

Relationships Australia[®]

VICTORIA

Since 1948



We're still here

Since 1948, during COVID-19 and into the future

Annual Report 2019/20

Our vision is for positive,
respectful, safe and fulfilling
relationships for all Australians.



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways of Australia. We support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination, and are committed to encouraging a culturally safe and supportive environment for all Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people who access our services. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this annual report may contain images of people who have since passed away.

We are committed to inclusivity and providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people. We welcome members of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual (LGBTIQ+) communities to our organisation.

We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma. We recognise those who had children taken away from them.

We use some stock photos in this report and advise that they are for illustrative purposes only. No association between the person/s pictured and the subject matter of the report is intended.

Key service achievements and events in 2019/20

October 2019

Strategic Plan 2019-2023 released



December 2019

New Counselling and Support
- For People Affected by the
Disability Royal Commission
service commenced





January 2020

Counselling and Support
- For People Impacted by
the Recent East Gippsland
Bushfires service announced
and implemented



March 2020

RAV announced as lead agency
for headspace Sale



March 2020

COVID-19: Services began
transitioning from face-to-face
to telephone, video and online



April 2020

RAV announced as new provider
of Open Place service for
Forgotten Australians/Pre-1990
Care Leavers from 1 July 2020

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President's foreword



In October 2019, following a collaborative planning day with the Board and managers, and with the input of our staff, we released a new Strategic Plan to guide our organisation for the next four years. We will focus on providing high-quality, effective and accessible services for people with complex relationship issues, and on delivering prevention services that lead to system-wide change that reduces the incidence of relationship problems.

The plan also details our new Vision for positive, respectful, safe and fulfilling relationships for all Australians. While we recognise that this vision is ambitious, we also know that it is worthwhile, as we believe that everyone has the right to have positive relationships, and that these relationships are fundamental to health and wellbeing.

Our Strategic Plan was developed with consideration of current and emerging issues, and those that may arise in the future, such as the increasingly complex needs of our clients and changes in the community, plus sector and government policy reforms that may take place as a result of royal commissions, inquiries and reviews.

We could not, however, have foreshadowed the difficulties that the remainder of the year would bring for RAV, and for those in Victoria and Australia and, indeed, worldwide. The disastrous bushfires across Victoria and Australia were quickly followed by the onset of the coronavirus (COVID-19), with significant impacts as a result of the pandemic and related restrictions.

Of critical importance, is that while the pandemic brings with it unique and unfamiliar challenges, our staff continued to provide much-needed services to clients, with little interruption to service delivery, by transitioning to telephone and online modalities. The focus throughout this time has been on providing ongoing access to our services, while ensuring the safety of our clients and staff.

Fortunately, our Strategic Plan was developed on the understanding that, as an organisation, it would not be possible to predict all the issues that would impact on our work in the future. Our core strategic goals and their underlying objectives are based on best practice, and on efficient and effective operations, service delivery and governance frameworks that guide, rather than constrain, our decision-making. This approach, and one of our values of adaptability, have enabled us to be flexible in responding to the year's challenges, and also its opportunities.

Significantly, during the year we were selected to provide four new services: Counselling and Support – For People Affected by the Disability Royal Commission, Counselling and Support – For People Impacted by the Recent East Gippsland Bushfires, a new headspace satellite site in Sale, and the Open Place support service for Forgotten Australians/Pre-1990 Care Leavers.

These services have resulted in considerable service growth in the organisation, which has been welcome given the impact of COVID-19 on our finances. RAV is not alone in experiencing economic consequences as a result of the pandemic, mainly due to reduced fees paid by clients experiencing financial hardship, and a reduction in some of our other fee-for-service activities.

Of additional concern is the impending cessation from December 2021 of the Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) supplement. The ERO was introduced in 2012, to enable organisations in our industry to appropriately remunerate employees in our women-dominant sector. Its discontinuation would, therefore, have a significant impact on not only ours and the sector's workforce, but importantly on service delivery and service accessibility. This issue is not one that RAV is facing alone and we are working with the Relationships Australia (RA) federation

“Despite the challenging circumstances facing all of us this year, our staff have remained focused on their clients and have continued to deliver much-needed services. I know I speak for all Board members when I thank RAV staff for their hard work and dedication.”

and others in the sector, along with peak bodies, to advocate for the supplementation to continue, so that services remain accessible and affordable for clients.

RAV has more than 70 years' experience, and a history and culture of best practice, innovation and adaptability. Our organisation has robust governance processes in place, and a committed Board. Our workforce is highly skilled and qualified, and is dedicated to the clients they serve. This is evidenced by the way in which staff have been flexible and adaptable in responding to the challenges of the pandemic.

Despite the challenging circumstances facing all of us this year, our staff have remained focused on their clients and have continued to deliver much-needed services. I know I speak for all Board members when I thank RAV staff for their hard work and dedication. Our staff and managers have been once again, led commendably by our CEO, Dr Andrew Bickerdike, during this immensely demanding year.

While the future is somewhat uncertain, with this history, governance structure and our workforce, I am confident that RAV is well-placed to respond to COVID-19, and other challenges and opportunities that may arise in the future.

Lyn Littlefield

Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM
Board President

CEO's report



The 2019/20 year was one of two parts: before and after COVID-19. There were significant achievements for the organisation in the first nine months, before we focused on innovative responses to social distancing and restrictions.

We successfully tendered to provide a new headspace satellite service in Sale, and counselling and support for people affected by the Disability Royal Commission. We were selected to be the new provider of Open Place, and to co-deliver a service for people affected by the East Gippsland bushfires. Our Family Relationship Centres (FRCs) also introduced family dispute resolution (FDR) for property matters.

In partnership with Monash University's Monash Centre for Health Research and Implementation, we completed a research project into the effectiveness of men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs). This important research demonstrated that the programs positively impact a significant proportion of participants. It has also resulted in current and future recommendations for both RAV and the sector more widely, across the areas of service delivery and research.

Another key milestone for the year was the release of our new Strategic Plan 2019-2023. I invite you to read about our vision, focus, goals and objectives for the coming years on page 4.

As an organisation, we prioritise the needs and safety of our clients, quality service delivery and continuous improvement, and in 2019/20 we were successful in being audited against the ISO9001:2015 Quality Management Systems and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Standards. This assessment confirmed that RAV is continuing to deliver quality services and that we have effective Quality Management Systems in place.

Our headspace Bairnsdale centre also passed an assessment against the headspace National Office Model Integrity Framework, demonstrating

that the centre is effectively delivering services and can continue to provide high-quality services for young people.

In the final quarter of 2019/20, we were faced with unprecedented challenges as a result of COVID-19. Initially, we continued to deliver face-to-face services, with stringent hygiene procedures in place. As the pandemic intensified, though, and in response to government restrictions and our commitment to client and staff safety, in-person service delivery was reduced and only continued where absolutely necessary.

Recognising our responsibility to continue providing much-needed support, I am proud to say that at no time did we stop delivering services by transitioning to telephone, video and online modalities. We maintained a full staff complement, and continued full levels of service delivery. These new modalities enabled us to extend our geographic reach across broader metropolitan, regional and rural areas, and overcome traditional physical distance, disability and convenience barriers.

Feedback from our clients about our telephone and video-based services has been overwhelmingly positive. More than 87 per cent of counselling clients reported that they were satisfied with the service, and over half of FDR clients reported that they would prefer telephone or video-based FDR appointments in future.

Results of an organisational-wide staff survey on our response to COVID-19 were also exceptionally positive. This was despite considerable and swiftly implemented changes to working arrangements. Staff needed to cease face-to-face work and adapt to remote service provision, firstly from RAV centres and then from home. Both staff and clients had to navigate new technology, the profound impact of the pandemic on their own personal lives, and the worry and uncertainty impacting the whole community. I am extremely impressed by, and proud of our RAV staff.

Of course, we are also managing negative repercussions of COVID-19, including on our revenue. Inevitably, with so many Victorians being stood down, having reduced working hours or losing their jobs, more of our clients are experiencing financial hardship. Such circumstances often exacerbate the need for support, but reduce clients' capacity to pay for support services. We are committed to providing support to those who need it and do not refuse to provide a service because a client is unable to pay for it. Consequently, the financial challenges of our clients, among other things, have impacted our own finances.

Fortunately, our strong financial position before COVID-19 has protected us more than many others in our sector. The times ahead will still be hard, with the challenges exacerbated the longer COVID-19 continues. If the ERO ceases, we are as well-placed financially as we could be, given the magnitude of this unprecedented situation.

Our success in navigating the last few months, and indeed the year as a whole, is a credit to all those involved with RAV. Thank you to our Board and, in particular, our Board President, Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM. I recognise our staff for their flexibility and innovation under extraordinary and changing conditions. Our workforce is the essence of RAV, and I thank each and every staff member for their hard work, patience and dedication.

As I write this, it remains uncertain as to what the future holds. The wellbeing of our staff, clients and the wider community remains our priority, and I have a strong belief in our collective resilience and capacity to manage in times such as these.

Stay safe.

Dr Andrew Bickerdike
Chief Executive Officer

Strategic directions 2019–2023

Vision

Positive, respectful, safe and fulfilling relationships for all Australians.

Focus

Providing high-quality, effective and accessible services for people with complex relationship issues, and delivering prevention services that lead to system-wide change that reduces the incidence of relationship problems.

Values

Inclusivity

Treating all people equally.

Respect

Treating everyone with respect.

Integrity

Behaving with integrity in all our dealings.

Transparency

Being open and honest in our communications.

Accountability

Using our resources responsibly.

Effectiveness

Providing high-quality, effective services and maintaining the highest professional standards.

Adaptability

Proactively responding to change to meet the needs of the community.

Strategic goals

Goal 1
Advocacy
To be a trusted thought leader on how to address the impact of complex relationship issues.

Strategic objectives

Authoritative and influential voice

- Publish and comment regularly on select key areas relating to the organisation’s specialist expertise.
- Demonstrate capacity to participate in and influence policy debate.

Influential research

- Undertake targeted research that demands attention from, and influences the sector and government.

Digital transformation

- Integrate digital technology across business and service areas to deliver efficiencies and effectiveness to clients and customers.

 Download our full Strategic Plan 2019–2023 at www.rav.org.au/StrategicPlan



Goal 2

Response services

To effectively deliver leading practice, client-centred and financially sustainable response services.

Goal 3

Prevention services

To increase knowledge and build the evidence base for reducing the impact of complex relationship issues, and to build capacity, and design and deliver effective prevention services.

Goal 4

Effective governance

To govern and operate an effective, sustainable organisation.

Sector analysis

- Undertake a client, funding body and sector analysis, and ensure services evolve to meet these needs.

Leading practice

- Develop program logic articulating the relationship between client needs, service design and outcomes.

Evidence base and practice improvement

- Measure client outcomes, evaluate service effectiveness and demonstrate informed service improvements.

Prevention strategies

- Design, develop and implement evidence-informed prevention programs or services in response to identified societal problems that are aligned to our vision.

Build evidence base

- Evaluate and demonstrate effectiveness of prevention services, including evidence of change and credible presumption of positive population impact.

Secure funding and revenue base

- Acquire secure core, recurrent funding for key prevention service/s.

Skilled workforce

- Foster a skilled and motivated workforce aligned to client, funding body and organisational needs.

Board performance

- Build a motivated, skilled and balanced Board that drives organisational success through data-informed decision-making.

Financial performance

- Ensure the organisation is financially secure and robust with sustainable revenue growth annually.
- Foster and implement strategies for future growth.

RAV in 2019/20

Our organisation

\$29,924,923

income



332

employees



16

locations



4

Family
Relationship Centres



2

headspace
centres

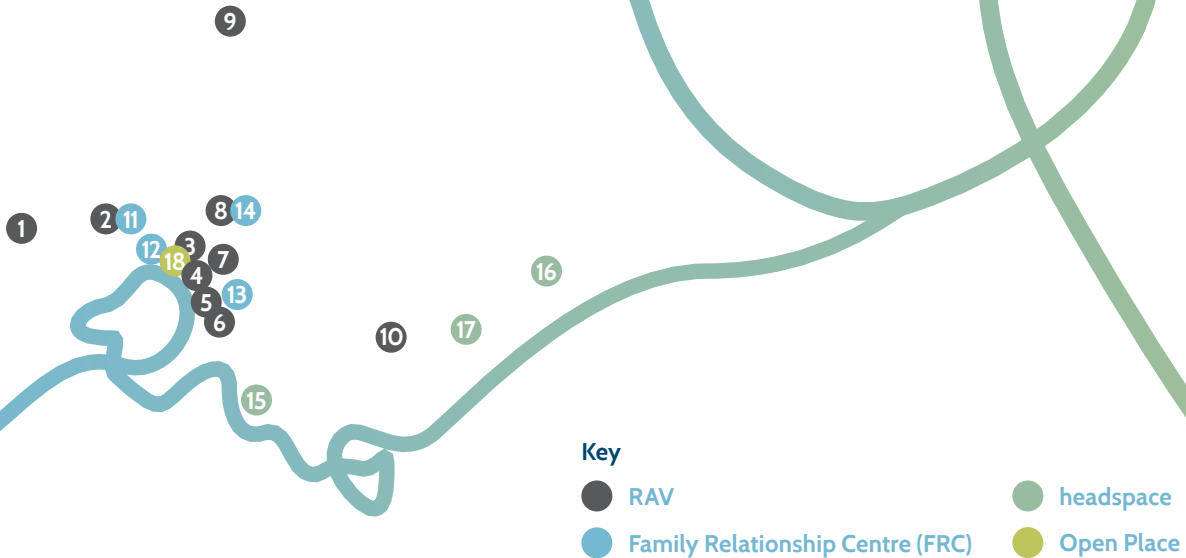


1

Central
Office



Our locations



- | | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Ballarat | 6 Cranbourne | 11 Sunshine FRC | 15 headspace Wonthaggi |
| 2 Sunshine | 7 Boronia | 12 Melbourne FRC | 16 headspace Bairnsdale |
| 3 Kew | 8 Greensborough | 13 Berwick FRC | 17 headspace Sale* |
| 4 Camberwell | 9 Shepparton | 14 Greensborough FRC | 18 Open Place Richmond^ |
| 5 Cranbourne North | 10 Traralgon | | |

* To open in 2020/21

^ Provided by RAV from 1 July 2020



Our clients

22,621

clients



3709

children



3200

clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

44.3%

reported an income of \$25,000 or less



407

Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people

Client satisfaction with counselling, FDR and FRC services

98.7%

felt listened to and understood

99.0%

were better able to deal with issues they sought help for

97.7%

were satisfied with the service received

“I have used other services, been frustrated by the police and legal system, but RAV listened, understood and helped me to get the support I needed: financial, emotional, everything.”

– RAV client

During COVID-19**

11,877

sessions



4853

counselling sessions



3650

FDR sessions



87.1%

of counselling clients were satisfied with the service they received

82.4%

of FDR clients felt their practitioner had listened to them and understood their issues

88.9%

of counselling clients felt their counsellor had listened to them and understood their issues

** Provided between 30 March and 30 June.

Our services

Services

Bagung ba Wadamba: Gather and heal programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

- Women's Journey
- Brutha's Day In
- Growing Up Kids

Counselling for individuals, couples and families

- face-to-face
- telephone
- video
- online

Counselling and Support – For People Affected by the Disability Royal Commission

Counselling and Support – For People Impacted by Recent East Gippsland Bushfires

early matters healthy family relationships program

Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) and for parenting and property matters

- AccessResolve Property Mediation and conciliation
- child-inclusive FDR
- enhanced child-focused FDR
- at the Royal Children's Hospital
- legally assisted FDR
- Property Dispute Settlement and Conciliation
- Safe Resolutions Legally Assisted and Culturally Appropriate FDR

Family Relationship Centres (FRCs)

Family Safety Contact Services

Family Safety Model

Family Safety Navigation Program

Family Therapy

Forced Adoption Support Service

Gippsland Drought Counselling

headspace centres

Home Visiting Service

i-Connect Family Mental Health Support Service

Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs)

- for male perpetrators of family violence
- for Vietnamese male perpetrators of family violence

Men's Case Management Program for male perpetrators of family violence

Prepare/Enrich pre-marriage and commitment program

Redress Support Services for people contemplating or going through the National Redress Scheme

Support for Fathers project

Workplace Support Services and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)

Groups and programs

Arts Group providing art therapy-based, facilitated social connections for young people

ASD Games Group for young people with autism spectrum disorder

ATTUNE antenatal program for expectant and/or new parents

ATTUNEplus postnatal program for parents with newborn babies

DRUMBEAT connections, music and healthy relationships program

- at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women with complex needs
- at the Royal Children's Hospital
- for community groups

Games Group facilitated social group for young people

"I like, like you" healthy intimate relationships program for secondary schools

"I like, like you UP" healthy close relationships program for primary schools

Kinship and Grandparent Support Group

My Parents 'N' Me program for children during and after separation

Opening the Doors program for women who have experienced family violence

Parenting After Separation programs

Post-Separation Parenting programs

Ready Set Kids healthy relationships program for playgroup, kindergarten and lower primary school children

Relationship Recharge

Relationship Rescue

Repair-enting program for fathers who have used violence in their relationships

Right Now group for women who have experienced interpersonal trauma

Tuning in to Kids™ emotionally intelligent parenting program

- for Afghan women
- for dads
- for parents
- for parents together

Tuning in to Teens™

- emotionally intelligent parenting program for parents of teenage children
- Parenting in a Pandemic webinar

Unique but United (U.B.U.) support group for LGBTIQ+ young people

Walking Group for young people to socially connect and learn healthy habits

Women Making Choices program for women who have experienced controlling and abusive behaviours



Community engagement

We participated in activities and initiatives to engage with, and provide support to, the community, and to build and strengthen relationships with other services. Examples of our engagement activities include the following:

Attendance at:

- events to mark the Anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations
- the NAIDOC Week March, Youth and Elders' Ball, and Flag Raising Ceremony
- the Walk Against Family Violence

Information stalls at:

- the Frolic Festival, an LGBTIQ+ arts and culture festival
- the Midsumma Festival's Midsumma Carnival
- the official launch of Victorian Mental Health Month 2019
- the Whittlesea Welcome Expo
- Sisters Day In at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre

Participation in networks

Presentations and workshops to:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men about healthy relationships
- kinship carers
- lawyers in northern Melbourne
- men and women on healthy relationships
- multicultural youth
- schools, higher education facilities and football clubs on youth mental health
- young people about suicide awareness

Support and/or sponsorship of:

- Neighbour Day – Australia's annual celebration of community led by RA
- Sisters Day Out Ballarat
- the Gippsland Eid Festival celebrating the end of Ramadan
- the Melbourne Queer Film Festival

Professional training and development

Accredited training

- Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution (CHC81115)
- Graduate Diploma of Relationship Counselling (with a focus on family violence) (CHC81015)
- Mediation Skill Set Short Course (CHCSS00110)
- Specialist Course in Couple Therapy

Professional development workshops

- Advanced Family Violence
- Advanced Training in Property and Financial Matters in Family Dispute Resolution Practice
- Attending Court and Writing Reports
- Introduction to Couple Therapy

- Introduction to Property and Financial Matters in FDR Practice
- Managing Challenging Behaviours
- Mediation Short Course
- Performance Energy within the Workplace
- Professional Boundaries in Therapeutic Work
- Reconnecting Teams During COVID-19
- Responding to Family Violence in the Workplace
- The Casual Counsellor
- The Tree of Life: An Approach to Working with Vulnerable Children, Young People and Adults
- Trauma-Informed Care
- Vicarious Trauma

Specialist programs

- ATLAS Train the Trainer: For facilitators delivering workshops in prisons
- LINC'S: Psycho-educational workshops for people who are subject to Community Correction Orders
- LINC'S for Families: Psycho-educational workshops for people who are subject to Family Violence Orders

Registered Training Organisation (RTO 21977)



Advocacy, sector engagement and research

We seek to share our skills, knowledge and experience by publishing and commenting regularly on key areas of expertise, participating in and influencing policy debate, and undertaking and sharing the results of targeted research. We also focus on integrating digital technology across RAV's business and service areas to deliver efficiencies and effectiveness for our workforce, and for clients and others we work with.

Sector engagement

During the year, we engaged with Family Safety Victoria and No To Violence, an organisation working to end men's family violence through individual and member consultations and interviews, to share our knowledge and influence reforms and processes. Key consultations related to the implementation of the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) guidelines, Orange Doors and, in particular, the development of a demand management framework, as well as new perpetrator guidelines and online service delivery in response to COVID-19.

We also participated in a Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Centre for Evaluation and Research rapid research project into COVID-19 and the impact on service delivery across Victoria.

We were invited to sit on the Family Violence and Sexual Assault Outcomes, Evidence and Funding Reform Reference Group, which was jointly led by Family Safety Victoria, the DHHS and the Department of Premier and Cabinet. We also accepted an invitation to join a Family Safety Victoria Implementation Working Group focused on a state-wide evaluation of MBCPs undertaken by Deloitte

and the Social Research Centre. We participated in consultations with Monash University regarding the Australian Securities and Investments Commission's (ASIC) research into financial abuse, as well as consultations with No To Violence for its submission to the Victorian State Government's Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

We made four key submissions to government royal commissions, inquiries and committees during the year. The unifying theme of our submission to the Joint Select Committee on Australia's Family Law System review was that urgent reforms to the Family Law System are required in order to support and encourage the resolution of family disputes at the earliest opportunity, and in the least costly and harmful manner. At the heart of this approach is the need to protect the rights of children and to promote their welfare. The submission identified that the traditional understanding of 'access to justice', which is synonymous with 'access to court', is particularly pronounced in the family law field; whereas, the emphasis should be on enhancing people's capacity to understand their position and, where possible, resolve matters themselves with appropriate advice and support.

We welcomed the opportunity to provide a response to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. Our recommendations included increasing funding for place-based mental health services that reflects population growth, the cost of delivering services and service accessibility challenges in regional and remote areas. We also advocated for services based on family systems approaches to be Medicare-funded, the expansions of workplace wellbeing audits and employee support programs, as well as the increased integration of mental health prevention and promotion programs into service systems, including education.

Our submission to the Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria outlined key themes related to the impacts of historical practices of forced adoption, and provided responses to these themes supported by client feedback. We provided recommendations for responding to systemic problems and failures, including increasing funding for support services, ongoing education of professionals about the issue of forced adoption, increasing access to records, and greater recognition, compensation and support for people affected by forced adoption.

Our last key submission of the year was for the Interim Report to the Joint Standing Committee on the Implementation of the National Redress Scheme. In this, we highlighted what is working and not working with the scheme, and made recommendations related to issues such as the traumatic impact and complexity of engaging with the scheme, the limitations of the available compensation and the impacts of institutions that have not joined the scheme on victim-survivors.

At the Child-Centred Approaches to Ending Family Violence Conference, Dr Andrew Bickerdike presented on how to ensure the views and best interests of children are considered in family court proceedings and parenting arrangements, and provided insights from his experiences as a Part-time Commissioner for the Australian Law Reform's review of the federal family court system. At the same conference, three RAV staff members spoke about interventions for keeping children safe and how to support parent-child relationships.

RAV was also well-represented at the Family and Relationship Services Australia National Conference, with well-attended sessions on working with family safety in the context of MBCPs, and how different ways of being a dad can impact family violence.

By invitation, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Specialist presented culturally informed lectures at both Swinburne University and No To Violence (see page 34).

Through our extensive network of centres, RAV was represented on a broad range of networks across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. These included Integrated Family Violence Committees, Risk Assessment and Management Panels, the Forced

Adoption Support Services Australian network, Local Aboriginal Networks and Family Law Pathways Networks, as well as other networks related to family law, mental health, drug and alcohol, multicultural, Redress, and parenting and children.

We also continued our RAV Lawyers' Panel, which engages a dedicated group of qualified lawyers specialising in family law who understand and support FDR. The panel, which has been in operation for more than 20 years, provides a forum for lawyers and RAV's FDR practitioners to exchange information and ideas, and consider developments in family law and FDR.

Submissions

- Australia Victoria. (2019, July 5). *Submission to the Victorian Government Royal Commission Into Victoria's Mental Health System*. https://rcvmhs.vic.gov.au/download_file/view/604/389
- Relationships Australia Victoria. (2019, December). *Joint Select Committee on Australia's Family Law System* (Item 119). https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Family_Law_System/FamilyLaw/Submissions
- Relationships Australia Victoria. (2020, April 27). *Submission to the Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria* (Item 15). <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/lsc-la/inquiries/article/4253>
- Relationships Australia Victoria. (2020, April). *Interim Report Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the Implementation of the National Redress Scheme* (Item 19). https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/National_Redress_Scheme/NationalRedressScheme/Submissions

Conference and webinar presentations

- Alford, D. (2019, November 19–22). Exploring how different types of being a Dad can impact family violence [Conference session]. FRSA National Conference, Hunter Valley, NSW, Australia.
- Alford, D. (2020, May). Dads working from home in COVID-19 [Virtual conference session]. Australian Fatherhood Research Symposium. Relationships Australia Victoria.
- Bickerdike, A. (2019, September 18–19). Towards child-inclusive mediation & family court proceedings [Keynote]. Child-Centred Approaches to Ending Family Violence Conference, Melbourne, VIC, Australia.
- Hebb, A. (2020, May). Property FDR at the Sunshine FRC and the Role of Lawyers [Live webinar]. Family Law Pathways Network, Melbourne, VIC, Australia.
- Meehan, K., Booth, S., Tomlinson, B., & O'Connor, M. (2019, September 18–19). Interventions for keeping children safe & supporting parent-child relationships [Conference session]. Child-Centred Approaches to Ending Family Violence Conference, Melbourne, VIC, Australia.
- O, Connor, M., Panayiotidis, A., & Cooke, T. (2019, November 19–22). Working with family safety in the context of a men's behaviour change program [Symposium]. FRSA National Conference, Hunter Valley, NSW, Australia.

Publications

- O'Connor, A., Morris, H., Panayiotidis, A., Cooke, V., & Skouteris, H. (2020). Rapid Review of Men's Behaviour Change Programs. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, *org/10.1177/1524838020906527*.



>10,500 
hours of video-based client
appointments or meetings
during COVID-19 with over
16,500 participants

Media and resources

We accepted invitations to provide comment for local, state and national media agencies on a broad range of topics, including our headspace centres, COVID-19-related challenges, preventing and managing relationship challenges, online dating, family estrangement, parenting, and challenges faced by new mothers and couples.

In 2019/20, we published a range of free resources in order to share information and knowledge, and to increase the capacity and resilience of our community members.

Recognising the significant and immediate impacts and challenges of the pandemic, we developed a suite of COVID-19-specific information sheets. These included managing issues such as stress and anxiety, social isolation with partners, self-isolation with children and family, and conversations about money with partners. Additional resources focused on working from home effectively, preventing and overcoming loneliness, being a caring family member, and supporting children to return to school. We also shared some of the positives of the pandemic for separated families, such as new routines and perspectives, improved communication and increased involvement in children's day-to-day lives.

We updated our tip sheet on FDR and, as part of the RA Federation, we published eight new tip sheets on a range of topics related to parenting, families, relationships and retirement.

In partnership with On the Line, we commenced a project to update and reprint our popular *Renovate Your Relationship: A Manual for Men* booklet, which provides simple steps for men to take to maintain their wellbeing and their relationship.

Digital transformation

There were significant changes for RAV in the area of digital transformation in 2019/20. While strongly focused on security and privacy, we introduced organisational-wide use of video-conferencing software, secure remote access and Microsoft Teams to our workforce. These initiatives have enabled staff to deliver services remotely, and to maintain connections with colleagues and teams during COVID-19.

To support these processes, we deployed additional hardware, including tablets, laptops and room-based video conference equipment. We also implemented softphone applications and transitioned to securely storing client files digitally.

Following the milestone implementation of a new Client Relationship Management system last year, we developed and launched an e-learning module this year to provide new and existing staff with ongoing online program support.

Other technology achievements included server software and hardware enhancements, and the commencement of projects to implement RAV-wide staff and visitor wi-fi, as well as upgrading our intranet to a contemporary platform for storing and accessing RAV information and files. We also commenced a project to develop a Business Intelligence System, which will provide real-time access to current and historical service delivery and financial data via an interactive dashboard.

Our Human Resources department began a staged implementation of

a new Human Resource Information System. With thousands of employment applications annually and over 300 staff, the new platform will enable us to more effectively and efficiently manage and report on recruitment, training, performance, safety and workforce data.

We partnered with Ability Works Australia, a not-for-profit social enterprise that provides meaningful employment to people with disability, or who are socially excluded, to complete the migration of RAV's paper-based human resources file system to a digital storage solution. As well as supporting a socially responsible organisation, this environmentally beneficial initiative has streamlined remote storage of, and access to, staff records.

Our Quality Management Unit also focused on streamlining access to information by commencing a project to transition to a new, online incident and complaints reporting, notification and management framework.

Our Communications and Marketing team began a project to develop a new organisational website that will replace our existing RAV website and deadlyRAV Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services website. Initial consultations were held with internal stakeholders, with further internal and external consultations to be undertaken as part of the website's design, development and user-testing processes.

Within our Training and Development team, we engaged a learning experience designer who will focus on enhancing online training learning opportunities in 2021.



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“I think if we had been able to determine a property settlement 12 months ago, shortly after we separated, it would have meant that we were able to move on and hopefully maintain a relationship that allowed us to co-parent.”

– FDR client through FDR Outcomes Study

“I really believe once you get into the family court, it’s a horrible place to be and if you can work it out together and come out of it the other end without being thousands of dollars short, but also without fighting each other across the court room, you’re a lot better off. For yourself, emotionally, and for your family.”

– FDR client through FDR Outcomes Study

Research

The effectiveness of men’s behaviour change programs

Research into our MBCPs (see page 18) continued this year, in partnership with Monash University’s Monash Centre for Health Research and Implementation (MCHRI). The research stemmed from the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria), which highlighted the urgent need for MBCPs to be examined. Our joint rapid review of the content, implementation and impacts of the programs on participants and family outcomes internationally was published in a leading international family violence journal, *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*.

The findings of the review indicated a limited evidence base of detailed MBCP evaluations, and the information relating to program content covered a wide range of topics not documented in the research. Evaluations that were existing, however, indicated that positive changes were reported in relation to participants’ communication, parenting, interpersonal relationships, empathy, skills development, responsibility for behaviour, self-awareness and cognitive beliefs – as well as their aggression, abuse, power and control tactics, behaviour control and abusiveness patterns. No evaluations examined the links between men’s accountability and responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of women and children. The review also revealed a lack of implementation evaluations, and no assessments of the integrity of program delivery, system processes or evaluations based on program logics.

As a result of this review, a detailed program logic and evaluation plan was developed to enable RAV’s MBCPs to be examined, with 60 program participants and 19 RAV facilitators and family support contact service staff participating in the research.

Following an MBCP, men reported significant improvements in their belief to be able to manage stressful times; understanding of the impact of their use of violence; and their skills to repair the impact of their use of violence on their partner/former partner, children and family members.

Trends in the data showed improvements in the men’s understanding of their own emotional and mental health, understanding of their partner/former partner and family members’ needs and feelings, relationships with their partners/former partners and family members, and understanding that their behaviour in relationships could improve. But, in relation to their children’s needs and feelings, and the impact of their violence on children, responses from men indicated that further attention is needed on how to deliver MBCPs that promote the safety, development and wellbeing of children.

Overall, program facilitators reported the program positively impacted 43 per cent of men, who experienced significant improvements recording changes in their attitudes, levels of accountability and responsibility, and active use of strategies learned in the program.

The research has resulted in recommendations for current and future attention on the further development of MBCPs, staff engagement and additional research into the impact of the programs.

Outcomes of FDR for parenting and property matters

The RA FDR Outcomes Study, which was jointly led by RAV and RA Queensland, was completed this year. RAV led the property component of this national study, which involved collecting survey data at multiple points in time from 1,695 clients across Australia. Interviews with 200 of these clients generated evidence on the outcomes of RA FDR services in both parenting and property disputes.

RAV prepared a qualitative paper to be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal that presents client views on the advantages and disadvantages of FDR for property matters, compared to legal methods. While most participants choosing FDR for property matters primarily wanted to avoid the increased costs, stress and levels of acrimony associated with legal processes, many also identified benefits of the mediation process, itself, as key to their choice. These benefits included facilitating communication, both during and outside FDR, and having a skilled and impartial third party to direct negotiations and control emotion.

One of two other papers submitted to the *Journal of Family Studies* uses interview data to assess reasons for the low use of FDR for property matters in Australia, given the benefits cited above. Among 112 interviewees who had hoped to use FDR to resolve their property matters, only 37 per cent were able to make a serious attempt at a property settlement. The most common reason for participants’ inability to progress with property negotiations was an unwilling former partner. The paper suggests that making FDR mandatory before filing to the court for property matters, as is the case for parenting matters, would increase the likelihood that separating couples can negotiate their disputes; therefore, improving adjustment to separation for both former partners and their children.

Further papers are being prepared by RAV, including for the Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference. A quantitative paper on measuring FDR outcomes will also demonstrate that the benefits of FDR for both parenting and property clients extend beyond reaching agreements, to reducing psychosocial distress and improving adjustment to separation.

The role and effectiveness of separation-related smartphone apps

In 2019/20, RAV partnered with high-profile academics at the Australian National University and colleagues at RA Canberra and Region, to apply for an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant.

The proposed study, which would run for two years, aims to examine the role and effectiveness of separation-related smartphone apps in supporting families to respond to the many challenges of post-separation co-parenting. In an increasingly digital landscape, where poor choices of apps can have serious consequences for families, this knowledge is urgently needed by parents and family law practitioners, including FDR practitioners, to provide an evidence base for recommendations regarding the use of such technologies. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlights the need for access to effective and safe digital communication tools.

The project is expected to deliver a comprehensive understanding of the benefits and risks of digital divorce apps. Planned outcomes include the first web-based decision-making tool to help separated parents make important decisions about managing post-separation communication, which can reduce the risk of parental conflict and improve outcomes for children.

As a service organisation, with practitioners at the front line helping separating parents to manage inter-parental conflict, RAV's participation as a key industry partner is critical to ensuring maximum impact from the research on real-world practice and outcomes. RAV researchers will contribute to all aspects of the study, including by coordinating practitioner input, translating research findings into practice implications and communicating results – leading to

referrals and recommendations for separating parents that are based on reliable information.

The use and misuse of communication technologies in post-separation parenting

Our collaborative relationship with Victoria University continued as a study of the use and misuse of communication technologies in post-separation parenting. This year, we completed the first phase of this project, which was a prevalence survey of separated parents attending RAV's FRCs about their use of 11 different kinds of technology including email, SMS, instant messenger, social networking sites, online learning and video calls.

Analysis of the data indicates that text/instant messaging is the most frequently used form of communication technology, both in general and for co-parenting, with text messages sent or received by participants daily, on average. This form of technology was considered useful for co-parenting as it was convenient and allowed for communication without requiring direct conversations or being associated with too much conflict, while also providing a record of communication.

In contrast, while social media was generally frequently used, it was considered most likely to lead to negative communication and conflict, and participants reported very little use for co-parenting purposes. This suggests that many parents are discriminating in their choice of communication technologies for co-parenting, and are able to adapt their general habits with regard to the use of technology for this purpose.

Although misuse of communication technologies was reported to be infrequent, on average, 82 per cent of participants had experienced at least one occasion of misuse in the last six

months, such as a former partner sending harassing or threatening messages via social media or text, or a former partner checking their internet use without their consent. More frequent and recent experiences of misuse were associated with greater hostility between the parents, and with the existence of an intervention order.

The data shows that experiences of misuse are strongly correlated with experiences of abusive incidents in general. In particular, some forms of communication technology misuse are indicative of, and/or enabling, jealous behaviour. This includes a former partner viewing the other former partner's social media account, tracking their internet use or taking information/images from their phone, email or social media account without their permission.

The next phase of the study will involve in-depth interviews with 20 clients to further explore experiences of communication technology misuse in the context of co-parenting. These interviews will also seek to elicit information about how the use of technology for co-parenting purposes changed when COVID-19 restrictions affected face-to-face communication.



Response services

Analysing the needs of our clients, funders and the sector

In working to achieve our Strategic Plan 2019–2023, we commenced a project to undertake a client, funding and sector analysis, to ensure that our services evolve to meet the changing needs, expectations and circumstances relating to clients, funding bodies, the community and the sector. This strategic objective is part of our goal to effectively deliver leading practice, client-centred and financially sustainable response services. The project commenced with a scoping workshop involving senior managers and key internal stakeholders, which has informed a brief that will guide research and evaluation activities.

Diverse counselling services

We offer a broad range of counselling services across Victoria, including for individuals, children, families and couples. Our focus is on working with clients to achieve positive outcomes such as child safety and wellbeing, safe, secure and respectful relationships, individual wellbeing and positive family functioning, and to foster connected communities.

Our practitioners support change by identifying needs, assessing risk, establishing engagement, building rapport and motivation, strengthening the capacity and resources of individuals and families, and informing and empowering clients with awareness, knowledge, skills and attitudes.

In addition to counselling, we offer a Prepare/Enrich pre-marriage and commitment program that provides a customised couple assessment that identifies a couple's strength and growth areas. A trained facilitator helps the couple discuss and understand the results of their assessment, and teaches them proven relationship skills.

Counselling during COVID-19

With our commitment to our vision, our services have remained accessible throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. For the safety of our clients and staff members, in late March, we transitioned our service delivery from face-to-face to telephone and video-based counselling. As our counsellors adapted their practice to working remotely, our focus remained on client confidentiality, the therapeutic relationship, supporting current and new clients during a period of great stress, uncertainty and change and the provision of effective services. Our Online Counselling Service continued to operate as a text-based, therapeutic support service.

We supported the implementation and delivery of these service models through the development of practice guidelines and manuals for practitioners, as well as resources and tips for clients.

Clinical intake pilot

In February 2020, we commenced a clinical intake system pilot at our Sunshine and Traralgon centres. The system is designed to provide clients with clinical and client-centred responses from their first telephone engagement with us. This client-focused model is designed to enhance clients' service experiences and outcomes, with experienced practitioners undertaking clinical assessments to identify callers' issues, needs, risks and safety concerns, and support them in accessing appropriate services, including through appropriate referrals. The pilot will conclude in December 2020, with a formal evaluation to measure clinical outcomes and client experiences.

99.2%
of our counselling clients were better able to deal with issues for which they sought help



Therapeutic counselling for veterans

We welcomed the opportunity to become the preferred provider of trauma-informed specialised couple counselling for Open Arms, a mental health and wellbeing support service for current and ex-serving Australian Defence Force personnel and their families. The service will commence early in the new financial year, and will involve experienced RAV couple counsellors with mental health and trauma-informed expertise providing relationship counselling to Open Arms clients. Open Arms will also provide training to RAV's practitioners working with veterans in trauma-informed ways.

RAV was established in 1948 as the Marriage Guidance Council of Victoria, in response to the challenges of the Second World War and issues facing returning servicemen and their partners. With this history and our extensive experience in delivering trauma-informed and mental health services, we are proud and well-placed to deliver this important service to support veterans who have made sacrifices for our country.

RAV is privileged to work with the East Gippsland communities that are continuing to show incredible strength, to assist them in rebuilding and recovering following the bushfires by providing relevant mental health services.

East Gippsland bushfire counselling

In response to the devastating summer bushfires in East Gippsland, RAV partnered with the Royal Flying Doctor Service to deliver a Frontline Emergency Distress and Trauma Counselling Program. A multidisciplinary clinical team delivers free and confidential therapeutic services to individuals, families and emergency service personnel affected by the bushfires in East Gippsland.

The service is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health until 30 June 2021, and is supported by contract manager Gippsland Primary Health Network (PHN), which is leading the mental health response to bushfire-affected areas of Gippsland.

Since January 2020, impacted community members have been able to access up to 10 free counselling sessions without a referral from a GP. While counselling is usually provided from locations across East Gippsland, COVID-19 restrictions resulted in the transition of appointments to telephone or video. There has been a strong uptake of these service modalities, which offer clients the flexibility of receiving services in their homes and remove the requirement to travel to attend appointments.

RAV recognises that partnerships are key to delivering relevant, effective services to these communities, and we're proud to be working with the Royal Flying Doctor Service to deliver this Counselling and Support – For People Impacted by Recent East Gippsland Bushfires service.

We are also working collaboratively with a network of services to respond to needs as they emerge, such as through our membership of the Outer Gippsland Drought and Bushfire Mental Health Wellbeing Partnership, which is planning community connection-focused activities and events when COVID-19 restrictions allow.

Drought counselling

With funding from the Victorian Government, drought-affected farming communities in Gippsland were supported with mental health and wellbeing programs. Through a partnership of local agencies, led by Gippsland Lakes Complete Health, our Traralgon centre delivered centre-based and on-farm counselling support to drought-affected individuals, couples and families, in order to support farmers who cannot leave the farm, or those who are isolated and unlikely to seek help. We also planned community fun days to enhance community connectivity, which will be held when COVID-19 restrictions allow.

Resolving parenting and property disputes

We supported separating and divorcing couples to resolve parenting and property disputes through our FDR, mediation and conciliation services. As the largest provider of federally funded family law mediation/FDR services in Victoria, we delivered services through 10 metropolitan and regional centres, including four FRCs.

FDR and FRC clients

98.6%

were better able to deal with issues they sought help for



97.2%

were satisfied with the service they received



“We have been very grateful that this service is available to us. It has made a significant difference for our family and is an integral part of our success as a separated family.”

– FDR client

“[The staff] were amazing and helped me feel a lot more at ease and confident that a fair outcome would be achieved even though I was representing myself.”

– AccessResolve Property Mediation client



Property and financial settlements at our FRCs

In July 2019, as a result of additional funding from the Women’s Economic Security Package delivered through the Australian Government Attorney-General’s Department, our four FRCs began to provide FDR for property and financial matters. With our FRCs historically providing FDR for parenting matters only, the new service helps families to achieve faster, fairer, accessible and cost-effective family law property settlements, thereby increasing their economic independence after separation.

Property FDR assists clients to establish each person’s financial needs, make decisions about how to divide property and finances and, where relevant, determine what is needed to provide for the needs and best interests of children in the family. This service is offered in addition to FDR for child and parenting matters and, through our FRCs, property FDR can be undertaken either separately or together with parenting matters.

RAV was well-placed to implement this service, as our long history of delivering property FDR in other centres has enabled us to use established models and practice experience. In keeping with the recommendations of the ‘Family Law for the Future – An Inquiry into the Family Law System’ report, we also provided additional training to enhance the skills of our FRC FDR practitioners in resolving property and financial matters.

Since its implementation, there has been significant demand for property FDR at our FRCs, with approximately 30 per cent of FRC service requests between July and December 2019 relating to property matters.

Innovative dispute resolution during the pandemic

The introduction of COVID-19 restrictions, the cessation of face-to-face services in March 2020, and the organisation’s decision to continue delivering essential FDR services resulted in a transition to innovative service delivery models. Initially, we provided all FDR appointments by telephone, with clients able to elect to attend appointments later via secure video-conferencing.

This new way of delivering FDR was supported by newly developed training materials, practice guidelines and manuals, and online resources for both practitioners and clients to assist with managing important issues such as how to maintain confidentiality, privacy and safety when services are not delivered on RAV premises.

In many cases, technology has provided functions that have supported specific FDR models, such as the use of breakout rooms to enable lawyers and clients to confer privately in legally assisted FDR before returning to joint appointments to continue negotiations.

To support FRC clients to access information they would typically gain during face-to-face information sessions, we developed digital resources including an online, introductory FDR presentation about frequently asked questions. We also commenced a project that will enable clients to virtually attend FRC information sessions, and webinars about children’s experiences of separation and the negative impact of parental conflict.

While the way in which FDR was delivered changed at RAV, the volume of service delivery has remained high, reflecting the ongoing needs of clients, and our employees’ adaptability and commitment to supporting clients.

AccessResolve Property Mediation and conciliation for the Circuit Court of Australia

For the seventh consecutive year, we delivered AccessResolve Property Mediation and conciliation on behalf of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia. The legally assisted service involves often intractable cases, which have reached court proceedings. It offers separating couples the opportunity to resolve their disputes about property and financial settlements in a safe, respectful, timely and affordable way, while avoiding further protracted and potentially expensive litigation processes.

As with our FDR services, in March 2020, as a result of COVID-19, this service transitioned to a remote service delivery model, with mediations predominantly conducted by phone, with some mediations via video-conferencing. During 2019/20, we undertook 397 mediations in 16 circuit locations across four Australian states, enabling property settlements to progress in timely and accessible ways, without requiring matters to be adjourned or postponed due to the pandemic, the availability of local services or geographical barriers.

An increase in the number of mediations undertaken this year reflects the willingness of clients to attend the service, and the expertise of the service’s qualified, skilled and experienced mediators. These include barristers and former judges who deliver effective mediation and conciliation services both in-person and remotely.

397
AccessResolve
property mediations
and conciliations



“I just really needed someone to talk to and you helped me see what was going on and that it was not my fault.”

– Family Safety Contact Service client

Working with people impacted by family violence

We remained committed to enhancing the safety of women and children experiencing, or recovering, from family violence by providing support to victim-survivors and programs to men who use violence, including during COVID-19.

RAV acknowledges the government departments that fund our family violence programs: the DHHS, – Family Safety Victoria, the Victorian Government Department of Justice and Community Safety, and the Magistrates’ Court of Victoria.

Programs for men

As one of the largest providers of MBCPs in Victoria, we delivered more than 50 programs to approximately 900 men who use violence and support their affected family members, from five centres and an additional six outreach locations in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria.

Our 20-week programs offer men who have chosen to attend, or are court-mandated to do so, a respectful space to review their lives and become better able to develop and maintain healthy, safe and equal relationships. The programs hold men accountable for their behaviour, challenging them to think differently about their relationships, behaviours and attitudes. They support men to practise new, healthy behaviours in relationships.

Our Men’s Case Management Program offers individual support to men who have complex needs such as drug and alcohol misuse, mental and physical health issues and homelessness to increase the safety of victim-survivors. The program aims to reduce the impact of these issues by actively referring men into specialist services, such as drug and alcohol services. At the same time, we assist men to better understand

the impact of their violence on their partner and children. Men who engage in this program can achieve positive outcomes for both themselves and their families by reducing harm to women and children, and becoming the people they want and leading the lives they want in caring, respectful relationships.

At the heart of our work: The safety of women and children

The safety of women and children lies at the heart of our organisation and our Family Safety Contact Service is a critical component of our work. Through this service, our family safety practitioners offer regular telephone or face-to-face support to the partners or former partners of men who are engaged in our MBCPs and case management program. We also support clients accessing our FDR services through our Family Safety Navigation Program (see page 31). We contact women to monitor what is happening in their lives, including the current violence by their partners, and the effects of the violence on them and their children.

Our family violence staff have skills and expertise in assessing the levels of risks to these women. They support them in developing safety plans and accessing other services such as specialist women’s family violence crisis and accommodation services. Our family violence teams are also embedded in the local response to family violence system, and for women experiencing high levels of risk, we work closely with police, child protection and other specialist family violence services to keep women and children safe.

“I can finally talk about everything and know that someone else understands and believes me.”

– Family Safety Contact Service client

Adapting services during COVID-19

As the transmission of COVID-19 began to increase overseas and in Australia, RAV observed the impact of the virus and the associated lockdowns. We also carefully monitored the growing concerns about the increasing frequency and severity of family violence experiences of adult and child victim-survivors overseas. As a result, when COVID-19 restrictions triggered the suspension of face-to-face individual and group family violence services in March, we were well-placed to transition our service delivery approaches. We developed and implemented a Telephone Holding Model for men who use violence, and an enhanced model of telephone support to victim-survivors based on our existing Family Safety Model. We delivered this to 360 men and 260 partners who were using, or due to start using, our services.

We also worked to provide perpetrator interventions and, where appropriate, comprehensive telephone risk assessments for men who would otherwise be seeking an MBCP, in line with advice from Family Safety Victoria and No to Violence, to maintain engagement with men seeking support to reduce their use of violence or controlling behaviours towards women and/or children.

Of critical importance was our agility and timely communication to clients to ensure they were aware that we were still open and providing continued support and contact through the pandemic.

The Telephone Holding Model’s development was informed by feedback from MBCP participants gained through interviews, consultations with RAV family violence practitioners, and discussions with our funding and peak bodies.

“It’s been really positive to see some men connect during their group sessions and keep in touch with each other by phone during isolation. This has meant they could continue to support each other through their journey of change.”

– Family Violence Coordinator on the Telephone Holding Model

93.8%



of MBCP participants stayed in contact with family violence practitioners through our Telephone Holding Model

With both men and women, we schedule weekly telephone calls to ensure we maintain visibility of the men, and provide ongoing services and support, including strategies for men to manage their behaviour and avoid using family violence.

The regular contact also enables ongoing assessment and management of risk through the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, and reports to the police and child protection if the levels of violence increase, as well as safety planning and support for women and children. Throughout COVID-19, we have seen a remarkable level of engagement of men, with over 93 per cent of men staying in contact with our family violence practitioners.

Feedback from our practitioners indicates that while men miss attending group sessions, they have responded positively to the new weekly telephone support option, which has offered RAV the opportunity to work more deeply with men than was sometimes possible during group sessions. We will continue to monitor the outcomes of this model and integrate learnings into future service delivery.

Of equal importance was our commitment to check in more frequently with women who were partners or former partners of male family violence service clients. Social distancing and restrictions often resulted in these women and their children being in the same home with their partner for extended periods of time, without respite from the violence. Some women indicated that the regular telephone calls with RAV were often their only engagement outside their household, highlighting the critical importance of the contact in providing a space for them to talk about how they were coping and know that help was available.

Helping women recover from family violence

This year we reviewed and redeveloped our Opening the Doors group program for women who are experiencing or have previously experienced family violence. The program explores coercive control as a pattern that emotionally ‘captures’ women, and keeps women and children feeling trapped in relationships involving abuse and violence. Over time, this abuse pattern impacts daily freedom as affected family members alter their activities and decisions to safeguard their emotional and physical safety.

Opening the Doors helps participants to heal by sharing and listening to each other’s stories. This enables a deeper understanding of psychological abuse, which is often the beginning of the abuse dynamic, and it provides the opportunity to make sense of, and move forward from, experiences of abuse. It focuses on providing information to affirm that violence and abuse are occurring, and that an abusive relationship is not equal or healthy in the long term.

The program’s primary goal is to strengthen emotional resilience so that women begin to heal, learn how to ‘see the red flags’ to avoid entering another abusive set of circumstances in the future, and disconnect from an abuser or navigate an abuser’s changing behaviour as a result of an MBCP.

Every session has a strong focus on risk assessment and safety planning, and explores women’s resilience and existing strengths, while providing much needed information about the dynamics and effects of domestic abuse on emotional and physical wellbeing, as well as details about the court and justice system.

Mental health support for children and young people

In early 2020, we welcomed the announcement of our success in tendering to establish and deliver a new headspace satellite in Sale.

As with our existing headspace centres in Bairnsdale and Wonthaggi, the centre will provide young people aged 12–25 with a range of confidential and free, or low cost services related to, physical and mental health, wellbeing, work and study. It will also provide drug and alcohol support services.

Recognising the importance of young people being actively involved in designing and operating headspace services, our Bairnsdale and Wonthaggi centres both have an active Youth Advisory Group (YAG). This group of young people with diverse experiences and unique perspectives meets regularly to discuss and contribute ideas to the services, and provide advice on, and advocate for, the needs of young people in local communities. The groups inform both the operational and strategic visions and directions of the centres, to ensure services are accessible and inclusive.

All headspace services are funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, with administration of RAV’s headspace funding carried out by Gippsland PHN.

“I can’t get over how my daughter came home after her appointment. She was feeling so much happier than what she has been in recent weeks.”

– Parent of headspace Bairnsdale client

headspace Bairnsdale

Since 2017, headspace Bairnsdale’s experienced clinicians, administration and community engagement staff have worked to increase mental health literacy, reduce stigma, encourage early help-seeking and promote access by young people to mental health supports. The centre provides counselling, health promotion workshops and events, social support and other groups, and parenting programs. Staff from other local community organisations also co-locate within the centre to deliver child and adolescent psychiatry, drug and alcohol, disability, employment, Centrelink support and allied health services, including exercise physiology and dietetics.

This year we implemented an enhanced inclusive practice to engage family and friends of young people in support plans and care. This approach can assist in achieving improved outcomes for young people, including improved mental health and enhanced relationships with the young person’s family.

As part of our Community Awareness and Engagement Plan, we undertook 37 health promotion workshops and events within the community and schools, and strengthened our strong relationships with young people, parents, carers, school welfare teams and community services. In collaboration with local services and agencies, we undertook a range of activities, including a day trip to Buchan Caves to mark headspace Day. We also co-hosted an inaugural headspace Round with two local football and netball clubs, which included workshops for coaches, committee members and senior players on youth mental health and how to better support young people in their respective clubs and associations.

Our Games Groups for young people with autism spectrum disorder grew

significantly this year, with the introduction of weekly groups for different age groups. We also continued to deliver our well-attended and positively received LGBTIQ+ support group, Unique But United (U.B.U), and our Tuning in to Teens parenting program.

headspace Bairnsdale and the mental health of young people was significantly impacted during the year as a result of not only COVID-19, but the devastating summer bushfires in East Gippsland. We continued to provide services during the bushfires and, with additional funding from Gippsland PHN, we expanded our outreach model. This enabled us to deliver health promotion, youth engagement, one-on-one clinical support and therapeutic group support, and to engage with local secondary schools and community facilities in smaller Gippsland communities including Orbost, Swifts Creek, Buchan, Cann River and Mallacoota.

As a result of COVID-19 restrictions, we transitioned to video and telephone-based support, with feedback indicating that many of our clients found it easier to talk about their experiences using these modalities, with a decrease in the number of clients not attending scheduled appointments.

Another significant achievement was the centre’s successful assessment against the headspace National Office Model Integrity Framework, which details the 16 core components of the headspace service model. Evidence of these components must be provided by all headspace centres in order to achieve Framework certification, which demonstrates that the centre is effectively delivering services and can continue to provide high-quality services for young people under a renewed headspace Trademark Licence Deed. Key elements of the

assessment included youth participation in service design community awareness and engagement strategy effectiveness, the provision of the four key streams of service, and the design and delivery of inclusive, accessible and youth-appropriate services.

During the year, we were also saddened by the death of headspace Bairnsdale Independent Chair, Dr Deb Foskey, who ably led the headspace Bairnsdale consortium.

headspace Bairnsdale is operated through a consortium of local service providers. These are the Latrobe Regional Hospital, Australian Community Support Organisation, Gippsland Lakes Complete Health, Australian Personnel Management, Moogji Aboriginal Council East Gippsland and Within Australia. This year, the consortium warmly welcomed additional Sale-based members – Youth Support and Advocacy Service, Wellington Shire Council, Youth Insearch, Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault and Quantum Support Services.

headspace Wonthaggi

During 2019/20, headspace Wonthaggi marked one year of service provision to young people in South Gippsland and Bass Coast. The centre’s services are delivered through a main centre in Wonthaggi and five outreach locations. This year, we established the Korumburra and Cowes outreach locations, joining the outreach locations already in operation in Foster, Leongatha and Wonthaggi. The outreach services are delivered in partnership with South Gippsland Hospital, Leongatha Healthcare Pty Ltd, Wonthaggi Medical Group, Korumburra Medical Centre and Bass Coast Health at the Phillip Island Health Hub, with four of the outreach services co-locating with established Youth Assist and Access Clinics.



“[It’s] a wonderful place to receive support and link with other services. The staff are exceptionally lovely and it’s really nice to be part of this wonderful place!”

– headspace Wonthaggi client

We also introduced a weekly GP clinic in 2019/20, which is provided in partnership with consortium agency Wonthaggi Medical Group. The clinic enables young people to access bulk-billed GP services, and offers a continuity of care that supports young people’s physical and mental health needs.

In term 1 of 2020, headspace Wonthaggi began providing a weekly Games Group and a therapy Art Group, which offer young people the opportunity to meet regularly and work to address their needs alongside other young people and headspace staff, in a safe and supported environment.

headspace Wonthaggi staff underwent training in delivering RAV’s “I like, like you” program (see page 29), which will enable the centre to deliver the program locally, with the aim of engaging with young people, increasing awareness of headspace services, promoting healthy, respectful relationships and encouraging participation on the YAG.

As in Bairnsdale, in response to COVID-19, headspace Wonthaggi began providing telehealth appointments via digital/screen and telephone, to ensure that young people remained safe and connected, and could access ongoing support. Young people reported the new modality helped to overcome transport and geographical barriers, and reduced anxiety associated with attending in-person appointments. For the centre’s YAG during COVID-19, meeting weekly via video-conferencing enabled ongoing connection to the service, and provided a safe and friendly space to engage with peers during restrictions.

headspace Wonthaggi is operated with the support of 13 consortium partners who form the headspace Wonthaggi Consortium. They are Wellways, Latrobe Regional Hospital, Australian Community Support Organisation, Bass Coast Health, Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault, Quantum Support Services Victorian Government Department of Education, Youth Support and Advocacy Service, Australian Personnel Management, South Gippsland Hospital, Wonthaggi Medical Group, Leongatha Healthcare Pty Ltd and Korumburra Medical Centre.

headspace Sale

RAV was delighted to be selected as the lead agency for headspace Sale, a satellite service under parent centre headspace Bairnsdale – which will enhance RAV’s capacity to deliver youth mental health services in Gippsland.

Providing services three days a week, headspace Sale will deliver all four core streams of headspace services in partnership with members of the headspace Bairnsdale Consortium.

In working to establish the centre and its services, RAV worked closely with the Wellington Shire Youth Councillors, who represent the views and needs of local young people and are providing valuable input to the satellite until a YAG is engaged.

The local community recognised the need and advocated for the satellite’s establishment, and RAV looks forward to supporting and working with local communities once headspace Sale opens in the second half of 2020.

“I can help people my age (older and younger) and go somewhere where I feel I belong.”

– headspace Wonthaggi YAG member

“Having a headspace in Sale will deliver greatly needed and appreciated services to the young people in Wellington shire. We are super excited to see this happen!”

– Wellington Shire Youth Councillor

Across headspace Wonthaggi and Bairnsdale:

787

young people used individual services



26.4%

of young people identified as LGBTIQA+



3795

occasions of service





i-Connect

Since 2014, RAV has been delivering i-Connect, an early intervention family mental health support service for children and young people under 18 years of age in East Gippsland. Funded by the DSS, i-Connect uses a strengths-based model to provide therapeutic case management to clients to support them in their achievements within education, physical, personal, community and safety key goal areas.

This year, bushfires resulted in communities across the region being evacuated numerous times, and small towns and family homes being lost. The immediate impacts prevented residents from knowing if family and friends were safe, and from returning home for extended periods of time. In the longer-term, many in these communities are still seeking permanent housing, and rebuilding their properties and lives.

The challenges and trauma caused by the fires, particularly relating to accommodation and access to technology, have been intensified by COVID-19 due to stay-at-home and learning-from-home requirements. We worked to swiftly adapt our service model in response to both crises to ensure the increased demand that we experienced for our services were met in timely and appropriate ways.

294



children and young people supported through i-Connect

During COVID-19, i-Connect services have predominantly been delivered to young people by video or telephone, often with the attendance and active involvement of a parent. This participation enables parents to assist children and young people in implementing strategies and tools, including schoolwork aids and sensory tools in between sessions. It helps parents to learn how to work with their child to address behaviour and emotional changes as a result of their recent experiences of trauma.

i-Connect's brokerage funding has also enabled the service to provide children and young people who lost their homes in the fires with basic items such as colouring books, pencils, bike helmets and fishing rods. These simple yet fundamental items can help to reduce stress and support trauma recovery by allowing children to enjoy wellbeing activities, and connect with family and friends in indoor and outdoor environments.

During the year, i-Connect successfully engaged with local schools to facilitate two new and engaging programs. The first program was designed to promote teamwork, innovation and adaptability through the design and development of billy carts. A second program to research, design and build a chicken coop enclosure, worm farm and herb garden was facilitated with children transitioning to the school, to encourage positive speech and respectful relationships, recognition of peer contributions and celebration of common goals.

We have also developed a six-week, trauma-informed therapeutic group program for primary school students that, once COVID-19 restrictions allow, will provide practical skills and address the impact of the fires on wellbeing.

Specialist services

Counselling and Support – For People Affected by the Disability Royal Commission

In November 2019, RAV was notified of its success in tendering to provide a new service; Counselling and Support – For People Affected by the Disability Royal Commission.

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability is investigating the following:

- preventing and better protecting people with disability from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation;
- achieving best practice in reporting, investigating and responding to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability;
- promoting a more inclusive society that supports people with disability to be independent and live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Source: Commonwealth of Australia (2020) Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. Licensed under Creative Commons CC BY 4.0. Retrieved from <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au>.

Our state-wide service provides important emotional support to anyone affected by the Disability Royal Commission, including people with disability, their carers, family, friends, career, allies and support workers. The service provides information about the Royal Commission with help to decide whether to make a submission. There's also information about counselling to manage the impacts of trauma from violence and abuse, as well as assistance to access Royal Commission-specific and other community services.

Using a model of trauma-informed care and trauma therapy approaches to counselling and case management,

“You are my biggest champion, and help me to see how far I’ve come, and how much I’ve achieved.”

– Counselling and Support – For People Affected by the Disability Royal Commission client

“The support you have offered me over the last year has been a life saver, and I would not be here without it.”

– Forced Adoption Support Service client

the team works with people with physical, intellectual, psychosocial and sensory impairments.

In consultation with a Monash University Research Fellow, RAV developed the service model following research into best practices for supporting people with disability who have experienced trauma from violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect.

Recognising the importance of accessible and timely services, in December 2019 we initially introduced a telephone-based service before implementing our full service in February 2020, which incorporates face-to-face, telephone, video, email and other online modalities.

Our intake model aligns with best-practice findings from past Royal Commissions and has been developed as a result of our extensive experience providing other Royal Commission and senate inquiry-related services. It enables people to speak with a counsellor and provides skilled, trauma-informed engagement from first contact.

We transitioned smoothly and quickly to providing video and telephone counselling and support during COVID-19, as well as video-based stakeholder presentations. Many people with disability have been significantly impacted by the pandemic, due to increased social isolation and limited access to support services such as in-home support. As a result, we have increased support to individual clients during this challenging time.

Consulting with people with lived experience of disability and abuse, and relevant stakeholder groups is central to our stakeholder

engagement and consultation processes and awareness initiatives. To date, we have identified over 120 relevant stakeholders, including professionals in health, disability, mental health, advocacy and community services who will be engaged to enhance awareness of our service by the diverse range of client groups eligible to access support.

Forced Adoption Support Service

RAV's Forced Adoption Support Service provides free and confidential assistance to people affected by past forced adoption policies and practices. After a formal apology from the Australian Government in 2013, the service was introduced in recognition of a need for specialised support for the people affected, inclusive of mothers, fathers, adopted people and other family members.

Our service offers trauma-informed counselling, and emotional support and education about the impacts of trauma that can be consequences of the impacts of historical forced adoption. We also provide therapeutic case management, advice, advocacy and support regarding adoption-related issues, as well as support searching for records and family members who have been separated as a result of forced adoption.

The provision of counselling, which was new to the service this year, is now a core client support option. It was introduced following a review of client feedback and their most important needs, and changes to our funding guidelines. During the year, our practitioners received training in contemporary, best-practice trauma-informed practice to ensure delivery of safe, supportive and effective counselling. Many of our clients have responded positively to this shift in

service focus, with feedback that the service has greatly enhanced our capacity to meet clients' needs in addressing the emotional, psychological and interpersonal impacts of forced adoption.

Additionally, in response to client feedback, we changed the name of our service to the simple but clear Forced Adoption Support Service. Client feedback also informed our submission responding to the terms of reference for the Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoptions in Victoria (see page 10).

We continued our Small Grants Program this year, funding four projects for forced adoption stakeholder groups in Victoria. The grants provided for mental health, self-care, LGBTIQ+ training for staff, Writing as Therapy Workshops for adopted people and natural parents, a national network to bring mothers affected by forced adoption together from different states and creative workshops for mothers.

Also, this year our practitioners provided training for more than 40 staff and volunteers of the Geelong National Wool Museum, which hosted the 'Without Consent: Australia's Past Adoption Practices' exhibition. Training topics included the impacts of forced adoption, how people attending the exhibit may be affected and how to respond to people displaying signs of distress.

The onset of COVID-19 and the related restrictions significantly impacted some of our clients by exacerbating existing challenges including social isolation, family violence, chronic physical health issues, mental health issues and suicidal ideation. This resulted in increased support needs. As a state-wide service that already supports clients in regional and rural areas, we were well-placed to transition to our alternative online and telephone service delivery modalities.



Our Counselling and Support – For People Affected by the Disability Royal Commission service, Forced Adoption Support Service and Redress Support Services are funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. Go to www.dss.gov.au for more information.

Redress Support Services

Our specialist Redress Support Services continued to support people in Victoria affected by the National Redress Scheme through trauma-informed counselling, information and appropriate referrals, and assistance writing applications. We provide medium to long-term support before, during and after submitting an application to the scheme.

The scheme was established following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, with the aim of providing victim-survivors of institutional child sexual abuse with access to monetary acknowledgements, funding for counselling and direct personal responses from the responsible institutions.

Redress Support Services clients

93.7%

felt listened to and understood

90.5%

were better able to deal with issues for which they sought help

95.2%

were satisfied with the service

“Without this organisation I don’t know where I would be. They have provided me with a range of strategies and techniques to cope; they helped me to fill out all the Redress forms and provided me with support throughout this process.”

– Redress Support Services client

The 2019/20 year was one of growth for our service, as a result of increased service demand, including as a result of COVID-19, and additional funding that enabled broader geographical reach to regional areas and additional counselling services. The Redress team also worked flexibly to respond to the challenges of COVID-19, providing ongoing and accessible services throughout the pandemic.

We witnessed the significant positive impacts for clients of having their applications to the scheme reviewed and approved, resulting in both monetary payments and written acknowledgements of the sexual abuse perpetrated against them. Such outcomes have provided clients with healing, validation and empowerment, and helped them to achieve a long-awaited sense of societal recognition of the institutional sexual abuse that had so often been silenced in the past.

The scheme is also associated with significant barriers and challenges. With this knowledge, and of clients’ needs and experiences, we welcomed the opportunity to provide a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the Implementation of the National Redress Scheme (see page 11).

We understand that the emotional, psychological and social impacts of traumatic sexual abuse continue to impact our clients, often daily. As part of our commitment to continuous improvement and client-focused service delivery, we undertook regular practice reflection to ensure our services continue to meet the needs of our clients. As a result, this year we enhanced our focus on trauma-informed therapeutic counselling, based on evidence and best-practice expertise for responding to trauma symptoms. Our specialist team utilises psycho-education, practical nervous system, emotional grounding and calming techniques, and provides clients with strategies to manage impacts such as flashbacks, nightmares and dissociation.

Open Place

Following a competitive tender process in April 2020, the DHHS announced that from 1 July 2020, RAV would be the new provider of Open Place. Open Place is a specialist support and advocacy service for people who as children were in Victorian institutional out-of-home care including children’s homes, orphanages and other residential facilities prior to 1990. People accessing this service often identify and refer to themselves as Forgotten Australians or Pre-1990 Care Leavers.

In 2004, it was estimated 500,000 children in Australia lived under these circumstances and, sadly, many were abused and neglected.¹ Open Place was established in 2010 to help Forgotten Australians deal with the legacy of their childhood experiences, and to improve their health and wellbeing through a range of services. These services have grown to include assistance with record searching, including for family members; counselling; coordinated support; support with applications to the National Redress Scheme; a drop-in centre and activities in Richmond; community education; and monthly social support groups in various city and regional locations across Victoria. A capped brokerage fund also assists people with their medical, health, dental, optical and other unmet needs.

Our organisation has a long history of involvement with Open Place. We supported the original provider’s tender to deliver the service, and were involved in the original governance of the program. We also provided counselling to some Open Place service users. We are honoured to have been awarded the ongoing management and delivery of Open Place following a decision by Berry Street Victoria to cease operations. We are mindful of the responsibility to work collaboratively to provide service users with specialist supports to address the lifelong impact of their care experiences.

¹Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children (2004).

“We recognise that the impacts of childhood trauma are lifelong, and we’re committed to ensuring that Open Place services remain accessible, safe and timely for service users.”

– Dr Andrew Bickerdike, CEO

Throughout the final months of the 2019/20 financial year, we undertook significant preparations for Open Place to commence as a RAV service. This included recruitment of 22 existing Open Place staff to RAV, building works to the drop-in centre in Richmond, service delivery planning, and preparations across the domains of information, communication and technology, practice quality, communications and marketing, HR, asset and operations management.

In assuming the management of Open Place, RAV has committed to a ‘business as usual’ model of service delivery. Our focus has been on facilitating a smooth process for both staff and clients, and on ensuring that clients continue to receive services safely and in a timely manner. We planned for 1 July, to mark the significant milestones of Open Place being operated by a new provider, and 10 years since service delivery commenced. We look forward to working and consulting with Open Place staff, service users, Forgotten Australians and stakeholders, and to incorporating their feedback about the program and opportunities for the future.

Open Place is funded by both the DHHS and the DSS.

Healthy co-parenting after separation

Many of our RAV centres and FRCs provided Parenting After Separation and Post-Separation Parenting groups to support parents in having workable co-parenting relationships after separation, and help their children adapt to separation and divorce.

The psycho-educational groups cover topics including the impact of separation and divorce on children, adjustment processes, ways to support children, parenting styles and communication with children. The groups also provide tried-and-true strategies for managing conflict, harmonious and healthy co-parenting and honest communication with the other parent, informed by the children’s best interests. The

interactive groups are suitable for all parents who are separated and meet the requirements for court orders.

Our traditional face-to-face program is being developed into a hybrid online model involving self-paced modules and an interactive, facilitated webinar. This online learning approach will enable clients to work through materials at their own pace while having the opportunity to learn and ask questions of skilled RAV practitioners. The online program, which will be launched early in the new financial year, will be a convenient, accessible, confidential and safe way for parents to gain important knowledge and skills.

Supporting workplaces and employees

Throughout the year, our Workplace Support Services and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) supported employees from over 40 workplaces from a diverse range of sectors and industries. COVID-19 was associated with an increased demand for EAP support, as workplaces sought to support their employees during the unprecedented circumstances. Demand for support was particularly strong from smaller businesses and organisations including the not-for-profit, real estate, education, manufacturing and community sectors.

The social and economic impacts of COVID-19, including stay-at-home restrictions, increased social isolation, and the ongoing uncertainty and anxiety related to the pandemic, impacted the mental and physical health, productivity and finances of many employees. Stress and anxiety were frequently reported as reasons for seeking help. We also provided assistance for issues related to social connectedness and support, with these issues often exacerbated by challenges associated with working from home. These challenges included technical difficulties, increased workloads and less frequent contact with, and support and direction from employers.

32.2%

increase in EAP sessions in 2019/20

Positively, working from home arrangements and the availability of our services via telephone and video-conferencing often increased the accessibility of our services for clients, as online service delivery negated the need to take time off work to travel to a RAV centre.

With working remotely likely to continue to be far more prevalent going forward than it has been in the past, we will continue to offer our EAP service via telephone and video-conferencing. We are also mindful of the ongoing importance of our program in supporting employees and employers working remotely, or otherwise, in the future, and will review our services and delivery modalities to ensure they continue to meet the changing needs of employees and workplaces.

EAP client needs





Evaluating our response services

We are committed to providing leading practice and delivering high-quality, evidence-informed and effective services. We undertake a broad range of evaluation and feedback activities to evaluate the effectiveness and outcomes of our response services, ensure we meet the needs of our clients, achieve our service goals and identify opportunities for practice improvement.

SCORE

More than 4,600 counselling, FDR and FRC clients responded to the Standard Client/Community Outcomes Reporting (SCORE), a measure of the impact of services on clients' lives developed by the DSS. Results indicated significant positive outcomes for clients, and high client satisfaction rates of more than 97 per cent across all three services. Notably, 99 per cent of clients were better able to deal with the issues they sought help with.

FDR most significant change evaluation

We undertook a process to use the Most Significant Change technique to evaluate the impact of our FDR service for clients. This form of participatory monitoring and evaluation is used to evaluate highly individualised services with complex, diverse and emerging outcomes. A participatory workshop enabled senior practitioners to reflect on and incorporate clients' FDR experiences and perspectives, and provided the opportunity to enhance their ongoing consideration of the impacts and desired outcomes of FDR.

The process highlighted that the most significant outcome of FDR for clients is improved communication, which aligns with one of the key outcomes of the FDR program logic. Regardless of whether FDR results in the resolution of a dispute, an important outcome of the service is clients' understanding of the next steps and how to move forward in reaching agreements, even if this involves pursuing legal processes. FDR also helps clients to clarify and eliminate options, and gives a sense of agency and control over the process.

COVID-19 counselling and FDR survey

In April and May 2020, we surveyed clients in our counselling and FDR services about the impact of COVID-19 on family and household relationships, as well as the satisfaction and outcomes of the service received – particularly with respect to the telephone and video service modalities used during the pandemic.

The survey revealed that COVID-19 had negatively impacted family or household relationships for the majority of respondents. For most clients, these impacts were significant across the areas of home schooling, isolation and loneliness, contact with children, grandchildren and others, finances and family or relationship tensions. Positively, almost one in five counselling clients reported that there were positive impacts as a result of COVID-19, including improved relationships as a result of increased time spent together.

The online or telephone modalities were associated with strong service satisfaction, with over 82 per cent of FDR and 88 per cent of counselling clients reporting that their practitioner listened to them and understood their issues. More than 87 per cent of counselling clients reported that they were satisfied with the service they received.

Qualitative responses demonstrated that most participants were satisfied with receiving services via telephone or video, with close to a third of counselling clients and half of FDR clients reporting that they would prefer such services over face-to-face appointments in future. FDR clients reported that these modalities were convenient, accessible and provided additional feelings of safety as clients did not need to be in the same location as their former partner.

Client feedback obtained through both surveys will be used to inform future service delivery and practice improvements.

87.1%
of counselling clients were satisfied with the telephone or video service they received during COVID-19

“It suited as my former husband and I weren't in the same space, but still had the opportunity to discuss issues. It was better than face-to-face.”

– Telephone FDR client

“It has helped practitioners understand, in a deeper way, the importance of learnings from feedback.”

– Senior FDR Practitioner on the Most Significant Change technique

AccessResolve Property Mediation

We also continued evaluating our AccessResolve Property Mediation and conciliation service, with clients of the service invited to complete a brief questionnaire exploring their experience and satisfaction with the service.

Clients demonstrated strong satisfaction with the service, particularly in relation to questions reflecting the skills of the mediators, such as whether the mediator offered helpful information and advice or was impartial and even-handed. More than three-quarters of respondents also reported experiences of abuse by their ex-partner.

As part of the ongoing mixed-method evaluation project, clients will be interviewed about the benefits of the service and their experiences of mediations conducted during COVID-19. Collectively, this data will enable identification of opportunities for service improvements, and comparisons of recent client experiences against face-to-face service modalities, which will guide decisions regarding the use of technology in the future.

Since the evaluation project began in April 2019, over 78 per cent of participants have achieved a settlement, which is notable given the litigious background of many cases.

AccessResolve Property Mediation clients

90.0% 
found their mediator to be impartial and even-handed

98.3% 
reported that their mediator offered helpful information and advice





Prevention services

Supporting fathers across Australia

The Support for Fathers project aims to support young men and fathers in their role as parents and partners, with the outcome of increased men's involvement in gender equality and reduced violence. We provide men with information and options about fatherhood, their relationship with their partner and connecting with their kids. We also assist support services to work with dads and families more thoughtfully by providing a toolkit to engage dads.

The project commenced in 2018, and is being delivered by RAV collaboratively with input from the RA federation of state and territory organisations, and with funding from the DSS as part of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*. We were pleased to be notified this year of an extension of this funding, which enables the project to continue until August 2021.

Following an initial roadshow and national survey to engage with dads, families and professionals, we officially launched a website and resources, in December 2019, dedicated to supporting fathers across Australia. The Support for Fathers website provides free information, advice and resources designed specifically for dads on topics including the different types of dads, healthy family relationships, bonding with kids, connecting with other dads and dads at work. It also includes a toolkit for professionals who work with fathers and families.

A family-friendly launch was attended by Mr Peter Khalil MP, Member for Wills; professionals and services working with fathers and

families; local dads and families, and their children; and staff and students from Belle Vue Park Primary School in Glenroy, where the event was held. In addition to the formal proceedings, attendees enjoyed a morning tea, show bags, and arts and crafts activities.

To promote the new website and resources, we undertook a second national roadshow to deliver community workshops for dads, and free workplace training sessions to professionals working in support services including councils, schools, community organisations and health services. To maximise awareness and engagement with the resources, the sessions were focused on both metropolitan and remote areas of Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia. Further sessions were planned for Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory until COVID-19 impacted face-to-face delivery opportunities.

Consequently, we transitioned our face-to-face professionals' sessions to a free, introductory, three-part webinar series, and commenced development of additional online webinars for professionals that will further explore the resources and toolkit in order to support enhanced engagement and support of fathers in the service sectors.

We welcomed opportunities to present at both the Family Relationships Services Australia Conference on how different types of dads can impact family violence, and at the online Australian Fatherhood Research Symposium on dads working from home during COVID-19.

Support for Fathers project

633

professionals attended 22 face-to-face workplace training sessions



439

professionals from over 200 organisations and support services attended an online webinar



“We recognise that fathers are crucially important in the roles of parenting and that they make unique contributions to children’s growth and wellbeing.”

– Dr Andrew Bickerdike

“Dads are realising that they are not limited to being one single ‘type’ of dad, such as the breadwinner, and they’re excited to talk and think about the sorts of fathers they want to be with their children in the future.”

– Dom Alford, Support for Fathers Coordinator

Pictured: Mr Dom Alford (Support for Fathers Project Coordinator), Dr Andrew Bickerdike (CEO), Mr Peter Khalil MP (Federal Member for Wills, Victoria) and Mr Paul Kenna (Principal, Belle Vue Park Primary School).

Family violence prevention in schools

"I like, like you" is our healthy relationship and mental health, and family violence prevention program for primary and secondary students. Based on the principle of gender equity, it was developed by RAV in 2014. It's designed to provide, enhance and reinforce a whole-of-school approach and curriculum to prevent gender-based violence and build respectful relationships. "I like, like you" incorporates workshops for parents and teachers delivered before student sessions, so that parents and teachers can reinforce and support the student learnings.

The program can be modified on a school-by-school basis to meet the development, cognitive, social emotional, cultural, school-context and gender-based presenting needs of schools. This year, we tailored the program for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including for young women at an Islamic school. As a result of COVID-19, we also adapted the program to enable it to be co-facilitated live via video to school students who are learning remotely.

early matters for healthy family relationships

We worked to promote and strengthen healthy and safe family relationships in specific areas of Ballarat and Sunshine through our early matters program. The program logic is based on the premise that primary prevention is integral to promoting healthy relationships, mental and emotional wellbeing, and preventing family violence, and that early intervention provides vulnerable families the opportunity to intervene early without stigma. The program aims to improve child wellbeing and early development, enhance parental confidence and skills, improve family functioning and prevent family violence.

With funding from the DSS, early matters delivers a range of evidenced-informed primary prevention and group programs, which are targeted at critical transition points for parents and children. These programs draw on evidence about risk and protective factors, program delivery and implementation, and are provided in universal settings such as kindergartens, schools, hospitals, and maternal and child health centres. Families are further supported through our early intervention Home Visiting Service, which provides families with one-to-one, short-term intensive support for parenting challenges.

1055

"I like, like you" participants



"The students have been considering their boundaries and values. They are getting good at identifying their needs and asking for help."

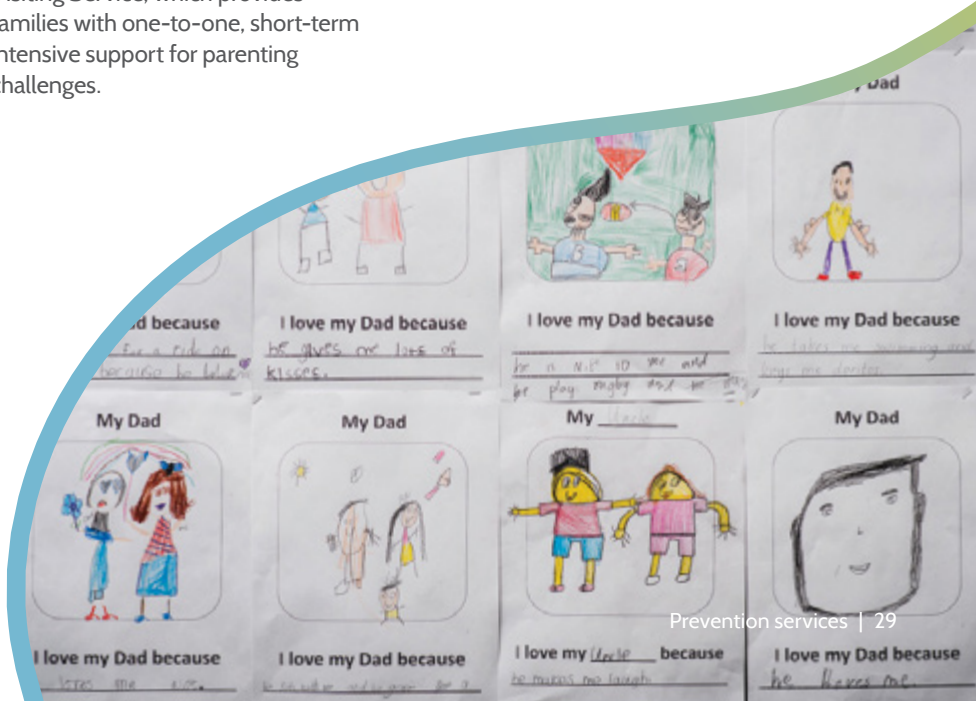
- Teacher of students participating in "I like, like you"

"I will be more aware of my emotions and calm down so as not to impact a relationship."

- "I like, like you" student participant

1332

early matters clients



As a predominantly face-to-face service, the onset of COVID-19 proved challenging for early matters and our clients. We understood, however, that the pandemic would exacerbate the needs of vulnerable families and communities, so we worked to quickly transition to telephone or video-based modalities where possible, with online evaluations implemented to allow ongoing collection of information about client outcomes and service experience.

One of the programs we modified was our weekly, two-hour Tuning in to Kids™ group sessions, which were altered to involve a one-hour, group video session followed by an individual telephone session with a facilitator for each parent or couple. This one-to-one phone call supports participants in integrating their program learnings and applying them to their unique family circumstances and challenges, including those arising from the COVID-19 crisis. It also enables clients to share their week's parenting successes and challenges in a structured way, which enables the facilitator to make appropriate referrals and tailor future program materials to clients' needs and circumstances. Clients also receive weekly emails with resources and suggested strategies to try before the next session.

Run in collaboration with the City of Ballarat – Maternal and Child Health services, we also provided ATTUNEplus as part of existing six-week new parents groups. The session, which was delivered online in 2020, focuses on changes in parents' relationships following the birth of their baby, expectations of parenting, family violence and parents' connection with their infant.

Client feedback indicates that the online delivery of ATTUNEplus has helped to better engage fathers and that participants are more at ease than during face-to-face sessions. Online delivery has also provided greater convenience for participants, as we've been able to trial groups on different days and at different times, and clients can virtually attend groups that are delivered outside their local area without needing to travel. This is particularly important in rural areas, where group attendance is traditionally lower due to concerns about a lack of anonymity and the stigma of attending parenting groups.

The overwhelmingly positive feedback, in conjunction with evidence of strong client engagement, reduced group withdrawals, and strong evaluation data (see page 33), has resulted in a decision to continue to provide online group programs even when face-to-face groups can resume.

Originally funded by the DSS as a five-year pilot service, funding for early matters was this year extended for 12 months until 30 June 2021.

“I find the one-hour group session combined with the one-on-one phone call is working well, and I am so glad you all made it happen in this difficult time.”

– early matters Tuning in to Kids participant

“Session was valuable. I have found that we have concentrated mainly on the baby and caring for the baby so far. This session has helped us to think about ourselves/ our relationship and how that can have an effect on the baby.”

– early matters ATTUNEplus participant



Our Family Safety Navigation Program's Family Safety Practitioners offer professional, timely and consistent support over the phone or face-to-face as needed. They listen to clients' stories and care about their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their children. They offer regular check-ins until clients are in a stable situation and they feel safe.

Supporting family violence-impacted clients through FDR

We continued to provide our Family Safety Navigation Program to support clients accessing FDR at our Melbourne and Sunshine FRCs. With our knowledge of the significant impact of separation on families and children, the whole-of-family pilot program prioritises safety and child wellbeing. In particular, we support families that are identified, often for the first time, as being impacted by family violence. These families are referred to one of our Family Safety Practitioners, who will provide case navigation, appropriate referrals, comprehensive assessments of risk and psychosocial needs, continuity of care and therapeutic support in times of need.

The RAV model, which was commended in the Family Law Council's *Families with Complex Needs and the Intersection of the Family Law and Child Protection Systems* report to the Attorney-General (2016), caters specifically for families that want to undertake FDR, but have multiple family violence risk factors compounded by complex needs. For these families, FDR may not be appropriate without the support of our unique, enhanced service response model. In such cases, families would be required to resolve disputes independently, in potentially unsafe environments, or navigate an adversarial family law system with increased safety and wellbeing risks due to lengthy court proceedings that often take 12 months.

Tuning in to Teens in the City of Yarra

Since 2017, our Melbourne FRC has been a partner agency in the Yarra Communities that Care initiative, a community-led initiative focused on supporting the healthy development of children and young people aged eight to 14 in the City of Yarra. The strong collaborative partnership,

which involves more than 24 local agencies, was established in response to feedback from local year six and eight students, which indicated that a significant proportion of students were experiencing family management and conflict issues with their parents and/or carers.

Through the partnership, we lead the coordination and delivery of the evidence-based programs, Tuning in to Kids and Tuning in to Teens. These are six-week parenting programs delivered in partnership with local primary and secondary schools. The programs are often tailored to meet the needs of participants from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

This year, we presented at an event launching the findings of an evaluation of the first two years of program delivery (see page 33), and featured in a video highlighting parents' and facilitators' reflections on the program.

From March 2020, our Tuning in to Teens program content was redeveloped for delivery via online webinars. In particular, our free Parenting in a Pandemic webinars focused on supporting families that were experiencing increased pressures as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. The webinars were developed in partnership with Yarra City Council, the Neighbourhood Justice Centre, North Richmond Community Health, local schools, Beginners Mind and Mindful at the University of Melbourne, which developed the original program content on which the webinar was based.

The live webinars, which were available to new and previous program participants, covered common parenting pandemic-related challenges, such as managing screen time, supporting learning from home and dealing with conflict with children. The safe and confidential online sessions included

demonstration role plays, interactive question and answer segments, and opportunities for reflection. The webinars were well-received and positively impacted the parents who attended from 11 local schools.



Family Safety Navigation Program clients' most common needs:

- Family violence
- Child wellbeing
- Legal advice
- Information about intervention orders
- Therapeutic support

Parents who attended the Parenting in a Pandemic webinars:

98.4% 
found the program useful

88.9% 
were more confident as a parent after the program

"I found it interesting that the core messages in the course were also the central tenets for parenting in the pandemic, especially the home schooling. Thanks for getting on top of the technology so it could be delivered remotely."

- Tuning in to Teens webinar participant



Evaluating our prevention services

We design, implement and evaluate the outcomes of evidence-informed prevention and early intervention programs to reduce the impact of complex relationship issues.

“I like, like you”

We continued to evaluate “I like, like you” and “I like, like you UP” programs, following the latter program’s 2018 achievement of promising program status with the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Pre- and post-program evaluations demonstrate statistically significant improvements of eight to 10 per cent for key indicators. These include an increased understanding of healthy relationships, improved conflict resolution and communication skills, and the importance of gender equality in relationships; specifically, how to achieve respect and equality in relationships, and how gender stereotypes impact relationships. Notably, students demonstrated that they were more confident in communicating their feelings, with qualitative responses indicating increased empathy, greater awareness of other people’s feelings and greater understanding of how to communicate respectfully in healthy relationships.

After the program, more than 89 per cent of participants also reported that they would know where to go for help if they needed further support, indicating longer-term impacts of the program against its aims to promote healthy and respectful relationships and, ultimately, prevent family violence.

“[I will] be more mindful of gender stereotypes and building and maintaining my own values and boundaries.”

– Student on what they’ll do differently as a result of the “I like, like you” program.

Family Safety Navigation Program

We continued an evaluation of our self-funded Family Safety Navigation Program, which strongly indicated that the service has been invaluable for many clients. Client interviews demonstrate that it addresses a lot of the negative effects of family violence and separation on employment, physical and mental wellbeing, family functioning and child wellbeing. There have also been significant positive impacts for children as a result of appropriate referrals, reduced parental stress and increased feelings of safety.

Participants attributed improvements in their safety, the wellbeing of children and improved relationships with children to the program, in addition to reduced stress, greater confidence and an enhanced ability to maintain employment during separation. Specifically, participants were more aware of their rights and the choices that lay ahead of them, which improved outcomes for them and their children.

Our evaluations indicate that there was also a reduction in the level of assessed risk, and improvements in emotional wellbeing and clients’ ability to manage day-to-day life, with the greatest improvements occurring within the first three months of service delivery. Such outcomes are a significant achievement against the aims of the program in supporting women and children through the challenging time of separation.

“ [The Family Safety Practitioner] taught me it was okay for me to also put in boundaries. She reassured my actions and decisions. Empowered me to put my safety, and my child’s safety first. Validation makes you feel secure.”

– Family Safety Navigation Program client

9/10

Average client rating of the impact of the Family Safety Navigation Program



“As an enhanced Maternal Children Health Nurse, I’ve noticed an increase in family violence. The tools provided today will give me confidence to engage with dads.”

– Support for Fathers Workplace Training participant

“Loved the 7 types of dad. I will use this in individual and group sessions, particularly with dads who are struggling with self-esteem, sense of belonging and separated dads who are struggling to connect with their kids.”

– Support for Fathers Workplace Training participant

early matters

In late 2019, we concluded a three-year mixed-method approach evaluation of our early matters program. The evaluation involved a combination of validated and fit-for-purpose tools combining qualitative and quantitative data, including pre- and post-program surveys to assess and measure outcomes.

The evaluation indicated that early matters positively impacts clients. Specifically, the Home Visiting Service was associated with a 27 per cent reduction in the impact of significant issues on families, and a 30 per cent reduction in how stressed families were about their presenting issues. The vast majority of teachers felt confident that their students would be able to develop healthier relationships following early matters children’s group programs, and programs for parents were associated with increases in confidence with self-care and seeking support, and increased parental confidence in parental attachment with their new baby.

early matters since July 2016

4,315
clients



8/10



teachers felt confident that students would be able to develop healthier relationships following the Ready Set Kids program

30%

reduction in how stressed families were about their presenting issues after accessing the Home Visiting Service



Support for Fathers

Results from our Support for Fathers project evaluation found that the practitioners were better equipped to support fathers after attending our workplace training program, with an 11 per cent statistically significant increase in confidence to engage dads in services, and a 15 per cent increase in practitioners feeling that they had the skills and knowledge to successfully engage with dads.

Of fathers who attended our community information sessions, 85 per cent agreed that the session was relevant to them as a dad.

Tuning in to Teens

As part of a collaborative initiative with the Yarra Communities that Care initiative, RAV leads the coordination and delivery of the evidence-based program, Tuning in to Teens.

An evaluation of the activities in 2019/20 indicates strong positive outcomes for participants. A significant proportion of parents who participated gained an increased awareness of their own and their teen’s emotions, and enhanced skills that can assist them in being supportive, empathic and staying connected with their teen. There was also an increase in their capacity to regulate their own behaviour and provide positive emotional role modelling for their children.

During the year, all of the 43 parents who participated were satisfied with the program, with 94 per cent doing things differently as a parent as a result of the program.

Tuning in to Teens program in the City of Yarra in 2019/20

100%

of respondents were satisfied with the program



94.73%

of participants were doing things differently as a parent following the program



84.2%

of participants had increased confidence in responding to their children’s emotions



73.7%

felt they had increased connectedness with children



“I now feel confident coaching my son to better manage his emotions.”

– Tuning in to Teens participant





Inclusion

We are committed to providing culturally safe services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people from LGBTIQ+ communities.

Reflective of our commitment to cultural competency and inclusion, and our belief that all people in their diversity have the right to live their lives safely and with dignity, we implemented a new, organisational-wide training program designed to build and enhance cultural competence in the workplace. This blended-learning course includes engaging online multimedia learning modules and resources, and face-to-face training that will be delivered once COVID-19 restrictions allow.

The online component, offered through SBS, is considered to be Australia's leading online inclusion and cultural competency training. It includes core inclusion and cultural modules, and three standalone courses on working with people with disability, from LGBTIQ+ communities, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement

We focus on supporting Aboriginal-led agreements in Victoria, by making self-determination foundational to our commitment to working with Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people, and strengthening culturally safe services. To champion the right of a person to self-determination, the most basic human right is a commitment by RAV to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' connection to Country, cultural knowledge and lived experience inform us, and lead all interactions, partnerships and services moving forward together.

Our new engagement specialist

We welcomed Ash Dargan as RAV's new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Specialist. Ash is a Larrakia man from Darwin in the Northern Territory and brings a wealth of community experience, cultural knowledge and project management skills to the role.

He holds a Master of Indigenous Studies, following the work of renowned Emeritus Professor Judy Atkinson on transgenerational trauma recovery in Aboriginal communities, and has considerable experience in postgraduate teaching and mentoring roles. Ash has worked successfully across the justice, education, mental health and community services sectors, and under his passionate leadership we look forward to increasing the health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples accessing our services.

During the year, Ash accepted invitations to share his cultural expertise through the presentation of culturally informed lectures to an Aboriginal cohort of students completing a Certificate IV in Community Work at Swinburne University, and to students undertaking a Postgraduate Certificate in Client Assessment and Case Management at No to Violence.

Cultural safety

We continued our involvement with the implementation of recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria), including Recommendation 148 for all mainstream family violence services to engage in cultural safety reviews. This has granted us the opportunity to work closely alongside designated cultural safety officers embedded into Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in all regions in which we operate. Key staff from these organisations, along with RAV management and staff, participated in cultural safety workshops delivered by Djirra and funded by the DHHS, Family Safety Victoria and the Victorian Government Department of Justice and Community Safety. These workshops introduced us to the Strengthening Cultural Safety Toolkit, which has been developed in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to provide an evidence-based approach for increasing cultural safety across the areas of operations, governance, workforce and relationships with community.

Significant progress has been made towards furthering our capacity to strengthen the cultural competency of our workforce through the introduction of new service-specific cultural safety training packages, organisational reviews, Aboriginal cultural inclusion training, and revision of policies and community engagement strategies.

Culturally responsive FDR

In 2019/20, RAV embarked on a project to develop a culturally responsive FDR model of engagement and practice using an action research approach. Our strong relationships with key stakeholders in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities play an important role in informing RAV's actions and helping to develop appropriate culturally responsive services that meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We look forward to implementing our new culturally adapted FDR model and engagement resources in the second half of 2020.

DRUMBEAT at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre

As part of a Sisters Day In family violence prevention and wellbeing workshops event facilitated by Djirra, we hosted an information booth and facilitated DRUMBEAT drumming workshops for Aboriginal women at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, to promote a shared sense of rhythmic community harmony. DRUMBEAT is an evidence-based, 10-week social and emotional learning program that explores topics such as relationships, behaviour and emotions, and culminates with a drumming performance.

The event led to an invitation to deliver two further DRUMBEAT programs for Aboriginal women at the prison, as part of a group that promoted a self-determined approach to narrative group therapy, and for women supported by the centre's Aboriginal Wellbeing Officer and Elders who regularly visited.

Brutha's Day Out

We renewed our commitment to supporting the Brutha's Day Out program in 2020 and beyond, through a partnership with Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place, which has taken carriage of the program. Brutha's Day Out is a community-driven initiative to create a culturally strong space for Aboriginal men to engage with existing community supports, and develop new strategies for maintaining healthy relationships with family, community and the continuity of cultural practices.

Culminating in an annual, multi-day gathering on Country, participants engaged in strengthening both individual and whole-of-community social and emotional wellbeing through activities such as smoking ceremonies, yarning circles, painting and tool-making, and Aboriginal keynote presentations, with the support of existing services and Community Controlled Organisations. RAV has supported Brutha's Day Out for many years, during which time it has grown and adapted to meet the needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and we look forward to continuing our involvement with the program.

RAV has a rich history of welcoming, acknowledging and celebrating the diversity found within Victoria's vibrant communities. This cultural diversity is also present within our organisation's workforce and is recognised by our leadership and RAV's Board as a key organisational strength.





Diversity

Vietnamese MBCPs

Our in-language and in-culture Vietnamese-specific MBCPs continued from our Sunshine centre in 2019/2020. Delivered by experienced bi-lingual facilitators, the program is tailored to meet the needs of men from the Vietnamese community, by helping to strengthen their family relationships and educating them about family violence, and its impacts on women and children, as well as relevant Australian laws and legal processes. The MBCPs highlight the importance of healthy relationships, and support men to reflect on their behaviours and learn new ways to manage their relationships without using violence.

When COVID-19 emerged in March 2020, we suspended face-to-face groups and transitioned to a newly developed Telephone Holding Model (see page 18) for men who had recently commenced a program, men who were about to commence a program and later, to those who were assessed as eligible for the MBCP. Facilitators provided weekly telephone support to men that focused on risk assessment and management, while our experienced bi-lingual family safety practitioners offered regular, ongoing contact with women and children of participants to provide support, education and safety planning.

Women using our Family Safety Contact Service reported that they were more vulnerable to family violence during COVID-19 as a result of additional challenges such as job losses or reduced working hours, or male partners working from home or having lost work, resulting in immense financial hardship. As a result of stay-home restrictions, women were isolated from support networks and were having to spend more time in their home with their children and the perpetrator of the

violence. This also made it more difficult for women to openly share information with our practitioners. Many women reported that, as a result of the pandemic, violence, control and manipulation had escalated, and they were being kept in the dark or told untruths about COVID-19.

Demand for our services increased during the pandemic, including from women who had previously been clients of RAV reaching out for further assistance. Women have reported that regular phone calls have provided them with connection and an appreciation of someone being interested in their and their children's wellbeing. Feedback indicates that they have felt less isolated and more valued, informed, reassured and supported through being able to tell their story and revisit their safety plans. A significant number of men advised that they would like to participate in groups when they recommence and, ultimately, our service has extended support well beyond the standard 20 weeks of MBCPs, with men having been afforded individual support.

“I feel like once I do attend the program I will learn more things to improve my family relationships. I also feel relieved that there is no language barrier with the facilitators.”

– Vietnamese MBCP participant

Eid Festival

In July 2019, our Traralgon Centre welcomed the opportunity to again support Gippsland's annual Eid Festival, an event for both Muslim and non-Muslim families to celebrate the end of Ramadan and to strengthen community connections. More than 500 people joined together to enjoy a day of games,

craft, cultural and other activities, food and musical performances.

RAV supported organisers, United Muslim Sisters of Latrobe Valley, to secure funding for the event and by providing mentoring in how to plan and deliver the event. We also facilitated an activity to create a series of canvases depicting the theme of 'the hands of friendship', featuring the painted handprints of festival attendees. These canvases now take pride of place in the counselling area of our Traralgon centre.

African–Australian Community Family Violence Workshops

In partnership with the Victoria Police African Australian Community Taskforce, we delivered a series of workshops on family violence prevention to community leaders in South–East Melbourne.

The community-led taskforce and workshops arose following discussions between African–Australian community leaders and the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, which identified family violence education as a key preventative element in addressing the impact of family breakdown on the lives of young people in the community.

Our two workshops were held with community leaders, including youth leaders, from African–Australian communities from the horn of Africa such as Ethiopia, Oromo, Eritrea and South Sudan. The community leaders were supported to explore their perspectives on the complex cultural and systemic factors contributing to family conflict and violence, youth disenchantment, parent-adolescent difficulties and inter-generational conflict. Some of the identified challenges included changing household gender roles and expectations, the impact of trauma, difficulties associated with migration,

re-settlement, loss of traditional knowledge, language and practices, distrust of services and differing parenting styles.

Workshop topics included healthy couple and family relationships, abusive behaviours and the impacts of family violence. The men actively participated in the workshops and expressed their desire to return to their communities with strategies to enhance community members' awareness and engagement in family violence and conflict prevention.

The project concluded with a graduation ceremony for all workshop participants and community leaders, and recognition of the contributions from RAV and other agencies.

LGBTIQA+

Led by our Rainbow Working Group, we focus on ensuring that our centres and services are accessible and welcoming, and that our staff have the knowledge and skills to support the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual (LGBTIQA+) individuals, couples and families.

Rainbow Working Group

Our Rainbow Working Group remained focused on increasing the accessibility and inclusivity of RAV's services for the LGBTIQA+ community. The Working Group creates, locates and distributes resources to assist clinicians and centre staff to best support LGBTIQA+ clients, including language guides, information about working with same sex couples and referral lists. This year, we developed a poster to inform the community of our commitment to LGBTIQA+ communities' safety and inclusion at RAV. The poster will be displayed in all RAV centres and at community engagement events.

Sponsoring community events

Since 2014, RAV has been proud to host a stand at the annual Midsumma Carnival, which is part of the annual queer arts and cultural Midsumma Festival.

This year, RAV staff took the opportunity to celebrate diversity, engage with members of the rainbow community, and provide service information and resources about common relationship issues. We also provided a free badge-making activity, which was a favourite among the many people who visited us on the day.

For the eighth consecutive year, we sponsored the Melbourne Queer Film Festival, the largest and oldest queer film festival in the southern hemisphere. While the festival itself was unfortunately postponed due to COVID-19, we took the opportunity to attend the preliminary festival launch to show our support and acknowledge the way in which sharing stories through film supports LGBTIQA+ communities to feel recognised and included.

**We welcome LGBTIQA+
people and families**

**We're committed to providing
safe and inclusive services**



Professional training and development

Innovation in training

Like our client-based services, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated changes in our training delivery, with face-to-face training paused from March 2020. With many employees required to work from home, we focused on enhancing our capability to support the ongoing and emerging learning needs of the sector by delivering training in innovative ways.

We introduced new modes of delivery across our programs and Registered Training Organisation (RTO) courses, and designed additional workshops to support workplaces and organisations, and employees with emerging challenges and concerns during the period of considerable transition.

We refreshed and enhanced our Learning Management System to provide increased functionality for external clients and internal RAV staff. As a result, we were able to introduce a blended-learning approach to our Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution (CHC81115). This hybrid model integrates face-to-face workshops with online learning units and resources, webinars and virtual classrooms. In 2019/20, over 25 students were enrolled in the Graduate Diploma of FDR across three intake periods, with online delivery of training enabling students to continue their learning from home during the pandemic.

Our mediation courses were redesigned to utilise a blended learning model to increase accessibility for busy professionals.

The new courses incorporate self-paced online learning modules, interactive webinars and intensive workshops. Our adoption of this approach prior to COVID-19 ensured that students could maintain their studies despite social distancing requirements and restrictions. This mediation training and assessment, resulted in National Mediator Accreditation under the NMAS system for 22 newly qualified mediators.

Throughout the year, we delivered professional development workshops to more than 600 participants from 22 workplaces, including the Royal Women's Hospital, Responsible Gambling Foundation, Victorian Government DHHS, Sacred Heart Mission and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) in Morwell.

In response to COVID-19, and the need for workplaces to find different ways of working to continue operating effectively and efficiently as a team, many of our professional development workshops were transformed and delivered as interactive learning opportunities through the use of virtual classrooms. This enabled a broader cohort of participants from both within and outside of Victoria.

We also introduced two new workshops. Our one-day Reconnecting Teams workshop helps workplaces to understand psychological trauma, the way in which COVID-19 has affected teams and their dynamics, and support self-care and employees to connect and communicate while negotiating

the current challenges. Our Performance Energy within the Workplace workshop focuses on understanding the signs of work-life imbalances, strategies for personal wellbeing and resilience, and how to maintain professional boundaries given the new working arrangements.

Within our other specialist LINCS, LINCS for Families and ATLAS programs, we utilised digital platforms to facilitate delivery of programs remotely, which increased accessibility and enabled ongoing support during COVID-19.

In April 2020, we designed and launched a new customised training service, which offers tailored training solutions to workplaces and organisations. Working collaboratively with workplaces, agencies, organisations and not-for-profits, we seek to meet unique needs by delivering learning solutions using online, blended and face-to-face solutions.

As an experienced, leading training organisation that also delivers evidence-informed services and high-quality research, our customised training is tailored to suit the needs of individual workplaces.

Improving accessibility with student loans

We were pleased to be successful in our application to become an approved provider of VET Student Loans with the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment. Once implemented in the new financial year, access to our Graduate Diploma of FDR will be enhanced, supporting the diversification of our workforce.

Family violence-focused relationship counselling course

Through our RTO, we offered the accredited Graduate Diploma of Relationship Counselling (with a focus on family violence) (CHC81015). The course helps practitioners gain an understanding of family violence in the context of various relationships and families, and is designed to provide a complete learning pathway for those wanting to further their professional development as a relationship counsellor. It includes a practical placement program within RAV centres.

Specialist skills for working with couples

We delivered our Specialist Course in Couple Therapy, now in its 30th year, to counsellors and psychologists wanting to develop knowledge and specialist skills to work with couples experiencing a range of difficult issues. The course is an accredited component of the Swinburne University Master of Counselling, with couple counselling specialisation at the second-year level. It uses an integrative therapeutic approach that is grounded in evidence-based models and contemporary practice.

Teaching methods include interactive presentations, the application of theory and methods through case discussion and live demonstrations, and workshops offering opportunities to practise learned therapy skills. Students are able to pursue a supervised internship at an RAV centre following successful completion of theory subjects.

External professional development workshops

>2330
hours



601
participants



22
workplaces



“Your passion as trainers is clearly visible and I am very grateful for the opportunity to be part of this learning experience.”

– Graduate Diploma of FDR student

“Great training. Really relevant. I will be implementing some of the ideas in future training and interactions.”

– The Casual Counsellor professional development workshop participant





Effective governance

Best practice

We foster a service delivery approach that is continually evolving and improving, based on principles of strong clinical governance, a culture of accountability and a focus on safety. We aim to strengthen practice quality and staff wellbeing, and to support practitioners to provide high-quality, evidence-based, trauma-informed, person-centred services. In turn, these services assist our clients and enable us to work towards our vision to achieve positive, respectful, safe and fulfilling relationships for all Australians.

Safety

The safety of our clients, staff, visitors and the community is of fundamental importance to RAV, and is reflected in our governance processes across the domains of risk management, critical incidents and continuous improvement. We have a strong safety record, which is significant given the size and complexity of our work, and is reflective of our strong commitment to identifying and implementing preventative actions, undertaking safety audits, and supporting our staff through regular individual and team supervision, reflective practice, specialised clinical training, and evidence-informed professional development.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been guided by the DHHS, government advice and government guidelines to ensure that our centres are safe for both staff and clients, and that we have continued to deliver essential services.

New MARAM framework

As part of our commitment to prioritising safety and the wellbeing of those impacted by family violence, we continued to implement MARAM, which supersedes the Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF). The framework, which has been established in law under a new part of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Cth), aims to increase the safety and wellbeing of those impacted by family violence by ensuring that relevant services seamlessly collaborate to effectively identify, assess and manage family violence risk.

As part of the project, RAV provided MARAM training to specialist family violence practitioners and relevant managers. We also employed a dedicated project officer and established a working party responsible for the successful multi-stage implementation of the framework, which will involve the alignment of RAV's policies, procedures, practice guidance and tools to MARAM.

Accreditation

RAV falls under a number of standards that govern our services, including the internationally recognised ISO9001:2015 Quality Management Systems and DHHS Standards. We are audited annually against these standards and also undergo regular audits for our Registered Training Organisation.

This year, we underwent a four-day maintenance assessment against the DHHS and ISO standards, with a particular focus on our Victorian Government-funded family violence programs, and our established Quality Management System. The comprehensive audit undertaken by HDAA Australia involved staff and client interviews, file audits, and reviews of policies, procedures, manuals, and the framework and implementation of our Quality Management System.

We achieved a positive audit outcome, which confirmed that RAV is continuing to deliver quality service and that service users can have confidence that RAV has effective ISO9001:2015 Quality Management Systems in place. Feedback from the audit report also highlighted the evidenced dedication and commitment of RAV staff to clients and engagement of clients with our services.

“The assessment of RAV indicates an organisation which invests in quality and focuses on the clients they support.”

– HDAA Australia

“Staff are welcoming, non-judgemental, compassionate, caring and interested in you.”

– RAV client

Risk management

Our robust risk management processes align with the International Standard for Risk Management, ISO31000:2009. Embedding risk-based and opportunistic thinking across all levels of operations and decision-making is a priority for RAV.

Our risk portfolio utilises an analytic, risk engagement and acceptance approach that is governed by controls, mitigations, foresight and planning. This provides RAV with the opportunity to recognise risks, including those associated with organisational growth or service diversification, and identify strategies to minimise their likelihood and impact.

The onset of COVID-19 focused RAV's risk priorities particularly on staff and client safety, while ensuring we met significant client needs through the implementation of digital client files, policies, procedures, manuals and other supporting resources.

Critical incidents

Management and prevention of critical incidents are guided by our risk management and continuous improvement processes. Collectively, these inform our practice responses, policies and procedures, and the identification of opportunities for practice improvements and staff professional development.

As our service breadth grows and diversifies, the work that our staff undertake is also increasing in complexity. Recognising this, we began this year to develop a new framework for reporting and monitoring client incidents and complaints. The automated systems include functions for accurate collection, reporting and tracking of incidents and complaints, to allow timely, data-informed insights and responses that guide our practices, operations, training and processes.

Continuous improvement

Continuous improvement is an area of particular focus for RAV's Board, Senior Leadership Team, Quality Management Committee, management and practice teams. Continuous improvement is a priority for all levels of the organisation, and all staff are invited and encouraged to explore opportunities for innovation and improvement.

Changes to a range of systems and processes that we implemented in 2019/20, to overcome challenges and achieve time and resource efficiencies are detailed on page 12.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the safety and wellbeing of our staff and clients has been our priority.



“Commitment to clients is evident in the organisation’s planning and focus. It is, most importantly, evident in the direct service delivery provided by a team of dedicated, professional staff who spoke of the people they support with a sense of passion and commitment. Client feedback reflected this.”

– HDAA Australia

Our skilled workforce

We recruit, engage and foster a highly skilled, qualified, motivated and diverse workforce that is aligned to client, funding body and organisational needs. We provide a supportive work environment, with above-award wages, and benefits and conditions that are valued and help to attract and retain high-quality staff. Our staff and teams work cohesively across 16 locations to work towards our vision, and deliver and support services that achieve positive, meaningful outcomes for clients.

Throughout the year, our staff and their immediate family members were able to access our Employee Assistance Program, which involves confidential, counselling support from a qualified, external provider.

As an organisation, we are committed to gender equality, and have completed our annual Workplace Gender Equality Agency report to detail RAV’s policies, processes, reviews and activities related to gender equity activities, improvements and initiatives.

Adapting to COVID-19

There were significant challenges for RAV this year, as we adapted the way in which we work in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

We responded by implementing stringent COVID-19 hygiene, screening and social distancing measures, as well as relevant policies and procedures, with face-to-face services transitioning to telephone and video-based appointments in response to Victorian Government restrictions. Our workforce moved to working from home on a temporary and rostered basis, depending on the nature of the essential service being provided. The implementation of a digital filing system provided flexibility to allow staff to efficiently and effectively work remotely, while maintaining secure, confidential and accurate client files.

Staying connected and supporting colleagues has been pivotal during this time, and we found creative ways to facilitate this, including through regular check-ins, increased clinical peer supervision, virtual meetings and online professional development

opportunities. We also undertook an organisational-wide survey on RAV’s response to COVID-19, to seek feedback on the new methods of working and challenges experienced, evaluating self-care and wellbeing, and identifying opportunities for future improvements and ways in which RAV could continue to support staff.

Throughout the pandemic, our staff worked together to enable RAV to continue to operate and provide much-needed client services without any centre closures. Our workforce has demonstrated their resilience and ongoing dedication to our clients throughout COVID-19, and this is evidenced by the continued high levels of service delivery achieved despite the changes in service delivery modalities and remote working arrangements. We are enormously appreciative of our committed staff who have worked tirelessly during this time.



Professional development

We invest strongly in training and development for our staff. This includes workshops and courses, and attendance at conferences and seminars to develop and enhance the skills and competencies required to respond to the changing and increasingly complex needs of our clients, as well as the needs of our funders, the sector and the community. Training is delivered by either members of our experienced training and development team, or by expert external facilitators.

Key highlights of our professional development offerings this year included core training in suicide-risk assessments with a focus on perpetrators of family violence who may present with suicidal ideation, and a two-day complex trauma workshop delivered by international trauma research and practice expert, Bessel Van Der Kolk. We also introduced a new Core Inclusion Program, to build and enhance the cultural awareness and competency within the organisation (see page 34).

Later in the year, COVID-19 impacted both the accessibility and content of traditional professional development opportunities, resulting in our employees participating in online training courses that supported them to transition service delivery online and/or via the telephone.

Professional development topics included:

- A Practical Guide to Providing Telehealth Services
- Adjusting your Practice for COVID-19
- Busting Burnout and Chronic Stress – Vicarious Trauma
- Child-Inclusive Practices
- Clinical Approaches to Working with Trauma
- Comprehensive First Aid
- Core Inclusion Program
- Cultural Safety and FDR for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Clients
- Cultural Safety in Family Violence Services
- High-Performance Teams
- Loneliness and Social Isolation in the Time of COVID-19
- Motivational Interviewing
- Online Counselling Essentials
- Property and Financial Matters in FDR
- Suicide Bereavement Support
- Suicide Risk Assessment
- Understanding and Responding to Controlling and Escalating Behaviours
- Working with Traumatic Memory

Our employees in 2019/20

332
employees



92
new staff members



24
staff promotions



4828
hours of professional
development provided



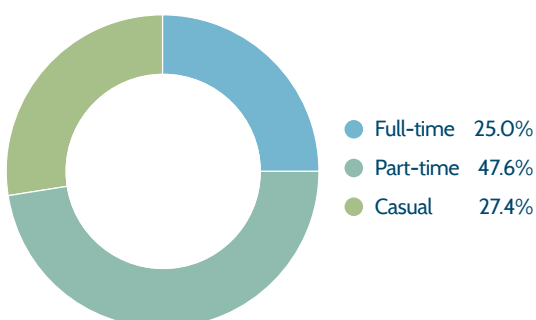
71.0%
of our managers
are women



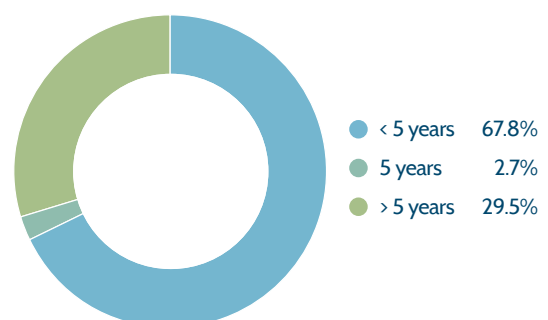
32.2%
joined the RAV team
five or more years ago



Employment type



Tenure with RAV



Leadership

Senior Leadership Team*



Dr Andrew Bickerdike
Chief Executive Officer



Michael Beres
General Manager
Operations



Anastasia Panayiotidis
General Manager
Clinical Services



Shiranthi Sivarajah
Chief Financial Officer



Carl Beeston
Senior Manager
ICT Operations



Anna Clarke
Senior Manager
Communications
and Marketing



Sharon Greenhill
Senior Manager
Human Resources



Suzanne Ichlov
Senior Manager Operations
South East, Senior Manager
Risk and Compliance



Donna Plavljanic
Senior Manager
Training and Development



Fiona White
Senior Manager
Operations North West

Management Team*

Rose Byrnes
Senior Manager Western

Emily Hanscamp
Programs Manager
Therapeutic Services

Carolyn Last
Senior Manager Kew

Lisa Stockheim
Acting Manager
Melbourne FRC

Cate Chaiyot
Centre Manager headspace
Wonthaggi

Andreana Harrison
Programs Manager
Family Violence Services

Christine Lye
Manager
Northern Melbourne

Shelley Watson
Manager Shepparton

Amanda Exley
Centre Manager headspace
Bairnsdale and Sale

Jo Huggins
Senior Manager
Gippsland

Suresh Ramachandraiah
Senior Manager
Southern and Eastern

*As at 30 June 2020

Board*



Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM
President

Governance Committee member

Clinical Governance Committee member

Member since October 1993



Ms Kaye Frankcom
Vice-President

Clinical Governance Committee Chair

Member since April 2016



Mr Michael Hunt
Audit and Finance Committee member

Clinical Governance Committee member

Member since January 2018



Ms Kimberly Hunter
Clinical Governance Committee member

Member since October 2011



Ms Ronda Jacobs
Governance Committee member

Member since October 2018



Mr John Lovell
Member since October 2008



Mr Michael Shaw
Audit and Finance Committee Chair

Member since October 2018



Mr Paul Staindl
Governance Committee Chair

Member since January 2018

Board performance

Our Board is composed of eight committed, skilled and experienced individuals who are focused on driving organisational success and achieving our vision through data-informed decision-making. Our Board members' collective expertise spans the not-for-profit, commercial and private sectors including health, mental health, service delivery, finance, law, banking, government policy, strategy, business development and IT.

RAV's robust Corporate Governance Framework and the work of three Board committees underpins the work of the Board, across the areas of strategy, governance, financial management, sustainability and operations.

Committees

The Governance Committee is responsible for ensuring the Board and its committees are composed of individuals who are appropriately skilled, accredited and trained to enable them to discharge their responsibilities as directors, having regard to the law, the RAV constitution and highest standards of governance.

The Audit and Finance Committee assists the Board in fulfilling its oversight responsibilities for the organisation's ongoing financial performance, compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, financial risk management practices and the endorsement of RAV's annual operating and capital budgets.

The independent Clinical Governance Committee safeguards RAV's responsibilities and compliance against clinical governance standards. Members oversee the analysis of clinical services and practices, and provide specialised advice to the Board and RAV's leadership in relation to new services and practice models, continuous clinical quality improvement and risk management, in order to provide safe and positive outcomes for clients.

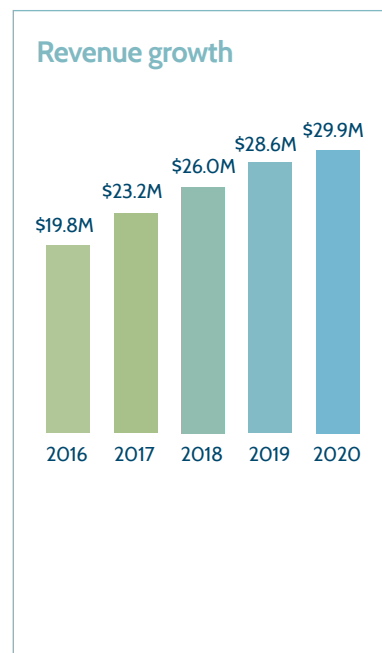
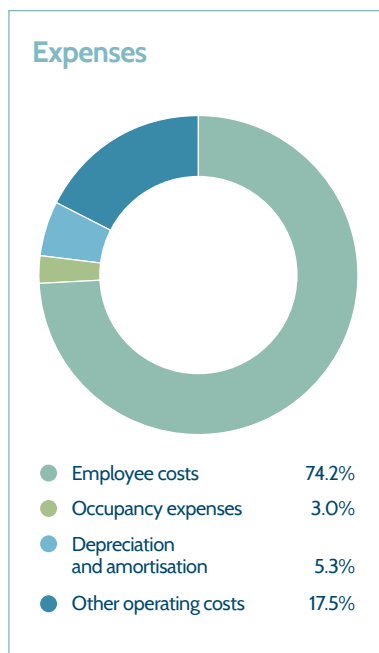
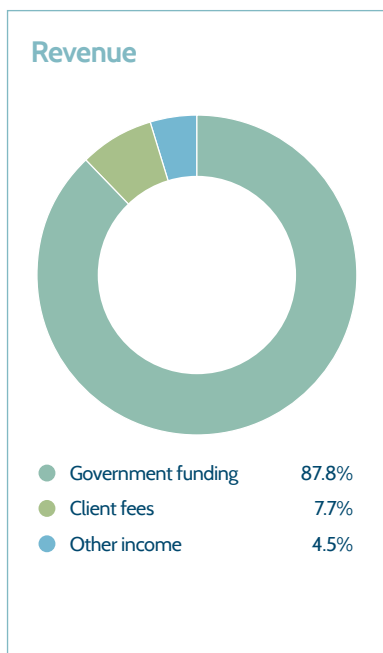
Financial performance

Summary statement of comprehensive income for the year ended 30 June 2020

	2020 (\$)	2019 (\$)
REVENUE		
Government funding	26,285,500	24,622,479
Client fees	2,305,604	2,520,152
Other income	1,333,819	1,532,309
Total revenue	29,924,923	28,674,940
EXPENSES		
Employee costs	21,662,143	20,665,702
Occupancy expenses	872,380	2,159,487
Depreciation and amortisation	1,543,689	156,001
Other operating costs	5,117,101	4,908,667
Total expenses	29,195,313	27,889,857
SURPLUS	729,610	785,083
OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME		
Net gain on revaluation of non-current assets		
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME	729,610	785,083

Summary statement of financial position as at 30 June 2020

	2020 (\$)	2019 (\$)
ASSETS		
Current assets	19,204,023	16,398,524
Non-current assets	9,881,135	6,169,109
Total assets	29,085,158	22,567,633
LIABILITIES		
Current liabilities	9,846,055	6,876,448
Non-current liabilities	3,655,743	837,435
Total liabilities	13,501,798	7,713,883
NET ASSETS	15,583,360	14,853,750



Independent Audit Report to the Members of Relationships Australia Victoria Limited

We have audited the summarised financial report of Relationships Australia Victoria Limited comprising the Summary Statement of Comprehensive Income for the year ended 30 June 2020 and the Summary Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2020 in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards.

In our opinion, the information reported in the summarised financial report is consistent with the annual financial report from which it is derived and upon which we expressed an unqualified audit opinion in our report to the members dated 6 October 2020.

For a better understanding of the scope of our audit, this report should be read in conjunction with our audit report on the annual financial report.

Grant Thornton Australia

Brock Mackenzie
Partner

Melbourne
6 October 2020

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services

www.deadlyrav.com.au

connectedspace website for young people

www.connectEDspace.com.au

Support for Fathers website

www.supportforfathers.com.au

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Acronyms

DHHS	Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services
DSS	Australian Government Department of Social Services
EAP	Employee Assistance Program
FDR	Family Dispute Resolution
FRC	Family Relationship Centre
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual
MARAM	Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework
MBCP	Men's Behaviour Change Program
PHN	Primary Health Network
RA	Relationships Australia
RAV	Relationships Australia Victoria
TM	Trademark
YAG	Youth Advisory Group



Relationships Australia Victoria acknowledges the support of the Victorian and Australian Governments.



Relationships Australia[®]

VICTORIA

Since 1948



Accredited by HDA. Achievement of Accreditation to ISO 9001:2015 provides service users with confidence that Relationships Australia Victoria has effective management systems in place that are regularly reviewed.