknowledge the synergy between their philosophy and ours, particularly the commitment to supporting





children thrive in a stimulating environment, 'where they have ownership and feel a sense of belonging and joy.' On one of our early visits to the service, one of the children approached us and said, "You're welcome here!" It was a significant moment, and a true reflection of the essence of the kindergarten.

The kindergarten was previously managed by a Committee of Management, who recognised GEKA for our commitment to exceptional quality and the long-term sustainability of services.

We commend the Committee on their

work, particularly Paula Hurley and Stephanie Murphy, and acknowledge the dedication and effort it takes to operate a kindergarten under complex legislation, in a volunteer capacity. Consultation with the community and a unanimous vote to join with GEKA saw the partnership successfully secured.



GEKA CAULFIELD PRIMARY KINDERGARTEN

GEKA welcomed the Caulfield Primary Kindergarten to the GEKA community, in December 2021.

Caulfield Primary Kindergarten has offered both 3-year-old and 4-year-old kindergarten, on the grounds of the Caulfield Primary School for many years. Operating from within a heritage building, the kindergarten is situated adjacent to Glen Huntly Road and has its own access point for children and families. The kindergarten has two language teachers, as part of the Early Years Language Program (funded by DET), who support children to learn Japanese. This complements the vision of the Primary School, which delivers a bilingual program to all children. The kindergarten was assessed and rated as exceeding the National Standard in November 2018, demonstrating a strong commitment to Early Years Education.

The kindergarten was previously managed by another Early Years Manager who recognised GEKA's local presence and reputation for exceptional quality programs as being what is best for the community moving forward. We thank this EYM for their commitment to the early years sector and their confidence in GEKA.

While we have been discussing the idea of transitioning the Caulfield Primary Kindergarten to GEKA for several years, the community officially made the changeover to GEKA's

management on 20 December – in perfect time to upgrade the environment for children and families attending in 2022. We acknowledge and thank the Department of Education and Training and the Victorian School Building Authority for their financial commitment to sustaining the heritage building for the foreseeable future.

It is an exciting time for GEKA as we support our 14th kindergarten under management to continue to deliver high-quality services to the community.

INVESTMENT IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)

Throughout 2021, GEKA continued to invest in IT and to analyse business requirements against predicted future needs to create an Information Technology Strategy. This project included identifying key risks, developing a comprehensive and clear strategy for innovation, and developing a roadmap to bring the strategy to life. As an outcome of this, GEKA introduced SharePoint and OneDrive document libraries across the GEKA office and services. This project required the transfer of all GEKA documents into the cloud, allowing the office team to work remotely during COVID, and access essential documents from home or whilst attending services. The intranet site has been designed to hold essential information such as links to policies (via the GEKA website), newsfeeds and news posts, links to external resources, events, calendars, and key contact lists. The intranet site has continued to grow with features as it is implemented across GEKA's services. All GEKA information is protected, and user specific. GEKA has also implemented digital transformation using Microsoft 365 with two factor authentication to protect Individual accounts and information, as per Governments cyber security guidelines. We also work in partnership with Human I.T, to perform regular reviews of our online platforms to ensure that they are maintained in accordance with the latest security practices.

In 2021, GEKA also engaged external contractors to support the vendor selection process for a new Customer Relations/ Enrolments CRM platform. This project leveraged on GEKA's IT strategy and roadmap to ensure alignment and clarity of scope. The scope for the software selection was based on a set of core CRM and operational scenarios. To achieve this, it was essential to ensure the new platform was aligned to GEKA's IT Strategy & Architecture, targeted to address key pain points, value and capability focused, and consistent with the roadmap. GEKA plan on progressing with the selected preferred provider and implementation will occur in 2022.



OUR PEOPLE

IMPLEMENTATION OF VECTEA 2020

The Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Educators Agreement 2020 (VECTEA 2020) was approved by the Fair Work Commission on 12 July and came into effect on 19 July 2021. The VECTEA 2020 contains a significant number of terms and conditions that are more beneficial than the modern award and relevant agreements in the sector.

Key VECTEA 2020 benefits for the sector include:

- 16 weeks employer-paid parental (maternity) leave.
- Four weeks partner (parental) leave to support a primary caregiver.
- 15 days of personal/carer's leave for each year of service to all employees (pro-rata for part-time)
- Five days of paid compassionate leave (per occasion)
- 20 days of paid family and domestic violence leave
- Four days leave for provisionally registered teachers and teacher mentors to assist with VIT registration
- Two days of professional development for all employees
- Three organisational (set-up) days
- Additional one hour of planning time per week per service for Educational Leaders and Nominated Supervisors.
- Access for staff to a Wellbeing Support Program.

GEKA was an active participant in the negotiations for better pay and conditions for the early childhood sector. Thanks to Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) for their advocacy and diligence throughout the process.

HOSTED CONVERSATIONS WITH MELBOURNE ARCHDIOCESE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS (MACS): Preparing for our Preps 2022

The GEKA General Manager, Operations, Education and Pedagogy, Melissa MacMaster, was invited to facilitate a conversation with a group of 87 Principals and Principal Advisors, about our knowledge on supporting the 2021 cohort of children and families transitioning into the primary school setting. The purpose of the meeting was to inspire deeper thought about

the way environments are established to facilitate rich learning experiences and a sense of security for children.

The session was well attended and provided participants with an opportunity to ask questions about the experience children and families have had during COVID. The group was challenged to consider how they would embrace children that had increased independence skills, but a heightened sense of anxiety regarding change, to enable a smooth and successful transition to school. Exploration of the value of a play-based curriculum was discussed at length (as well as how to create a learning environment so children could thrive), along with the ways to establish and build on relationships with families, in supporting this approach. This provided GEKA with an opportunity to share our pedagogical early years expertise and invited teachers to consider alternative perspectives to setting up foundation classrooms and transitioning young children into the school environment.



EDUCATION STATE FORUM

GEKA's Inclusion Manager, Rachael Gemmill, was invited by DET to participate in the 2021 Education State Forum. This event provided the opportunity for the sector to discuss key issues in Early Childhood Education and Care, including workforce attraction and retention and the three-year-old kinder rollout. GEKA's Inclusion Manager was a part of a panel discussion on participation: access, equity, inclusion, along with a parent from GEKA, so the perspective of the family could be heard and understood. GEKA's practices were shared with around 50 sector and Departmental representatives. It was an important space to occupy as advocates and leaders in the Early Childhood Sector.

The feedback from participants about the collective practices across GEKA was overwhelmingly positive and inspiring:

“An inspiring example of a true partnership between parents/carers, teachers and educators in the service of the child.”

Kim Little, Deputy Secretary,
Department of Education and Training

“What an amazing speaker and story from Rachael Gemmill and parent Ann. They are stars and what a huge plus for GEKA! Everyone was very impressed with GEKA’s culture of inclusion”

Darren Youngs,
Executive Director, Early Childhood Implementation,
Department of Education and Training

“Sounds like leadership and management and a supportive team have been critical, together with a high level of emotional intelligence from all.”

Participant

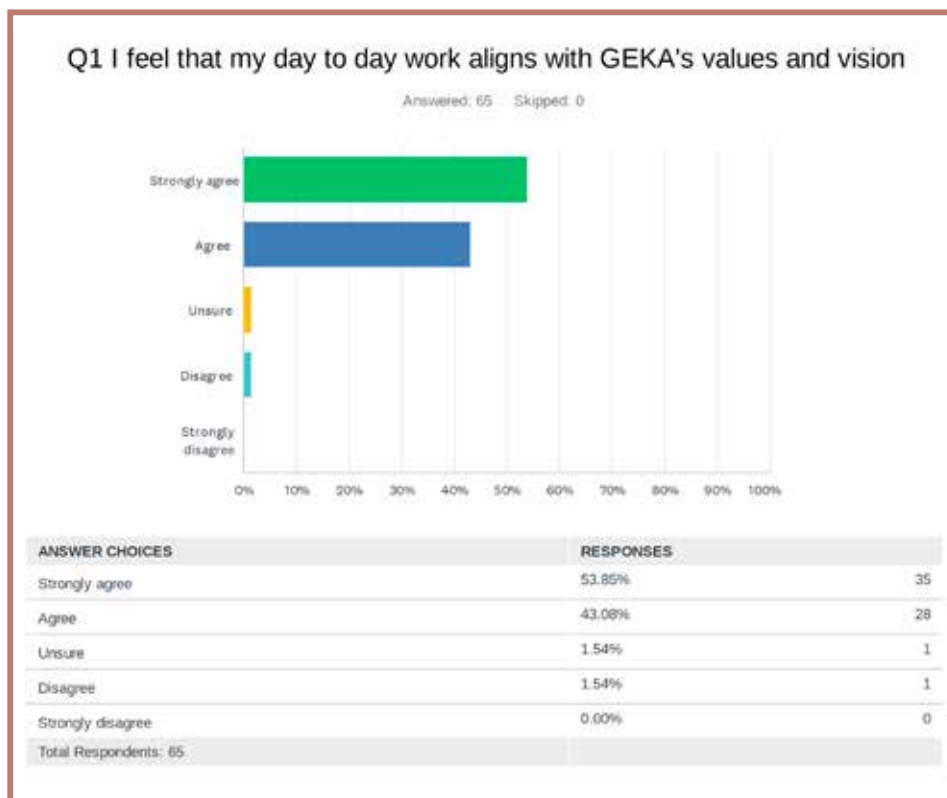
“Thank you both for sharing such a powerful narrative, one that we need to honour and advocate for - sending best wishes and respect for all you do.”

Participant

“Such courage, heart and vulnerability to share your stories - thank you so much.”

Participant

STAFF ENGAGEMENT AND ALIGNMENT SURVEY



GEKA undertakes a staff satisfaction survey every year – the survey is undertaken by an external organisation (InSync) every second year, whilst an internal ‘pulse check’ is undertaken on the alternate year. The pulse check follows the same categories of questions related to staff engagement and alignment. Sixty-eight per cent of permanent staff responded to the survey. The results demonstrate that staff engagement and alignment remain extremely high (following on from 2020 results which were the highest in the organisation’s history).

OUR FAMILIES

EXTENDED HOURS

Late in 2020, GEKA re-evaluated its business model, considering the needs of the community, and ongoing financial viability. After lengthy conversations internally and externally, GEKA made the decision to offer programs beyond the standard kindergarten hours funded by DET (15 hours for four-year-old and five hours for three-year-old children) at our services that were holding vacancies.

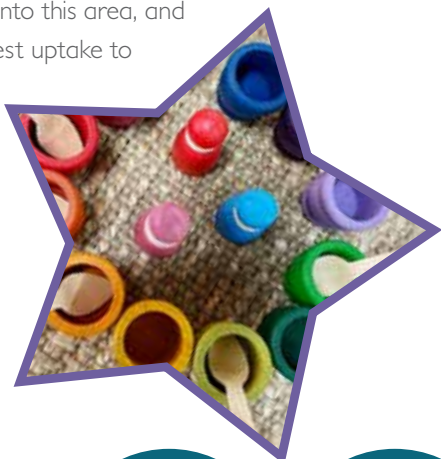
With the support of local councils to offer vacant positions to families interested in additional hours for their child, we trailed this model in 2021. The pilot program was a huge success, with families taking up the offer of additional kindergarten hours for their child. For many, it meant increased consistency and security for their child, who could attend one early years' service, rather than take up a funded place in a kindergarten and a second place with additional hours, in a long day care setting.

Whilst our priority remains working with local councils to ensure all children are able to access a funded, two-year kindergarten program prior to school, we will continue to explore opportunities to expand our offerings, so that we can meet the ever changing needs of children and families.

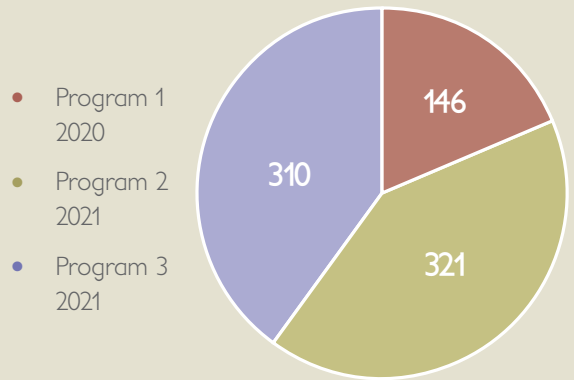
This was a significant shift for GEKA, however, feedback from our families has been exceptionally positive. The additional hours provide families with flexibility to attend our programs for longer and/or additional days, and it enables the organisation to remain competitive within the early years sector.

HOLIDAY CARE PROGRAM

A few years ago, GEKA introduced holiday care as part of our offering. Feedback from families was the key driver in our decision to expand into this area, and 2021 saw our greatest uptake to date.



DAYS BOOKED



The GEKA Holiday Care Program is offered to children aged between three to five years, living within Glen Eira, Bayside, Kingston, Monash and the surrounding communities. We are open during the term two and term three holidays (excluding public holidays), for a total of 4 weeks a year.

Qualified educators operate our program, and we offer a variety of engaging activities from visual art, sports, music and movement, environmental education, cooking experiences and flexible indoor/outdoor play.

While we operate from one or two GEKA kindergartens (depending on the demand), we have found that children ease into the program with little concern being at a different kindergarten to usual. This is largely due to a GEKA services having a consistent 'homely' feel and commitment to high quality resources, that are familiar to children. Our educators are sensitive to the transition for children from neighbouring services and provide an individualised orientation program for those that need time to settle.

Families have appreciated being able to access a high-quality educational program during the term breaks, as it not only provides the care needed, but also a continuity in learning for their child. GEKA families also have the added benefit of completing a simple enrolment of days for the program, with all enrolment details and relevant medical information, being transferred from their permanent GEKA kindergarten to the holiday care program.

As the program continues to gain popularity, we will look to offer the program at more GEKA services, so we can meet the needs of the community.

OUR COMMUNITY

ENGAGING IN RESEARCH WITH CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY - Supporting children's early communication

GEKA is often asked to take the time to engage in research that supports the development of children in the early years. In 2021, we were asked to participate in research with Charles Sturt University to investigate the experience of educators and families in supporting children's communication in the first five years. Results of the survey were published by the University and will assist in the creation of resources for children.

UN-INCORPORATION OF GEKA GLOVER STREET KINDERGARTEN

An EYMs success can be largely attributed to the strong partnerships they have with key stakeholders, such as families, local government and DET. It is critical that all partners are clear of the contribution they all make towards achieving the same goals. Clear articulation of roles and responsibilities enables each partner to perform their roles with confidence, ultimately contributing to the overall effectiveness and sustainability of GEKA.

When a service transitions to GEKA, we assume the role of approved provider and as such, hold the kindergarten licence and all the liability and responsibility for the kindergarten. The Committee of Management (COM), evolve into a volunteer Parent Group (VPG), responsible for the building of social connections and the generation of funds through fundraising events.

To ensure clear responsibilities between GEKA as the approved provider and the parent group as volunteers, we made a decision to mandate that all new kindergartens joining GEKA would need to un-incorporate the parent groups, as part of the transition to GEKA. The need to report financial activity to Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV), for example, becomes redundant, as GEKA assume this role, so remaining incorporated is no longer needed.

GEKA Glover Street unincorporated in 2021, which now sees all GEKA kindergarten volunteer groups operating as unincorporated groups. GEKA is one of the only EYMs with the clear distinction between approved provider and volunteer. It has meant greater clarity of roles and a freedom to focus on building community partnerships between families and with members of the local community.

KEEPING A LOCAL KINDERGARTEN OPEN: GEKA's partnership with the St Kilda Steiner Kindergarten Community

This year, we have opened our doors to the St Kilda Steiner Kindergarten community, who, after 20 years in the one location, needed to relocate to new premises. Managed by a volunteer Committee of Management, the group have secured a new location, but the new site will not be ready to open until mid-2022. The committee approached GEKA for guidance and support and we responded with empathy, understanding the importance of keeping the service operating for the benefit of children and families in the community.

By reconfiguring our timetable at GEKA Orrong Road Kindergarten (a double room unit), we were able to maximise utilisation to operate from our front room, which freed up the back room for use by the Steiner team. With the support of the Department of Education and Training and the Glen Eira Council, we were able to make this arrangement work, so the kindergarten did not need to close its doors for the next 6-12 months.

We also worked with DET to ensure shared responsibility of the outdoor garden, which will be utilised by children from both kindergarten settings. GEKA led the way in 2021 with the introduction of shared licenced spaces, when children from GEKA Sacred Heart Kindergarten and children from the Sacred Heart Primary School, entered into a shared outdoor space arrangement, while operating under separate departmental licences. By supporting the Steiner team to operate from a GEKA site, we have been able to support

the wider community to continue to access kindergarten, to develop stronger partnerships between educators so we can all learn from each other, and we can offer management support to the COM to ensure smooth operations and continued adherence to National Regulations.



OUR COMMUNITY

SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CARNEGIE TOY LIBRARY

Members of the Carnegie Toy Library, reached out to GEKA to partner together to apply for a grant, to provide GEKA families and children experiencing vulnerability in the local community, with a complimentary (silver) membership to the toy library – and they were successful! The grant was awarded to the Carnegie Toy Library from the Glen Eira City Council to the value of \$1,800.

We believe that the learning that occurs at home is so critical in supporting children to develop strong foundations for future success, we were thrilled when Gemma from the Carnegie Toy Library, reached out to us to partner with them, to help families in this way. Together, we have been able to offer 15 GEKA families the free 12-month membership!

Thank you to the Carnegie Toy Library and to the Glen Eira Council, on behalf of these families, for the opportunity to provide children with greater access to resources, that can be used with children to facilitate rich learning experiences at home.



FAMILY LIFE CHRISTMAS APPEAL

Each year we ask families and staff within our community to consider donating to local people in need of support. Last year we partnered again with Family Life, and collected many donations for food and toy hampers. We were overwhelmed with the generosity of our staff and families, particularly during such a challenging year.

A message from Family Life:

“2021 has been another tough year for everyone, and in particular for vulnerable families and children. It is more important than ever for us to spread some Christmas joy and Family Life is committed to making this happen. To reduce handling in the COVID-19 environment, we are asking for individual toys and complete hampers. This will enable us to safely allocate complete packages to those in need.”



LOOKING TO 2022

REBRANDING

As GEKA are now operating across four local government areas, we need to consider our name and brand, to ensure it is inclusive and well placed to serve our families, children, educators, and communities, well into the future. It does not seem appropriate to continue to operate as the 'Glen Eira Kindergarten Association' when we also offer services in Monash, Kingston and Bayside. We also offer programs beyond the provision of kindergarten including holiday care and parenting programs, with the capacity and drive to consider other innovative offerings that will benefit staff, children, and families.

GEKA engaged an external consultancy firm, GOSH Creative, to lead the consultation process with employees, children, families, and the wider community, in helping us articulate our purpose and in refreshing our brand. Decisions about who we are and who we will be in the future have been thoughtful and deliberate based on the feedback received. We have a rich and successful history and a reputation that is well known for high quality service. Our new name and brand is representative of honouring our foundations in Glen Eira and our purpose, whilst capturing our expanded geographical footprint and diversification.

The Journey

"My son gets really excited to go there every week. The smile on his face when I tell him he has kinder tomorrow."

Parent

Joy of learning, connecting, belonging and thriving. It's the feeling our children, families and staff have as we strive to develop lifelong learners.

A little over a decade ago, a group of hard-working parent volunteers came together to form an organisation that would more effectively manage early years education, in their community. With the support of local and state governments, the Glen Eira Kindergarten Association, or GEKA, as it has become known, was created.

Commencing with four local kindergartens, each unique to

their location, they worked to establish and embed, shared beliefs and values of respect, authenticity, integrity, excellence, celebration and community.

GEKA's historical roots are grounded in the belief that our purpose is to grow people, through the delivery of high-quality service provision and a commitment to the ongoing development of our staff, through exceptional leadership and management. Through our unwavering commitment of supporting young children to thrive, GEKA has become synonymous with high quality, accessible and professional Early Years education, that consistently exceeds the National Standard for education and care.

Over the past few years, our reputation has brought opportunities for growth beyond the Glen Eira community that have been embraced by children, families, educators and school communities. Our scope has evolved to manage an expanded number of kindergartens, the provision of holiday care, parent education, inclusion and education support and the delivery of professional development. Our aim is to grow sustainably and responsibly. To deliver locally based and community focused programs and services for children and families that are evidence-based, inclusive and foster a lifelong love of learning.

As we evolve, so too does our name.

Our ongoing identity has been built on a solid foundation, that honors our connection to where it all began – in Glen Eira. It is a brand that captures who we are and what we offer. It is a promise to the community that we will continue to thrive, to strive for excellence, and to create outstanding and nurturing environments, in which to learn.

WELCOME TO GLEN EDUCATION.



LOOKING TO 2022

GEKA'S STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2024

GEKA's 2018-21 strategic plan has been successfully executed over the last three years. The organisation has grown and evolved and is well positioned for its next chapter. Building upon the last three years, and with an awareness of changing demographics, Government policy, needs of families whilst ensuring financial viability, GEKA's 2022-24 strategy has an ongoing focus on sustainability, coupled with balanced growth. In achieving this, the organisation will:

- Remain responsive
- Maintain its positive and professional reputation
- Sustain quality
- Honour our differentiation

In partnership with internal and external stakeholders, we will work towards:

- Sustainability in an ever-changing environment
- Exceptional people, programs, and purpose
- The provision of exceptional child and family experiences
- Effective and efficient operations
- Strong and influential thought leadership

In carrying out the 2022-24 strategic plan, we will continue to embrace opportunities and challenges, and continue our advocacy for a strong and professional early years sector.



UNIVERSAL FUNDED KINDERGARTEN FOR CHILDREN AGED THREE YEARS

Universal funded three-year-old kindergarten will be rolled out across all of Victoria (including childcare centres that provide a kindergarten program) in 2022. This has been a staged approach over a three-year period, based on the socio-demographic needs of the community. In 2022, all GEKA services will receive DET funding to provide five hours of funded three-year-old kindergarten. Funding from DET will progressively increase to 15 hours (aligning with four-year-old kindergarten) by 2029.

The Victorian Government has acknowledged the significant infrastructure, workforce and service delivery implications for providers and services, and the early childhood workforce – particularly as funded three-year-old kindergarten must be staffed by an early childhood teacher (again, aligning with four-year-old programs). GEKA is in a healthy position to deliver funded three-year-old kindergarten, as our programs have always been staffed by an early childhood teacher. This is not the case for many other organisations that have relied on a Diploma qualified educators to lead these programs.





GEKA MURRUMBEENA KINDERGARTEN

We are proud to announce that GEKA Murrumbeena Kindergarten will be operating from St Patrick's Primary School commencing term one 2023.

GEKA Murrumbeena Kindergarten has been in operation at the Holy Nativity Hall in Blythe Street for over 40 years. It has always been a popular kindergarten in the neighbourhood and continues to have strong enrolments for both three and four-year-old children each year. In 2020 we were informed that the lease of the premises would not be renewed, as the landlord intends to repurpose the site. The GEKA community remained committed to ensuring the kindergarten continued to operate into the future as it is the only community kindergarten in the suburb of Murrumbeena.

We are excited at the opportunity to partner with St Patrick's Primary School in establishing a kindergarten on the school site. This will ensure we can continue to meet the demand for kindergarten places in the local area. It will also align with the State Government's vision to co-locate kindergartens on school sites, and to ensure community demand for places is met.

The initiative will see an existing portable classroom transformed into a purpose-built facility for kindergarten aged children. To support this project, the GEKA Board committed to investing significant funds towards ensuring the kindergarten's

future. In 2021, we were successful in our application for a DET Building Blocks grant to the value of \$400,000. This co-contribution from the Victorian State Government will see the half a million-dollar project delivered in its entirety by term one 2023.

We understand that the successful transition to school requires an interconnected and collaborative approach between the kindergarten and the school community. We believe a strengths-based approach to learning will see children develop a strong sense of belonging between the kindergarten and the school. The partnership will support each child's ability to transition to school with an eagerness to learn more.

We are grateful for the continued support of St Patrick's Primary School, in particular Principal Jenny Hawkins and her team. We would also like to acknowledge the incredible contribution from the Department of Education and Training. We thank the Hon. MP Steve Dimopoulos, for joining us to celebrate the funding announcement (as pictured). We are excited to commence building works from June 2022.

FINANCIAL REPORT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2021

We are pleased to present the audited financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2021. The audit was conducted by Crowe Australasia, an external and independent audit and accounting firm. The financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position of GEKA as at 31 December 2021.

OVERVIEW

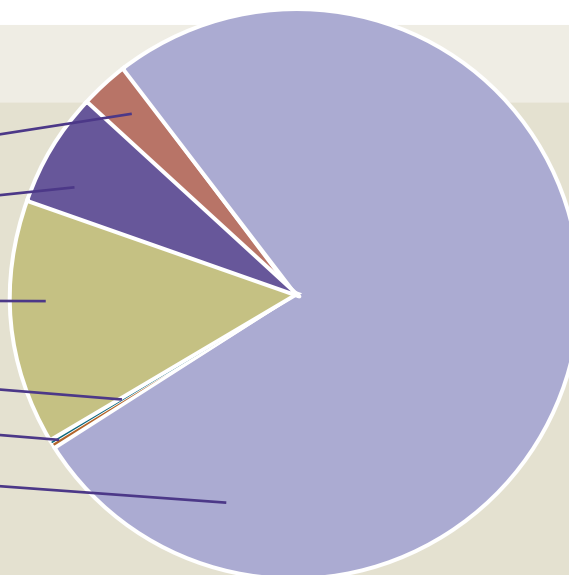
The organisation reported total revenue of \$6,979,746 (2020: \$5,711,108) and generated a surplus of \$669,652 (2020: \$326,762). This was primarily due to the acquisition of four services throughout the year, and the subsequent increase in revenue from State Government funding and parent fees (where applicable).

WHERE THE MONEY CAME FROM:

INCOME	2021
Parent Fees (3YO and extended hours)	\$457,719
Other Revenue (includes Job Keeper and Gain on Bargain Purchase)	\$975,937
Interest	\$2,097
Fundraising	\$28,371
Government Funding (including free 4YO kindergarten)	\$5,323,105
Government Grants	\$192,517
TOTAL INCOME	\$6,979,746

2021 INCOME

- Government Grants
- Parent Fees
- Other Revenue
- Interest
- Fundraising
- Government Funding



Government funding represents the main source of income throughout 2021. This amount also includes the Government's free kindergarten initiative for 4-year-old programs, and subsidised program for 3-year old's. Parent fees consist of the unsubsidised 3-year-old kindergarten program and extended hours. For the first quarter of 2021, GEKA was in receipt of Job Keeper payments. This is reflected in Other Revenue.

GEKA's operating income is supplemented by fundraising income generated by Volunteer Parent Groups. In 2021, fundraising income totalled \$28,371 (2020: \$17,648). COVID restrictions throughout the year have hindered many fundraising activities but despite these issues, we have managed to increase the result on the prior year.

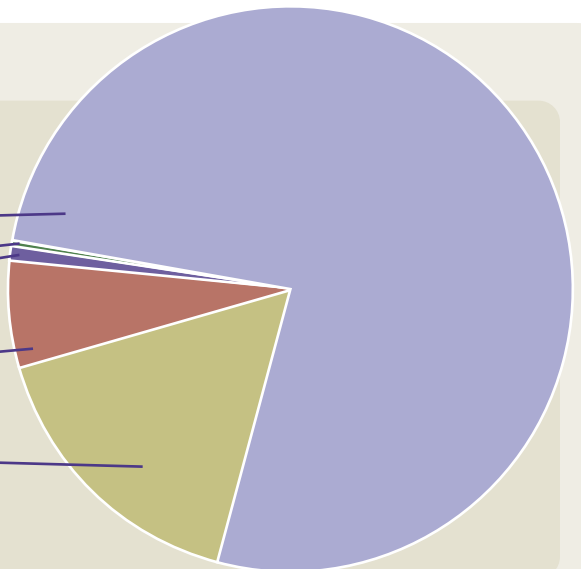
We note that fundraising expenses were higher than the fundraising income for 2021, due to the decision to 'give back' to the community during COVID. Fundraising reserves were used to host events that provided education and activities to children (face painters, music, etc), catering for family events (BBQs), programs to enhance the curriculum (Playball sport, music, and dance, etc.) and the hiring of facilities for end of year events.

WHERE THE MONEY WAS SPENT:

OPERATING EXPENSES	2021
Staff Costs	\$4,822,657
Accounting and Audit	\$26,477
Fundraising activities	\$55,132
Depreciation	\$379,593
Programs and Administration	\$1,026,185
Total Expenses	\$6,310,094

2021 EXPENSES

- Staff costs
- Accounting and Audit
- Fundraising
- Depreciation
- Programs and Administration



THANK YOU

Children and families enrolled that
have utilised GEKA services

Staff and volunteers

The Department of Education and
Training (DET)

Victorian School Building Authority
(VSBA)

Glen Eira City Council

Monash City Council

Kingston City Council

Bayside City Council

Early Learning Association Australia
(ELAA)

BV Landscapes

Caulfield Primary School Community

Carnegie Primary School Community

Sacred Heart Primary School
Community

Early Childhood Australia (ECA)

Holy Nativity Anglican Church

Melbourne Archdiocese of Catholic
Schools (MACS)

Crowe

HumanIT

Insync

Yooralla

Officeworks

Play Australia

Play to Learn

PlayBall Glen Eira

Gillon Group

Virginia Park Café

Resource Rescue

Suarez Group

Tri Nature

Pixel Storm

Bunnings Oakleigh South

The Marketing Business

Family Life

Glen Eira Senior Citizens Group

Local member for Bentleigh,
Mr Nick Staikos MP

Local member for Oakleigh,
Mr Steve Dimopoulos MP

Carnegie Toy Library



GEKA SERVICES

GEKA BENTLEIGH

9 Higgins Rd,
Bentleigh 3204
P: (03) 9557 1804



GEKA BENTLEIGH EAST

202 East Boundary Rd
Bentleigh East 3165
P: (03) 9570 4806



GEKA BRADY ROAD

84 Brady Rd
Bentleigh East 3165
P: (03) 9570 1149



GEKA CARNEGIE

51A Truganini Rd
Carnegie 3163
P: (03) 9571 0575



GEKA CAULFIELD PRIMARY

1C Birch St
Caulfield South 3162
P: (03) 9528 4131



GEKA CAULFIELD SOUTH

1C Birch St
Caulfield South 3162
P: (03) 9528 4131



GEKA CENTRE ROAD

850-852 Centre Rd
Bentleigh East 3165
P: (03) 9570 6103



GEKA CHELSEA

36 Glenola Road,
Chelsea, VIC 3196
P: (03) 9772 2788



GEKA GLOVER STREET

11 Glover St
Bentleigh East 3165
P: (03) 9570 5200



GEKA HOLIDAY CARE

220 McKinnon Rd
McKinnon 3204
P: (03) 9570 5866



GEKA MCKINNON

220 McKinnon Road
McKinnon 3204
P: (03) 9578 5964



GEKA MURRUMBEENA

1A Blythe Street
Murrumbeena 3163
P: (03) 9569 9405



GEKA OFFICE

2 North Drive
Bentleigh East 3165
P: (03) 9570 5866



GEKA ORRONG ROAD

55 Orrong Rd
Elsternwick 3185
P: (03) 9528 2203



GEKA SACRED HEART

2 Mora Avenue,
Oakleigh, VIC 3166
P: (03) 8574 4562



GEKA ST JOHN'S

14-16 Darcy Avenue,
Sandringham, VIC 3191
P: (03) 9598 7874



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