

# Working towards a better future

Advocating for Victorian children,  
young people and families.



## 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.

## Our details

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare  
Level 5, 50 Market Street, Melbourne VIC 3000

03 9614 1577

[admin@cfecfw.asn.au](mailto:admin@cfecfw.asn.au)

ABN: 24 629 376 672

RTO: 3696



[facebook.com/CentreForExcellenceInChildAndFamilyWelfare](https://facebook.com/CentreForExcellenceInChildAndFamilyWelfare)



[twitter.com/CFEFCFW](https://twitter.com/CFEFCFW)



[cfecfw.asn.au](https://cfecfw.asn.au)

## 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.







# Contents

Chair's report	06
CEO's report	08
Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)	10

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## **01. Advocating for and with the sector** **12**

Victoria State Budget 2023 outcomes	13
In the Media	15
Australian Child Maltreatment Study multi-sector response	16
Submissions and reports	20
Treating Families Fairly	21
Supporting the mental health and wellbeing needs of children, young people and families	22
Making sure children and young people are visible and heard	22
Leaving a Legacy Award 2022	23
Child Information Sharing Scheme	25
Adolescents and young people who use violence in the home	26
Young People's Media Network	26
Lived Experience Design Project	27
Feedback from participants in the Lived Experience Design Project	28
Tri-Peaks partnership	31
Feedback from the Connections and Collaboration roundtable and workshop	34
Children, Young People and Families Philanthropic Network	37
Out of Home Care – Education Project	38

---

## **02. Walking alongside children and young people** **40**

Early Start, Bright Future project	41
Family Preservation Reunification Response	43
These Are Our Kids	44
Raising Expectations	46
Game Changers Peer Mentoring Program	49
Level Up Peer Mentoring	49

---

## **03. Strengthening sector capability** **52**

OPEN: Outcomes, Practice, Evidence Network	53
OPEN program management: Building the OPEN Community and developing strategic projects and opportunities	54
Finalisation of the Learning System Grant (LSG) funding proposal	55



# Contents

Relaunch of the Children Australia journal	55
OPEN Portal: Translating knowledge into practice	55
OPEN Symposium 2022	57
OPEN Forums	58
Carer KaFE	63
Switch to Social Work	64
Fostering Connections	66

---

## **04. Growing a responsive and sustainable Centre**

### **70**

Preparing for Social Services Regulation Reform	71
Learning and development	72
Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) training	72
Case Study: The Centre's MARAM training for Aboriginal organisations	73
Residential Care Learning & Development Strategy	77
Nationally accredited training	81
Beginning Practice	81
The Centre's office renovation	82

---

## **05. Staying connected to our sector**

### **84**

Connecting Communities Tour	85
Strategic networking at the Centre	90
Media Awards	92
Continuing to raise awareness for children and their families	94
Key stats for 2022-23	95
Our board and staff	96
Our members	98

---

## **06. Financial Statements Overview**

### **100**

Treasurer's report	102
Statement of surplus or deficit and other comprehensive income	104
Statement of financial position	105
Statement of changes in equity	106
Statement of cash flows	107

# Chair's report

This year, I've been encouraged to see the child and family services sector embrace and embed research evidence and lived experience voices into practice, as well as the development and implementation of programs and policies that meet the real needs of Victorian families. The outstanding work of our integrated family services is far reaching and multi-faceted and is having the impact necessary as we see entries to care slowly decline, a first in many years.

Recent media attention has focused on the out-of-home care system in particular Foster Care, emphasising a need for modernisation and a complete re-imagining. Within the sector and at all levels of government, there is a growing and urgent need for, and appetite for, change.

Despite ongoing government recruitment and investment, there is a decline in people volunteering to be foster carers, putting additional strain on kinship placements and our residential care programs.

The collective efforts of so many saw a mature system for recruiting new carers developed and solid data collected to paint a truer picture of the profiles of carers and the challenges faced through the Centre's Fostering Connections services. We understand that short-term fixes will not suffice and that our out-of-home care system requires reform.

The Centre has conducted extensive research to better understand the problems we are facing and those we are attempting to solve, so we can focus on designing an out-of-home care system that truly works for children and young people and puts families at the centre.

We are now working to embed these insights using the Global Commission on Evidence approach, which provides recommendations on how to use research evidence to address societal challenges.

The Centre is collaborating with the Demographics Group to better understand the demography and location of current and potential new carers, which will allow us to plan for future needs throughout the state. This exciting piece of work also sees us working with Behaviour Works at Monash University to gather insights and understand the changes that are required in the way we attract, engage, and retain carers.

This research will assist us in better understanding how our carer communities are changing and how to better serve them. We know, for example, from the research we have already undertaken that many carers are now working full-time and require assistance with before, and after-school care. This sort of insight enables us to identify the support services carers require and has shown us that we must evolve to meet the changing needs of carers so we can better support their work-life balance. It also means our member agencies can better plan and support carers, but new models of care will be needed and funded to make this a reality.

I am continually impressed by the agility of our members agencies who work throughout the child and family service sector, no matter what challenge prevails they embrace and continue to build that strong evidence base of what works for children and families within context and place.

Our CEO, Deb Tsorbaris remains the driving force at the centre consistently ensuring that children are at the heart of our every action, Deb along with their exceptional team is relentless in facing any challenge compelling us to persist in our purposeful journey informed by our evidence based practice.

Deb and her team's ability to unite and guide the sector enables The Centre to fulfil its vision of ensuring that all Victorian children, youth, families, and carers are happy and safe, connected to family and culture, and have access to the services they require.



**“The Centre has conducted extensive research to better understand the problems we are facing and those we are attempting to solve, so we can focus on designing an out-of-home care system that truly works for children and young people and puts families at the centre.”**



A stylized, handwritten signature in blue ink.

**Dr Lisa J. Griffiths**

Chairperson, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

# CEO's report

I am pleased to present the Centre's Annual Report for 2022–23 which reflects the great work of the child and family services sector and the peak. Each year we see a remarkable capacity for innovation and growth among our member organisations. Our sector and our members are tireless in their efforts to improve the lives of vulnerable children and families in Victoria, and I am in awe of our workers, and the depth of their commitment and capability.

All of us are living in very challenging times, and increasingly so during the last few months of 2023 as we present this Annual Report at the Centre's AGM.

Victoria emerged from rolling COVID-19 lockdowns into a national cost-of-living crisis. Inflation and rising interest rates are putting pressure on families and creating huge demand for services. As a sector, we see difficulties in recruiting and retaining our workforce. The Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS) has given us very clear and sobering insight into what is happening for Australian children. To add to this, many communities are still reeling from a disappointing and distressing outcome in the referendum on the Voice to Parliament.

This is a difficult and demanding time for children and families, and for the services that support them, and it's important to recognise the context in which we operate right now.

However, there is much to celebrate, and some great work is being done within the Centre, through our members, and across the sector.

We are a determined bunch, and many achievements this year stem from long-term vision and member organisations' consistent and persistent advocacy for better outcomes. I want to express how grateful I am to our members for your insightful contributions to the work of the Centre in policy, advocacy,

and capacity building. Every win is a collective achievement, with collaborative and individual efforts shared through out member networks and contributing to lifting us all.

Funding received for residential care means Victoria leads the country in delivering therapeutic care, which is a wonderful outcome for young people in care. The sector has pulled together over a long period advocating for better funding for residential care. I am excited to continue our work with Hon. Lizzie Blandthorn, who is now our Minister for Children, and strengthen our ongoing and enduring partnership with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing as we explore solutions to modernise out-of-home care systems and services.

We are incredibly grateful for the funding from Government and private philanthropy which supports the many programs delivered by the Centre. This year our Raising Expectation program, which has been funded by the Victorian Government since 2018, was successful in obtaining funding from the Commonwealth to expand its successful peer mentoring program to care-experienced young people aged 15 and up.

The Centre is committed to advocating for children's voices and experiences to being ingrained in all that we do. We have seen how important early intervention, education and child-centred approaches are. The Centre continues to work closely with the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) to advance the Early Intervention Investment Framework and forge strong partnerships between DTF, central agencies and service providers. The Centre's Lived Experience Design Project is now working with its second cohort of birth parents with lived experience of the child welfare system. This innovative project is a global first, engaging parents to provide advice to government and sector on



reforms, building their individual capacity to advocate for themselves and their communities.

The profound findings of the ACMS were released in April. This data and the implications for our sector cannot be ignored. The Centre is committed to keeping the study alive and using it to inform future programs and policies. We continue to represent the sector in state and federal government, consulting with members on many inquiries and taskforces relevant to the work of members. Through the Treating Families Fairly alliance, we advocate for welfare policies that uphold the rights of children and families and speak out against policies that cause harm.

A highlight of the past year was visiting our members and colleagues across the state through the Connecting Communities Regional Tour. This listening and learning tour helps us to build our understanding of the unique challenges faced in regional Victoria. We learnt about the impacts of cost-of-living pressures and the challenges in accessing mental health, medical, and specialist services for children and young people in regional Victoria. We look forward to maintaining these channels of communication and ensuring that regional voices are heard.

We have walked alongside First Nations colleagues through comprehensive

collaboration to achieve legislation that acknowledges Aboriginal people are best placed to make decisions and deliver services for their children. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are now the first responders to all First Nations child welfare cases in Victoria. I congratulate the department and everyone who was involved in these reforms.

The Centre is committed to keep moving forward despite the recent referendum outcome. We reaffirm our commitment to listen to and support our First Nations colleagues and will continue to embrace the Uluru Statement from the Heart and share its message.

Over the past year, the Centre has been working on the Centre's Reconciliation Action Plan, which we are proud to present to this AGM. Our vision for reconciliation is that all First Nations children and young people grow up safe, healthy, thriving, and connected to culture, kin and community. We will continue to partner with First Nations organisations in our advocacy and policy work.

Finally, the Centre's staff never cease to impress me with their work ethic and ability to evolve and grow year after year. Thank you to our board for their ongoing support and guidance, as well as to our members and the many workers in our sector who make a difference in the lives of Victorians every day.



A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Deb Tsorbaris".

**Deb Tsorbaris**

Chief Executive Officer, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

# Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)

Since 2006, Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) have enabled organisations to sustainably and strategically take meaningful action to advance reconciliation. These plans are based around the core pillars of relationships, respect and opportunities, and provide tangible and substantive benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, increasing economic equity and supporting First Nations' self-determination.

Murrundindi, Elder and head man (Ngurungaeta) of the Wurundjeri tribe is our Reconciliation Advisor. He brings a wisdom and ways of teaching to guide and inform our organisation's cultural learning journey, individual and collective growth and ongoing contributions to reconciliation that bring about meaningful change for First Nations children, young people, families and communities.

## Reflect RAP

The Centre's Reflect RAP project began in 2016 and assisted in taking an in-depth look at our human resources procedures and processes which informed our desire to examine our ways of working that promote equal and equitable opportunity and support First Nations colleagues, members, organisations, and stakeholders. While some procedures and processes were inclusive of First Nations peoples, we identified we can do more to build recruitment and pathways for First Nations people across the organisation.

Our Reflect RAP supported dedicated work to not only complete the goals set out in our Reflect RAP, but to consciously and publicly support First Nations peoples and organisations to further the rights of First Nations families and children.

## Innovate RAP

At the Centre's AGM in November 2023, we will present our Innovate RAP, which has been developed over the past year and is the next part of our reconciliation journey. This is our agreed public commitment to contribute to reconciliation. We engage with stakeholders at every level as part of developing, influencing and advocating for public policies that advance the rights and wellbeing of all children, young people and families and address the social, economic and cultural barriers to improving their lives.

Through our allyship with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations as they lead Victoria's commitment under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap we aim to:

- Deepen and improve engagement and collaboration at an organisational level, while empowering individual responsibility from staff to build respectful relationships within community.
- Demonstrate ways of working that support First Nations peoples in pursuit of their rightful place in Australia and stand by First Nations peoples in support of the Voice.
- Support our employees and members to grow individually and collectively in their understanding of, and respect for, First Nations cultures and protocols and bring this understanding to their work.



# Reconciliation Action Plan Innovate

October 2023 to October 2025



The Centre's Reconciliation Advisor Murrundindi, Elder and head man (Ngurungaeta) of the Wurundjeri tribe.









# 1. Advocating for and with the sector

## Victoria State Budget 2023 outcomes

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) welcomed an \$895 million investment in the child and family services system included in the Victorian State Budget for 2023-24.

## 2023-24 Budget funding includes:

- \$548 million for residential care services, recognising the needs of young people in residential care and helping to meet demand and enable care homes to deliver more therapeutic supports.
- \$140 million to support greater self-determination for Aboriginal services and communities, and to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system by the establishment of Aboriginal-led, end-to-end child protection services.
- \$11 million to continue trials to embed vital family services in universal settings such as schools, early years services and community health hubs. This is welcomed by the Centre and means vulnerable families can access support where and when they need it.
- \$117 million to continue to support victim survivors of family violence, provide specialist family violence legal assistance in court and increase the number of sexual assault support services available.
- \$33 million to support around 225 young people with complex needs when they leave residential care, providing multidisciplinary support and access to housing.





## In the media

- ABC News: [Professional foster care models 'no-brainer' for more government funding, sector leaders say](#)
- Pro Bono Australia: [Australia needs a plan to combat the effects of emergencies on children](#)
- Pro Bono Australia: [Choosing change](#)
- ABC News: [Raising Expectations program boosting TAFE, university numbers of former out-of-home-care youth](#)
- The Age: ['No longer a pipe dream': Hundreds of young people from out-of-home care helped into university](#)
- LinkedIn: [Supporting children with a disability to achieve their potential](#)
- LinkedIn: [For families, Early Help underpins a stable future](#)
- LinkedIn: [Reform for families in poverty is long overdue](#)
- The Standard: [Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare meets with Warrnambool welfare agencies](#)
- LinkedIn: [Kids in resi deserve more, and they deserve it now](#)
- The Guardian: [Australia's kinship carers desperate for support as numbers of children in out-of-home care grow](#)
- LinkedIn: [Action to address child maltreatment is long overdue](#)
- The Sector: [Calls for a National Taskforce to end child maltreatment as study shows depth of issue](#)



# Australian Child Maltreatment Study

## multi-sector response

The Centre brought together over 200 sector leaders and government stakeholders in June 2023 to hear the findings of the Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS). This landmark study stems from the 2017 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, responding to gaps in the evidence base from which we can derive policy.

CEO Deb Tsorbaris told attendees the findings of the ACMS require everyone at the table, committed to working together to end child maltreatment. She said the research gives the sector a chance to have a national conversation about our children and to use the research to guide our actions.

“It also gives us a clear blueprint for action – we know exactly where to direct our energy, where the most urgent needs lie, and where we can have the most immediate short and long-term impacts. The research shows us where our policies and programs have already had an effect and are influencing historic social shifts,” she said.

“What we do next will matter. It will need to bring real, impactful changes to people’s lives.”

Head of the National Office for Child Safety Rebekah Kilpatrick opened the event, reminding attendees that the best place to start was by having brave conversations, not just with children and young people, but with each other as adults.

Prof. Ben Mathews of Queensland University of Technology and Prof. Daryl Higgins of Australian Catholic University presented the findings of the study, highlighting some of the victories that have been achieved and are represented in the data, and reminding the sector that change is possible and has been achieved.



Photos from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study, a multi-sector event at the MCG.







Watch the opening speeches and the ACMS Research presentation [here](#).

## Key findings


1. Child maltreatment is endemic in Australia
2. Multitype maltreatment is common
3. Australian youth are suffering now
4. Girls are at much higher risk
5. Health impacts accrue quickly
6. National crisis in self-harm and suicide attempts.

## Recommendations

1. A national coordinated approach
2. Invest more, and better, public health approach, emphasising prevention
3. Societal level: broad policy for social determinants; new social norms
4. Community level: sectoral support to respond to maltreatment (health, education, services)
5. Individual level: parent support
6. An emotional revolution: a paradigm shift
7. A sexual and relational evolution: turbocharged prevention, education.







**“[The ACMS Report] gives us a clear blueprint for action – we know exactly where to direct our energy, where the most urgent needs lie, and where we can have the most immediate short and long-term impacts. The research shows us where our policies and programs have already had an effect and are influencing historic social shifts.”**

**Deb Tsorbaris** (CEO, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare)

# Submissions and reports

The Centre has completed a number of advocacy pieces and submissions in 2022–23, including:

- National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032
- Future Directions in Partnerships Addressing Disadvantage (PADs)
- Systemic inquiry into the educational experiences of children and young people living in out-of-home care
- Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor – submission on information sharing and risk assessment
- Senate Select Committee on Work and Care
- Review of Victoria's Reportable Conduct Scheme
- Parents Next (Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services)
- Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability
- Measuring what Matters – Wellbeing Budget Submission
- Senate Community Affairs References Committee – Inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia
- Inquiry into the implementation, performance and appropriateness of Workforce Australia Employment Services
- CFECFW 2022–23 State Election Budget Submission
- Family Law Amendment Bill 2023: feedback on the draft Bill
- Select Committee on the Cost of Living
- Review of the Impact of COVID-19 on School Students with Disability
- The Early Years Strategy (DSS)
- National Housing and Homelessness Plan
- Review of the Long Service Benefits Portability Act
- Inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care
- First Action Plan 2023–2017 and Draft Outcomes Framework (National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children)
- Federal budget response
- NDIS Review – Children in out-of-home care
- NDIS Review – Early years and families
- RACP Draft Health Care of Children in Care and Protection Services (Royal Australasian College of Physicians)
- ACT Inquiry into Justice (Age of Criminal Responsibility) Legislation Amendment Bill 2023
- Australia Human Rights Commission: Youth Justice and Child Wellbeing Reform across Australia



## Treating Families Fairly

Treating Families Fairly is an alliance of child and family service organisations, peak bodies and academics advocating for federal policies that uphold the rights of children, and speaking out against policies that cause harm, with a particular focus on social security and welfare conditionality.

The alliance continued to meet in the past financial year to advocate for welfare policies that would lift people from poverty and enable more self-determining ways of income support management.

The alliance has long raised concerns about the design, purpose, fairness and efficacy of the ParentsNext program – a pre-employment program with mandated conditions – and welcomed the Albanese Government's decision to immediately pause the compulsory requirements in May 2023, which meant participants in the program would no longer be subjected to payment suspensions or penalties for not engaging with program activities.

Even more welcome was the decision to abolish ParentsNext from 1 July 2024 and replace it with a new voluntary service. The alliance will be watching the development of this new service closely to make sure it is designed in consultation with parents, underpinned by the best available evidence, and genuinely in the best interests of those it aims to assist. With the abolition of the Cashless Debit Card program in March 2023, the alliance will also be closely monitoring and responding to the government's approach to 'enhanced income management'.

Over the past year we also continued to monitor the effects of cost-of-living pressures on Victorian children and families through surveying our sector and using our findings on the impact of poverty to inform submissions to state and federal governments.



# Supporting the mental health and wellbeing needs of children, young people and families

The Victorian Government is currently rolling out its mental health reforms in response to the 2021 Royal Commission into Mental Health. The Centre has advocated strongly for child and family services to be recognised for their vital work in supporting the mental health and wellbeing needs of children, young people and families.

One of the challenges identified by the Royal Commission is the need for a more seamless service system in the interests of clients. With a small amount of funding from the Department of Health, the Centre was able to consult widely with our sector to identify the many ways in which our service providers currently support the mental health and wellbeing needs of children, young people and families, and the ways in which we could continue to do so in the future. Responding to mental health challenges cannot be the responsibility of mental health services alone.

Nearly 90 per cent of our survey respondents reported working closely with parents, family members or children and young people experiencing mental health issues. The survey and in-depth interviews the Centre conducted highlighted a range of ways in which the interconnection between the mental health and child and family services systems can be strengthened. On behalf of our members, the Centre prepared a communications and engagement strategy for the Department of Health, outlining the opportunities for the Centre and our members to be more centrally involved in the implementation of the state's mental health reforms.

## Making sure children and young people are visible and heard

The Centre has been a consistently strong advocate of children's rights to be heard, to be safe, to be connected culturally and to thrive.

Our Child Wellbeing project, which is funded by Family Safety Victoria and is now in its second year, has provided opportunities for the Centre to support practitioners in working more effectively with children and young people. In addition to webinars, workshops and providing expert input into resource development, the Centre has developed a suite of eight practice guides aimed at building practitioner confidence and expertise in talking with children and young people.

The series is aimed at key workforces, mainly in The Orange Door, and provides accessible and practical information to support better engagement with children and young people, and with their caregivers.

The guides are expected to be publicly available in late 2023.

# Leaving a Legacy Award 2022



The Centre's Leaving a Legacy Award is presented at the annual Victorian Protecting Children Awards.

This award recognises the people who have made a significant contribution to the child, youth and family services sector throughout their careers as well as making an impact on their local community. It acknowledges those who have positively contributed to the sector and whose remarkable achievements should be highlighted.

In 2022 the Leaving a Legacy Award winner was Gerard Jones, former Deputy CEO at MacKillop, who was a true pioneer in child and family services.

Gerard passed away earlier this year, but his legacy lives on. Gerard's many achievements included:

- Directing the redevelopment of residential care services and leading the development and implementation of the Therapeutic Residential Care Model, while at the Victorian Department of Human Services
- Leading the residential care capital project redesign which improved the living environment of residential homes
- Building valued partnerships across the sector and between agencies – notably, forming trusted relationships with Aboriginal communities across Australia
- Bringing the Sanctuary Model to Australia
- Project managing a \$13 million progressive major redevelopment at Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre
- Leading the redevelopment of MacKillop Education schools in Victoria and the trauma-informed approach to education, now known as ReLATE
- Serving as an active Board Member to the Centre for several years. The Centre would like to remember Gerard Jones for his life-long commitment to improving the lives of at risk children and young people.







# Child Information Sharing Scheme

The Centre has continued our work in supporting the implementation of the Victorian government's Child Information Sharing Scheme. The Centre has been working with both the Department of Education and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to actively promote information sharing to keep children, young people and their families safe and ensure their rights and wellbeing needs are being met. In particular, the Centre has worked with government and other sector organisations to embed a culture of information sharing in services and programs.

Much of the Centre's work in the past financial year has involved preparing a monthly newsletter, hosting regular multi-agency meetings to share what has been done and what has been learnt, developing resources, delivering webinars, facilitating online forums and workshops, gathering case studies of effective practice, and pulling together a series of testimonials showcasing positive examples of information sharing undertaken by professionals and showing how these can lead to positive outcomes for children and their families.





# Adolescents and young people who use violence in the home

The Centre continues to build the evidence base for adolescents and young people using violence in the home (AVITH). The Centre is funded by Family Safety Victoria (FSV) to support specialist AVITH providers with implementation of their funded programs and build the capacity of the sector more broadly to respond to this area of need. We consult regularly with providers to understand better the barriers to and enablers of AVITH service delivery. We also facilitate and support four dedicated AVITH networks, promote information sharing through our webinars and events, and host an online AVITH Resource Hub via the OPEN website. The Centre also contributes to projects at a federal level to progress knowledge about effective AVITH program design. We continue to work with community service organisations to deliver customised training to support learning in this emerging field.

## Young People's Media Network

The Young People's Media Network is shifting the narrative around out-of-home care by empowering young people with a lived experience to safely tell their stories. The Young People's Media Network provides paid training, support, and media opportunities to empower young people to become advocates of positive change.

A website and guide for journalists has been developed in consultation with young people with a care experience and will be launched in 2023–24.





# Lived Experience Design Project

The Lived Experience Design Project is the Centre's unique approach created for elevating the voices and lived experiences of birth parents who are or who have experienced vulnerability.

Our project is underpinned by deeply listening, collaborating and co-designing with lived experience groups, which is critical to the success of our work and that of our stakeholders. We believe that engaging people with a lived experience is an essential step to breaking down stigma and discrimination that these communities often face.

Every parent is the ultimate expert on their own life. There is no greater source of information about the quality and the physical, emotional and cultural safety of our services than the experiences and views of children, young people, parents and carers who have used them.

## Fit-for-purpose model

Significant testing and iterating have resulted in an evolved Lived Experience Design model. We continue to empower birth parents to influence and advocate for change, while recognising and appreciating the diverse views and challenges individuals may face.



Members of the Lived Experience Design Project meeting with Centre CEO Deb Tsorbaris.



## Feedback from participants in the Lived Experience Design Project

“Overall, this work has taken the shame out of my story, it has given me the confidence to stand up and use my lived experiences as lessons for others to learn from, I am now proud to use my voice.”

“Us ladies would like to thank you Paulleen for your ongoing support as well. Amy and I feel comfortable having you be there for us First Nations ladies and we are grateful to work with an amazing bunch of strong empowered women.”

“I have a friend who is taking part in the project, and I just wanted to message and say I am so proud that the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare are taking an interest in LIVED EXPERIENCES!”

“I’ve really enjoyed having the opportunity to work with other strong women.”

“I have valued working on the Lived Experience Design project because it has given me a sense of importance.”

“I have a better understanding of the processes that need to take place to make positive change within a broken system.”

"I am more confident due to participating in the Buddy Support program."

"It's been empowering to be part of a team of incredible humans working together for the greater good."

"I have a better understanding of myself and my capabilities."

"I have enjoyed learning about the child protection system from a different point of view."

"I have valued working on the Lived Experience Design project because it has given me and my child a voice to share the trauma that child protection has given to us as First Nations people. It also has given me the confidence to move forward in being a voice to other parents suffering."

"I have valued working on the Lived Experience Design Project because my story is being heard and I am able to help others who are about to or are embarking on the same path I have just walked."

"Overall, this work has encouraged me to use my voice."

## Dynamic capacity building

The Centre empowers Lived Experience Parent Designers in their aspirations for change and advocacy through our Buddy Support program. This program focuses on the value of peer-to-peer facilitated support, building knowledge and value-adding skillsets.

## Innovative ways of working

Underpinning our collaborative approach to lived experience projects are ethical practice principles, design thinking frameworks, agile methodology and the belief that people with lived experience have a unique awareness of how policy decisions and social structures affect them and their communities. To effectively measure the quality of current policies and services, and to shape future ones, we need these voices at the table.

## Storytelling and creativity

Drawing on lived experiences, we co-design person-centred solutions with our Lived Experience Parent Designers. By becoming grounded in their needs and developing empathy for their experiences, we can surface and translate insights into products and solutions they want and need.

Through design thinking activities, capacity building and ways of working, Lived Experience Parent Designers' outcomes and achievements include:

- Improved parent knowledge of child and family policy and service design
- Increased product co-creation, elevating lived experience voices and advising into government
- Increased parent confidence to engage in co-design approaches
- Increased group by 50%, resulting from the Voice of Parents initiative
- Increased parent educational and career outcomes
- Enhanced Buddy Support program
- Facilitated workshop by Suzanne Walshe on creating safe spaces
- Delivered resources for Child Protection Training Program:
  - [Video 1: Engaging birth parents during a child protection investigation](#)
  - [Video 2: Engaging parents during child protection court processes](#)
  - [Video 3: Parent experiences of sharing their stories with child protection](#)
- Presented and participated in Roadmap Implementation Ministerial Group Meeting, 27 September 2022.





## Tri-Peaks partnership

There is a need for cross-sector collaboration and alliances of individuals and organisations from the nonprofit sectors. This way, all parties can draw on their diverse perspectives and resources to jointly solve societal problems and achieve a shared goal. Tri-Peaks is an innovative model seeking to build more collaboration across the children, young people and family services sector, alcohol and other drugs support services, and community health sectors to strengthen the services they provide to the community.

The COVID-19 pandemic helped us appreciate how much we can achieve when we work together in a crisis. Collaboration across services is critical to improving outcomes.

Tri-Peaks exemplifies this through joint capacity building activities aimed at improving cross-sector relationships, uplifting leadership and workforces' governance capabilities, and embedding a culture of sharing knowledge and better connectivity with clients and communities.

### Webinar program

As communities confront obstacles of unparalleled complexity, many critical issues demand our timely attention: supporting health and wellbeing, parents and carers with disabilities, suicide prevention, Aboriginal self-determination, reconciliation, climate change, widening socioeconomic gaps, and declining educational outcomes.

The webinar program offers leaders and practitioners monthly opportunities to hear from and engage in contemporary thinking and research, to build knowledge and interconnectivity, and to explore ways to quickly iterate and adapt service design and delivery.

#### Delivering and developing cross-sector knowledge in 2022-23

- Supporting the health and wellbeing of young people leaving care
- Charter of rights for parents and carers with disabilities involved in child protection in Victoria
- Relationship between nutrition and mental health
- Suicide prevention and adolescent health: AOD and mental health
- Innovation grants: Youthlaw 'Stand Up for Our Rights'
- Reconciliation Australia.

## Community Services Mentoring Program

This program brings together experienced cross-sectoral leaders, managers and frontline workforces from the child and family services, alcohol and other drugs, and community health sectors. Its objective is to strengthen the community services sector and build leadership capability, foster networking and enhance relationships. This will be achieved through collaboration and the exchange of insights, experience and practice wisdom.

Launched in June 2023, the program features 20 cross-sector mentoring pairs that have commenced in building relationships based on an exchange of knowledge, experience and goodwill.

## Participating organisations



## Roundtables and workshops

Leadership is an essential ingredient for determining how we overcome obstacles and seize opportunities amid the complexities of these challenging times. With a rise in complex, interdependent and emergent challenges, effective change to secure a brighter future requires transformative leaders who can effectively lead cross-sector collaborations.

The Tri-Peak Partnership roundtables and workshops bring together leadership and middle managers to identify greater cross-sector collaborations that support capability uplift, improving outcomes and experiences for clients and families – for example, the intersections between children and family services and drug and alcohol services.

A new element of the Tri-Peaks Partnership is a series of cross-sector workshops, roundtables and capability-building events.

In May 2023 two cross-sector roundtables were held at the State Library: a roundtable for Executive and/or Board members and a workshop for managers and or team leaders. These sessions provided opportunities for leadership and middle management to:

- Identify enablers for collaboration.
- Increase ways of working across sectors.
- Improve the intersections between children and family services, drug and alcohol services and community health workforces.

## CEO Roundtable: Connections and collaboration for strength

Conversations focused on key success factors for collaboration. These include having a unified vision, a clear purpose, adequate resources, strong governance, trust, and an agreed focus on intended outcomes.



## Managers Workshop: Connections and collaboration for impact

Connections and collaboration for impact focused on key success factors including understanding roles and responsibilities, building connections and trust, sharing challenges and identifying opportunities.





## Feedback from the Connections and Collaboration roundtable and workshop

“The need to keep the action going, collaborate and build sector knowledge and reform”

“It’s very possible to focus on cross-sectoral issues”

“It is great to get back in touch with others and put collaborative work back in focus”

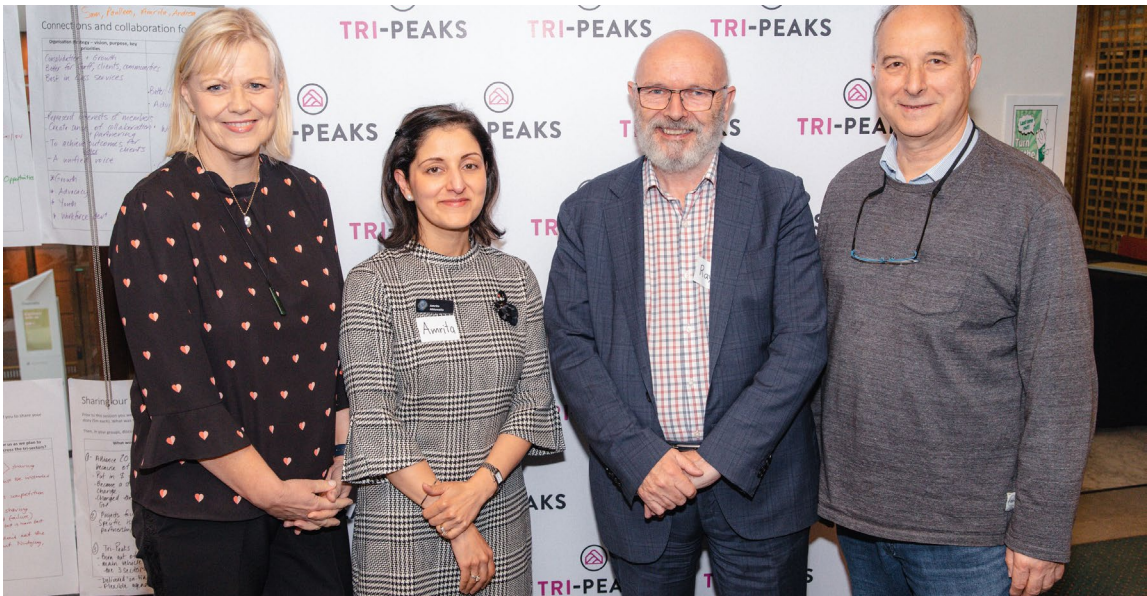
“Shared themes, shared commitment and determination”

“The importance of cross-sectoral vision”

“Shared vision amongst participants”

“Shared willingness to collaborate”

“Strong commitment to cross-sector collaboration”



Tri-Peaks cross-sector roundtable and workshop on Connections and Collaboration held at the State Library in May 2023.







# Children, Young People and Families Philanthropic Network

The Children, Young People and Families Philanthropic Network is a collaborative group of philanthropic organisations with a shared interest in improving the outcomes of children and young people at risk. Since its inception in 2018, the Network provides a unique forum for its members to learn about the child and family services sector, including trends, evidence and innovations.

This year the Network changed its name to encompass the broader social policy scope including child and family services, drug and alcohol, community services and health, education, mental health and wellbeing, disability and justice. The collaborative funding model enables ways of giving to create leverage and greater impact. This is achieved through innovation grants, which allow philanthropists or entities to join forces and capital to support larger-scale change and make a difference in a variety of areas.

## Capacity building and collective learning

Coordinating key government policy and inquiries, national and international research and media reporting, and aligning with guest speakers to build shared knowledge and identify collaborative funding opportunities.

## Giving review

Philanthropic funding supports trailblazing initiatives such as Home Stretch, Brighter Futures and Raising Expectations, all made possible by the Network's support. Some initiatives have been scaled and made ongoing due to government investment.

In December 2022, Network members celebrated 5 years of collaborative philanthropy. The Network has gifted a total of \$3.5 million, enabling innovation projects in Victoria. Hosts Emily Cormack and Deb Tsorbaris emphasised the importance of shared focus and working together to achieve greater scale and systemic impact for vulnerable children and young people.

# Out of Home Care – Education Project

The Out-of-Home Care – Education project is funded by the Department of Education and Training (DET) to build greater awareness, particularly among carers and child and family services, of the Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment Partnering Agreement and The Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care.

We work in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People’s Alliance and VACCA, ensuring professionals supporting carers and children in out-of-home care have access to information and resources to advocate for children in care in their education.

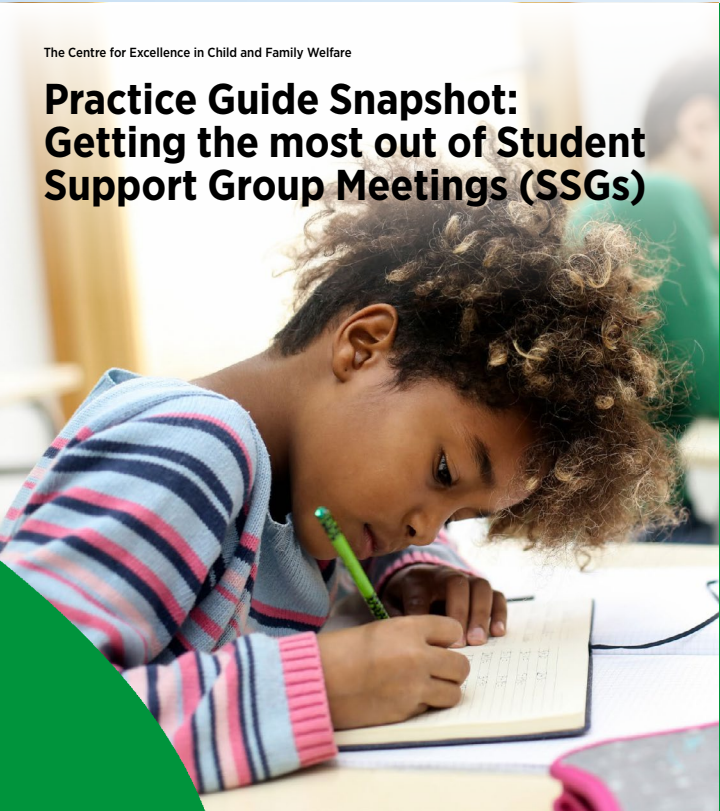
Over the past year this project has conducted research into education services and support in residential care homes, which has been presented to stakeholders including LOOKOUT and DFFH. This research has supported a promotional program to raise awareness of LOOKOUT services within residential homes, and a training program aimed at overcoming barriers to education for children and young people in residential care.

Communication pieces, including a series of poster, were created and distributed through residential care home, with further resources to promote LOOKOUT and the Out of Home Care Partnering Agreement in production.

The Education Project hosts an Education Resource Hub on the Centre’s website, which contains snapshots of the supports offered by the OoHC Partnering Agreement and LOOKOUT.

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

**Practice Guide Snapshot:  
Getting the most out of Student  
Support Group Meetings (SSGs)**



## Key terms for SSGs:

<b>TEAM</b>	Consists of professionals including school staff, case managers, the child/young person and their carer
<b>ATTENDEES</b>	It is important to consider who attends as this is very distinct from a care team meeting. It is important to discuss with the child/young person/ carer beforehand who should be in attendance.
<b>STUDENT VOICE</b>	The student has the right to have a say in what they think when adults are making decisions that affect them and their opinions should be taken into account. The student has the right to attend the meeting or not but should be consulted before the meeting actually takes place to voice their views.



# It's NEVER Too Late!

**Have you missed a bit of time at school?**

You don't need to have finished secondary school to go to TAFE!  
There are lots of study options available through TAFE and  
university, including finishing VCE.

Talk to your school's careers advisor for more info.

 Centre for Excellence in  
Child and Family Welfare







## 2. Walking alongside children and young people



### Early Start, Bright Future project

The Centre's Early Start, Bright Future project continues in its third year with a vision for every child – regardless of postcode, family circumstance or cultural background – to thrive when they enter school. Funded by the Department of Education, this project has helped drive cultural change in the child and family services and early years sectors. It highlights the importance of access to quality early learning opportunities for children experiencing disadvantage as well as the importance of understanding trauma when engaging with families. The project centres a child's right to education as key to transforming their life outcomes. In early 2023, Early Start, Bright Future secured additional funding to expand the team to better support children and family with complex needs.

## **Capacity building: Webinars and training**

The Centre delivered Stepping Stones to Kinder in November 2022, in collaboration with Foundation House, across the four Department of Education regions in Victoria. The sessions aimed to build professionals' knowledge of the Best Start, Best Life reforms. More than 160 people attended the sessions across the state. Feedback from the training indicated that practitioners felt more confident with strategies to support parents and carers access kinder for their children and found the resources to be very useful and relevant for their work.

In March 2023, the Centre partnered with the Department of Education to deliver a follow-up information session that received significant interest. The session focused on addressing sector queries about the Best Start, Best Life reforms. Participants reported increased confidence and knowledge in supporting children to access kinder – a significant step towards providing access for children and families experiencing disadvantage.

## **Capacity building: Communication channels**

The project delivered a monthly newsletter providing clear, concise information on early years services aimed at professionals working with families with children up to 8 years old. With a growing base of over 1,800 subscribers, the newsletter has created a key communication channel between the Department of Education and the child and family services sector, keeping practitioners informed about early years updates and reforms. It has expanded the subscription base to include professionals from kindergartens, long day care centres, maternal and child health services, local government, The Orange Door, and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to increase cross-sectoral understanding. Engagement rates are higher than industry benchmarks and indicate a strong interest and need for guidance in this space.

Through a dedicated website, the Early Years Hub and Finder has grown, embedding it as an invaluable tool for professionals working with children in the years before school, connecting children to health, education and care supports during this time. Over 5,300 users have visited the site in the past 12 months, with most users directed to the site via the newsletter or training. Information on early years programs and subsidies has been particularly of interest.

## **Contributing to the evidence base: Access and engagement in early years services by children, carers and vulnerable families**

Early Start, Bright Future continues to contribute to the evidence base of factors that hinder or facilitate access to engagement in early years services by children, carers and vulnerable families. The project has been capturing examples of good practice through case studies, to be completed in the 2023–24 year.



# Family Preservation Reunification Response

## Leading by coaching

The Family Preservation and Reunification Response (FPRR) is an innovative approach to delivering evidence-based and integrated support to vulnerable children and families. The aim is to prevent at-risk children from entering or re-entering care services and reunifying children safely with their families. Together, FPRR agencies, the child protection system and professional services seek to build a strong link into community to increase the safety and stability of children.

The FPRR program is currently in Phase 2 of its service delivery. The Centre has been pivotal in delivering coaching to team leaders and practitioners within the FPRR to build confidence and competency in their use of the evidence-based practices. A key aim of this coaching is to enhance practitioner reflection in a safe environment for learning, and exploration of new understandings and skills.

The Practice Lead team has observed shifts in the practice of FPRR team leaders and practitioners, resulting in overall confidence and competence in the use of evidence-based skills. Working in partnership with the DFFH; the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA); Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOS); Community Services Organisations (CSOs); and the Centre for Evidence and Implementation (CEI), we are thrilled at the positive feedback on the impact of coaching on practice, leading to better outcomes for families. We look forward to continuing our lead role in driving systemic and cultural change across the child and family services system through coaching, training and supporting the implementation of the FPRR Initiative.

### Reflections from a coaching survey by DFFH:

“Understanding my staff, seeing my staff be vulnerable and participate in sessions – how to take the skills and utilise them holistically”

**Team Leader**

“Being able to provide the appropriate response for families and supporting the caregivers to learn new skills and develop”

**Practitioner**

**40%**  
**OF YOUNG PEOPLE**  
**have experienced more**  
**than 1 type of abuse.**



**THESE ARE OUR KIDS**

[cfefw.asn.au/theseareourkids](https://cfefw.asn.au/theseareourkids)

A PRODUCT BY THE  
Centre for Excellence in  
Child and Family Welfare



## These Are Our Kids

These Are Our Kids is a collaboration between the not-for-profit and philanthropic sectors, with a focus on how we can advocate for the best support for children who have experienced, or are experiencing, family violence.

The project has developed an evidence-based, lived experience-informed campaign to raise awareness of the impacts of family violence for children and young people both in the short term and throughout their lifetime.

Raising community awareness about the prevalence and impact of family violence on children is crucial, and using evidence-informed research such as the Australian Child Maltreatment Study strengthens the campaign's credibility. The focus on multi-type maltreatment, which encompasses various forms of abuse, can help the community understand the complexity, far-reaching nature and severity of the issue. It can also reinforce the predominant finding that multitype treatment is endemic in Australia and our youth are suffering.

We are looking forward to launching our campaign and creating meaningful change through the campaign.

Deloitte Access Economics undertook a review of the evidence relating to the impacts of family violence and what works for children and young people.

The review highlighted several key themes, including the need for:

1. Increased investment in intensive interventions for children experiencing family violence
2. A system-based response for children experiencing family violence
3. Child-focused and age-appropriate family violence interventions
4. Improved data collection and reporting systems to document the prevalence and nature of the family violence experienced by children
5. Further research to better understand the effectiveness of existing family violence interventions for children.



The launch of the These Are Our Kids campaign in Melbourne.





# Raising Expectations

Raising Expectations supports young people in out-of-home care and care leavers to aspire to, access and succeed in vocational and higher education. Raising Expectations has been funded and supported by the Victorian Government since 2018.

Many care leavers face significant social and economic barriers in admission to TAFE and university. It can be incredibly difficult, not because they aren't capable, but because they lack the right support.

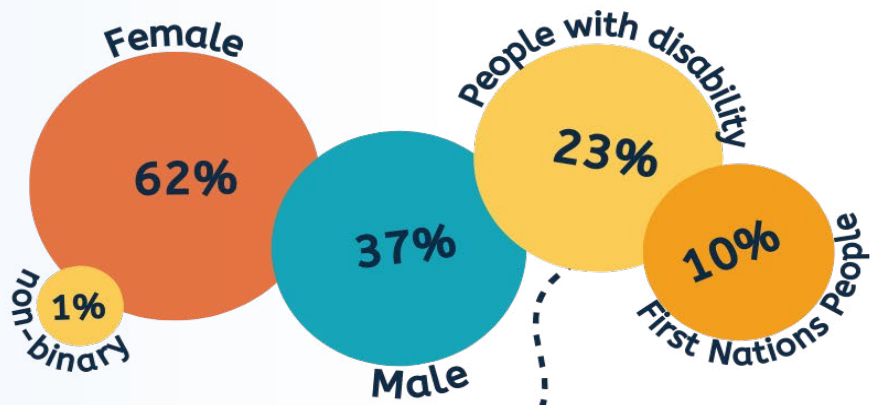
Raising Expectations is a cross-sectoral collaboration between the Centre, our member organisations and our university partners, which began with initial philanthropic funding from the Sidney Myer Fund.

Raising Expectations is funded by the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) and by working across the community and post-secondary education sectors, we are changing a culture of low expectations for care-experienced young people, to one that recognises their strength and potential.

In 2022–23, the Centre and our partners – Federation University Australia, La Trobe University and Swinburne University of Technology – continued to provide valuable on-the-ground support to care-experienced students to achieve their life and learning goals.

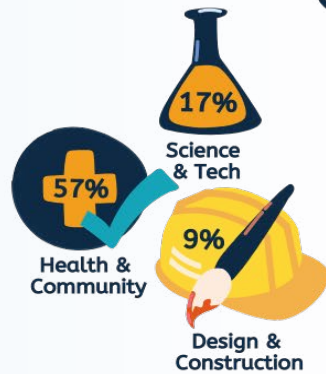
## Highlights for this year include:

- More care-experienced students accessed and completed TAFE and university.
- Raising Expectations continued to record high numbers of care-experienced students participating in TAFE and university.
- In the first year of our program, we identified 43 care-experienced students; in 2022–23 we recorded close to 700 care-experienced students studying at our three partner institutions. This number continues to increase as Raising Expectations expands to provide more support across more institutions.
- Care-experienced students want to make a difference in their communities, with many choosing to study in fields related to community services, social work, education and healthcare.
- A growing number of care-experienced students completed their TAFE and university courses, transitioning into the workforce with the necessary skills and experience to make an impact in their chosen industry.



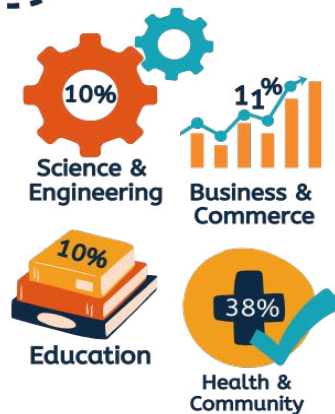
677 students at

**TAFE  
&  
UNI**



**TAFE**  
top study areas

**UNI**  
top study areas



**355**  
study completions  
2020-2023







# Game Changers Peer Mentoring Program

The Game Changers Peer Mentoring Program connects care-experienced students at TAFE and university, helping new students to feel connected, engaged and supported with their studies. Mentoring sessions have been running online since September 2022 and are open to care-experienced students across Victoria. To date, the program has engaged 10 mentees, and trained and supported 15 mentors across 8 different TAFE and university institutions.

“I know for myself, confidence to ask for help was a massive barrier in education settings... I could be that person they turn to for help...  
It's not, just a 'been there, done that' – it's also 'I got you, you are not alone!’”

**Peer Mentor**

Mentoring sessions are designed to be responsive and flexible to the needs of the mentee, and have covered a wide range of topics, including career networking, planning for future study, connecting with additional support services, providing academic support, and budgeting for student life.

Both mentors and mentees have spoken about the benefits of connecting with other care-experienced students, and the increased confidence they have gained through the program.

“My mentor understands my situation. They provide compassionate and practical advice... More people should be made aware of this program. It's important care leavers know that they can have support to study that works for them.”

**Mentee**

## Level Up Peer Mentoring

In mid-2023, we were successful in securing funding from the Department of Social Services to pilot an expanded Peer Mentoring Program. The expanded program will be available for care-experienced young people aged 15 and up and will focus on building aspiration and support to pursue TAFE and university.

## Capacity building and awareness raising

Raising Expectations has worked to increase the knowledge and capability of the professionals that support care-experienced young people to access and participate in post-secondary education. This work has involved the development of resources in response to needs identified by workers, as well as delivery of training to a variety of workforce groups.

### Online learning

We developed two open-access eLearn modules aimed at TAFE and university staff, focused on increasing awareness of the out-of-home care system in Victoria, experiences of trauma and the impact on engagement in education. We have had a total of 742 enrolments from 91 organisations across community services, local government, state government, schools, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, and TAFEs and universities.

“Hearing and watching stories from those with lived experience is an incredibly powerful way for me to connect to the humanistic layer rather than just understanding numbers.”

**Educator**

“Super useful for educators—would love to see it as part of the mandatory annual training for the Department of Education.”

**Educator**

### Building TAFE capacity

All 12 Victorian TAFE providers are engaged in our Raising Expectations TAFE network to build their capacity to support care-experienced students. In 2022–23 we provided members with information and training sessions on trauma-informed care, approaches to providing tailored student support and how to identify care-experienced students.



## Leaving and Post-Care Network

A monthly sector meeting for workers supporting young people leaving and post-care. These meetings featured a range of presenters and focused on themes of education, disability, leaving care resources, extending care to 21, health literacy, advocacy, housing, legal issues, youth justice, pathways to independence and early parenting.

## Connecting with educators

Raising Expectations worked with the LOOKOUT Centres to plan 2 statewide forums for education staff on supporting young people in care transition into post-secondary education. We presented on our program and worked with students with lived experience to co-design and present in the sessions.

## Communications: Changing the narrative

Core to our communications activities is shifting the story around care experience and educational success by highlighting diverse perspectives and insights from those with lived experience. Our communications provide accessible updates to workers, teachers, carers, parents and young people about the latest research, programs, services and tools to support access and success in higher education.

We continue to share powerful stories from care-experienced students about their journey to post-secondary education, helping other care-experienced young people to see the many possibilities open to them.

We regularly featured care-experienced student stories in both our sector newsletter and our youth focused newsletter, 'Game Changers'.

Raising Expectations was featured in the news – we worked with care-experienced student Marcelle on two impactful articles written by [The Age](#) and [ABC News](#).



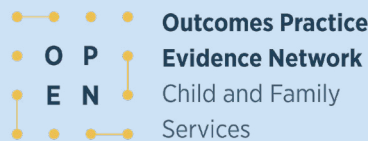








# 3. Strengthening sector capability



## OPEN: Outcomes, Practice, Evidence Network

The Outcomes, Practice and Evidence Network (OPEN) is a partnership between Victoria's child and family services sector, government and research, 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.

The Centre is proud to work with the sector and our members to gather and raise knowledge and capacity to use evidence in practice.

OPEN's objective is to support Victorian child, youth and family services to use, share and build evidence about what works from research, practice and client experience to deliver the best outcomes for children, young people and families. OPEN does this through fostering the knowledge, skills, culture and cross-system collaborations required to support the development of strong learning systems within the sector.

OPEN has met its priorities for the 2022–23 financial year. Key successes include increased OPEN membership and improved reach supported by the development of a Children and Family Services communication email list. The extensive event program for 2022–23 involved 1,058 attendees along with event reflections and recordings. Supporting the sector's access to key events, and active engagement and involvement in the Evaluation Community of Practice, OPEN has provided strong advisory support – with 15 organisations receiving advice; 6 OPEN Insights, Data, Evaluation Advice & Support (IDEAS) projects completed; 4 currently underway; and 4 receiving training. The Portal refresh is also underway, with migration to a new data platform and plans for new functionality and design features. New finalised content will also be included on the portal, with an expected delivery time of 4 months.



# OPEN program management: Building the OPEN Community and developing strategic projects and opportunities

Increased reach has seen the OPEN community grow to 2,975 (up from 1,893 in July 2022).

To grow our reach, we have developed a communication manager email list. OPEN meets with communications managers and develops agreements about mutual sharing of organisational information. This email list, along with the relationships with communications managers we have developed, has expanded the reach of OPEN and tapped into the achievements and needs of organisations.

Organisations currently engaged include:



# Finalisation of the Learning System Grant (LSG) funding proposal

This proposal was developed in the second half of 2022. It was submitted to the Community Support Fund in March 2023. We are waiting to hear the outcome of this process. The proposal requests funding for a second LSG program to deliver 20 sector projects per year for 2 years. This follows the success of our previous LSG program, which built momentum and buy-in for strengthening evidence-informed practice.



## Relaunch of the Children Australia journal

OPEN is currently redeveloping the Children Australia journal for relaunch at the OPEN Symposium 2023. The new publication will be a peer-reviewed journal focused on publishing content from researchers and the sector that has direct practice utility. It will include diverse paper types relevant to the work of the sector, researchers and policymakers. It will be open source (free for authors and readers). The journal and its archives will be available from the OPEN portal and from our publication platform. We are currently seeking expressions of interest from those interested in being part of the editorial board and journal management committee. A senior editor will run the journal and provide support to the editorial board, peer reviewers and authors. [childreinaustralia.org.au](http://childreinaustralia.org.au)

## OPEN Portal: Translating knowledge into practice



**14**  
newsletters



**11**  
news bulletins



**37.6%**  
newsletter engagement



## OPEN events



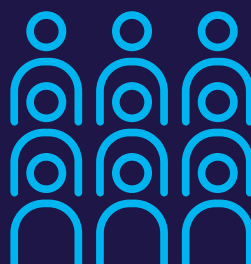
**1**  
symposium



**40**  
organisations  
presenting



**7**  
forums



over  
**1000**  
attendees

## OPEN Symposium 2022



**18**  
sector  
presentations



**472**  
delegates



**22**  
workshops



**2**  
keynotes



**2**  
sponsor  
sessions

# OPEN Symposium 2022

The 2022 OPEN Symposium was bigger than ever. The theme was 'Maintaining Momentum: Continuing to innovate and build Victoria's Children and Family Services sector evidence base.' This theme reflects the perseverance and resilience of the sector, which has managed to maintain momentum in the face of many unprecedented challenges.

Keynote speakers: Professor Leah Bromfield, Director for the Australian Centre for Child Protection; and Professor Sharon Bessell, Director of the Children's Policy Centre, and of the Poverty and Inequality Research Centre.

The four-day symposium included many other cross-sector speakers, presenting on a broad range of themes relevant to the sector, including early years, family violence and out of home care.

Recordings and resources are available [here](https://opensymposium2022.com.au)



# OPEN Forums

## **Collaborative approaches to delivering best outcomes for children and families**

**June 2023**

This forum brought together Relationships Australia Victoria and the Yarra City Council – Yarra Communities that Care (CTC) initiative, as well as Merrihealth – Ready, Set, Prep! and School Ties in City of Meri-bek. Forty-one attendees came together for a great session, sharing key learnings from the collaboration underpinning these two place-based, large-scale projects.

[Click here for recordings and resources](#)

## **Family Preservation & Reunification reforms: VACCA's approach to embedding cultural practice and outcomes in CSnet**

**May 2023**

This forum with VACCA and CSnet was an engaging and thought-provoking discussion about VACCA's Aboriginal-led design of a client information system (CSnet). VACCA's approach embeds culture and practice across multiple programs to deliver outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

[Click here for recordings and resources](#)

## **What makes life good? Measuring what matters to care leavers' wellbeing**

**March 2023**

Dr Claire Baker, a renowned advocate for young people in and leaving care, presented at this OPEN Forum to discuss the development of, and response to, care leaver surveys developed as a part of the Bright Spots program. This program has been running for 10 years and has gathered over 20,000 responses from young people in and leaving care, identifying what makes life worth living for them.

[Click here for recordings and resources](#)

## **The Menu of Evidence for Children and Family Services**

**March 2023**

OPEN supported the DFFH Evidence Strategy team in exploring the first stage of the Menu of Evidence, an online repository providing information on evidence-based practices and programs for child and family services in Victoria. This tool provides insights into evidence-based programs and practices. The session included an overview of the project and a walkthrough of the website.

[Click here for recordings and resources](#)



## **Centring the Youth Voice – Innovative Youth Participation Approaches**

### **December 2022**

This forum explored three organisations' innovative approaches to supporting, engaging young people in decision-making and advocacy. Presenters included IPC Health, sharing their Youth Leaders in the West program; Y-Change (Berry Street) on their experiences, reflections and next steps for these fabulously innovative programs; and YSAS on their Youth Advocates program.

[Click here for recordings and resources](#)

## **Unlocking key ingredients in cross sector partnership: Perspectives from child and family services and adult mental health working with parents and children**

### **August 2022**

This forum included perspectives from child and family services and adult mental health practitioners working with parents and children. Presenters included Vanessa Kirby and Julie Wassell (Family Life), Alice Morgan (Alfred Mental and Addiction Health), Natalie Papps (Monash Health) and Sally Groom (OzChild).

[Click here for recordings and resources](#)

## **OPEN Evaluation Community of Practice**

The OPEN Evaluation Community of Practice brings together evidence practitioners (those who have evaluation and research responsibilities - or interests - in the child and family service sector to support collaboration, professional learning and self-development.

The OPEN Evaluation CoP continues to attract interest. It has met 5 times in the 2022–23 financial year and has almost 30 members. The group meets quarterly, alongside additional meetings to undertake key projects as they arise.

This year's program built upon last year's work developing a discussion paper on strengthening evidence practice. The insights provided by the paper have been used extensively in work the Centre is undertaking with Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) on steps to improve client outcome measurement, the development of budget proposals, and work between the sector and DFFH.

Forthcoming actions regarding the findings of the paper include the development of an index for current member organisations' outcome measurement tools and data systems. This will generate a resource that can be used by members and the broader OPEN membership base.

## OPEN advice and services

OPEN provides an advisory service to support Victoria's child, youth and family sector to become more evidence-informed with prompt help online, ongoing project support, training and workshops, and sector-led communities of practice.

# 29 organisations

supported in 2022–23

---

# 91 organisations

supported since 2019



OPEN's support has built understanding and skills in the following areas:

- Understanding of outcomes, evidence, data collection and the value of building evidence
- Program and outcome logics and Evaluation Plans for projects and organisations
- Data collection tools, undertaking analysis and reporting
- Commissioning and managing external experts – evaluators or academic partners
- Steps to embed evidence into organisational culture
- Strengthening team and organisation skills in designing and measuring outcomes
- Capturing the client's/children's voice in data collection processes
- Understanding collaboration models – designing and measuring







## **OPEN Insights, Data, Evaluation Advice & Support (IDEAS) projects delivered or underway**

During the 2022–23 financial year, OPEN completed 6 IDEAS projects, with 4 currently underway. The key focus areas of IDEAS projects are to embed evidence into organisation practice and to develop program logic and evaluation approaches for programs.

- **Caroline Chisolm Society**
- **Child, Youth and Family Services at Macedon Ranges Council**
- **South East Community Links MERLE**
- **Child and Youth Services, Moreland Council**
- **Peak Partnership: Multidisciplinary Practice Project (MDPP)**
- **Uniting**





## Carer KaFE

A consortium comprising of the Centre, Kinship Carers Victoria (KCV) and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) was the successful tenderer with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) to deliver the learning and development program for home-based carers, Carer KaFE, from 1 April 2023.

Carer KaFE provides accessible, innovative, high-quality and culturally safe learning and development activities and resources to equip Victorian home-based carers with the necessary skills and knowledge to undertake their critical caring role.

By 30 June 2023, Carer KaFE had already funded delivery of 36 training activities. Sessions covered a diverse range of topics, including trauma, carer mental health and self-care. The feedback received from attendees underscores the high value and relevance of these training sessions.

We are also engaged in rebranding and redevelopment efforts for the Carer KaFE website and will design a Learning Management System tailored to meet the specific needs of its users. We are very excited about the future of Carer KaFE.





## Switch to Social Work

The Centre, its members and the DFFH have partnered with La Trobe University for the Switch to Social Work program. This program has been in planning for the delivery of the qualification component in collaboration with industry in 2024–25.

The Switch to Social Work program is an innovative approach to developing a new pipeline of social workers to support children and families across Victoria. A unique model, this trial program brings together the delivery of a Master of Social Work (Child and Family Practice) for career-changers with a package of supports to remove financial and workplace barriers. In this trial, the Centre is leading the work to recruit applicants and employers, provide induction into the program, design a workplace support approach for all participants and implement the Earn and Learn model. This trial program offers prospective career-changers a chance to achieve a government-funded Master of Social Work focused on children and families, while building a relationship with a community services organisation across the 2 years of the program, in a mixture of work experience transitioning to employment. It is an exciting opportunity to trial a different approach to the development of the workforce, drawing on the expertise of community service organisations across the child and family services sector.

As this is a trial of a new approach to develop a pipeline of qualified, job-ready practitioners into the child and family services sector, detailed information will be gathered during the project's life to inform an evaluation of the design, implementation and the outcomes achieved. Participating organisations will play an important role gathering information and regularly engaging in evaluation activities.

The trial is also focused on achieving and embracing diversity in student applicants. A stated aim of the program is to recruit Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally diverse backgrounds, people who identify as LGBTIQ+, or people with a disability.







# Fostering Connections

Fostering Connections is the cornerstone of foster carer recruitment in Victoria, providing information and recruitment services across the state, as well as capturing and collecting data and insights to help improve the foster care recruitment and accreditation process.

Foster Connections was formed in 2016 by Victoria's foster care agencies with support from the Victorian government to make it easier for new foster carers to find information about foster care and connect with the agency that is best for them.

Fostering Connections is the only program of its kind in Australia. It supports Victorians in learning more about foster care and how they can play a play by becoming foster carers.

## Fostering Connections has:

- had over 59 million people visit our website the past year
- achieved 59 million impressions through the 2022-23 financial year advertising campaign
- processed over 38,000 enquiries since its inception in 2016 – it represents all Victorian foster care agencies and services, and is a critical part of Victoria's foster care infrastructure
- processed 3,900 Victorian foster care enquiries via the Family Journey content management system
- run a dedicated suite of communication activities and events with agencies to promote foster care during Foster Care Week
- facilitated 10 network meetings to promote sector collaboration and information exchange
- partnered with Ermha365 to release a four-part foster care podcast series talking about mental health and disability
- achieved 815,000 social media impressions.





### **Fostering Connections continued to support the sector by:**

- responding to almost 4,000 foster care enquires direct to Fostering Connections
- launching the Foster Care Worker Resource Hub in December 2022 – a centralised place for the sector to access consistent, timely and relevant information to better inform their work, with 100+ registered users
- providing a Play a Part co-branding pack and practical support to agencies to promote and leverage the campaign
- offering general marketing and communications support to agencies, including carer attraction activity reviews and recommendations on key infrastructure e.g. websites and content development
- supporting improved data use, input and literacy in the sector through an online training suite, webinars and one-on-one consultation.

### **During Foster Care Week 2022, Fostering Connections:**

- engaged 10 councillors and parliamentarians
- achieved 15 different media mentions
- partnered with Too Peas in a Podcast to deliver a podcast episode on fostering children with a disability
- facilitated a Foster Care Week online event with representatives from 4 agencies
- produced and promoted an interview with foster carer and Deputy Mayor of City of Kingston Jenna Davey-Burns.



## Disability Scoping Project

In February 2023, Fostering Connections launched the Disability Scoping Project, a Victorian first-of-its-kind research project aimed at understanding the profile and experience of foster carers for children with a disability. Results are expected at the end of 2023.

## Quantum Market Research

Each year Fostering Connections undertakes important market research on the Victorian public's perceptions and motivations of fostering as well as the impact of the Play a Part foster care recruitment advertising campaign. This year we conducted research that provided valuable insights into the sector on the impact of cost of living and community sentiments towards caring for children.

For more information [click here](#).

## Events

- Attended the Victorian Father of the Year Awards hosted by YMCA, where foster carer Michael te Wierik won the 2022 award.
- Attended the Midsumma Pride March to support rainbow families.
- Attended the Foster Care Association of Victoria Annual General Meeting.





The Centre and Fostering Connections attended the Midsumma Pride March to support rainbow families.









# 4. Growing a responsive and sustainable Centre

## Preparing for Social Services Regulation Reform

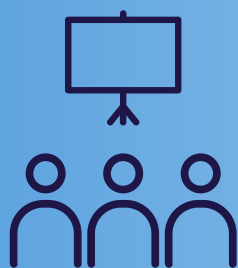
Parliament passed the Social Services Regulation Bill, which gives effect to a comprehensive new regulatory scheme for Victorian social services. The scheme, which will be implemented in a phased manner from 1 July 2024, aims to reduce or prevent harm to social services users. The Centre is represented on the Taskforce that has been established to guide the work. The Taskforce provides strategic advice that incorporates the view-points of service providers and service users to inform the development of draft regulations, communications materials and the Regulatory Impact Assessment process.

The Social Services Regulation Reform Taskforce has been meeting regularly to make sure that services covered by the legislation are fully informed about the expectations and changes coming into effect on 1 July 2024. The Centre has been represented on the Taskforce by our Deputy CEO, Dr Michele Lonsdale, while David Tennant, CEO of Family Care, has been critically important in bringing his expertise as a CEO of a community service organisation. The past 12 months of the Taskforce have been mainly focused on reviewing and providing feedback on different draft policy documents prepared by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

Of particular importance was the need to prepare service sectors for the Regulatory Impact Statement and Draft Regulations (which have now been finalised and released publicly). The Centre set up a small expert group of representatives from member agencies to provide feedback on these documents for the Centre to take back to the Taskforce. It was important that we hear from experts in our sector with specialist knowledge of regulatory requirements and their impacts on service providers. Topics included outcomes and service requirements, prescribed fees, statement of expectations, communication and engagement of services, registration and notification requirements, change management for the establishment of the Social Services Regulator, and quality and safeguarding systems including accreditation. The Taskforce was a wonderful example of different services coming together to respectfully discuss with government the various perspectives of each in-scope service while helping to inform decision-making.

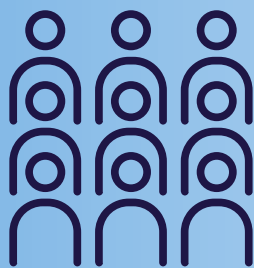
## Learning and development

The Centre offers a range of training and professional development opportunities for our sector. We offer customised and tailored courses and workshops to organisations across the child and family services sector, as well as training under the sector capability framework, and nationally recognised training for organisations and individuals.



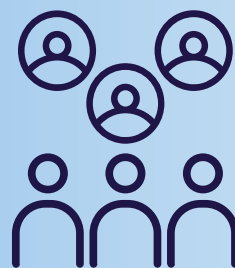
**306**

training programs  
delivered across L&D



**7815**

participants  
(25 per session)



**163**

organisations  
represented

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## Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) training

In the last 12 months we have delivered MARAM intermediate training to nearly 600 attendees across Victoria, delivering over 40 sessions.

In addition to the intermediate sessions, we have developed and delivered 3 new trainings related to MARAM as part of the Putting MARAM into Practice program. The program consisted of:

- Advanced Case Notes and Documentation in a Family Violence Context
- Techniques for Maintaining Engagement & Difficult Family Violence Conversations
- Intermediate Risk Assessment and Management

These were extremely popular, with an attendance of over 700 people across 50 sessions.



# The Centre's MARAM training for Aboriginal organisations

The Centre worked closely with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO), Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) to create a culturally appropriate version of MARAM training. They revised and co-designed three key aspects relating to the MARAM training and delivery content, pre-workshop engagement and facilitation to the Aboriginal context.

## Revised workshop content

- Acknowledgement of the family violence work already in progress within Aboriginal communities.
- Acknowledgement of certain language and concepts in MARAM, including key messages and risk factors that may assume a context of Anglo-European culture.
- Re-drafting of workshop case studies to reflect scenarios relevant to Aboriginal communities.

## Pre-workshop engagement activity

- Prior to delivering workshops, the Centre approached each organisation to understand the understanding of MARAM and what they hoped to gain from the workshops. These interactions helped facilitators in their preparation of the sessions and bolstered engagement from participants.

## Workshop facilitation by the Centre

- 17 workshops were delivered using this model.
- Each workshop commenced with a conversation about how family violence impacted the participants' work, the role of MARAM in their work, and their thoughts about MARAM. Almost all the talking in the first 30–45 minutes was led by participants rather than facilitators. This 'yarning' approach and 'deep listening' to the group as the starting point is in itself a cultural statement that builds trust and respect.
- Rather than an approach involving a pre-set agenda with a slideshow, the workshops had a flexible structure that could be adapted to each group. While facilitators led the key MARAM topics, the order of these topics arose from the groups' conversation. Each workshop had a unique character, reflecting the experience and knowledge of participants.

## Workshop success

- By pursuing a tailor-made approach, the workshops had exceptionally high participant engagement with uniformly positive feedback. Participants reported that the workshops were relevant to their work and improved MARAM embedment in their organisations.

"I feel more confident understanding the framework and the importance of the wider multidisciplinary team in supporting me as an individual in this space."

**Participant**

## Navigating the NDIS training

Navigating the NDIS is a 4-hour workshop designed to deliver practical, pragmatic training for child and family sector staff who may support participants in the NDIS, or the carers of children in the NDIS.

In 2023 four training sessions were held with a total 178 attendees. A further 8 trainings are scheduled for the 2023–24 year.

The session shares knowledge about how decisions are made in the NDIS. Participants leave with an insight into how disability is defined in the NDIS, what kinds of evidence influence decisions, and the appropriate language for achieving the best outcomes.

The workshop provides templates and tools to help participants gather information and communicate the needs of children, parents and carers to NDIS decision-makers. The workshop is delivered in partnership with the Association for Children with a Disability (ACD) to ensure a highly relevant and contextualised learning experience.

### Learning outcomes

- Understand how the NDIS is designed to work, including the many assumptions built into it about families and children with a disability.
- Clarity around the roles and responsibilities of child and family sector staff in working with families with disability.
- Appreciation of parental perspectives on the experience of caring for a child with disability.
- Tips and techniques that will help support vulnerable families as they navigate the NDIS, from access to review and appeal.
- An introduction to the wide network of support and advocacy organisations around the NDIS.



## Aboriginal community-controlled organisations

As part of the MARAM training, we have also been engaging with ACCOs across Victoria to increase uptake and participation. This has included a consultation session with the ACCO leaders to help develop a more tailored package for those organisations, followed by the delivery of multiple MARAM sessions, with 20 being delivered in this series.

The Centre worked in a partnership co-design model with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO), VACCA and the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) to create a culturally appropriate version of MARAM training.

Participant engagement was exceptional and feedback uniformly positive. Each workshop has had a unique character, reflecting the experience and knowledge of participants. Participants found the workshops relevant to their work and MARAM is now better embedded in each organisation.

## Shared Lives and Step-by-Step

The Centre delivers training and assessment packages for foster care agency staff. Shared Lives is the training package for foster care agencies and practitioners to learn and deliver the package to train prospective foster carers. Step-by-Step is the mandatory, competency-based carer assessment package to be used in the assessment of potential foster carers by community services organisations in Victoria. The Centre has continued to deliver these training packages in Victoria, which have now been funded for another 2 years.

In the last year, Shared Lives has been delivered to over 60 attendees. Our most recent session in July was the Centre's first-ever hybrid delivery of training in the newly refurbished office. This format allows metro-based participants to come into the office and regional and rural based participants to join. The delivery was successful, and we plan to deliver training in the same way moving forward.

Step-by-Step continues to enjoy high rates of participation. We have successfully delivered 3 sessions, with over 15 participants per session. Feedback has been very positive on the facilitation and content of the sessions.



## MARAM Information Sharing (MARAMIS) Sector Capacity Building Grants Program

The Centre has been engaged in the MARAMIS Sector Grants Project since 2021. This program has involved the Centre supporting the implementation of three intersecting reforms: MARAM, the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) MARAMIS. The Centre is responsible for delivering activities that support the child, youth and family services sector to align and embed the MARAMIS reforms, with the objectives of:

- supporting prescribed services to obtain an overview of the reforms and their responsibilities
- increasing understanding of the benefits of MARAM and the embedding of MARAM tools and practice within the targeted sector
- engaging with the sector to understand any barriers to implementation, and identify opportunities to overcome the barriers
- engaging with and supporting prescribed services to align their practice with the MARAM framework and to fulfil their obligations under the Information Sharing Schemes.

Over the last 12 months the Centre has engaged in resource development both independently and in collaboration with Safe and Equal and No To Violence, including case studies, tip sheets and materials used for professional development.

The Centre also produces a bi-monthly newsletter providing updates to the sector, including messaging around the Family Violence Reforms, events and resources, as well as opportunities to socialise surveys and consultations, and provide much needed feedback.

The project has also provided the Centre with an opportunity to create an Information Sharing Resource Hub, a channel for sharing resources developed by the Centre, and resources from FSV and DFFH.

In addition to the resource development and platforms for this promotion, the project has also involved the development and ongoing facilitation of Child and Family Services MARAM Community of Practice, the bi-monthly MARAM Alignment Working Group meetings and the production of a sector-wide forum showcasing the development of a series of Information Sharing case studies.

The project has made a genuine contribution toward embedding the MARAMIS reforms in organisational procedures and professional practice. We hope to continue this important work well into the future.



# Residential Care Learning & Development Strategy

## RCLDS training facilitation

RCLDS facilitated 90 accredited and non-accredited live training workshops, including 'Motivational interviewing, counselling skills for non-counsellors and Aboriginal cultural awareness' (delivered by Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd (VACSAL)); 790 residential carers completed courses. As of 30 June 2023, there were 1,251 residential care workers registered on the Centre's LMS. The most popular workshops were the following:

- Beginning Practice: Mandatory minimum qualification: 9 sessions, 101 completions
- Skilled at looking after children (LAC): 6 sessions, 91 completions
- Effective conflict management: 9 sessions, 89 completions
- CALM suicide intervention: 5 sessions, 70 completions
- Supporting young people with medication: 5 sessions, 51 completions.

## Residential care lived experience group

Drawing on the lived experiences and perspectives of young people who have lived in residential care is a key priority for RCLDS. The Centre facilitates the residential care lived experience group – eight young people aged 18 to 25 years who are working on a range of projects to benefit young people currently in care. This year, the group developed a proposal for a lived-experience mentor program and initiated a podcast series for new workers.



## ResiROCKS

ResiROCKS is an annual event that brings together residential care workers from across Victoria to celebrate practice excellence and cultivate a culture of learning and innovation.

First held in 2006, ResiROCKS is an acronym for Recognising Our Carers Knowledge and Skills. The event recognises the significant contribution and value of this workforce.

ResiROCKS was held on 30 September 2022, and was a great success. We had over 450 people registered and a waitlist of over 80.

The rock 'n' roll songwriting breakout was the clear highlight of the event. Over 3 sessions, each team created a verse of a song which was performed at the end of the day.



Centre CEO Deb Tsorbaris and the crowd celebrate ResiROCKS 2022.



“Wow - What an experience to be a part of!”

“The most engaging and fun activity  
I have ever participated in”

“Spending some  
quality time with  
my team, as we  
don’t often get  
opportunities to  
spend quality time to  
connect in our day-  
to-day roles.”

“[The young people  
with lived-experience  
panel was] very  
powerful. The best  
part of the day”

“Being treated to a beautiful  
day, with the most beautiful  
company. (Those that laugh  
with, cry with, and protect  
us, our pillars of strength,  
safety, comfort, when we  
walk through those doors.  
Our colleagues.) A day  
dedicated to us, to empower  
us to continue dedicating  
ourselves to serving our  
most important children.”

“I won’t ever go to a  
resi house again and  
just wander in ‘as if I  
own the place’, I will be  
more conscious about  
respecting the space as a  
young person’s home.”

## RCLDS training facilitation

RCLDS completed a large-scale learning and development sector mapping project using the data from the Workforce Research Project to:

- understand the L&D activities currently delivered and organised by service providers
- gather information on gaps and opportunities to inform a sector L&D framework
- identify areas of potential investment for RCLDS delivery.

New training was introduced over the last 12 months, including:

- Professional Boundaries
- Psychological First Aid
- NDIS training
- More advanced drug and alcohol training.

A large-scale project commenced to review all current RCLDS training, to ensure sessions are relevant and engaging.

Discussion commenced with a number of consultants to create a learning pathway for residential care workers, to ensure consistency across agencies and to avoid workers having to repeat unnecessary study as they change organisations. The learning pathway will also set out a clear career trajectory for workers, to encourage staff retention and to show how working in residential care can lead to leadership opportunities.

This year RCLDS has seen several new organisations accessing learning and developmental support through RCLDS. RCLDS has delivered training to 683 participants from 28 different organisations.

RCLDS has also experienced staff changes with the departure of our L&D coordinator Helen Evans and the commencement of the RCLDS workforce development lead Leesa Scanlan.



Video of song written  
at last year's  
ResiROCKS



Video of  
ResiROCKS



# Nationally accredited training

## Diploma of Leadership and Management

In December 2021, Windermere hosted the graduation ceremony for the Windermere, WAYSS and Better Places class of 2021 Diploma of Leadership and Management students. The diploma is a practical, hands-on course that provides the critical tools needed for new and emerging leaders. Importantly, existing managers can apply these skills immediately to effectively develop and execute strategy and lead successful teams.

The next intake of the diploma commenced in February 2022 with 12 participants. In 2022–23 the Centre's RTO delivered three Diploma units to 34 participants. The subjects reflect leading management and leadership techniques, while being tailored to our sector. This year, we have included interviews with relevant sector representatives to aid discussion and inquiry.

## Beginning Practice

The Centre continues to deliver Beginning Practice (the mandatory minimum qualification for Victorian residential care workers) to the sector. This course has been delivered via remote learning since 2020 and hence is able to cater to the training needs of organisations in regional Victoria. In 2022–23 the Centre's RTO delivered 9 courses (4 units counted as a single course) and registered 101 completions.

**The four 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).





# The Centre's office renovation

The Centre's staff moved into our newly refurbished office space in Market Street in Melbourne's CBD in June 2023, following an extended time working from home due to COVID-19 restrictions and the renovations.

We have been in these premises since 2003 and before the renovations started in 2022 we engaged with stakeholders to understand the individual, team and member needs for an office that was fit for purpose and future proof.

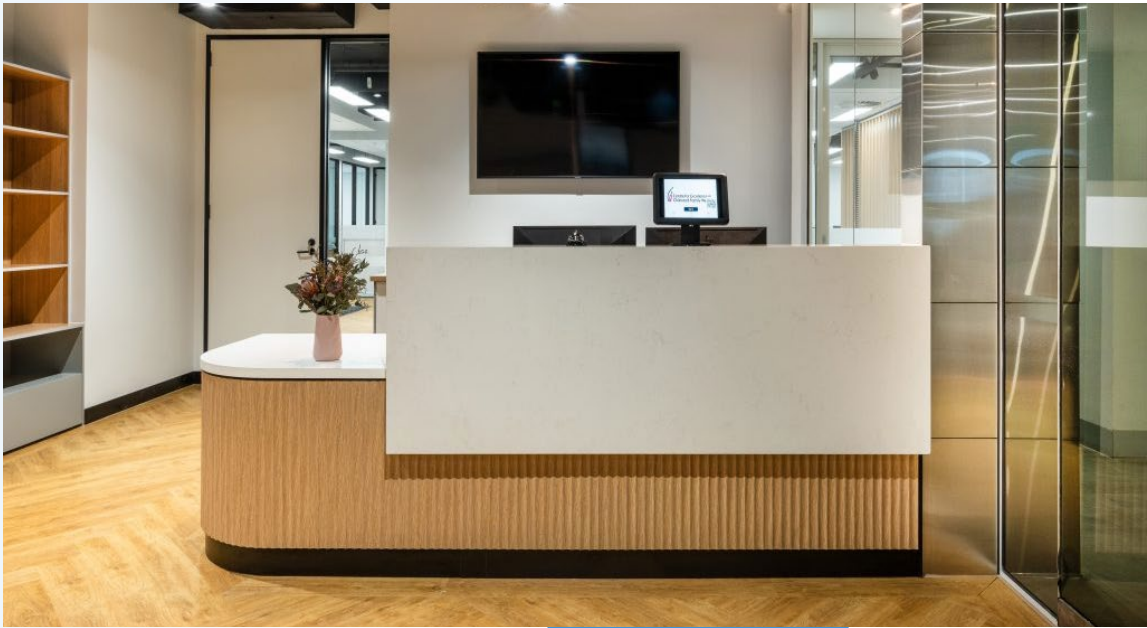
We are delighted to now have a completely redesigned office space that is bright, flexible and spacious. The office is now fully wireless and has multiple meeting rooms that hold in-person and hybrid training. There are various workspaces to suit the needs of our team, including individual work areas, phone pods, a group working area and quiet working areas.

Our meeting rooms will be available to our member organisations to hire, and give them access to our technology to host their own in-person and hybrid events here. We especially look forward to welcoming our regional members who will benefit from having access to meeting rooms while visiting Melbourne, and be able to access more training and events in our hybrid spaces.

We are very grateful to all our members and the Board for their support during this renovation and it has allowed us to adopt new technology that facilitates new ways of working and collaborating across the sector.













# 5. Staying connected to our sector

## Connecting Communities Tour

Over the course of a year, the Centre visited 8 regions in Victoria to connect and engage with our valued members and sector partners. The aim of these visits was to identify the challenges faced by local communities and to learn about the great work being done to address them. We wanted to provide a forum for local service providers to share ideas and engage in important conversations about the evolving needs of the sector and how they can be met.

We received valuable knowledge and insights from those who attended each community consultation, providing us with critical information about how children, families, communities, and sector organisations are faring across the state.

Our objective for the Regional Tour was to listen closely to the needs of practitioners and service providers, identify priorities and to report these to government.

# The Centre's Connecting Communities Regional Tour:

Let's **engage**, **share**, and **collaborate**.



The sector has achieved a lot over the last two years, despite the challenges. As the peak body for Victoria's child and family services sector, we've seen our workforce adapt and rise to many different and complex challenges. And while we've seen a lot of each other online, now it's time to connect in person as part of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare's Connecting Communities Regional Tour.

Throughout July and August, the Centre looks forward to visiting several regions throughout Victoria to hear directly from our members to better understand the unique challenges and opportunities children, young people, and families are facing in your community. Along with meeting with our members, the Centre will also be engaging with community leaders and child and family services workers. We'd love to see you there.



To learn more about the Connecting Communities Regional Tour and register for an event in your community, please visit [cfecfw.asn.au/ConnectingCommunities](https://cfecfw.asn.au/ConnectingCommunities)



## Who we met

During the tour, the Centre engaged with a diverse group of people working within or collaborating with Victoria's community services sector. We met 589 sector colleagues and partners from 114 different organisations. Local MPs and MLCs were also invited to hear first-hand about the challenges, service gaps and collaborative innovations happening in the child and family services sector in their community.

## What we heard

We heard that our regional members and sector partners are being affected by a number of common pressure points, which tell a story about how our regional communities are faring.

We were told that there is a critical need to:

- address the shortage of safe, affordable, and stable housing
- improve the coordination and accessibility of regional service delivery
- support our regional workforce to be the best they can be
- foster the educational and employment aspirations of young people in the regions
- ensure disadvantaged families have access to high quality services and an adequate income to thrive
- shift the balance from crisis response to early intervention
- support parents and carers
- improve access to regional mental health services.







Photos from the Connecting Communities workshops held across Victoria in 2022 and 2023.



## Strategic networking at the Centre

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

Over the past year, the Centre has provided critically important opportunities for information sharing. These include:

**Child and Family Services Alliance meetings**, where the alliance chairs, facilitators and coordinators come together and identify issues relating to the efficient functioning of the alliances across Victoria, sharing information and highlighting examples of effective interagency collaboration.

**Child FIRST, Integrated Family Services and the Orange Door network meetings**, which bring together practitioners working in child and family services, Child FIRST and Orange Door to discuss emerging issues and share data, opportunities and good practice examples.

**Families where a Parent has a Mental Illness (FaPMI)** which regularly meets 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. This network engaged with lived experience kinship carers to inform the delivery of a new website hub, the delivery of Kinship Care Week in 2023, and the co-design of resources for kinship carers.

**Leaving Care and Post Care Network** 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 is convened by the Centre continues to generate interest with participant numbers growing to around 70 over the past year. The range of topics continued to be broad covering the new Child Safe Standards, Social Services Regulation Bill, Social Services Regulation Reform updates, Commonwealth vs State regulatory standards crossover (for example, with the NDIS), Client Incident Management System (CIMS), Victims of Crime, audits, accreditation, Reportable Conduct Scheme and other quality assurance related requirements and challenges. The group hears from department colleagues and participants also provide updates about their work in quality assurance. New members are always welcome.

**Rainbow Tick meetings**, which identify and discuss progress towards participating organisations becoming more LGBTIQ-inclusive in line with the Rainbow Tick Standards and indicators.

**Out-of-home care providers**, which was born out of the Centre's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and initially was a fortnightly meeting with senior level representatives of out-of-home care providers & the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. The group continues to meet on a monthly basis to discuss issues of relevance to out-of-home-care.



# Media Awards

The Centre's 2022 Media Awards recognised ethical and respectful journalism on issues affecting children, young people and families experiencing vulnerability. Six awards were presented on news stories covering topics including family violence, out-of-home care and homelessness.

The winners recognised in 2022 were:



## 2022 Media Awards

**Best story about children**

Winner:  
**David Estcourt & Sumeyya Ilanbey**  
**The Age**

*"Parliamentary inquiry recommends raising age of criminal responsibility to 14"*

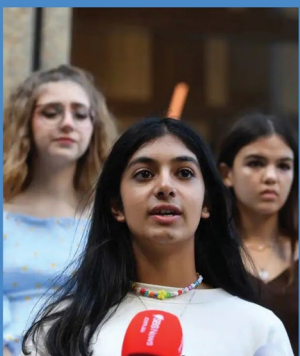
 Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

### Best story about children

**Winner:** David Estcourt and Sumeyya Ilanbey

The Age

[Parliamentary inquiry recommends raising age of criminal responsibility to 14](#)




## 2022 Media Awards

**Best story about children**

Highly Commended:  
**Amy Hall & Natasha Kaul**  
**SBS News**

*"Teen activists vow to keep fighting for 'climate justice', despite Federal Court ruling against them"*

 Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

### Best story about children

**Highly commended:** Amy Hall, Natasha Kaul

SBS News

[Teen activists vow to keep fighting for 'climate justice', despite Federal Court ruling against them](#)



## 2022 Media Awards

**Best story about young people**

Winner:  
**Jewel Topsfield & Sophie Aubrey**  
**The Sydney Morning Herald**

*"We're not 'snowflakes': Why young people have it harder than ever"*

 Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

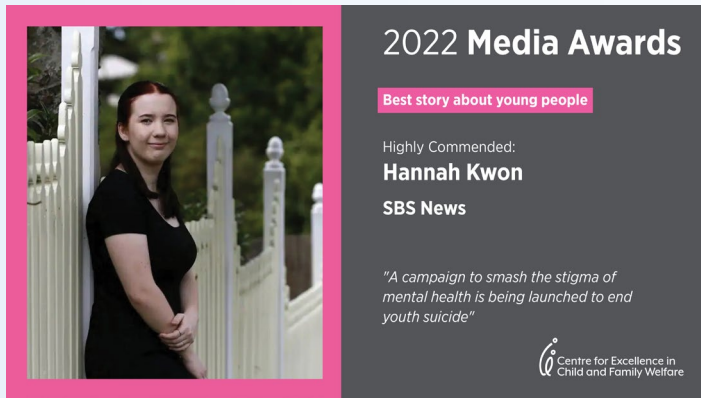
### Best story about young people

**Winner:** Jewel Topsfield and Sophie Aubrey

The Sydney Morning Herald

[We're not 'snowflakes': Why young people have it harder than ever](#)





**Best story about young people**  
**Highly commended:** Hannah Kwon

SBS News

[A campaign to smash the stigma of mental health is being launched to end youth suicide](#)



**Best story about families**  
**Winner:** Matilda Marozzi

ABC Radio Melbourne

[Signs of domestic abuse trigger 'are you safe at home' question from concerned parent](#)



**Best story about children or young people in out-of-home care**  
**Winner:** Katri Uibu,

ABC News

[Bad Parent](#)

The winners were selected from a shortlist for each category, which included impressive stories from ABC, The Age, SBS and rural and regional publications.

# Continuing to raise awareness for children and their families

At the Centre, we know the importance of communicating and sharing through social media networks and channel. During 2022-23, the Centre has used social media to promote days of significance, internal projects, new legislations and policies, and media releases.

Our community on LinkedIn consists of like-minded and interested individuals. Our LinkedIn follower count almost doubled since last year, and continues to grow. On LinkedIn, we are able to communicate directly to members and individuals, and we find that they are consistent in responding and engaging with our posts. We use comments and replies as opportunities to strengthen sector-wide relationships through this platform.

We use the platform Twitter/X as a means to live tweet events and reshare bite-sized information. This platform is best used for quick communication. Moreover, we use this platform to keep an eye across any movement from MPs and notable journalists in the sector to help locate new platforms and journals to pitch to. The Centre's Twitter/X impressions reached almost 90,000 during this time.

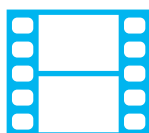
The Centre's website hosts thousands of users per year, with the majority of users navigating to the site to engage with the Centre's online learning and training opportunities. Our website is currently being redesigned and rebuilt, and we look forward to the new functionality and better user-experience.

We have seen consistent growth across our YouTube platform as we continue to upload Centre webinars and events. Our Youtube videos are getting more and more traction, with our watch time increasing by 30% in the past year.

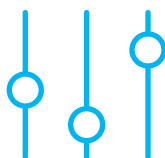
## Platforms



**eNewsletters:** SectorBuzz (fortnightly), Daily Digest (twice weekly)



**Media:** Monthly feature in on Deb Tsorbaris' LinkedIn, as well as frequent pitches to other outlets and news desks across the state



**Radio:** Regular radio appearances on JOY 94.9, 3CR, and RRR, as well as on regional and rural radio



**Social Media:** Daily updates on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn



**Days of significance:** Creating campaigns for days of significance relevant to our members, stakeholders, and sector



## Key stats for 2022–23

**88,876**

Twitter  
impressions

**22,152**

LinkedIn followers

**272,600**

Impressions  
on Twitter

**22,989**

Facebook  
reach

Youtube watch time  
nearly

**1,000  
hours**

**3,952**

LinkedIn  
reactions

LinkedIn  
followership  
almost

**doubled**

**30%**

increase in Youtube  
watch time

# Our board and staff

Our Board	Name
Chairperson	Dr Lisa Griffiths
Vice Chairperson	Sue White
Treasurer	Teresa Jayet
	Michael Perusco
	Graham Boal
	Andrew Bruun
	Sue Sealy
	Allison Wainwright

Position	Name
Chief Executive Officer	Deb Tsorbaris
Executive Assistant	Sue Maddison
Executive Advisor	Imogen Gerraty
<b>Operations and Finance</b>	
Executive Manager - Operations & Finance	Padraic Keyes
Finance Business Partner	Justine Koutsoupas
Senior Financial Accountant	Lakmini Kulathunga
Bookkeeper	Grace Kasper
Office Coordinator	Sheena Lestock-Kay
Administration Officer	Matthew Edwards
Project Officer	Oliver Tsorbaris
<b>Projects</b>	
Director - Strategic Innovation	Paulleen Markwort
Senior Project Officer - Tri Peaks	Philippa McLean
Senior Project Officer - Voice of Parents	Nicole Paterson
Project Officer - Kinship Care Network	Caitrin Mooney
Project Manager MCRI - Child Healthcare, Adversity and COVID-19 Project	Karen McLean
<b>Switch to Social Work</b>	
Director - Switch to Social Work	Liz Stafford
Senior Project Officer - Switch to Social Work	Jason Crockett
Communications and Engagement Officer - Switch to Social Work	Charles Ellingham
Project Officer - Switch to Social Work	Meena Amiry
<b>Learning and Business Development</b>	
Executive Manager - Learning and Business Development	Vivienne Lim Interrigi
Program Manager - Residential Care Learning and Development	Leesa Scanlan
Manager - Strategic Engagement	Lisa Tuffs
Compliance Admissions Officer	Natasha Lobo
Senior Trainer - NDIS, MARAM Customised Training	Mark Ryan
Shared Lives Coordinator	Glenda Quinn
Administration Coordinator - Learning & Business Development	Henry Small
Instructional Designer	Emily Grazia
Administration Officer	Reggie Chang
Administration Officer	Rosie Tu
Practice Lead - Family Preservation and Reunification	Elle Sherwin
Practice Lead - Family Preservation and Reunification	Rebecca Hulett
Practice Lead - Family Preservation and Reunification	Merewyn Bayldon
Practice Lead - Family Preservation and Reunification	Laura Gawenda
Practice Lead - Family Preservation and Reunification	Tanya Davis
Practice Lead - Family Preservation and Reunification	Melissa Lane
Practice Lead - Family Preservation and Reunification	Sri Kirkwood



Position	Name
<b>Communications</b>	
Executive Manager - Strategic Projects and Communications	Nevena Spirovska
Graphic Designer & Digital Coordinator	Selena Repanis
Media & Communications Advisor	Louise Johnson
<b>Fostering Connections</b>	
Manager - Fostering Connections and Campaigns	Madeleine Dowling
Foster Care Connection Specialist	Jasmine Isaacs
Campaign Lead	Bronwen Maher
Digital Communications Administration Coordinator	Molly Weightman
<b>Policy, Research and Advocacy</b>	
Deputy CEO - Director - Policy, Research & Advocacy	Michele Lonsdale
Senior Policy and Research Officer	Caitlyn Robertson
Senior Project Officer	Karalyn Davies
Senior Project Officer - Education	Nathaniel Slater
Senior Policy Manager	Lisa Abbey
Senior Project Officer Child Wellbeing	Andrea Nash
Senior Project Officer - Information Sharing	Beatrice Wood
Project Officer - Information Sharing	Kate McLaughlin
Project Officer - Information Sharing	Emma Nugent
Project Officer - Early Years	Johanna Croke
Policy Support Officer	Conor Pall
Senior Manager - OPEN	Mandy Charman
Senior Project Officer - OPEN	Sarah Ryan
Project Support Officer - OPEN	Kathryn Hutchins
Project Support Officer - OPEN	Emelie Inglis
Senior Editor - Children Australia Journal	Melissa Storey
Program Manager - Raising Expectations	Pearl Goodwin-Burns
Project Lead - Raising Expectations	Ursula Cliff
<b>Interns</b>	
Intern, Policy and Research	Lottie Harris
Intern, OPEN	Shida Binti Mohd Ayub
Intern, OPEN	Occero Fuller
Fostering Connections	Junie Ha Le

# Our members

## Full members

Access Health and Community, Act for Kids, Allambi Care Ltd, Anchor Community Care Ltd., Anglicare Victoria, Aruma (formerly E. W. Tipping Foundation/House with No Steps), Australian Childhood Foundation, Australian Childhood Trauma Group, Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative Limited, Bapcare, Benalla Rural City Council, Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd, Bendigo Community Health Services, Berry Street, Brophy Family & Youth Services Inc, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Bubup Wilam, CareChoice (Aust) Pty Ltd, Caroline Chisholm Society, CatholicCare Victoria, Child and Family Services Ballarat, Christian Brethren Community Care Ltd T/A 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 Welfare Inc, Dandenong & District Aborigines Co-operative Limited, Dhauwurd-Wurrung Elderly and Community Health Service, Doncare, Drummond Street Services, EACH Social and Community Health, Family Access Network Inc, Family Life, Family Care, FVREE Free From Family Violence, Gippsland & East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC), Gippsland Lakes Complete Health, Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand, Goolum - Goolum Aboriginal Co-operative Limited, Gunditjmara Aboriginal Co-operative Limited, 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 Accommodation and Support Program, Mallee District Aboriginal Service, Mallee Family Care, Melbourne City Mission, Meli Community, Melton City Council, Mirabel Foundation Inc, Moira Inc, Moonee Valley City Council, Multicultural Community Services Geelong Inc, Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation, Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative, Njernda Aboriginal Corporation, No to Violence, Northern District Community Health, Odyssey House Victoria, Olivia's Place, ONCALL Group Australia, Oz Child, Permanent Care and Adoptive Families, Queen Elizabeth Centre (QEC), Quantum Support Services Inc, Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation, Refuge Victoria Inc, Relationship Matters, Relationships Australia, Rumbalara Family Services, Safe Steps, 54 reasons (Save the Children), Sunbury and Cobaw Community Health, TaskForce Community Agency, The Alannah and Madeline Foundation, The Bridge Youth Service, The Reach Foundation, The Salvation Army, Thorne Harbour Health, Tweddle Child and Family Health Service, Uniting, Upper Murray Family Care, VANISH Inc., VICSEG New Futures, Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Inc. (VACCHO), Vacro, Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-Operative Ltd, Windamara Aboriginal Corporation, Windermere Child & Family Services Inc., Yarra Ranges Kinders, Yooralla, Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS), Zoe Support Australia

## Subscriber members

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









Centre for Excellence in  
Child and Family Welfare

DO NOT OBSTRUCT  
SMOKE DOOR



A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows a person in a grey suit standing next to a German flag. The person is partially visible, showing their arm and torso. The flag is red, black, and gold. In the background, a window looks out onto a city street with a blue sky and some buildings.

# **6. Financial statements overview**

**For the year ended 30 June 2023**

# Treasurer's report

The financial information presented in this Annual Report has been derived from the Centres' audited Financial Report for the year ended 30 June 2023. A copy of the full financial and auditor's report is available [here](#).

It has been a pleasure to work alongside the Board and the Centre's finance team as the Centre's treasurer over the last year. The Board is pleased to announce that the financial year ended 30 June 2023 had an operating surplus of \$1,093,614. Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to members of the Association was \$1,316,405. The total revenue for the year was \$9,618,302 and the total expenditure was \$8,745,192.

The following movements are shown in the financial report.

## Revenue

The revenue for the year amounts to \$8,745,192, representing an increase of \$538k (6%) attributed to the funding of new programs. Government funding is \$8.1 million and is an increase of \$506k (7%).

- Affiliation Fees from members increased by \$39k (7%) and is based on 0.14% of declared Child Youth and Family Services Revenue from the prior financial year.
- Revenue from Business undertakings increased by \$195k (38%) due to increased number of projects over the year.
- Charitable contributions decreased by \$202k (52%) due to the completion of philanthropic funded projects.
- Investment income increased by \$129k (141%) due to the increase in interest rates on term deposits.

## Expenditure

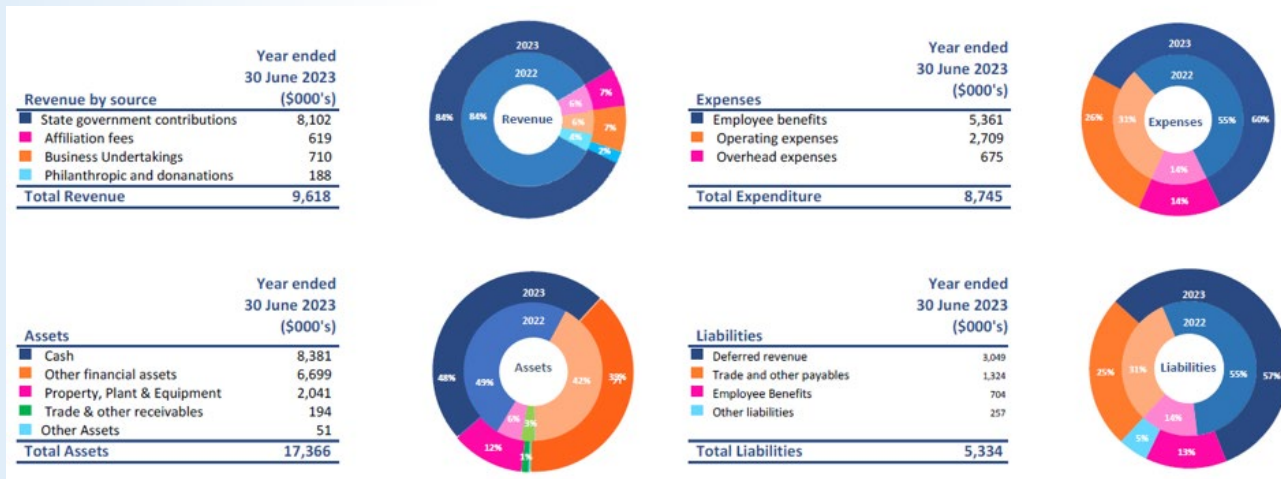
The expenditure has moved in line with revenue and has increased by \$874k (11%).

- Employee benefits expenses increased by \$843k (19%) due to increased staffing for the new funded programs.
- Operating expenses have decreased by \$266k (9%) as a result of anticipated program expenditures that have yet to materialise, which aligns with the deferred grant income.
- Overhead expenses increased by \$297k (79%), mainly IT project costs (including redevelopment of websites) of \$110k and \$100k in repair of the air conditioning system.
- Assets have experienced an increase of \$2,209 million (15%) due to the refurbishment of the office.
- Liabilities have also increased by \$933k (21%), being an increase in deferred grants of \$647k (27%) for activities that have started but are not yet complete and \$257k in deferred grant income.

The Centre holds sufficient reserves to continue supporting our members and member organisations in their invaluable work with vulnerable children, young people, and their families.

I would like to thank the members of the Finance committee during the 2022-23 financial year: Lisa Griffiths, Graham Boal and Andrew Bruun. 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 2023. These general-purpose financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the Australian Accounting Standards–Simplified Disclosures issued by the Australian Accounting

Standards Board (‘AASB’) and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012. The Association is a not-for-profit entity for financial reporting purposes under Australian Accounting Standards by Grant Thornton Audit Pty Ltd. 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 2023

	2023 \$	2022 \$
Revenue	9,618,302	9,039,872
Investment income	220,504	91,683
Gain on disposal of property, plant and equipment	-	20,930
Depreciation expense	(70,588)	(65,269)
Employee benefits expense	(5,361,002)	(4,518,157)
Operations expense	(2,709,119)	(2,974,632)
Office expense	(426,672)	(231,407)
Occupancy expense	(164,683)	(70,496)
Motor Vehicle expense	(13,128)	(10,959)
<b>Surplus for the year</b>	<b>1,093,614</b>	<b>1,281,565</b>
<b>Other comprehensive income</b> <i>Items that may not be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss</i>		
Changes in fair value of assets classified as fair value through other comprehensive income	222,791	(232,331)
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to members of the Association</b>	<b>1,316,405</b>	<b>1,049,234</b>



# Statement of financial position

At 30 June 2023

Assets - Current Assets	2023 \$	2022 \$
Cash and cash on hand	8,381,446	7,460,288
Other financial assets	6,698,591	6,335,715
Trade and other receivables	193,944	478,789
Other assets	51,402	21,158
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>15,325,383</b>	<b>14,295,950</b>

Non-current assets	2023 \$	2022 \$
Property, plant and equipment	2,040,767	860,660
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<b>2,040,767</b>	<b>860,660</b>
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>17,366,150</b>	<b>15,156,610</b>

Liabilities - Current Liabilities	2023 \$	2022 \$
Trade and other payables	1,323,953	1,388,969
Deferred revenue	3,049,264	2,167,614
Provisions	683,886	588,564
Other liabilities	257,000	275,000
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<b>5,314,103</b>	<b>4,420,147</b>

Non-current liabilities	2023 \$	2022 \$
Provisions	10 19,742	20,563
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	<b>19,742</b>	<b>20,563</b>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>5,333,845</b>	<b>4,440,710</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>12,032,305</b>	<b>10,715,900</b>

Equity	2023 \$	2022 \$
Accumulated Surplus	12 9,223,425	8,367,877
Reserves	2,478,418	2,240,352
Revaluation reserve	330,462	107,671
<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>12,032,305</b>	<b>10,715,900</b>

# Statement of changes in equity

For the year ended 30 June 2023

	Accumulated Surplus \$	Reserves \$	Revaluation Reserve \$	Total \$
Balance at 1 July 2021	6,780,332	2,546,332	340,002	9,666,666
Surplus for the year	1,281,565	-	-	1,281,565
Other comprehensive income for the year	-	-	(232,331)	(232,331)
Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to the members of the association	1,281,565	-	(232,331)	1,049,234
Transfer to reserves	305,980	(305,980)	-	-
<b>Balance at 30 June 2022</b>	<b>8,367,877</b>	<b>2,240,352</b>	<b>107,671</b>	<b>10,715,900</b>
Surplus for the year	1,093,614	-	-	1,093,614
Other comprehensive income for the year	-	-	222,791	222,791
Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to the members of the association	1,093,614	-	222,791	1,316,405
Transfer to reserves	(238,066)	238,066	-	-
<b>Balance at 30 June 2023</b>	<b>9,223,425</b>	<b>2,478,418</b>	<b>330,462</b>	<b>12,032,305</b>



# Statement of cash flows

For the year ended 30 June 2023

Cash flows from operating activities	2023 \$	2022 \$
Receipts from customers	11,511,717	9,401,777
Payments to suppliers and employees	(9,503,255)	(7,827,621)
<b>Net cash inflows from operating activities</b>	<b>2,008,462</b>	<b>1,574,156</b>

Cash flows from investing activities	2023 \$	2022 \$
Payments for property, plant and equipment	(1,250,695)	(73,416)
Net payments for financial assets	(57,113)	(94,646)
Interest received	220,504	91,683
<b>Net cash outflow from investing activities</b>	<b>(1,087,304)</b>	<b>(76,379)</b>

Cash flows from financing activities	2023 \$	2022 \$
Payment of lease liabilities	-	(9,150)
<b>Net cash outflows from financing activities</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>(9,150)</b>
<b>Net increase in cash and cash equivalents</b>	<b>921,158</b>	<b>1,488,627</b>

Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the year	7,460,288	5,971,661
<b>Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the year</b>	<b>8,381,446</b>	<b>7,460,288</b>

## 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

Level 5, 50 Market Street,  
Melbourne VIC 3000

Telephone: (03) 9614 1577

Facsimile: (03) 9614 1774

[admin@cfecfw.asn.au](mailto:admin@cfecfw.asn.au)

Find us on Twitter @CFECFW and Facebook

The Centre acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government



Families,  
Fairness  
and Housing