



Advocating for Victorian children and their families

Annual Report 2020–21

Our Vision

Victorian children, young people and families are safe, happy and connected, with access to support when they need it.

Our Purpose

Policy and ideas

Develop, influence and advocate for public policies that advance the rights and wellbeing of children, young people and families, and address the social, economic and cultural barriers to improving their lives.

Research and practice

Lead and share research to support innovation and evidence-informed practice.

Capacity building

Strengthen the capacity of organisations to provide services that best suit the needs of children and families experiencing vulnerability.

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Acknowledgements

We, at the Centre, respectfully acknowledge that our work is done on the traditional land of the Kulin nation and we acknowledge the Wurundjeri people as the traditional custodians of the land. We pay respect to Elders past and present. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded, and that this was and always will be Aboriginal land.



We appreciate and celebrate diversity in all its forms. We believe diversity of all kinds makes our teams, services and organisation stronger and more effective.



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Chair's report

In a year that has seen the child and family services workforce and our clients adapt to a new way of living, I am honoured to have commenced as the Centre's chair after 6 years serving as a board member.

Throughout 2020–21 the disruption, uncertainty and fatigue we've all felt reminded me they are everyday realities for many of the children, young people and families our sector supports. With unprecedented demand for our services, and more families experiencing vulnerability, our work to enable communities to thrive has never been more important.

The pandemic aside, it has been a year of immense change for service delivery in our sector. The Victorian and Aboriginal Family Preservation and Reunification Response commenced, and is already delivering impressive results through working collaboratively with children and families to provide a rapid, intensive and sustained intervention aimed at preventing at-risk children from entering or re-entering out-of-home care.

Pleasingly, in the Victorian State Budget 2021–22, the Victorian Government announced \$335 million over 4 years to continue the transformation of child and family services to focus on early intervention and prevention, including the expansion of the response.

A number of key research projects and reviews shone a light on the urgent issues impacting our sector and the children, young people and families we work with. The Commission for Children and Young People's *Out of sight* report highlighted the need for urgent action to support young Victorians who go absent or missing from residential care, with this cohort reported missing at 75 times the rate of children and young people aged 13 to 17 in the general population. The Commission's *Our youth, our way* report drew attention to the stark over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria's youth justice system, calling for a reimagined system that places families, communities and culture at the heart of finding and implementing solutions.

The Centre continued to strengthen and expand its relationships with government and members, collaborating with new sectors and

philanthropic partners to deliver innovative projects to effect change for families. This included the Residential Care Occupational Health and Safety Capability Program, co-funded by WorkSafe Victoria and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, which is delivering a safety leadership program to provide psychologically safe workplaces across the levels of the residential care sector. The Centre's learning and development offerings engaged a record number of workers, with training covering new topics and reaching new sectors through the Tri-Peaks partnership and Outcomes, Practice and Evidence Network (OPEN).

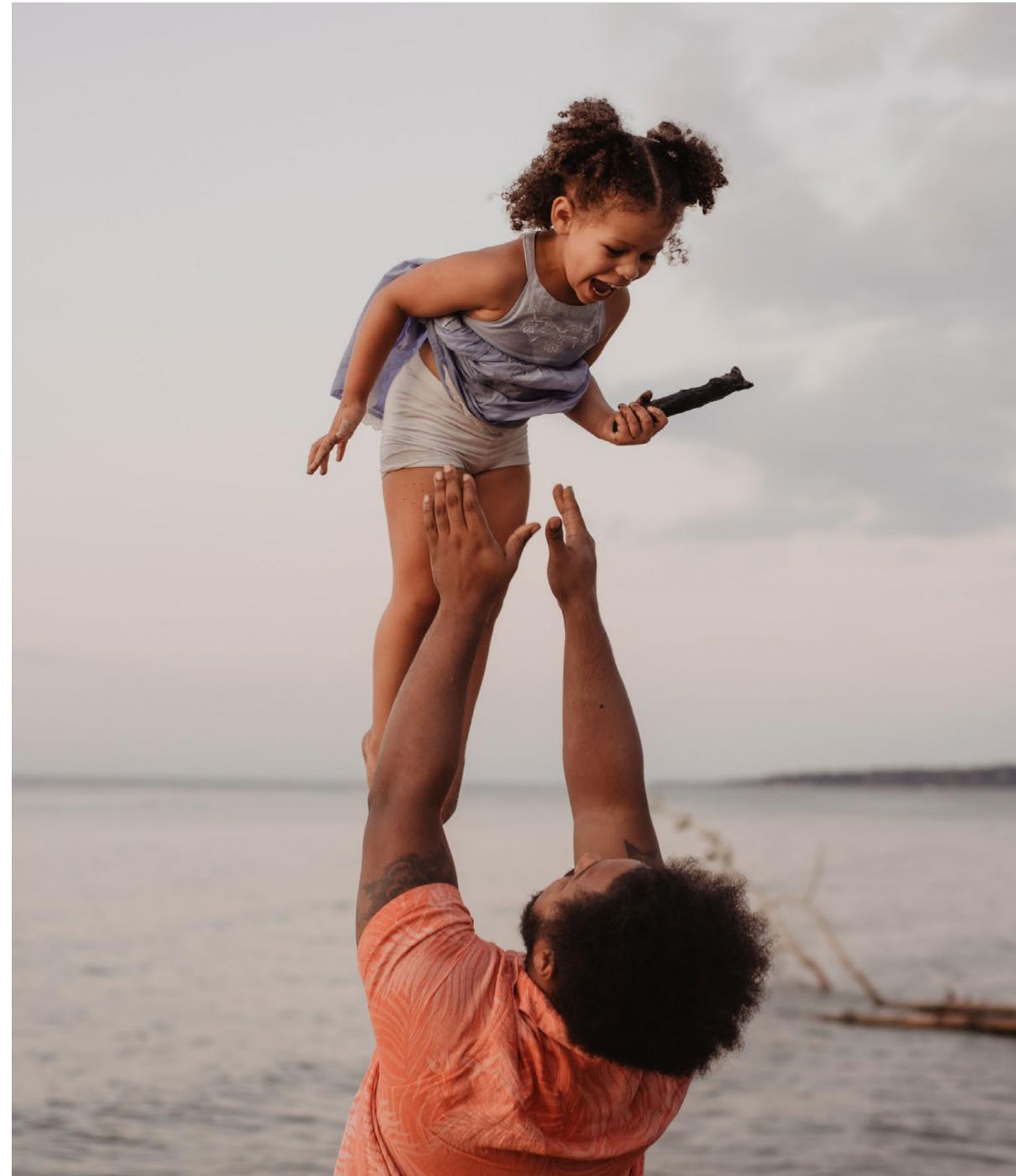
I want to extend my sincere gratitude to our Chief Executive Officer, Deb Tsorbaris, for her outstanding leadership and continued drive for improved outcomes for children, young people and their families. I also want to thank the Centre's board, executive leadership team and staff for playing a crucial role in supporting the Centre's members throughout this challenging year. Thank you to former Minister for Child Protection and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Luke Donnellan, for his steadfast advocacy for children and carers, and continued faith in our services. Warm appreciation, too, for the many partners we have across other government departments and sectors, and throughout Australia. Finally, to our workforce in our membership, I thank you for your unwavering commitment to supporting families to learn, connect and thrive.

Yours in making a difference,



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'LJG', written over a white background.

Dr Lisa J. Griffiths
Chairperson



CEO's report

The past 12 months have tested the resilience and tenacity of both the Victorian child and family services workforce and the children, young people and families we support. COVID-19 has continued to disrupt the safety net of childcare, school and social connectedness for many children, with an increasing number of families facing material hardship. The pandemic has also escalated family violence, family separation and reports of mental stress.

While it's already clear the pandemic will profoundly impact our children's future, I am incredibly humbled by the innovation of the Centre's member organisations and our sector in working to keep children safe, healthy and thriving. Our workforce has not only adapted but elevated, despite additional safety measures and virtual service delivery, ensuring our important work can continue to reach those who need it most.

Reflecting on the past year, I am deeply impressed by the Centre's growing breadth and depth of work that continues to expand across our sector and others. A number of key projects in 2020–21 sought to understand and address COVID-19's short- and long-term impacts on communities. Social Ventures Australia's *Keeping families together through COVID-19: The strengthened case for early intervention in the child protection and out-of-home care system in Victoria* report, commissioned by the Centre, Berry Street and a number of other sector organisations, found that additional investment in targeted early

intervention could prevent up to 14,600 children entering care over the next 10 years and save at least \$1.8 billion. The *Social security and time use during COVID-19* study by the Centre, Australian National University, Swinburne University of Technology and Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand found the Coronavirus Supplement and suspension of mutual obligations improved social security recipients' engagement in the labour market, as well as their physical and mental health.

Newly underway, the Child Healthcare, Adversity and COVID-19 project with the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, funded by the Victorian Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, is exploring how COVID-19 has affected the health needs of Victorian children and young people experiencing vulnerability and will identify service system improvements. The Victorian State Budget 2020–21 will be remembered for its focus on COVID-19 recovery, response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, and emphasis on caring for Victorian communities. The Centre and our sector more broadly welcomed the investment of an additional \$1.2 billion investment in the child and family system, in particular the \$842 million in mental health and wellbeing support for children and young people. We were also proud to play a role in extended support for young Victorians leaving out-of-home care being enshrined in legislation, with the Victorian Government amending the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* as a result of the Home Stretch campaign.

The Victorian and Aboriginal Family Preservation and Reunification Response also commenced in 2020–21, and is already making great strides in supporting parents and caregivers to create a safe and nurturing home environment for their families.

In this ever-changing landscape, we continued to adapt our work to meet the needs of the community. The Centre, along with 18 of Victoria's leading peak organisations came together to launch the Australian-first Embracing Equality campaign, which included a charter and pledge in allyship with the state's LGBTIQ+ community. Our annual OPEN Symposium successfully transitioned online, with a week of sessions focused on achieving better outcomes for children and families in a rapidly changing environment. We proudly launched our first annual Media Awards, recognising excellence in journalism on issues affecting children, young people and their families. And our Raising Expectations program was awarded a Social Impact Measurement Network Australia Award for its economic and social benefits to both government and the wider community.

Finally, we welcomed OzChild CEO Dr. Lisa Griffiths as our new chair. A colleague of many years, Lisa had already served as a board member for several years and is held in high esteem both at the Centre and across our workforce.

Looking ahead, we know COVID-19 will be with us for some time. I have every confidence that our sector will continue to be a steadfast advocate for children, young people and their families as we navigate the new normal together.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D. Tsorbaris".

Deb Tsorbaris
CEO of Centre for Excellence
in Child and Family Welfare

Section 1

Advocating for and with the sector



Moving forward – resilience and rebuilding

Over the past year, we have seen enormous ongoing efforts across the state as people work together in the best interests of the health and wellbeing of our community. The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to impact Victorian children, young people and their families as life under lockdown extended into 2021. The resilience of Victoria’s families has been put into sharp focus as we rebuild during this time. Parents and carers have stepped up time and time again to support children and young people with at-home learning. Young people have demonstrated their determination despite many changes in both their schooling and lives, with many advocating for important global issues and changes. Families have adapted to uncertain times. And all the while, the child and family services sector has been able to support those in need when they needed it most.

The Centre is incredibly proud of the sector’s perseverance and resilience in working with families during the pandemic. The efforts of our workers have been – and will continue to be – critical to keeping children in Victoria safe and cared for. To every single worker, we say thank you for your efforts and we look forward to working with you into the next year.

Budget outcomes

Budget 2020–21

The Victorian State Budget 2020–21 was welcomed by the Centre as a once-in-a-generation budget. It promotes dignity, safety and fairness for Victorian children, young people, and their families and carers. The \$1.1 billion budget spend on children, young people, families and carers included:

- fully funding the Home Stretch program supporting out-of-home care leavers up to the age of 21 to stay with their kinship or foster families, or transition to independent living arrangements
- support for earlier intervention through family services to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families

- the construction of 2- and 3-bedroom units to better meet the needs of young people in residential care
- establishing care hubs to provide wraparound support for children, young people and sibling groups entering out-of-home care to increase security and promote reunification with their families
- \$230 million to continue the implementation of the Royal Commission into Family Violence recommendations.

The Centre also welcomed the very significant investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, communities and organisations, and continued support for self-determination. This investment includes funding established Aboriginal-led family support teams, helping address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care, and continuing the Aboriginal Cradle to Kinder program.

Budget 2021–22

The Centre welcomed the Victorian State Budget 2021–22 announcement’s significant investment in mental health services and services for children, young people and families. The additional \$1.2 billion investment in the child and family services system will significantly improve the lives of many Victorians. This includes an investment of \$842 million in mental health and wellbeing support for children and young people.

The budget announcement also contained \$171 million over 4 years to recruit another 280 child protection workers and to increase out-of-home care placements for children who cannot live safely with their families.

Funding was also made available for an additional 500 families and a trial to embed family services in universal settings such as schools and early years services.

The Centre commends the government’s investment of \$44 million to support women, children and young people affected by family violence and sexual assault.

In the media

The Centre's media outreach in 2020–21 highlighted the issues affecting children, young people and families, as well as the achievements of the sector. Centre CEO Deb Tsorbaris secured a monthly column with Pro Bono Australia, writing on topics including social security, out-of-home care and collaborative philanthropy. In the lead up to the Victorian State Budget 2021–22, the Centre and sector's push for a 25% increase in funding to family services was covered by The Age, ABC Melbourne and ABC Ballarat. The launch of the Australian-first Embracing Equality campaign received widespread coverage in both mainstream and LGBTIQ+ media, including on radio stations JOY 94.9 and 3CR, and in Star Observer magazine and the regional media.

Minister for Child Protection and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers Luke Donnellan's

joint media conference with the team behind the Centre's Fostering Connections program to encourage more Victorians to become foster carers received coverage on Channel 7, Channel 9 and Channel 10, as well as in online and print media. Similarly, Foster Care Week in September provided an opportunity to amplify the voices of foster carers and agency workers across Victoria in rural and regional media, including via ABC Goulburn Murray, ABC Mildura-Swan Hill, 3BA Ballarat and the Myrtleford Times.

The recipients of the Centre's annual residential care awards were profiled by their local radio stations and newspapers, including The Bendigo Advertiser and Sunraysia Daily. And an initiative awarded a grant by the Centre's Out-of-Home Care Philanthropic Funders Network – the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency's Growing up Aboriginal Babies at Home project – was featured in the Koori Mail and on 3KND radio.

Read Deb Tsorbaris's articles:

- Not good enough: Raising expectations for young Australians leaving care
- Learning how to effectively engage young care leavers
- Strengthening parental participation to improve outcomes for children and families
- Recognising the rights and unique experience of young people in care
- Collaborative philanthropy: A new model to enable systemic change
- Recognising children as victims of crime in their own right
- An investment in the mental health, wellbeing and education of Victoria's children and families
- The Australian government must uphold its responsibility to unemployed care leavers
- Homelessness shouldn't be inevitable for women and children escaping family violence
- COVID-19 through the eyes of children and young people

Submissions and reports

Our submissions in 2020–21 included:

- Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy (Vic)
- Lessons from Remote and Flexible Learning (Vic)
- Draft National Report for Australia's Third Universal Periodic Review (Cth)
- 2020–21 Pre-Budget Submission (Cth)
- The Centre prepared a joint submission with Brotherhood of St Laurence, Council of Single Mothers and their Children, and Grandparents Victoria/Grandparents Australia.
- Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020 (Cth)
- Monitoring the Family Violence Reforms (Vic)
- Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Continuation of Cashless Welfare) Bill 2020 (Cth)
- Victorian Youth Strategy (Vic)
- Social Services Legislation Amendment (Strengthening Income Support) Bill 2021 (Cth)
- State Budget Submission 2021–22 (Vic)
- Victorian State Disability Plan 2021–25 (Vic)
- National Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse (Cth)
- ParentsNext: examination of Social Security (Parenting payment participation requirements - class of persons) instrument 2021 (Cth)

The Centre was invited to give evidence at the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights hearing for this inquiry.

In the Centre's opening statement, we argued the ParentsNext program is incompatible with human rights and the best interests of the child, and recommended it be discontinued.

- Day of General Discussion: Children's Rights and Alternative Care (Int)
- Inquiry into the Family Law Amendment (Federal Family Violence Orders) Bill 2021 [Provisions] (Cth)
- Inquiry into the Use of School Buses in Rural and Regional Victoria (Vic)
- Next steps in the Victorian Early Childhood Workforce Strategy (Vic)



Treating Families Fairly

Treating Families Fairly is an alliance of child and family services organisations, peak bodies and academics advocating for government policies that better support families and uphold the rights of children. The alliance speaks out against policies that cause harm, with a particular focus on social security and welfare conditionality. Established in 2017, the alliance continues to meet bimonthly to share knowledge, scrutinise government policy, gather evidence of impacts on children and families, and engage in collective advocacy. Meetings are co-chaired by FamilyCare and the Centre. This year, we were pleased to welcome Professor Sharon Bessell (Australian National University), Cohealth and Social Ventures Australia to the alliance.

Key alliance activities in 2020–21 included:

- launching the research report *Social security and time use during COVID-19*, which examined the impacts of the \$550 Coronavirus Supplement and the temporary suspension of mutual obligations on the time use and wellbeing of people who receive social security payments
- developing a logo and branding for the alliance
- continuing and expanding monthly update emails providing easy access to the latest

news and evidence relating to federal welfare policies and their impact on families

- preparing a 2020–21 pre-budget submission for the federal government recommending social security reforms so the system is fit for purpose now and in the future;
- releasing a statement in response to the Federal Budget
- preparing submissions for the Senate Select Committee on Job Security and the Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Strengthening Income Support) Bill 2021
- providing input to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) to inform the development of the statement of intent on recovery for the child and family services system, highlighting the importance of government action to address poverty
- meeting with National Children’s Commissioner Anne Hollonds to discuss aligned advocacy priorities.

We would like to thank all members of the alliance for their incredible advocacy efforts and look forward to continuing this important work together in 2021–22.

Working alongside Aboriginal colleagues and organisations



Joint forums

The Centre has co-hosted several forums with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). On 13 July 2020, the Centre and VACCA facilitated a highly successful forum on Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC), during which VACCA shared with community service organisations (CSOs) its alternative approach to that of Child Protection. The forum provided invaluable lessons for CSOs considering guardianship in the future. VACCA took attendees through the steps of preparing for ACAC implementation and examined the core principles and features of the ACAC practice approach (Nugel) relevant to mainstream service providers. The forum was very well attended with many questions and positive feedback from attendees.

Aboriginal Children’s Forum

The Centre is a signatory to Wungurilwil Gapgapduir Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement and a member of the Aboriginal Children’s Forum (ACF). We attended the ACF online sessions in September and December 2020, and in March 2021. While it was disappointing not to be able to attend in person due to COVID-19, the online sessions still captured the richness of the cultural activities presented by the host ACCO. The Centre continues to advocate strongly for the transition of Aboriginal children into Aboriginal care and welcomes the opportunities the ACF provides to explore options for reaching ACF targets.

The Centre is also represented on the ACF working group, Wungurilwil Gapgapduir steering committee and each of the 4 Wungurilwil Gapgapduir (Objectives 1–4) working groups.

The Victorian and Aboriginal Family Preservation and Reunification Response

The Centre has played a critical role in the delivery of phase one of the new Family Preservation and Reunification Response (FPRR). The goal of the FPRR is to keep families together and reduce the number of children and young people entering and/or remaining in care.

The Centre's main role has been to provide coaching to help embed the FPRR's evidence informed practices across sites. Our team of highly experienced practice leads has delivered this coaching throughout the first year of the FPRR as it has evolved. In the past financial year, we have provided 704 hours of coaching to 33 team leaders and 86 practitioners in 9 community service organisations across the 17 DFFH areas. We are now expanding our core team as part of phase 2 of the FPRR.

The feedback we have received during phase one has shown the difference a model like this can make to workers and families, including practitioners' increased levels of confidence and skill in using the practice approaches and promising signs of better outcomes for children and their families.

Feedback from team leaders and practitioners in the coaching sessions has included the following:

'I am really noticing a difference with how families are working with us ... They have a voice and feel like they have hope, sometimes for the first time.'

'It's about genuine collaboration; it's about putting the parent at the centre. Traditionally, we haven't been there – the system did not support it. Through this program I have actually been able to be led by the parent and their goals and then lead the parent, with role modelling on good parenting.'

'The practices make sense when working with families – they're so used to being told what to do that they find it so much more meaningful to be asked what they think needs to happen. It's great to see that happening for families and other services seeing it working as well and coming together to get the best outcome for the family.'

Sector sustainability

During COVID-19

In July and August 2020, the Centre gathered additional data from child and family services, mainly through the child and family alliances, to capture how workers and their clients were experiencing the second, extended COVID-19 lockdown during 2020. One of the 4 survey questions asked how organisations were supporting staff. The responses highlighted the creative and flexible approaches being taken across our sector to maintain staff morale and wellbeing. From whole-of-organisation actions to team-level responses, the level and type of support being provided was incredible and enabled staff to maintain their own wellbeing in order to better support the children and families they were working with.

No to Violence evaluation

The Centre has completed its final report for No to Violence (NTV) on an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Graduate Certificate in Client Assessment and Case Management in preparing students to apply what they learned in regard to men's behaviour change practice skills and knowledge. The broader project focused on growing the size of the specialist family violence services by increasing industry engagement,

and growing family violence literacy in the broader community, including by working with other peak bodies. The evaluation was limited to 2 elements of the project: student learning and preparedness for practice from the graduate certificate, and the level and nature of the collaboration achieved among TAFE trainers through the collaborative practice network. The Centre was able to work closely with NTV and interview key stakeholders to determine if and how effectively the objectives of the graduate certificate were being achieved (i.e. whether students display confidence and competence in transitioning to employment in men's behaviour change facilitation). This collaboration provided the evidence base required to support decision-making about future electives and targeted skillsets to enhance the skills and knowledge of future cohorts. It also helped determine the factors limiting TAFE involvement in the TAFE Family Violence Collaborative Practice Network and potential enablers.

Industry Plan

During the first part of 2021 the Centre began reviewing the Child and Family Services Industry Plan 2019–21 to determine how much of the original plan needs to be retained, refreshed or replaced with more contemporary priorities and actions. In particular, we have been looking at the implications of COVID-19 for workforce capability. We look forward to consulting with the sector to develop a revised set of priorities and goals.



Incorporating the voices of service users

**Young
Leaders
Collective**

Young people podcasting

As part of their professional development, 5 participants of the Centre's Young Leaders Collective undertook a 4-week training course with SYN Media, a youth community media organisation, to learn about podcasting techniques, content development, and recording and editing their own podcasts.

They were then able to do a podcast each on a topic related to an aspect of being in care, such as helping parents help their kids, getting into university, what could be improved in a sibling care experience, giving equal opportunities to all kids in care, and kinship care and mental health. The podcasts provided insights into what schooling and being in care had meant for them, the challenges, and the learning that enabled growth.

 **Voice of
parents**

The Voice of Parents

The Voice of Parents project is a 2-year project led by the Centre, supported by Gandel Philanthropy and Equity Trustees – The Arthur Gordon Oldham Charitable Trust.

In 2020–21, the Voice of Parents project published a literature review, overview of compliance frameworks, and survey on child and family service worker experiences of engaging parents. Supported by a senior reference group comprised of leaders across government, child and family services, and adjacent sectors such as law, this work helped to inform the recruitment process of the project's Parent Advisory Group (PAG) in June 2021.

Comprised of birth parents with lived experience of child protection contact, the newly recruited PAG will provide the critical expertise and support required to ensure birth parents with child protection contact can be meaningfully engaged in child and family services.

Hearing from parents

“I acknowledge that participating in this work takes strengths and courage and I want to tell my future self that I have made a difference.”

“I’m proud of myself for changing a negative experience and for having the strength to be able to talk about it for a positive cause.”

“Child Protection is a statutory system and it impacts families for life. We need more avenues for advocacy and support.”

Section 2

Walking alongside children and young people



Keeping children, young people and families safe



Helping our members to keep children, young people and families safe is a key priority at the Centre. The Centre is committed to advocating for an improved out-of-home care system that intervenes early to keep children safe and with family. We take a lead role in the rollout of the FPRR initiative through our practice leads who are driving cultural change across the child and family services system.

We play a key role in the rollout of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) and Child Information Sharing Schemes through our MARAM/IS project. This project is strengthening collaboration and practice knowledge across the child and family and allied sectors with a focus on keeping children and young people in view in our responses to family violence and child wellbeing concerns.

The Centre hosted a range of information sessions and events to improve sector capacity and understanding of child safety. These included KidSafe Victoria presenting on accidental injuries and children, and the Commissioner for Children and Young People addressing how to engage with children and young people.

The Centre hosted a powerful roundtable on children and victims of crime. We heard from Professor Thea Brown and her team on the drivers of filicide in Australia and ways we can improve our service response. Commissioner for Children and Young People Liana Buchanan spoke movingly about the harms experienced by children in our service system.

The Centre has advocated strongly for a Victorian Youth Justice System that keeps children out of prison and with their families in the community. The Centre has met with key government ministers and their advisors to advocate to reduce the criminalisation of children with a care background.

We are active members of the Raise the Age campaign and work closely with our allied sectors to improve outcomes for children and young people in the justice system. We continue to support the implementation of the Framework to Reduce the Criminalisation of Young People in Residential Care, through the development of resources to assist the residential-care workforce.

The Centre invited legal experts to attend a forum on the legal issues facing children and young people in out-of-home care. Our members learned about the common legal issues facing children and young people in care, and where to seek assistance.

The Centre continued to support member organisations to cultivate child-safe environments.

The Centre delivered information sessions on Child Safe Standards, provided advice on child-safe policies to organisations and continued to develop resources. The Centre's expertise has been recognised through our child safeguarding consultancy services, provided to a range of member and non-member organisations. This includes the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) and local governments.

The Centre continued to develop and deliver information sessions on Child Safe Standards and the Reportable Conduct Scheme in 2020-21 to a range of member and non-member organisations, including youth theatre groups, early childhood and kindergarten programs, local governments and public institutions.

The Centre designed and delivered a series of child-safe workshops for staff across the DJCS.

The Centre strongly advocates for systemic change to improve outcomes for children and families. Our policy team has consulted widely with our members to inform a range of submissions to government and review bodies.

The Centre submitted responses to over 15 state and commonwealth requests for consultation across a broad range of topics. The Centre appeared and gave evidence in person to parliamentary inquiries on welfare conditionality and family law.

The Centre has a strong focus on the impact of poverty on children and their families. As a co-convenor of Treating Families Fairly we advocate to raise the rate of income support to above the poverty line. The monthly Treating Families newsletter is positively received across the Centre's membership and beyond.

Supporting our sector to keep children, young people and families safe



In 2020–21, the Centre continued its collaboration with Family Safety Victoria (FSV) to further develop the evidence base in relation to adolescents who use violence in the home (AVITH) and to develop a draft AVITH-focused MARAM practice guide.

As an important first step the Centre consulted with a wide range of professionals working with adolescents using violence in the home to gather their insights into this complex area of practice to help inform and shape the content of the guide. We developed the draft guide and a set of risk assessment tools, drawing on the literature and practitioner expertise and experience. In the next phase of development and consultation it will be important to seek feedback from those with lived experience.

A key theme to emerge from the consultations carried out over the past year was consistent with the Royal Commission into Family Violence finding that adolescent violence in the home is different from adult perpetrators' use of violence in the home and requires a different response. The experts we consulted highlighted the duality of a young person who is causing harm while simultaneously requiring care and support from parents and caregivers, and reinforced the need to maintain a developmental and trauma-informed lens. The guide looks at the different risk and protective factors associated with AVITH and recognises that not all young people use violence for the purposes of coercion and control.

This work has enabled the Centre to establish an extensive network of researchers and practitioners, all with a commitment to making sure adolescents using violence in the home receive the support they need at the earliest possible opportunity to keep them and their families safe.

The Centre also presented at the FSV's statewide adolescent family violence provider forum on 25 February 2021, and facilitated several meetings of an AVITH practice group.

Paid internship partnership

In December 2020, the Centre completed the first phase of a paid internship pilot, connecting universities, graduates and service providers in a paid internship experience for a year. While COVID-19 made placements very challenging, there was positive feedback on the pilot, and, with a small amount of department funding, the Centre commenced a second phase in February 2021. The focus of this phase has been to consolidate and to identify what improvements might be made for university and CSO participants if the pilot were to be expanded in 2022.

Information sharing

The Centre received 12 months of funding from the Peak Sector Capacity Building Grant from Family Safety Victoria and DFFH to support our sector's implementation of the MARAM framework, the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) and the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS). In 2020, the Centre launched a dedicated website to host the range of resources we have developed to support our sector to align to the family violence reforms, including webinar recordings, podcasts and interviews.

In collaboration with Domestic Violence Victoria and No to Violence, the Centre delivered a 3-part webinar series focused on children and young people's experiences of family violence, and explored how each sector can keep children in view. This webinar series contributed to developing greater awareness and knowledge of how to effectively work with other sectors using MARAM and information-sharing schemes for the purpose of ensuring children and young people are safe and heard.

Section 3

Strengthening sector capability



OPEN – Strengthening the evidence base

The Outcomes, Practice and Evidence Network (OPEN) is a partnership between Victoria’s child and family services sector, government and researchers, aimed at supporting the use, creation and sharing of evidence from research, practice and client experience to deliver better outcomes for children, young people and families

Highlights of 2020–21 included our first digital annual symposium focused on achieving better outcomes for children and families in a rapidly changing environment – a week-long digital event in October 2020, which included over 30 presentations and attracted 250 participants from 70 organisations. We had 3 wonderful keynotes in Dr Penny Hagen, the director Auckland Co-Design Lab (NZ); Tom McBride, Early Intervention Foundation (UK); and Thomas Engell, Regional Centre for Child and Adolescent Mental Health (Norway).

OPEN advisory services

We continued to provide free or low-cost advisory services to our sector, offering project support, coaching and training to strengthen confidence, knowledge and capability to identify, develop and use diverse forms of evidence in service design, delivery and evaluation.

OPEN advisory and support services are in high demand. In 2020–21, OPEN delivered intensive project support (IDEAS projects) to 19 sector organisations, training sessions to 10 organisations, and advice and coaching to 15 organisations.

Support for OPEN’s services highlighted the value of support that takes a ‘learning through doing’ approach to building key skills. Participants consistently commented on the value of the approach in building confidence and enthusiasm for strengthening their outcome and measurement focus and embedding this within program implementation and evaluation.

Feedback from sector organisations included:

‘Support through OPEN has changed the way we work in our program, and has inspired the rest of our department to put together evaluation processes/ documents and ensure we are working from an evidence base.’

‘After working with OPEN I feel confident that we can produce a great piece of work, which accurately reflects the great outcomes of the program and, ultimately, will better our chance of being refunded. My manager and I love our work with OPEN. We feel as though we are not only helping out the program and the clients, but we are engaging in meaningful professional development.’



OPEN forums

OPEN Forums are now bimonthly. In total, including our OPEN Symposium, 761 participants have attended OPEN Forums in 2020–21. Topics and presenters included:

Promising practices in remote service delivery – Tom Mulvaney (Family Life), Toni Gauntlett (BCYF), Louise Rehe (Access Health and Community)	50
Panel: Evidence and learnings on remote delivery the first time around (DHHS, CFECFW, Anglicare, Tweddle Child and Family Health Service)	78
Capturing client voices in challenging contexts – Melanie Field Pimm and Dr Aaron Hart (VACRO)	93
Children’s rights in the digital world – Professor Amanda Third (Western Sydney University) and Bec Nguyen (Telethon Kids Institute)	54
Embedding evidence into everyday practice: lessons from 2 organisations – Victoria Baird (Mission Australia) and Darelle Cassidy (Family Life)	115
Panel: Strategies to embed evidence into organisation practice: Getting started on the journey (even on a shoestring) (Anglicare, Centre for Multicultural Youth, independent researcher, OPEN)	121

OPEN Groups

Reflecting input from the sector, OPEN has formed 2 new groups to build sector sharing, capability and collaboration. These are:

- **Evaluation Community of Practice**, which meets bimonthly and aims to share knowledge, tools and expertise; generate shared language and understanding about evidence-based practice; and foster and develop collaborative cross-organisational projects. The Evaluation CoP currently has 25 members, and representatives from Anglicare, OzChild, BCYF, Whitelion, Lighthouse Foundation, Create, VACCA, Bethany, Family Life, MacKillop, research institutes, and youth services within local government.
- **Multicultural Community Working Group**, which commenced in 2020 and meets quarterly. It is composed of senior representatives from the government and agencies that provide services to multicultural communities across different sectors including children and family, youth, aged care, out-of-home care, and disability. The group’s purpose is to inform the Centre and OPEN’s advocacy and capability building work about the services’ needs, and barriers for multicultural communities in assessing quality services. Members include the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Barwon Child Youth and Family, Brotherhood of St Laurence, DFFH, Centre for Multicultural Youth, Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, and Settlement Services International (Victoria).

Learning system grants

The learning system grants (LSG) funded by DHHS since 2017 are intended to strengthen the capacity of child and family services in Victoria to generate evidence and deliver evidence-informed services. The Centre has successfully administered 3 rounds of these grants with the third round currently underway and projects ending in December 2021.

In 2020–21, 9 diverse projects received LSG funding, with recipients from Anglicare Victoria, Caroline Chisholm Society, Family Life, Gippsland Lakes Complete Health, Kids First, MacKillop Family Services, The Bridge Youth Service, Uniting Vic. Tas, and Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.

The Centre provides a platform for successful recipients to showcase their work through the OPEN portal and forums. In interviews, LSG recipients highlighted the value of the grants for building evidence for innovative programs, while developing evidence understanding across their organisations. They also provided positive feedback about OPEN and its knowledge-sharing mechanisms, as well as recommendations for expanding its evaluation capability building initiatives.



Governance et. al. with King & Wood Mallesons

In 2020–21, the Centre commenced work with King & Wood Mallesons to deliver Governance. et. al., a pro bono training series. The series seeks to boost the ability of not-for-profit organisations to identify, manage and respond to governance and related issues more effectively. At the invitation of the Centre, PeakCare Queensland and the Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA) are also offering the series to their members. Topics in 2020–21 included overview of governance, understanding the board, the role of company secretaries, and the duties of officers and directors.

Tri-Peaks collaboration

Tri-Peaks is a collaboration between the Centre, the Victorian Healthcare Association (VHA) and the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) to support and promote good governance and integrated practices across the child and family, community health, and alcohol and other drug sectors.

The continuing impacts of COVID-19 have necessitated adaption of Tri-Peaks to continue delivery through lockdowns and uncertainty. This pivot has proven successful, responding not only to the 3 sectors’ need for collaboration and information sharing, but to the appetite for workforce development opportunities across metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria.

In 2020–21, Tri-Peaks continued with several key workstreams, building on the program of activities that had served the 3 sectors in 2020. This has included:

- a series of 12 webinars focused on virtual learning, development and knowledge building covering topics such as adapting to COVID-19, risk management for health and community services, implementing clinical best-practice governance frameworks, economic and wellbeing impacts of COVID-19, implementation of the voice of the client framework, and system design assumptions. Across 24 webinars a total of 3,760 individuals from across the three sectors attended one or more tri-peaks webinar
- Tri-Peaks cross-sector structured 12-month mentor program. Three intakes comprising 80 participants – board members, CEOs, senior executives and senior practitioners – from across the 3 sectors are currently running, with further intakes planned.

These activities were made possible by the unified vision, clear purpose, resourcing and trust between the 3 peaks. This has enabled Tri-Peaks to continue to collaborate and improve integration across the 3 sectors through joint education, professional development and capacity-building activities.

After demonstrated successes across a range of critical initiatives designed to support workforce development and cross-pollination of policy, ideas and practices, Tri-peaks is now working with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and the Department of Health to develop a plan for the next four years.



Prevention of occupational violence and aggression in residential out-of-home care

In February 2021, the Residential Care Sector Occupational Health and Safety Capability Program (RCSOC) was launched via webinar. It is a 2-year project, led by the Centre and co-funded by WorkSafe Victoria and DFFH. Speakers included WorkSafe’s CEO Colin Radford and senior ergonomist Dr Tony Carden, as well as the deputy secretary of DFFH, Argiri Alisandratos. A panel discussion headed by Centre CEO Deb Tsorbaris included sector leaders Muriel Bamblett (VACCA) and Paul McDonald (Anglicare), among others. The event was attended by 242 participants, including 21 CEOs and 4 deputy CEOs from the sector. Overall the feedback was very positive and highlighted the importance of addressing the safety of workers in residential care through this program.

Following the launch, the program was rolled out with the formation of a steering board group. The board meets quarterly to provide guidance, direction, oversight and good governance to ensure best practice project implementation.

The Centre established partnerships with safety researchers from Monash and Griffith Universities and completed multiple iterative co-design workshops to build the safety leadership framework. An early clear win of the project is the high level and consistent engagement from

the sector. From the sector, 11 organisations participated in the workshops along with 31 individuals. Relevant stakeholders from WorkSafe, DFFH and the Australian Services Union were also active participants. Output from the WorkSafe-led project on occupational violence and aggression systems thinking, specifically the Accimap, a systems-based technique of analysing causes of accidents and incidents, was also used as input to build the foundation of the safety leadership framework of the residential care sector.

The safety leadership framework, contextualised for the residential care sector, was presented to the CEO and senior leaders of the participating organisations in July 2021. The next stage of the project is to survey the residential care sector to provide a baseline measurement of safety leadership practices. The survey results will help shape the development of training programs and gauge changes in safety leadership. A report will be submitted by the Centre’s research partners following the completion of the survey and will incorporate the co-designed Safety Leadership (Lead-Energise-Adapt-Defend) Framework.

The project is continuing and is expected to be completed in 2022.



Fostering Connections

Fostering Connections provides prospective carers with a first point of call and centralised information on the process of becoming a foster carer and acts as a referral pathway for enquiries to agencies across Victoria. Since its inception in 2016, over 25,000 enquiries have been processed through Fostering Connections. Representing all Victorian foster care agencies and services, Fostering Connections is at times responsible for almost half of the foster care enquiries received across the state.

In 2020–21, continuing its COVID-19 response, Fostering Connections has provided support and advice to the sector including:

- working with agencies to move their training and assessment entirely online, including producing a guideline document approved by DHHS, and direct training support
- developing a hybrid training delivery model for Shared Lives Training to allow for prospective foster carers to continue their recruitment journey through lockdowns and restrictions
- enabling improved data use, input and literacy in the sector through an online training suite, webinars and 1:1 consultations
- undertaking a range of initiatives to improve foster carer recruitment processes
- enhancing sector recruitment through access to foundational education on best-practice attraction and recruitment
- providing practical support for agencies including attraction activity reviews, recommendations on key infrastructure including websites, and development of content.

In addition to providing support through the pandemic, Fostering Connections has also maintained business as usual by:

- processing 5,679 Victorian foster care enquiries via the Family Journey Content Management System
- delivering a state-wide media and advertising campaign through TV, radio and digital advertising channels, and the development of shared and co-created messaging and marketing products
- attending Midsumma along with foster care agencies
- welcoming two new agencies to Fostering Connections
- providing interstate consultation on the current Victorian Fostering Connections model.

As a result of this critical work, Fostering Connections is now funded on an ongoing basis to continue to engage and educate Victorians on the need for foster carers, help prospective carers in their journey, and support the hard work of foster care agencies.

Raising Expectations

Expanding influence during the global pandemic

Raising Expectations has continued to expand its influence during the global pandemic, sustaining and adapting its response online. The model has grown despite a dynamic external environment to maintain its relevance and impact. It has strengthened and broadened program reach and awareness, and increased the knowledge of supports, services and initiatives available to increase and maintain the educational engagement of children and young people in care and the post-secondary education options available to them. The Centre – together with its partners, La Trobe University, Federation University Australia and Swinburne University of Technology – is now supporting nearly 700 students in tertiary education.

Growth in enrolments

Impact

Student enrolment nearly doubled between 2019-20 and 2020-21. The growth in vocational student participation has increased by almost 70%. We congratulate all students who have persisted with their study through the challenges of the pandemic.

Expanding to all Victorian TAFEs and dual sector universities

Expansion

We have established the Raising Expectations TAFE Network, which is increasing awareness, access and support of care-experienced students in post-secondary education. All 17 TAFEs and dual-sector universities have recognised the important work of Raising Expectations and have engaged positively to strengthen connectivity and improve pathways and supports for care-experienced young people to access and succeed in their study.

Spreading the word

Reach

Raising Expectations has broadened its reach, increasing awareness and knowledge of supports, services and initiatives available for care-experienced young people to stay engaged in learning in and beyond school. Fortnightly newsletters are one way we do this, with the number and breadth of subscribers increasing, ranging from offices of ministers and the Commissioner for Children and Young People, to LOOKOUT education-support centres, and frontline workers.

We celebrated the achievements of care-experienced young people and students during National Careers Week, Education Week and Youth Week. Care leaver Reggie's story was published on the national careers website, myfuture.

Education information hub

Education information hub

Our website contains information and resources for care-experienced people, their supporters and professionals to find out what post-secondary education options, supports and services are available.

We give voice to students through their stories and to inspire other care-experienced people. Our 'care leaver convos' series includes interviews with care leavers talking about what's important when it comes to education and employment.

The series is accessible via the Resources page of our website and a range of care leaver profiles and stories on our Stories page.

Section 4

Growing a responsive and sustainable Centre

Building a connected system

Raising Expectations continues to build a connected system across multiple sectors to better support care-experienced young people to go onto post-secondary education. Through presentations, workshops, webinars and digital resources, Raising Expectations has connected with hundreds of professionals, carers, care-experienced people and students including careers practitioners, teachers, and school-based staff and student-support staff in TAFEs and universities. Key events include the LOOKOUT-hosted Building Connections event during Education Week in May 2021, where Raising Expectations presented to over 200 school-based staff. It featured a conversation with Marcelle, a student at La Trobe University, about what is important in supporting care-experienced young people to pursue tertiary education.

Our work in strengthening connection and collaboration across programs and services in education, employment, leaving care and aligned organisations, community service organisations and government has become increasingly important to inform young people and professionals of post-secondary education options to prepare them for employment during and post the pandemic.

National recognition: award and research

Raising Expectations and Deloitte Access Economics won in the 'Effective Investment in Social Impact Measurement' category in the 2020 Social Impact Measurement Network Australia (SIMNA) Awards. A fitting accolade for Deloitte's positive Return on Investment work earlier in 2020.

Raising Expectations featured in the Australian Institute of Family Studies Snack Size Research Showcase – [The Power of Possibility: Transforming the Life Trajectories of Care Leavers through Education](#). (paperlessevents.com.au)

Building a connected system

National recognition



Strengthening and supporting our workforce

Evidence-based management course

This year, the Centre hosted the second ‘Evidence-based decision making for leaders in human services’ course in partnership with Centre for Evidence-Based Management (CEBMA), Carnegie Mellon University and OzChild. Eric Barends, the Managing Director of CEMBA, and Dr Lisa Griffiths, OzChild CEO, led the course and facilitated the 5 virtual course sessions.

This advanced course uses a blended learning approach that integrates eLearning modules that can be completed online with live tutorials. In addition, this course takes a problem-based approach: It starts with practical issues (problems/opportunities) typically encountered by not-for-profit managers, rather than the body of knowledge produced by academics.

The course ran from April to September 2021. Twenty managers from across child and family services and DFFH joined the executive course to develop evidence-based skills and enhance understanding of how an evidence-based approach can be used to support organisational decision making.

Learning and development

Throughout the year the Centre has focused on delivering Excellence in Learning and Development that reflects and leverages our leadership role within the sector and builds on the learning and innovations initiated by the pandemic experience. In the past year we have established four key strategic areas for L&D to strengthen the capability of child, youth and family services, as well as allied sectors, to deliver better outcomes for children and families:

- Sector-wide capability
- Practice Essentials
- Emerging and specialised skills
- Accredited training.

The team has collaborated with subject matter experts and partnered with a wide range of stakeholders, including member organisations and government departments, to deliver high-quality and evidence-informed content responding to key reforms and identified skill gaps.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, workshops were largely delivered online, which meant expanding our technical capabilities and exploring new methods for online training delivery, including innovations to dynamic and self-paced eLearning.

Core practice and specialised skills workshops delivered for Centre members

The Centre reached close to 700 practitioners through targeted learning and development, delivered as both scheduled and customised training exclusively for organisation and alliances.

Some of the major workshops delivered in 2020–21 were:

- Best Interest Case Practice Model Framework (14 sessions)
- Case Notes in Human Services and Record Keeping (10 sessions)
- Self-care and Preventing Vicarious Trauma (6 sessions)
- Working with Adolescents Experiencing Dual Diagnosis (4 sessions)
- Supervision Skills (2 sessions)
- Skilled at Looking after Children (LAC) (2 sessions)
- Trauma Informed Care (2 sessions)
- Motivational Interviewing (2 sessions)
- Working with Adolescent Family Violence – applying the evidence to family work (2 sessions)

Industry-wide capability uplift initiatives

MARAM training

The Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) framework supports services to effectively identify, assess and manage family violence risk. The framework has been established in law under a new Part 11 of the Family Violence Protection Act 2008. The Centre was funded by the DFFH to deliver MARAM Brief and Intermediate and Screening and Identification level training for ChildFIRST, family services, designated mental health, alcohol and other drugs, and homelessness workforces to support practitioners to understand their responsibilities under this important new reform.

‘Thank you for making it so accessible and digestible.’

NDIS training

In 2020–21 the Centre continued to deliver ‘Working with the NDIS to support families at risk’ training for child and family services in partnership with DFFH and the Association for Children with a Disability. In June of 2021 we registered our 2,500th participant.

The Centre tailored training for kinship carers and DHHS complex case practitioners and, from October 2020 through February 2021, partnered with Domestic Violence Victoria to deliver 34 specially adapted NDIS sessions to 793 specialist family violence workers and sexual assault workers.

Of the attendees, 98.5% said they would recommend the training to others.

‘Absolutely fantastic training – incredibly engaging for online training. I found this training so valuable to my practice in family services and have already used much of the learning to support families accessing NDIS.’

‘Super fantastic training. Would have been so lost to support so many vulnerable families without this training. Such a new area for workers that we didn’t receive training in and is now expected as part of our work. So important to understand well.’

Sleep and settling training for the maternal and child health (MCH) nurse workforce

The Centre partnered with Tweddle Child and Family Health Service to develop and deliver ‘Sleep and Settling Model of Care’ training for Victoria’s MCH Nurse workforce, funded by DFFH. This training, which takes the form of 6 eLearning modules, delivers the latest insights and techniques for sleep and settling of children aged 0-7.

Between March and the end of June 2021, 1,802 MCH nurses registered. Feedback shows the nurses’ level of confidence across the competencies increased significantly through the course

‘Fantastic training. Great range of resources. Videos were excellent. Keen to work with families recognising their strengths and knowledge.’

Shared Lives Victoria (SLV) 2019: Training for foster care agency staff

In 2020–21 the Centre, funded by DFFH, coordinated and delivered both the Familiarisation and Comprehensive SLV 2019 training packages.

We delivered 10 sessions (9 online), training 120 foster care agency staff.

One unintended positive consequence of the move to online delivery for some regional agencies: Due to the reduction in costs, they trained extra staff and thus increased capacity, enabling more staff to now train prospective foster carers.

Nationally accredited training

As an RTO, the Centre provides nationally recognised training to organisations and individuals working in child and family services. In 2020–21 we delivered the Diploma of Leadership and Management (BSB51918) and Beginning Practice – the mandatory minimum qualification run by the Centre for Victorian residential care workers.

The 4 Beginning Practice units are:

1. Facilitate responsible behaviour (CHCCCS009)
2. Provide primary residential care (CHCPRT009)
3. Work with children and young people with complex trauma and attachment issues and needs (CHCPRT010)
4. Work effectively in trauma-informed care (CHCMHS007).

In 2020, the Centre commenced the Diploma of Leadership and Management course for 3 community service organisations – Windermere, Wayss and Better Places – under their Emerging Leaders program. In the unique circumstances of a global pandemic, all participants, which included staff with varying roles and levels of experience, from new team leaders to experienced managers, showed particular resilience and motivation by successfully completing the diploma course in May 2021.

Course name	Number of courses	Participants (Attendance across all courses)
Diploma of Leadership and Management (November 2020–May 2021)	7 (Each unit counted as 1 course)	76
Beginning Practice	8 (4 units counted as 1 course)	112
Total	15	188

Residential Care Learning and Development Strategy

The Residential Care Learning and Development Strategy (RCLDS) is funded by DFFH and delivered by the Centre in partnership with residential care providers. RCLDS includes training alongside other support mechanisms to recognise and strengthen the residential care workforce, including forums and education scholarships. Four \$2000 scholarships were awarded in 2020–21.

Reflecting the critical importance of the residential care workforce, the renewed energy and significant government investment in the past year, the Centre established a senior strategic leadership group to advise on RCLDS and provide guidance and oversight on appropriate and sustainable capability building and planning. We thank the senior leaders of the residential care provider organisations for their commitment to RCLDS and the strengthening and celebration of the sector.

In the past year, while continuing to deliver online workshops and eLearning, the Centre has worked closely with providers and DFFH to finalise the RCLDS Strategic Framework 2021–23 and identify the key priorities for learning and development.

The annual Resi ROCKS event was successfully held online in November 2020, hosting residential care workers and leaders. Minister Donnellan recorded a short video thanking practitioners for their tireless work. The Residential Care

Awards presented at the event showcased the rich and incredible care individuals and teams provide young people every day, and particularly throughout the pandemic.

RCLDS Workshops from July 2020–June 2021

	Workshops	Attendees
Skilled at looking after children (LAC)	6	198
Support to children and young people with autism	2	41
Working well with Igbtqiqa+ young people	3	251
Effective conflict management	4	161
Culturally responsive practice (CALD) training	2	23
Aboriginal cultural awareness training	1	15
Drug and alcohol assessment and young people	2	17
Introduction to supervision and leadership	1	19
Case noting in human services	1	29
Medication training	3	46
Working with a person with suicidal thoughts and safety planning	2	60
Working with young people through a trauma informed framework	4	374
Creating a mentally healthy workplace	1	40
Practice response to child sexual exploitation (CSE)	1	125
Motivational interviewing	2	98
Self-care	1	26
Coping skills 101 – supporting young people to manage emotions	1	60
Introduction to mental health: Working with young people who are experiencing mental illness	1	46
Fire safety	eLearning	1043
Good notes and documentation in residential care 2019–20	eLearning	67
Infection control in residential care	eLearning	378
Reportable conduct scheme residential care workers 2019–20	eLearning	104
Supervision conversations	eLearning	20
Supporting young people with medication online (2020)	eLearning	76
Total	41	3,366

Staying connected to our sector

The Centre has continued the breadth and richness of our engagement across the child and family services sector. Our membership of the Child and Youth HOPE Project Steering Group (Hospital Outreach Post-suicide after Engagement model) and of the Statewide Children and Family Services - Practice Leadership Network has enabled the Centre to contribute to the sharing of evidence with colleagues in other parts of the broader service system. Topics in the statewide practice leadership group – chaired by the DFFH – included evidence-based programs and evidence-informed practice, refugee communities, and engaging clients with a disability.

Strategic networking at the Centre

A critical part of our engagement with the child and family services sector is the wide range of practice and strategic networks and alliances that the Centre facilitates.

These include the:

- **Child and Family Services Alliance meetings**, where the Alliance Chairs and Facilitators/ Coordinators come together and identify issues relating to the efficient and effective functioning of the Alliances across Victoria, sharing information and highlighting examples of effective inter-agency collaboration.
- **Child FIRST, Integrated Family Services and the Orange Door network meetings**, which bring together practitioners working in child and family services and Child FIRST/ Orange Door to discuss emerging issues and share data, opportunities and good practice examples.

- **Families where a Parent has a Mental Illness (FaPMI)**, which comes together regularly to explore opportunities for working in more integrated ways across mental health and child and family services. This group has a strong focus on making sure families where a parent has a mental illness can be supported.
- **Foster Care Network**, which provides a regular forum for foster care case workers to come together and share emerging issues, solutions, gaps and needs.
- **Kinship Care Network**, which provides a regular forum for kinship care case workers to strongly advocate for the needs of kinship carers, including identifying challenges and potential solutions.
- **Leaving Care and Post Care Network**, which has a strong focus on supporting young people before and during their transition from care to independent living, while staying connected to education, employment, safe accommodation and healthcare.
- **Quality Learning Circle**, which has a strong focus on quality assurance in organisations, including the impact of government reform.
- **Rainbow Tick meetings**, which identify and discuss progress towards participating organisations becoming more LGBTIQ-inclusive in line with the Rainbow Tick Standards and indicators.
- **Media and Communications Roundtable**, which brings together communications representatives from a range of organisations to discuss issues and pool ideas and strategies for engagement.

Over the past year, the Centre has provided critically important opportunities for information sharing as the global pandemic has evolved. Many of the sessions were held weekly and then monthly, such as the appetite for information during COVID. Attendees wanted to know the latest public health information, the impact of COVID-19 on families and service provision, the rapid adoption of technology and creative workarounds, the latest on vaccination policy, and ways of keeping staff and clients safe.

The Centre has been a vital conduit of two way information during the past year of COVID, with attendance at these network sessions skyrocketing in some instances. The meetings have provided a vehicle for information from government to the sector and from the sector to government, informing COVID decisions, policies and strategies.

The forums bring together child and family services, child protection and the former Department of Health and Human Services and provide regular opportunities to receive expert advice from health or other professionals and updates from government, and share on-the-ground experiences from practitioners and sector leaders.

Having the sessions online has meant anyone across the state can participate without having to travel. It has been wonderful to see an increase in participation among regional and rural colleagues in the discussions, updates, emerging issues and sharing of promising practices. The Centre welcomed 10,992 attendees to our network meetings, events, and webinars over the last financial year.



Section 5

Out-of-Home Care Philanthropic Funders Network



The Out-of-Home Care Philanthropic Funders Network (OoHC Network) is a collaborative group of philanthropic organisations with a shared interest in improving the experiences and outcomes for children and young people who are at risk of entering, in or have an experience of out-of-home care. The network is a successful example of a collaborative philanthropy model. Its members share a strong interest in understanding innovation and identifying opportunities to support system-wide change that improves the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with an out-of-home care experience.

OoHC Network members collaborate to enable innovation grants for the OoHC sector that focus on co-designing and building the evidence base for innovation. To date, the OoHC Network has facilitated over \$1 million in funding across 2 grant rounds to support innovative programs in the out-of-home care sector, with a third grant round developed over the course of the year.

Prior to launching the additional grant, and in order to inform the grant process, the Centre engaged with the sector to identify areas with the greatest need for innovation. Workshops focused on innovation and collaboration were held in the lead up to the grant round opening to support and develop the sector's capability in designing programs that foster collaboration and address systemic change.

The OoHC Network is supported by Equity Trustees Mars-Stride Trust, David Taylor Galt Charitable Trust, R.M. Ansett Trust and James Raymond Hartley Charitable Trust. Their support and guidance have been integral to the success and outcomes of the network.

A case study was also developed on the OoHC Network, which discusses the purpose, activities and successes of the network and provides an overview of the journey and key features of its collaborative philanthropy approach.



Campaigning for our sector

The Centre is committed to advocating in the best interests of its members; our sector; and Victorian children and young people, and their families. That's why we're a part of these campaigns to support positive action being taken in our community.



Embracing Equality: The health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ communities is in crisis. Urgent action is needed to end the discrimination and inequities experienced by LGBTIQ+ people. The Centre is proud to be part of a group of peak service sector organisations in Victoria that have come together and created the Embracing Equality charter to show their commitment to making positive change as allies of LGBTIQ+ communities. The Embracing Equality pledge has also been developed for individual service providers to sign onto as they commit to work toward safe and culturally appropriate services for LGBTIQ+ people.



#HomeToBilo: This group is made up of Biloela residents, family friends and supporters. Supporters have come together to help Nades, Priya and their girls after they were taken from their home in Queensland and placed in detention. We want them #HometoBilo.



Home Stretch: As part of the Victorian Government's \$1 billion Victorian State Budget 2020-21 investment in children and families, \$64.7 million will make the landmark Home Stretch program universal – extending state supports for young people leaving care from 18 to 21 years. Home Stretch provides an accommodation allowance so a young person can remain living with their kinship or foster carer if they wish, or transition to supported independent living arrangements. From 1 January 2021, that support will continue up to the age of 21 for every young Victorian in out-of-home care.



Raise the Rate: The campaign to Raise the Rate for Good is key to reducing poverty and inequality in Australia. The goal of the Raise the Rate for Good campaign is to fix our social security safety net permanently so that it keeps people out of poverty by providing an income of at least \$65 a day.



Raise the Age: Children don't belong in prison. Everyone knows that children do best when they are supported, nurtured and loved. But across Australia, children as young as 10 can be arrested by police, charged with an offence, hauled before a court and locked away in youth prisons. When children are forced through a criminal legal process at such a formative age, they can suffer immense harm – to their health, wellbeing and future. Ten-year-old kids belong in schools and playgrounds, not placed in handcuffs, held in watchhouses or locked in prisons away from their families, community and culture. Governments can change this by raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years.



Healthy Homes for Renters Campaign: More people are renting than ever before, but some homes are making people sick. We need basic energy efficiency standards to ensure healthy homes for renters. Legally enforceable energy efficiency standards would require property investors to make their rental properties safe.



Family Matters: Family Matters is Australia's national campaign to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture. Family Matters aims to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 2040.



HEALing Matters: HEALing Matters uses a trauma-informed philosophy to guide carers' understanding of the link between healthy lifestyle behaviours of young people and improved physical, cognitive, social (interpersonal) and emotional outcomes. Importantly, HEALing Matters builds on general models of therapeutic care and recognises that food and physical activity are powerful ways of demonstrating trust, care, predictability, flexibility and attuned parenting. It is through this approach that HEALing Matters is seen as foundational in helping young people develop the necessary life skills required before leaving care.



Change the Date: The Centre acknowledges that 26 January is not a day of celebration for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may see this day as one of mourning, survival and resistance. This country is home to the oldest continuing culture on earth, which serves as a powerful reminder of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's connection to the land, water and skies across the nation.



International Transgender Day of Visibility: We envision a world where every person, no matter their gender or the way they dress, feels safe and has the opportunity to grow and thrive in school, at home, at work and in the community. A world where transphobia is called out, challenged and becomes a thing of the past. To promote the inclusion and safety of trans and gender diverse people, we stand in support of children and young people to express themselves and live life as their true selves this and every day. We thank the 36 member organisations who supported this statement.

Continuing to spread the word and raise awareness for children and their families

Throughout 2020–21, the Centre continued its communicating and advocating on behalf of our members and Victoria’s children and young people, and their families.

In the past year, more people visited our website from social media than ever before. Compared to 2019, in 2020 Facebook referrals increased 247.2%, LinkedIn referrals increased by 635%, Twitter referrals increased by 120.9%, and YouTube referrals increased by 27,000%.

Our social media platforms continued to be a vital source of information for the sector and community.

Twitter: For the first time, we reached people over 100,000 times in a monthly reporting period – twice.

LinkedIn: LinkedIn has seen a 75% increase in the growth rate of new followers, increasing from 100 new followers each month at the beginning of 2020 to 200 monthly new followers by the end of 2020.

YouTube: There was a 255% increase in watch time of our YouTube videos from 2019 to 2020.

Our media highlights included achieving more radio interviews in the past year than the previous two years combined. The Centre sent out a record number of media releases to news desks and increased its regional footprint by engaging with media outlets across the state. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 environment, the Centre’s stories were cutting through with regular features in the ABC, The Age, Pro Bono News and other outlets.

In the past year, we also expanded the Centre’s reputation as the leader in the children’s rights space by launching our annual Media Awards. The awards recognise reporting that elevates the voices of children, young people, and families in a respectful and material way. We congratulate our 2020 winners and look forward to continuing the awards in future years.

Key Stats

198,144 engagements on facebook

837,000 impressions on Twitter

103,167 engagements on LinkedIn

38,400 views on YouTube

1,176,711 people reached online in 2020 alone

Media awards

All too often, the voices of children, young people, and their families are excluded from the dominant media narrative in Australia. Despite increasing awareness around family and domestic violence as well as the sexual exploitation of children, media reports tend to disregard children as victims in their own right. Many stories also diminish the significance of meaningfully representing the voices of children and young people. For this to change, the way in which these stories are reported must change.

That is why the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, the peak body for Victoria’s children, young people, and their families, launched its Media Awards to recognise journalists who have sought to elevate the voices of children and families in a respectful and material way. We congratulate all the 2020 winners.

2020 Media Awards
Best story about children or young people in out-of-home care
Winner: Sarah Marinos, Herald Sun
Forget partying, meet the 20-somethings opening their homes to fostering

2020 Media Awards
Best story about children
Winner: Matilda Marozzi, ABC Radio Melbourne
Child victim of domestic violence breaks his silence, describing horrors of his abusive stepfather

2020 Media Awards
Best story about young people
Winner: Daniel Miles, ABC South West Victoria
Victorians with disabilities speak of 'lifetime lockdown' due to inaccessible public transport

2020 Media Awards
Best story about families
Winner: Vivienne Jones, The Border Mail
Alicia Little's family call for national domestic violence register

Our board and staff

(as of 30 June 2021, A-Z by first name)

Board

Amanda Youngs
Resigned 2021

Andrew Bruun

Deb Tsorbaris
Chief Executive Officer

Graham Boal

Greg Levine OAM
Independent Expert Member

Lisa Griffiths
Chairperson

Michael Perusco
Vice Chairperson

Paul McDonald
Former Chairperson, retired
November 2020

Silvia Alberti

Sue Sealey

Sue White

Teresa Jayet
Treasurer

Executive

Deb Tsorbaris
Chief Executive Officer

Sue Maddison
Executive Assistant

Media and Communications

Bronwen Maher
Digital Communications
Coordinator and
Communications Adviser,
Fostering Connections

Christie Long
Media and Communications
Adviser

Nevena Spirovska
Executive Manager, Strategic
Projects and Communications

Fostering Connections

Dan Christie
Campaign Lead

Danielle Walt
Senior Manager, Strategic
and Innovative Projects

Natalia Nowak
Foster Carer Connection
Specialist

Learning and Business Development

Emily Mellon
Learning and Business
Development Manager

Glenda Quinn
Shared Lives Coordinator

Helen Evans
Training and Events Officer

Jane Phillips
Senior Trainer

Mark Ryan
Senior Trainer – NDIS,
MARAM and Sleep & Settling

Matthew Edwards
Administration Officer

Natasha Lobo
Compliance Admissions
Officer

Reggie Chang
Youth Support Facilitator

Tulay Bairam
Training Coordinator

Strategic Innovation

Emma Fenby
Director – Strategic
Innovation

Emma Chua
Senior Project Manager –
Residential Care Sector OHS
Capability Program

Ennur Erbasi
Project Officer – Child
Healthcare, Adversity and
COVID-19 Project

Karen McLean
Project Manager – Child
Healthcare, Adversity and
COVID-19 Project

Nicole Paterson
Senior Project Officer –
Voice of Parents

Oliver Tsorbaris
Project Officer

Rachel Anderson
Project Coordinator – OoHC
Philanthropic Funders
Network

Policy, Research and Advocacy

Alyssa Medway
Practice Lead - Family
Preservation and
Reunification

Catherine Cooney
Advanced Practice Lead

Dakhina Mitra
Practice Lead – Knowledge
Building

Danielle Farah
Youth Support Facilitator

Ella Perry
Project Officer

Georgette Antonas
Manager – Policy

Joanne O’Connell
Practice Lead – Family
Preservation and
Reunification

Karalyn Davies
Project Officer

Kelly Bowey
Senior Policy and Research
Officer

Kiersten Van Aperen
Practice Lead – Family
Preservation and
Reunification

Mandy Charman
Project Manager – OPEN

Michele Lonsdale
Deputy Chief Executive
Officer, Director – Policy,
Research and Advocacy

Molly Ouk
Practice Lead – Family
Preservation and
Reunification

Pearl Goodwin-Burns
Project Officer – Information
Sharing Reforms

Sharon Clerke
Senior Policy and
Project Officer

Sue Wilson
Program Manager

Raising Expectations

Basil Abubaker
Youth Support Facilitator

Joanna Humphries
Program Manager

Laura Cashman
Project and Communications
Officer

Operations and finance

Justine Koutsoupas
Executive Manager –
Operations and Finance

Rachel Zhang
Senior Finance Officer

Celeste Oliver
Administration and
Research Officer

Grace Kasper
Bookkeeper

Sheena Lestok-Kay
Office Coordinator



Our Members

Full members

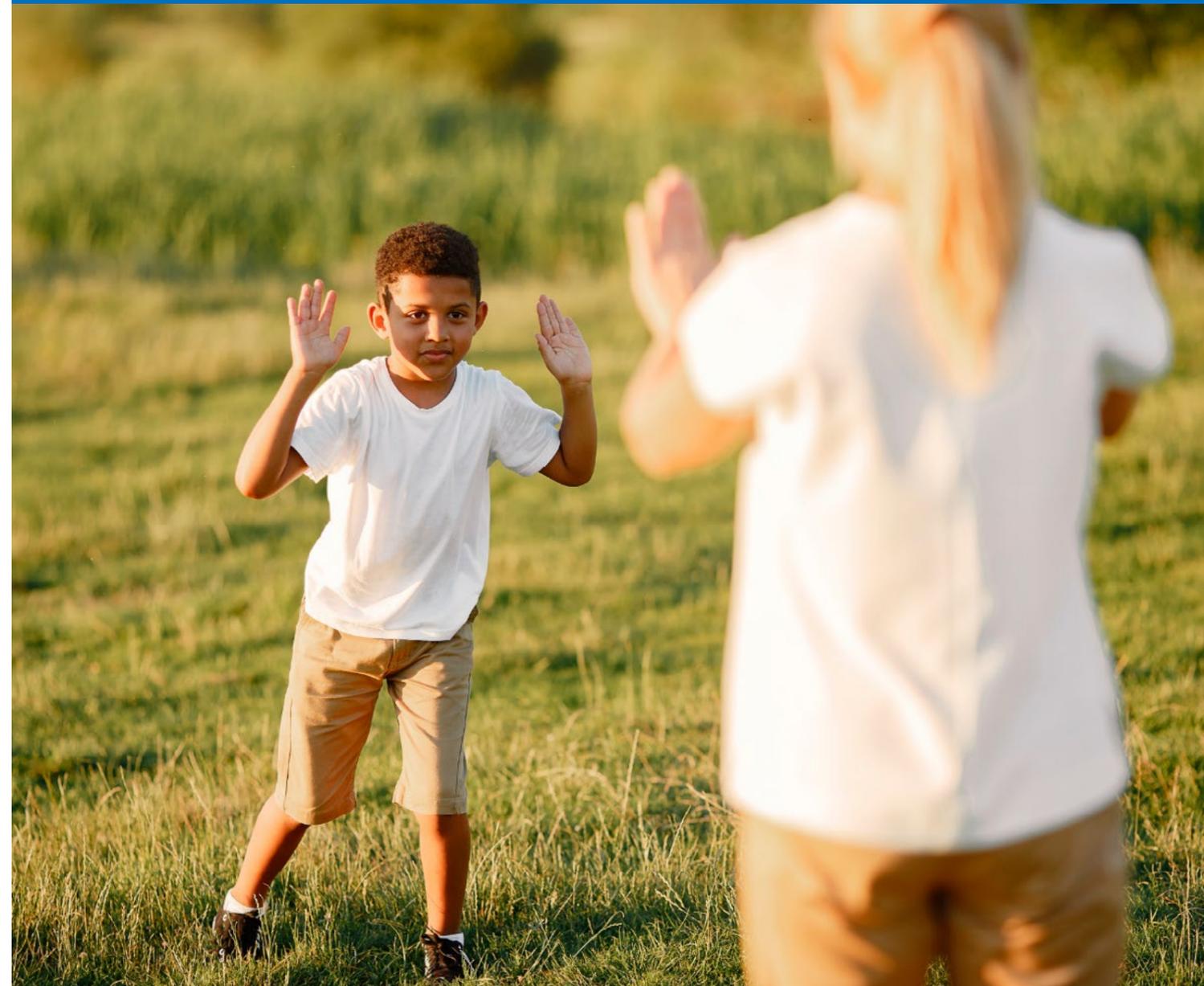
Access Health and Community, Allambi Care Ltd, Anchor Inc, Anglicare Victoria, Aruma, Australian Childhood Foundation, Australian Childhood Trauma Group, Bapcare, Barwon Child, Youth & Family, Benalla Rural City Council, Bendigo Community Health Services, Berry Street, Bethany Community Support, Brophy Family & Youth Services Inc, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Bubup Wilam, CareChoice (Aust) Pty Ltd, Caroline Chisholm Society, CatholicCare, CatholicCare Sandhurst, Centacare Ballarat, Child and Family Services Ballarat, Temcare, City of Darebin, City of Melbourne, City of Port Phillip, City of Yarra, CoHealth, Colac Area Health, Community Living and Respite Services (CLRS), Concern Australia, Multicultural Community Services Geelong Inc., Doncare, Drummond Street Services, EACH Social and Community Health, Eastern Domestic Violence Service (EDVOS), Family Access Network Inc, Family Life, FamilyCare, Gippsland & East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC), Gippsland Lakes Complete Health, Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand, IPC Health, Jesuit Social Services, Jewish Care, Junction Support Services Inc, Kara House, Key Assets, Kids First, Kyabram Community & Learning Centre, Life Without Barriers, Lighthouse Foundation, MacKillop Family Services, Make A Difference Dingley Village Inc, Mallee Family Care, Melbourne City Mission, Melton City Council, Mirabel Foundation Inc, Moira Inc, Moonee Valley City Council, No to Violence, Odyssey House Victoria, ONCALL Group Australia, Oz Child, Permanent Care and Adoptive Families, QEC, Quantum Support Services Inc, Relationship Matters, Relationships Australia, Rumbalara Family Services, Safe Steps, Save the Children Australia, Sunbury and Cobaw Community Health, TaskForce Community Agency, The Alannah and Madeline Foundation, The Bridge Youth Service, The Reach Foundation, Salvation Army Victoria, Thorne Harbour Health, Tweddle Child and Family Health Service, Uniting, Upper Murray Family Care, VANISH Inc, VICSEG New Futures, Victoria Legal Aid, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Inc (VACCHO), Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO), Windermere Child & Family Services Inc, Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS), Zoe Support Australia

Subscriber members

Ability Assist, Allah Muhammad Ali Fatima Hassan Hussain Federation, Catholic Social Services, Council of Single Mothers and their Children, Federation of Community Legal Centres (FCLC), Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative, Kids Under Cover, Mansfield Shire Council, Playgroup Victoria, Settlement Services International, The Pyjama Foundation, YMCA Victoria, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic)

Section 6

Keeping the Centre in check



Treasurer's Report

After another year of significant activity at the Centre during a global pandemic, it has been a pleasure to act as treasurer working alongside the Board and the Centre's finance team.

The Board is pleased to present an operating surplus of \$2,338,827 for the financial year ended 30 June 2021. Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to members of the Association is \$2,673,750. From the recorded surplus, \$676,332 of income has been quarantined for the purpose of delivering the associated services and initiatives in the coming year.

While continuing to navigate the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centre staff has demonstrated continued resilience to deliver on our purpose. We have leveraged technology and implemented new processes to help us in many areas across the organisation. We have continued investing in our members and are committed to funding independent pieces of work.

Analysis of the financial report shows the following movements

- Revenue
 - Government funding increased over the year by \$724,718 (10%).
 - Affiliation Fees from members increased by \$15,391 (3%) with overall membership levels increasing.

- Revenue from Business undertakings increased by \$71,541 (18.5%) due to increased number of projects over the year.
- Charitable contributions increased by \$57,682 (60%).
- Interest income is down by \$72,196 (41%) due to lower interest earned on term deposits.
- Expenditure moved in line with the revenue and increased by \$495,761 (8%)
 - Employee benefits expense increased by \$380,280 due to increased headcount.
 - Operating expenses increased by \$228,563 due to increased consultancy work on key projects.
 - Office expenses reduced by \$108,711 as a result of remote working.
- Current assets have increased by \$2,238,437 (22.7%).
- Non-current assets had a minimal decrease with annual depreciation of \$68,771.
- Total liabilities had decreased by \$504,083 (13%). This includes other liabilities of grants payable and deferred grant income that

have reduced by \$879,479. This reduction was offset by an increase in trade payables of \$202,666 and increase in employee provisions of \$135,375.

- The Statement of cash flows shows a net increase of cash and cash equivalents of \$2,399,712. The change is cash flow primarily represents a timing difference between when a project is funded and when those funds are expended.

The Centre maintains a healthy level of reserves providing a stable platform to ensure that the important work of the Centre continues to support our members and member organisations in their work with vulnerable children, young people and their families. I would like to thank the members of the Finance committee during the 2020-21 financial year: Lisa Griffiths, Graham Boal and Silvia Alberti. I would also like to acknowledge the Centre's finance team for their professional work during the year.

The following financial statements overview has been extracted from the Centre's Financial Statements for the year ended 30 June 2021. The financial statements have been prepared as General Purpose Financial Statements in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards - Reduced Disclosure Requirements and Interpretations issued by the Australian Accounting Standards Board (AASB) and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits

Commission Act 2012 (ACNC Act). The financial statements have been audited in accordance with the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 and Australian Auditing Standards by Crowe Melbourne. The full financial statements can be obtained from the Centre's website.



Teresa Jayet
Treasurer

Statement of Surplus or Deficit and Other Comprehensive Income (for the year ended 30 June 2021)

	2021 \$	2020 \$
Revenue	9,010,373	8,141,041
Investment income	103,707	175,903
Depreciation expense	(68,771)	(65,613)
Employee benefits expense	(3,752,990)	(3,372,710)
Operations expense	(2,642,977)	(2,414,414)
Office expense	(228,262)	(336,973)
Occupancy expense	(71,399)	(77,871)
Motor Vehicle expense	(10,854)	(11,911)
(Deficit)/Surplus for the year	2,338,827	2,037,45
Other comprehensive income Items that may not be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss		
Changes in fair value of assets classified as fair value through other comprehensive income	334,923	(55,537)
Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to members of the Association	2,673,750	1,981,915

Statement of Financial Position (at 30 June 2021)

	2021 \$	2020 \$
Assets - Current Assets		
Cash and cash on hand	5,971,661	3,571,949
Other financial assets	5,972,757	6,054,303
Trade and other receivables	131,342	136,551
Other assets	35,836	110,356
Total current assets	12,111,596	9,873,159
Assets - Non -Current Assets		
Property, plant and equipment	848,789	900,128
Right of Use Asset - equipment	8,793	26,225
Total non-current assets	857,582	926,353
Total assets	12,969,178	10,799,512
Liabilities - Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	698,043	495,377
Deferred revenue	1,752,888	1,697,751
Provisions	488,048	361,259
Lease liabilities	9,150	17,782
Other liabilities	325,000	2,568,116
Total current liabilities	3,273,129	3,776,648
Liabilities - Non-current liabilities		
Provisions	29,383	20,797
Lease liabilities	-	9,151
Total non-current liabilities	29,383	29,947
Total liabilities	3,302,512	3,806,595
Net Assets	9,666,666	6,992,916
Equity		
Accumulated Surplus	6,780,332	5,117,838
Reserves	2,546,332	1,870,000
Revaluation reserve	340,002	5,079
Total Equity	9,666,666	6,992,916

Statement of Changes in Equity (for the year ended 30 June 2021)

	Accumulated Surplus \$	Reserves \$	Revaluation Reserve \$	Total \$
Balance at 1 July 2019	3,640,386	1,310,000	60,616	5,011,002
Surplus for the year	2,037,452	-	-	2,037,452
Other comprehensive income for the year	-	-	(55,537)	(55,537)
Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to members of the Association	2,037,452	-	(55,537)	1,981,915
Transfer to reserves	(560,000)	560,000	-	-
Balance at 30 June 2020	5,117,837	1,870,000	5,079	6,992,916
Surplus for the year	2,338,827	-	-	2,338,827
Other comprehensive income for the year	-	-	334,923	334,923
Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to members of the Association	2,338,827	-	334,923	2,673,750
Transfer to reserves	(676,332)	676,332	-	-
Balance at 30 June 2021	6,780,332	2,546,332	340,002	9,666,666

Statement of Cash Flows (for the year ended 30 June 2021)

	2021 \$	2020 \$
Cash flows from operating activities		
Receipts from customers	8,994,251	8,759,599
Payments to suppliers and employees	(7,052,859)	(7,273,298)
Net cash inflows from operating activities	1,941,392	1,486,301
Cash flows from investing activities		
Payments for property, plant and equipment	-	(17,703)
Net payments for financial assets	372,395	(94,601)
Interest received	103,707	175,903
Net cash inflows from investing activities	476,102	63,599
Cash flows from financing activities		
Payment of lease liabilities	(17,782)	(16,776)
Net cash outflows from financing activities	(17,782)	(16,776)
Net increase in cash and cash equivalents	2,399,712	1,533,124
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year	3,571,949	2,038,825
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year	5,971,661	3,571,949

About the Centre

For over 100 years, the Centre has advanced the rights and wellbeing of children, young people and families in Victoria.

We advocate for the rights of children and young people to be heard, to be safe, to access education and to remain connected to family, community and culture.

We represent over 100 Victorian organisations working across the continuum of child and family services, from prevention and early intervention to the provision of out of home care.

Our members are at the forefront of supporting children, young people and families.

Contact

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

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The Centre acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government

