

SUPPORTING  
CHILDREN AND  
YOUNG PEOPLE

ANNUAL  
REPORT  
2015-2016

*Relationships Australia*®



Relationships Australia is honoured to have His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove as our national patron.

**[relationships.org.au](https://relationships.org.au)**  
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Names and images have been changed to protect the client's identity.

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NATIONAL  
BOARD



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*1970 Relationships Australia staff*

worked with 176,000 people  
through our 113 centres around  
the country this year.



# CHAIR'S FOREWORD

## IT IS WITH PLEASURE THAT I PROVIDE THE FOREWORD FOR RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL 2015/16 ANNUAL REPORT.

As happens every year, a quick reflection on the past 12 months reveals just how crowded and busy our professional lives continue to be, working under often difficult circumstances to assist people during times of crisis and change. While new governments are elected and areas of policy focus shift over time,

there is always one constant: the urgent need people have for professional support when their relationships are suffering, when they have been subject to abuse and when there is major change in their lives. That is our work, and that support is our commitment to the people we serve.

The year started in mid-2015 with the Minister for Social Services, The Hon Scott Morrison MP, but changed soon after when the new Prime Minister reshuffled his cabinet. From September 2015 the Minister for Social Services has been The Hon Christia Porter MP. Minister Porter's primary focus has been on the collection of data that demonstrates the effectiveness of funded services in terms of outcomes for people who access those services. Relationships Australia fully supports a focus on client outcomes. We have been conducting national evaluations of the effectiveness of our programs for several years, and see it as a powerful way to reflect on and improve our collective practice. We look forward (with the return of Government immediately after the end of the reporting period) to working with the Minister and his team to that end.

Family law has been subject to major review over the year, with a report released by the Attorney-General toward the end of the reporting period. Relationships Australia, as a major provider of family law services, is keen to work closely with the Government to examine some new ways that services can be offered and funded, and has recently written to that effect to the review panel.

This year has also seen a review of the action plans relating to the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children* and the *National Framework for the Safety of Women and their Children*, to which we have provided feedback. Relationships Australia provides services directly to children and as part of whole-of-family approaches, and we have dedicated this report to illustrating a number of ways that children's lives can be enhanced, and even transformed, through effective intervention at the right time.

We hope you enjoy reading about our work, and that you make contact with us should you be interested in further information.

As in previous years, we continue to be grateful for the interest of our national patron, the Governor-General of Australia. This year our National Executive Officer and I had the privilege of meeting with the Governor-General to brief him about our work. We found him to be highly engaged, knowledgeable and interested in the work we undertake with families around the country. We very much appreciate the support that gives us.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Board for their support during the year. Early in the new year, we will see the departure of a long-standing member of the Board, the CEO of Relationships Australia South Australia, Judith Cross. Judith has been an intellectual powerhouse in our sector over many decades and I know she will be missed, not only within Relationships Australia, but more broadly in the South Australian and Australian social services sectors. We will welcome Dr Claire Ralfs, Deputy CEO of Relationships Australia South Australia as the new CEO and as a member of the National Board from October 2016.

I hope you find this report interesting.



**Dr Andrew Bickerdike**  
**Chair – Relationships Australia National Board**

# The Year in Review

The past year  has seen significant social policy review and reform at the national  level. There were major announcements  about enhancements to family violence funding and support, and for half the year, the 2015 Australian of the Year, Rosie Batty , gave voice  to the prevalence and impact  of family violence in our society.

# EACH YEAR WE TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ACKNOWLEDGE OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COMMONWEALTH DEPARTMENTS OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND ATTORNEY-GENERAL, AS WELL AS STATE AND TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS WHOSE FUNDING ALLOWS US TO PROVIDE A BROAD RANGE OF SERVICES TO FAMILIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

The past year has seen significant social policy review and reform at the national level. There were major announcements about enhancements to family violence funding and support, and for half the year, the 2015 Australian of the Year, Rosie Batty, gave voice to the prevalence and impact of family violence in our society.

It was a year in which the second action plans under the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children* and the *National Framework for the Safety of Women and their Children* came to an end, and new action plans developed.

Toward the end of the reporting year, a report from a significant review of family law services was released by the Attorney-General. As a major provider of family law services, we read the report with great interest, and provided a submission in response.

These reviews and action plans are highly related to Relationships Australia's services, and we work closely with Departmental staff in respect to such issues.

We also made a number of formal submissions during the year in addition to the submission to the Attorney-General's review of the *Future Focus of Family Law Services*.

These included Relationships Australia's response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Issues Paper 10 – Advocacy and Therapeutic Treatment Services (March 2016), and a Consultation Paper on Out of Home Care in April 2016. In March 2016 we also prepared a submission to the Department of Social Security's discussion paper on Benchmarking under the Data Exchange Framework.

On 1 January 2016 Relationships Australia commenced a twelve month pilot program in six sites across the country (Launceston, Tasmania; Kew, Victoria; Adelaide, South Australia; Canberra, Australian Capital Territory; Wagga Wagga, New South Wales; and Strathpine, Queensland) to provide elder relationship services.

These services are for families who have an elder family member, and where there is a decision, quandary or concern about an issue relating to the elder.

Presenting issues to date have included aged care arrangements, end of life decision making, burial arrangements, wills, estate planning and powers of attorney, elder abuse and a range of other issues causing concern to families.

Using a therapeutic mediation model, a range of services are tailored to individual client groups, depending on their needs.

Our aim is to have families leave our service with an issue resolved, and the relationships within the family functioning well. The pilot program will be evaluated from the end of 2016.

As mentioned in previous annual reports, Relationships Australia is the custodian for *Neighbour Day*, an annual celebration of community across Australia. Through nearly 70 years of working with Australians at times of difficulty in their lives, Relationships Australia is highly conscious of the link between good mental health and resilience, and positive, close relationships with those who live nearby. Equally, social isolation and loneliness are strongly correlated with poor mental health.

*Neighbour Day is Relationships Australia's self-funded contribution to the promotion of good mental health, the importance of looking out for people in every street—particularly the frail, elderly, ill and otherwise vulnerable—and the importance of showing small kindnesses to people living near our homes.*

These kindnesses may make the difference between a day of sadness and grief, and a day of energy and hope.

In March this year, the Minister for Social Services, The Hon Christian Porter MP, many Members of Parliament, our *Neighbour Day* Ambassadors and supporting organisations helped us launch *Neighbour Day*. Celebrations were held in every State and Territory.

We saw a marked increase in the numbers of local councils (now at more than 17% of all Australian local government areas) using *Neighbour Day* as a key social platform to connect their communities. We welcomed a new Ambassador: Sophie Thomson from ABC TV's *Gardening Australia*, whose life is dedicated to bringing communities together through gardens, conservation and organic produce. An estimated 133,000 Australians connected in some way this year with their neighbours through *Neighbour Day*. Relationships Australia is already planning toward better-connected communities throughout Australia in 2017.

Our online surveys on relationships.org.au continue to be popular, with between 2,000 and 3,000 visitors to the website completing a two minute survey each month on a range of topics. Topics in 2015/16 have included: attitudes to homelessness; impact of financial hardship on relationships; end of life planning; corporal punishment; stress at Christmas; stigma associated with mental ill-health and elder abuse. A full list, and survey reports relating to each topic, can be found on our website.

*Our aim is to have families leave our service with an issue resolved, and the relationships within the family functioning well.*



In the past year, Relationships Australia has seen around 176,000 clients, of whom 56% were female and 43% were male. Overall, 4% of clients were from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background and 8% from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, though these statistics varied widely across the country.

Services were provided by a staff of just under 1,970 from 113 Relationships Australia venues across all States and Territories, in addition to many more outreach services.

Most of this year's report focusses on our work with children and young people—from early intervention to trauma services. We hope you find this snapshot worthwhile and thought provoking. If you would like further information, please visit our website, or call our National Office on 02 6162 9300.

**Alison Brook**  
**National Executive Officer**  
**Relationships Australia**



# NATIONAL RESEARCH

# IN 2015/16 THE RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA FEDERATION WAS INVOLVED IN MORE THAN 30 SEPARATE RESEARCH PROJECTS.

The majority were undertaken in partnership with universities, including Griffith University, the University of Newcastle, Macquarie University, the University of New South Wales, the University of Queensland, the Queensland University of Technology, LaTrobe University, the University of Melbourne, Victoria University, the University of South Australia and the University of Western Australia.

The Relationships Australia National Research Network was formed in 2011 with the goal of supporting national research collaboration to inform and improve client services. The Network supports research and evaluation projects carried out within the Relationships Australia federation and undertakes independent research on behalf of the federation.

These research projects are primarily designed to assess the process and outcome of a diverse spectrum of Relationships Australia services including family violence prevention, gambling, childhood trauma, family dispute resolution, family counselling, parent education, couples counselling and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services. Research has also been undertaken on same-sex parenting, fathering and the impact of social media on relationships.

While many of these projects are ongoing, they have already resulted in publications in peer-reviewed journals and numerous sector conference presentations. The findings are also influencing the design of models of practice as Relationships Australia organisations learn and consequently improve services and outcomes for clients.

In 2016 the Relationships Australia National Research Network initiated three important new research projects funded by the Relationships Australia federation.

## *The Effectiveness of Parenting Agreements* (2016–2018)

Over three years this research project aims to track the function and performance of post-separation parenting arrangements to identify the key interventions and support processes that facilitate positive shared parenting among clients attending family dispute resolution. A sample of 100 clients/cases who have completed a shared parenting plan will be tracked across time to examine the success and challenges of implementing their parenting agreements, and the impact of the shared parenting arrangements on children and parents. It is anticipated that the project's outcomes will inform revisions and improvements to clinical practice.

## *Family and Domestic Violence* – Prevalence and Effective Treatment (2016–2019)

This research project has been designed to achieve three key outcomes. First, the project will audit the current practices and policies used to detect and respond to family and domestic violence (FDV) across all Relationships Australia services. Second, the research will establish a common reliable prevalence figure for FDV across all Relationships Australia services. Finally, the research will assess the effectiveness of specialised FDV and mainstream services in assisting those affected by FDV. The outcomes will be used to inform and improve responses to FDV-affected clients across all Relationships Australia services.

## *Family Property Dispute Resolution Outcomes* (2016–2018)

Relationships Australia has a long history of providing safe and effective family property dispute resolution (FPDR) services that are protective of, and sensitive to, coinciding parenting agreements and mindful of the wellbeing of children—something that is not always achieved with legally-derived property outcomes. There is limited independent and robust evidence, however, of positive FPDR outcomes, both within Relationships Australia services or in the community sector as a whole. This project will identify the process variables that contribute to effective outcomes in FPDR and the barriers that obstruct settlement. Particular focus will be paid to the impact of FDV on the dispute resolution process. The study will involve more than 500 cases, and include examples from a number of models of practice including facilitative mediation, property conciliation and lawyer-assisted processes.

*The project will audit the  
current practices and policies*  
used to detect and respond to  
family and domestic violence.

WHOLE OF

# FAMILY



# 5 WORK



## I like, like you: *a family violence prevention and early intervention program*

**FAMILY VIOLENCE HAS EMERGED AS ONE OF SOCIETY'S MOST DIFFICULT AND CONFRONTING ISSUES. IT HAS A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON ALL MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE IT, FAMILIES, SCHOOLS, WORKPLACES AS WELL AS THOSE WHO USE VIOLENCE IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS.**

Intimate partner violence, or violence inflicted by one adult partner against the other, is responsible for the premature death and ill-health of more Victorian women under 45 years of age than any other risk factor (VicHealth, 2004).

Ongoing research indicates that being in a healthy intimate relationship is a positive predictor of better health and wellbeing for life (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Proulx, et al., 2007). A VicHealth (2004) study concluded family violence needs to be framed as a public health issue with a strong need for prevention-focused programs.

Recognising this, Relationships Australia Victoria developed *I like, like you*, a violence prevention and mental health promotion program for primary and secondary school students. *I like, like you* works to address, in a preventative context, issues that may lead to destructive relationship behaviours—most notably, family violence. It helps to identify and prevent unhealthy relationships, family violence and mental health issues.

Relationships Australia Victoria's program differs from traditional relationship education programs through its whole-of-school approach and incorporation of both program and curriculum aims.

## *I like, like you* program aims to:

- provide an integrated support service that establishes and strengthens partnerships between schools, communities, families and young people;
- prevent and reduce the impact of family violence, family breakdown and mental health issues on individuals and families; and
- integrate good mental health promotion with violence prevention into the curriculum for young people.

## At the curriculum level, *I like, like you* aims to:

- highlight the connection between healthy relationships and emotional health and wellbeing;
- give students the opportunity to consider the kinds of relationships they want to experience in their future; and
- provide practical skills for maintaining good mental health and healthy relationships.

Relationships Australia Victoria delivers *I like, like you* as a healthy close relationships curriculum for upper primary school children in grades five and six, and a healthy intimate relationships curriculum for secondary school students in grades seven to eleven. In both programs, students acquire knowledge and practical skills to support healthy relationships and then critically reflect on their experiences, influences and future relationship aspirations.

The curriculum is facilitated by Relationships Australia Victoria practitioners alongside teachers and is delivered in schools located near Relationships Australia Victoria centres.

*I like, like you* has a strong focus on engaging parents in the curriculum and the students' learning. The involvement of teachers and parents, and the schools' proximity to our centres supports the provision of *I like, like you* as an integrated support service.

Throughout the program Relationships Australia Victoria practitioners work with teachers to identify children and families that are, or have been affected by family violence and provide referrals to intervention and support programs to support the safety and recovery of all family members.

An extensive evaluation of *I like, like you* has commenced and preliminary results indicate that students have acquired new knowledge and skills they can use in the future. *I like, like you* has been available in Victoria since June 2014.

## Mothers and children – *safe from family violence*

### **RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S FAMILY ABUSE INTEGRATED RESPONSE PROGRAM (FAIR) IS AN EVIDENCE-BASED FAMILY SAFETY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAM FUNDED BY WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S DEPARTMENT FOR CHILD PROTECTION.**

A key focus of the program is children and allowing them to express their hurts, worries and fears as well as acknowledging their skills, particularly their efforts to keep themselves and others safe. Contact with children and adolescents is initiated via their mother's involvement in the *FAIR* program.

Children have the opportunity to meet in sessions with their mother, individually with siblings or join a six-week after school children's program.

*FAIR's* theoretical position and practice in working with children has changed in significant ways in recent years due to current research in the field. The *FAIR* program has embraced the response-based practice of Allan Wade that

## References

- Kiecolt-Glaser, J. K. & Newton, T., 2001. Marriage and health: His and hers. *Psychological Bulletin*, Volume 127, pp. 472–503.
- Proulx, C. M., Helms, H. M. & Buehler, C., 2007. Marital Quality and Personal Well-Being: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(3), pp. 476–503.
- VicHealth, 2004. *The Health Costs of Violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence*, Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

acknowledges children, like their mothers, are not passive recipients of abuse and that the common emotions of fear, anger, sadness, worry and self blame; as well as aggression, self-harm, sleep disruption and difficulties at school are contextual responses to abuse and an expression of the harm perpetrated.

More recently the mother-child inclusive model of Cathy Humphries has been incorporated in the *FAIR* children's program. Cathy Humphries' research asserts that "it is vital for the social growth of abused mothers and their children that they find ways of working through the experience of living with domestic violence together."

*FAIR's* practitioners find that mothers are often mindful of avoiding further trauma to their children by speaking with them about their father's violence, and are sometimes unsure how to have that conversation. At other times they are caught in the legal processes that dictate that a mother is "not allowed" to speak to her child about court matters.

## Focusing on conversations with children

The children's program focuses on conversations with children and mothers together about the direct and indirect abuse experienced. This can include the dilemmas and disruptions that children endure, including violence interfering in the children's schooling, friendships, and family relationships. It can also include dealing with multiple moves in home, community and school to be safe. More specifically, the loss of community and family is exponential for Aboriginal mothers and children as this represents not only a violation of the individual but of their cultural identity and connections.

The use of creative art, play and sand tray work is employed, giving counsellors the opportunity to notice children's insights, efforts and knowledge. Joint activities are conducted to enhance the communication and bonding of mothers and children through 'speaking about the unspoken' and providing guidance to the mother in having these conversations with her children.

## Interrupting the intergenerational impact of violence

The *FAIR* program has been successful in promoting both mother's and children's safety, wellbeing and emotional security, as well as interrupting the intergenerational impacts of family violence. Children are able to express their hurts, worries and fears, and have their skills, interests and hopes valued.

They have the opportunity to explore the ways they have kept themselves, and others, safe, as well as identify helpful people in their family and community—all in the company of other children, providing a positive social experience.

*FAIR* is a free service with a wide range of referrals, including from Child Protection, Family Services, Family Courts, general practitioners, schools, police and self-referrals.

## Supported playgroups *for high conflict families*

**THE CHALLENGES FOR SEPARATED PARENTS EXPERIENCING SOCIAL AND/OR ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE ARE OFTEN COMPOUNDED BY HIGH CONFLICT WITH THEIR FORMER PARTNER, FREQUENT PRESENTATIONS OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE, AND LIMITED CONTACT WITH THEIR CHILDREN.**

Concerned by the fissures emerging in these families, the staff at Relationships Australia New South Wales, Blacktown (Western Sydney) initiated a supported playgroup for clients in July 2015.

The aim of the playgroup is to facilitate parenting skills and build trust between parents leading to improvements in the quality of the time spent with their children as well as the quantity of time, as the resident parent feels more confident about increasing the contact with the other parent. Based on the principles of group process and adult learning, the playgroup combines facilitated peer discussion with planned psychoeducational interventions.

**Topics include:**

- appropriate child discipline (or behaviour management skills)
- food for healthy kids
- interactive play
- rough and tumble play
- bonding with your child
- helping children manage emotions
- helping your child learn.

## Three key areas of change

In the year since this group began, the following three key areas of change in clients have emerged:

1. Children's behaviour changes in the playgroup from being quiet and reserved to active and talkative across the course of the program.

2. Parents notice changes in their own wellbeing and self-confidence as a consequence of feeling more relaxed and confident in making parenting decisions. At the end of the program, they actively commit to using and building upon their new parenting skills.

3. Facilitators see the benefits of the children and parents interacting in a more natural environment as the playgroup context is less contrived. The playgroup enables parents to spend time with their children in a positive parenting atmosphere, that helps to 'normalise' the situation for families and focus on what's important in parent-child relationships.

To build upon this informal evidence, outcomes of the playgroup are now being tested through a routine research based evaluation. Parents will complete validated scales on Attitudes to the Other Parent's Competence, Passionate Hatred and Psychological Distress at the start and end of the program, and again at quarterly intervals through follow up. Parents can also volunteer to take part in an in-depth interview to describe what they see as the impact of the program.

This client data will be used to reflect on the benefits and challenges of supported playgroups for non-residential parents, particularly within the context of high parental conflict and domestic and family violence.



*If therapy is fun for children*  
it maximises their ability to  
learn and allows them to  
explore their potential.

## Help for children *impacted by violence*

**CHILDREN WHO LIVE THROUGH DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE CAN SUFFER PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE AND MAY GO ON TO BELIEVE THAT VIOLENCE IN RELATIONSHIPS IS NORMAL. A NUMBER OF STUDIES ALSO SHOW THAT RATES OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE ARE HIGHER IN REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS WHEN COMPARED TO URBAN AREAS (AIFS, 2015).**



In the regional Queensland areas of Rockhampton and Townsville, Relationships Australia Queensland takes a community specific approach when working with families impacted by family violence, with a particular focus on working with children to break the cycle of violence.

Children who live in homes where there is domestic violence often experience trauma similar to that experienced by children who are victims of child abuse (Jaffe et al 1990). In the communities of Rockhampton and Townsville, Relationships Australia Queensland supports children from pre-birth to 18 years who have been impacted by domestic violence, taking varying approaches in each region. The *Not Now, Not Ever* report into domestic and family violence in Queensland noted,

“ A one-size-fits-all approach to delivering integrated domestic and family violence services across Queensland will not work. Integrated, holistic and timely responses to domestic and family violence are needed, tailored to the specific needs of each community. ”

### A community specific approach

In Rockhampton, therapy focuses specifically on children, encouraging them to use their own skills, talents and imaginations to work through their trauma. Very young children are engaged in child-centred play therapy or approaches that involve strength perspective, brief therapy, systems, choice theory and narrative ideas that assist therapists to allow the child's exploration of their experiences.

If therapy is fun for children it maximises their ability to learn and allows them to explore their potential.

In Townsville, Relationships Australia runs a program that works with families who are considered vulnerable, have had involvement with, or are at risk of involvement with the child protection system, and who need support to address complex needs. The program provides families with intensive in-home case management support for a period of at least six months, with the option to continue if appropriate and needed. Support takes a strengths-based approach where staff work with families in their own home to build skills. External referrals and brokered services are offered as part of the case management. The program provides support to around 50 families in the community at any one time and employs an Aboriginal liaison worker.

Families play a critical role in providing an environment of wellbeing and safety to nurture children. When working with children who have been impacted by violence, family safety

and wellbeing is of critical importance.

An individually tailored, child-centred and family-focused approach enables Relationships Australia to work towards family wellbeing whilst encouraging children to heal from trauma.

## References

Campo, M & Tayton, S, 2015, Domestic and family violence in regional, rural and remote communities: An overview of key issues, Australian Institute of Family Studies, <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/domestic-and-family-violence-regional-rural-and-remote-communities>

Jaffe, P., Wolfe, D., & Wilson, S., 1990, *Children of Battered Women*, Newbury Park CA: Sage.

<https://www.qld.gov.au/community/documents/getting-support-health-social-issue/dfv-report-vol-one.pdf> Supporting children in vulnerable families

## Supporting children in vulnerable families

**THE CHILDREN'S CONTACT SERVICE (CCS) WAS DESIGNED TO SAFELY SUPPORT CHILDREN AND PARENTS AT TIMES OF FAMILY SEPARATION, ONE OF LIFE'S MOST DIFFICULT TIMES FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTS.**

In 2014 the Relationships Australia Tasmania CCS reviewed the way services were offered to clients. They found that many CCS clients became 'stuck', often with one parent becoming dependent on the service, and the other becoming frustrated with the lack of progress. Staff asked: "What about the children, who are often stuck in the middle?", and observed that CCS clients accessing supervised visits seemed to have the most difficulty in making a transition to less intensive services, often relying on courts or the family law system to assist them in making such decisions.

A key role of a CCS is to encourage families to progress onto less intensive services and eventually onto private arrangements when safe and appropriate to do so.

*The new CCS case management model* supports children at the time of complex life transitions, while also supporting the parents.

Following the review of its CCS process the Relationships Australia Tasmania CCS modified its framework for case management for CCS clients to one that provided an early intervention and active management of client expectations.

The new CCS case management model supports children at the time of complex life transitions, while also supporting the parents to manage their own contact arrangements and not become long-term dependent on CCS services.

## The Children's Contact Service Case Management Framework includes:

- the offer of a specific number of supervised visits followed by a review meeting with each parent
- the introduction of two new service types: supported visits and maintenance visits
- direct referrals to other support services such as the *Parenting Orders Program*, counselling, family dispute resolution or education groups.

## About the new services

Supported visits are similar to supervised visits in that they occur within the CCS. The difference is that staff do not monitor all conversations and only write observational notes at the start and end of each visit, as well as any incidents of significance. Supported visits are intended as a step towards less intensive services, while maintaining the security of centre based visits.

Maintenance visits are supervised visits that occur four to five times per year and allow the child to maintain a link with the parent they do not live with. These visits mostly occur around Mother's Day, Father's Day, Easter, children's birthdays and Christmas according to availability of the families and service staff. Maintenance visits are for families where it is not safe for children to have unsupervised visits.

In the 18 months since the implementation of the case management model there has been anecdotal evidence that families are moving through the CCS and on to less intensive services in a shorter amount of time than previously. Many families have also been able to make the decision to transition to managing their own contact arrangements.

Relationships Australia Tasmania continues to monitor and reassess the model over time, working to ensure a smooth transition for all families between use of the CCS and self-management in supporting safe and fulfilling relationships between children and both their parents.



## It's not rocket science, *but it is brain development*

**HIGH QUALITY INTERACTIONS BETWEEN INFANTS AND THEIR PARENTS ARE CRUCIAL FOR LIFE-LONG MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING. WHILE THE TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD CAN BE A TIME OF EXCITEMENT, FOR MANY IT CAN ALSO BE A TIME OF STRESS.**

Stress disrupts a parent's ability to provide warm, sensitive and responsive caregiving, ultimately increasing the infant's vulnerability to detrimental effects on brain development. Relationships Australia South Australia identified *First Touch™*—a practical and low cost program run by Baby in Mind Ltd that supports parents to protect, restore, and enhance these early interactions and lay the foundations for optimal mental health.

### The *First Touch™* program

The *First Touch™* program model is universal, meaning that it can be accessed by families with a wide range of needs. The program itself is strengths-focused, fostering infant-parent interactions through a multi-modal approach, including touch, massage, voice, facial expression, eye contact, and movement. Importantly, these behaviours play a vital role in early intervention to prevent and reduce the impact of trauma.

They are key to the optimal development and functioning of an infant's underlying stress response system known as the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) Axis—an area that controls the adaptation response to stress and influences long-term mental health outcomes.

In 2012 and 2013 Relationships Australia South Australia piloted the *First Touch™* program in families with a moderate risk of early mental health issues. Comparisons of pre and post program *Karitane Parenting Capacity Scale (KPCS)* scores demonstrated the program's effectiveness in decreasing depressive moods and improving parents' confidence in their ability to ask, and then answer, the question, "what is my baby telling me about what he/she needs right now?".

*First Touch™* is delivered by facilitators who have completed nationally accredited training and assessment through the *Australian Institute of Social Relations*. Licenced and overseen by *Baby in Mind Ltd*, the training covers cue-based infant massage and parent-infant relationship education. After the encouraging results of the pilot, Relationships Australia South Australia appointed a Certified Infant Massage Instructor who mentors our instructors and coordinates the delivery of *First Touch™* groups across our children and parenting programs.

### Helping parents and babies

The program is currently delivered across the Adelaide metropolitan area as well as in two communities in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjara (APY) lands. An evaluation has shown an increase in the wellbeing of both parents and their infants and an increase in the confidence of the parents involved.



## Case study

One of the mums involved in *First Touch™* said:

“ My attitude isn't trying to be 100% perfect anymore. It is more focused on reading to him and seeing what he wants. It's not trying to do every single step by the book. [When he cries now] I feel more relaxed. I can be the support for my baby when he needs me.”

These positive outcomes and achievements were acknowledged in September 2015 when the Relationships Australia South Australia's Infant Massage Program was awarded the South Australian NAPCAN Play Your Part Award.

## Dhunlung Yarra – *supporting children and young people*

**RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA CANBERRA AND REGION'S DHUNLUNG YARRA ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SERVICE CONTINUES TO FOCUS ON BUILDING COLLABORATIVE, RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ORGANISATIONS IN DEALING WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ISSUES, ESPECIALLY GRIEF AND LOSS AND INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA.**

Since its inception five years ago the *Dhunlung Yarra Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service* has concentrated on building more effective relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. The team works closely with Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service, through regular outreach counselling and supervision services.

### A new trauma clinic

In 2016 the *Dhunlung Yarra* team supported Winnunga's new trauma clinic for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in care with non-Aboriginal families.

The trauma service refers children and their carers to the *Dhunlung Yarra* team for specialist counselling addressing trauma, grief and loss, especially related to loss of family and cultural connection. An important role for the *Dhunlung Yarra Service* is to not only support the young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care but to also support the non-Aboriginal carers. The hope is to help the carers to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and customs, which would result in children in their care increasing connection to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage.

The *Dhunlung Yarra* team also works with children and young people through outreach services to Gugan-Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation delivering culturally informed therapeutic services to children and young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The team's knowledge, relationships and connections to the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community continues to inform the approach and understanding of significant issues of grief, loss and intergenerational trauma.

## A culturally relevant approach

The *Dhunlung Yarra* teen work is delivered individually and in small groups through art, storytelling, cultural connections, education and role modelling. Its approach is underpinned by narrative and strengths-based ideas and informed by evidence-based cultural research.

The success of this service has been recognised by the clients and their families, the community and other service providers. The children and young people continue to genuinely engage with the work which has a positive influence on family relationships, understanding of self and more informed decision making.

The vision of the Relationships Australia Canberra and Region *Dhunlung Yarra* Service is beginning to be realised with local community groups and members consulting with the team regularly to provide support, education and therapeutic services across a broad cross section of community issues. The issues for which we provide support include suicide prevention and awareness, reducing incarceration rates, building stronger and healthier relationships within family systems, the historical context of cultural grief, loss, trauma and racism and understanding and addressing family violence through a cultural lens.

## Early Intervention *Youth Boot Camps*

The Northern Territory *Early Intervention Youth Boot Camp Program* is a targeted intervention designed for young people who are at risk of future long-term offending. By offering a voluntary intensive wilderness experience which builds insight and skill capacity; young people are able to develop the mindset that they can be an agent of growth or change in their life.

The *Early Intervention Youth Boot Camps* are co-ordinated by the South Australian-based youth Non Government Organisation, Operation Flinders, with the support of Relationships Australia Northern Territory.

The Boot Camp helps young people become aware of the impact of their choices (positive and negative) and also to learn behaviour management skills.

The young people learn survival skills, participate in team-building exercises and learn about their country and culture from Aboriginal traditional owners. They are encouraged to take positive risks through guided adventure activities with support from volunteers and youth workers.

The inclusion criteria for camp participants are early family or parental conflict, poor parental supervision and discipline, early involvement with alcohol or drug use, family members involved in the criminal justice system, a history of family abuse or neglect, disengagement from education or employment and anti-social behaviour.

## Case Study

### ETHAN FROM ATITJERE

Ethan is a 14 year old young man from Atitjere, a remote community approximately 215 kilometres from Alice Springs who attended the *Early Intervention Youth Boot Camp* in 2015. Ethan was referred by a Department of Children and Families caseworker who had noticed he was lacking confidence, seeming unsettled at school and beginning to display behaviours that were bringing him to the attention of police.

Initially on camp, Ethan isolated himself from the group and struggled to develop relationships with his peers and the team leaders. As the camp progressed, Ethan began to share his significant knowledge of traditional bush foods with the other young men on the camp. Throughout the week Ethan's confidence grew, as the other participants began to look up to him as a leader, based on his cultural knowledge.

On the last day of the camp, Ethan's expertise was acknowledged. Today Ethan reflected on this and said "It made me feel proud, and I'm still proud. I felt it was true, that there was a change".

Six months on from the camp, Ethan recalls the goals he set in his Staying Strong Plan: "I'm going good on some of the goals, but not so good with others". Ethan said he thinks about the camp, and particularly the relationships he developed throughout the program. This year Ethan has moved closer to Alice Springs to attend a new school and build relationships with family and friends. This was a goal he is pleased to have achieved. As part of the program, Relationships Australia Northern Territory stays in contact with Ethan and his family for three months to ensure the camp experience is maximised.





# Wheel of Well-being

## A mental health *and wellbeing hub*

**LOGAN, ON THE SOUTHERN OUTSKIRTS OF BRISBANE, IS A YOUNG, DIVERSE CITY WITH ONE OF THE HIGHEST CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE AND REFUGEE POPULATIONS IN AUSTRALIA.**

It is also an area of concentrated socio-economic disadvantage. Logan and the nearby Southern Moreton Bay Islands were chosen as one of three Regional Hubs funded by the Queensland Health Mental Health Commission under the *Early Action: Queensland Mental Health Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention Action Plan 2015–17*. Relationships Australia Queensland was selected to manage the Logan Hub services.

### **Early action**

*Early Action* acknowledges that good mental health and wellbeing are fundamental to all our lives. Good mental health is the foundation of flourishing individuals, families, and communities, and central to achieving long-term social and economic prosperity.

The Logan and Southern Moreton Bay Islands Wellbeing Hub was established to improve knowledge and understanding of positive mental health, including the ways in which individuals and communities can enhance and protect mental health and wellbeing. This includes promoting the understanding that good mental health and wellbeing is an important end in itself and not just an absence of illness.

### **Encouraging community connection**

*Early Action* acknowledges that communities play a central role in supporting and protecting good mental health and wellbeing through fostering social inclusion, connectedness and equity, and enabling access to resources and services. While mental health and wellbeing is important to all, certain groups are at increased risk of poor mental health and wellbeing due to a range of individual, social and environmental circumstances. In addition to a whole-of-community focus, the Logan and Southern Moreton Bay Islands Hub works with key groups identified as being at risk of poor mental health and wellbeing.

Some of those key groups include social housing tenants, low socio-economic families (through the Logan Together initiative for children up to eight years) and refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse communities (through Access Community Services and Multilink).

The Hub utilises existing evidence-based mental health and wellbeing frameworks, programs and tools to improve mental health and wellbeing.

The project focuses on disseminating wellbeing information, resources and capacity through community networks, systems and services, including traditional and online networks.

As a pilot project, the work and learnings of the Logan and Southern Moreton Bay Islands Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub will inform future mental health and wellbeing directions for Queensland.

## Parenting *After Separation*

**PARENTING AFTER SEPARATION IS A SIX-WEEK COURSE RUN BY RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA NEW SOUTH WALES FOR PARENTS WHO ARE SEPARATED AND WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT RAISING CHILDREN AND MANAGING ONGOING RELATIONSHIPS WITH FORMER PARTNERS EFFECTIVELY.**

The course aims to help parents understand and focus on the needs of their children, learn how conflict affects children and develop constructive ways of dealing with conflict, understand unhelpful patterns of relating, manage strong feelings, and develop parenting skills to best meet their children's needs. Moving on from entrenched dispute to a more constructive co-parenting relationship is widely acknowledged to be in the best interests of children, and this course aims to help facilitate that process.

Since relationship breakdown is often characterised by significant interpersonal conflict, clients attending *Parenting After Separation* are often entrenched in long-term, highly volatile conflict. There is widespread concern for the welfare and developmental of children who remain caught up in high levels of conflict between their parents, with children's adjustment likely to be negatively impacted by such conflict. Recent research by Bruce Smyth

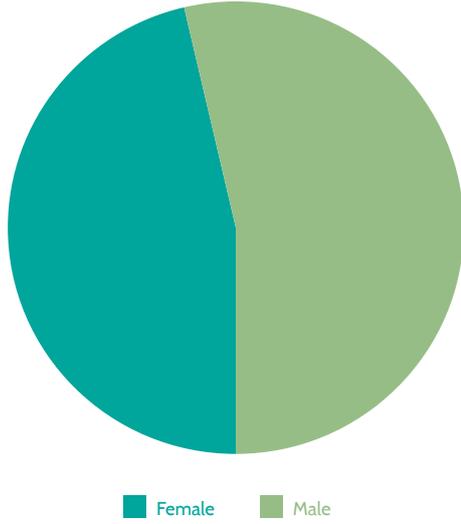
in Australia and Steven Demby in the USA has suggested that traditional conceptualisations of conflict and acrimony between separated parents are too cognitively based, and do not fully account for the emotional aspect of their conflict. They suggest that "hate" may be a more useful concept with which to investigate high-conflict post-separation parents. If child welfare concerns exist in situations of parental conflict, these concerns are exacerbated where parenting relationships are characterised by hate.

As part of an ongoing evaluation of *Parenting After Separation*, we sought to investigate how feelings of hatred are embedded within post-separation conflict, and the extent to which they change through course attendance. In addition, we investigated clients' perceptions of their former partners' parenting competence, and their self-reports of psychological distress. Clients were invited to complete surveys at the beginning and end of the course, containing three validated scales:

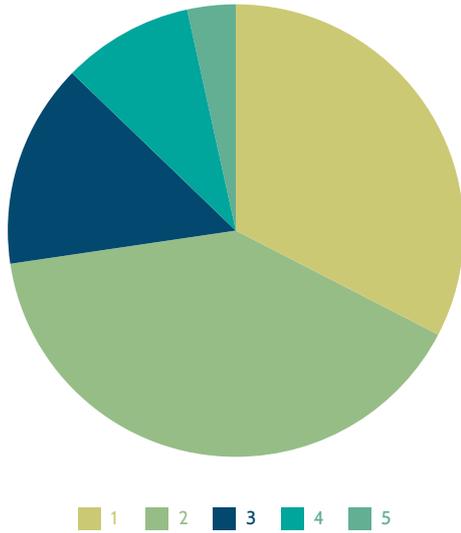
- Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSC)
- Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)
- Passionate Hate Scale (PHS).

To date, 87 participants have completed pre-group and post-group surveys.

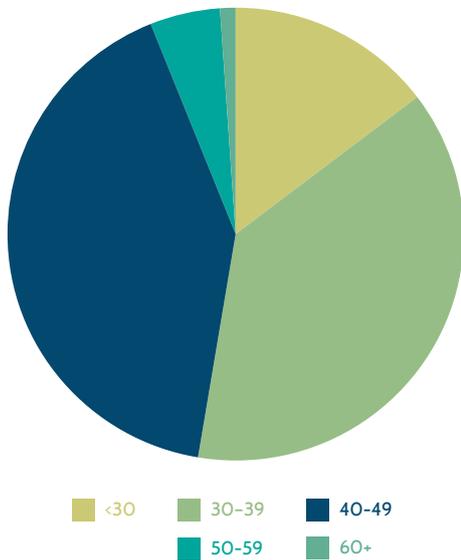
Gender



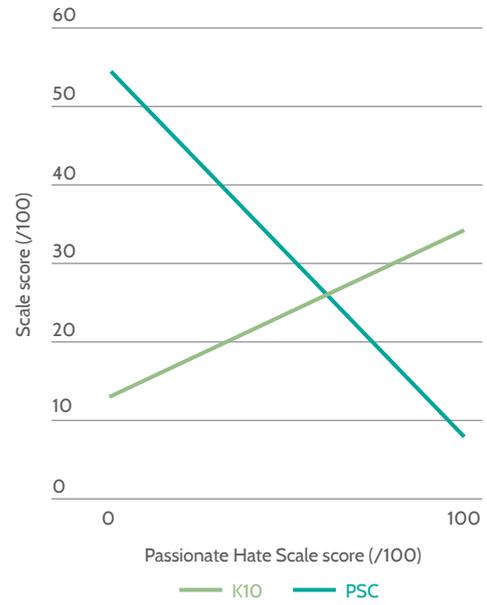
Number of Children



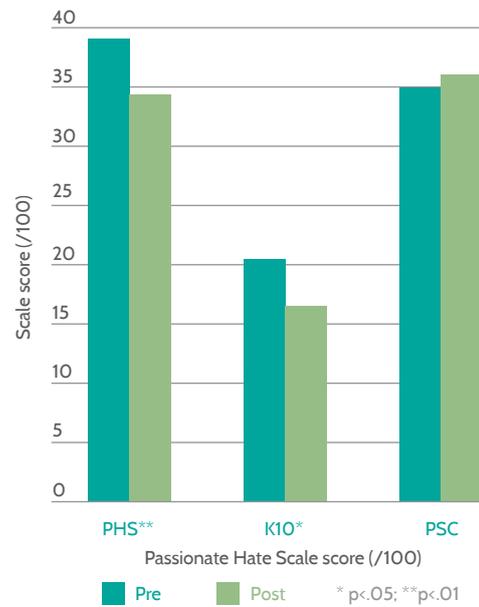
Age



Clients' reports of hate were positively correlated with psychological distress ( $p < .01$ ), and negatively correlated with perceptions of former partners' parenting competence ( $p < .001$ ).



Post-course hate and psychological distress scores were significantly lower than pre-course scores.



Participants reported reduced psychological distress and hatred towards former partners after completing *Parenting After Separation*.

Although perceptions of former partners' parenting abilities did not change, participants' emotionally charged hate response was reduced. It is likely that decreased feelings of hate will provide a better space for these mothers and fathers to positively parent their child. Letting go of hate allows for their focus to be shifted from intense negative feelings directed at their

former partners, and enables more emotional base to focus on their children and their needs as they adjust to living with separated parents. Ongoing evaluation will investigate contextual factors associated with the observed changes and individual narratives, particularly as they relate to hatred between former partners and co-parenting relationships.

## *4families – healing children first*

**ALL FAMILIES GO THROUGH LIFE'S UPS AND DOWNS AND MANY PARENTS HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN'S MENTAL, EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL WELLBEING. OFTEN FAMILIES NEED SUPPORT TO GET THROUGH THE TOUGH TIMES.**

The main areas of concern for children and their families who approach Relationship Australia Western Australia's *4families* service include childhood anxiety, depression, difficulty managing strong emotions like anger, high conflict family separation and family and domestic violence.

*4families* is a free service that works with children and families to reduce family stress and enable children and young people to reach their full potential by providing the support families and carers need, and linking them to a variety of services. It is a Family Mental Health Support Service funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

The key focus of *4families* is the mental health and wellbeing of children. The children and young people are the primary focus, and their voices are heard throughout the process. *4families* allows a flexible set-up to deliver practical support for children and families. The program also has a strong therapeutic element that helps children build resilience and develop coping strategies to work through the ups and downs of life.

Initially, staff work together with the child and family to identify the goals they would like to achieve, before jointly developing strategies to reach these goals. Areas of focus can include emotional and social wellbeing, material wellbeing, relationships, safety, and school or career matters.



*Staff work together with the child* and family to identify the goals they would like to achieve, before jointly developing strategies to reach these goals.



They then monitor progress and make adjustments along the way to ensure the goals can be achieved.

*4families* was initially available from 2012 in Kwinana and Cockburn, Western Australia and has now expanded to support 828 people, in 2520 sessions in six different locations across Western Australia.

**Initiatives are implemented and shaped to respond to local community needs.**

**Local group programs include:**

- a multi-cultural craft and support group for women and children, with participants from many countries including Sudan, Afghanistan and the Philippines.
- a support group for women who have experienced abusive behaviour and violence from their partners, based on the specialist domestic violence program run by Relationships Australia Western Australia.
- a hip-hop dance group for young people in Kwinana, choreographed by a local Aboriginal youth leader and dance enthusiast. This partnership between Kwinana Youth Centre (The Zone) and *4families* aims to engage young people in a positive and rewarding activity after school.
- *Tuning in to Kids*, a six-week parenting program successfully facilitated in partnership with Parenting WA and Parent Line.
- *Rhythm for Life and Get with the Beat*, run by an accredited *Drumbeat* facilitator to engage children and young people and also provide therapeutic intervention.

*4families* is currently building its team capacity and staff recently attended *Tuning in to Kids* and *Tuning in to Teens* training, presented by the University of Melbourne, as well as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) presented by CBT Australia. This allows for a better response to the increasing demand and complexity of the families who require support.

*The programs and the resulting relationships with clients and stakeholders enable us to identify at-risk families.*

## *early matters*

**EARLY MATTERS IS AN EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICE DEVELOPED BY RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA VICTORIA FOR PARENTS WITH CHILDREN AGED 12 YEARS AND YOUNGER. IT IS DESIGNED TO PROMOTE AND STRENGTHEN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS TO PREVENT FAMILIES FROM ENTERING A STRESS PATHWAY, BY RESOURCING PARENTS WITH ENHANCED PARENTING SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE.**

The service works with families at three critical transition points: after the birth of a new baby focusing on post-natal and post-partum relationships; during kindergarten when preparing children for primary school; and in middle to late primary school when preparing for high school.

## **Universal education and early intervention**

*early matters* has two components: a universal education curriculum and an early intervention model of service. By providing these components in tandem, *early matters* promotes the knowledge, skills and attitudes that support healthy relationships and parenting practices, while also providing families with opportunities to seek support early without feeling stigmatised.

Relationships Australia Victoria has adopted a whole school or educational approach (World Health Organisation, 1994) into its prevention programs that address social and wellbeing issues for families and children. This approach has demonstrated the benefits of forging strong partnerships with families and within educational and health settings. These partnerships have frequently resulted in targeted support being provided to vulnerable children and families earlier than would otherwise take place.

As a result, the *early matters* prevention component incorporates a range of educative group work programs delivered in universal services such as kindergartens, primary schools, hospitals and maternal and child health centres. The groups provide the opportunity to establish relationships with a broad section of the community, as well as with stakeholders within the universal services.

**early matters delivers healthy relationships-based curricula for parents and children including:**

- *ATTUNE* – a post-natal program for couples that provides knowledge, practical skills and attitudes for good emotional and relationship health
- *Tuning in to Kids* – a parenting program that focuses on the emotional connection between parents and kindergarten children
- *Confident Kinder Kids* – supports four and five year olds transitioning to primary school through greater emotional awareness and regulation, enhanced social skills, and increased confidence and resilience
- *I like, like you UP* – a healthy relationships program for year six students transitioning to high school.

The programs and the resulting relationships with clients and stakeholders enable us to identify at-risk families and for families themselves

to identify challenges they are experiencing and request further support. Where needed, these families are referred to an appropriate external service or the early intervention component of *early matters*—a home visiting outreach service.

An evaluation of the *early matters* model of service and the first year of the new parent and children’s group curricula have been undertaken. Preliminary findings indicate that families are self-referring into the home visiting service, and that primary prevention work in universal services has been successful in engaging and resourcing vulnerable families at an early stage in their journey.

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## Aboriginal *Building Connections*

**THE IMPACTS OF INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND LATERAL VIOLENCE ON ABORIGINAL FAMILIES HAVE RESULTED IN COMMUNITIES LOSING MECHANISMS FOR DEALING WITH CONFLICT WITHIN THEIR FAMILIES. THE TRAUMA PASSED ON TO CHILDREN IS WELL DOCUMENTED (OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE, 2014).**

The Social Justice Report (Gooda, 2011) highlighted the ongoing impacts of colonisation as a contributor to a loss of cultural identity. The additional impacts of drugs, alcohol and family violence have further diminished family cohesion in Aboriginal communities and resulted in the normalisation of violence. Furthermore, the low median age of the Northern Territory Aboriginal population results in a lack of positive role models to learn parenting and life skills from (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

To work effectively within Aboriginal communities, building relationships is crucial, as is flexibility in delivering services relevant to the context of clients’ lived reality (Productivity Commission, 2014).



The *Aboriginal Building Connections* (ABC) Program, originally developed by Interrelate NSW, offers education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents on the impact of conflict on their children, following family separation. Using culturally-inclusive activities it provides practical tools for how to 'take the heat' out of conflict and enhance the sense of security for their children.

This program is funded by the Australian Attorney-General's Department, under Relationship Australia Northern Territory's Post-Separation Services Program, and implemented by the team of Aboriginal and Islander Cultural Advisors (AICA) on its staff.

ABC is delivered to individuals who present at the Family Relationship Centre for family dispute resolution, and off-site to groups in rehabilitation centres, prisons, women's shelters, and on remote Aboriginal communities.

In June the AICA team travelled to Jabiru and Gunbalunya to deliver the program to clients at the Gunbalunya women's shelter, the Clontarf Academy and to staff from the Jabiru Health Clinic and Children's Ground.

Prior to this trip the AICA team identified a need to provide some context to ABC material as it assumes prior knowledge that conflict is dangerous for children. A foundational 'straight talk' was developed to create a bigger picture to bush people about the intergenerational transmission of trauma and the effects of violence/colonisation on subsequent generations.

The combination of this 'straight talk' and the ABC created 'lightbulb' moments for many clients, giving them the language to interpret what is happening in their lives and the consequences of this on their children.



Outreach work has further identified the need for information, mediation and counselling to be provided in remote areas of the Northern Territory (something the realities of cost make difficult) and ongoing professional development for our AICA team.

## References

ABS – See Australian Bureau of Statistics

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, June 2011, ABS, Canberra, viewed 14<sup>th</sup> July 2016, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3238.0.55.001>.

Australian Human Rights Commission 2006, *A Statistical Overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia*, AGPS, Canberra viewed 4th July 2016, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/statistical-overview-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-australia>

Gooda, M. 2011 *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Social Justice Report 2011*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Chapter 2.

Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2014*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, Pg. 2.

## *Psychological services* for children in Tasmania

**THE ACCESS TO ALLIED PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE (ATAPS) IS A PROGRAM FUNDED BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT THROUGH PRIMARY HEALTH TASMANIA TO DELIVER THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS TO CHILDREN UNDER 15 YEARS OF AGE UPON REFERRAL FROM A GENERAL PRACTITIONER (GP), PAEDIATRICIAN OR PSYCHIATRIST.**

The program focuses on supporting children with, or at risk of developing, a mental health disorder.

Many children who present to this service have been exposed to family violence, triggering risk assessments for child safety and the involvement of child protection and specialist services as necessary.

In Hobart and Launceston a team of Relationships Australia Tasmania psychologists and mental health social workers deliver services to children who have been referred by their doctor with mild to moderate presentations. Outreach sites at Bridgewater and Huonville allow other families to access practitioners closer to home.

### Good partnerships are key

Good partnerships with community health centres and GP practices have seen these services work together to support vulnerable clients who may otherwise have difficulty accessing help.

For clients and their families this has meant a seamless service and the benefit of warm referrals to a range of professionals. A dedicated administrative officer manages referrals from doctors and results in a timely provision of initial appointments.

Practitioners meet with parents or guardians initially to obtain a clinical history and to discuss their concerns, and then with the child. Common presenting issues include anxiety, depression, anger, self-harm and suicidality, trauma, adjusting to parental separation, school refusal and sleep and behavioural disorders. Child friendly consulting rooms allow both the child and practitioner to build rapport in a comfortable and inviting setting with a number of options for ongoing engagement.

### Evidence-based approaches

Evidence-based treatment approaches are used by the team to assess, diagnose and treat presenting difficulties. Communication with referring agents along with school support staff and other services involved in the child's care enables a thorough assessment and collaborative treatment approach.

This service has proved invaluable to families who would not otherwise be able to afford the services of an allied health practitioner.

*"I'm not really in danger, it's just a false alarm!"*

He was then able to calm himself using abdominal breathing and think more realistically about the situation.

## Case study

### ABOUT BILLY

Billy is a ten year old boy who was recently referred by GP to the ATAPS program. He had been diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder, generalised anxiety and challenging behaviour in the context of his parents' separation, and exposure to family violence. The practitioner allocated to this case completed a thorough assessment of the family resulting in the mother being offered her own psychological support and safety plans put in place to ensure the ongoing safety of her and her children.

Billy worked with his practitioner who used a cognitive behavioural approach and exposure and response prevention to address his ritualistic behaviour, along with developing self-soothing skills. Billy engaged well and made therapeutic gains within his initial six sessions. He was able to implement the new strategies learnt and could identify when he began to feel anxious, reporting 'I'm not really in danger, it's just a false alarm!' He was then able to calm himself using abdominal breathing and think more realistically about the situation.

With his mother's improved mental health, her capacity to manage his behaviour at home also improved. The ATAPS program has supported Billy to manage the complexities of his life in an improved way.



## The *Future Youth Initiative* – *confidence, skills and jobs*

**FUTURE YOUTH INITIATIVE IS A NEW NAME AND BRAND LAUNCHED THIS YEAR FOR A MUCH LOVED SERVICE AT RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA SOUTH AUSTRALIA. THE SERVICE WORKS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE TO SET THEM UP FOR THE FUTURE. THE PRIMARY INCENTIVE FOR THE SERVICE IS THE YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA WHICH SITS AT 20.1% FOR 15 TO 24 YEARS OLD COMPARED TO 14.9% NATIONALLY (WORKREADY, 2016).**

### Improving social and emotional wellbeing

The *Future Youth Initiative* is dedicated to improving the social and emotional wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 21 years who are at risk of leaving school, or are about to leave, or have left and are not pursuing employment or further education. The service offers case management, programs and activities that support ongoing education and finding employment. Since their modest though ambitious beginnings, The *Future Youth Initiative* now reaches more than 300 students in 30 schools. The service offered is holistic and includes education, personal wellbeing, independent living skills and job skills. The staff are known for their never-give-up approach and the high attendance at the service proves that it's more than working.

One of the goals achieved for this year was the establishment of two full service cafés in the Adelaide suburbs of Blackwood and Glenunga, that also offer commercial catering. As part of the program young people are given on-the-job training and mentoring by a qualified chef while completing Certificate II or III in Community Services

from the *Australian Institute of Social Relations*.

Through the *Future Youth Initiative* Cafés and catering work, students are able to put their skills into practice and increase their confidence and self-esteem and learning to work with a broad range of people and circumstances.

The *Future Youth Initiative* Café at the new Glenunga Hub is a collaboration with the City of Burnside. Evaluation with patrons undertaken by the City of Burnside in May 2016 showed overwhelmingly positive feedback on the quality of the food and the excellent service.

#### Customers have said:

- the staff are friendly and the presentation is exceptional
- we really enjoy talking with the young people
- the *Future Youth Initiative* Café students are super polite and very friendly.

The success of the *Future Youth Initiative* is supported by involving students in a dynamic learning experience, applying theory to real-life work situations and strong support for skills development. The *Future Youth Initiative* is making a real difference to the young people involved in Blackwood and Glenunga, South Australia.

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NCVER 2015, *Australian vocational education and training statistics: the likelihood of completing a government-funded VET program, 2009–13*, NCVER, Adelaide.



Staff pictured: Sam George and Stacey Williams

## Family Referral Service – *goes to school*

**IN 2014 A COLLABORATION BETWEEN RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA CANBERRA AND REGION'S RIVERINA MURRAY FAMILY REFERRAL SERVICE, NSW FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES (FACS) AND THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION EMBARKED ON A SMALL PILOT PROGRAM WITH THREE LOCAL WAGGA HIGH SCHOOLS TO ADDRESS THE GROWING WELFARE NEEDS OF FAMILIES AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITHIN A SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT.**

The Family Referral Service in Schools pilot engaged families and young people to assist them in finding the right support; to connect schools, families and local services; and enhance multi-agency case management.

The Service has provided help to families experiencing family breakdown, parenting issues, mental health concerns, financial stress, family and domestic violence, homelessness, emotional and physical abuse, suicide risk and sexual abuse.

More than 300 young people and their families from the three pilot schools have been supported by the Riverina Murray Family Referral Service in schools project.

### A positive change for young people

Due to the success of the pilot, the Riverina Murray project doubled in size in 2016 and now includes 11 schools in the Wagga, Junee, Albury and West Wyalong areas. The key success measure is the way the education and community sectors have been able to work together in the interests of creating positive change for young people and families.

The *Family Referral Service in Schools* pilot has been independently evaluated by Charles Sturt University and results will provide evidence that the welfare needs of students and families are being successfully addressed.

The co-ordinated model has been embraced by the wider Family Referral Service network and there are now similar projects in Western Sydney, the Illawarra region on the South Coast of NSW, the Far North Coast of New South Wales and the Hunter Region.

## *connectEDspace: a website for young people*

### **RESEARCH SHOWS THAT YOUNG PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY YOUNG WOMEN, ARE THE PRIMARY USERS OF ONLINE SUPPORT RESOURCES (SHAW & SHAW, 2006).**

Many young people value the anonymity, affordability, accessibility and convenience of online support, particularly outside of business hours and especially at night (Gulliver, et al. 2010). Online is sometimes the preferred support option, with a recent paper indicating that people who were in the initial stages of trauma recovery preferring the provision of online counselling and information above other modalities (Burke, et al. 2016) including face to face and telephone counselling.

Increasingly, e-technologies are being developed as a key prevention and early intervention response to family violence (Field & Mercer, 2015). Recognising the increasing body of research and the value of online support mechanisms, Relationships Australia Victoria developed *connectEDspace*, a website to support young people with issues relating to family violence, mental health and family law.

*connectEDspace* reflects and extends the violence prevention and mental health promotion focus that underscores Relationships Australia Victoria's child and family programs.

The website includes tip sheets, useful links, interactive quizzes and a game to engage and inform young people on issues such as bullying, family violence, emotional wellbeing, relationships, stress and mental health, and conflict with parents. It also provides the opportunity for young people to contact Relationships Australia Victoria to enquire about support options, to ask questions anonymously and to share their stories for publication on the website in order to help other young people who may be experiencing similar issues.

Since it was launched in late 2014 the website has received significant traffic, with the number of site visitors and sessions continuing to increase substantially. More than 70 per cent of the website's users are female, which is unsurprising given that young women are more likely to demonstrate help-seeking behaviour and more likely to use online resources than their male counterparts (Shaw & Shaw, 2006).

Recently, *connectEDspace* received an enquiry from a teenage girl with parents who were separated. The young woman wanted information on how she could alter her shared care living arrangements without distressing either of her parents. While reassuring the young person that her parents' conflict was not her fault, a Relationships Australia Victoria practitioner arranged counselling referrals for the young person and her family. Information on options for reviewing post-separation parenting arrangements, including family dispute resolution using child-inclusive practices was also provided.

Through *connectEDspace* Relationships Australia Victoria is able to connect with and support young people experiencing a wide range of difficulties or challenges, and provide those needing primary prevention information and early intervention responses with integrated referral options. The website is also used to support young people and their families who are receiving Relationships Australia Victoria services, and as part of Relationships Australia Victoria's *I like, like you* healthy relationships program curriculum.

*connectEDspace* is proving itself to be a highly valued option for young people seeking support.

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## Aboriginal girls *art therapy*

**RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA NEW SOUTH WALES IS CURRENTLY WORKING TO ITS STRETCH RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN THAT OUTLINES A STRONG COMMITMENT AND STRATEGIES TO EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES AND COMMUNITIES IN CHANGE. WE ARE WORKING TO BUILD OUR CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE, APPRECIATING THE INTERGENERATIONAL IMPACTS OF THE PAST.**

The *Western Sydney Family Referral Service* funded by NSW Health is a child protection, case coordination and referral service for families under the Risk of Significant Harm threshold. The service seeks to improve access to support for vulnerable young people and their families, and to provide culturally-appropriate and effective referral pathways for Aboriginal young people and their families. This is achieved by developing culturally appropriate engagement strategies with a whole-of-family focus with an emphasis on building trust.



In 2015, through the use of brokerage funding, a joint initiative was undertaken between the *Western Sydney Family Referral Service* and Richmond High School to run a six-week art therapy group for Aboriginal girls in year 10. Based on Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) these groups have been facilitated by an Aboriginal staff member from Relationships Australia New South Wales and an art therapist from the Dharug Nation.

### Exploring wellbeing

Across the six weeks the group explores each girl's individual and collective sense of wellbeing and knowledge about their identity, through connecting with culture, land and the history that has impacted their lives.

The program provides a supportive place for the girls to strengthen their sense of self identity, self-worth and connection to their culture using the creative processes of art therapy.

This provides a way of being with themselves, strengthening their self-knowledge, thoughts and feelings, and finding new ways of expressing this to others.

It is not about making 'good art' or being outcome directed. Rather, it is the process of expanding the ways they come to know themselves. One of the benefits of using art in this context is that the girls retain the power of choosing how much to share with others, whilst still participating in meaningful work.

This is a particularly helpful and respectful way of working with adolescents in a group setting in a school environment.

Now finishing its fifth program and with a waiting list growing, the effectiveness of the program is evidenced by the participant's strengthened

sense of identity and confidence, increased sense of trust with each other and with the school, and noticeable differences in their engagement with learning.

"This program has been a revelation for the girls involved and has had a significant impact on their wellbeing. Thank you for developing and offering this opportunity to our students. I look forward to working with you all next year." — Deputy Principal

In the coming year Relationships Australia New South Wales will evaluate the program more formally using culturally appropriate research methodology and outcome measurement.

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## Transgender children – *bright futures*

**AN ESTIMATED 1 IN EVERY 150 PEOPLE EXPERIENCES PERSISTENT FEELINGS OF DISCOMFORT WITH THE GENDER THEY WERE ASSIGNED AT BIRTH AND 1 IN 200 MAY TRANSITION TO ANOTHER GENDER IDENTITY (CONWAY, 2002). IN QUEENSLAND THERE IS JUST ONE PSYCHIATRIST/ENDOCRINOLOGIST TEAM CHARGED WITH THE TASK OF SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES IN NAVIGATING THE MEDICAL AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL OBSTACLES THAT STAND BETWEEN A TRANSGENDER CHILD AND A BRIGHT FUTURE. THE WAITING TIME FOR AN APPOINTMENT EXCEEDS A YEAR.**

The increased presentation of pre-pubescent gender dysphoria or gender identity disorder is widespread. The Gender Service of Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital has seen dramatic increases in new referrals from 40 in 2013 to 170 in 2015 (Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, 2015).

Gender dysphoria is the current terminology for gender-non-conforming children who experience extreme discomfort with the gender assigned to them at birth. In the past, medical responses have been divided. The 'reparative' approach, which aimed to correct or 'repair' what was historically viewed as a disorder in children is largely giving way to an 'affirmative' approach, supporting children to live within their own self-identified gender (Hill et al, 2010).

Transgender people are four times more likely to have been diagnosed with depression than the general population, and 1.5 times more likely to have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder (Hyde et al. 2014). The majority of children experiencing gender dysphoria develop concerns about their gender as early as three or four years old (Telfer et al. 2015) and yet social and emotional support for transgender children and their families in Queensland is limited.

## The Rainbow Program

Relationships Australia Queensland has supported people of diverse bodies, genders and sexualities, through its *Rainbow Program*, since 2008.

In addition to Lesbian Bay Bisexual Transgender Intersex Queer (LGBTIQ)-specific counselling and a team of 'Rainbow Reps', Relationships Australia Queensland launched the *Transcendence social and emotional support group* in 2014. In response to expressed community need, the group provides support to transgender people of all ages, stages and identities, in the greater Brisbane area.

Our ongoing consultation with the LGBTIQ community revealed a conspicuous gap in service provision for transgender children. We were approached by parents desperately seeking support for children too young to access existing support groups and organisations.

## Transilience – social and emotional support

*Transilience* is a monthly social and emotional support group for transgender children and their families, based at Relationships Australia Queensland's Spring Hill venue. The current six-month pilot provides an opportunity for trans children and their families to receive social and emotional support with the aim of countering the impacts of dysphoria, while families negotiate the most appropriate medical support for their child.

The current six-month pilot provides an opportunity for transgender children and their families *to receive social and emotional support.*



While the public discourse on the morality of supporting and affirming gender diversity in children shows no sign of abating, Relationships Australia Queensland remains unshaken in its commitment to safety and respect and supporting the health and wellbeing of those who are vulnerable and at risk. We are delighted to be responding to such a pressing need in the community and promoting greater understanding of gender diversity in Queensland.

## References

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## Healing Our Children

**HEALING OUR CHILDREN (HOC) IS A PILOT PROJECT FUNDED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET. IT AIMS TO PREVENT TRAUMA IN THE CRITICAL FIRST 1,000 DAYS OF CHILDREN'S LIVES FROM CONCEPTION THROUGH EARLY INTERVENTION WITH THEIR MOTHERS AND CAREGIVERS.**

In its first year on the Tiwi Islands, the project has delivered a series of two-way learning workshops with women in three Aboriginal communities, focusing on the effects of trauma on young children from a neurobiological perspective combined with cultural knowledge of raising strong and healthy children. Some of these women are employed as Group Facilitators by the project, while others volunteer their time as Peer Mentors.

Influenced by the narrative therapy "Tree of Life", the HOC group work program uses the metaphor of a tree to engage vulnerable women in a safe

conversation about children's holistic needs.

The forest metaphor is used to explore family and community responsibilities towards children.

Those working on the project decided that the best way of encouraging women to take part in the support groups was to invite them on a bush camp. A series of three-day camps for women (and their children) were held where the staff facilitated groupwork sessions featuring yarning circles, art therapy and a traditional healing ceremony. The camps also allowed for rebuilding strong cultural connections to elders and the land, through bush medicine, swimming, walking, painting, weaving and hunting.

An independent evaluator was contracted to ensure that the project would be delivered in a way that was culturally safe and engaging for the Tiwi people. The local Review Team, comprising six Tiwi community members, were drawn to the Pinyama tree (bush apple) as a symbol to understand the program's aims.



## *Healing Our Children aims to prevent trauma*

in the critical first 1,000 days of children's lives from conception through early intervention with their mothers and caregivers.

Drawing on oral tradition and imagery, a large tree was mapped out in the evaluation workshops.

Western language of Inputs and Outputs was replaced with discussion about Food and Nourishment, and Fruits of the project. Words were shared about the project history, much like how it started out like a seed. The truth of the tree, it was agreed, represented culture.

The two broad outcomes of the program became the two main branches of the tree and the activities of the project were represented as the smaller twigs. Attached were the leaves representing stakeholders. The fruit represented the changes the Review Team wished to bring about for their people and community.

A storm metaphor was used to explore the risks to people who might be participants in the project, namely the effects of drugs, alcohol and violence. A hope was expressed that "We, the Tiwi people can help ourselves to heal and recover from these storms, just like a tree that regenerates over time."

The tree drawing now depicted delightful fruits bursting with hopes and dreams for the community growing on two strong branches. The evaluator's attention then shifted to developing a quality criteria: "How will we know if we are doing a good job in the program?" A large tunga (woven basket) would be under the tree overflowing with quality fruit to suggest the tree and the program were healthy.

Having a strong sense of direction is important because every seed needs to be planted in the right place, facing the right way. All agreed "We believe that change is everything, we can all make changes and we can make a difference. Having these beliefs gives us a sense of direction."

The Review Team invited a young emerging artist to paint the Pinyama as a screen-print, which is being reproduced on selected merchandise to promote and raise funds for the project.

Using the tree metaphor to explore and understand the process of evaluation has allowed the Tiwi people to see, feel and bring to life their own vision for this project.

# LISTENING

TO CHILDREN



*Listening to children as part of the family mediation process has the potential to reduce parental conflict.*

## The voice of the child in *family dispute resolution*

**RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT LISTENING TO CHILDREN AS PART OF THE FAMILY MEDIATION PROCESS HAS THE POTENTIAL TO REDUCE PARENTAL CONFLICT. THIS IN TURN MAY INCREASE THE CHILD'S CAPACITY TO DEVELOP HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS, IMPROVE THE CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM AND DECREASE THE POSSIBILITY OF ONGOING PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES.**

Relationships Australia Western Australia's family dispute resolution service, funded by the Australian Attorney General's Department, has identified the limitations of the family dispute resolution practitioner role. In addition to the existing *child inclusive practice (CIP)*, a Child Development Consultant (CDC) and a Parenting Coordinator have been employed, so the voice of the child is better heard during the mediation process. As a result, more families have been able to resolve their concerns through family dispute resolution, reducing the number of cases proceeding to the Family Court.

### Involving a CDC

The CDC brings the child's voice into the mediation forum, particularly where there is conflict relating to parenting practices, styles or care arrangements. Individual sessions are held with each parent to hear each client's experience of the child's attachment story, exploring their child's unique developmental history and their particular needs within the context of the family.

Once this understanding has occurred, the CDC shares the information with the parents and provides support to assist them in modifying their parenting practices, styles and/or care arrangements.

**This intervention has been effective where:**

- a child has special medical needs and parents have reached an impasse in family dispute resolution about the suitability of the child being in the care of the other parent;
- the parents have both disclosed in family dispute resolution that their child is self-harming, but are unable to put aside their own adult conflict patterns to focus on what is happening for the child; and
- parents hold strong views on parenting styles especially in regard to appropriate discipline.

Where conflict is long standing or ongoing, or there is anxiety from either parent or the child, a parenting coordinator is utilised.

A raft of therapeutic, psychological and conflict management interventions support parents to recognise the impact of their actions on their child, and to strengthen their communication with the other parent, and with their child.



## Case Study

### JARROD, WENDY AND THE PARENTING CO-ORDINATOR

Jarrold and Wendy separated four years ago and have one son aged seven years old.

Jarrold moved out of the family home and had spent the past three years on a journey of self-discovery, while Wendy and their son moved back with her parents. There had been no contact from Jarrold during the previous three years.

Upon returning to Perth, Jarrold contacted Wendy and asked to be able to spend time with their son. When this was refused, Jarrold initiated family dispute resolution. At the second session the Family Dispute Resolution Practitioners referred Jarrold and Wendy to a parenting coordinator.

The Parenting Coordinator held three, one hour sessions with each parent individually. Wendy was able to address her sense of being abandoned, the financial hardship and the fear their son would prefer to live with Jarrold. Jarrold learnt of the impact his actions had on Wendy and their son. They returned to the third mediation session where acknowledgments were made and steps agreed for their son to spend time with Jarrold. At the fourth mediation session they reviewed the agreed time and were able to develop a parenting plan.

*At the fourth mediation session*  
they reviewed the agreed time and  
were able to develop a parenting plan.

## Supporting children *following the death of a parent*

**RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA CANBERRA AND REGION PROVIDES THERAPEUTIC COUNSELLING TO ANYONE AFFECTED BY A DEATH THAT IS SUBJECT TO A CORONIAL INQUIRY IN THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY (ACT). THE COUNSELLING IS PART OF THE ACT CORONIAL COUNSELLING PROGRAM.**

Children who experience the sudden, unexpected death of a parent or primary caregiver are known to be at increased risk of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder as well as suffer decreased self-esteem and attachment related issues.

Children who enter the *ACT Coronial Counselling Program* are often acutely bereaved within the first few weeks of a parent death. The surviving parent or primary carer can engage the child in counselling when they feel they do not have the capacity or confidence to support the child's grief in addition to their own.

Counselling can assist children who do not want to be a burden on the surviving parent by sharing their own grief, or a child who needs a confidential space to talk openly about the event.

Initially, the Relationships Australia Canberra and Region *Coronial Counselling Service* supports the surviving parent to help their child through strategies to use at home to open conversation, gauge the child's adaption to their loss and normalise the grief. This approach enables consistency in care where there is trust and a sense of safety. It also opens communication within the family about the death, provides the child with a sense of camaraderie in the grief journey and helps to minimise the bereavement divide and isolation.

Relationships Australia Canberra and Region counsellors may also see the child separately to the family. After engaging the child and explaining the role of counselling, confidentiality and the importance of feeling safe, counsellors work through a range of activities with the child to understand the event and to make sense of their current situation. Throughout the process, the counsellor seeks to keep the surviving parent engaged in the child's progress and so they can continue to provide grief support at home.

The *ACT Coronial Counselling Program* is funded by the ACT Government Health Directorate and receives the majority of its referrals directly from the ACT Magistrates Court, along with some community referrals.



*Counsellors work through a range of activities* with the child to understand the event and to make sense of their current situation.

## Case Study

### ABOUT DANIEL

Eight year old Daniel's Mum died as a result of suicide. Daniel lives with his biological Dad and two older siblings. Using an outline of a human figure, Daniel was asked to draw how his body was feeling following his mother's death. Without hesitation he reached for a black crayon, deliberately and intently drawing black circles throughout his body describing them as horrible and hard. He drew a grey, broken and separated heart.

Daniel said his head felt confused about what happened, his face had lost its smile and he did not feel he could ask questions at home. Daniel described how he used to enjoy dancing with his mum, though now his whole body was sad and his legs won't move. After four sessions with the counsellor, Daniel's experience of his body started to change. The confusion in his head changed from black to red and Daniel was less deliberate and more reflective in his colouring. His heart was now drawn whole, though still had a broken fracture line down the middle. As part of the ongoing sessions Daniel began to spend more time talking about his Mum's life (as opposed to her death), memories of them together and adjustments he has made at school, home and with his friends.

## Empowering Parents *Empowering Communities*

**EMPOWERING PARENTS EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES IS A NEW PROGRAM FOR RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA TASMANIA THAT TRAINS LOCAL PARENTS TO RUN PARENTING COURSES IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES. THE PROGRAM IS BASED ON THE IDEA THAT PARENTS FEEL COMFORTABLE BEING WITH OTHER PARENTS IN SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES TO THEIR OWN.**

Parents in selected communities attend the *Parent Facilitator Training* program and are then able to run the *Being a Parent* course in their communities. The course is specific to parents and carers of children from 2 to 12 years old.

The *Being a Parent* course has been found to improve parent-child relationships, reduce child behaviour problems and develop a parent's ability to raise confident, happy and co-operative children. The new parenting strategies help parents to be more responsive to the needs of their children and in turn support positive childhood development, health and wellbeing.

“ I'm glad I came along because I've learnt so many new parenting tricks and tools over the past eight weeks. ”

“ I now understand that my children are not being deliberately naughty, that there is normally a reason behind their behaviour. ”

Sessions involve sharing information through group discussion, reflection and role play to practice new skills in a supportive environment. *Being a Parent* focuses on practical communication and relationship skills including listening, empathy, expressing and accepting feelings and setting limits.

“ I found the strategies discussed by the course leaders and other participants really useful and it was great to have people to talk to with similar family issues. ”

“ I enjoyed listening to what works for different people and contributing my own ideas. ”

“ It was good to share experiences and concerns without feeling judged. ”

The program evaluation has identified positive changes in children's behaviour and family dynamics. Parents have said they are now more aware of their own behaviour, able to stay calm in challenging situations and to understand their child's feelings and reactions.

The Parent Facilitators have reported significant personal growth, especially in confidence and self-esteem. The course was particularly empowering for a young, single mother who had always felt looked down upon. Following her Parent Facilitator experience this young woman was very proud of her achievements and decided to enrol in further study.

*Empowering Parents Empowering Communities* is delivered under the *Communities for Children Initiative*, funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.



*The new parenting strategies help*  
parents to be more responsive  
to the needs of their children.

# Supporting children and families in Northern Adelaide and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands

**SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES TO ENGAGE MEANINGFULLY IN SCHOOL REQUIRES A WHOLE-OF-COMMUNITY APPROACH. WORKING SPECIFICALLY IN PLAYFORD (NORTHERN REGION OF ADELAIDE) AND THE ANANGU PITJANTJATJARA YANKUNYTJATJARA (APY) LANDS, RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA SOUTH AUSTRALIA PROVIDES CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE SERVICES TO ABORIGINAL PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN WITH A STRONG FOCUS ON BUILDING NETWORKS AND SUPPORTING FAMILY STRENGTHS.**

For some children living in Playford and the APY Lands, school engagement may have been interrupted due to a range of complex family circumstances, such as family and domestic violence, homelessness, and/or intergenerational trauma. Previous research suggests that for children who are disengaged from school, the impacts can be long lasting as schools provide an important setting in which to provide support, intervention and prevention services for children experiencing or at risk of homelessness and family violence. (Gibson, 2011; Gibson & Johnstone, 2010; Kovacs & Tomison, 2003).

In Playford, *The Yarning Circle* is a weekly group for Aboriginal parents and grandparents. Facilitated by our senior Aboriginal Educators this lively group gather to share stories and learn about raising children. Connecting to Aboriginal parenting principals Before Colonisation (BC) and connecting to culture plays an important role in this group.

Using an adaptation of the Circle of Security, families are supported to recognise and address trauma which is, more often, intergenerational. The group ‘yarns up’ on trauma, its effects on parenting, and disruption to attachment through child removal practices are explored in safe and supportive ways. Parents are encouraged to problem solve together, develop supportive relationships and strengthen connection to culture. If more intensive parenting support is identified, additional services through home visits or working directly with children are offered.

Working in the Aboriginal community of Pukatja means collaborating and building relationships are at the core of Relationships Australia South Australia’s work in the APY Lands. Delivering programs and initiatives that enhance school attendance is achieved through working together with teachers, police, health workers, government and non-government workers, child protection workers and community members.

With active involvement from Senior Anangu men in the planning and design, Relationships Australia South Australia facilitates a ‘young dads’ program, based on the notion that early engagement of parents in their child’s education provides the foundation for ongoing involvement and commitment.

With a focus on developing parenting skills, managing emotions, dealing with anger and strengthening wellbeing in the context of Anangu culture, the ‘young dads’ program is helping to build meaningful connections to education and improve school engagement.

**Where to now?**

A man with a beard and a woman are sitting at a table, looking at each other. There are papers and a drink on the table. The background is a wooden wall with some faint writing.

CONFERENCES,  
PRESENTATIONS AND  
**PUBLICATIONS**

## International Conferences

Andrew, R (RAWA), Oral Paper: *Repositioning women – from blameworthy and ‘part of the problem’ to active resisters of ‘the problem’*, European Conference on Domestic Violence, Belfast, Ireland, September 2015.

Andrew, R (RAWA), *Workshop: From prescribed self to preferred self: Assisting men who have hurt their loved ones*, European Conference on Domestic Violence, Belfast, Ireland, September 2015.

Codrington, R & Allan, D (RANSW), *Using Relational Counselling to Address Trauma*, International Family Therapy Association Conference, Hawaii, United States of America, April 2016.

Hartman, N & Park, S (RASA), A mentoring programme for young adoptees, *Redefining Families Conference*, Auckland, New Zealand, January 2016.

Hindle, M (RANSW), *Cirtix Recommends: Mark Hindle Head of ICT Relationships NSW*, Nutanix .NEXT Global Conference, Las Vegas, United States of America, June 2016.

Juuk, B (RASA), *Dinka Cultural Practices and Family Law in Australia: A clash of Legal Cultures*, International conference for Law and Culture, London, United Kingdom, September 2015.

Law, I (RAQ), *Clinical Governance and Accountability: Running a Counselling Organisation in An Era of Compliance*, Therapeutic Conversations TC13, Vancouver, Canada, April 2016.

Ralfs, C & Lee, J (RASA), *Family Law DOORS workshop*, Annual Conference of Norwegian Forensic Psychologists, Oslo, Norway, September 2015.

## National Conferences, Seminars and Presentations

Andrew, R (RAWA), *Men’s Behaviour Change Program*, Family & Domestic Violence Study Day: A focus on perpetrators (run by WA Department of Health), Subiaco, November 2015.

Betti, K (RAWA), *Family Relationship Centres and Family Dispute Resolution Child Inclusive Practice (CIP)*, WA Family Pathways Network Conference, Perth, May 2016.

Betti, K (RAWA), *Interactive Hypothetical (on a family accessing the WA Family Law System)*, WA Family Pathways Network Conference, Perth, May 2016.

Bickerdike, A (RAV), *Alternative Dispute Resolution and Family Violence*, Australian Small Business Commission, December 2015.

Bickerdike, A (RAV), *Fatherhood*, Victorian Parliament Men’s Health Breakfast, August 2015.

Codrington, R & Allan, D (RANSW), *Using Relational Counselling to Address Trauma*, 36th Australian Family Therapy Conference, Melbourne, November 2015.

Codrington, R & Allan, D (RANSW), *Using Relational Counselling to Address Trauma*, Workshop for Unifam, Sydney, March 2016.

Curran, S (RAV), *Relationships Australia Victoria’s Elder Relationships Services Pilot and Sector Collaboration*, Elder Abuse Awareness Forum, Melbourne, June 2016.

Dobsinon, S & Gray, RM (RANSW) *A Review of Best Practice for Families Affected by Violence in Post Separation Family Dispute Resolution*, Family Relationships Services Australia Annual Conference, Brisbane, November 2015.

Elkington, L (RANSW) *Children Court in the Middle*, Family Law Pathways Network Annual Conference, Coffs Harbour, May 2016.

Elvery, S (RANSW), *Keynote: Working with the Many Traumas of Domestic and Family Violence*, Independent Group Leaders Annual Conference, Sydney, October 2015.

## National Conferences, Seminars and Presentations Continued

Elvery, S (RANSW), Poster: *The Only Women in the Group: Exploring Female/Male Co-Facilitation in Taking Responsibility in a Men's Behaviour Change Program*, Inaugural Stop Domestic Violence Conference, Canberra, December 2015.

Elvery, S (RANSW), *Relationships Australia NSW Men's Behaviour Change Program – Taking Responsibility: A Course for Men, Ending Domestic Violence Conference*, Sydney, April 2016.

Elvery, S & Lang, J (RANSW), *Working with Men in Men's Behaviour Change Program – Taking Responsibility: A Course for Men, Ending Domestic Violence Conference*, Sydney, May 2016.

Gangemi, M (RASA), *Gambling and the dyadic relationship: Infants of parents with gambling addiction*, Annual National Association of Gambling Studies (NAGS), Adelaide, November 2015.

Golden-Brown, J & Cryer, A (RANSW) *Reconciliation Action Plans Literature Review: What works and What Doesn't*, 27th Local Government Aboriginal Network Conference, Port Macquarie, August 2015.

Gray, RM & Broady, TR (RANSW), *Gender & Violence Attitudes, Emerging Themes from Client Interviews after a Men's Behaviour Change Program*, Family Relationships Services Australia Annual Conference, Brisbane, December 2015.

Gray, RM, Wheeler, A & Hewlett, B (RANSW), *The Parental Regard Approach*, 4th Annual Child Aware Approaches Conference, Brisbane, May 2015.

Hambledon, R, Lee, J & Gawlik, N (RASA), *Using Universal Screening to Uncover the Hidden Harm from Family Violence in Gambling Service*, Inaugural ANROWS Conference on Family & Domestic Violence, Melbourne, February 2016.

Howe, E, Petch, J, Tometzki, H, Turner, W & Halford, K (RAQ), *Gambling severity as a predictor of wellbeing outcomes in routine community counselling*, National Association of Gambling Studies, Adelaide, November 2015.

Jones, S (RATAS), *A collaborative approach to LGBTI suicide prevention in Tasmania*, National Suicide Prevention Conference, Hobart, July 2015.

Jones, S (RATAS), *The meaningful inclusion of lived experience – what helps or hinders?*, National Suicide Prevention Conference, Hobart, July 2015.

Lee, J, Hambledon, R & Gawlik, N (RASA), *The effectiveness of community-based gambling counselling on psychological distress in gamblers and their family members*, Annual National Association of Gambling Studies (NAGS) Conference, Adelaide, November 2015.

Lee, J & Ralfs, C (RASA), *Truthful, beneficial and respectful: A survey of client attitudes to universal screening for safety risks in families*, Stop Domestic Violence Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Mental Health Association, Canberra, December 2015.

McDonald, E & Nield, J (RAV), *I like you, like you: A healthy intimate relationships program for schools*, FRSA Conference, Brisbane, November 2015.

McDonald, E (RAV), *Practice considerations working with young women affected by parental separation*, AUSMed, Melbourne, July 2015.

McIntosh, JE & Lee, J (RASA), *The Value of Universal Screening after Parental Separation*, Stop Domestic Violence Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Mental Health Association, Canberra, December 2015.

McIvor, R & Perry, M (RAV), *Creating a safe structure for participants in Men's Behaviour Change Programs experiencing individual trauma*, NTV Practitioners Forum, Melbourne, August 2015.

McIvor, R, Nguyen, K & Bhandary, R (RAV), *Effective Men's Behaviour Change Programs for CALD Men*, Ending Domestic & Family Violence Conference, Melbourne, October 2015.

McIvor, R (RAV), *Why CALD Men's Behaviour Change Programs?*, Family Violence Has No Boundaries Conference, Melbourne, October 2015.

- Mclvor, R (RAV), *RAV working in the family violence area: prevention, training, early intervention in a tertiary context, response, cultural specificity and accountability*, Australian College of Applied Psychology, Melbourne, June 2016.
- Mclvor, R (RAV), *Why CALD MBCPs?*, Australian College of Applied Psychology, Melbourne, June 2016.
- Mclvor, R (RAV), *RAV working in the family violence area: prevention, training, early intervention in a tertiary context, response, cultural specificity and accountability*, Network meeting of representatives from the Victorian Commonwealth-funded alcohol and other drugs service delivery agencies, Melbourne, 2016.
- Mclvor, R (RAV), *The critical role of the general practitioner (GP) in responding to family violence*, HealthEd Annual Women's Health Update, Sydney, February 2016.
- Mills, S (RAV), *The crucial role of the GP in family violence*, Annual Women's Health Update, Adelaide, May 2016.
- Mills, S (RAV), *The crucial role of the GP in family violence*, Annual Women's Health Update, March 2016.
- Oudih, E (RASA), *Cultural issues when working with CALD clients*, Spotlight on Hepatitis B event for World Hepatitis Day, Melbourne, July 2015.
- Oudih, E (RASA), *The importance of public health approach to address gambling within CALD communities*, The Public Health and Gambling Seminar, Adelaide, November 2015.
- Oudih, E (RASA), *The first ever State Action Plan to respond to problem gambling in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities in South Australia*, National Association of Gambling Studies Conference (NAGS), Adelaide, November 2015.
- Oudih, E & SA Health (RASA), *South Australian Community of Practice for Action on HOV and Mobility CoPAHM SA*, SiREN (Sexual Health and Blood Borne Viruses) Symposium – Innovation in Practice, Perth, June 2016.
- Poynten, H & Cella, V (RAQ), *Financially Fit*, QCOSS State Conference, Brisbane, October 2015.
- Poynten, H & Cella, V (RAQ), *Budget Talks: Linking Financial counselling with problem gamblers non-attendance GHS rates*, National Association Gambling Studies Conference, Adelaide, November 2015.
- Poynten, H & McMasters, K (RAQ), *Interventions using Behaviour Change Programs*, National DFV Summit, Sydney, February 2016.
- Poynten, H & Sharray, A (RAQ), *Disenfranchised Grief and Childhood Institutional Sexual Abuse*, Australian Grief and Bereavement Conference, Melbourne, May 2016.
- Roberts, D, Jones, J & Nichols, N (RANSW), *"Who Resolves the Conflict?" Interdisciplinary Collaborative Practice: An Alternative for Separating Families*, 3rd Annual Conference of the Association of Family and Conciliatory Courts Conference, Sydney, July 2015.
- Roberts, D, Jones, J & Nichols, N (RANSW), *Interdisciplinary Collaborative Practice*, Kon Gres: The Annual Conference of the Resolution Institute, Sydney, September 2015.
- Roberts, K (RASA), *A review of the first Infant Touch Massage Program embedded in a community development setting*, Marce Society Australasian Conference, Adelaide, October 2015.
- Roberts, P (RAV), *Self-Care and Managing Anxiety*, AUSMED on Pathological Behaviours in the Workplace Conference, Melbourne 2015.
- Rohrsheim, D (RASA), *Child-Focused Practice*, Child Aware Approaches Conference, Brisbane, May 2016.
- Rohrsheim, D & Haro, C (RASA), *Child Focus Practice Online Learning Course*, The National Domestic & Aboriginal Family Violence Conference, Adelaide, September 2015.
- Rose, T (RANSW), *Be Careful with those Assumptions: Adapting Child Inclusive Practice to Meet the Needs of Culturally Diverse Families*, Greater Sydney Family Law Pathways Network Seminar, Western Sydney, September 2015.

## National Conferences, Seminars and Presentations Continued

- Siviour, C & Henderson, I (RASA), *Child Focus Practice Online Learning Course*, Australian Childhood Foundation International Trauma Conference, Melbourne, June 2016.
- Skirrow, AK (RASA), *Contained Stories: An expressive intervention for cross-cultural use harnessing the therapeutic power of storytelling*, Australian Childhood Foundation International Trauma Conference, Melbourne, June 2016.
- Stott, J (RASA), *The Sound Partnership House*, Australian Psychological Society, College of Organisational Psychologists National Conference, Melbourne, July 2015.
- Stott, J & Buckley, K (RASA), *The Sound Partnership House*, National Aboriginal and Family Violence Conference, Adelaide, September 2015.
- Stott, J & O'Connor, R (RASA), *Stepping up to empowerment and resilience: addressing child and adolescent family violence*, Institute of Group Leaders Conference, Sydney, October 2015.
- Street, A (RATAS), *Substance Use & Problem Gambling: A Local Perspective*, Tobacco and Other Drugs Council of Tasmania Conference, Hobart, May 2016.
- Tester, R (RAWA), *Breakout session: Trauma, Attachment and (Dys) Functional responses*, 2015 National Domestic and Aboriginal Family Violence Conference, Adelaide, September 2015.
- Teys, K, Burgess, R & Gray, R (RANSW), *Community builders delivering social cohesion*, Advancing Social Cohesion: Towards a national compact Conference, Sydney, July 2015.
- Trenorden, NR (RASA), *Cross cultural trauma informed expressive arts therapy for work with young refugees*, Australian Childhood Foundation Trauma Conference, Melbourne, June 2016.

## Publications and Peer-Reviewed Journals

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## Books and Book Chapters

Shafer, M (RAV) 2016, *Zoe's Choice*, Melbourne: Good Ships, Relationships Australia Victoria.

## Films

RAV, *Relationships Australia Victoria Traralgon supporting communities through the Morwell Open Cut Mine Fire*, 2015.



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