

# 70 years strong

Annual Report 2017/18

*Relationships Australia*<sup>®</sup>

VICTORIA



## Contents

Our vision	1
70 years of support	2
President's introduction	4
Since 1948	5
CEO's report	6
2017/18 at a glance	7
About our clients	8
Where we are	9
Strengthening healthy, safe and respectful relationships	10
Helping families and children	14
Working against family violence	18
Promoting and enhancing good mental health	22
Supporting older Victorians and their families	26
Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities	28
Embracing Victoria's diversity	31
Engaging with Victorian communities	33
Delivering accredited training, and workplace services	36
Focusing on practice quality, research and evaluation	38
Fostering our workforce	42
Our Board	44
Financial overview	46
Representing our organisation	48
Acronyms	48

ABN 51 263 215 677

Relationships Australia Victoria acknowledges the funding support it receives from the Australian and Victorian Governments. 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. Photos for illustrative purposes only.



# Our vision

A photograph of a family of three sitting outdoors in a grassy area. The father, on the left, is wearing a red, white, and blue striped shirt and is smiling. The mother, in the center, is wearing a blue top and is also smiling. A young child, on the right, is wearing a blue patterned top and is looking towards the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a soft-focus green field.

**For positive, safe and respectful relationships for couples, families, schools, workplaces and communities.**

# 70 years of support

From our origins as the Marriage Guidance Council of Victoria in 1948, Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) has evolved significantly from a modest but aspirational organisation that engaged volunteers to primarily offer marriage guidance, particularly in response to the impact of the Second World War on marriages and social stability.

Seventy years later, RAV provides a diverse range of professional services including counselling, family dispute resolution (FDR), Family Relationship Centres, relationship education, mental health services, family violence prevention, support and recovery services, training and workplace services.

We focus on providing effective services to support Victorians at all stages of life, by strengthening relationships and social connections for individuals and families, and in schools, workplaces and communities across all life stages. The relationships we aim to support are defined in the broadest sense, including relationships between intimate partners, parents and children, older people and their adult children and grandchildren, neighbours, and between individuals and organisations.



## 1948

Established first Marriage Guidance Council in Melbourne. The provisional Committee involved doctors, clergy and professionals. Trained volunteers provided talks, public lectures, limited counselling and pre-marriage education.

## 1953

Held national conference in Melbourne. Established first regional centres.

## 1955

Received first state government grant.



## 1959

The Matrimonial Causes Act resulted in Commonwealth Government subsidies being available for marriage counselling.



## 1964

After operating in private homes and in Melbourne's CBD, Armadale and Prahran, the Council purchased and relocated to 46 Princess Street, Kew – from where we still provide services today.

1948–  
1969

## 1971

Renovated and extended the Kew Centre to cater to organisational growth.



## 1975

*The Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)* was passed, which established the principle of no fault divorce and resulted in the introduction of special Family Courts.



## Late 1970s – early 1980s

Shifted from volunteers to a professional counsellor workforce. Provided first educational support groups for recently separated people. Introduced marriage counselling for Italian and Greek migrants.

## 1982

Experienced growth in training courses and increased focus on research.

## 1984

Commenced providing mediation. Established collaborative pilot with legal service that provided information and mediation counselling to clients.

## 1988

Growth of mediation department and funding for Family Mediation Service.

1970–  
1989



## Early 1990s

Consolidated telephone counselling service. Introduced marriage enrichment groups and family violence services.

## 1994

Changed organisation's name to Relationships Australia Victoria and became an incorporated association.



## 1995

Significant increase in funded mediation services following changes to the Family Law Act 1975 designed to encourage use of alternative dispute resolution services. Increased focus on children across our services, including in counselling, family therapy and FDR.

## Early 2000s

Received dedicated state funding to provide men's behaviour change programs and support programs for women, children and family members.



## 2000

Experienced growing demand for mediation services as a result of funding shifts from Court to community-based services.



## 2006 - 2009

Successfully tendered for and opened four Family Relationship Centres.

## 2007

Received funding for drought counselling in regional Victoria.

## 2008

Selected for a national FDRP accreditation and training contract with the Commonwealth Government. Launched RAV's first standalone website. Became a Registered Training Organisation.

## 2013

Successfully tendered for i-Connect Family Mental Health Support Service. Commenced AccessResolve Property Mediation service, which provides enhanced access to justice for people in rural and regional Australia.



## 2014

Developed "I like, like you" healthy relationships program. Granted classification as a public benevolent institution. Successfully tendered for early matters and Compass Forced Adoption Support Service. Launched connectEDspace website.

## 2015

Developed Family Safety Model. Launched Elder Relationship Services pilot program. Successfully tendered for headspace Bairnsdale.



## 2016

Successfully tendered for LINCS, Safe Resolutions and Changeabout's Family Safety Contact Services. Achieved emerging evidence-based status for "I like, like you UP" and Repair-enting programs.

1990-  
1999

2000-  
2009

2010-  
2018

# President's introduction

In 2018, we celebrate the 70th anniversary of RAV – a milestone in our organisation's history, and an opportunity to celebrate our past and look forward to the future. Over 70 years, RAV has supported more than 500,000 Victorians, and has grown and changed significantly. From our beginnings in 1948 as the Marriage Guidance Council of Victoria, we have evolved to be a \$26-million organisation with over 300 professional employees. We now deliver a diverse range of services from 14 centres and additional outreach locations across Victoria to relieve the suffering, distress and helplessness of vulnerable and disadvantaged people, and to enhance their social and emotional wellbeing.



In the period following the Second World War, there was community concern about the increasing prevalence of divorce. And so our organisation was born, with volunteers providing public pre-marriage lectures, marriage and family living education, and some marriage counselling.

In the succeeding years, a range of legal and social changes have impacted RAV. In 1959, the Matrimonies Causes Act resulted in the provision of government subsidies for couples counselling. The Family Law Act 1975, and subsequent reforms to it resulted in the introduction and, later, growth of our mediation/FDR services. In the 1990s, in response to the impact of, and need to prevent family violence, we developed family violence programs for male perpetrators. In recent decades, we have continued to grow and evolve, and our diverse services now encompass the areas of relationships, children and families, family violence, mental health and ageing.

Throughout our 70-year history, our focus has remained on relationships. Our vision is for positive, safe and respectful relationships for couples and families, and in schools, workplaces and communities.

As we mark our anniversary, it is important to not only look back at our origins, but

also to look forward to the future. We must consider the increasing complex and diverse needs of our clients, the impact of changes to law, policy and sector priorities, and how we can best prepare to respond to these and other societal drivers of change.

This year, we welcomed the result of the marriage equality vote, which culminated in same-sex marriage becoming legal in Australia. Our services are for all members of the community and we respect the rights of all people in their diversity to enjoy healthy relationships.

The media and government continue to focus on the devastating issue of family violence. This attention, in conjunction with the impact of the Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria), is increasing community awareness of family violence and enabling services such as RAV to work with perpetrators to prevent family violence and provide increased support to affected women, children and families.

As an organisation providing extensive family law services, RAV is also mindful of the current Australian Law Reform Commission's review of the family law system and how its outcomes and recommendations could impact on us. We provided a submission into the Senate Inquiry into Family Law, and presented to the Parliamentary Inquiry into a Better Family Law System to Support and Protect Those Affected by Family Violence. In early 2018, our Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Dr Andrew Bickerdike, accepted an invitation to be a part-time Commissioner for the Review. I congratulate Andrew on his appointment, which is recognition of his extensive FDR knowledge and experience.

Victoria's population is ageing. Older people make up more than 15 per cent of the state's population<sup>1</sup> and the number of Victorians aged 65 years and older is predicted to reach 2.1 million by 2051<sup>2</sup>. As this demographic grows, so too will the need for relevant services. We are already responding to this increasing need through our senior relationship services, and we will continue to seek opportunities to meet these and other emerging needs.

While we can't be certain of what the future will entail, what is clear is that RAV is well-placed for the challenges and opportunities that may arise. We have a committed Board that I thank for their time and expertise, including new members Paul Staindl and Michael Hunt. Our skilled and experienced staff and management are equally committed to the organisation, their clients and to delivering high-quality, effective services.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have helped to make RAV what it is today; including past volunteers, executive directors and directors, and our current staff, CEO and Board. Our success and the positive impact that we have had on so many Victorians over our 70 years is a credit to you all, and I know that with the continued support of our valued workforce and Board, we will continue to thrive.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lyn Littlefield".

**Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM**  
President

<sup>1</sup> Department of Health and Human Services, Victoria. (2018, September 20). Ageing. Retrieved from Victoria State Government Health and Human Services: <https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/ageing>.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Victoria. (2016). Victoria in Future 2016: Population and household projections to 2051. Brunswick: Impact Digital.

Since 1948

More than

500,000

clients supported



Our original centre in Kew remains, with 13 additional centres across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria.

Network of volunteers



Workforce of 300 professional, experienced employees



**THE DISTINCTIVE TAIL UNIT OF THE JOHN FORREST**, first of five Convair aircraft ordered for Trans-Australia Airlines to reach Australia, photographed at Essendon yesterday when the aircraft landed after its flight from California (USA). The passenger gangway is hydraulically lowered from the fuselage, and the passengers enter through the tail. The Convair is expected to go into operation on October 19.

# VFL still seeking higher charges for finals

**IN its effort to have outer ground prices increased for the final and grand final games this year, the VFL has sought another conference with Melbourne Cricket-ground trustees.**

When Mr L. H. McBrien, VFL secretary, divulged this yesterday he said that the League would ask permission to charge 3 for admittance to the outer ground. Last week the trustees rejected an application by the League to charge that sum for semi-finals.

## WHERE MONEY IS WANTED

McDonald, Acting Premier, yesterday: "Football is the man's sport, and it should be so commercialised that only with plenty of money can it be played."

## U to move equal pay

will ask Federal trade to apply immediately variation Court for an "or women" clause in s agreed on at a con- on representatives in rday. also decided to ask ernment to "honour obligations on the al pay for women employ." It agreed to basic wage for

# NEW COUNCIL WILL GIVE MARRIAGE GUIDANCE

Melbourne's first Marriage Guidance Council has been formed, and is expecting to be operating by the end of the year. A working committee of the council met for the first time last night. The council proposes, broadly, to help with practical advice anyone needing sympathetic guidance on the problem of marriage.

## PERSONAL

The Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Edmund Herring, presided at a meeting of the State Executive Council held at the Old Treasury Building yesterday afternoon. The Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Edmund Herring, received the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Councillor the Hon J. S. Disney, at Government House yesterday.

## Insured for £50,000

Her brother, Jean, has been her accompanist for 12 years. In Melbourne she will give three concerts with orchestra, and two recitals, plus sandwiched in. She comes of a musical family. Her great-uncle was the composer and organist Charles Widor. Her mother, made her debut at seven years of age, and until the war came she had played in 110 cities. After her Australian tour she will have 10 days in Paris before filling her heavy gage.

# Reds 'spit on law,' says Hughes

**CANBERRA, Tues:** "Communism in Australia, like the Soviet in the international sphere, spat on the name of law," Mr Hughes (Lib, NSW) said in Parliament today. Mr Chifley had said in the House last week that Russia did not lead to war, but would be an ideological war, but would not lead to war. In the same breath, he said that no attempt to stop Russia, "because it would lead to war."

# Keilor joins drive against shooter

Keilor Council is unanimously behind the Broadmeadows Council's efforts to protect land on against Sunday rabbit hunters. Councillors pointed out at the meeting that danger points in Keilor Shire included the banks of Kororoit Creek and along the Maribyrnong River. Bullets frequently ricocheted from rocks, and some members of landholders' households were afraid to venture from the protection of the homesteads on Sunday.

# Commissioners agree to extra shift

**SYDNEY, Tues:** First returns from today's miners' ballot showed an overall 2 to 1 majority in favour of alternate Saturday work, according to unofficial estimates.

## ADMINISTRATION METHODS

Generally the new controls would be administered from the State where production was greatest, or where the headquarters of a recog-

Mr J. F. Waidron, Prices Decret Commissioner. Mr H. A. C. Corlett, Country Land Sales Commissioner. Mr C. J. Bradley, Land Sales Director.

State Directorate, precedence in ge to pro- from the ate school only the among at Pens- a fence

5

re

re

re

re

re

re

re

re

re

re

re

re

re

re

Yesterday... Country Land Sales... Mr D... Strathed... Maxwell... Government... Mr Max... -Genera... ment, in the... GET 50... Fiat "D... riced in... immedia... red. Stre... ale stre... vt.]... day... E!

# CEO's report

In our 2017/18 year, RAV continued to grow and achieved a number of organisational milestones. Our income increased by almost 12 per cent to exceed \$26 million for the first time, and we supported over 29,500 clients – an increase of close to 13 percent. We also reached our 70-year anniversary. We welcomed extensions for a number of our service delivery contracts, secured new funding for a range of new services and programs, and introduced other services to enhance clients' service options and opportunities. This growth and the expansion of services is closely aligned with our organisational strategy plan, and reflects our commitment to responding appropriately to changing priorities and client needs.



We successfully tendered as the lead agency for headspace services in Bass Coast and South Gippsland, which will be established in late 2018 and will be our second headspace service in the Gippsland area.

Family violence is a very serious issue affecting the majority of clients who seek our services. This year, we welcomed new funding to pilot case management alongside some of our Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs). The program will enable our practitioners to tailor individual responses for perpetrators of family violence to address complex needs, including alcohol and other drugs, mental and physical health, and homelessness and consequently, increase the safety of those affected by family violence.

To cater to increasing local needs and service growth, we commenced planning for a new centre in Cranbourne North, which will provide dedicated family violence services including MBCPs, case management and family safety contact services.

Our Training Department developed a new, innovative family violence-focused relationship counselling course to be introduced in early 2019.

Another notable innovation in 2017/18 was the introduction of online counselling.

We recognise that some clients cannot or would prefer not to access traditional face-to-face counselling, so we developed a secure, private and accessible online service that allows clients to book an appointment and virtually chat with a counsellor online.

Other tender successes included funding to support young men and fathers in their roles as parents and partners, and a contract to develop a suite of personal development and wellbeing training modules for remandees.

As an organisation, we receive funding to provide the majority of our services. We, therefore, welcomed announcements of extensions of contracts from our funders and for specific services including from the Attorney-General's Department until 2022, from the Department of Social Services until mid-2019, for specialist family violence services for a further two years, for our Reclaim Support Services until December 2018 and for headspace Bairnsdale until September 2018. While these contract extensions are appreciated, and provide increased certainty for the future, they are also challenging due to the short-term nature of many, which requires careful management of our workforce, premises and resources to ensure the services that our clients receive and value are not compromised.

Positively, after three consecutive years of no indexation on our Attorney-General's Department funding, which effectively represented an annual funding cut, the freeze on indexation has now ended.

RAV remained strongly focused on research and evaluation, and extensive evaluations resulted in overwhelmingly positive feedback from our clients. Of 8400 clients surveyed across our core programs, over

97 per cent were satisfied with our service, and more than 98 per cent reported they were better able to deal with issues that they sought help for. We welcomed the acceptance of our "I like, like you UP" program as a Communities for Children Facilitating Partners list evidence-based program. We also commenced numerous research projects, including with Monash, Swinburne and Victoria universities.

Another milestone for RAV was our audit success against the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System. This result demonstrates our commitment to quality and continuous improvement, and provides our clients with confidence that we have effective management systems in place that are regularly reviewed.

It has been a momentous year in RAV's history and one that would not have been possible without our highly skilled staff. During the year we conducted a Staff Engagement Survey, which demonstrated that our staff feel engaged, supported and positive about their work with RAV, and our strategic direction. This is evident through, not only their clinical work, but through their engagement with colleagues and in the way they represent RAV every day. I thank all staff for their contributions to our organisation and I look forward to the years ahead as we continue to support all Victorians, in all life stages, to have positive, safe and respectful relationships.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dr Andrew Bickerdike".

**Dr Andrew Bickerdike**  
Chief Executive Officer



# 2017/18 at a glance

29,506

clients ▲ 12.98%

14

centres

313

employees

\$26,003,541

income ▲ 11.9%

98.5%

of our clients felt listened to and understood by the service

97.7%

of our clients were satisfied with the services they received



# About our clients

Our services are for all members of the community, regardless of religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances.

## Gender



● Female	51.30%
● Male	48.59%
● Not stated/other	0.11%

## Age range



● 0-18	19.60%
● 19-34	23.45%
● 25-49	42.80%
● 50-65	11.20%
● 65+	2.95%

## Employment status



● Employed	49.58%
● Unemployed (actively looking for a job)	6.76%
● Not in the workforce (stay-at-home parent, volunteer, not looking for a job)	11.39%
● Not stated	28.97%
● N/A - person aged under 15 years	3.30%

## Marital status



● Single or never married	8.44%
● Married	17.38%
● De facto	9.94%
● Other relationship	2.36%
● Widowed	0.30%
● Divorced	5.09%
● Separated	11.82%
● Separated but not divorced	9.71%
● De facto separated	0.03%
● N/A - person aged under 15 years	8.56%
● Not stated	26.37%

# Where we are



\* To be established in 2018/19

## Service location



● Ballarat	8.7%	● Greensborough FRC	5.4%
● Berwick FRC	4.8%	● headspace Bairnsdale	3.0%
● Boronia	5.3%	● Kew	12.9%
● Camberwell	3.5%	● Melbourne FRC	6.7%
● Cranbourne	8.1%	● Shepparton	5.7%
● Gippsland	13.9%	● Sunshine	10.0%
● Greensborough	5.4%	● Sunshine FRC	6.6%

# Strengthening healthy, safe and respectful relationships

This year, we remained focused on providing a broad range of relationship services to support Victorians at all stages of their life, particularly those whose relationships are impacted by family law, family violence and mental health issues. Our relationship services include counselling, family dispute resolution, education and groups.

2710

FDR clients

7033

FRC clients

7951

Counselling clients

## Counselling

Our counselling services offer individuals, couples and families a supportive and collaborative environment to improve their overall wellbeing by relieving distress and enhancing their relationships. Our clients access counselling through our centres in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria, including through our Melbourne and Sunshine Family Relationship Centres (FRCs), which support clients already using the centre's FDR service. Individuals who are unable to attend a centre or outreach location can use our Telephone Counselling service or new Online Counselling service.

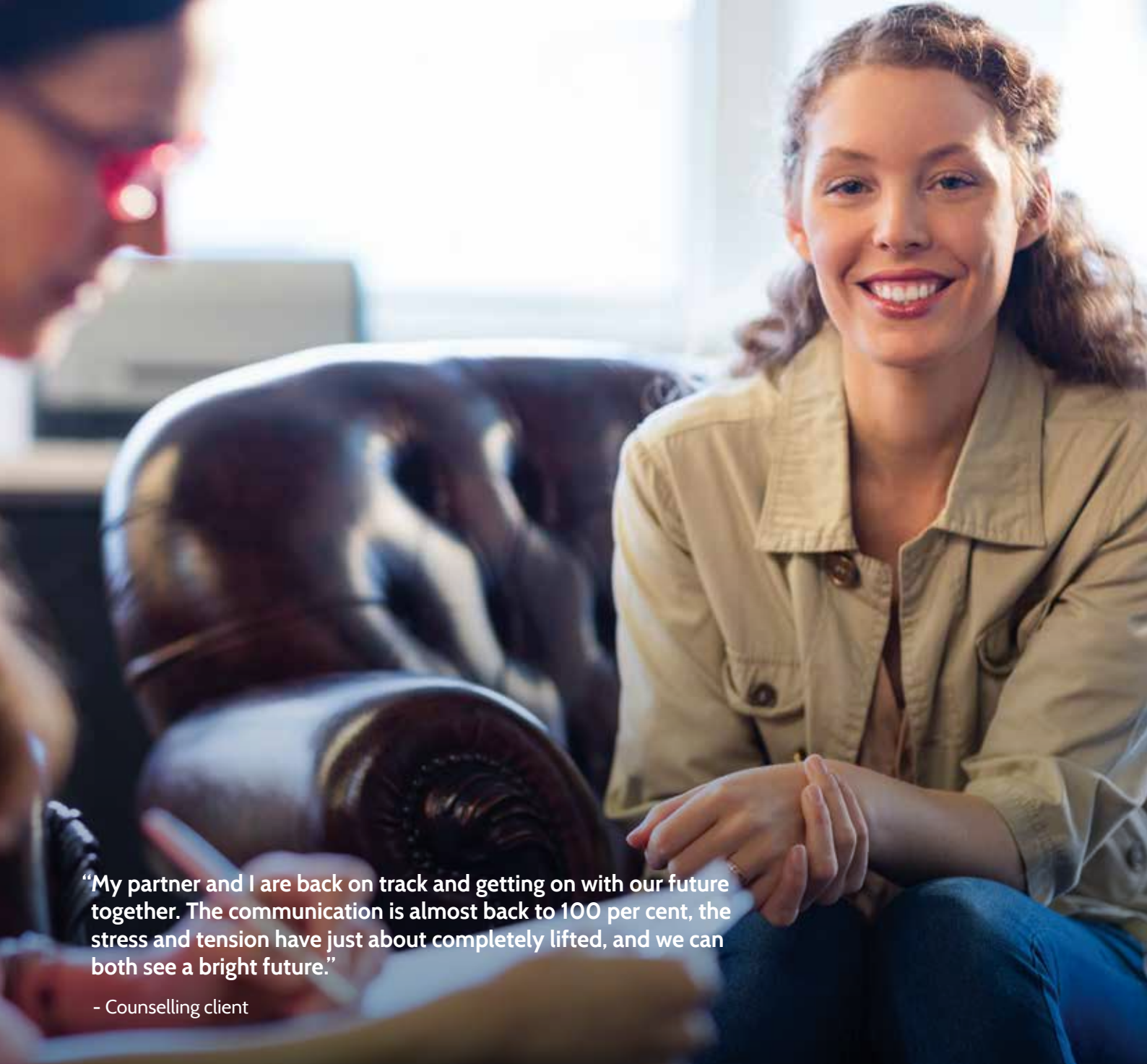
Using a family-inclusive, client-centred and strengths-based approach, our counsellors support clients to recognise their strengths, wisdom and knowledge, and build solutions for issues including communication and parenting challenges, managing conflict, anger, mental health issues, behavioural issues, and issues relating to relationships and separation.

"Prepare" is a program that supports couples who are preparing for marriage, or long-term commitment, to plan for the challenges that inevitably arise when people live and share their lives together. Couples share their different perspectives, explore conflict, discuss their expectations and set shared goals for the future.

Following the successful implementation of Single Session Consultations in our Kew and Ballarat centres, we commenced offering this service at our Traralgon Centre. Clients complete a pre-appointment questionnaire to identify their greatest concern, which is then the focus of an extended counselling session. Results of a preliminary evaluation of the consultations indicate that after attending the service, clients were less stressed about the greatest concern they sought counselling for, and the impact of the concern was reduced.

In February 2018, a pilot of a new, private Psychologist and Counselling Service commenced at our Kew Centre, to complement our existing range of funded services. The service supports children, individual adults and couples with a range of mental health, relationship, emotional, social, developmental and behavioural issues, as well as life challenges including anxiety, depression, grief and loss, parenting, and managing separation and divorce. Counselling is provided by registered, experienced psychologists, with eligible clients able to claim rebates through a general practitioner (GP) referral as part of Medicare's Better Access initiative, or through their private health insurance with psychology extras.

There are often times when parents can get stuck at particular family transitions or life changes. The key is to stay calm, repair moments that don't go so well, and practise conflict resolution skills. Sometimes it is not the end result of these trickier times, but rather how you got there that strengthens relationships.



**“My partner and I are back on track and getting on with our future together. The communication is almost back to 100 per cent, the stress and tension have just about completely lifted, and we can both see a bright future.”**

- Counselling client

## Spotlight

### Online Counselling service

As part of our commitment to e-Therapy detailed in our Strategy Plan 2015-19, in 2017/18 we developed and began piloting a new Online Counselling service.

The service enables individuals to book and virtually attend a confidential, 50-minute counselling appointment involving real-time, text-based chat messages. They can discuss concerns or challenges with a qualified, experienced RAV counsellor of their choice, who offers practical advice, resources and support to help them to manage their situation.

The Online Counselling service can be used by individuals unable to access face-to-face services, particularly due to geography, disability, work or child care accessibility issues. It is also ideal for individuals who prefer using online services, including young people who expect to be able to use technology and online services. Online Counselling is also used as an introductory service to RAV's traditional face-to-face services.

The service uses a Single Session Consultation framework that includes pre-appointment questions to assess

for risk, and to identify a client's greater concern and its impact. Following the appointment, clients receive a personalised email from their counsellor detailing key takeaway messages, relevant resources and referrals, and an invitation to provide feedback on the service.

The service can be accessed at <https://onlinecounselling.relationshipsvictoria.com.au/>

**“I have a better idea of who I am and understand that my self-care comes first. This has improved my self-esteem and resulted in me making decisions more closely aligned with my values.”**

– Counselling client

## Help after separation

We offer services, programs and information workshops to support those affected by separation and divorce.

FDR, also known as mediation, gives separated couples the opportunity to resolve disputes and reach agreements on family law issues such as parenting, child care, and financial and property settlement, in a timely and cost-effective way. We also offer “shuttle” FDR where it is appropriate for parties to be in different rooms as part of the mediation process. Child-inclusive and child-focused FDR gives parents insights into their children’s thoughts and needs, so that this feedback can be reflected in the couple’s parenting plan.

The Melbourne FRC continued to provide FDR for separating parents of children who were on extended stays at the Royal Children’s Hospital. The focus of the outreach service is on reducing conflict, thereby supporting parents to reach positive outcomes and positively impact patient wellbeing.

We continued to deliver legally assisted property mediation to court-mandated clients through a Relationships Australia national contract with the Federal Circuit Court of Australia. Four hundred and ten mediations were completed from 18 Federal Circuit Court locations in four states, with 67 per cent of clients settling their disputes through the AccessResolve Property Mediation process.

Building on our long history of providing FDR for property matters, we introduced a Property Dispute Settlement and Conciliation Program. Distinct from RAV’s

existing FDR service, conciliation offers separated or divorcing couples a structured process for settling financial and property disputes without litigation, with the option to involve legal representation during the process. It uses externally, nationally accredited mediators and FDR practitioners (FDRPs) who have extensive experience in property and financial disputes including barristers, solicitors and retired judges and magistrates.

We delivered interactive and informative Parenting after Separation groups in centres across Victoria to help separated and divorced parents to explore their experiences, reactions and adjustments to separation. The groups, which were delivered as both one-day workshops and three- to four-week programs, also focused on how parents could establish a working co-parenting relationship, manage conflict and strengthen relationships with their children.

Parents in step-families attended Step-Family Survival Strategies, a three-hour workshop at our Berwick FRC, which offered practical guidance to help parents manage expectations of their family and understand how to balance their involvement in parenting step-children.

Our Greensborough Centre and Greensborough FRC continued to work to enhance RAV’s presence in northern Melbourne through increased outreach services at the Epping Community Services Hub. We offered FDR, counselling, and relationship education and groups such as Parenting after Separation to support clients in the local area.

## Promoting healthy relationships

We promoted and supported healthy, safe and respectful relationships through our group programs, community engagement work, and development of relationship resources.

We enhanced our one-day Relationship Recharge workshop for couples wanting to strengthen their relationship for the future. Provided at our Kew Centre, the workshop focuses on improving communication and conflict management skills, and learning about personal relationship styles.

Couples who were experiencing relationship difficulties but wanted their relationship to last were supported through Relationship Rescue, a one-day seminar in which couples can develop and practise strategies to improve relationships, in a supportive group environment.

We completed the development of our series of short videos on common family and relationship issues including healthy relationships, managing conflict, managing change and parenting tips. The videos are available on our website as resources for our clients and members of the public. New tip sheets on our FDR service and how to manage conflict were also developed and published.

We provided information about healthy relationships and our services to a range of community members, professionals and services, including to nurses, doctors and welfare staff at a hospital in south-east Melbourne, at a self-care event supporting the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) community, and as part of a National Families Week event at a Shepparton primary school.



**A healthy, safe, respectful relationship involves trust, honesty, support, having separate identities, mutual respect and equality. It means understanding and respecting the other person's values and opinions.**

Student leaders at La Trobe University's Bendigo campus attended our one-day workshop on healthy relationships, to enable them to support fellow students with issues affecting their health, wellbeing and studies, and bystander interventions.

On behalf of RAV, our staff presented at a variety of conferences and events, including on RAV's child-inclusive practice model, legally assisted FDR, women in caring roles, the use of restorative conferencing practices to repair family relationships when high conflict is present, and as a panel chair at the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC) Australia 4th Annual Conference.

Recognising the importance of sharing knowledge with, and strengthening relationships between services and within the sector, we collaborated with and participated in networks and committees, including through a community services industry survey, and as a member of Family Law Pathways Networks and steering committees.

We also participated in a survey designed to inform a 10-year community services industry plan for Victoria, which will be developed by the Human Services and Health Partnership Implementation Committee, co-chaired by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Victorian Council of Social Service in partnership with the Victorian community sector.

We sponsored the Family and Relationship Services Australia National Conference 2017, supplying information, resources and giveaways including tote bags, high-bounce balls and house-shaped stress relievers to delegates attending the wellbeing-focused event.

**92%**

**of clients of our private Psychologist and Counselling Service strongly agreed that they were likely to use the service again**

# Helping families and children

RAV delivered a comprehensive suite of programs and services for children and families, using a “collaborative continuum of care” approach, where our preventive programs are well connected to our early intervention and secondary services.

5783

clients aged 18 years and under

1800

early matters clients

**“I learnt how other people felt, I learnt that boys can do what girls do and girls can do what boys do, I learnt how to handle my strong emotions.”**

– “I like, like you” participant

We welcomed Associate Professor Sophie Havighurst (PhD), Principal Researcher for the Tuning in to Kids™ program, as guest speaker at our 69th Annual General Meeting. Associate Professor Havighurst presented engagingly on the early intervention promotion of positive parent-child relationships, using examples from the Tuning in to Kids™ program that RAV delivers at a number of centres.

## Programs for children, parents and families

In addition to providing counselling to children and young people, family therapy and engaging children in FDR services through our child-focused and child-inclusive models, we offer groups and programs to support children with the impact of family law, family violence and mental health issues.

Our innovative “I like, like you” healthy relationships program for schools was delivered across Victoria. In primary schools we facilitated the healthy close relationships program, “I like, like you UP”, while in secondary schools the focus was on healthy intimate relationships. Since its development in 2014, more than 7700 children and young people have participated in the program, gaining knowledge, skills and attitudes that promote healthy, safe and respectful relationships.

In 2017/18, the program was delivered to 1428 students, including to rural primary school students whose families had experienced separation or divorce. We also developed a short video detailing the background, aims, curriculum and outcomes of this innovative family violence prevention and mental health promotion program.

The Tuning in to Kids™ parenting program, which focuses on emotional intelligence and the emotional connection between parents and children, was delivered in locations such as Cranbourne, Kew, Ringwood and Shepparton. It was also delivered in partnership with Brimbank City Council, and with parents living, working or studying in the City of Yarra as part of the Yarra Communities that Care initiative.

Parents of older children participated in Tuning in to Teens™, a program helping parents to support pre-adolescents and teenagers aged 12 to 16 years to develop emotional intelligence and have stable and satisfying relationships as adults. The program was offered at the Kew Centre, as well as to parents of high school students in inner eastern and northern Melbourne.

Fathers had the opportunity to attend a six-week Tuning in to Kids™ program for dads at the Cranbourne Centre.

In partnership with the University of Melbourne and University of South Australia, the Kew Centre piloted Tuning in to Kids for Couples. The free, eight-week group program helps caregivers to develop key skills to recognise and respond to their children’s emotions, manage conflict and support their children to develop emotional intelligence.

The pilot will contribute to a research study evaluating the program’s effectiveness and the impact of improved parenting skills on couple relationships. It will also seek to strengthen the evidence base of the “Tuning in to” programs. The program was well received, with some participants who travelled overseas during the course electing to use videoconferencing facilities to ensure they could virtually attend all sessions and benefit from the full program.





**To prepare today's children to be tomorrow's adults, we need to provide prevention programs that support good outcomes for both relationship and emotional health.**

Children aged six to 10 years with separated parents attended the Melbourne FRC's My Parents 'N' Me program, designed to help build their resilience by understanding the separation, adapting to changes in their family, and feeling safe to share their experiences with other children in similar circumstances.

We facilitated Seasons for Growth™ with grade one primary school students who had experienced death and/or separation within their family. The eight-week group program supported children to share their stories and feelings, develop trust and friendships in the group, and make positive choices.

In Shepparton, our Confident Kinder Kids program supported preschool children to manage their emotions and develop skills to develop and support healthy friendships.

We delivered DRUMBEAT, an engaging and educational drumming program, to primary school students in Melbourne's west, in collaboration with the Royal

Children's Hospital Mental Health Service. DRUMBEAT engages participants to build social skills and increase self-esteem, and explores connections between making music together as a group and developing healthy relationships. One of the key elements of the program is the recognition of achievement by each participant. DRUMBEAT workshops were also provided to young mothers and as part of our "early matters" program in regional Victoria.

The Melbourne FRC delivered an information and self-care session for pregnant women and new mums. Over two hours, Nurturing a Newborn covered information on preparing emotionally for motherhood, values and identifying accessible support networks.

The Melbourne FRC also delivered a parent information session as part of a women's literacy program, with topics including healthy relationships, social and emotional resilience, and emotion coaching that were integrated into literacy activities following the session to reinforce learning.

**I've never met a parent who doesn't worry about their child at some point. But parents should not think that there's something wrong with them or their child. The best approach is to seek help from the school, a community centre, or a professional. Do this early. Don't wait until things get out of hand.**



Close family relationships play a crucial role in our development by teaching us how our connections to others can enrich our lives and wellbeing, and guide us to make good choices.

## Spotlight

### Support for Fathers

RAV welcomed new funding for a national project to support young men and fathers in their roles as parents and partners, promote healthy and respectful family relationships, and reduce family violence. Support for Fathers is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services as part of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and

their Children 2010–2022. The two-year project has commenced with Australia-wide consultations with young men, fathers and service providers, as well as attendance at professional forums and conferences, to gain feedback on fathers can be better supported and information on their current and future resource needs.

The project will develop resources for young men and fathers, and a professionals' toolkit for support services, to increase men's involvement in gender equality and to reduce violence.



## early matters

Our “early matters” program involves a range of educative groups and a home visiting service/outreach service to promote and strengthen healthy, safe family relationships in specific areas of Ballarat and Sunshine.

ATTUNE supports expectant and new parents to maintain healthy adult relationships following the birth of a new baby, with equal participation of both mothers and fathers. It promotes healthy, safe relationships between parents and their baby, and normalises the challenges of parenthood. We strengthened our relationship with a regional hospital to offer the program to the hospital’s first-time parents’ antenatal group. We also collaborated with midwives and maternal child health nurses in Ballarat to pilot ATTUNEplus, a new postnatal program providing a safe and relaxed environment for parents to focus on connecting with their baby, and maintaining safe and healthy relationships.

The “early matters” team also worked with Ballarat’s School Focused Youth Services to deliver LIFT, a four-week program for students preparing to transition from primary to secondary school, with a focus on friendships, healthy relationships, identity, bullying and cyber safety. Simultaneously, parents of the participants attended a Tuning in to Kids™ program.

We presented “I like, like you UP” to upper primary school students, as well as Ready Set Kids, our whole-of-school early intervention program for kindergarten and

primary school-aged children. Ready Set Kids is designed to enhance emotional awareness and regulation, and encourage respectful relationships based on gender equality, and interpersonal and social skills.

“early matters” continued to work collaboratively with the Vietnamese community, delivering abridged Ready Set Kids programs to four Vietnamese playgroups, and engaging with playgroup facilitators and the Australian Vietnamese Women’s Association. Throughout service delivery, “early matters” team members worked closely with playgroup facilitators to ensure the programs were culturally relevant and appropriate. The program has also established strong referral pathways with RAV’s new Safe Resolutions service for Vietnamese families in western Melbourne.

The “early matters” strengths-based home visiting/outreach service provided identified families with between one and four sessions of short-term intervention to support them with their greatest concern or most significant challenge, and reduce the likelihood that families would require tertiary service interventions.

Recognising the importance of supporting not only children and families, but also teaching and support staff, “early matters” has focused on engaging with and being highly visible in the community. In 2017/18 we joined in a range of community-based activities, including morning teas at three schools to celebrate National Families Week and acknowledge the contributions that teaching staff make to their students and community

## Engaging with the community

Through guest speaking engagements and presentations, we shared our expertise and information on our services across Victoria. This included to GPs and nurses working with secondary school students, to a regional cooperative on the topic of recognising and supportively responding to children’s emotions, and to single mothers and young mothers.

In Traralgon, we joined with over 70 participants at a local AFL AusKick program, where we hosted a drumming activity to encourage connections within the community and increase awareness of RAV’s services.

We welcomed the invitation to contribute to *Insight*, the magazine of the Victorian Council of Social Service. Our article on healthy relationships highlighted the importance of teaching young people how to develop healthy relationships to ensure the strength of future communities.

Our professional staff engaged with a significant number of networks, groups and consultations, including the Fathers Inclusive Practice Network, Statewide Parenting Educators Network and Communities for Children Committee.

# Working against family violence

We know that healthy, safe and respectful relationships are fundamental to health and wellbeing. We delivered a broad range of prevention, early intervention and tertiary services to prevent and reduce the prevalence of family violence, and support all people who are affected to recover from family violence.

## Working with people affected by family violence

A new Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, which was developed by Family Safety Victoria and informed by the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Cth) and the Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria), was introduced in 2018. RAV welcomes this important initiative, which strengthens responses to, and recognises the complexities and risks associated with family violence. It is designed to ensure the safety and protection of those experiencing family violence, and to hold perpetrators to account.

We introduced robust processes in preparation for and in response to the scheme, including identification and registration of key information-sharing entities within the organisation that have facilitated and responded to requests for information. Organisational representatives, including managers and members of our family violence leadership team, also undertook training in the new Information Sharing Scheme.

We recognise the importance of integrated, cohesive family violence services, and use an innovative Family Safety Model we have developed for working with our clients affected by family violence. The model seeks to work with and provide services and support to all members of a family who are affected by family violence, including children. It uses a whole-of-family, child-centred approach that involves the allocation of a family violence case coordinator to proactively prioritise safety. The coordinator conducts safety, risk and needs assessments, develops case plans, and provides coordinated services and warm referrals to meet the needs of all family members.

Our Family Safety Model is used within our MBCPs, and is being piloted at our Melbourne and Sunshine FRCs.

RAV is the largest provider of MBCPs and Family Safety Contact Services in Australia, and this year we received additional funding to provide extended programs as well as extra groups in metropolitan Melbourne, Ballarat, Wodonga, Wangaratta, Shepparton, Traralgon and Bairnsdale. The MBCP curriculum is structured to support a pathway for men to change and stop using violence in their relationships, and in the process become better partners, better fathers and improve their sense of self.

In 2017, Family Safety Victoria, in collaboration with Monash University, No To Violence and its MBCP members, initiated a review of the Minimum Standards for MBCPs. RAV was invited to participate in a review of these standards to ensure all MBCPs reflected good practice, and were safe and effective. As a result of this review and subsequent changes to the standards, in 2017/18 RAV introduced a new, extended 20-week curriculum, which involves core and elective components that facilitate engagement, insight, empathy and knowledge of how to relate safely. The program also involves pre-program assessments and comprehensive evaluation processes.

As part of our Family Safety Model, we held information and support sessions for partners, former partners and family members of men attending MBCPs, giving participants the opportunity to ask questions and discuss concerns and available supports with our specialist family violence staff.

Our contract to provide Family Safety Contact Services for the Department of Justice and Regulation's Changeabout program was extended until mid-2019. The aim of the service is to reduce the risk of family violence for identified partners and family members who could be at increased risk while male participants' stress is heightened when participating in the Changeabout program. The Family Safety

# 49%

of our clients had a family violence-related need

## Common family violence-related issues of our clients:

- Anger
- Family violence orders
- Adult physical/emotional abuse
- Child protection
- Financial abuse



After completing Repair-enting over 94 per cent of participants reported that they had skills to repair the impact of their violent behaviour on their children, compared with 55 per cent of participants before the program.

“Everyone has been able to share their stories, free from judgement, and get support, and help and understand what was happening.”

– Opening the Doors participant

“I gained knowledge and understanding about what family violence is and how to recognise it. I now have a clearer picture of how to respond to family violence and who to go to if I need help.”

– Opening the Doors participant

Contact Services ensure an awareness of and responsiveness to family safety, to mitigate, manage and respond to safety risks that may emerge.

We welcomed new funding to pilot a case management program alongside our Department of Health and Human Services-funded MBCPs. This approach recognises the Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria) recommendation that perpetrators of family violence be provided individual case management, where required, to support the provision of tailored interventions that address individual needs and risks. The funding provides the capacity for RAV to tailor responses to meet the complex needs of individuals who perpetrate family violence, and consequently increase the safety of women, children and families affected by family violence.

Following an invitation from Victoria Legal Aid in 2016/17, we joined a pilot of Family Advocacy and Support Services at the Family Court of Australia in Dandenong. The services aim to support family violence-affected families by providing legal advice, safety planning, social support services and referrals. Working closely with the Court and Court staff, RAV offers MBCPs, parenting programs and counselling to support men who have been violent in their relationships, to reduce the risk of further family violence and support healthy relationships between parents and children. We have engaged with legal services, judges and community groups and services to raise awareness of the services.

Our involvement with the Dandenong Multidisciplinary Centre continued, with our specialist family violence practitioners coordinating with Victoria Police, child protection and other services to provide timely interventions to perpetrators of family violence. These include initial telephone contact to engage men who have used violence in their relationships

and make timely, relevant referrals. The interventions are designed to prevent further violence by prioritising the safety and protection of victim-survivors of family violence, sexual assault and child abuse.

We commenced My Mum and Me, a free, seven-week program we developed for children and their mothers recovering from family violence. In each session, separate activities for mothers and children enable participants to focus on the skills and concepts that are most relevant to them. The two groups then re-join to share their learnings, and complete activities designed to help rebuild and strengthen the mother-child relationship.

The whole-of-family program is part of our Family Safety Model, and complements our existing MBCPs and our Repair-enting group for fathers who have completed an MBCP. Repair-enting is offered in metropolitan and regional centres, and through outreach locations, to provide dads with knowledge about and skills for effective, healthy parenting, and the opportunity to discuss how to repair their relationships with their children. Partners, former partners and family members of Repair-enting participants were invited to attend a free information session to learn about the program's content, available support services and to have questions answered.

Opening the Doors was well attended in Sunshine by women who had experienced family violence. Over 10 weeks, women shared their stories, gained an understanding of the impact of and ways to manage trauma, and regained their sense of self and empowerment through identity-strengthening activities. The trauma-informed, strengths-based program, funded by Women's Health West, uses hands-on activities that recognise the impact that trauma can have on the body and brain. It explains how to navigate the service system, with guest

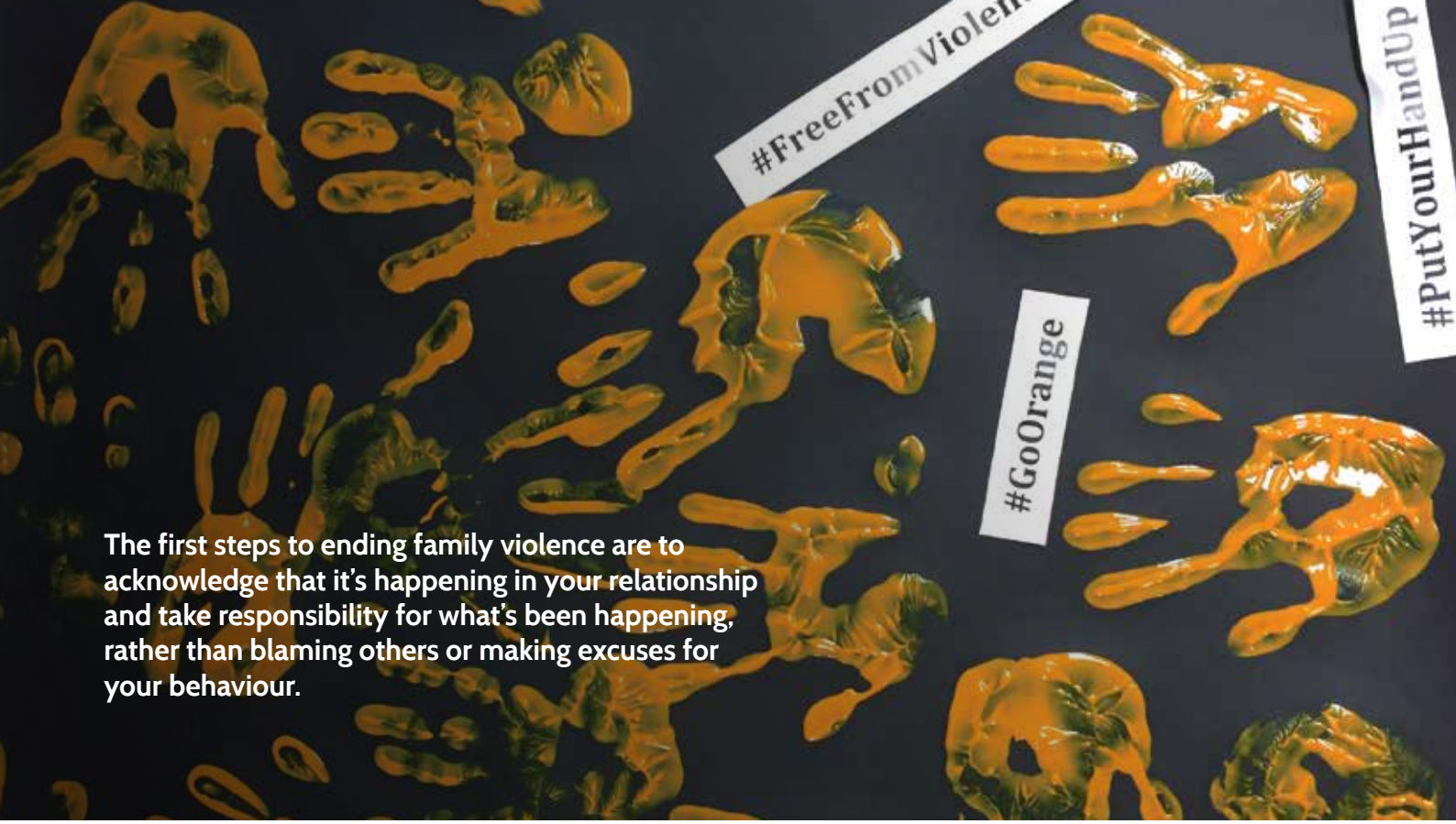
presentations from local legal and family violence agencies. Feedback indicates that women find the relationships that they develop with each other and the support they receive from facilitators to be highly valuable and supportive in their journey to recovery.

Women who had felt powerless as a result of experiencing the controlling and abusive behaviours of others attended our Kew Centre's Women Making Choices program. By exploring topics including self-care, problem-solving and conflict management, the women gained new knowledge, shared their experiences, supported each other and accessed therapeutic support.

Also in Kew, our Women Managing Anger program helped women to understand the impact of their anger on themselves, their relationships and their loved ones, including children, and provided them with communication and assertiveness skills that support change.

Women who had experienced trauma or violence and were worried about returning to work or employment engaged with our Traralgon Centre through our five-week Survival 2 Strength program. The supportive group environment used music and rhythm through drumming to help participants to acknowledge their strengths, find practical solutions to challenges and move forward.

A new evidence-informed group therapy program, Right Now, was introduced in Kew for young women who had experienced interpersonal trauma and/or family violence. Over eight weeks, participants used mindfulness, movement-based activities and other non-verbal strategies such as yoga and meditation, to promote self-compassion, increase energy and direction, and prepare to move into the future with confidence.



**The first steps to ending family violence are to acknowledge that it's happening in your relationship and take responsibility for what's been happening, rather than blaming others or making excuses for your behaviour.**

In partnership with Quantum Support Services, we delivered Inspiring Women, an eight-week self-esteem and healthy relationships-based support group for women who have lived with family violence. The program is unique in the Gippsland area, and provides support and learning opportunities for family violence-affected women, as well as support to prevent the recurrence of family violence.

### Engaging with the community

Staff from multiple RAV centres participated in the annual Walk Against Family Violence, which coincides with White Ribbon Day, to raise awareness of family violence and the impact it has on the community. We also joined other family violence services in hosting a stall at Federation Square where we distributed information, resources and giveaways, including “All relationships matter” temporary tattoos.

To mark the global 16 Days of Activism and the third annual Victoria Against Violence campaign calling for Victorians to “put their hands up” and wear or display the colour orange to end family violence, staff from our Greensborough centres created an artwork of orange handprints.

In Gippsland, we provided a Purple Hearts Women's Group for women with intellectual disabilities. Over six weeks, the women gained knowledge about

healthy relationships and how to stay safe in relationships, with monthly activities held for six months after the program concluded. The participants' parents and carers also attended a session that explained the program's content.

In Traralgon, we provided education and skills development sessions to the Yooralla women's and Yooralla men's disability groups. The sessions focused on healthy and safe relationships and reducing family violence. Feedback from groups, particularly the men's group, indicated they gained new knowledge and had strong interest in participating in further healthy relationships workshops.

Recognising the role that workplaces can play in supporting people affected by family violence, we developed a new tip sheet to support managers and employees, when relevant, to ask colleagues if they are experiencing family violence. Asking About Family Violence in the Workplace includes information on creating a safe place to disclose, asking the initial question, responding to disclosures and accessing additional supports that are available.

We attended events, groups and other opportunities to collaborate with family violence services, government and the family violence sector, including the Department of Health and Human Services Family Safety Victoria Support and Safety Hub Consultations, and the

Victorian Law Reform Commission's Review for the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996 Consultation. We also participated in a round table event on improving the financial capacity of family violence survivors, the Safe from Harm Multiagency Forum, and as a member of the Western Action Plan for Communications in Media for Family Violence and Violence Against Women.

We participated in committees including the Greater Shepparton Family Violence Prevention Network, Boroondara Family Violence Network, LGBTIQ+ Family Violence Network, Gippsland Prevention of Men's Violence Against Women Steering Committee, and Integrated Family Violence committees in Goulburn and Gippsland.

Our Greensborough FRC hosted representatives from Victoria Police, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Djirra and Banyule Community Health on topics including the role of police in family violence matters, financial counselling, and the impact of drugs and alcohol. The presentations provided valuable opportunities for our staff to enhance their knowledge, as well as strengthen referral pathways and relationships with services, to achieve better outcomes for clients.

# Promoting and enhancing good mental health

More than 48 per cent of our clients in 2017/18 had a mental health-related need addressed while using our services. We understand the impact that mental health concerns can have on individuals, relationships and families, and recognise the importance of providing to a range of preventive, early intervention and tertiary services to support Victorians.

48.6%

of our clients had a mental health-related need

634

i-Connect clients

15.7%

of headspace clients identified as LGBTIQ

Everyone has different ways of managing their stress, so it's important to find out what works for you.

“[I] need to thank you for your amazing understanding and support ... Your knowledge and reassurance is above and beyond ...”

– Reclaim Support Services client

## Reclaim Support Services

Through our Reclaim Support Services, we offered free, comprehensive and timely trauma-informed support to survivors of child sexual abuse and people affected by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Clients accessed specialist counselling, information and advice before, during and after private Royal Commission sessions, as well as following the conclusion of the Royal Commission and the delivery of its 17-volume Final Report in December 2017. The conclusion of the Royal Commission impacted the community and Reclaim clients significantly. We experienced a significant increase in enquiries and requests for assistance, particularly in relation to the proposed Redress Scheme and the announcement of an upcoming national apology by the Prime Minister, the Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP.

We recognise the importance of the Redress Scheme. We provided input into the related legislation and scheme's establishment through our membership of the Victoria and Tasmania Royal Commission Support Services Stakeholder Network, via consultations, as part of a Relationships Australia national written submission and through our attendance at a National Stakeholder Workshop facilitated by the Redress Taskforce. During each of these opportunities we worked to represent the needs of our Reclaim clients, while recognising the importance of the establishment of the scheme as an option for survivors and as a legacy of the Royal Commission's impact on our society.

With funding for Reclaim due to conclude at the end of 2018, we continue to support and work with survivors during the development of the Redress Scheme, which is expected to commence in January 2019.

## Compass Forced Adoption Support Services

In 2017/18, our Compass program worked with people affected by forced adoption policies and practices, including mothers, people who have been adopted and family members of adoptees presenting with complex needs.

We developed and commenced implementing a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy to increase awareness of past forced adoption policies and practices, their impact, and the support available through the Compass program.

Organisationally, RAV respectfully commemorated two significant anniversary events: the fifth anniversary of the Victorian Parliamentary Apology for Past Adoption Practices, and the fifth anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions. We hosted staff events that recognised the mothers, fathers, sons, daughters and families who were harmed by past forced adoption policies and practices in Victoria. In addition to readings of the respective apologies, we screened a new video message featuring the Hon Julia Gillard AC, which honoured and observed the anniversary of the National Apology.

In marking the anniversary of the National Apology, Compass staff attended a commemorative event hosted by ARMS (Victoria) and the Victorian Adoption Network for Information and Self Help (VANISH), and also journeyed to Sale in East Gippsland, where they laid flowers and small toys at the site of the Cherished Mother and Child Memorial. This beautiful memorial is a place to acknowledge motherhood, and for mothers and other people to reflect on and contemplate the precious and sacred relationship between mother and child. It was launched in 2017 and was partly funded through the Compass Small Grants Program, which





aims to build capacity and enhance support for people affected by forced adoption.

Compass also funded a range of other projects through the Small Grants Program, including training sessions for support group facilitators, updates to a forced adoption support website and an event to commemorate the anniversary of the Victorian Apology.

### **i-Connect**

We assisted young people aged 18 years and under in East Gippsland, who had or were at risk of mental illness, through our i-Connect Family Mental Health Support Service. In 2017/18, we supported 634 clients with case management support and we experienced growing demand for services in more-remote areas of East Gippsland. The number of primary school-aged children from Aboriginal backgrounds accessing our services also increased.

Following a request from a rural primary school, i-Connect developed and delivered a short program on bullying for girls in grades two and three. The program focused on topics such as positive friendships, qualities to admire in peers, and positive talking and conversations. The school provided feedback that the program had successfully reduced the incidence of bullying, enabling all children to attend and be engaged in learning opportunities.

We gave funding to deliver Play 2 Learn, a playgroup designed to encourage positive play and behaviour for children under five years of age and their parents. i-Connect co-facilitates the program, which is delivered one morning each week for 10 weeks.

In conjunction with headspace Bairnsdale, we attended Colour Fest 2018, a free event for Gippsland youth aged 12 to 25 years that is part of Victorian Youth Week celebrations. More than 300 of the estimated 1500 event attendees visited RAV's stall, where we hosted a popular photo booth, distributed information about our services, and answered questions from young people and parents about mental health and our services.

Through i-Connect, RAV staff participated in the Youth Ambassadors Network, Mental Health Practitioners Network, Youth Focus Network Forums and the Family Mental Health Support Service State Network.

Across RAV, our staff participated in networks, attended events and collaborated with others in the sector, including the Mental Health Professionals Network, Gippsland Mental Health Alliance and a Business Leaders Breakfast that focused on the importance of workplace mental wellbeing.

**“Your support has made our lives so much easier and we have only you (i-Connect) to thank for all the help, thank you.”**

– i-Connect client

“The community and I have really benefited from having a positive and welcoming space such as headspace. Although our centre is new, it has already begun to break down the negative stigma.”

– headspace Bairnsdale Youth Advisory Group member

## headspace

We were successful in tendering to be the lead agency to deliver headspace services for Bass Coast and South Gippsland. In partnership with a range of local services and organisations, headspace aims to improve mental health outcomes for young people aged 12 to 25 years with, or at risk of, mild to moderate mental illness, by offering a comprehensive suite of free or low-cost mental health support services.

The services—provided from a centre in Wonthaggi and through outposts in Cowes, Korumburra, Leongatha, Foster and Wonthaggi—will include mental, general and sexual health services as well as education, employment, and alcohol and other drug support services.

In 2018, we celebrated the one-year anniversary of the opening of our headspace Bairnsdale centre, which provides mental health services for young people including counselling, case work, advocacy, employment assistance, drug and alcohol support, and bulk-billing GP appointments, among other services.

The centre hosted a celebratory morning tea that was widely attended by consortium partners, members of the centre’s Youth Advisory Group, other local services and members of the public, demonstrating the support that the centre has received from the local East Gippsland community.

The Youth Advisory Group continued to be an integral and active part of the centre, meeting fortnightly to contribute to service development and social action activities, and to ensure that services are inclusive and relevant.

For headspace 2017/18 was a successful year, with 2796 occasions of service provided to over 760 clients, and group and health promotion activity participants. Our three mental health and social connectedness-focused groups cater to different needs in the community:

- Our fortnightly Games Group for young people with Autism allows attendees to relax, play board games, connect with peers and learn more about engaging with health services.
- Optimal Health Program is an eight-week, holistic and evidence-based wellness program delivered in partnership with within Australia, to improve mental health outcomes for young people aged 15 to 25 years through education and developing coping strategies and skills.
- Unique But United (UBU) is a fortnightly LGBTIQ+ support group for young people aged 12 to 25 years who want to meet other sexually and gender diverse young people and allies in a safe and supportive space.

The centre hosted a games day to increase awareness of headspace services, engage with young people in the area and facilitate social connectedness. The centre supported the Rainbow Ball, East Gippsland’s first inclusive formal for LGBTIQ+ young people and their allies.

headspace Bairnsdale also supported an interactive information session to raise awareness about viral hepatitis, risks and treatments/outcomes, with a photo and video competition for attendees to show what they had learnt.

We attended the 2018 headspace National Forum, which was a wonderful opportunity to connect, showcase work and share knowledge with other headspace centres. Our Youth Advisory Group presented an engaging poster aligned to the theme ‘The possibilities of headspace in a rural area’, which is now proudly displayed in headspace Bairnsdale’s reception.

Centre staff also presented to high school students and teachers about the centre and good mental health, and hosted an information stand as part of AFL Gippsland’s Mental Health Round.

## headspace Bairnsdale clients



● 12–14 years	18.70%
● 15–17 years	61.82%
● 18–20 years	10.26%
● 21–23 years	5.84%
● 24–25 years	3.38%

In celebration of Victorian Youth Week 2018, the centre held and participated in a number of events to engage young people in the community, including a yoga and mediation session, and a Spray and Stencil Art event for young people to create artwork for the centre’s walls.

A feedback session was held for family and friends of clients, enabling participants to share their experiences and thoughts on their young person’s journey with headspace Bairnsdale.

At the East Gippsland Field Days, a local annual agricultural marketing event, we co-hosted a chill-out zone and art activity space, and provided Pit Stop men’s health checks. The two-day event was well attended, enabling us to engage and discuss the centre’s services with young people and families, and create new art for display in the centre.

We welcomed additional funding from the Victorian Government to enable



headspace Bairnsdale to make available face-to-face, short-term therapeutic intervention services to secondary school students. The Enhancing Mental Health Support in Schools activity is designed to identify, increase support for, and improve responses to young people presenting with mild to moderate mental health concerns. It will support school communities to effectively respond to their students' mental health needs.

As a consortium partner of headspace Hawthorn, we participated in the management committee and clinical governance sub-committee, and provided trauma assessment, trauma therapy and family therapy to the centre's clients and their families.

At headspace Greensborough, we offered onsite counselling for young people and their parents, partners and siblings for support with issues including relationship stress and breakdown, communication, personal identity, self-esteem, stress, anxiety and social connectedness. We actively participated in consortium meetings, offering advice and support focused on delivering the centre's service objectives and ensuring strong community and stakeholder engagement.

### **Collaboration and working in the community**

Our Cranbourne and Sunshine centres, along with our Berwick and Sunshine FRCs, collaborated with the Self-Help

Addiction Resource Centre (SHARC) to host BreakThrough, a series of education sessions funded by the Victorian Government about use of the drug, ice. The sessions were an opportunity to engage with local communities around an issue affecting many of the families with whom we work. Participants who attended the free workshops gained knowledge about the drug and its effects, its impact on physical and mental health, safety planning and strategies to help manage challenging behaviours associated with ice.

We facilitated DRUMBEAT at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, a women's prison facility in western Melbourne. The program used the healing power of music and rhythm to support women who had experienced trauma in their past, by acknowledging strengths, letting go of hurt and moving forward. DRUMBEAT focuses on enhancing resilience by developing protective factors including increased self-esteem, social connections, social skills, emotional control and reduced antisocial behaviour.

In Ballarat, we joined other headspace services, Lifeline and Ballarat Community Health in presenting to over 50 family members of tradespeople, who gained knowledge about mental health issues (such as anxiety and depression) among this group of workers, and support services available in the area. RAV's presentation focused on how to engage tradespeople, particularly men, to access therapeutic services such as counselling, and how social,

gender and geographical issues can affect how and how often men access mental health services. Attendees also received practical advice on starting conversations about mental health with family members, friends and colleagues, with feedback indicating that the information session increased participants' confidence in raising concerns in supportive, compassionate and helpful ways.

In Gippsland, we participated in the Briagolong Winter Wellness Festival, which focused on mental, physical and spiritual health. In our role as a member of a local mental health service provider consortium, we led a Pit Stop men's health check activity, which assisted more than 50 men with mini health checks and information on managing their health and wellbeing, and how to seek support when needed.

Our Traralgon Centre also provided Pit Stop at the Yarram Centenary of Flight Air Show and at Farm World, Gippsland's premier regional agricultural event. They also collaborated with local services to offer the health checks at the Traralgon and Districts Agricultural Show.

We supported Put Your Hand Up, a one-day workshop in Gippsland designed to raise awareness about mental health issues and their impacts on relationships, and to improve communication and resilience.

# Supporting older Victorians and their families

While continuing to build our capacity to ensure that our existing services meet the needs of older Australians, RAV participated in innovative and developmental projects aimed at addressing elder abuse, mental health issues, and social isolation and loneliness in older adults. These initiatives form part of our commitment to providing targeted and effective Senior Relationship Services for Victorians aged 65 years and older, and their families.

Our Kew Centre continued to offer counselling, mediation and groups tailored for older Victorians, as part of RAV's Senior Relationship Services. In particular, through these services, we worked to prevent and provide support for those affected by elder abuse, including financial abuse, which is an increasingly prevalent social issue affecting our ageing population.

## Elder abuse prevention

With funding from the State Trustees Foundation, we delivered Steering the Right Path: Planning a Family Route for Ageing workshops at our Kew, Greensborough, Traralgon and Ballarat centres, and in the community including at libraries, and community and neighbourhood centres. The educational sessions are designed to prevent elder abuse, preserve family relationships and social connection, and support informed planning and decision-making to reduce the risk of older people and their families entering into problematic informal family arrangements.

More than 250 older Victorians and their families, community members, family violence case workers and aged-care professionals attended the free early intervention and prevention workshops. The workshop was also presented to members of Greek seniors groups, with the program content adapted for Greek-speaking participants.

We participated in the 5th National Elder Abuse Conference in Sydney, which was attended by over 500 delegates, and focused on responses to and prevention of elder abuse. We joined a panel discussion on elder abuse in the context of conflict and interpersonal relationships, and, in particular, how mediation and other informal resolution processes can be used when elder abuse is present.

We also facilitated a workshop and discussion session that was based on our Steering the Right Path elder abuse education and prevention workshops.

During the conference, RAV representatives attended the inaugural meeting of Elder Abuse Action Australia, a newly funded peak body representing key community stakeholders in promoting policy reform and research in effective elder abuse prevention and intervention.

We joined participants from government, the social services sector and community organisations at a workshop that was hosted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the National Ageing Research Institute, to develop a unified definition of what constitutes elder abuse. Through an additional workshop we contributed to the design and subsequent review of a new tool to screen for elder abuse.

An invitation to attend the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day breakfast provided a valuable opportunity to share ideas, and increase knowledge of the Victorian Government's family violence reform agenda, and its implications for older people and elder abuse.

As part of Swinburne University's Wellbeing Clinic for Older Adults, we presented to Masters students at the university on the situational contributors to elder abuse and strategies that can be employed to prevent it.

**Raising awareness about elder abuse is a vital first step in changing ageist attitudes, and encouraging older adults to seek support.**

## Educating and sharing information

With an understanding that retirement is a significant life transition that can have long-term health and wellbeing consequences, we introduced You, Me, Us, an interactive workshop for couples who are planning for, or are in, the early stages of retirement. It was developed following a process of research and consultation, including with RAV practitioners, focus groups of retired Victorians, and external specialists in the aged and broader healthcare sectors.

The one-day program educates participants on how to enhance wellbeing during retirement, and discuss individual and shared goals, values and interests. It also focuses on supporting a positive experience of retirement by recognising the strengths that individuals and couples have developed through the years, and considering and planning for potential challenges ahead. The new program has been well received, with participants finding it valuable to talk openly with both their partner and the group about their expectations, concerns and goals for retirement.

In preparing to deliver a new 10-week Reminiscence Activity Group for people aged 65 years and older, RAV staff undertook training in reminiscence approaches. The approach involves activities to facilitate participant reflection and sharing favourite memories, music and food with a group.

We participated as a guest speaker in A Well Planned Journey, a workshop for older people in west-central Victoria. The one-day event discussed end-of-life and ageing-related topics such as care and funeral planning, and legal considerations and responsibilities. It also empowered participants to prepare for the future and make choices for themselves and their loved ones.



**“The workshop gave us a safe environment to talk to each other about our concerns. It was facilitated by expert counsellors, who made sure we covered the important topics. They didn’t get in the way of people sharing. They gave us ways of seeing the positives. I feel more prepared now.”**

– You, Me, Us participant

Members of a stroke support group in metropolitan Melbourne attended a presentation on our senior relationship services, and how they can assist in planning for the future and preventing loneliness.

We engaged with local community members at the Manningham City Council’s Modern Ageing Forum, designed to provide information to the local community on ageing well in a modern world, including the organisations and services that can support ageing well. We shared information on our services, along with promotional note pads, pens, heart-shaped sticky notes and tote bags.

We attended information-sharing opportunities throughout the year, including the Department of Health and Human Services Strengthening Seniors Inclusion and Participation Forum; an Ageing in Australia seminar featuring the Age Discrimination Commissioner, The Hon. Dr Kay Patterson AO; and a Social Justice and Caring in Later Life Forum. We also participated in the Elder Abuse Network in Ballarat and the Eastern Elder Abuse Network.

## Resourcing older Victorians

To support our clients and our staff in their work with older clients and their families, we developed two resources that detail key organisations and services that support Victorians as they age, and a list of educational, social, informational and financial resources for people approaching or in retirement.

We published *Ice-cream at midnight*, a rich and beautifully illustrated picture book that tells the story of a grandmother talking to her grandson about what it is like to grow older. The book is the fourth to be published as part of our Good Ships initiative, which supports children to cope with common challenges.

# 870

clients aged 65 years and older.

**You have to make a conscious effort to be curious; ask questions; not make assumptions about where the other person sits; to allow each person time to say what they want to say or to clarify what they want to say; and to make sure that the older person is really heard and not talked over.**

– RAV’s approach within our Elder Relationship Services

# Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

In 2017/18, RAV worked to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by strengthening existing and developing new relationships with organisations, services and communities to support healthy relationships and families.

## Programs and services

For a second year, the Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service, Wayapa® Wuurrk Aboriginal Wellness Foundation, Aboriginal Centre for Males and RAV, in conjunction with specialist program facilitators, delivered the Bagung ba Wadamba Aboriginal cultural program. Bagung ba Wadamba, which means “gather and heal” in Woiwurrung language, supports Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who are currently engaged with Corrections Victoria.

The program’s model promotes the participation of Aboriginal offenders in cultural programs and the use of protective or healing factors as a key stepping stone into other rehabilitation programs. The voluntary program has a strong focus on Elders in their roles as keepers of knowledge, positive role models and sources of connection to the community.

As the lead agency, RAV has supported the design, development and implementation of the culturally specific group programs for men, women and parents by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. The first two programs, Men’s Journey and Women’s Journey, focus on connection to cultural practices and learnings, building strength and resilience through culture, healing from trans/inter-generational trauma, and support and linkages with culturally safe services. The third program, Growing Up Kids, is an eight-session parenting program about healing, cultural strengthening, and developing culturally specific and tailored parenting skills.

The programs are currently being offered in Victorian correctional facilities, and in culturally safe community spaces such as Aboriginal healing centres and cooperatives for people undertaking community corrections orders.

Participant feedback from all three programs has been positive, with reports that reconnecting with culture was one of the key factors in enhancing strength and healing.

We supported Sister’s Day Out wellbeing events in Yarraville, Footscray, Horsham and Sunbury and at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre. Sister’s Day Out aims to give Koori women the opportunity to increase their awareness of family violence, its underlying causes and impacts, available supports, and how to promote community safety and strengthen their self-esteem and identity. Djirra (formerly the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria), a family violence prevention and support organisation, facilitated the events, which included pampering activities such as nail and hair styling, massages and reiki, and promoted the right of women to feel safe and secure.

RAV sponsored Deadly Kitchen Elders Gatherings, an initiative implemented by IPC Health to connect elderly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are isolated, to promote conversations about culture, and offer health and wellbeing information through guest speaker presentations. We also supported a weekend trip to Warrnambool for Elders in the Deadly Kitchen program, to provide cultural experiences and the opportunity to engage with others.

We partnered with IPC Health to support its Healthy Kinship program. Through our Sunshine Centre, we offer free counselling to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people engaged in the program.

We completed a pilot project in western Melbourne, funded by West Metro Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group and in partnership with Sarah’s Drive School. The Drive Away Family Violence program supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, partners or mothers

of Aboriginal children who are recovering from family violence, to improve self-esteem, resilience and independence, and support positive life choices in future.

The program incorporates an assessment process, group sessions focused on literacy to prepare for a learner’s permit, driving lessons to assist them to obtain a driver’s licence, and information about and warm referrals to family violence support services. Following referrals from a broad range of community organisations, 10 women have participated in the innovative program.

Our Traralgon Centre was invited to participate in the 715 Health Check program, which has been designed to assess aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s health and wellbeing. As part of our commitment to providing outreach services in the community, we participated in the program at the Wulgunggo Ngalu Learning Place, a residential housing facility in Gippsland for Koori men undertaking community corrections orders. We operated a Social and Emotional Wellbeing Station, which assessed mood, level of distress and coping mechanisms, and involved discussions about how to seek support on returning to the community and the protective factors that help to prevent feelings of depression or anxiety.

RAV has an established relationship with the Learning Place, having previously delivered therapeutic drumming workshops and a series of culturally appropriate workshops to help Indigenous men to enhance their connections with themselves and their families, communities and support agencies.



1225

clients from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds

75

people participated in Bagung ba Wadamba

93%

of participants would be very likely to recommend Men's Journey and Women's Journey to other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander men and women

**“Every co-op and prison in the country should be running this program.”**

- Women's Journey participant

**“The program opened doors and gave the fellas incentive to learn about our culture.”**

- Men's Journey participant



# 6

Cultural Awareness Training days provided to RAV staff.

## Community engagement and activities

Our relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, such as community health organisations and family violence and legal services, remained strong, in particular through our work in the community and with Local Aboriginal Networks in south-east, western and northern metropolitan areas of Melbourne. Through this engagement, RAV has been able to establish and enhance trust with clients, in the community and with professionals.

We welcomed an invitation from ThinkPlace and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency to participate in ThinkCamp, a two-day intensive workshop to explore concepts and methods of holistic healing, and the resources and infrastructure required to prevent and respond to family violence. The workshop's findings have resulted in a report incorporating the views of local communities, service providers, Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

We were proud to sponsor a community barbecue hosted by Willum Warrain Aboriginal Association, which offered

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members and families the chance to come together and connect with one another.

Across the organisation, RAV staff participated in a wide range of activities to mark important dates and events relevant to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including National Reconciliation Week, which celebrates culture, our past and our future; the 15th Anniversary Gala of Djirra; and the Long Walk Women's Luncheon, which celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's leadership and achievement.

During NAIDOC Week, we attended the NAIDOC March, NAIDOC Ball, multiple flag-raising ceremonies, and community events including a family day at the Collingwood Children's Farm involving Indigenous bush planting and cultural craft activities. We also sponsored the Eastern Metropolitan Region NAIDOC Ball, and delivered a presentation at a women's prison as part of the Koori mental health project that seeks to make child and adolescent mental health services more accessible. In Bairnsdale, our headspace centre hosted a NAIDOC Week lunch, which included two young people from the local Aboriginal community as guest speakers.

To mark the 10th anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, we attended an event hosted by the Whittlesea Reconciliation Group and City of Whittlesea, with one of our counsellors in attendance to support community members where required. The event acknowledged and recognised members of the Stolen Generations and their families.

## Enhancing cultural awareness

RAV commenced a series of Cultural Awareness Training sessions throughout the year, providing our staff with an understanding of the Victorian Koori community, the diversity of culture, our shared history and the opportunity to have an open conversation that facilitates breaking down barriers for a shared understanding of the richness of Koori culture. Further training sessions will be held in the near future.



# Embracing Victoria's diversity

RAV is committed to supporting all Victorians, regardless of their background. We are an ethical leader in the community services sector, and support people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to have positive, safe and respectful relationships. Our organisation strives to understand and tailor services to meet the needs of the client groups with which we work.

## Culturally appropriate services and resources

RAV commenced a contract with the Department of Justice and Regulation to develop responsive, culturally specific family violence initiatives for cohorts within Victoria's correctional system. In partnership with the inTouch Multicultural Centre against Family Violence, Kildonan Uniting and No to Violence, we developed family violence-related information sessions and resources, and family violence programs for African and Maori men. We also developed culturally appropriate Arabic and Vietnamese MBCPs, focused on enhancing relationships within families, understanding and communicating emotions, improving relationships with children and managing behaviour. The project involves the development of cultural guidelines for the delivery of Corrections Victoria offending behaviour programs.

In western Melbourne we worked with Vietnamese perpetrators of family violence in our Vietnamese-specific MBCPs. The groups are tailored to the needs, culture and experiences of Vietnamese men in Australia, including Australian laws and customs. The program's facilitators and family safety practitioner are all Vietnamese, which enhances the cultural appropriateness and accessibility of the group. This group is now well established and participant feedback is consistently positive.

There was increasing interest and demand for Safe Resolutions, a free, legally assisted and culturally appropriate FDR service for Vietnamese families in western Melbourne experiencing separation and divorce. The pilot service, which is funded by the Attorney-General's Department, has been operating through RAV's Sunshine FRC since October 2017.

In partnership with the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association, Brimbank Melton Community Legal

Centre and WEstjustice, the RAV service has supported families experiencing complex family violence issues to resolve their family law disputes. The innovative service has been well received and appreciated by the local Vietnamese community. Integral to the program's success are Vietnamese-speaking program facilitators who understand cultural differences, and translators with training to understand the family law system and dispute resolution services.

As part of the service, a range of family law and family violence education sessions have been held to enhance access to the service and strengthen the community's capacity to respond to the issues. Safe Resolutions has also hosted a series of Vietnamese Cultural Awareness Training days, designed to enhance the skills of FDR, legal, family violence and administrative staff in using culturally sensitive practices when working with Vietnamese clients.

Building on RAV's engagement with South East Community Links staff and management in recent years, RAV funded and co-facilitated an Afghan Family Strengthening Group in south-east Melbourne, in partnership with South East Community Links. Over four sessions and with the assistance of an interpreter, family members from the local Afghan community gained knowledge about how to strengthen their family relationships. Psycho-education, skills-building and informal discussions enabled participants to raise topics of importance to their families and community, including strategies to connect with family, challenges when parenting adolescents, discipline, managing social media, and identifying healthy and unhealthy relationships. Feedback indicated that the groups were clear, interesting and positively impacted participants' feelings of wellbeing, with the materials used and the presentation of content appropriate for Afghan culture.

3604

clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds including India, Vietnam, China and Sri Lanka

92

languages spoken other than English by our clients including Vietnamese, Mandarin, Hindi, Arabic and Samoan

137

countries of birth of our clients



**“I feel very fortunate to be linked with the Safe Resolutions program. The mediation meeting went really well. I received very good support to help me resolve my issues. I couldn’t be happier thanks to your service.”**

– Safe Resolutions client

In partnership with the Flemington Community Centre, the Melbourne FRC delivered a series of parent information sessions for 20 local mothers from a range of cultural backgrounds including Vietnamese, Somali, Eritrean and Ethiopian, many of whom were caring for children from within their extended family networks as well as their own children. The interactive sessions included topics supporting children’s growing emotional intelligence, building strong attachment and play-based learning. Feedback indicated that the women valued the opportunity to share their parenting experiences, problem-solve issues and meet other local residents.

RAV participated in a celebration of cultural and linguistic diversity at a primary school in south-east Melbourne. As part of an activity-filled day, we held a debate as well as a question and answer session to explore the themes of family; cultural awareness; connecting through culture, including through stories and music; and the link between communication and relationships.

Our Traralgon Centre collaborated with the newly established Multicultural Women’s Friendship Group in Gippsland. During an informal craft session, RAV provided group members, many of whom were new to Australia or to the local area, with the opportunity to hear and ask questions about our services, including relationship counselling. Additional craft sessions focused on the topics of connecting with others, sharing skills and increasing participants’ awareness of what is healthy

and what is unhealthy in a relationship. The use of craft activities enabled RAV to develop relationships, engage and share information with the women in a safe and supportive environment.

Young Gippsland women from multicultural backgrounds attended Girls Space, a series of educative sessions delivered after school, where we presented on topics such as relaxation, body image, relationships and self-care.

### **Working with the community**

Our Traralgon Centre once again celebrated Eid al-Fitz, which marks the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting. We sponsored and participated in the Eid Festival, which encourages positive relationships with people of all backgrounds and faiths in the community. The community event gave Muslim and non-Muslim families the opportunity to come together to enjoy a range of activities, food and craft stalls, and connect with their community neighbours.

Across many of our centres, we joined in celebrations to mark Refugee Week and Harmony Day, while in Shepparton we provided an interactive activity at an inclusive-focused family event, as part of the launch of Cultural Diversity Week.

Also in Shepparton, we participated in a community day focused on children and families, particularly new members of the community from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

We joined the South East CALD Network’s Pathways to Better Living Expo, which showcased services and support available in Dandenong for the community, particularly for people from diverse backgrounds. We also shared information and engaged with services at a forum in eastern metropolitan Melbourne, which focused on promoting gender equity and respect in multicultural communities.

Our Kew Centre welcomed the opportunity to present to young Somali Australians in northern Melbourne, and consult with them about our upcoming relationship education courses, and how they could be tailored to the specific needs and experiences of the Somali community.

With a commitment to working collaboratively with other services and the community, we participated in networks such as the Yarra and La Trobe Settlement Forums, Family Violence CALD Network, Whittlesea Multicultural Issues Network, South East CALD Network and the Brimbank Melton Settlement Advisory Committee.

**“All the topics were great and it helped me in many ways. Keep it up.”**

– Afghan Family Strengthening Group participant

# Engaging with Victorian communities

RAV recognises the significant impact that isolation and loneliness can have on physical, emotional and mental health. Through our centres, outreach programs and community engagement work in 2017/18, we engaged with the community to help reduce social isolation and loneliness, and prevent negative health outcomes. We recognise that these issues are intensifying and require increased attention, and we are, therefore, focused on expanding our services to prevent and address these issues.

As part of our commitment to LGBTIQ communities, we once again joined in the colour, vibrancy and fun of the Midsumma Carnival, Victoria's premiere LGBTIQ arts and culture festival. From our stall we engaged with the community, providing visitors with information, promotional products and the opportunity to chat to our staff. In particular, we welcomed many past clients of RAV, who gave positive feedback about their experiences with our organisation. Visitors were also invited to participate in an interactive, 3D art activity, in which they wrote their answer to the question "What would you tell your 16-year old self?", with the answers forming a colourful canvas for display in our Traralgon Centre.

For the sixth consecutive year, RAV was proud to sponsor a film at the Melbourne Queer Film Festival, a well-established annual celebration of LGBTIQ-themed films and documentaries. We provided rainbow pens to patrons of our sponsored film, *The Ring Thing*, which explored the nature of commitment and how the prospect of marriage can raise challenges even within a loving relationship.

In Shepparton, we hosted a stall at the annual Out in the Open Festival's Carnival Day, which celebrates pride and community diversity, and aims to address inequalities faced by the local LGBTIQ communities and enhance the inclusiveness of the Greater Shepparton community.

Our Greensborough centres hosted a stall at YouthFest, Banyule City Council's free, inclusive event to engage young people in positive activities, celebrate their talents, and ensure they feel valued by and connected to the community. RAV's stall focused promoting self-care, looking after others and recognising when to seek help, and included craft activities and a selfie photo competition. We also talked to visitors about the importance of positive relationships on health and wellbeing.

Our Traralgon Centre undertook a broad range of community engagement initiatives and activities, including drumming and beading, across an expansive geographic area, and participated in a shared community lunch to engage with the community and strengthen relationships between services. We partnered with local community and neighbourhood houses to provide relaxation and support focused pamper days for residents impacted by the Hazelwood Power Station closure, challenges being experienced in the dairy industry and rural isolation.

We continued as a partner organisation in the Traralgon East Revitalisation and Capacity Building Project, which organises events and activities to encourage community connection and relationship building. RAV has participated in a number of ways, including through art and music activities, hosting community cooking workshops and undertaking guest speaking engagements.

Families attended a Family Fishing Day in Gippsland that was hosted by the Churchill and District News and involved a number of sponsors, including RAV. The annual event is designed to enable families to spend quality time together, and particularly for fathers, single parents and grandparents to spend time with the children in their lives, and strengthen their relationships and family connections.

Recognising that men, and particularly men in regional areas, are less likely to visit the doctor than women, we co-facilitated Pit Stop Men's Health Checks at the South Gippsland Dairy Expo and the Yarram Centenary of Flight events. The brief health checks assessed physical and mental health, including stress, and anxiety and coping skills to identify concerns and support men to seek further support when required.

## What would you tell your 16-year old self?

"Don't be afraid.  
It's okay to be gay.  
You are stronger  
than you realise."

"Be proud, be yourself,  
don't conform, listen to  
your inner voice and not  
the external."

"Judge less. Love more.  
Be more compassionate."

– Midsumma Carnival visitors





**With simple acts of kindness, we encourage every day of the year to be Neighbour Day – an initiative to encourage people to connect with those who live around them.**

A second workshop was held as part of our Community Mosaic Project, involving community members designing and creating mandalas that represent themselves or something unique to them. The project has engaged many different members of the community, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. Once complete, the mandalas will form a mosaic designed by the Centre for Multicultural Youth to represent diversity and being welcoming, and will be displayed in our Traralgon Centre.

We welcomed the opportunity to be a guest presenter and panel member at the Carers Victoria Women Carers Forum, "Talking Taboo ... all the questions you want to ask, now answered". The one-day forum focused on information and support around relationship issues that women in caring roles may face, and enabled participants to ask questions that they may not typically feel comfortable to ask, in an open and safe environment.

In Shepparton, we provided information to and engaged with professionals at the Goulburn Valley Regional Council's Information Sharing Forum, and we attended the Latrobe Women Creating Conversations event in Gippsland,

designed to build community capacity and resilience following the closure of the Hazelwood Power Station.

Our staff engaged with community-focused groups and networks, including as a member of the Carlton Local Agency Network, Latrobe Community Service Providers Network and Banyule Community Safety Working Group.

### **Celebrating Neighbour Day**

The Neighbour Day initiative, which Relationships Australia has supported for the past five years, continued to engage individuals, couples, families, organisations and neighbourhoods across Victoria to celebrate their communities. It is designed to bring together like-minded people to grow stronger, well-connected communities, and help prevent social isolation, loneliness and depression, particularly for older people. Neighbour Day recognises the importance of healthy relationships with others, and the positive impact these relationships can have on communities. While Neighbour Day is officially held annually on the last Sunday in March, Relationships Australia is working to grow the ethos of well-connected communities every day of the year.

RAV held a range of events to mark the 2018 Neighbour Day theme of 'The importance of a supportive neighbourhood for children and young people'. At our Kew Centre, staff shared a morning tea and discussed how Neighbour Day was an opportunity to say "hi" to their neighbours, particularly young families.

In Ballarat, we attended the annual Ballarat North Neighbourhood House Neighbour Day, and we hosted a centre lunch, where staff came together to recognise and celebrate their 'work neighbours'.

In partnership with headspace Greensborough and Banyule City Council's Youth Services, our Greensborough Centre and Greensborough FRC held a celebration of Neighbour Day in Greensborough Walk – a busy thoroughfare for families and young people. Cupcakes, fruit and drinks, as well as a range of RAV-branded piggy banks, pencils and "I love my family" temporary tattoos, along with information on Neighbour Day and the 2018 theme, were offered to visitors.

# Delivering accredited training, and workplace services

In 2017/18, we continued to provide a broad range of accredited training opportunities, professional development workshops and short courses, and expanded the provision of psycho-educational workshops and resourcing for the community services sector.

## Accredited training

Our Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution, which we offer through our Registered Training Organisation, remained popular with students from counselling, psychology and legal backgrounds undertaking the nationally accredited qualification. As the only provider of the graduate diploma in Victoria that offers students a guaranteed placement, the well-regarded course provides students with a unique learning experience and is a valuable workforce development opportunity for the FDR sector.

RAV is uniquely positioned to deliver the course, as our organisation has extensive experience and expertise in providing FDR services to clients. This association between theory and practice enables students to benefit from the knowledge, skills and experience of qualified, practising FDRPs, and contributes to our excellent course outcomes, as evidenced by our course evaluations.

Our five-day intensive Mediation Short Course continued this year, providing students with knowledge and skills to facilitate structured mediation sessions with clients. Many students also elected to complete an additional assessment day, enabling them to register as an accredited mediator under the National Mediator Assessment Standards. The short course can also be an entry pathway to RAV's Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution.

**“Excellent, engaging, experienced and knowledgeable trainers. Comprehensive and highly relevant resource base.”**

– Graduate Diploma of FDR student

RAV provided counsellors, psychologists and social workers with specialist training in couples counselling, through our Specialist Course in Couple Therapy, which involves lectures, case discussions, live demonstrations and clinical practice experience. RAV has more than 30 years' experience delivering the course, which was once again fully subscribed and elicited positive feedback from students and industry partners, including universities and employers. Our partnership with Swinburne University enables the training program to form the second and third year specialisation units as part of the university's Master of Counselling program.

## Professional development workshops

We offered a range of professional development workshops to professionals working with individuals, families, children and workplaces in the community:

- The Casual Counsellor – basic counselling skills to support clients, colleagues and friends
- The Tree of Life – an approach to working with vulnerable children, young people and adults
- Supporting Separated Families – understanding separation, its impacts and how to support families to manage this change
- Gender and Sexuality Equality and Inclusivity – supporting increased inclusivity of sex-, sexuality-, and/or gender-diverse staff, students, patients and clients
- Introduction to Working with Couples – different therapeutic processes and dynamics when working with couples.

Professional development workshops were also provided to organisations, schools and services within corporate

settings to give employees knowledge and skills relevant to healthy and respectful relationships within workplaces. Workshops included Responding to Family Violence in the Workplace, Work-Life Balance and Self-Care, Managing Challenging Behaviours, Dealing with Difficult Calls and Communication Skills.

We also hosted Scott Miller, an internationally recognised expert in therapeutic intervention, to provide 'What Works in Therapy' training workshops for RAV staff and the broader community. During the workshops, Scott identified the evidence-based factors responsible for therapeutic success, and empirically supported practices and skills to enhance therapeutic outcomes. His application of high-performance tools to the continuous improvement of counselling practice was challenging and enlightening for the practice professionals.

**“Both trainers were very good at including case studies and experience to illustrate points.”**

– Introduction to Working with Couples attendee

**“It's the best training I've been to for some time.”**

– The Casual Counsellor attendee

**“There were so many parts that were 'lightbulbs'. It was great!”**

– Gender and Sexuality Equality and Inclusivity attendee

## Training for prisoners on remand

We successfully tendered for a project to develop a suite of non-clinical training modules targeting the wellbeing and personal development of un-sentenced prisoners (remandees) in prison locations across Victoria.

The Department of Justice and Regulation-funded project recognises that remandees have complex needs, and require tailored interventions and support to successfully rehabilitate and reintegrate into the community.

In partnership with Caraniche, a specialist provider of psychological services, RAV designed a suite of training modules on

topics including adjusting to change, positive communication, managing conflict, respectful relationships, stress management and independent living skills.

The training package uses a strengths-based approach that incorporates adult learning principles to allow the development of skills during practical and interactive sessions that are linked to accessing further supports.

The project will conclude with the delivery of a Train-the-Trainer package to Corrections Victoria staff, who will then deliver the training to remandees in prisons across Victoria.

The Melbourne Assessment Prison has also engaged RAV to provide weekly workshops on healthy and respectful relationships to prisoners held on remand. The SORT program includes information on the Self, Others, Relationships and Transitions to assist prisoners to identify and implement helpful ways of interacting with their peers, friends and family members.

The SORT program utilises adult learning principles, trauma-informed practice and a strengths-based approach to engage participants and support them to achieve learning outcomes.

## Family violence training

In response to a recognised need in the community services sector for staff development and skills in responding to family violence, we implemented new family violence training for RAV staff and the sector more broadly. Following significant consultation, we developed and commenced offering the following workshops:

- Child-Focused Practice with Families Experiencing Family Violence
- Trauma-Informed Practice for Responding to Family Violence

We have also developed a new relationship counselling course with a family violence focus that is designed for counsellors or equivalently qualified practitioners working in the community services sector. This includes those in senior roles with oversight of family violence service delivery. This innovative qualification, which will commence for the first time in 2019, will enhance participants' skills and knowledge for working with individuals, couples and families affected by family violence.

## Workplace services

We were contracted to provide employee assistance programs, conflict resolution, family violence planning, training and management support by over 80 state and national organisations, including community health, not-for-profit, regulatory and private services. In 2017/18, the service experienced significant increased demand for workplace conflict resolution, as well as counselling services.

We supported organisations and services following traumatic incidents, through group and individual emergency debriefing sessions that focused on creating a safe space for staff to raise concerns and discuss feelings, process grief and prioritise self-care.

## LINCS: Training for positive community integration

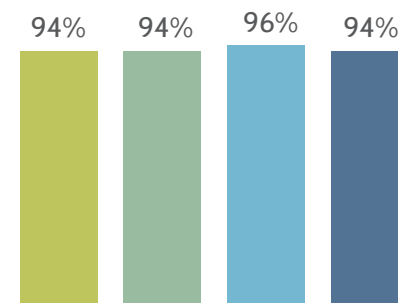
For a second year we delivered LINCS workshops, which promote personal reflection and positive future direction for people serving community correction orders across Victoria.

RAV is funded by the Department of Justice and Regulation to provide the weekly workshops for participants in Dandenong, Carlton, Broadmeadows and Geelong.

The program encourages participants to Look at their values and strengths, Identify their life priorities, set their Next steps and identify available Community Supports.

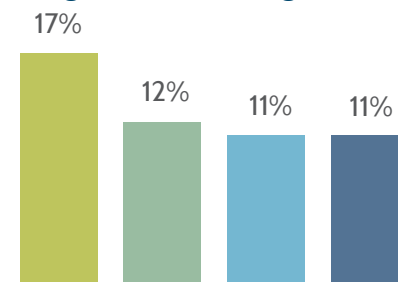
Feedback from participants and the Community Corrections Services staff has been extremely positive, with over 94 per cent of participants achieving all learning outcomes.

## LINCS Learning Outcomes



- I am able to identify my own values and strengths
- I am able to identify some priorities for my life right now
- I understand the steps involved in setting a SMART goal
- I can name people and services in the community that can support me

## Most common needs addressed of Employee Assistance Program counselling clients



- Mental health
- Relationship difficulties
- Family including separation and parenting
- Employment including bullying and conflict

# Focusing on practice quality, research and evaluation

The provision of high quality, effective and professional services is supported by the organisation's commitment to research, evaluation and client engagement based on client feedback. Systems and processes have been established to assist us to better identify client needs, ensure practice quality, continuously improve our services and contribute knowledge that informs ongoing service development and improvement within our organisation and the sector more broadly.

## Ensuring practice quality

We developed and implemented an enhanced clinical review and supervision process for our FDR and counselling services to support practice developments and complement existing quality improvement processes, including clinical, peer and group supervision. Additional mechanisms introduced include random case and file reviews, which supplement annual clinical observation processes, support competencies and identify future practice developments.

These approaches were also implemented for our MBCPs and other family violence services, and our specialist services including "early matters", Reclaim Support Services and Compass Forced Adoption Support Services. Within our MBCPs, we introduced an enhanced model of reflective practice to ensure that all facilitators regularly and appropriately reflect on their group facilitation, particularly with respect to gender equality.

A range of policies and procedures were also developed and reviewed, including in relation to client safety, family violence and breach of intervention orders, critical incidents, mental health risk assessments and child inclusive practice.

We completed a comprehensive Theory of Change project designed to formally articulate what we do and how we do it, as well as strengthen our cultural focus on outcomes, client needs, evidence and evaluation. We undertook extensive staff consultations to identify our organisational principles of practice and conducted a literature review, with consideration of sector developments and areas of focus that will impact our organisation, and future engagement with families. These included our approaches of evidence-informed, and outcomes- and client-focused practice.

The project has resulted in a shared organisational understanding of our intended social impact, and tangible outcome domains to measure how we succeed in strengthening families and relationships for individuals, couples, families and communities.

The outcomes of the Theory of Change project will contribute to the development of program logics for our core services, and will inform our clinical governance framework, program manuals and our overarching approach to evidence-informed practice, supervision, evaluation and research. It will also influence all other activities that RAV undertakes, including communicating our services to the public, and staff recruitment and induction.

## Evaluating our impact

More than 8400 evaluations of our funded counselling, FDR and FRC services indicated high client satisfaction. Over 98 per cent of clients felt listened to and understood by the service, while 97.7 per cent of clients were satisfied with the service they received. Notably, 97 per cent of FRC clients and almost 96 per cent of FDR clients reported that they worked on and talked about what they wanted to during the service, indicating that our FDR and support services are client-centered. This is quite an achievement given that clients who are separating or can often present with quite different views about what are the most important issues to be resolved.

We are particularly encouraged by the feedback from clients who received counselling. Of the 3461 clients who responded, 98.9 percent stated that as a result of the service they received they were better able to deal with issues they had sought help for, illustrating the value

of our services in supporting clients to develop skills and strategies for managing their issues.

Evaluation is an integral part of our organisation and our commitment to delivering evidence-informed programs and services. In 2017/18, we enhanced our annual Counselling Outcomes Survey by undertaking a follow-up survey three months after the initial survey was completed. The follow-up survey is designed to identify the longer-term impact of counselling on clients' wellbeing, family functioning and relationships, using a range of goal-focused, evidence-based evaluation scales, including the Perceived Stress Scale and the Parenting Confidence Scale.

At the time of the follow-up survey, 84 per cent of survey respondents reported gaining new knowledge and strategies to deal with their concerns. Clients reported increased personal wellbeing and overall life satisfaction since the initial evaluation was completed, particularly in the domains of personal relationships, safety and community connectedness. Other positive changes included increased confidence in making choices and raising issues in relationships, improved relationships with children, reduced conflict, and lower scores on the Perceived Stress Scale, which indicates lower levels of depression and anxiety.

**“This service has been invaluable. Far exceeded my expectations. Very easy to access and continue even financially.”**

- Counselling Outcomes Survey client feedback





Following the survey, we invited RAV's clinical leaders to participate in a workshop utilising the Most Significant Change Technique: a participatory monitoring and evaluation approach that identifies and systemically analyses significant changes that clients experience as a result of attending counselling. This approach is designed to help foster RAV's shared organisational vision, improve practitioners' capacity to analyse the impact of their work and identify unexpected changes.

We completed a preliminary evaluation of our MBCPs and new curriculum through a combination of pre-, post- and retrospective program evaluations. The evaluation revealed improvements at the completion of an MBCP in participants' empathy, awareness of the impact of abusive behaviours on family members, and understanding and skills relating to emotional regulation. They also demonstrated greater acknowledgement of the need to improve their relationships and stop using violence, coercion and control, illustrating a positive shift towards the intended outcomes of the program.

Following the submission of an evaluation of our "I like, like you UP" program to Child

Family Community Australia, we welcomed the announcement that the program had been recognised as a promising evidence-based program through the Communities for Children Facilitating Partners list. Promising programs meet a set of criteria that reflect a minimum standard for good quality programs for families and children.

Evaluations were also conducted for an extensive range of other programs, including Repair-enting, Tuning in to Kids, Ready Set Kids, Bagung ba Wadamba's Growing Up Kids, and the "early matters" ATTUNE program and home visiting service.

Results of a preliminary evaluation of our Single Session Consultations in Traralgon were positive, indicating that after attending the service, clients were less stressed about the greatest concern they sought counselling for, and the impact of the concern was reduced.

### Undertaking research

RAV, through the Relationships Australia federation, continued to participate in the Relationships Australia FDR Outcomes Study. The national research project is

designed to demonstrate the outcomes and efficacy of Relationships Australia FDR services, in both parenting and property disputes, including the durability of outcomes. RAV is leading the property component of the study.

The study employs a longitudinal survey design with quantitative data collected through client surveys at multiple points in time. More than 1800 clients participated in the first client survey in the second half of 2017, with 800 participants completing the second survey three months later. Preliminary analysis of this data has commenced, while the third data collection will be undertaken in late 2018. A subsample of participants will also be interviewed to gauge their experiences and perceptions of the dispute resolution process as part of the third data collection point.

Data analysis will focus separately on parenting and property disputes, with the clients' issues in conflict and aims in attending FDR being examined to determine variables that predict clients progressing to mediation, and subsequently reaching and maintaining agreements following FDR.

# Theory of Change

We provide prevention, early intervention and recovery services to strengthen families and relationships.

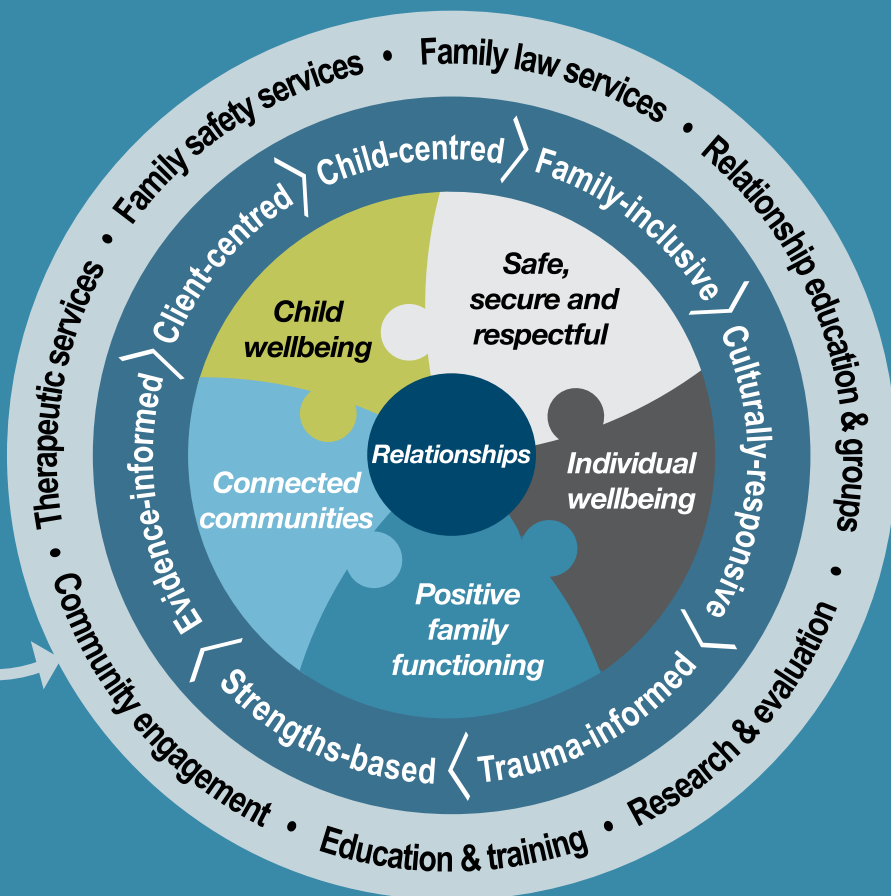
## How we create change

Provide access and identify needs

Establish engagement, rapport and motivation

Strengthen the capacity and resources of individuals and families

Inform and empower with awareness, knowledge, skills and attitudes



## Spotlight

### Connecting with Others in Older Age research project

In conjunction with Swinburne University and with support from an Iverson Health Innovation Research Institute grant, we continued the Connecting with Others in Older Age research project. The research is investigating how older adults establish and maintain relationships, and the role technology can play in preventing and addressing loneliness in older adults between the ages of 65 and 75 years.

Using a flipped healthcare approach that used consumer consultations, a series of focus groups have been conducted with members of the target age group to gain insight into their experiences in transitioning into and through retirement.

Focus groups will also seek to gain participants' opinions and preferences to inform the design brief for the interactive, multimedia-rich digital prototype.

The website will be designed using a broad approach of active ageing and wellbeing, to help older people to plan for retirement, to help older people to plan for retirement, have a sense of purpose, stay connected and prevent social isolation from the very start of their journey through retirement.

By taking a life course approach to ageing well, it will offer interactive information and wellbeing checkups, as well as tips and strategies for planning ahead. It will also provide resources for those experiencing,

or at risk of, undesired social isolation and loneliness.

Adopting a 'salutogenic' approach, the website will aim to integrate an understanding of the processes that move people towards, or keep people at, the health-ease pole as opposed to the disease or pathogenic pole.

It will seek to take into account the way in which people make sense of the world, use the required resources to respond to it, and feel that these responses are meaningful and make sense emotionally.



RAV also engaged in a broad range of research projects, including through formal collaborative partnerships with Monash University, Swinburne University and Victoria University.

We commenced a collaborative research project with Monash University to evaluate RAV's MBCPs and the case management pilot program RAV is delivering with funding from Family Safety Victoria.

With Victoria University, we began co-sponsoring a new research project designed to gauge the use, impact and harm of social media, particularly in relation to couples who are separated and engaged in family law disputes. Development of the research methodology and selection of data collection instruments was completed, and we commenced recruiting RAV FDR clients to voluntarily participate in research surveys.

The project is particularly timely, as while social media can be an effective communication tool, particularly for couples managing the complexities of parenting when separated, there is increasing evidence of the mis-use of social media by separated parties who continue to monitor and abuse their former partners, including through digital/online stalking.

The family law system is still grappling with how to appropriately respond to the rapidly emerging communication opportunities and risks associated with social media, and it is, therefore, vital that service providers educate clients about how to use digital tools in effective and safe ways.

Our partnership with Swinburne University's Wellbeing Clinic for Older Adults continued through the Digital Story in Residential Aged Care project. The project is positively impacting older people in aged-care settings who are experiencing low mood and anxiety, through the creation and sharing of three-minute digital stories about the older people. It also aims to investigate the effect of digital stories on caregivers' attitudes, demonstrate the mental health benefits of storytelling for older adults, and research the geropsychology skills, competencies and attitudes of research participants.

Preliminary findings of the digital stories intervention indicate that they can improve residents' feelings about themselves by reaffirming identity, uniqueness and lived experiences, and improve carers' knowledge of, and attitudes to, residents.

# Fostering our workforce

As part of our commitment to being an employer of choice, and our ongoing focus on continuous improvement and high-quality service delivery, we undertook a range of initiatives to provide a positive and supportive working environment, and to ensure that our clients' needs and safety are the focus of our work.

In 2017/18, across the organisation our staff engaged in more than

# 100

different professional development activities

We implemented a new pilot program to induct new employees into the organisation, including through the provision of online resources and information using an online learning management platform. We also delivered quarterly face-to-face induction training days for new staff, with presentations from senior managers and key departments, and undertook employee on-boarding surveys to evaluate new employees' experiences of recruitment and induction.

Employees continued to access a confidential Employee Assistance Program that provided them and their immediate family members with access to free counselling sessions.

Many employees availed themselves of the opportunity to take additional leave this year as part of our entitlement to purchase flexible leave, which recognises the importance of a healthy work-life balance.

A wide range of policies and procedures related to areas including human resources, workplace health and safety, and practice quality were developed or updated, and distributed through a new online policy and procedure platform. The platform is designed to increase document accessibility and transparency of employees' organisational obligations and responsibilities.

RAV is committed to gender equality, both in the community and within our organisation. As part of this commitment, and our focus on being an employer of choice, we implemented a number of policies including relating to employee remuneration, employee retention, and workforce diversity and gender equality. Following the submission of a report to the Workplace Gender Equity Agency, we welcomed the notification that RAV is compliant with the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* (Cth).

In 2017/18, across the organisation our staff engaged in more than 100 different professional development and training activities to support ongoing skill development and clinical competency. The diversity of topics of these learning and development areas is indicative of the broad range of services RAV offers and the complexity of our work. They included workshops and training sessions on anger and trauma, complex issues in family law, family violence and children, the impacts of trauma and sexual assault, youth mental health first aid, cultural awareness, clinical supervision, Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF), leadership skills, and working with loss and trauma through the adoption lens.

We are committed to creating an engaging work environment for our staff. In 2017/18, we conducted our organisation-wide, bi-annual Staff Engagement Survey, which is designed to gain anonymous and confidential feedback from staff and measure how engaged they are in different areas of our organisation.

More than three-quarters of our staff provided valued feedback through the voluntary survey, which indicated increased levels of engagement with the organisation, its values, vision and focus since the last survey was conducted. The results demonstrated that overwhelmingly our staff feel engaged, supported and positive

about their work at RAV, and in relation to our values and strategic direction.

A further key outcome of the survey was also the identification of primary areas on which management can focus to further enhance employee engagement with RAV in the future. These areas informed, and will continue to inform, initiatives that human resources and management undertake across RAV.

## Staff Engagement Survey Results

"I believe that RAV makes a positive difference"

- 95% of staff agreed  
(1% disagreed)

"I would recommend RAV's services"

- 92% of staff agreed  
(1% disagreed)

"I can balance my home and work life"

- 85% of staff agreed  
(5% disagreed)

"I find my work meaningful"

- 89% of staff agreed  
(1% disagreed)



## Leadership team



**Dr Andrew Bickerdike**  
Chief Executive Officer



**Anastasia Panayiotidis**  
General Manager  
Clinical Services



**Michael Muldoon**  
General Manager  
Operations



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

## Management team

**Carl Beeston**  
Senior Manager ICT  
Operations

**Anna Clarke**  
Senior Manager  
Communications  
and Marketing

**Megan Cooper**  
Senior Manager Risk,  
Compliance and Audit

**John Corvan**  
Manager Melbourne FRC  
and AccessResolve

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

**Sharon Greenhill**  
Senior Manager  
Human Resources

**Karen Holmes**  
Senior Manager Training  
and Development

**Jo Huggins**  
Senior Manager  
Gippsland

**Suzanne Ichlov**  
Senior Manager  
Centre Operations

**Christine Lye**  
Manager Northern  
Melbourne

**Cate Newcomen**  
Centre Manager  
headspace Bairnsdale

**Mark O'Callaghan**  
Senior Manager Southern  
and Eastern Melbourne

**Shelley Watson**  
Manager Shepparton

**Fiona White**  
Senior Manager Western

# Our Board



## Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM – President

Lyn is the Executive Director of the Australian Psychological Society, the peak professional body for psychologists in Australia. Lyn was formerly Head of the School of Psychological Science, La Trobe University and Inaugural Director of the Victorian Parenting Centre. She is a clinical psychologist specialising in couple, child, family and group therapy, as well as conflict resolution. Lyn sits on a number of Commonwealth Government expert advisory and reference groups concerned with mental health policy and service delivery. She is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) and the Australian Institute of Management. Lyn has been a Board Member since 1993, was Vice-President from May 2013 and has been President of the RAV Board since October 2014.



## Ms Kaye Frankcom

Kaye is a highly accomplished businesswoman and leader in the health sector. She is an endorsed clinical and counselling psychologist, consultant to the insurance industry, in-demand speaker and trainer, and has held national roles in psychology regulation and professional standards. She has operated a successful group psychology practice in Williamstown, Victoria for 17 years. Kaye is a well-known mentor and supervisor to early career psychologists. She currently operates a consulting company offering business advice and coaching to psychology practices. She was an appointee to the first Psychology Board of Australia. Her current appointments include Independent Chair of the Expert Advisory Group on Mental Health (North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network). Kaye is also a member of the YMCA Redress Panel, which is responding to the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Kaye chairs the Clinical Governance Committee. She joined the RAV Board in 2016.



## Mr Peter Gome – Vice-President

Peter is an experienced Chief Financial Officer (CFO) with an international career spanning over 30 years. He spent the majority of his career at BP with roles in Australia and internationally, including the UK. His last roles at BP were as CFO for various business units including exploration and production, and marketing. Subsequently, he has held a number of Australian CFO and Chief Operating Officer (COO) roles with mid-tier companies in the oil, transport, printing, construction project management and sports industries. He is currently the CFO of the Pacific Group of Companies involved in retail and commercial property investment and management. Peter blends his strong leadership and finance background with strategy and marketing skills and experience, and has lectured in the Master of Marketing and MBA programs at Monash University. He holds Fellow memberships of both the AICD and CPA. He joined the RAV Board in 2009 and chairs the Audit Committee. Peter has been Vice-President since October 2014.



## Ms Debra Goldfinch

Deb has had an extensive career in the not-for-profit, health and community sectors with a focus on change management and working with people at risk. In Deb's 20 years as a CEO, she has implemented business restructures and developed corporate strategies to take organisations to their next level. She embraces and succeeds in responding to the challenge of appointing the right people by fostering strong, stable teams, and developing and improving the culture within organisations. Deb has implemented new, innovative programs within the organisations she represents, which continue to thrive and flourish, and positively impact the community. Deb has participated as a member on a number of federal and state committees and boards relevant to the health, community and not-for-profit sectors. In addition to her current role as CEO of Irabina Autism Services, Deb is on the Board of Early Childhood Intervention Australia at the national and state levels. Her extensive experience and expertise includes risk management and good governance. Deb joined the RAV Board in 2013.



### **Mr Michael Hunt**

Michael has practised as a mediator for more than 30 years and was instrumental in setting up the family mediation system in Australia. During the 1990s, Michael was Director of the Family and Child Mediation Service at RAV. He was CEO of RAV from 2001 until he retired in 2010. He is a former Board member of Family Relationships Services Australia. Michael remains an Accredited Mediator under the National Mediator Standards Board and a Clinical Member of the Australian Association of Family Therapists. Now in semi-retirement, he remains active in the sector, providing consulting services to Bond University's Dispute Settlements Centre, The College of Law and various not-for-profit organisations. Michael joined the RAV Board in 2018.



### **Ms Kimberly Hunter**

A director of Clancy & Triado, Kimberly completed her Bachelor of Laws at Auckland University. She was admitted to practice in 1989, and decided early on to specialise in family law. During a six-month attachment to the Human Rights Commission, Kimberly researched and prepared a submission on Marital Status Discrimination. After living and working in London for five years, she moved to Australia in 1996 and joined Clancy & Triado. She became an accredited specialist in family law in 1999. An active member of the Law Institute of Victoria, she has served on numerous committees, including the Executive of the Law Institute of Victoria's Family Law Section, the Children and Youth Issues Committee and the Courts Practice Committee. She is a member of the Family Law Section of the Law Council of Australia and the Relationships Australia lawyers' panel. She joined the RAV Board in 2011.



### **Mr John Lovell**

John has more than 25 years' experience in the IT industry, both within Australia and internationally. His experience covers IT projects for the introduction of ATMs and EFT/POS within Australia, pay TV systems, broadband services and other significant IT-related projects. Prior to returning to Australia, John was based in Hong Kong, where he was responsible for the IT infrastructure for the Walt Disney Company across Asia Pacific. John is currently working within the education sector, assisting with the integration of IC&T and innovation to effect positive learning outcomes. He joined the RAV Board in 2008.



### **Mr Paul Staindl**

Paul is an accredited lawyer specialising in family law and the Managing Director of Clancy & Triado, with strong knowledge and experience in family law. He has served on many committees in his professional capacity and also on a number of boards in the not-for-profit sector. He has chaired the Executive of the Law Institute Family Law Section, and has also served on and chaired the Specialisation Board of the Law Institute for five years. He has published many papers on family law and participated in seminars to the profession, the community and on radio. Paul was a member of the RAV Board from 1999 to 2011. He rejoined the Board in 2018 and chairs the Governance Committee.

### **Dr Janine Bush (until January 2018)**

Janine's diverse career spans across government, the health and community sector, and academia. She has held senior executive roles and served on management committees and community organisations.

### **Mr David Colliver (until January 2018)**

An experienced senior executive and director, with a background in private and public sectors, including education, manufacturing, financial and professional services, and the not-for-profit sector.

# Financial overview

## Summary statement of comprehensive income for the year ended 30 June 2018

	2018 (\$)	2017 (\$)
<b>REVENUE</b>		
Government funding	21,762,995	19,384,681
Client fees	2,759,710	2,535,108
Other income	1,480,836	1,321,518
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>26,003,541</b>	<b>23,241,307</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
Employee costs	19,293,968	16,322,064
Occupancy expenses	2,285,030	1,821,907
Depreciation and amortisation	21,731	33,732
Other operating costs	3,663,877	4,080,582
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>25,264,606</b>	<b>22,258,285</b>
<b>SURPLUS</b>	<b>738,935</b>	<b>983,022</b>
<b>OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME</b>		
Net gain on revaluation of non-current assets	3,197,000	-
<b>TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME</b>	<b>3,935,935</b>	<b>983,022</b>

## Summary statement of financial position as at 30 June 2018

	2018 (\$)	2017 (\$)
Current assets	14,543,849	13,512,979
Non-current assets	6,218,841	3,043,572
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>20,762,690</b>	<b>16,556,551</b>
Current liabilities	5,895,091	5,674,471
Non-current liabilities	798,930	749,348
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>6,694,021</b>	<b>6,423,819</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>14,068,669</b>	<b>10,132,732</b>



## Source of expenditure %



● Employee costs	74%
● Operating costs	14%
● Occupancy costs	9%

## Source of income %



● Federal government	64%
● State government	9%
● Other grants	11%
● Other	2%
● Client fees	11%
● Training	2%
● Interest	1%

## Independent Audit Report to the Members of Relationships Australia (Victoria) Inc.

We have audited the summarised financial report of Relationships Australia (Victoria) Inc. comprising the Summary Statement of Comprehensive Income for the year ended 30 June 2018 and the Summary Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2018 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 2018.

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 2018

# Representing our organisation

## Presentations

Bailey, A. (2017). *What were we thinking! Doing seriously complex child inclusive work*. Family & Relationship Services Australia (FRSA) Child Inclusive Practice Forum, Adelaide, Australia.

Bailey, A., & Nesbitt, S. (2017). *Family Safety Navigation Model—pilot role*. The Partnership of Victorian Family Relationship Centres Conference, Docklands, Melbourne.

Belmont, N., Hatch, M. L., Fell, T., & Handy, F. (2017). *Schools and families working together—how to successfully navigate relationships*. Parents Victoria Conference, Melbourne, Australia.

Bickerdike, A. (Chair). (2017). *Addressing cultural issues when making decisions in the best interests of children* [Workshop]. Fourth Annual Conference of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, Melbourne, Australia.

Bickerdike, A., Brook, A., & McDonald, E. (2017, August). *Relationships Australia* [Public hearing]. Parliamentary inquiry into a better family law system to support and protect those affected by family violence. Canberra, Australia.

Curran, S. (2017, February). *Conflict resolution and interpersonal relationships* [Panel discussion with Q & A]. 5th National Elder Abuse Conference, Sydney, Australia.

Curran, S. (2017, September). *Elder abuse, situational contributors, and prevention strategies* [Seminar]. Swinburne University Wellbeing Clinic for Older Adults, Hawthorn, Australia.

Curran, S. (2018, February). *The role of counselling and mediation in responding to elder abuse*. Boroondara Family Violence Network Meeting, Melbourne, Australia.

Grant, J. (2017, June). *From the trenches: Using restorative conferencing practices as new ways to repair/restore family relationships in high conflict battles*. Resolution Institute Webinar, Melbourne, Australia.

Lye, C. (2018, May). *About Relationships Australia Victoria in northern Melbourne*. Doctors in Secondary Schools Forum, Doncaster, Australia.

McDonald, E., & Opoku, S. (2017). *Early matters: Strengthening families with an evidence informed framework*. Outcomes Practice Evidence Network (OPEN) Child and Family Services Research Symposium, Melbourne, Australia.

O'Callaghan, M., & Opoku, S. (2017). *ILLY UP*. Journey to Evidence Base for Programs with Wicked Issues Forum, Cardinia, Australia.

O'Callaghan, M., & Opoku, S. (2017). *Repair-enting*. Journey to Evidence Base for Programs with Wicked Issues Forum, Cardinia, Australia.

Pullen, J., & Curran, S. (2018, February). *Steering the right path—a prevention approach to elder abuse*. 5th National Elder Abuse Conference, Sydney, Australia.

## Articles

Bickerdike, A., & McDonald, E., (2017), *Building healthy relationships*, *VCOSS Insight magazine*, 18, 16-17.

## Films

Relationships Australia Victoria. (2017). *I like, like you: A healthy relationships program for schools* [Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4QAmbiVHokg&t=156s>.

Relationships Australia Victoria. (2017). *Managing change | Relationships Australia Victoria* [Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMuj8N8G3-w&t=1s>.

Relationships Australia Victoria. (2017). *Managing conflict | Relationships Australia Victoria* [Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsDmlauZMoE&t=10s>.

Relationships Australia Victoria. (2017). *Parenting tips | Relationships Australia Victoria* [Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QvHlYP69aM&t=3s>.

Relationships Australia Victoria. (2017). *Tips for a healthy relationship | Relationships Australia Victoria* [Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-Haw9jllO4&t=6s>.

## Books

Shafer, M. (2017). *Ice-cream at midnight*. Melbourne, Australia: Good Ships.

---

## Acronyms and other abbreviations

**FDR** family dispute resolution

**FDRPs** FDR practitioners

**FRC** Family Relationship Centre

**GP** general practitioner

**LGBTIQ** lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer

**MBCP** men's behaviour change program

**RAV** Relationships Australia Victoria



*Relationships Australia*<sup>®</sup>

VICTORIA

**Postal address**

Central Office  
PO Box 180  
2 Prospect Hill Road  
Camberwell VIC 3124

**Telephone**

03 8573 2222

**Email**

enquiries@rav.org.au

**General enquiries**

1300 364 277

**Website**

[www.relationshipsvictoria.com.au](http://www.relationshipsvictoria.com.au)

**Facebook**

[www.facebook.com/RelAustVic](http://www.facebook.com/RelAustVic)

**Twitter**

@RelAustVic



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.