

**ANNUAL  
REPORT**  
2018/19

*Relationships Australia*<sup>®</sup>

VICTORIA

Since 1948



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ABN 51 263 215 677

ACN 628 873 941



Relationships Australia Victoria acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Owners and first people of Australia. We acknowledge and pay respect to the Elders past and present. We are committed to encouraging a culturally safe and supportive environment for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who access our services or engage with our organisation. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this annual report may contain the images of people who may have since passed away.



Relationships Australia Victoria is 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 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.





**Since 1948, we have been supporting Victorians to have healthy, safe and respectful relationships.**

# PRESIDENT'S FOREWORD



**The past year has been one of stability, strength and reflection. I am proud to share some of our key achievements, innovative programs and service outcomes in this annual report, as well as stories of clients who have used our services.**

Significantly, we marked 70 years since our organisation was first established in 1948 as the Marriage Guidance Council of Victoria. I was privileged to join staff, Board members and former Directors at an event to celebrate this milestone. Collectively, we reflected on our history and the significant impact Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) has had on the lives of Victorians, and recognised our present and past staff, and Board members for their role in our organisation's success.

Our 70th anniversary also gave us an opportunity to look forward to the future, with our Board and members of our Senior Management Team meeting in May to develop a new Strategic Plan. The plan, which will be released in the second half of 2019, will set the strategic direction of our organisation for the coming four years. It will enable us to proactively prepare for and respond to the needs of, and changes within, our sector and the community, including the results of the continued implementation of the Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria) and the current Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

As the largest community provider of family law services in Victoria, the Australian Law Reform Commission's comprehensive review of the family law system is also highly relevant for RAV's future. Our CEO, Dr Andrew Bickerdike, continued in his role as a part-time Commissioner this year, contributing his experience and expertise in family dispute resolution (FDR), mediation and family law matters. In March 2019, the Commission released its final report, which included a raft of recommendations relating to closing jurisdictional gaps, children's orders, case management, property division, legislative simplification and amicable resolution of disputes. We will watch with interest as the Australian Government responds to these recommendations.

We welcomed notifications of a number of significant funding extensions during the year, including from the Attorney-General's Department until 2024 and the Department of Social Services until 2020. We were re-contracted for a further two years as the lead agency for our headspace centres in Bairnsdale and Wonthaggi. headspace Bairnsdale was also funded to begin delivering the Enhancing Mental Health Support in Secondary Schools program, which supports Victorian government secondary school students in Gippsland.

The Minister for Women, the Hon Kelly O'Dwyer MP, announced additional funding to enable Australia's 65 Family Relationship Centres (FRCs) to provide FDR for property matters from 1 July 2019. With four FRCs, this significantly enhances RAV's capacity to assist families to fairly resolve disputes about financial and property matters following separation, thereby increasing their economic independence.

We achieved a strong financial result in 2018/19, with our income reaching \$28.675 million this year; an increase of 10.3 per cent on the previous year. Our continued financial sustainability and growth, coupled with the funding announcements, provide us with security and confidence to continue offering much-needed services in the years ahead.

At our annual general meeting (AGM) in October 2018 our association members resolved that RAV would convert from an incorporated association to a company limited by guarantee. This recognises the size and complexity of our organisation as a result of the significant growth we have experienced in recent years, and the robust governance framework embedded across RAV.

Also at our 2018 AGM, we welcomed Ronda Jacobs and Michael Shaw to our Board, and said farewell to Debra Goldfinch and Peter Gome. I would like to acknowledge all our Board members for their ongoing commitment to our organisation's success. I also sincerely thank RAV's valued staff and managers for their dedication, skill and expertise, as well as our CEO, Dr Andrew Bickerdike. It is our people who make and have made RAV what it is today – a trusted, valued and respected organisation that delivers services that truly make a difference.

**Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM**  
Board President

# STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS 2015-19

## Our vision

Positive, safe and respectful relationships for couples, families, schools, workplaces and communities

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## Our focus

To provide effective services to strengthen relationships and social connections for individuals and families, and in schools, workplaces and communities across all life stages

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## Our values

Inclusivity

Accountability

Respect

Effectiveness

Integrity

Adaptability

Transparency

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## Our strategic priorities

Relationship services

Mental health services

Child and family services

Seniors relationship services

Family violence prevention, support and recovery services

# CEO'S REPORT



## In what was a milestone year for RAV, we marked our 70th anniversary and completed four years' work towards the blueprint of our organisation: our Strategic Plan 2015–19.

The year has provided the opportunity to review our developments and achievements, including in our priority areas of relationship services; child and family services; family violence prevention, support and recovery services; mental health services; and seniors relationship services.

Our staff and management have been committed to our plan, as evidenced by the breadth and quality of the services which are detailed on page 8. Since 2015, we have introduced a suite of new services, including online counselling, legally assisted and culturally appropriate FDR, elder mediation services and family violence perpetrator case management services. We have significantly increased our provision of men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs) and family safety contact services, and our Registered Training Organisation (RTO) developed an innovative new Graduate Diploma of Relationship Counselling (with a Focus on Family Violence), which will be delivered for the first time in July 2019.

During the 2018/19 year, we increased our geographic reach significantly. We established a family violence-focused centre in Cranbourne North and a headspace centre in Wonthaggi, following the opening of our headspace Bairnsdale centre in 2016. Our clients can now access services through 15 client service delivery centres located across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria, as well as through additional outreach locations, and telephone, video and online capabilities.

Our FRCs prepared to introduce FDR for property matters, which extends our capacity to support families experiencing separation and divorce. The decision by the Australian Government to fund this initiative aligns with one of the recommendations by the Australian Law Reform Commission, which undertook the first comprehensive review since the commencement of the Family Law Act in 1976. I was honoured to accept an invitation to participate as a part-time Commissioner in the review, which has and continues to provide a unique opportunity for much-needed reform.

Recognising the need for current research evaluations that examine the effectiveness of men's family violence programs, RAV has commenced a partnership with Monash University into our MBCPs and responsive case management pilot. This ground-breaking research, which is detailed on page 42 of this report, will be pivotal for both our organisation and the sector, in informing the development and delivery of programs to prevent family violence and, most importantly, keep women and children safe.

Another key achievement during the year was our successful completion of an audit against both the Department of Health and Human Services Standards and the international standard ISO9001:2015 Quality Management System, demonstrating RAV's commitment to quality service delivery, continuous improvement and effective internal processes. We also implemented new Client Relationship Management software across the organisation. The smooth transition to this new system is due to our internal project team and the flexibility of our workforce in embracing positive change.

I would like to recognise all staff for their support and their ongoing commitment to their work. At the end of this year, we said farewell to Michael Muldoon, who retired from his position as General Manager Operations after 10 years with RAV. I thank Michael for his significant contribution to RAV, and also welcome his successor, Michael Beres. Thank you also to our Board members for their valued contributions, and in particular, our Board President, Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM.

At the end of a rewarding year, we now prepare to embark on a new strategic direction. We are focused on the changing, emerging and future needs of our clients, and the impact of sector changes and government reforms. Throughout our history, our organisation has always strived to improve and adapt, and our focus has always been on supporting healthy, safe and respectful relationships by meeting the changing needs of clients and the broader community. This ethos, which is reflected in our values, has shaped RAV as a provider of contemporary and effective services. It is evident in our service evaluation results and in the selection of client stories shared in this report.

It is also a credit to our staff and management – current and past – whose expertise and professionalism has enabled our organisation to positively impact the lives of so many Victorians. With this valued workforce and our committed Board, I am confident that RAV will continue to prosper and make a meaningful difference.

**Dr Andrew Bickerdike**  
Chief Executive Officer

# OUR IMPACT IN 2018/19: A SNAPSHOT

## OUR CLIENTS



**28,570**

clients



**27,701**

counselling client  
contact hours



**4008**

children

**3203**

clients from culturally  
and linguistically  
diverse backgrounds

**1300**

Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander people



**30.56%**

reported an income  
of \$25,000 or less



**50.03%**

had a need related  
to family violence

**51.64%**

had a need related  
to mental health

## SATISFACTION WITH OUR COUNSELLING, FDR AND FRC SERVICES

**99.59%**

of clients felt listened  
to and understood



**99.63%**

of clients were satisfied  
with the services they  
received

**98.79%**

of clients were better able  
to deal with their issues



**99.43%**

of clients worked on  
and talked about what  
they wanted to

# RAV IN 2018/19

Our organisation has grown and evolved significantly since we were established in 1948 as the Marriage Guidance Council of Victoria. Today, Relationships Australia Victoria proudly provides a diverse range of high-quality, effective services to promote, strengthen and support healthy relationships and make a difference to Victorians.

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## \$28,674,940

income



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## 321

employees



## 15

centres



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## 4

Family Relationship  
Centres



## 2

headspace centres



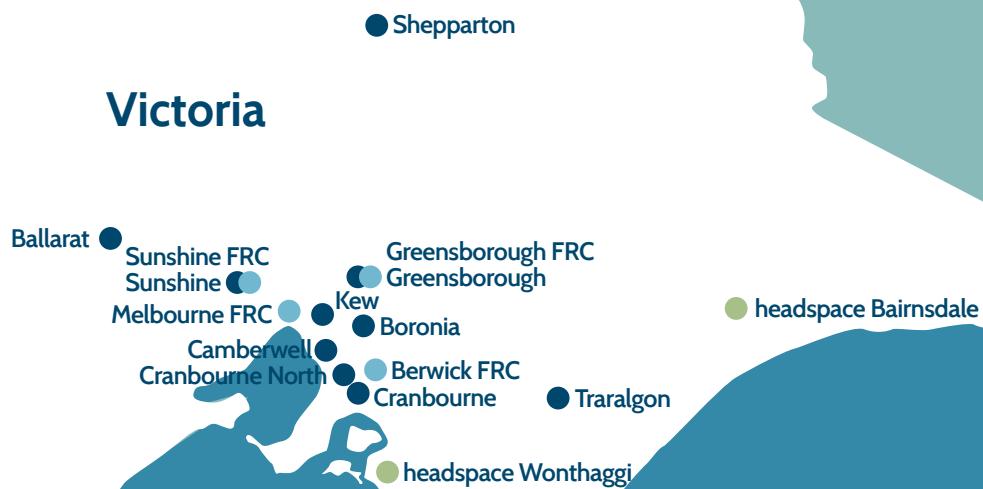




## Our centres

- RAV centres
- Family Relationship Centres
- headspace centres

## Victoria



## Our services

### AccessResolve Property Mediation

**Bagung ba Wadamba** program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

- **Growing Up Kids** for parents
- **Men's Journey** program for men
- **Women's Journey** program for women

**Case Management Support** for male perpetrators of family violence

### Compass Forced Adoption Support Services

### Counselling

- face-to-face
- online
- telephone

**early matters** healthy family relationships program

**Family Dispute Resolution (FDR)** for parenting, and financial and property matters

- child-inclusive FDR
- enhanced child-focused FDR
- elder mediation
- at the Royal Children's Hospital

**Family Relationship Centres (FRCs)**

**Family Safety Model**

**Family Therapy**

**headspace centres**

**i-Connect Family Mental Health Support Service**

**Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs)**

**Property Dispute Settlement and Conciliation**

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

**Safe Resolutions** legally assisted and culturally appropriate FDR for the Vietnamese community

**Support for Fathers** project

**Vietnamese Men's Behaviour Change Programs**

**Workplace Services and Employee Assistance Programs**

## Groups and programs

**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** program exploring the connections between making music as a group and the development of healthy relationships

**Healthy Relationships Workshops** for students with a disability

**Home Visiting Service** for families

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

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

**My Mum and Me** program for children and their mothers after experiencing family violence

**My Parents 'n' Me** program to help children during and after separation

**Opening the Doors** program for women who have experienced family violence

**Parenting After Separation** workshops

**Post-Separation Parenting** programs

**Prepare/Enrich** relationship, marriage and commitment preparation program

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

**Relationship Recharge** workshop for couples to strengthen their relationship

**Relationship Rescue** workshop for couples experiencing relationship difficulties

**Reminiscence Activity Group** for seniors

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

**Right Now** group for women who have experienced interpersonal trauma

**Right Now for Carers** trauma-informed program

**Steering the Right Path** workshops on planning a family route for ageing

**Tuning in to Kids™** emotionally intelligent parenting program on connections between parents and children

- for parents
- for parents together
- for Afghan mothers
- for dads

**Tuning in to Teens™** emotionally intelligent parenting program for parents of teenage children

**Unique but United (UBU)** LGBTIQ+ support group

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

**Women's Support and Social Group** for migrant women

**You, Me, Us** program for couples approaching retirement

## Community engagement

**Activities and initiatives** to engage with and provide support to the community, build and strengthen relationships with other organisations and services, and enhance sector knowledge:

- network participation
- collaborative partnerships
- conferences and forum representation
- support of, attendance at and participation in, community events

**Neighbour Day:** an annual celebration of community, which fosters social connections and encourages people to build better relationships with those who live in their neighbourhood, especially the elderly and vulnerable. Neighbour Day is managed by Relationships Australia.

## Professional training

### *Accredited training*

**Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution (CHC81115)**

**Graduate Diploma of Relationship Counselling (CHC81015) with a Focus on Family Violence**

**Mediation Training Short Course**

**Specialist Course in Couple Therapy**

### *Professional development workshops*

**Advanced Family Violence Practice**

**Advanced Training in Property and Financial Matters in FDR Practice**

**ATLAS Train the Trainer:**  
For facilitators delivering workshops in prisons

**Child-Inclusive FDR**

**Cultural Competence in Case Formulation**

**Family Violence in the Workplace**

**Grief and Loss**

**Introduction to Property and Financial Matters in FDR Practice**

**LINCS:** Psycho-educational workshops for people who are subject to Community Correction Orders

**Managing Challenging Behaviours**

**Managing Conflict in the Workplace**

**Professional Boundaries in Therapeutic Work**

**REACH: Taking your Clinical Effectiveness to the Next Level**

**Refresher Training in Property and Financial Matters in FDR Practice**

**Responding to Critical Incidents**

**Supporting Separated Families**

**The Casual Counsellor**

**The Tree of Life: An Approach to Working with Vulnerable Children, Young People and Adults**

**Trauma-Informed Practice**

**Vicarious Trauma**

**Working with Couples**

*Registered Training Organisation (RTO)*



Watch a short video to mark our 70th anniversary  
[youtube.com/watch?v=3SWboCwNuzc](https://youtube.com/watch?v=3SWboCwNuzc)

# FOCUSING ON RELATIONSHIPS

We know that positive, safe and respectful relationships are fundamental to health and wellbeing. We work to promote and support healthy relationships through services including couple, individual and family counselling, FDR and relationship education.

## Resolving family conflict at the Royal Children's Hospital

Separated parents who are caring for a child in hospital often need to make decisions with the other parent about their child's care and medical treatment. It's a challenging time for any family; however, pre-existing or ongoing conflict between parents can increase stress and uncertainty, and reduce the capacity of parents to communicate with each other and make informed decisions.

Through our Melbourne FRC, we deliver a free, responsive family mediation service at the Royal Children's Hospital in Parkville. The program, which has been offered since 2016, assists parents to parent cooperatively and reach agreements about their child during their hospital stay that are in their child's best interests. It supports separated parents to improve their communication and clarify their roles, responsibilities and parenting arrangements, including visiting schedules if required.

In consultation with social workers at the hospital, our qualified FDR practitioners (FDRPs) assess referrals, contact families, conduct assessments, and if appropriate, provide FDR in a timely manner, on location at the hospital. Families are also referred to local community and legal services when appropriate.

Our service is unique in that it is integrated into the hospital's existing infrastructure and is responsive to the critical needs of families who might not otherwise be aware of or able to access FDR services.

It aims to reduce conflict and the immediate negative impact of conflict on parent-child relationships, and, importantly, to also reduce ongoing conflict after the child has left hospital.

## Help for couples at a crossroad in their relationship

Couples experiencing conflict and communication difficulties who want their relationship to last attend our Relationship Rescue seminar. The one-day experiential group program recognises that investing time and energy to attend to relationships can provide skills to improve communication, manage conflict, understand differences and collaborate as a team. It also highlights the importance of showing appreciation in a relationship and ensuring more positive interactions than negative behaviour such as criticism, stonewalling or contempt.

Experienced counsellors co-facilitate the group, providing educative information on what makes committed relationships succeed, as well as opportunities for couples to develop and practise strategies that support them to express different opinions on relationship issues in calm and respectful ways. These include active listening skills, recognising each other's needs, and identifying and interrupting established patterns of behaviours. Relationship Rescue also encourages couples to identify barriers that may prevent use of these skills in the future, including their own habits, coping styles and triggers, and the general busy pace of life.

Hospital stays are challenging for any family; however, existing conflict can increase the stress and the challenges in making decisions about children in hospital. Our service helps to reduce some of this stress, by resolving disputes about visits, parenting arrangements and ongoing medical care.

“

Great group to get on the right track with sorting out our issues and helping to reflect on our own contributing behaviours to the relationship.”

– Relationship Rescue participant



The supportive group environment helps to normalise the challenges that couples face, and gives participants a safe space to reflect on and take responsibility for their relationship, as well as learn from others in the room. At the conclusion of the group participants receive a resource pack that reinforces the program’s learnings, supports their continued work on their relationship, and provides an invitation to engage with us further if needed.

### Flexible counselling to suit our clients

In addition to our face-to-face counselling service, which is provided from 12 centres and additional outreach locations across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria, we also offer Telephone Counselling and a text-based Online Counselling service. These services are designed to meet the needs and circumstances of clients who may otherwise not be able to attend or comfortable attending traditional services.

Our Online Counselling service is focused on enhancing access to support, including for those who prefer the anonymity and flexibility of online services. Launched in early 2018, the 50-minute appointments use a Single Session Consultation Framework to identify a client’s greatest concern and its impact, which the client and counsellor can focus on through real-time, text-based chat messages. After each appointment, counsellors provide clients with a summary of the session, including suggested resources and referrals.

Since 1991, we have delivered a statewide Telephone Counselling service that provides support through single session or ongoing appointments. While the service was originally funded for clients whose access to services was disadvantaged as a result of distance, disability or drought, more recently, it has been extended to those for whom telephone-based services are simply more convenient or accessible. This includes individuals experiencing a disability, mental health issues, family violence or marginalisation as a result of culture or isolation, and those with childcare responsibilities.

Those living in small towns or rural areas also often use Telephone Counselling because of limited service accessibility, concerns about maintaining their privacy locally, or because of seasonal crop and livestock responsibilities, such as planting,

harvesting or shearing, that prevent them from accessing other support. We are also able to provide telephone-based couple and family counselling, where appropriate, when access to services would otherwise be logistically impossible, such as because of overseas living arrangements.

Our clients report that that they value the convenience of the service and that they can establish a therapeutic relationship with their counsellor, with many of our longer-term clients visiting our centre on at least one occasion to meet with their counsellor in person.

7008

counselling clients



2575

FDR, property settlement and conciliation clients



23.29%

of our clients were separated and 5.56% were divorced



71.8%

of our AccessResolve Property Mediation clients settled their dispute



Find out more about our Online Counselling service [onlinecounselling.relationshipsvictoria.com.au](https://onlinecounselling.relationshipsvictoria.com.au)

## CLIENT STORY

### Telephone support in the Wimmera

Chrissy\* first contacted our Telephone Counselling service in 2007 for support with her relationship with her son and her reactions in times of stress. Living on a large, isolated wheat and sheep property in the Wimmera region, she felt unable to access counselling because of the three-hour journey to the nearest service and due to the stigma associated with counselling that still exists in her small rural community. Chrissy also felt that she wasn't unable to talk about her concerns with her family and that there was an element of secrecy and shame in talking about problems within her friendship groups and social networks.

Our counsellor talked to Chrissy about how to safely start difficult conversations with her son and talk to her family about her concerns, and supported Chrissy to seek help from other services including women's health agencies. The counselling sessions worked on understanding Chrissy's past and its impacts, and her emotional reactions, and on identifying practical strategies to manage times of distress, such as focusing on her physical reactions and taking time out.

On several occasions, Chrissy has attended a joint Telephone Counselling appointment with her partner, which Chrissy says has positively impacted their relationship and would have otherwise been impossible due to their day-to-day responsibilities on the farm.

Over the last 12 years, Chrissy, now aged 55, has used Telephone Counselling periodically when she felt she needed additional support or as new challenges have arisen. She's reported that she's found the service to be invaluable, in providing her with privacy and convenience at home while receiving support from a counsellor who knows her history and understands her circumstances. Without this service, Chrissy has said that she would not be able to commit to getting the external support she has needed to manage her emotional needs and concerns.

She is a strong advocate of telephone counselling, with members of her wider family and members of the local community having also used our service as a result of her recommendations.

\* Name has been changed.

### Property mediation across Australia

Since 2013, our AccessResolve Property Mediation has provided separating couples with a genuine opportunity to settle their disputes over property and financial matters in a safe and respectful environment, while avoiding protracted and expensive litigation processes. The structured mediation process is delivered to court-ordered clients on behalf of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia.

Qualified, skilled and experienced mediators, including barristers and former judges, deliver the service using a process that enables and encourages legal representatives to be involved. Using our preferred model of shuttle conferencing, participants can be located in different rooms with their respective lawyers, who provide support and advice to enhance the mediation outcomes. Lawyers also assist vulnerable participants to overcome power imbalances, navigate the family law system, and manage legal and procedural complexities.

Our service takes into account the complex needs that many clients experience, including those who are self-represented, experiencing family violence or have safety concerns for their children.

In 2018/19, the service provided 380 mediations from 18 Court circuit locations across Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania, achieving a settlement rate of over 71 per cent for the year. We are able to provide the service to clients regardless of their geographic location in Australia, with telephone and video conferencing facilities available in regional and rural locations where face-to-face mediation is not available or practical.

Our clients most commonly needed support for relationship issues, communication issues, conflict, anxiety, stress, anger and parenting.

# WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

We provide a diverse range of services for children, young people, parents and families.

## Hearing children's voices in family law disputes

We know that there are significant limitations and barriers to children's participation in the family law system, which often result in children being unheard or under-supported at a time when they want to provide some input into the decisions that will impact their lives in the future.

We have long championed the direct inclusion of children's perspectives, opinions and experiences in the FDR process, where it is safe and practicable to do so. Since the introduction of mediation/FDR to our organisation in the early 1980s, the best interests and wellbeing of children have been at the core of our processes for resolving parenting matters.

We believe that improving children's participation helps to gain an accurate understanding of a child's current situation and supports parents to reach outcomes in FDR that are more child-focused. As a result, child-inclusive practice has been incorporated into our FDR services for over 30 years, and we strongly advocated for the continued use and funding of child-inclusive practice in our 2018 submissions to the Australian Law Reform Commission's review of the family law system.

Our views are informed by our extensive experience working with children, recent reports into children and young people in separated families (Carson, Dunstan, Dunstan, & Roopani, 2018; FLPNSA, 2018), and by pioneering research (McIntosh & Long, 2006) our organisation has been involved in into the efficacy of our child-inclusive FDR practices.

Our child-inclusive FDR provides the opportunity for school-aged children, with the consent of both their parents, to talk to a trained child consultant about their situation and experiences during a significant period of change and adjustment. The consultant provides feedback to parents to help them to make parenting decisions in FDR that are informed by their child's needs, interests and experience of their parents' separation.

Where decisions are being made for children under four years of age, or when child-inclusive practice is not appropriate, our consultants can share information about current research on children's ages and stages of development, and on how different parenting arrangements may work for children. This process, known as "child-enhanced FDR", can assist to inform parents' decision-making.

In considering how, when and if the voice of a child can safely and effectively be incorporated in FDR, our practice prioritises balancing two vital elements of children's rights – the empowerment and participation of children, and the protection of children from harm. We also focus on ensuring that each child's voice is heard, and that the wishes and feelings expressed by a child authentically belong to that child, and have not been unduly influenced by a parent, siblings or others.

### References

Carson, R., Dunstan, E., Dunstan, J., & Roopani, D. (2018). *Children and young people in separated families: Family law system experiences and needs*. Melbourne, Victoria: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Family Law Pathways Network South Australia (FLPNSA). (2018). *Young Peoples Family Law Advisory Group – A Pilot Project 2016/17*. Retrieved from <https://www.pathwaysnetworksa.com.au/ypflag>

McIntosh, J.E., & Long, C.M. (2006). *Children beyond dispute: A prospective study of outcomes from child focused and child inclusive post-separation family dispute resolution*. Canberra, ACT: Australian Government Attorney-General's Department.

“

Many children express gratitude for the opportunity to verbalise what is impacting on them in a negative and positive way. There is often a genuine sense of relief.”

– Child consultant on child-inclusive practice

14%

of our clients were aged 18 and under



1887

“early matters” clients





Download *Why Am I going to Relationships Australia?*, which explains to children what's involved when they meet with a child consultant in child-inclusive FDR  
[www.rav.org.au/WhyGoingRA](http://www.rav.org.au/WhyGoingRA)



## Supporting dads across Australia

Support for Fathers is a national project we are delivering to support young men and fathers in their role as parents and partners. With funding from the Department of Social Services as part of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022, it aims to increase men's involvement in gender equality and reduce violence.

Since the project commenced in January 2018, we have consulted with over 900 fathers, partners and professionals working with fathers across Australia, at an extensive range of forums, conferences, expos and meetings, and through a national online survey. These consultations have helped to identify the information and services fathers need and want to support them in their parenting roles, and the current barriers to accessing services and support. They highlighted the limited resources available for dads about fatherhood, including on their role as a dad, connecting with their kids and managing their relationship with their partner, particularly after the birth of a new baby.

We identified a requirement for support services focused on engaging with and the needs of dads, which resulted in a pilot of a new network for professionals working with fathers in northern Melbourne, to facilitate discussion, information-sharing and collaboration. This network and the resources we have provided to support it have since assisted in the development of two additional networks in southern and western Melbourne.

As a result of our consultations and a review of the current evidence base on father-specific resources, we have developed a new Support for Fathers website, which will be launched in the second half of 2019. The website includes resources for dads as well as a professionals' toolkit to support dads to access and have positive experiences with relevant services.

The resources are also designed to enhance men's confidence in being dads and partners, role-modelling healthy and respectful relationships within their family and community, and managing challenges such as work-life balances so that they can be the dads they want to be.

The Support for Fathers project will culminate in a nationwide promotion of the website and resources,

as well as training opportunities for service providers in using the new toolkit.

## Assisting families during critical transitions in life

Our "early matters" service delivers a range of programs in areas of Sunshine and Ballarat, to promote the knowledge, skills and attitudes that support healthy relationships and parenting practices, and provide the opportunity for families to seek support early without feeling stigmatised.

With its primary prevention and early intervention focus, "early matters" aims to reduce the risks of families entering a stress pathway that will require tertiary services in the future, by supporting families during critical transition points in life.

The service, which has been funded as a five-year pilot program since 2015, combines educative group programs and parenting programs, such as the emotionally intelligent parenting group, Tuning in to Kids™. The suite of programs is underpinned by contemporary family violence prevention, mental health promotion and gender equity approaches.

We understand that when working with vulnerable families, it is important to carefully consider program selection as well as the way programs are delivered, to enhance access to services for clients who may not otherwise receive support. As a result, our educative group programs are provided through universal services such as hospitals, schools, and child and maternal health centres. These programs include Ready Set Kids for children aged three to six in playgroups, kindergartens and primary schools; "I like, like you UP" for upper primary school students; and ATTUNE.

ATTUNE supports expectant and new parents with the changes and challenges placed on relationships after the birth of a baby. Provided at Ballarat Base Hospital, it promotes healthy, safe relationships between parents and their baby, normalises the challenges of parenthood and delivers information on self-care and further support that is available. Since introducing the program two-and-a-half years ago, over 1000 participants have undertaken the program. Men represent 46 per cent of all participants, demonstrating the service's ability to engage fathers and fathers-to-be.



“

I love the moment where you see it click for parents and they realise that, rather than focusing on their child's behaviour, they can focus on what their child is feeling and their needs. When parents start connecting with that, you see the impact it has on their relationship with their child.”

– Tuning in to Kids™ facilitator



### Due to our “early matters” service:

# 96%

of teachers felt confident that students would be able to develop healthier relationships after Ready Set Kids



# 30%

Parents were, on average, 30% less upset/stressed about their greatest concern, and the concern happened 24% less often after using the home visiting service



# 24%

Parents were, on average, 24% more confident in dealing with their greatest concern or challenge after using the home visiting service



Following the success of ATTUNE, we were invited by Ballarat Maternal and Child Health Service to deliver ATTUNEplus with parents attending antenatal classes when their babies are 10 to 14 weeks old. Topics include the expectations and challenges of parenting, changes in family relationships and dynamics, and connecting with and attuning to their new baby.

In addition to our group programs, we offer a strengths-based, family-centred home visiting service that uses a single session framework to provide short-term support for a family's greatest challenge.

Evaluations of “early matters” use both validated and fit-for-purpose tools and demonstrate that the service is effective in increasing parenting confidence, enhancing knowledge and awareness, and promoting healthy relationship and emotional wellbeing skills.

## CLIENT STORY

### Sandra and Peter – Tuning in to their kids

Sandra\* was referred to “early matters” by her maternal child and health nurse after moving from China with her husband Peter\*, 11-month old daughter Kylie\*, and three-and-a-half-year-old son Oliver\*, who is bilingual. Sandra was concerned about Oliver's increased defiant behaviour, and his frustrations in communicating and being understood.

Through the Tuning in to Kids™ program, Sandra gained increased knowledge of emotional intelligence and connection. She created a book of emotions with labelled photos showing Oliver expressing different emotions, which helped Oliver to identify and calmly convey how he was feeling.

During the program, Sandra came to recognise that Oliver's frustrations were often exacerbated by the relationship dynamics between him and his parents, and that he was reluctant to have his father care for him at home, resulting in the family using the “early matters” home visiting service.

Our practitioner provided coaching around behaviour expectations and developmental stages, and strategies for responding to behaviour, such as using praise, ignoring certain behaviours and enjoying activities as a family.

With an understanding that they had very different parenting styles, Sandra and Peter began using these strategies so that they could ‘be on the same page’ and present a united parenting front. By their next appointment, they reported that Oliver was much more settled, was calmly responding to instructions and requests the first time they were given, and that Peter was now able to settle Oliver at bed time.

Sandra and Peter say that while their journey with “early matters” has not finished, the program has already changed the trajectory of their lives.

\* Names have been changed.

# PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

Everyone has the right to be safe, and live their life free from violence and abuse. Our services are designed to prevent, and provide support to people experiencing, family violence.

## Holding men accountable for stopping family violence

As the largest provider of MBCPs in Victoria, RAV believes that men who use patterns of control, and abusive and violent behaviours in their relationships and families, are capable of change given the opportunity, knowledge and resources to do so.

In 2018/19, we introduced a new 20-week MBCP in response to significant state policy changes, new Family Safety Victoria Minimum Standards and the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria). Our extended programs use an integrated approach to focus on the attitudes and beliefs that inform family violence, and work to address the complexities associated with sustained behaviour change.

Our MBCPs are co-facilitated by one male and one female group facilitator who have the practice skills, knowledge and experience required to invite men to change their violence-supportive attitudes and beliefs, while ensuring impacted family members are safe and supported. MBCPs are provided using our Family Safety Model, which ensures that we work with and provide services and support to all family members affected by the violence, and prioritise the safety of partners, former partners, children and family members of family violence perpetrators.

We believe that men who use control, abuse and violence in their families are capable of change given the opportunity, knowledge and resources to do so.

“

Stay focused on what you can change about you – you can't change anything else.”

– MBCP participant's advice to men in future programs

MBCP groups are delivered across Victoria and include a specific session on physical and mental health wellbeing, to support men to work with their GP and mental health services to address issues such as depression and anxiety.

The programs incorporate group work, as well as behaviour and action-focused activities that recognise personal accountability and responsibility as critical mechanisms for change. During each weekly program session, each man selects one of 26 action strategy cards, choosing a simple strategy to guide their safety planning for the week. Facilitators report that the newly introduced cards have become a valuable tool, enabling participants to focus on their ability to begin to action their safety plan and implement micro changes that build over time.

## Addressing barriers to behaviour change

Since July 2018, our Kew, Boronia and Cranbourne North centres have piloted a responsive case management program for male perpetrators of family violence, including MBCP participants. The program seeks to address complex issues that can act as barriers to engaging in the process of behaviour change, and as a result, increase motivation for behaviour change, enabling perpetrators to take responsibility for their behaviour, and victim survivors to live safely.

Our case managers develop individualised and tailored service responses for each client, involving warm referrals to practical, psychological and other specialist services for support with substance misuse, unmanaged mental and physical health concerns, homelessness and child protection issues. They also support men to engage with programs designed to stop family violence, including MBCPs.

Significantly, our case management approach also includes an educative component that provides men with information on the cycle of violence, and wheels of power and control, to increase their understanding of the impact of family violence behaviours and the harm they cause to partners and children. Goal-setting and monitoring of goal achievements are used as key indicators of accountability.

Underpinned by our Family Safety Model, the program involves work with family members affected by the violence, systemic and integrated risk



The types of issues that male perpetrators of family violence present to us with reflects the level of complexity of the work that we do. It's not uncommon for them to require support with more than one significant issue, such as mental health, drug and alcohol, and homelessness.

“

We're able to observe a marked difference in self-esteem and self-confidence after the program. Many of these women initially present as traumatised and vulnerable, but by the end of the group, they have formed important friendships and started their journey to emotional healing.”

– Opening the Doors facilitator

assessments and risk management strategies, and a focus on keeping perpetrators in view of services and relevant authorities.

The program, which is funded by Family Safety Victoria, is a response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria) recommendations for using responsive and holistic approaches to family violence programs, and reinforcing the accountability of perpetrators of family violence. We welcomed the announcement in June 2019 of the extension of funding for this program, enabling us to continue to deliver the service as a vital part of our response to family violence.

We are currently undertaking joint research with Monash University into the effectiveness of our case management program and MBCPs (page 42).

### Opening the Doors to recovery after family violence

Our Sunshine Centre again provided Opening the Doors, a support group for women who have experienced family violence. Delivered bi-annually for the last six years, the program provides a safe and non-judgemental environment for women to connect with others, understand and manage trauma, strengthen self-esteem, and gain knowledge and practical resources to assist them in their recovery.

The strengths-based, trauma-informed group combines a narrative approach with identity empowering and strengthening activities, and opportunities for women to share their experiences of family violence.

With educative elements, it enhances participants' understanding of the controlling nature of family violence. Groups discuss safety planning, the cycle of violence, ways in which perpetrators resist changing their behaviour, the effects of family violence on women and children, including symptoms of trauma, and how to practise self-care.

Guest speakers from legal and family violence organisations attend the group to discuss how to navigate the service system and to answer questions, with participants also enhancing their knowledge of assertive communication and how to stay safe, including around technology.

Art therapy activities provide a sensory soothing experience for women to experience emotions that may otherwise not be felt due to high levels of stress, conflict and trauma. Play and creative expression also support and enable participants to connect to existing feelings of mastery and control over their lives.

Feedback from women and facilitators indicates that the group significantly enhances knowledge of family violence, its effects and how to seek help, and enables the women to tell their story, develop connections with each other and feel less isolated.

Each new group involves thorough intake and assessment processes, to ensure that the program is appropriate for every woman and her personal circumstances, and to identify other relevant support.

This year we welcomed an extension of program funding that will enable us to continue to support women in western Melbourne to recover from the impacts of family violence for a further three years.

### Working in schools to prevent future family violence

Relationships influence us across our life span and play a crucial role in our growth and development. Early childhood and adolescence represents an important opportunity for preventive and early intervention programs that encourage respectful and equitable relationships, and promote non-violence and non-coercive strategies for dealing with difficulties in relationships.

“I like, like you” is our innovative, whole-of-community program for schools that aims to address the underlying factors that contribute to violence against women while also promoting emotional health and wellbeing.

## 50.03%

of our clients had a family-violence-related need



## 91%

of students felt they knew how to repair a relationship after the “I like, like you” program



“

For the last five years I have been isolated in my home with no friends and only my ex-partner's family around. I have never known such kindness and support [as I have in this group]. I feel very good about my life and strong for my children now.”

– Opening the Doors participant

“

Instead of talking over people in an argument, I'll listen to them and see the problem through the other person's eyes.”

– “I like, like you” participant

“I like, like you” is provided to secondary school students, and to primary school students as “I like, like you UP”.

Program curriculum is designed to promote the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours demonstrated by healthy, safe relationships, and provide practical skills for repairing relationships after conflict, maintaining good mental health and knowing how to help a friend who is in an unsafe relationship.

It strongly emphasizes social emotional intelligence and the gendered nature of family violence, and uses age-appropriate strategies to challenge gendered stereotypes and historical perceptions and expressions of masculinity.

One of the important characteristics that distinguishes “I like, like you” from other respectful relationship programs is that it aims to enhance integration of support services through strong partnerships between young people, families, schools, and health services

and community agencies. The program assists facilitators, teachers and wellbeing staff to identify at-risk children and families, including those experiencing family violence, and help them to access additional supports. Teachers and wellbeing coordinators are engaged in program sessions so that they can reinforce learnings and model behaviours during the program, and further develop students' attitudes, behaviours and skills after the curriculum has been completed.

Over 1370 students undertook “I like, like you” in 2018/19, with more than 9860 students having participated in the program since RAV developed and introduced it in 2014. Extensive pre- and post-program evaluations demonstrate that students have enhanced relationship and communication skills, an increased understanding of healthy relationships, and improved awareness of their own and others' emotions after participating in the program.

## CLIENT STORY

### A whole-of-school approach to stopping family violence

Braybrook College engaged RAV to deliver “I like, like you” to 10 classes of 14- and 15-year-old boys and girls as part of its Respectful Relationships curriculum.

The 225, year nine students participated in four interactive sessions and completed projects to demonstrate their learning. We have also provided ‘wrap around’ support focused on ensuring that the immediate safety and needs of students, families, the school and the broader community are addressed. Working closely with teachers and support staff, we have provided services through our centres and referrals to other appropriate services, to enhance opportunities to change the trajectories of families who are at risk of or are experiencing family violence, and mental health and other issues.

Feedback from students, teachers and parents has indicated that “I like, like you” has positively impacted students' perceptions of gender stereotypes, and understanding of the importance of managing their emotions and the impact of this on healthy relationships. It has also enabled teachers to promote program concepts and strategies within their teaching, continue the

dialogue about healthy relationships with students and better support students to feel safe to express themselves and manage emotional difficulties.

Following the program, the school facilitated an information evening for parents focused on the “I like, like you” key themes. Students delivered presentations and performances at the event to demonstrate their learnings and the program's key messages. RAV was represented in a panel discussion involving Associate Professor Debbie Ollis, the author of the Respectful Relationships curriculum for Victorian secondary schools, and Ms Katie Hall MP, member for Footscray.

The event reinforces Braybrook College's integration of the program's curriculum into the broader school community. It also demonstrates the school's commitment to a whole-of-school approach to raising awareness and continuing conversations with the broader school community about respectful relationships, the gendered drivers of family violence and the prevention of family violence against women.



# PROMOTING AND ENHANCING GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

We deliver mental health services to support individuals, couples and families, including young people.

## A new chapter for youth mental health in Gippsland

In December 2018, we opened a new headspace centre in Wonthaggi, to provide young people aged between 12 and 25 with free or low-cost early intervention mental health services. Our confidential services include counselling, sexual assault counselling, group work, disability support, vocational guidance, help with job seeking, drug and alcohol assessments and counselling, as well as other health and wellbeing services. The centre also undertakes a range of community engagement activities.

Importantly, headspace Wonthaggi is a youth-friendly, inclusive and accessible service for all young people, including young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and LGBTIQ+ young people.

In addition to the main Wonthaggi centre, three outreach services have been established in Leongatha, Foster and Wonthaggi, with two additional outreach locations in Korumburra and Cowes to be established in the 2019/20 financial year. These outreach locations are designed to ensure that young people across the expansive geographic areas of Bass Coast and South Gippsland can access headspace services.

Recognising the diverse needs of the local communities, RAV is proud to operate headspace Wonthaggi in collaboration with local service providers comprising the headspace Wonthaggi Consortium. The centre's services are also provided in consultation with the centre's Youth Advisory Group (YAG), a group of young people who provide direct input into headspace Wonthaggi's services and events, and advocate for the needs and interests of young people in the area.

We officially launched headspace Wonthaggi in March 2019 at an event attended by Mr Russell Broadbent MP, Federal Minister for McMillan; local community leaders; staff from headspace National Office, headspace Wonthaggi and RAV; YAG

members; and representatives from contract manager Gippsland Primary Health Network, the centre's consortium partners and other local services. A second well-attended youth-specific launch party held in June 2019 offered centre tours and information on how headspace can support young people, as well as a range of games, activities and refreshments.

The local Wonthaggi community, as well as communities across Bass Coast and South Gippsland, have embraced the new centre, which has experienced strong service uptake, particularly from young people who have not previously sought support for their mental health.

“

A wonderful place to gain support and link with other services. The staff are exceptionally lovely and it's really nice to be a part of this wonderful place.”

– headspace Wonthaggi client

51.64%

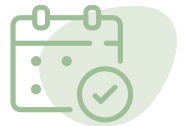
of our clients had a mental-health-related need, such as anxiety, depression and suicidality



During headspace Wonthaggi's first six-months of operation:

170+

young people attended 622 appointments



37%

of clients had not sought help from a mental health professional before



31%

of clients identified as LGBTIQ+





“

It's such a tough gig, this parenting thing, and the more support out there the better, so thanks for making this available for us. [The facilitators] work wonderfully together and delivered a great program.”

– Parent in headspace Bairnsdale's Tuning in to Teens™ program

## headspace across rural, regional and remote East Gippsland

Since 2017, headspace Bairnsdale has provided a range of physical and mental health, wellbeing, vocational and study, and drug and alcohol services to young people across East Gippsland. With youth participation central to our work, our YAG remained involved in our centre to ensure that the services and approaches were inclusive and accessible.

headspace Bairnsdale is staffed by a professional team of clinicians, administration and community engagement staff, with other community agencies co-locating in the centre to deliver child and adolescent psychiatry; Centrelink appointments; and drug and alcohol, disability employment and GP services.

This year we integrated an allied health clinic into our centre, which provides on-site access to dietetics and exercise physiology appointments in a youth-friendly atmosphere. Through this clinic we commenced a weekly walking group focused on both physical exercise and positive mental health strategies.

Other groups this year included a games group for young people with autism and a weekly wellbeing group that aims to support healthy headspaces. As part of a nationwide headspace pilot, we also began providing the emotional-intelligence-focused Tuning in to Teens™ parenting program, which has been well received.

We continued to host our innovative Unique but United (UBU) support group for LGBTIQ+ young people, and were excited to be recognised for this group in the priority area of Cultural Appropriate

Support and Other Diverse Communities in the 2018 Inaugural Gippsland Primary Health Awards.

As part of our Community Awareness and Engagement Plan, we undertook over 40 health promotion workshops and events in schools and the community, to strengthen our relationships with parents, carers, school welfare teams, community services and local agencies. Highlights of the year included a movie night to celebrate headspace Day, which was attended by over 90 young people, activities to mark Victorian Youth Week and the start of our Road Trips Program. This outreach program delivers face-to-face services to school students in remote and rural areas, with follow-up telephone and video conferencing support.

Recognising that it can be challenging for people with communication difficulties to get the information they need clearly and easily, our centre undertook a rigorous assessment that resulted in being awarded the Communication Access Symbol. This symbol demonstrates that our staff have the necessary skills to successfully interact with people experiencing communication difficulties, and helps community members to know that our service is communication-accessible and will treat people experiencing communication difficulties with respect.

headspace Bairnsdale also commenced a comprehensive self-assessment process against the new headspace Model Integrity Framework, which sets clinical and organisational governance, and community engagement expectations, to ensure that services are high quality and meet the needs and expectations of young people and their families.

## Reducing barriers to help at-risk young people succeed

Children and young people can face all sorts of pressures, including problems at home, school or with friends. These issues can act as barriers to their wellbeing, safety, social connectedness and educational supports, and if not addressed, can affect their mental health. Our i-Connect Family Mental Health Support Service aims to provide early intervention support to children and young people aged under 18 in East Gippsland who are at risk of, or affected by, mental illness.

# 413

headspace Bairnsdale clients accessed individual services



# 40+

headspace Bairnsdale health promotion events



“

I feel really well supported here and I know you won't judge me.”

– 13-year-old client at headspace Bairnsdale



Delivered since 2013, the service provides practical support to help clients stay engaged in education and learning, including sport and recreation, and remain connected to their family, friends and community. The long-term aim of the program is to strengthen the capacity of at-risk young people to achieve success in their education and learning, and to move into the workforce.

i-Connect provides case management support, group programs and community engagement activities to enhance knowledge of and access to the service. In 2018/19, we provided brokerage funds to clients and families of clients – a unique initiative in the East Gippsland area. Using a strengths-based approach, these funds offered financial support to enhance children's and young people's ability to achieve education, personal, physical, community and safety goals, which parents or carers couldn't otherwise fund. Brokerage was used to pay for activities such as therapies, tutoring and school camps, and basic needs such as food and clothing.

Brokerage can also often be provided to families who are experiencing family violence and have had to leave their homes quickly to remain safe, often without their possessions. We can support these families to ensure that immediate housing and health needs are met, and help them with longer-term needs such as clothing, household items, and school fees and uniforms. These items assist families to rebuild and recover, and children to return to school without feeling stigmatised because they don't have the appropriate clothes, uniform or school materials.

Covering an expansive geographic area across East Gippsland, i-Connect involves a significant outreach component that enables access in rural and remote areas where other services may not be readily available. In 2018/19, we responded to requests from remote primary schools whose students were experiencing bullying, behavioural issues and poor social connectedness. At the classroom level and across year levels, we delivered programs focused on enhancing students' awareness of their own and others' emotions, understanding of how to support their peers and knowledge of when to reach out to a trusted adult for support.

Integral to i-Connect's success is its close links with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, legal, family support, family violence and mental health services, including headspace Bairnsdale.

## CLIENT STORY

### Josh's journey from social isolation to connection

Sixteen-year-old Josh\* was referred to headspace Bairnsdale because he was experiencing low moods and was socially isolated, in part because of his home-schooling and challenges in socialising related to his autism diagnosis.

Josh attended individual counselling at headspace to learn strategies to manage his mental health and gain confidence in socialising with others. During these sessions, he expressed his interest in joining the centre's fortnightly Games Group for young people with autism. With the support of his youth access worker, who attended the first session, Josh joined the group and has since become a regular member, giving the group a “thumbs up” during the evaluation section of each session.

The group's facilitators have seen marked positive changes in Josh's self-confidence and mood since he started attending the group. He has demonstrated new social skills, including using eye contact to determine when it is his turn to play a game. When arriving at our centre, Josh now returns a “hello” from staff at the front desk as he passes, and will sometimes even wave. He is also now able to shift conversations from his topics of choice to topics that other group members may enjoy. In what has been a new and sometimes challenging social situation for Josh, he has been able to contain any frustrations he experienced, and respond patiently and calmly when situations are different and unfamiliar.

Josh's parents say that he looks forward to each Games Group session, and from the first week, they saw it had a positive impact.

“When I picked him up, he was bouncing and smiling, for the first time EVER after being in a social situation. He strutted out of headspace with a grin, and even turned back and replied, ‘See ya’ to two other young guys who also participated. This is a first in his 16 years of life,” Josh's dad said.

\* Name has been changed.



Watch a short video about our headspace Bairnsdale Unique But United (UBU) support group <https://headspace.org.au/headspace-centres/bairnsdale/#gallery-1>

# MEETING THE NEEDS OF SENIOR VICTORIANS

**We deliver targeted services, and undertake community and sector activities, to meet and promote the growing needs of senior Victorians and their families.**

Our Charter of Rights for Older Adults affirms the rights of older people and specifies what they can expect when engaging with our organisation. It guides how we engage with and provide services to older people, to support independence and autonomy, facilitate participation in decision-making and strengthen important relationships.

The charter is used to guide services across our organisation, including in elder mediation. This service aims to prevent or resolve family conflict involving or about an older person, and to support difficult conversations about ageing-related issues and planning for the future, including around medical, health, financial and living arrangements. The solution-focused process focuses on supporting and enabling the participation of the older person, where possible, and on decisions that protect the interests, rights and safety of older family members. Elder mediation often involves intergenerational family members and can assist to resolve disputes between families and aged care providers.

In 2018/19, we continued our partnership with Swinburne University to support the Digital Story Project in Residential Aged Care research, which pairs volunteers and professionals with older adults living in aged care facilities, to provide companionship and social interaction.

The result of the project is a short, digital video that tells the story of each resident's life. The stories can be presented as gifts or legacy records to the next generation of family members. Evaluations of the intervention show a positive impact on professional carers' empathy and engagement with residents, with evaluations of the therapeutic impact on mental health outcomes for residents currently being undertaken.

We continue to promote our primary prevention resources on topics including elder abuse, moving into residential aged care and becoming an elder carer.

## **Elder abuse prevention and responses**

Preventing and responding to elder abuse has been a recent focus for our organisation, with vulnerable older people who are presenting to our services most commonly experiencing issues such as financial exploitation, emotional abuse or the breakdown of shared living arrangements. In 2018/19, we responded to elder mediation referrals from Seniors Rights Victoria, and community, health and legal services, to help older people and their families find solutions and stay safe when elder abuse is present.

Recognising that strong, positive relationships are both a key predictor of wellbeing and a protective factor against elder abuse, we are focused on the concept of relationship planning, in addition to health and financial planning. Relationship planning promotes the importance of social supports and strong family connections in preventing situational elder abuse and promoting successful ageing. In line with this, we provide You, Me, Us, a primary prevention workshop for couples who are nearing or in the early stages of retirement.

The program's development was informed by a literature review on risks and protective factors for wellbeing in older age, and qualitative studies relevant to ageing as a couple. A consumer consultation process involving a focus group and







“

As the elders of our communities,  
you have a right to be treated with  
equality, dignity and respect.”

– RAV Charter of Rights for Older Adults

pilot workshop also contributed to the workshop design and implementation.

Throughout the year, our staff participated in state and national discussions on elder abuse, including through key local networks, and presentations at significant forums and conferences. At the Elder Abuse Conference, we joined an expert panel discussion session on conflict resolution and interpersonal relationships, and delivered an interactive workshop on our primary prevention and education program, *Steering the Right Path*. Initially developed with funding from State Trustees, the program is facilitated in workplace and community settings to increase awareness of some of the challenges associated with planning for ageing and decision-making, and provide simple steps to avoid these issues.

Through our membership of the Eastern Elder Abuse Network, we participated in a panel discussion at the Eastern Metro Region World Elder Abuse Awareness Day event. The event also involved the launch of two new elder abuse prevention resources that RAV co-developed.

At a national level, we remained a member of a Relationships Australia network focused on developing and enhancing senior relationship services. We also presented a seminar on elder abuse and the role of mediation and counselling, as part of the Swinburne University Wellbeing Clinic for Older Adults Seminar Series on Ageing.

### Digital platforms as social isolation interventions

This year we completed our *Connecting with Others in Older Age* research project, which we conducted in partnership with Swinburne University with the support of an Iverson Health Innovation Research Institute grant.

The project aimed to gain an understanding of the role of technology in establishing social connections, maintaining relationships, and preventing social isolation and loneliness in older adults. In particular, it focused on identifying loneliness resources and interventions that may assist across the spectrum, from prevention of undesired social isolation to remedial help.

The project resulted in a website prototype that was informed by online surveys and co-developed by six consumer focus groups of men and women aged 65 to 80 years from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds and locations.

Consideration was given to key transitions associated with participants' current life stage, and the impact of these on social isolation, their relationships, sense of purpose and meaning, and expectations and aspirations for social connection. This included how participants thought about, planned for and managed retirement, the death of a spouse, down-sizing and moving to a new neighbourhood. This information informed our understanding of how a digital resource could support or enhance participants' social interactions.

Universally, all participants identified that relationships were important to their sense of social connectivity and reported technology was one tool that supported their social interactions and relationships. Many participants reported having planned for the future with relationships in mind; however, others reported that they had made significant decisions, such as moving to a new area, without consideration of impacts on their relationships, and were struggling to form new relationships and stay connected.

Many members of the focus groups expressed significant fear of becoming increasingly isolated with age. While some were daunted by technology, most recognised that well-designed, secure online platforms could help build local connections.

A key finding of the study was that digital platforms are perceived by older people as one of many tools for establishing and maintaining their relationships, but that the use of such platforms is determined by similar considerations as for face-to-face or telephone social connections, such as privacy, effort required and the likely quality of the interactions with others.



Download our tip sheet on elder abuse  
[www.rav.org.au/elder-abuse](http://www.rav.org.au/elder-abuse)

# OTHER SPECIALIST SERVICES

We deliver trauma-informed, therapeutic case management services across Victoria, to support people who experienced institutional child sexual abuse and those affected by past forced adoption policies and practices.

## Forced Adoption Support Services

Forced adoption policies and practices affect a large number of Australians and have caused significant ongoing effects for many people, particularly mothers, fathers and adoptees. It's estimated that there were up to 150,000 adoptions in the period between 1951 and 1975, and as many as 250,000 adoptions from 1940 to 2012 (Australian Government Department of Social Services, 2018). Many of these adoptions were arranged without willing or informed consent, and were unethical and dishonest. In 2013, the Australian Government formally apologised to people affected by past forced adoption or removal policies and practices.

Our Compass Forced Adoption Support Services provide free information, referral and support to people affected by forced adoption, including on adoption-related issues and how they have affected people, and with accessing services and resources. We also support clients with record-searching and with the process of reuniting with lost family members.

Recognising the impact of trauma as a consequence of forced adoption, and to support affected clients, we began providing trauma-informed counselling and therapeutic support.

Through our small grants program, we funded a number of projects designed to build capacity and enhance support for people affected by forced adoption. Grants supported people from interstate who are affected by forced adoption to attend the unveiling of the Taken Not Given sculpture in East Melbourne and the development of a booklet to provide a historical record of the launch. The sculpture acknowledges the mothers and children who were separated by forced adoption policies and practices, and the loss and pain that this caused.

### Reference

Australian Government Department of Social Services. (2018). *Forced Adoption Practices*. Retrieved from <https://dss.gov.au>

It is striking how many of our clients tell us this is the first time they have felt heard, believed and supported since these injustices were perpetrated against them.

## Redress Support Services

In July 2018, we began providing free and confidential Redress Support Services across Victoria to anyone considering applying for the National Redress Scheme. The scheme was created by the Australian Government in response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and acknowledges that many children were sexually abused in Australian institutions. It holds institutions accountable for this abuse and is designed to help people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse gain access to counselling, a redress payment and a direct personal response from an institution. On 22 October 2018, the Australian Government delivered a National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse.

We are funded by the Australian Government to provide Redress Support Services to assist people before, during and after they apply for redress, as well as those who are contemplating applying for the scheme. Prior to the introduction of this service, we provided specialist counselling and support to individuals, couples and family members impacted by the Royal Commission, through our Reclaim Support Services, which operated from 2013 until July 2018.

Through our Redress Support Services, trained therapeutic case managers offer practical and emotional support, including brief counselling, case management and other arrangements to provide people with a safe environment to engage with the scheme. We also assist clients to access other appropriate services, including legal advice and financial counselling.

“

I really wanted to say to you that I have found [this] support to be the most pro-active I've ever received. It's been excellent for my wellbeing; it's really changed my life.”

– Client of Redress and Compass programs

Our team provide clear information about what the scheme is, how it can be accessed, and what can be reasonably expected from applying for and potentially accepting an offer of redress. We also help clients to complete application forms, including the often challenging process of describing their experiences of sexual abuse and the impact this has had on their lives.

We recognise that the wellbeing of many people who experienced child sexual abuse has been impacted, including their mental health, behaviour and personal relationships, physical health, education levels, employment and economic security. We provide free, face-to-face, outreach, telephone and online service support options across Victoria, to ensure that our services are accessible and inclusive, including in rural, regional and remote areas of Victoria.

In October 2018, following our submission to the Joint Select Committee on oversight of the implementation of redress-related recommendations of the Royal Commission, we were invited to appear at a public hearing and give evidence to the Joint Select Committee on the implementation of the National Redress Scheme.

# OUR COMMITMENT TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

We are committed to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Victoria. We do so by working towards our unique vision – our Statement of Commitment.

We are focused on developing and strengthening relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, by engaging staff, stakeholders and community members, and providing a culturally safe organisation.

## Bagung ba Wadamba: Gather and heal

RAV is a proud partner of the Bagung ba Wadamba project, which includes a suite of three culturally specific group programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved with the justice system. In 2018/19, more than 50 men and women participated in the programs, which were delivered in prisons, cultural centres and through Aboriginal organisations.

Funded by the Corrections Victoria Aboriginal Programs Unit's Kaka Wangity Wangin-Mirrie, the project has the Aboriginal concept of social and emotional wellbeing at its core. Guided by the Aboriginal organisations RAV partners with, our service model integrates program content that focuses on connection to land, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family and community, and how these connections contribute to healing.

We recognise the importance of cultural safety and prioritise providing a culturally safe and supportive environment for participants. Using a combination of evidence-based practice and culturally appropriate program content, we assist First Nations men and women to build resilience, strengthen cultural identity and enhance protective healing factors that can facilitate engagement in other rehabilitation programs. Ultimately, Bagung ba Wadamba is designed to facilitate healing from intergenerational trauma, enhance parenting practices, increase social and emotional wellbeing, and reduce re-offending rates.

As lead agency in the project, RAV has supported the development, design and implementation of the programs in close partnership with Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service, the Wayapa Wuurk Aboriginal Wellness Foundation and independent facilitator Mark Williams. These partners lead and advise on program design and development, and provide Aboriginal facilitators to deliver the three separate groups for women, men and parents: Women's Journey, Men's Journey and Growing Up Kids.

During both the Women's Journey and Men's Journey programs, participants take part in cultural and healing activities, such as smoking ceremonies, yarning circles, clap stick making and Wayapa Wuurk, an Aboriginal meditation and wellness practice meaning "Connect to Country". Throughout the programs participants have the opportunity to yarn about what matters most, and enhance their emotional and spiritual wellbeing. On the last day of the programs participants meet with an Elder and learn about services that can support them.

## 4.55%

of our clients were from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds



## 150+

Bagung ba Wadamba participants since the project's inception in 2016



## 9/10

average participant rating of the Men's Journey and Women's Journey programs



## 90%

of Growing Up Kids participants would do things differently as a parent after the program



“

I gained a lot of knowledge about trauma and the effects on children and looking after myself. I will be more aware of my kids and what is best for them. I think it was awesome.”

– Growing Up Kids participant

“

We learnt more about ourselves as men and what we should be teaching our little ones. Reflection was on who we should be spending time with when not in prison.”

– Men’s Journey participant

Elders also guide women through the process of making a possum skin cloak that represents their cultural identity, while men learn cultural dance.

The Growing Up Kids parenting program applies evidence-based activities with a culturally appropriate lens to enhance parental confidence, strengthen parents’ relationships with their children and promote positive parenting skills. It supports parents to look at their own childhood and consider how this has shaped the way in which they parent, and the parent they want to be.

Bagung ba Wadamba programs are regularly evaluated, with all participants who have provided feedback reporting that they would recommend their program to others. Feedback also indicates that participants overwhelmingly feel more empowered by their connection to their culture as a result of the healing programs. Participants of Growing Up Kids report that they felt heard, understood and respected during the program. They demonstrate notable improvements in their confidence as a parent, and an enhanced understanding of how connection to culture influences their parenting styles and use of problem-solving techniques.

### A Deadly Community Kitchen

For the past three years, RAV has supported Deadly Community Kitchen, a fortnightly cooking group delivered by IPC Health for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are socially isolated. The kitchen in western Melbourne provides a place for community members to participate in a communal cooking session, before sitting down to enjoy an affordable and nutritious meal together. Participants are able to gain new cooking skills, while learning about healthy food and lifestyle choices.

The group provides the opportunity to socialise, meet new people and have a yarn about culture. With a focus on helping group members to access health and community services, sessions also feature regular guest speakers to talk on behalf of relevant services.

An important element of the program is that, with the support of the facilitator, group members work together to select the meal for each session, which is both empowering and engaging for participants. Deadly Community Kitchen has resulted in new friendships being formed, which have extended beyond the boundaries of the group.

Our funding supports the running costs of the Deadly Community Kitchen, with RAV staff regularly attending sessions to assist with cooking, enhance awareness of and access to services that can support community members, and strengthen relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### Across our organisation and the community

In 2018/19, we continued our work to support and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and groups we have engaged with, using processes that enable inclusion, respect and understanding.

We are committed to ensuring ongoing development of Aboriginal cultural awareness and competency in our Senior Management Team, staff and Board, to enhance how our workforce understands and works with Victorian Koori communities, and the diversity of culture. We again provided a Cultural Strengthening Program this year, with senior managers attending a session provided by Koorie Heritage Trust, and other staff participating in one of nine training sessions delivered by Boonwurrung Custodian, Caroline Martin of Yalukit Marnang, and her mother Carolyn Briggs. Staff in Gippsland attended a local cultural awareness program that was facilitated by the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative.

Recognising the need to enhance access and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our sector, particularly in the area of FDR/mediation, we established a scholarship for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person to undertake our five-day Mediation Training Short Course and additional assessment day. The intensive course provides the knowledge and practical skills of the mediation process, with an additional assessment day offering a pathway for participants to become an accredited mediator.

We remained engaged in the national Relationships Australia Indigenous Network, which involves representatives from all state and territory organisations. The network provides the federation with policy advice and direction on Aboriginal service delivery, and offers support and cultural safety to Aboriginal staff and other staff working with Aboriginal families, within the context of the values of reconciliation, social justice, self-determination and integrity.





We also participated in a range of programs, events, initiatives and networks with, and to support, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Highlights of 2018/19 include the following.

- Support of Djirra's Sisters Day Out cultural and wellbeing workshops in Northcote, Werribee, Ballarat, Geelong, Deer Park, Moe and Lakes Entrance. Workshops are held regularly to enhance Koori women's self-esteem, sense of identity, and their understanding of their right to feel safe and secure in their roles as nurturers and leaders in the community. We provided information stands, raffles and gift bag giveaways on the days, which offer pampering activities, information on family violence and direct access to relevant support services.
- Delivery of DRUMBEAT workshops at Aboriginal community centres.
- Attendance at The Long Walk's The Long Lunch, and the NAIDOC Week Victoria March and Gala Ball.
- Partnering with Reconciliation Victoria, Banyule Council, Darebin Council, Yarra Plenty Library and 3KND, Melbourne's first Indigenous owned and managed radio station, to host a community conversation around treaty, and attendance at events and flag-raising ceremonies to mark Sorry Day and Reconciliation Week.
- Sponsorship of the 2on2 Youth Basketball Tournament, a six-week pilot program for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and African young people in the City of Port Phillip.
- Participation in Lulla's Health Day, an annual event at which local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are aged three-and-a-half can meet with a maternal and child health nurse, in preparation for starting pre-school and school. The appointments include a review of each child's growth, health, learning and development, and a vision screening. Engagement in the day was supported by a range of family-friendly activities, including craft activities provided by RAV.

## CLIENT STORY

### Working to help Aboriginal women heal through their culture

*by Marissa, Intensive Case Manager at Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service, and facilitator of the Women's Journey and Growing Up Kids programs in Bagung ba Wadamba.*

When an organisation like RAV partners with an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) such as Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service (BWAHS), you can work side by side in effective partnerships where the Aboriginal perspectives are heard and the community gains the benefits. Both services bring different kinds of expertise that allows us to work towards a common goal. Being able to talk with RAV about how the programs are developed and have our service take the lead in program delivery has worked well, because if ACCOs do not take the lead in partnerships it just does not work.

Given that our people are so over-represented in the justice system these programs are very important for Aboriginal women. We are helping our women who are in the justice system and are impacted by family violence and intergenerational trauma.

It's an opportunity for us to support Aboriginal women to reflect on their life journey and how they have been impacted by family violence and intergenerational trauma.

We assist with strengthening and empowering the women to take steps to make positive change.

The unique difference that these programs offer is that we are coming from an Aboriginal perspective and the programs work to support Aboriginal women with healing through cultural strengthening.

We sit and yarn with the women so that they can share their stories in a safe environment when they feel comfortable to do so. They appreciate the opportunity to participate in a program where they feel they are being heard and understood.

As a facilitator, I feel that the partnership [with RAV] is respectful as we were allowed to develop and tailor the program to the needs of Aboriginal women.

The programs make a real difference and remind me why I do the work that I do. Supporting women with healing through connection to culture is very powerful and I can see the results directly when I am working with the women.



# DELIVERING INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE SERVICES

Our values of inclusivity and adaptability support us to provide accessible and appropriate services to, and build and strengthen respectful partnerships with, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

## Safe resolutions for Vietnamese families

Separation and divorce are among the most difficult experiences in life. The process can be more difficult when language is a barrier to accessing mainstream services, including FDR. Our Safe Resolutions pilot program is designed to support Vietnamese couples in Melbourne's west who are separating or separated, through enhanced access to proactive, educative and early intervention services including FDR, education sessions, legal representation and family violence support. It provides the opportunity for Vietnamese families to safely resolve their family law disputes about their children, parenting, financial matters and property settlements, through a culturally appropriate and legally assisted model of FDR.

Our model differs from traditional FDR practices in that it is responsive to the needs of Vietnamese clients. Experienced practitioners deliver the service with the assistance of a cultural broker, who assists in reducing common barriers to navigating the family law system. Vietnamese interpreters who have an understanding of FDR and family law processes are also included in the service, enabling them to accurately translate words and phrases that may otherwise not be understood by clients.

The legally assisted service also offers clients free legal advice from community legal service lawyers, who attend FDR appointments and support clients throughout the mediation process. Lawyers provide clients with information on likely outcomes if they were to proceed to court, enabling them to make informed decisions and resolve disputes quickly without the need for litigation.

Bilingual staff at our Sunshine FRC, where the service is based, are integral to ensuring that the service is accessible to clients. Staff can answer calls, respond to enquiries and greet clients in Vietnamese, and our Vietnamese family safety practitioner helps women and children who are affected by family violence as part of our Family Safety Model. Through this model, we provide psychosocial and needs assessments,

warm referrals and management of cases to ensure that clients' needs are met, and that clients do not 'fall between the cracks' of the service system.

As part of the service's broader education initiatives, this year we delivered a range of community presentations to parents of Vietnamese playgroups and community groups, focused on enhancing community knowledge of the Australian family law system. Cultural awareness training has also been provided to RAV and external agency staff involved in the service.

Another key initiative in 2018/19 was the development of a new educational video that provides information in Vietnamese about parenting, with a focus on the best interest of children. The resource will be launched in 2019/20 as a tool to enhance client and public knowledge of the service.

## 11.21%

of our clients were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds



## 145

the number of different countries our clients were born in



## 83

the number of different languages spoken at home by our clients



## 146

clients used Safe Resolutions, our legally assisted and culturally appropriate FDR service



“

It's powerful to witness the changes that happen during our Vietnamese MBCPs – in terms of the men's knowledge, their attitudes of gender equality and their behaviour.”

– MBCP facilitator

“

I have been practising noticing my feelings and sharing the learnings from class with my husband and now we use the bear [emotion identification] cards every day to share with each other something about how we are feeling.”

– Afghan Tuning in to Kids™ participant

RAV delivers Safe Resolutions in partnership with WEstjustice, Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre and the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association Inc. Through these partners, our community engagement work and with the support of our clients, we have established strong networks, connections and referrals, and continue to build knowledge, trust and engagement with the Vietnamese community in Melbourne's west. The consistent demand that the program has experienced demonstrates high levels of need and interest from the community. Feedback from partner agencies and clients indicates that the holistic approach of Safe Resolutions is positively impacting clients by providing them with timely legal, safety, emotional and culturally appropriate support.

### Afghan mothers tuning in to their kids

In south east Melbourne, Afghan mothers of preschool-aged children attended a culturally appropriate adaptation of Tuning in to Kids™, an evidence-based parenting program developed by the Mindful Centre for Training and Research in Developmental Health. The program is based on attachment theory and focuses on helping parents to develop strong, sensitive and secure relationships with their children by listening and responding to emotional experiences.

Tuning in to Kids™ was delivered to participants of a supported playgroup with funding from Windermer's Communities for Children program, in recognition of the difficulties the Afghan women experience in accessing educational, support and other services. These barriers include language, literacy levels, social isolation, cultural differences, and role and gender expectations.

Our culturally appropriate program was designed to be responsive to the complex needs and circumstances of the participants who could not read, write or speak English, or read or write Farsi. Program content was presented verbally through an interpreter, and we allowed additional time for translations, and to explain and discuss expressions, words and concepts with which the women were unfamiliar.

Significantly, expressions of emotion, such as anger, sadness or fear, were not easily translated into the Afghan language. We provided examples of different emotions and discussed the impact of these

emotions physically in our bodies, which helped the women to identify, explore and understand their feelings and those their children experience.

Recognising that the mothers had children who were all aged under five and not yet at school, and that some mothers were breastfeeding infants or had limited childcare options, we provided a supervised play area during the group sessions. While the program content was delivered to the 16 mothers, 22 children enjoyed drawing, reading and other activities in a nearby area, enabling mothers to attend the group and freely express themselves without concerns of their children overhearing them.

Women have shared that the information that they received and their experiences in the group have been powerful. Within the three sessions, they started applying what they had learned, including how to emotionally connect with their children without feeling judged, resulting in positive changes for both their children and themselves.

The group has also provided a unique opportunity for the mothers to connect and share experiences with other women outside their family. This has been particularly important because of the limited social networks and lack of local support women have from their own mothers, who are in Afghanistan. The program also provided a pathway for women to access other referrals, education and individual assistance for family, relationship and community issues, such as family violence and child behavioural concerns.

The group's success has resulted in significant community demand for further programs to be facilitated in the future.

### Help for women during settlement

In partnership with Life Without Barriers, we delivered a support group for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who were awaiting the outcome of an application for an Australian visa. The Women's Support and Social Group in Sunshine provided a non-judgemental space for women to connect with others in similar circumstances, share experiences and support each other through the often stressful, uncertain and isolating journey of applying for a visa.

Women from South Sudanese, Persian, Iranian, Indian, Sri Lankan and Vietnamese backgrounds



“

It was comforting to see the women get some help and support, as they navigate uncertainty but look ahead to their future of settling in Australia.”

– Family safety practitioner on Women’s Support and Social Group



attended the five sessions, which were delivered across a five-month period to provide support across the extensive visa application period.

The group included informative presentations, art therapy activities and interactive discussions. Women with children were offered free childcare, enabling them to attend the sessions while their children were cared for by a qualified childcare worker.

Education topics included managing stress, women’s health and wellbeing, parenting, and family violence education and support, which was particularly important because of differences between the laws and expectations in different countries. Facilitators focused on what is not acceptable or legal in Australia, and discussed overcoming cultural barriers to safe, respectful and healthy relationships.

The group also explained how practical case management services could assist the women, including by contacting migration lawyers to clarify matters and gain updates on their application, identifying opportunities for volunteering with local organisations to enhance their sense of purpose, and undertaking driving lessons as a step to obtaining a driver’s licence for increased independence.

An informal lunch was provided at the end of each session, and despite some language barriers, many of the women were able to engage with each other, and form connections and friendships involving meaningful conversations and laughter.

Feedback from the group indicated that the women valued the supportive space outside of their homes and the chance to discuss many of the unique challenges they faced related to the migration circumstances.

### Vietnamese men’s behaviour change programs in Sunshine

One in eight people in the suburb of Sunshine were born in Vietnam and 16 per cent of people speak Vietnamese (ABS, 2016); however, at our Sunshine Centre, Vietnamese men are often unable to undertake mainstream behaviour change programs because of language barriers. Recognising this, RAV delivers a Vietnamese-specific MBCP for Vietnamese men who perpetrate family violence. While ensuring that participants can understand program content, it enables men to take responsibility for their actions

and end their use of controlling, abusive and violent behaviours in their relationships with women and children.

Traditional MBCP sessions are tailored to provide a safe and culturally appropriate space for men to share their experiences, learn strategies to manage their emotions and stop perpetrating family violence.

The program is facilitated by experienced facilitators and delivered in Vietnamese. Their awareness of Vietnamese customs and traditions, and the challenges that are commonly faced by migrants, helps to build rapport between the facilitators and participants, and enhances the men’s engagement with program content and their likelihood of changing their behaviour.

It also focuses on educating participants about Australian expectations and laws that do not tolerate family violence, and promotes healthy, safe and respectful relationships that do not involve controlling, abusive or violent behaviours.

As part of the group, RAV has established strong relationships and referral pathways with the Australian Vietnamese Women’s Association, Sunshine Magistrates’ Court, inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, and the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Men’s Behaviour Change Reference Group, of which RAV is a member.

With a focus on prioritising the safety of women and children, a Vietnamese-speaking family safety practitioner makes contact with partners and former partners of participants during the program. This component of our Family Safety Model involves comprehensive risk assessments and relevant referrals to ensure that women and their children are afforded support and safety.

In 2018/19, the program was extended to 20 weeks in response to new Family Safety Victoria Minimum Standards and as a result of significant state policy changes and the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria). This has been a positive change that has enhanced opportunities for men to make and also sustain behaviour changes.

#### Reference

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2016). 2016 Census QuickStats: Sunshine (Vic.) Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au>

# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

As an organisation that has an RTO and also delivers direct client services, RAV is uniquely placed within our industry to provide high-quality, service-informed accredited training and professional development opportunities for individuals, professionals and workplaces.

## Training the next generation of FDRPs

Many students who enrol in our Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution (CHC81115) are seeking a change in career direction, including from existing counselling, psychology, social work and legal backgrounds.

The graduate diploma is delivered by our RTO and provides students with the opportunity to learn vocational knowledge and skills and undertake a work placement at one of our 10 FDR service delivery centres. This enables them to build the capability to deliver FDR and register as an FDRP with the Attorney-General's Department.

The 2018/19 year marked 10 years since our RTO commenced delivering accredited training for FDRPs. This has resulted in significant workforce development, both within the sector and for RAV, with 58 per cent of our current FDRPs having completed their FDR training through our RTO.

## Responding to increasing family violence training needs

Recognising the growing demand for family violence services, we have developed a range of workshops and courses that respond to the increasing training needs of professionals, organisations and services in the family violence sector. This year, we delivered Advanced Family Violence Training, as well as Family Violence in the Workplace and Working with Children in Family Violence Response workshops.

Our RTO was successfully scoped to provide a new Graduate Diploma of Relationship Counselling (CHC81015) with a Focus on Family Violence. Students in this exciting, innovative course will gain the knowledge and skills to support individuals and families affected by a range of complex personal and relational issues that impact individual and family functioning, including family violence. The one-year course integrating classes, supervised practice and placement sessions will be delivered for the first time in July 2019 and will help to further develop the workforce within the family violence sector and broader community services.

# 1913

total workshop participants



# 279

total workshops delivered



“

Loved the course, great presenters, couldn't be happier.”

– Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution student

“

Trainers were excellent in encouraging open/honest comments, questions and reflections.”

– Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution student



## Enhancing the sector's capacity to manage vicarious trauma

In keeping with our commitment to enhance the capacity of the community services workforce, we delivered training on vicarious trauma to a wide range of professionals in the sector. This included 49 workshops for staff within the Department of Health and Human Services, as part of their employee wellbeing and support program.

Vicarious trauma is the cumulative impact of prolonged and repeated exposure to stories and pain, trauma and stress endured by others. It is an occupational challenge for any individual who has continuous exposure to change, adversity, trauma and violence and it is a significant issue for workers within our resource-limited sector, which encompasses child protection, disability and family violence services.

Our workshops provided attendees with an understanding of the nature and impact of vicarious trauma, tools to monitor personal and professional wellbeing, and practices that support resilience and reduce the risk of vicarious trauma, including opportunities to engage in reflective practice. The workshops provide the knowledge and strategies to support employees to practise self-care and work in a sustainable way, so that they can continue in their roles to positively impact the community.

We will continue to deliver vicarious trauma workshops to professionals, organisations and workplaces in 2019/20.

### Training delivered in 2018/19

#### Accredited training

- Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution (CHC81115)
- Mediation Training Short Course
- Specialist Course in Couple Therapy

#### Professional development workshops

- Advanced Family Violence Practice
- Advanced Training in Property and Financial Matters in FDR Practice
- ATLAS Train the Trainer: For facilitators delivering workshops in prisons

- Child-Inclusive FDR
- Cultural Competence in Case Formulation
- Family Violence in the Workplace
- Grief and Loss
- Introduction to Property and Financial Matters in FDR Practice
- LINC'S: Psycho-educational workshops for people who are subject to Community Correction Orders
- Managing Challenging Behaviours
- Managing Conflict in the Workplace
- Professional Boundaries in Therapeutic Work
- REACH: Taking your Clinical Effectiveness to the Next Level
- Refresher Training in Property and Financial Matters in FDR Practice
- Responding to Critical Incidents
- Supporting Separated Families
- The Casual Counsellor
- The Tree of Life: An Approach to Working with Vulnerable Children, Young People and Adults
- Trauma-Informed Practice
- Vicarious Trauma
- Working with Couples

# OUR PEOPLE: THE CORE OF OUR SUCCESS

The knowledge, skills, quality and commitment of our staff are integral to our organisation's success in achieving our vision and ensuring our clients receive the help that they need.

## Equipping our workforce

Our clients and organisation benefit from our capable workforce, whose varied backgrounds provide a diverse range of skills, experience and expertise. Our committed administration, support and corporate services staff provide the infrastructure and assistance required for our dedicated practitioners to deliver services and programs that achieve meaningful outcomes for clients.

We invest strongly in the recruitment, induction, training and development, supervision and support of our staff, to ensure they are equipped to continue delivering high-quality services that meet the increasingly complex needs of clients.

This year we revised our induction processes. Our updated, comprehensive program provides new employees with a structured on-boarding process incorporating both face-to-face and online learning opportunities, to familiarise them with their day-to-day role, team, centre and the organisation more broadly.

We offer employment conditions that support our staff to work with us in ways that meet their personal and family needs, including flexible working hours; remote work locations; compressed working weeks; and parental, flexible and study leave. Our Employee Assistance Program offers free, confidential counselling to staff and their immediate family members, for assistance with personal or work-related issues.

Our staff are committed to the work that they do and the clients who they assist, with almost one-third of our staff having worked with RAV for more than five years. We admire this commitment, and as a result of our career progression pathways and effective succession planning, we promoted 13 staff in 2018/19.

We provide all staff with professional training opportunities, such as workshops, courses, conferences and seminars, to strengthen core competencies and develop new knowledge and skills required to respond to the changing needs of our clients, funders, the sector and the community.

Highlights of the year included training on cultural awareness, LGBTIQ+ inclusive practice, and a workshop delivered by US counselling psychologist, Scott D Miller, on evidence-based strategies to enhance clinical performance and client outcomes. FDRPs also attended introductory or advanced training in FDR for property and financial matters, in response to the provision of new funding for FRCs.

## Staff professional development topics

- Clinical case-noting and preparing for court attendance
- Clinical skills and effectiveness
- Cultural awareness
- Difficult and distressed clients
- Information sharing scheme
- Multi-agency risk assessment and management (MARAM) framework
- Professional supervision
- Property FDR
- Reflective practice
- Resilience at work
- Supervision
- Time and email management
- Trauma-informed care
- Working with LGBTIQ+ communities



Our employees in 2018/19:



**321**

total employees



**13**

were promoted internally



**26**

accessed our Employee Assistance Program



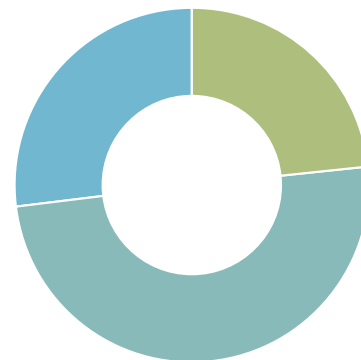
**58**

joined our team



**4543**

hours of professional development were provided



- Full-time 23.4%
- Part-time 49.8%
- Casual 26.8%



**69%**

of managers are women



**32%**

have worked with us for more than five years

“

The core of our success has always been the people and their incredible commitment to their work, to their professionalism and to the people they serve.”

– Susan Gribben, Former Executive Director on the occasion of RAV’s 70th anniversary

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## Executive team

As at 30 June 2019



**Dr Andrew Bickerdike**  
Chief Executive Officer



**Michael Muldoon**  
General Manager  
Operations



**Anastasia Panayiotidis**  
General Manager  
Clinical Services



**Shiranthi Sivarajah**  
Chief Financial Officer  
and Company Secretary

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## Management team

As at 30 June 2019

**Carl Beeston**  
Senior Manager  
ICT Operations

**Rose Byrnes**  
Senior Manager Western

**Cate Chaiyot**  
Centre Manager  
headspace Wonthaggi

**Anna Clarke**  
Senior Manager  
Communications and  
Marketing

**John Corvan**  
Manager Melbourne FRC

**Simon Curran**  
Senior Manager Kew,  
and Business and Service  
Development

**Sharon Greenhill**  
Senior Manager  
Human Resources

**Andreana Harrison**  
Programs Manager  
Family Violence Services

**Karen Holmes**  
Senior Manager Training  
and Development

**Jo Huggins**  
Senior Manager Gippsland

**Suzanne Ichlov**  
Senior Manager Centre  
Operations South East

**Christine Lye**  
Manager Northern  
Melbourne

**Cate Newcomen**  
Centre Manager  
headspace Bairnsdale

**Suresh Ramachandraiah**  
Acting Senior Manager  
Southern and Eastern

**Shelley Watson**  
Manager Shepparton

**Fiona White**  
Senior Manager Centre  
Operations North West

# MAKING OUR VOICE HEARD



With more than 70 years' experience in assisting Victorians, our organisation is committed to sharing our knowledge and expertise, by commenting on relevant issues and participating in policy debate, to contribute to ongoing reforms, sector improvements and improved client outcomes.

Our CEO, Dr Andrew Bickerdike, continued his appointment as a part-time Commissioner of the Australian Law Reform Commission, which undertook a comprehensive review of the family law system. The review focused on prioritising the best interests of children, addressing family violence and abuse, and supporting families, including those with complex needs, to resolve their family law disputes quickly and safely while minimising the financial burden.

RAV made a number of submissions to commissions during the year, including to the Australian Law Reform Commission, following our initial submission in May 2018. We advocated for the importance of child-inclusive practice in family law proceedings, including for the voices of children to be heard.

We appeared before the Joint Select Committee on oversight of the implementation of redress-related recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Melbourne. We advocated on behalf of our clients for flexible, trauma-informed and accessible services to support their recovery and healing journey.

Dr Bickerdike co-published a journal article on technology and family violence in the context of post-separated parenting.

We also delivered presentations at a wide range of conferences, forums and events.

## Submissions

- Relationships Australia Victoria. (2019, April). Submission to the Australian Government Productivity Commission on the Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health. Melbourne, Australia.
- Relationships Australia Victoria. (2018, August). Submission to the Joint Select Committee on oversight of the implementation of redress related recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Melbourne, Australia.
- Relationships Australia Victoria. (2018, November). Submission in response to the Review of the Family Law System: Discussion Paper. Melbourne, Australia.

## Publications

- Markwick, K., Bickerdike, A., Wilson-Evered, E., & Zeleznikow, J. (2019). Technology and family violence in the context of post-separated parenting. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 40(1). doi:10.1002/anzf.1350

“

RAV is committed to ensuring the Rights of the Child are upheld at every opportunity and believes that better including children's voices and improving their participation in the family law system will help in assessing their true situation and deliver more child focused outcomes.”

– RAV submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission on the review of the family law system

### Conference, forum and event presentations

- Alford, D. (2018, November). *Support for Fathers*. Session presented at the National Men's Health Gathering, Parramatta, New South Wales.
- Alford, D. (2018, November). *Support for Fathers*. Session presented at the International Domestic Violence and Health Conference, Melbourne, Victoria.
- Alford, D. (2018, December). *Support for Fathers*. Session presented at the Stop Domestic Violence Conference, Gold Coast, Queensland.
- Bickerdike, A. (2018, November). *The ALRC's review of the family law system: Discussion paper overview*. Keynote address at the FRSA National Conference 2018 – Be the Change: Leaving No One Behind, Cairns, Queensland.
- Bickerdike, A. (2018, November). *What would the ideal family law system look like?* Session presented at the FRSA National Conference 2018 – Be the Change: Leaving No One Behind, Cairns, Queensland.
- Bickerdike, A. (2019, March). *Issues in family law – 44 years after the Family Law Act*. Session presented at the National Access to Justice and Pro Bono Conference, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory.
- Bickerdike, A. (2019, April). *Family law reform. Opportunities, risks and vision*. Keynote address at the National Mediation Conference, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory.
- Bickerdike, A. & Corvan, J. (2018, July). *Effective community based, court ordered, lawyer assisted property conciliation*. Session presented at the Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, Melbourne, Victoria.
- Cooke, T. (2019, May). *Key knowledge & skills when working with men using abuse & violence*. Workshop presented at the Australasian Working Together to End Men's Family Violence Conference, Melbourne, Victoria.
- Curran, S. (2018, August). *Men and friendship*. Guest presentation at the Victorian Parliament Men's Health Committee Breakfast, Melbourne, Victoria.
- Curran, S. (2018, October). *Elder abuse*. Session presented at the Swinburne Wellbeing Clinic for Older Adults Seminar Series on Ageing, Melbourne, Victoria.
- Curran, S. (2018, November). *Communities of wellbeing: Preventing loneliness and unwanted social isolation of older Australians*. Research presented at the FRSA National Conference 2018 – Be the Change: Leaving No One Behind, Cairns, Queensland.
- Fallowfield, S. (2018, November). *Early matters: Driving change through a whole of community approach*. Session presented at the FRSA National Conference 2018 – Be the Change: Leaving No One Behind, Cairns, Queensland.
- Heard, G. (2018, July). *Thirty years of community sector property family dispute resolution – A mature, safe, effective, efficient and evidence-based service*. Research presented at the Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, Melbourne, Victoria.
- Hebb, A., & Phan, M. (2018, October). *Safe Resolutions*. Session presented at the FRC Partnership Good Practice Forum, Melbourne, Victoria.
- O'Connor, M., & Panayiotidis, A. (2019, June). *Preventing family violence: researchers and industry partners working systematically and collaboratively*. Research presented at the Public Health Prevention Conference 2019, Melbourne, Victoria.
- Opoku, S. (2018, July). *Understanding our impact: Relationships Australia Victoria's journey towards outcomes-focused thinking*. Research presented at the Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, Melbourne, Victoria.
- Perez, L. (2019, March). *Relationships Australia Victoria: Service provision in regional communities*. Session presented at Linkages Programme Ballarat, Victoria, Australia.
- Yorston, M. (2018, July). *“I'm at a Crossroads”: Supporting families through the family law system with the Family Safety Navigation Model*. Session presented at the Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, Melbourne, Victoria.



# FOUNDATIONS OF OUR WORK



**Best practice, evaluation, research, continuous improvement and inclusivity inform the work we do.**

## **Focusing on quality practice and client safety**

Our work is informed by our focus on evidence-based, systemic practice and is underpinned by a robust Clinical Governance Framework, clinical supervision model and professional development program. Our staff are supported by a team of practice specialists and senior advisors with expertise across the areas of therapeutic services, family law, and family violence and child safety.

- Our Theory of Change documents the guiding principles of our work and focus on positive outcomes-based practice to meet client needs.
- We understand that best practice takes not only the application of skills and expertise, but also dedication to our programs and our clients.
- Our Clinical Governance Framework is based on a person-centred and trauma-informed approach, and enhanced assessment processes, to provide safety for our clients.
- We are focused on providing services to children, young people, couples and families in child-safe ways and are committed to meeting Child Safe Standards and recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017).
- We recognise the importance of prevention and early intervention, and timely responses in the family developmental life-cycle.
- We are responsive to the changing needs of clients and community, and to significant reforms by government and the sector, and work in alignment with these reforms and changes.
- As an organisation, we work collaboratively, seeking partnership opportunities that facilitate knowledge and resource-sharing and lead to positive societal change.
- We are committed to providing culturally safe services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

- We seek to share our knowledge and expertise, by providing comment on relevant issues and influencing policy debate, to contribute to ongoing government reforms and changes in the sector.
- Our clients are increasingly presenting to us with complex and diverse needs that include family violence, mental health, and child protection issues and risks. With this increasing complexity and risk, we are focused across our organisation and within our culture on the key principle of safety – for our clients and their families, and for staff, stakeholders and the community.

## **Continuous improvement and evaluating our impact**

Across our workforce, we foster and strive for continuous improvement. We collect, analyse and report on a range of client need, client outcome, service output and client satisfaction metrics, in addition to information gained through staff supervision processes, client feedback and complaints, and critical incident registers. This collective information informs our decision-making in relation to individual clients and programs, and to the organisation's governance, operational and practice processes.

Our approach to evidence-informed practice integrates the best available evidence on service effectiveness, with knowledge of family contexts and practitioner expertise. We use a combination of targeted valid psychometric measures and fit-for-purpose evaluation tools that allow us to measure the impact of our services, ensure we meet our intended service goals and adapt to client needs.

**We respect the rights of all people in all their diversity to live safely and with dignity, and to enjoy healthy relationships.**



We know that routine data collection, reporting and analysis are essential elements to delivering client-centred, best practice services and achieving better outcomes for clients.

For example, our specialist “early matters” service and i-Connect Family Mental Health Support Service both provide systemic, strengths-based support to families. These programs have achieved a nine per cent to 12 per cent increase in perceived parenting skills and abilities, respectively, which is a reliable predictor of child mental health, emotional and behavioural problems. Families in these programs report that they are also less adversely impacted by the issues for which they sought help.

Evaluation of our counselling, FDR and FRC services demonstrated significant positive outcomes related

to client satisfaction, improved client circumstances and achievement of client goals. Notably, over 99 per cent of clients were satisfied with the services they received and over 98 per cent of clients were better able to deal with issues that they sought help for.

In the coming year, we will continue to foster our culture of monitoring, evaluation and learning, and will implement an outcomes framework across our services and programs. This framework will measure the impact of our services across five key domains, contributing to our evidence base and informing service design.

## Our outcomes framework



## Establishing a Rainbow Working Group

Our organisation recognises that a long history of discrimination, illegality and secrecy have negatively impacted LGBTIQ+ Australians and contributed to an increased vulnerability in their safety, mental health and relationships. Positively, federal and state legislative changes now enable LGBTIQ+ Australians to marry, adopt and parent children, and anti-discrimination laws have improved the safety and opportunities of LGBTIQ+ people, with new family structures continuing to emerge in this community.

We are committed to inclusivity and treating all people equally, including LGBTIQ+ Australians. This year, we established an organisational Rainbow Working Group, to ensure that our centres and services are accessible and welcoming, and that our staff have the knowledge and skills to support the needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals, couples and families. The group, which involves staff from a broad range of RAV's centres, services and roles,

is also focused on identifying and developing relevant, inclusive resources for practitioners and clients that are attuned to LGBTIQ+ needs and family circumstances.

Members of the Rainbow Working Group, our practice team and senior managers attended a professional development workshop on providing a welcoming and inclusive service to the LGBTIQ+ community, which was focused on the lived experience of LGBTIQ+ people and the barriers they can face in accessing services. The training emphasised the need for agencies to be proactive and visibly welcoming to the LGBTIQ+ community, and highlighted the high demand for LGBTIQ+ appropriate family and relationship support services that are provided by trustworthy and experienced providers.

The Rainbow Working Group will identify key areas of action for the next and future years, including further

“

That’s actually been a really cool thing that’s come out of mediation – that I can actually communicate with the boys’ mother if it’s about the children. I can do it with ease ... friendly and respectfully. Through mediation we were reminded a bit [that] you’re just focusing on the interests of the children.”

– FDR client

“

It wasn’t administrative, it wasn’t clinical. It actually came across as genuinely caring and concerning ... and that was great because it’s a quite big event that you’re going through. They’re [the mediators are] actually being respectful and considerate of both sides – an incredibly juggling job and just handled beautifully.”

– FDR client

specialist professional training, development of inclusive display materials for centres and exploring opportunities for appropriate LGBTIQ+ service accreditation.

### Our research

In addition to our research projects highlighted below, in 2018/19 we participated in:

- a joint research project with Victoria University on the use, impact and harm caused by separated couples’ use of online technology, including social media
- a University of South Australia research project involving our delivery of a Tuning in to Kids Together pilot program for primary caregivers of children, to evaluate the efficacy of the program in enhancing parenting skills
- the Connecting with Others in Older Age research project, conducted in partnership with Swinburne University (page 23)
- Swinburne University’s Digital Story Project in Residential Aged Care research (page 22)
- collaborative research with Swinburne University into Loneliness in Older Adults in Residential Aged Care and Community Settings: Prevalence and Predictors.

### Examining FDR outcomes across Australia

In 2018/19, we continued our participation in the Relationships Australia FDR Outcomes Study. The national research project is designed to generate evidence on the outcomes and efficacy of Relationships Australia’s FDR services, in relation to both parenting and property disputes, with RAV leading the property component of the study.

The study has employed a longitudinal survey design, with quantitative data collected through surveys of over 1700 clients at multiple points in time, in addition to 200 interviews with a sub-sample of participants to further investigate experiences and perceptions of the dispute resolution process.

A detailed analysis of both the quantitative and the qualitative data demonstrates that there is sound evidence of the efficacy of FDR provided through the Relationships Australia federation. The research demonstrates that our FDR services assist separating couples to not only reach agreements in parenting and property disputes, but also reduce their distress, improve their adjustment to separation and facilitate communication with each other outside FDR sessions.

Participants of the study highlighted the skills and qualities of the mediator in remaining issue-focused, managing emotions and conflict, and showing compassion and sensitivity while remaining impartial.

Results of the study’s preliminary findings were presented at the 2019 National Conciliation Conference and the study’s final results will be published in peer-reviewed journals.

“I am better able to deal with issues I sought help for”

98.39%

of counselling clients agreed



98.40%

of FDR clients agreed



99.25%

of FRC clients agreed



## Family violence service outcomes to be evaluated



### Men

Knowledge and awareness of their own emotional/mental health, their partner/former partner and children's needs and feelings, and the impact of family violence on their partner/former partner and children.

Levels of stress and coping strategies, and ability to repair relationships and improve their behaviour.

Relationship outcomes of relationship satisfaction, trust, commitment and intimacy.



### Partners and former partners

Reports of safety for themselves and their children, including frequency and types of threatening events.

Awareness and knowledge of family violence and gender equality.

The outcomes of this ground-breaking research into family violence programs will be critical not only for RAV, but for the sector, government and the community.

## Researching our family violence services with Monash University

The Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria) recommended changes to the way in which family violence is addressed within the community, and highlighted the urgent need for current research evaluations examining the effectiveness of men's family violence programs.

In 2018/19, we proudly commenced a partnership with the Monash Centre for Health Research and Implementation to evaluate two of RAV's family violence services for men: our 20-week MBCPs and responsive case management pilot program (page 16).

This unique and ground-breaking collaborative research seeks to enhance understanding of the impact of the programs on men, and on their families, including on the safety of women and children. It employs an implementation science methodology to demonstrate connections between the programs and practices, and current research, evidence-based practices, theoretical models and frameworks. The methodology also seeks to identify opportunities for continuous improvement through organisational and program curriculum changes, to ensure the delivery of sustainable, useful and impactful real-world programs.

In addition to engaging male clients, we are inviting partners and former partners of program participants, program facilitators, case managers and family safety practitioners to participate in the research.

Process and outcome evaluation data will be collected from multiple participant groups at different time points, before, during and at the end of the programs, to evaluate a range of outcomes.

Research outcomes will be critical for not only our organisation, but also for the sector in enhancing collaboration, informing program delivery and further development, and supporting increased funding for programs that make men accountable for their behaviours, and most importantly, keep women and children safe.

# BOARD AND GOVERNANCE

## Strong and accountable governance that reflects our values is central to our work.

Our organisation is underpinned by a strong Corporate Governance Framework, with an independent Board and committees. We have robust processes for ensuring quality, meeting compliance obligations, managing risks and responding to critical incidents.

### Our Board and committees

Our Board comprises eight committed and skilled volunteers, who generously donate their time, energy and knowledge to RAV. Their collective expertise spans the areas of health, mental health, service delivery, finance, law, banking, government policy, strategy, business development and IT across the not-for-profit, commercial and private sectors. Our Board drives our organisation's success, by setting strategic direction, and ensuring effective governance, financial management, sustainability and operations. Their work facilitates our high-quality service delivery and work towards our vision.

The following committees supported our Board in 2018/19.

- The Governance Committee assists the Board and RAV company members to effectively fulfil their responsibility for ensuring that the Board and its committees comprise individuals who can discharge their responsibilities as directors, having regard to the law, 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 Clinical Governance Committee provides independent, specialised advice to the Board on matters relating to the quality, effectiveness or direction of practice, and provides advice and leadership in the development of services and new models of practice.



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## Our 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

**Mr Peter Gome (until October 2018)**  
**Ms Debra Goldfinch (until October 2018)**

“

Strengths of RAV were noted as being non-judgemental; sensitive to mental health issues; genuinely passionate about their work; always willing to answer questions.”

– HDAA Australia

## Risk management and critical incidents

Our risk management approach is based on the international standard for risk management, ISO31000:2009 Risk Management, and involves the integration of risk-based thinking across the organisation, to build a risk-aware workforce. This awareness underpins our operational, project and management practices, as well as our strategic decision-making and corporate governance.

Our robust risk management framework supports collaborative engagement within the organisation to facilitate the identification, analysis, reporting, control and mitigation of identified risks, in line with the organisation's risk appetite. Using a wide range of client, service and workforce data metrics, with consideration to the external impacts including social, sector and political influences, our Quality Management Committee monitors and regularly reports to the Board on organisational risks.

We have an established process for managing critical incidents involving both a Critical Incidents Panel and Critical Incidents Response Team, who prioritise safety through thorough timely review, reporting of and response to incidents. Our Critical Incidents Register is overseen by the Clinical Governance Committee of the Board.

## Accreditation

Our organisation is accredited against the international standard ISO9001:2015 Quality Management Systems, which provides service users with confidence that RAV has effective management systems in place that are regularly reviewed. Our family violence services, including MBCPs, women's family violence support groups and counselling, and case management program, also have full accreditation against the Department of Health and Human Services Standards.

In 2018/19, we successfully undertook an external maintenance audit by HDAA Australia for both sets of standards. These accreditations demonstrate our commitment to quality service delivery, continuous improvement and effective internal processes, which inform decision-making, accountability and a focus on delivering positive outcomes.

The audits were conducted by HDAA, who highlighted the evident passion and values-driven work of the staff, and the positive feedback from clients interviewed, who consistently referenced the open, supportive and non-judgemental environments at RAV.

For the last 10 years, RAV has been a Registered Training Organisation (RTO 21977) under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic.), enabling the organisation to provide accredited courses and to award, confer or issue recognised qualifications listed on its scope of registration. The RAV RTO currently provides the Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution (CHC81115) and will commence offering the Graduate Diploma of Relationship Counselling (CHC81015) with a Focus on Family Violence in July 2019, to equip and enable the workforce in the community services industry.

“

Discussions with staff during site visits highlighted a strength of RAV as being non-judgemental to people and that the organisation is willing to let anyone who needs help gain that help where this is possible.”

– HDAA Australia

# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

## Summary statement of comprehensive income for the year ended 30 June 2019

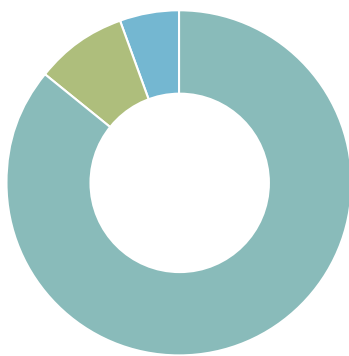
	2019 (\$)	2018 (\$)
<b>REVENUE</b>		
Government funding	24,622,479	21,762,995
Client fees	2,520,152	2,759,710
Other income	1,532,309	1,480,839
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>28,674,940</b>	<b>26,003,544</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
Employee costs	20,665,702	19,294,968
Occupancy expenses	2,159,487	2,285,030
Depreciation and amortisation	156,001	21,731
Other operating costs	4,908,667	3,662,877
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>27,889,857</b>	<b>25,264,606</b>
<b>SURPLUS</b>	<b>785,083</b>	<b>738,938</b>
<b>OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME</b>		
Net gain on revaluation of non-current assets		3,197,000
<b>TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME</b>	<b>785,083</b>	<b>3,935,938</b>

## Summary statement of financial position as at 30 June 2019

	2019 (\$)	2018 (\$)
<b>ASSETS</b>		
Current assets	16,398,524	14,557,794
Non-current assets	6,169,109	6,218,841
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>22,567,633</b>	<b>20,776,635</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
Current liabilities	6,876,448	5,909,038
Non-current liabilities	837,435	798,930
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>7,713,883</b>	<b>6,707,968</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>14,853,750</b>	<b>14,068,667</b>

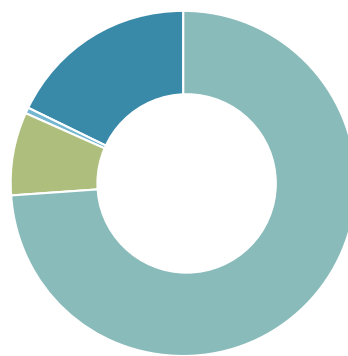


### Revenue



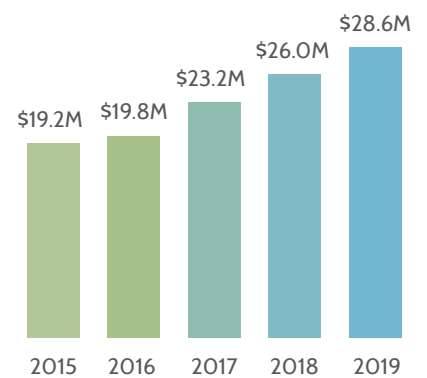
- Government funding 85.9%
- Client fees 8.8%
- Other income 5.3%

### Expenses



- Employee costs 74.1%
- Occupancy expenses 7.7%
- Depreciation and amortisation 0.6%
- Other operating costs 17.6%

### Revenue growth



### 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 2019 and the Summary Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2019 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 17 September 2019.

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  
17 September 2019

# CONTACT US

## Central office

1183 Toorak Road  
Camberwell Victoria 3124

PO Box 180  
2 Prospect Hill Road  
Camberwell VIC 3124  
(03) 8573 2222  
reception@rav.org.au

## General service enquiries

1300 364 277  
enquiries@rav.org.au  
www.rav.org.au

 /RelAustVic

 @RelAustVic

## Centres

### Ballarat

1025 Sturt Street  
Ballarat Victoria 3350  
(03) 5337 9222  
ballarat@rav.org.au

### Boronia

83 Boronia Road  
Boronia Victoria 3155  
(03) 9725 9964  
boronia@rav.org.au

### Cranbourne

2/199 South Gippsland Highway  
Cranbourne Victoria 3977  
(03) 5990 1900  
cranbourne@rav.org.au

### Cranbourne North

405 Narre Warren Road  
Cranbourne North Victoria 3977  
(03) 5911 5400  
cranbournenorth@rav.org.au

### Greensborough

Banyule Community Health  
3/25-33 Grimshaw Street  
Greensborough Victoria 3088  
(03) 9431 7777  
greensborough@rav.org.au

### Kew

46 Princess Street  
Kew Victoria 3101  
(03) 9261 8700  
kew@rav.org.au

### Shepparton

634 Wyndham Street  
Shepparton Victoria 3630  
(03) 5820 7444  
shepparton@rav.org.au

### Sunshine

1st Floor, Harvester Centre  
4 Devonshire Road  
Sunshine Victoria 3020  
(03) 8311 9222  
sunshine@rav.org.au

### Traralgon

59 Breed Street  
Traralgon Victoria 3844  
(03) 5175 9500  
traralgon@rav.org.au

## Family Relationship Centres

### Berwick FRC

1-2, 38 Clyde Road  
Berwick Victoria 3806  
(03) 8768 4111  
enquiries@berwickfrc.org.au

### Greensborough FRC

79 Grimshaw Street  
Greensborough Victoria 3088  
(03) 9404 7800  
enquiries@greensboroughfrc.org.au

### Melbourne FRC

Lower Ground Floor  
379 Collins Street (enter via  
Queen Street)  
Melbourne Victoria 3000  
(03) 8625 3666  
enquiries@melbournefrc.org.au

### Sunshine FRC

1 Clarke Street  
Sunshine Victoria 3020  
(03) 9313 0444  
enquiries@sunshinefrc.org.au

## headspace centres

### headspace Bairnsdale

171 Main Street  
Bairnsdale Victoria 3875  
(03) 5141 6200  
info@headspacebairnsdale.org.au

### headspace Wonthaggi

5b Murray Street  
Wonthaggi Victoria 3995  
(03) 5671 5900  
info@headspacewonthaggi.org.au

## Acronyms

<b>FDR</b>	family dispute resolution
<b>FDRP</b>	family dispute resolution practitioner
<b>FRC</b>	Family Relationship Centre
<b>LGBTIQA+</b>	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual
<b>MBCP</b>	men's behaviour change program
<b>RAV</b>	Relationships Australia Victoria
<b>RTO</b>	Registered Training Organisation
<b>UBU</b>	Unique but United
<b>YAG</b>	Youth Advisory Group

*Relationships Australia*®

VICTORIA

Since 1948



Accredited by HDAA. 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.