

Relationships[™]
AUSTRALIA • VIC

Supporting children, supporting families

Annual Report 2025–26



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



Australian Government



State Government

We acknowledge the funding we receive from the Australian and Victorian governments.

A note about photos in this report

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

First Nations peoples should be aware that this report may contain images of people who have since passed away.

A note about stories in this report

The stories featured in this report are based on the experiences of our clients, and shared with permission. Names and identifying details have been changed to protect their privacy.

Acronyms and initialisms

FDR	Family dispute resolution
Forgotten Australians	People who grew up in institutional care in Victoria before 1990, also known as Pre-1990 Care Leavers
FRC	Family Relationship Centre
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other sexually or gender diverse
MBCP	Men's behaviour change program
RA	Relationships Australia
RAV	Relationships Australia Victoria
YES	Youth Enhanced Service

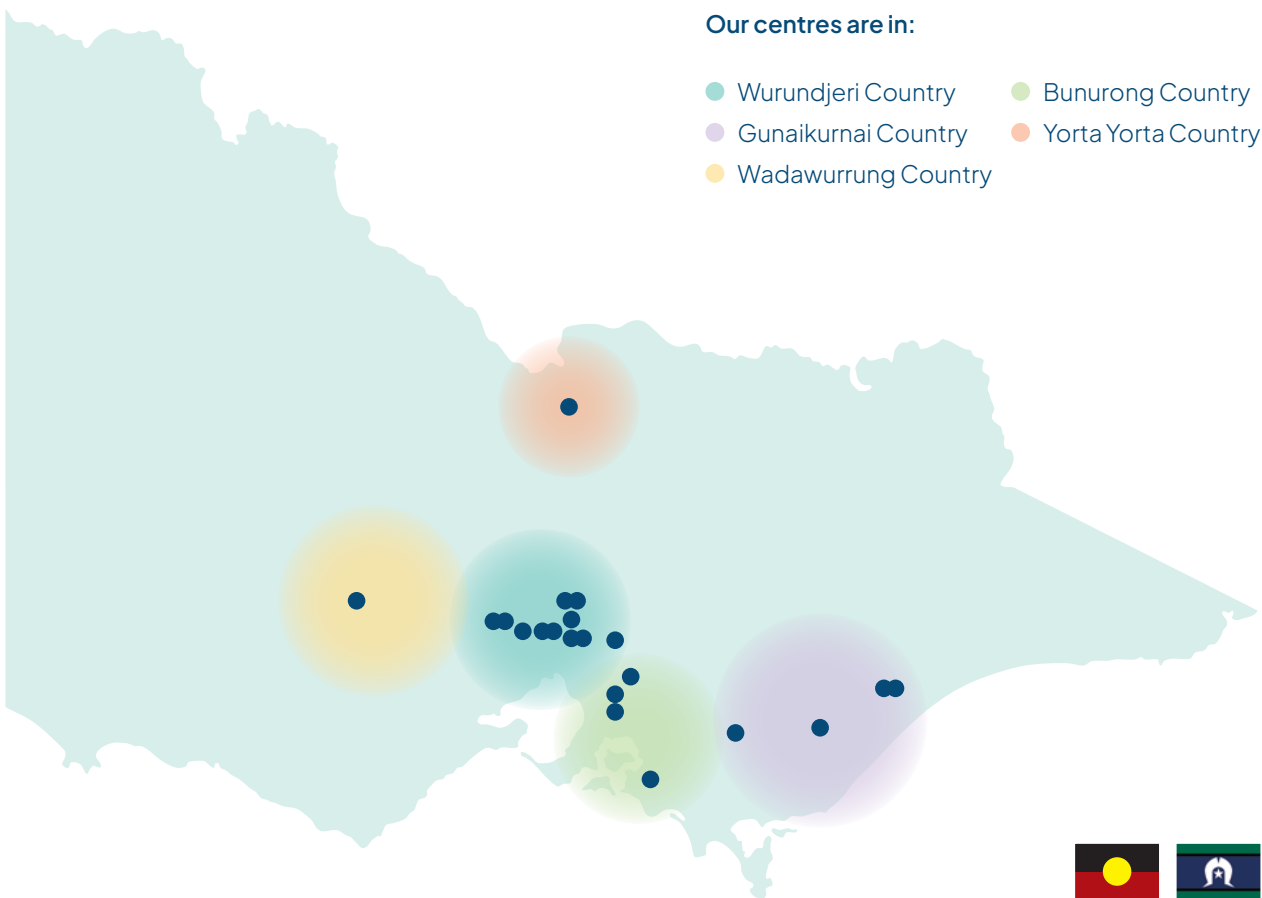
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We pay respect to First Nations Peoples of Victoria as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waterways. We acknowledge the pain caused by colonisation including disconnection from land, loss of life and freedom, and the forced removal of children.

We provide services from locations on the Lands of the Wurundjeri, Bunurong, Gunaikurnai, Yorta Yorta and Wadawurrung Peoples. The areas shown are indicative only and do not represent boundaries of Countries.

Our centres are in:

- Wurundjeri Country
- Bunurong Country
- Gunaikurnai Country
- Yorta Yorta Country
- Wadawurrung Country



Our foundations

The people, experience and resources behind our work

77

years of experience
supporting Victorians

396

valued employees

\$50.9m

revenue

Local services, state-wide impact

In-person,
telephone and
online support



21
sites



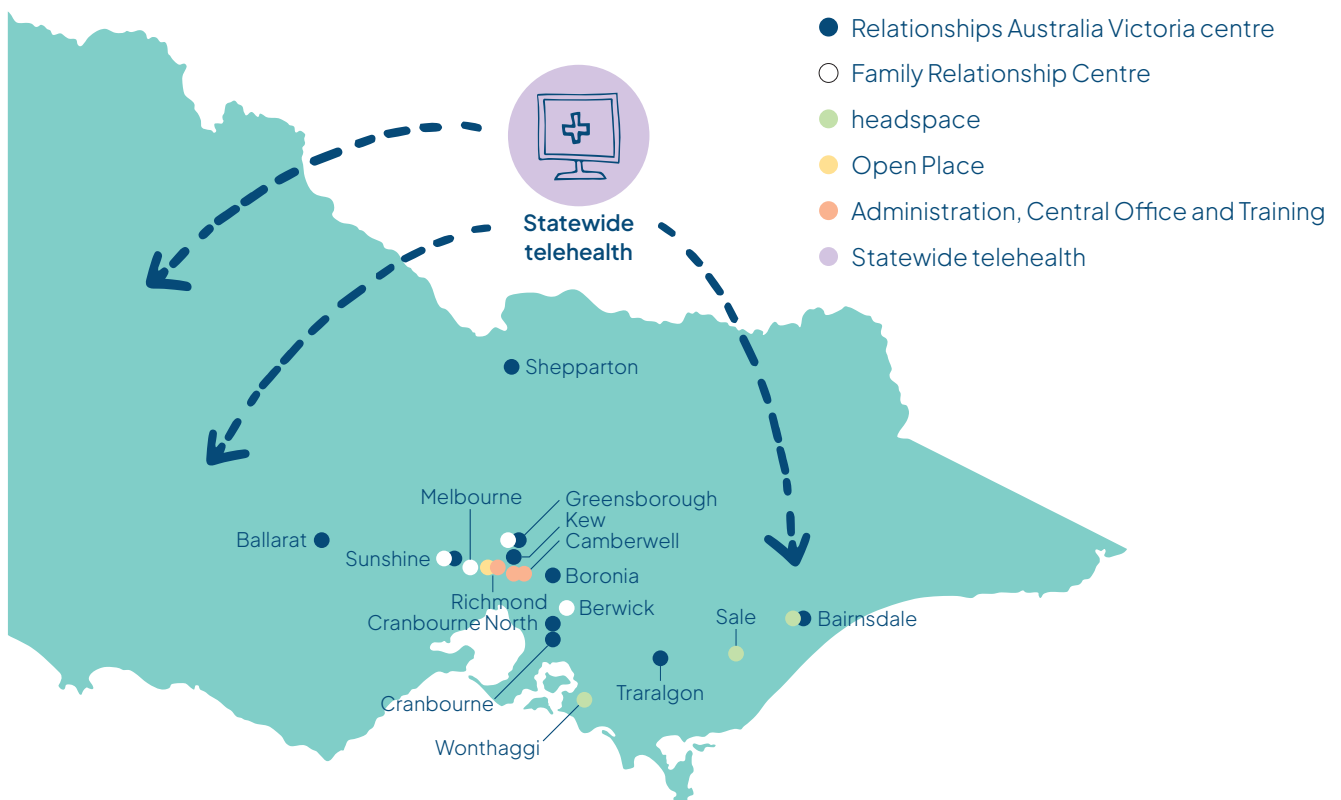
14

metropolitan sites



7

regional sites



In simple terms, we help people navigate some of the most difficult periods of their lives, and help people to strengthen their relationships, and gain skills to help navigate challenges in the future. We do this in ways that work for our clients: in our centres or at home via telehealth.

**Behind each of our services is a simple belief:
that everyone has the right to
have safe, healthy and
respectful relationships,
because they are one of the most
powerful protective factors,
especially for children.**



Preparing for what comes next

We are approaching the end of our current Strategic Plan at a time of considerable change and uncertainty. Cost of living pressures continue to affect our clients and increase the cost of delivering services. Technology, including artificial intelligence, is changing the way we communicate, connect and work, as well as how our clients choose to receive support.

At the same time, family law, family and children's services, mental health and the NDIS are all undergoing or preparing for reform. A Victorian election will take place in November, with a federal election also due by 2028.

Preparing for what comes next

The role of the Board is to ensure Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) is ready to respond to this changing environment while remaining financially responsible, well governed, and focused on the people and communities we serve. I'm pleased that the current Strategic Plan has provided a strong foundation for this work.

Over the course of the Plan, our organisation has grown and diversified its services, strengthened the way we measure and demonstrate our impact, and increased our work with children and families.

Highlights of the year

- Extended our suite of services to meet the needs of children, separated couples and families (see page 6).
- Strengthened our advocacy for improved responses to mental health and suicide prevention, children and families, psychosocial needs, and family violence, underpinned by our strong focus on research, evaluation and social impact measurement.
- Deepened our commitment to reconciliation, truth-telling, and culturally safe services through our Statement of Commitment to First Nations Peoples, and our new Acknowledgement of Country.
- Maintained a strong financial position, with our income exceeding \$50 million.
- Appointed a new Board member.

We have also continued to develop innovative approaches to mental health, school-based and place-based support, and children's services.

In the coming months, we will begin developing RAV's next Strategic Plan. This will be an opportunity to consider what we have learned, the changing needs of our communities, and where RAV can have the greatest impact in the years ahead.

Acknowledging history, truth-telling and embedding cultural safety

RAV officially launched its Statement of Commitment to First Nations Peoples this year. It reaffirms our responsibility to listen, learn, and build trust and relationships with First Nations peoples and communities over time.

We introduced a new Board-endorsed Acknowledgement of Country (see page 1), which recognises Traditional Owners and Custodians and, importantly, acknowledges our history and the effects of colonisation — an important part of truth-telling.

We also began implementing a new cultural capability framework, TRACKS (Truth, Respect, Accountability, Culture, Knowledge and Strength), which provides a clear pathway for embedding meaningful change in the way we work through tangible actions (see page 60).





Our Strategic Plan has helped us strengthen our foundations and have a meaningful impact. We will now determine where RAV can make the biggest difference in the coming years.'

Contributing to policy and reform

As our CEO, Dr Andrew Bickerdike, highlights (see page 7), we made key submissions emphasising the importance of prevention and early intervention, healthy relationships and social connection, accessible community-based mental health support, and services that recognise the needs of children and the adults around them.

The Board strongly supports RAV's advocacy on behalf of its clients and communities. RAV's perspective is informed by our direct work with individuals, couples, children and families, the experience of our staff, our organisation's 77-year history, and, importantly, what our clients tell us about lived experience. This practical knowledge should help shape future systems and services.

Planning for Board renewal

In April this year, we welcomed a new director, Brendan Kay, bringing the Board to 9 members. Brendan has more than 25 years of executive and board experience in digital transformation, artificial intelligence, cyber security, privacy and data ethics. He also has a long association with RAV as a digital consultant and member of our Digital Landscape Working Group.

His appointment followed a detailed analysis of the skills and experience the Board will need in the coming years. It also forms part of a planned renewal of the Board, ahead of the retirement in October of our long-standing and valued Board members, Michael Hunt and Kaye Frankcom.

The Board continues to prioritise good governance, financial strength, risk management and thoughtful innovation, providing the stability and flexibility RAV needs to grow, invest in its people and services, and continue supporting clients and communities.

I thank my fellow Board members for their knowledge, care and sound judgement. I also thank our CEO, Dr Andrew Bickerdike, and RAV's senior leadership team for the way they have led RAV during another busy year.

Recognising the value of our workforce

The Fair Work Commission's review of the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award recognised the gender-based undervaluation of work undertaken in a predominantly female sector.

RAV employees are paid above the applicable award rates, so the decision does not directly determine their pay. However, it recognises that the skills, responsibilities and value of work in our sector, traditionally undertaken by women, have been underestimated.

The Board remains committed to RAV being an organisation where people are supported to undertake meaningful work and where their expertise and contribution are valued.

To all RAV staff, thank you for the professionalism and dedication you bring to your work every day.

Listening to our clients

Finally, I recognise those who choose to use RAV's services and reach out for help when they need it. It is not always an easy thing to do.

We are committed to listening to our clients about their needs and experiences, evaluating our impact, and continuously improving our services to ensure they respond to what our clients need.

There is considerable change ahead, but RAV enters this next period with clear strengths: experience, a skilled workforce, strong governance, diverse services, a history of innovation, and a commitment to learning from evidence and experience. I look forward to working with the Board, Andrew and staff to shape the organisation's next strategic direction and continue making a meaningful difference across Victoria.

Ronda Jacobs
Board President

Responding to intersecting needs

Highlights of the year

- Supported more than 25,000 clients through 21 sites, additional outreach locations, and online.
- Introduced 3 new services for children and families.
- Published our latest Social Impact Report, with our new report for 2026 now available (see page 68).
- Developed a new Understanding Family and Domestic Violence Evidence Paper (see page 63).
- Made key submissions on the Productivity Commission's Review of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement, the future of psychosocial supports in Victoria, and proposed changes to Australian Government Department of Social Services-funded children's and family programs (see page 77).
- Prepared a submission on the Second National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032.

This year, we continued to see how closely relationship difficulties, separation, parenting, mental health, family violence and wellbeing can be connected.

Many people come to RAV for help with one concern while also managing other issues in their lives. We see this across counselling, family dispute resolution (FDR), family violence services and our dedicated mental health programs.

Mental health is one clear example. In 2023–24, more than one-third of clients across our organisation — over 9,200 people — had a mental health need addressed. Many were using our broader individual, relationship and family services rather than a dedicated mental health program.

Our capacity to provide comprehensive, integrated support for mental health issues outside our dedicated programs is limited by available funding and resources, particularly at this time of high demand. We also know that accessing other services is not always straightforward. People can face waiting lists, costs and stigma, as well as the difficulty of finding the right support and starting again with a new practitioner.

Children and young people are an important part of this picture. We work directly with children, but also with the adults around them, because supporting parents, carers, families and communities can make an important difference to a child's wellbeing. This year, we introduced 3 services extending our work with children and families:

- **Children's Mental Health Service:** free counselling for children aged 4–13 years, and their parents, who are affected by separation or divorce, to help children manage the changes in their family, and prevent emerging mental health issues from becoming more entrenched (see page 16).
- **The Family Link:** a place-based initiative in Sebastopol, with a dedicated Social Connector working alongside families and services to strengthen relationships, increase access to local service, and help families feel supported, understood, and able to support others in turn (see page 51)
- **Lawyer-Inclusive FDR:** a pilot FDR service that integrates legal representation, enabling separating clients to attend FDR with their lawyers, and work towards resolving parenting and property matters without proceeding to court (see page 30).





Our role is to understand the person who comes to us, the relationships around them and the support we can provide to have a meaningful impact for them, their families and the community.'

Reforms and a changing sector

Our annual Social Impact Report (see page 75) has further strengthened our understanding of the impact our services have for clients and families. This evidence is important for evaluating, improving and demonstrating the value of our services. It also enables RAV to contribute meaningfully through advocacy and engagement with government, the sector and reform consultations.

In our submission to the Productivity Commission, we emphasised the importance of healthy relationships and social connection to mental health, and the significant effects of family breakdown on individual and community wellbeing. We called for a preventive public mental health approach, including greater investment in programs that strengthen families, particularly during the early years.

We also advocated for an integrated mental healthcare model that would enable community-based organisations to deliver prevention and early intervention programs. This could help reduce risk factors, build protective factors, and enable people to access support earlier without having to navigate disconnected systems.

The funding and policy environment in which we operate continues to change. The Australian Government Attorney-General's Department has extended contracts for our Family Relationship Centres (FRCs), FDR, regional FDR and family law counselling services for 2 years, until 2028.

The Department has indicated that it remains committed to reforms arising from the review of the Family Relationships Services Program led by Robert Metcalfe AM, and plans to engage with the sector in 2027 about their implementation. It is not yet clear, however, whether the recommended expansion of services will be fully or partly implemented. These services also received low indexation this financial year, and a roll back on the previous years' indexation, representing a net effective funding reduction of approximately 4%, despite delivery costs continuing to rise and strong client demand resulting in waiting lists for many services. Nonetheless, recognising the broader difficult fiscal environment, RAV remains grateful for the funding it receives and is committed to delivering quality services to as many clients as possible.

We also made a submission to the Australian Government Department of Social Services' consultation on significant proposed changes to its funded programs. A new program focused on outcomes for children aged 0–17 and parents will replace previously separate programs.

We welcome the contemporary definition of *family* used in the proposed program, which recognises extended family members and other adults who are important in a child's life. However, many people in our community who are neither parents, children nor adolescents also need support. RAV receives funding across 4 of the 5 affected current programs, and we will need to re-tender for services under the new guidelines. In the meantime, our contracts have been extended for 7 months, until January 2027.

Our people at our core

None of this work, or the outcomes of our services for our clients, would be possible without our skilled and dedicated staff. I thank them and our managers for the expertise and care they bring to their work.

I also thank our Board, including our Board President, Ronda Jacobs, for their guidance and commitment, our funding bodies and partner organisations for their support, and our clients for the trust they place in us.

Government-funded programs necessarily have their own names, priorities, funding arrangements and eligibility requirements. But people's lives are not siloed in the same way. Our role is to understand the person who comes to us, the relationships around them and the support we can provide to have a meaningful impact for them, their families and the community.

Dr Andrew Bickerdike
Chief Executive Officer

Our clients

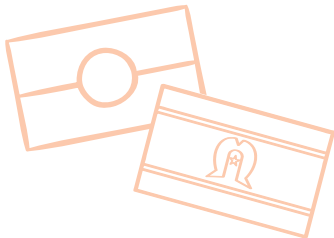
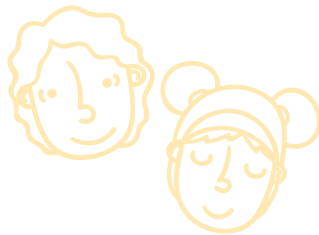
A snapshot of the children, young people, adults and families we worked with.

25,467

clients

3,217

children and young people



884

First Nations clients

82

different languages spoken at home



148

different countries of birth



42%

had a family income of \$50,000 or less



36%

needed support with their mental health



53%

were affected by family violence



I had an extremely positive experience with Relationships Australia Victoria. [My practitioner] was incredibly professional, supportive and approachable throughout what is naturally a very stressful process. She created a calm and respectful environment, which made it much easier to work through important decisions. I'm very grateful for the support provided and would highly recommend their services.'

– FDR client, Ballarat

Our services

Meeting people with the right support

We provide a broad range of services supporting children, adults, couples, families and communities across different stages of life.

While each of our services has a particular focus, many respond to multiple, diverse but interrelated needs, reflecting the complexity of the experiences of the people we support. We often see clients simultaneously navigating issues, such as mental health issues alongside challenges such as separation and divorce, family violence and family law disputes.

Explore all our services



What we delivered

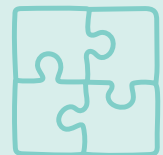
79,775

hours of service delivery



136

unique services and professional training offerings



1,804

FDR clients



3,974

counselling clients



5,897

FRC clients



66

client services, programs and groups



70

professional training and development offerings



Every service is an opportunity to strengthen the wellbeing of children, even when children aren't the direct clients.



Children, parents and families

Child and Parent Counselling

For children and teenagers, and their parents and carers, to strengthen relationships and wellbeing.

Dads Group

A supportive space for dads to connect and talk about mental health, relationships and parenting.

early matters → page 55

A free program in Ballarat, Delahey and Kings Park, to enhance parenting skills, and promote child wellbeing and healthy, safe family relationships. Includes:

- ATTUNE and ATTUNE Plus – antenatal and postnatal programs for expectant and/or new parents
- Circle of Security Parenting™ – an emotional needs and relationship-building program for parents
- Parenting Support Service – short-term, needs-focused interventions
- Tuning in to Kids® and Tuning in to Teens® – emotional intelligence parenting programs.



Intercountry Adoptee and Family Support Service

Free support for intercountry adoptees and their families.

Respect and Connect → page 26

A skills-based schools' program for primary and secondary students focused on healthy relationships, gender equality, managing emotions, communication and conflict skills.

The Family Link → page 51

An initiative in Ballarat helping to connect families with local services and with each other.

Tuning in to Kids®

An emotional intelligence parenting program, including specialised groups for:

- mums
- dads
- multicultural families
- Afghan mothers → page 53



Tuning in to Teens®

An emotional intelligence parenting program with specialised groups for culturally and linguistically diverse parents.

Information sessions and workshops

Get ready for high school

An information session for parents and carers of year 5 and 6 students, based on content from the Tuning in to Teens® program.

Raising resilient kids

A practical workshop for parents, grandparents and carers of primary school-aged children, based on content from the Tuning in to Kids® program.

Staying connected in a digital world

A webinar to help parents and carers support their child's wellbeing when using screens, social media and technology, based on the Tuning in to Kids® program.

Understanding children's emotions

An information session delivered in simple English to help multicultural parents connect with their child and understand and manage big feelings.

Unlocking the mysteries of the teenage brain

A webinar to help parents and carers strengthen their relationship with their teen and support them as they navigate this important developmental stage. The content is based on the Tuning in to Teens® program.

Counselling

Counselling → page 25

For individuals including children, and couples and families.

Family therapy

For families experiencing relationship challenges or changes.

Family violence → page 34

bRAVe Steps → page 35

A free therapeutic service in Cranbourne for children and young people aged 18 and under who are impacted by family violence.

Family Safety Contact

Support, safety planning, and risk and needs assessments for family members, partners and children of men participating in men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs), men's case management and post-MBCP programs.

Family Safety Navigation program

Enhanced safety and wellbeing support for FDR clients who are impacted by family violence, or have other complex needs.

Family violence counselling → page 35

A free therapeutic service for people aged 16 and over who are affected by family violence.

Men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs)

Free programs for men who have used violent, harmful or controlling behaviour towards family members, including partners and/or children, and who want to change their behaviour.

Men's case management program

Free, personalised support for men who want to stop using violent or harmful behaviours.

Repair-enting

A parenting program for fathers who have used violence in their relationships and completed an MBCP and wish to rebuild their relationships with their children.

Sustain

A program to reinforce behaviour change for men who have completed an MBCP.

Women Making Choices

A program for women who are affected by controlling and abusive behaviours.



Amazing counselling

service. My counsellor was kind, compassionate, deeply understanding, and offered thoughtful, insightful guidance that truly made a difference. I felt heard, supported and respected throughout the process. Highly recommend.'

– Counselling client, Sunshine



You Are Not Alone

A recovery group for women who have been impacted by family violence.

Mental health and wellbeing

Child Mental Health Service → page 16

A free mental health service for children aged 4 to 13 years, and their parents, who are experiencing separation and divorce.

Connect Me → page 18

Free early intervention mental health counselling and support program for children in Gippsland aged 4 to 11 years.

headspace sites → page 22

Information, support and services for young people aged 12 to 25 years, and their families. Services cover mental health and wellbeing, physical and sexual health, work and study support, and alcohol and other drug services. Through our headspace sites we provide:

- AMPLIFY – a project/social group that plans and delivers social activities for LGBTIQ+ young people
- Fit for mind – a free gym group for young men aged 14 to 25 years, combining fitness training and group discussions to support positive mental health
- Games group – for young people with autism
- socialspace – a social connections support group
- Social skills group – free sessions to assist young people to improve their social skills in real-life settings
- Unique but United (UBU) – an LGBTIQ+ social group delivered in partnership with Healthy Equal Youth



- Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs) – young people who contribute to the governance, service planning, design, delivery and continuous improvement of our headspace services.

i-Connect → page 21

A free, early intervention Family Mental Health Support Service for children and young people aged 18 years and under in East Gippsland including:

- Caring-Go-Round – a therapeutic program delivered in schools.

Men Being Well

A free program for men to meet, talk and learn about wellbeing through connection, reflection and peer support.

Victoria Legal Aid Family Advocacy and Support Services Mental Health Support

Free, strengths-based mental health supports for people with family court matters who are affected by family violence.

Youth Enhanced Service (YES) → page 24

Free mental health and wellbeing support for young people with complex mental health needs, aged 12 to 25 years in Gippsland.

Rehabilitation and reintegration

ATLAS

An interactive 10-module program targeting the wellbeing and personal development of un-sentenced and pre-trial individuals (persons on remand).

Diffuse

A 7-week psychoeducational program for people engaged with the correctional system.

LINCS

Strengths-based, psychoeducational workshops for individuals who are subject to a community correction order, with specialist programs for First Nations men.

LINCS in Families

Psychoeducational workshops for people who are subject to a community correction order as a result of family violence.

Relationships

Prepare/Enrich®

A pre-marriage, pre-commitment and relationship enrichment program.

Separation

AccessResolve Property Mediation and Conciliation Service → **page 29**

A property dispute resolution service for court-ordered clients, delivered on behalf of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia.

Family dispute resolution (FDR) → **page 28**

Mediation for parenting and property matters, including:

- Child-Inclusive FDR
- Lawyer-Inclusive FDR → **page 30**
- Legally-Assisted FDR
- Court-Ordered Dispute Resolution.

Family Relationship Centres

Information, referral, FDR and programs for parenting and property matters, to support couples and families experiencing relationship difficulties, including separation.



Berwick Family Relationship Centre

Focus on Kids → **page 32**

A webinar to help parents to understand their children's experience of separation and associated conflict, and focus on their children during FDR.

Parenting After Separation Seminar

An online program that provides parents with key information and strategies to support children to adjust to separation.

Specialist services

Forced Adoption Support Service → **page 58**

Free and confidential counselling, support and information for people affected by forced adoption.

Open Place → **page 40**

A free specialist support service for people who grew up in institutional care in Victoria prior to 1990, known as Forgotten Australians / Pre-1990 Care Leavers.

Redress Support Services → **page 58**

Free and confidential support for anyone making, or considering making, an application through the National Redress Scheme.

Training, Learning and Innovation → **page 78**

A diverse range of accredited and non-accredited training and professional development programs.

Workplace services

In-person and online support for workplaces to improve interpersonal relationships, effective communication, and practice, and resolve conflict. Includes:

- conflict resolution
- critical incident debriefing and counselling
- management training
- mediation and conciliation
- supervision services.

Healthy relationships, stronger mental health. Let's build it together.

1 in 2

of clients across our
services in 2025–26
had mental health needs



Watch: How relationships shape
mental health



Dedicated mental health support for children through separation



For many children, separation is one of the most significant changes they experience. It can bring uncertainty and big emotions as family life changes around them.



By providing support when it's needed most, we help children and families navigate separation with greater confidence, capacity and connection. Our new Child Mental Health Service provides early support for emerging mental health issues, to help children:



build resilience



navigate life changes with greater confidence and a sense of security



express their emotions in healthy ways



reduce the likelihood of longer-term mental health issues.

Our new Child Mental Health Service provides free, short-term, early intervention support for children aged 4 to 13 years experiencing mental health and wellbeing challenges arising from family separation or divorce.

We developed the service to give children a safe place to talk about their experience of their parents' separation, understand and manage their emotions, and build resilience. It helps to improve children's mental health and wellbeing, and build the social and emotional skills children need to navigate change.



124

sessions provided

Launched in September 2025, the Child Mental Health Service is our first dedicated mental health service supporting children after separation.

Through a whole-of-family approach, we also support parents to:

- better understand how separation can affect their child's mental health and wellbeing
- recognise and respond to their child's needs
- strengthen their relationship with their child
- connect with specialist services, where appropriate.

The face-to-face service is delivered from our Kew centre and is available to families from across Victoria who can attend in person. By providing free support early in age-appropriate ways, we aim to improve children's mental health and wellbeing while strengthening the relationships that help families to adapt and move forward positively after separation.

Learn how to access the service



Practitioner insight

One of the most meaningful parts of this work is helping children find their voice, especially during separation, which is one of life's biggest challenges. When children are given the space to express how they feel and what they need, it's incredibly empowering for them. At the same time, it can be quite humbling and eye-opening for parents. They often gain a deeper understanding of their child's experience, which builds empathy and strengthens their connection. It becomes a powerful experience for families, and the positive impact can be long-lasting.

– Naomi, Senior Child Therapist & Coordinator

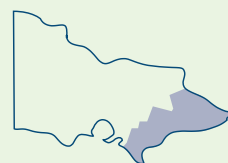


Bringing mental health support to regional schools in Gippsland



Where a child lives shouldn't determine whether they can access mental health support.

In Gippsland, Connect Me delivers early intervention mental health counselling through schools, helping children and families in regional and rural communities overcome barriers such as distance, cost and limited services, so they can access support earlier, closer to home.



Children and families in regional communities can face significant barriers to accessing mental health support, including distance, cost, limited local services and long waiting times. By delivering early intervention support in schools, our Connect Me outreach counselling service can reach children sooner, in a place where they already spend much of their time. It helps to strengthen their wellbeing and provides support before challenges become more significant.

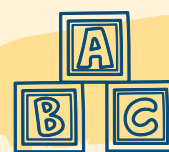
Connect Me provides free, early intervention mental health support for children aged 4 to 11 years in schools across Gippsland. Using a strengths-based approach, we support children experiencing challenges such as feeling stressed, worried, anxious or overwhelmed, relationship difficulties, or changes affecting their everyday lives. Together with children and their families, we help build confidence, strengthen emotional wellbeing and develop practical skills to navigate life's challenges.

Taking a whole-of-community approach, the program recognises that children achieve the best outcomes when the people around them work together.

Reach across Gippsland

10

kindergartens engaged in the service



96

schools engaged in the service

215

children supported



We work alongside children, parents and carers, school wellbeing staff, teachers, health services and community organisations. We encourage coordinated support that responds to each child's individual needs. This can include identifying emerging support needs early, developing safety plans where appropriate, and connecting children and families with additional services when they need them.

This year, we saw an increasing number of children referred to the program with complex needs. This reinforces the importance of timely, accessible services across the spectrum of prevention, early intervention, response and recovery. By providing support early and working collaboratively with families, schools and local services, we are helping children receive the right support at the right time.

Common outcomes for clients include:

- greater confidence to understand and express emotions
- improved emotional regulation skills
- stronger relationships with family, friends and trusted adults
- greater confidence to seek help when needed
- improved wellbeing and daily functioning.

These outcomes help build the skills, confidence and relationships that support children's mental health now and into the future.

Practitioner insight

A meaningful change that I often see in clients is when young people begin to understand and communicate their emotions more effectively. As they build emotional awareness and learn coping skills, they often become more confident in seeking support and navigating challenges in their life as they arise.'

– Hayley Wood, Connect Me Clinician

Extending our reach



The Connect Me program works across 6 local government areas, and this year provided support in 10 additional Gippsland primary schools, enhancing access to early intervention mental health support across the region.

Explore the Connect Me program



Connect Me is funded by the Gippsland Primary Health Network, which is leading the primary mental health and suicide prevention stepped care response of Gippsland.

Community insight

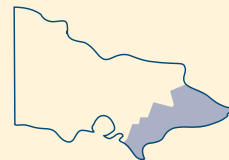
As a small rural school, having access to responsive and genuine support services makes a significant difference for our students and families.

The Connect Me team have been approachable, flexible and easy to work with throughout the referral process. We've particularly appreciated the way support is centred around the individual child, taking the time to build trust, understand their needs and help them feel safe, supported and heard. It has been wonderful to have another layer of support available for our school community.'

– School staff member

Stories behind the services

Daphne: Better sleep, renewed confidence and a return to school



1

Six-year-old Daphne was referred to Connect Me after struggling to regularly attend school. Her family and school had worked together to understand why she was finding it so difficult to attend school, but hadn't been able to identify the underlying cause or increase her attendance.



2

During counselling sessions at home and at school, Daphne shared that she had been having vivid night terrors and was afraid of her bedroom. She wasn't sleeping well, felt exhausted most of the time, and didn't have the energy or sense of safety she needed to get through the school day.



3

With Daphne's consent, her practitioner worked with her family to explore possible triggers and practical ways to help Daphne feel safer and more settled at night.

The family embraced a range of practical strategies, including involving Daphne to refresh her bedroom, adding a nightlight, creating a calmer bedtime routine and providing a safe space for her to talk about her worries.



4

As Daphne's sleep rapidly improved, so did her emotional wellbeing. She showed an interest in improving her morning routine and getting to school on time, and began attending school more consistently.

Daphne's parents and teachers shared that she was able to talk about and regulate her emotions better, which was helping her relationships with friends and family, and improving outcomes both at home and at school.

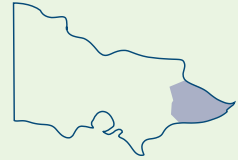


As children build communication, relationship and self-advocacy skills, the benefits often extend well beyond the counselling room. We regularly see positive ripple effects across family relationships, social connections, engagement in the community and overall wellbeing.'

– Kylie Lancaster, Centre Manager Gippsland

Working in East Gippsland schools and communities, where children need us[!]

For children and young people, particularly, accessible mental health early intervention can make a lasting difference during the critical years of emotional, social and educational development.



Mental health challenges can affect every part of a child's life, from school attendance to friendships, family relationships, community connections, sense of safety and daily functioning. Available across East Gippsland, i-Connect is helping children and young people aged 0 to 18 years who are at risk of developing mental health issues or have a diagnosed mental health issue. It provides early intervention to help address concerns before they become more significant.

Using a therapeutic case management approach, our team works alongside children, families, schools and other local services to develop practical strategies; strengthen young people's support networks; and build confidence to improve communication, emotional wellbeing and daily routines. By delivering outreach services across East Gippsland, we reduce barriers to accessing care and make it easier for children and families in regional communities to access health services close to home.

This year, the program continued to respond to growing demand from children and young people with increasingly complex needs. Working closely with schools has been particularly important, enabling children to access mental health support in familiar environments while reducing disruption to their education. Parents have told us that if their child had not been able access support at school, they simply wouldn't be able to access suitable support at all.



The beauty of the program is that case management can be so broad. Its outreach approach meets the needs of our regional communities and we see children and young people where they need to be met.'

– Kylie Lancaster, Centre Manager Gippsland

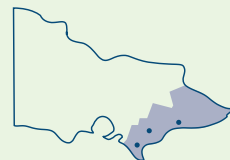
Explore the i-Connect program



i-Connect is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

A positive headspace for young people in South and East Gippsland

Every young person deserves to feel seen, heard and supported, and have access to welcoming, inclusive and accessible mental health and wellbeing services. That's what headspace is all about.



Growing up comes with new opportunities, but it can also bring with it considerable changes, uncertainty and pressure. Whether it's concerns about mental health, relationships, physical health, alcohol and other drugs, or work and study, young people need to be able to access the right support at the right time.

From our headspace Bairnsdale, Sale and Wonthaggi sites, we provide free, youth-friendly information, support and services for young people aged 12 to 25 years and support for their families. This is available across the Bass Coast, South Gippsland, Wellington and East Gippsland shires.

We help young people access the support they need in one welcoming place. Our multidisciplinary teams provide care across 4 core areas:

1. mental health and wellbeing
2. physical and sexual health
3. alcohol and other drugs
4. work and study.

Young people are at the centre of everything we do, with our Youth Advisory Groups helping to shape our services and ensuring our centres remain relevant, welcoming and responsive to local needs. Young people who engage with headspace are more likely to experience improvements in their:

- mental health and wellbeing
- relationships with family, friends and others
- confidence in seeking support.

This year, our headspace Bairnsdale centre increased engagement with multicultural young people through targeted community outreach. This followed its identification as a priority in our Community Engagement Action Plan. At headspace Wonthaggi, the introduction of secondary consultations for telepsychiatry improved access to specialist psychiatric advice, helping more young people in regional communities continue receiving care closer to home.



We are privileged to see the small but meaningful changes in young people from the moment they first come through our doors. These changes remind us why this service is so important. Young people in our community have a safe space where they feel seen and heard, build confidence, and develop the strength and strategies to manage the challenges they face, with the support of headspace staff.'

– Client Services Coordinator



headspace Wonthaggi celebrating Wear it Purple Day

Across our 3 headspace sites

11.2%

of clients identified as being
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

29.8%

identified as LGBTIQ+

67.1%

of clients were aged
12 to 17 years



4,136

services were delivered

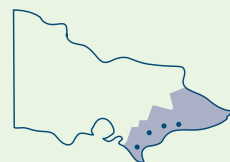
92.5%

client satisfaction

headspace Bairnsdale, Sale and Wonthaggi are operated by RAV. All headspace services are funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. Administration of funding is carried out by the headspace centre's local Primary Health Network, in this case, Gippsland Primary Health Network.

‘YES’ to mental health support for young people in the ‘missing middle’

Young people shouldn't have to wait for their mental health to get worse, or improve, before they can access the right help. Our Youth Enhanced Service helps bridge the gap, meeting young people in Gippsland where they are with the support they need.



Our Youth Enhanced Service (YES) provides free mental health and wellbeing support for young people aged 12 to 25 years across Gippsland. It supports young people whose mental health needs are often too complex for services such as headspace, but who do not meet the criteria for public specialist mental health services, leaving them without access to the level of support they need.

This year, YES continued to deliver outreach services in communities including Orbost, Yarram, Cowes and Drouin. It helped young people overcome barriers such as transport and geographic isolation so they can access mental health support closer to home.

With support available for up to 12 months, YES provides therapeutic support for many young people who otherwise may not have been able to access existing services. Young people who access the program report reduced levels of distress, increased understanding of their emotions, improved coping skills, and stronger relationships with family and friends.

Explore the YES program



The YES program is provided by RAV and funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. Administration of funding is carried out by the Gippsland Primary Health Network.

149

young people supported



Young people that come to the YES program have often bounced around between different services and are unsure where they can get support from. This is compounded when transport is an issue and the young person is isolated – geographically and socially. By providing outreach, our team can meet young people where they are at, and work alongside them to achieve their goals, improve their mental health and improve their relationships.

– Cate Chaiyot, Manager Youth Mental Health Services

Strengthening relationships

A space to work through what matters

Relationships and families are central to our lives, but they can also be where some of our most difficult experiences occur.

By providing clients with a dedicated time and space to focus on what's most important, counselling can help to reduce distress, strengthen relationships and support people to make positive changes in their lives.

Separation and divorce, parenting issues, conflict, grief and loss, mental health issues, financial stress and major life changes can affect not only our relationships, but also our health and wellbeing.

Our counselling service supports individuals, couples, children, young people, parents and families to work through these experiences in a safe and supportive environment. Our experienced counsellors work alongside our clients to:

- understand their concerns
- reflect on their experiences and relationships
- consider their options
- identify the changes that matter to them.

Every client's circumstances and goals are different, and we respond by providing support that best suits each client's needs. That may involve:

- strengthening communication between partners
- helping a family navigate change
- supporting parents with their relationships with their children
- managing difficult emotions
- helping someone understand how past experiences are affecting their life and relationships today.



3,974
counselling clients

Common support needs of our counselling clients



- Relationship difficulties, including communication issues, infidelity and trust
- Mental health issues, including anxiety and depression
- Trauma
- Parenting skills and support
- Child wellbeing and development
- Family violence and safety planning



Used this service this year with my partner. Excellent progress, amazing staff. Was a great place to go and find ourselves again.'

– Counselling client

Building respectful relationships early



We don't just teach young people about healthy relationships, we model them.

Through Respect and Connect, our facilitators demonstrate empathy, respect and healthy communication in every interaction, because the relationships young people experience today help shape the blueprint for a future generation of relationships.



Respect and Connect supports primary and secondary school students to build the emotional awareness, relationship skills and confidence they need to navigate friendships, adolescence and future relationships. Through evidence-based, interactive learning, the program helps young people explore respect, equality, communication and mental wellbeing in a safe and supportive environment.

Children and young people begin forming ideas about relationships, identity, equality and belonging long before adulthood. Early adolescence is an important time to strengthen the skills and attitudes that support safe, respectful relationships and positive mental wellbeing. Respect and Connect aims to work with children and young people to promote healthy, respectful relationships, improve mental wellbeing and prevent gender-based violence before it occurs.

This year, we expanded our delivery to upper primary students to support children at the crucial developmental stage in life when they are forming new ideas about themselves and the world. This is a time when peers rather than parents can become the most important influences in their life, and exposure to ideas from social media and community increases.

Year 5 to 9

student participants



14,000+

students have participated since the program first began

Starting respectful relationship conversations early helps steer young people towards pathways for healthy relationships in a world of competing messages and influences. Young people can feel more seen and included as we foster healthy relationships and promote gender equality. We support them to build skills and knowledge around emotional intelligence, and strengthen communication and conflict resolution skills – skills they can use now with friends and family, and in future relationships.

The strength of our targeted, 4-session program lies in the relationships created in the room through healthy role modelling. Our mental health-trained facilitators

are experienced in therapeutic work with young people. They help students feel safe to ask questions, share their views and explore topics that can feel uncomfortable or may not otherwise be discussed in everyday life.

Teachers also take part in the learning. By observing and joining these conversations, they build confidence in the language and approaches needed to continue supporting students. This whole-school focus helps reinforce consistent messages about respect, equality and wellbeing long after the program itself ends.

Get your school involved



Facilitator insight

We meet students where they are and provide a non-judgemental space for them to show up as they are and share and explore how they think and feel about tricky topics that are a part of their everyday world. The program also provides them with skills and healthy role modelling to equip them to build protective factors around them to have a healthy life, now and in the future.'

– Respect and Connect Coordinator



We provide FDR, also known as mediation, to support separating couples to resolve parenting and property family law disputes.

Our FDR and mediation services:



AccessResolve Property Mediation and Conciliation Service



Child-Inclusive FDR



Lawyer-Inclusive FDR



Legally-Assisted FDR



Court-Ordered Dispute Resolution

Moving beyond court with mediation

Our AccessResolve Property Mediation and Conciliation service helps to reduce the emotional, financial and practical impacts of prolonged family law conflict.

The mediation service helps separating parties to move forward with greater certainty and confidence. It provides property dispute resolution to separating parties who have begun proceedings in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia.

The service uses a conciliation model, in which legally qualified FDR practitioners may adopt an advisory role, when necessary, to help clients reach agreements. AccessResolve continues to achieve consistently strong settlement rates while improving access to timely and effective dispute resolution, in metropolitan and regional court locations across Australia.

Despite clients being court-ordered to attend, many AccessResolve clients gain increased confidence in navigating complex legal processes. They also increase their ability to communicate, negotiate and resolve conflict constructively after the service.

This year, we welcomed an announcement of a significant expansion of this service from 2026–27. This will enable us to extend support to court-directed clients with:

- parenting matters
- property matters
- both parenting and property matters.

Read our latest research on what drives property settlement through AccessResolve



29.5%
increase in clients

30+

court locations
supported across Australia



14
years delivering the services



Practitioner insight

One of the most meaningful changes I see in our clients is the shift from feeling overwhelmed and uncertain to feeling heard, informed and better prepared to make decisions. We often work with self-represented parties who are navigating a complex court process without legal representation and simply helping them understand what to expect can make a significant difference.'

– Intake Assessment FDR Practitioner,
AccessResolve Property Mediation and Conciliation

Bringing together legal advice and FDR after separation

Resolving disputes early, with the right legal and professional mediation support, can reduce conflict and costs.

It can also help parents to communicate more effectively and support safer, more positive co-parenting arrangements, where appropriate. By helping parents look beyond their disputes and focus on the needs of their children, Lawyer-Inclusive FDR can support the wellbeing, safety and stability of children and their families.



Many separating couples want to resolve parenting, property and financial matters without the cost, distress, delays and uncertainty of court proceedings. Lawyer-Inclusive FDR brings together an accredited FDR practitioner and one or both people's lawyers to help clients discuss issues, make informed decisions, and reach timely agreements while remaining at the centre of decision-making.

In July 2025, we launched a pilot of a new Lawyer-Inclusive FDR model at our Kew Centre, providing separated couples with another option for resolving parenting, property and financial matters. Unlike traditional FDR, clients attend sessions with their lawyer so they can receive real-time legal advice and support from their lawyer as discussions unfold. Our practitioners provide a safe and supportive space as they guide conversations and help people explore practical options so that they can reach agreements.

This voluntary service can be a valuable alternative for people who have already commenced or are yet to commence court proceedings, but who want a less adversarial process. It can help resolve issues more efficiently and reduce the need for lengthy negotiations or further court proceedings. The presence of a lawyer by their side can also support people experiencing family violence, power imbalances or other barriers to participating confidently in FDR, where appropriate.

Most family law matters are resolved without a judge making the final decision, with many people reaching agreement through negotiation or dispute resolution.



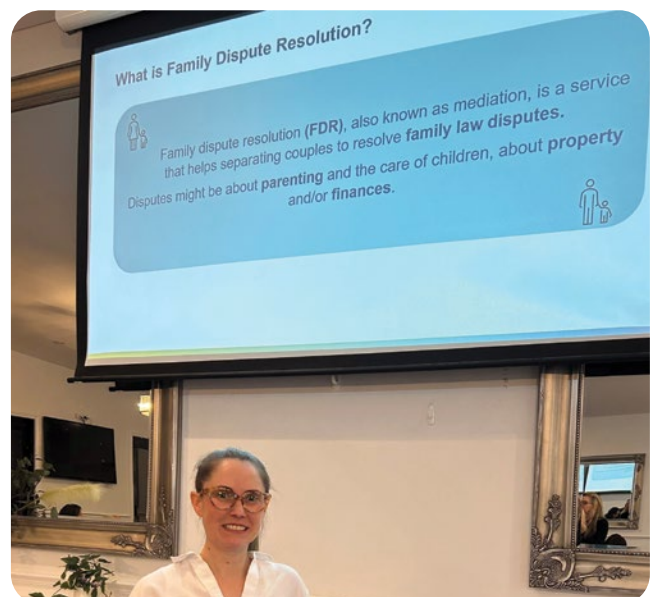
92%

of clients said they were able to express their point of view in mediation



100%

of clients felt more confident participating with their lawyer's support



Rachael Ellerton, Practice Specialist – Lawyer-Inclusive FDR

Sessions are available both in person at our Kew Centre and online. The service has been well received by clients living in regional areas who may have limited access to FDR, including Lawyer-Inclusive FDR closer to home. Alongside the pilot, we have implemented a comprehensive evaluation to better understand the experiences of clients, lawyers and practitioners, and to inform the future development of the service.

Our Lawyer-Inclusive FDR service is provided in addition to our other FDR services for parenting and property matters, including Legally-Assisted FDR, and Child-Inclusive FDR.



Client insight

If all the back-and-forth had been done as lawyers' letters [instead of this service], it might've taken months, been very expensive and maybe never gotten to this conclusion.'

– Lawyer-Inclusive FDR client

Related research



Read about our latest research on:

- hearing children and young people's voices in FDR, and general service design and delivery
- improving access to FDR for vulnerable clients with our Legally-Assisted FDR service, delivered in partnership with community legal centres
- the role of co-parenting apps after separation.

See pages 66–68.

Learn how the service works



Helping parents put children first during separation

Separation can be a difficult time for children, especially when they are exposed to ongoing conflict or feel stuck in the middle between their parents.

Focus on Kids is a free, interactive webinar for parents participating in our FDR service. It helps them understand separation from a child's perspective and how they can best support their children through this time.

Using a strengths-based approach, the webinar helps to prepare parents for FDR by:

- exploring challenges after separation, such as protecting children from conflict
- navigating co-parenting when communication is difficult
- reassuring children that the separation is not their fault
- making the most of the FDR process.

Parents leave with practical ideas and greater confidence to support their children while working towards future parenting arrangements.

Delivered online in a private and interactive format, Focus on Kids encourages parents to reflect on their own experiences, learn from practical examples, and keep their children's wellbeing at the centre of decision-making.



**Every child deserves[!]
a childhood free from violence.**



What is family violence?

Family violence (domestic violence) doesn't only include physical assault.

It includes a range of power and control behaviours which may include:

- direct or indirect threats
- fear and intimidation
- sexual assault or coercion
- emotional and psychological abuse
- financial control
- social isolation
- harming or threatening to harm pets
- monitoring and surveillance of movement and social life
- spiritual and religious abuse
- manipulative behaviours such as gaslighting (making you question your perception of reality)
- other behaviours that cause you to live in fear.

Together, these behaviours can form a pattern known as coercive control.

Coercive control is ongoing, continuous abuse over time that's often covert and difficult to identify, and used by a person to control, dominate and intimidate another family member.



Helping children and families recover from family violence

Family violence doesn't end when the violence stops. Children, parents and families all need opportunities to feel safe and recover.



Children don't have to have family violence directed at them, to experience its impacts. Family violence can affect children's emotional wellbeing, relationships, learning, development and sense of safety, often long after the violence has ended. Parents, too, are often recovering from their own experiences while trying to support their children.

Through our specialist family violence services, we provide free, trauma-informed counselling for adults, children and families, alongside evidence-based parenting programs. Recognising each person's unique circumstances, we help people understand and recover from the psychological, emotional and physical impacts of family violence.

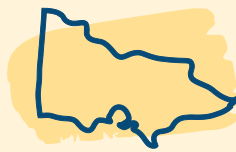
Our counselling service offers a pathway to healing and recovery. Up to 8 free sessions are available to children and adults from across 14 regions of Melbourne and Victoria, as well as in person at our Cranbourne centre or online via videoconferencing.

Through our children's counselling service, named bRAVe steps, children are supported to understand and manage their feelings, strengthen their relationships, focus on what's important to them and achieve their personal goals. Parents gain a deeper understanding of their children's emotional and developmental needs while learning practical, emotionally responsive parenting strategies that help build trust and support their children's recovery.

Alongside counselling, we deliver the Tuning in to Kids® and Tuning in to Teens® parenting programs, including culturally responsive programs delivered in Dari for Afghan mothers (see page 53), as well as programs for multicultural mothers delivered in English. These programs help parents understand their children's emotions, respond with empathy, and strengthen family relationships while creating opportunities for connection, learning and support within communities.

8

free sessions available



13

Victorian municipalities and communities supported

This year, we continued to see increasing demand for support from families affected by family violence. Across counselling and parenting programs, parents reported greater confidence, improved communication with their children and a stronger understanding of the impacts of trauma. Children demonstrated improved emotional regulation, reduced trauma symptoms, and increased confidence and engagement at home and school. Families also reported leaving the service with a greater awareness of community supports and practical strategies that could help them maintain their wellbeing beyond counselling.

Learn more about our support services for victim-survivors



Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

Supporting change. Prioritising safety

Family violence has significant and lasting impacts on individuals, children, families and communities.

But it can be prevented. When people who use violence are supported to take responsibility for their behaviour and make lasting changes, children, partners and families are safer.



Preventing family violence means working at every stage, from early prevention to supporting recovery, to stop violence from happening again. Our programs work with men who have used family violence. The programs help them to understand the beliefs and attitudes that drive their behaviour; take responsibility for the harm they have caused; and develop healthier, safer ways of managing their emotions, responding to conflict and relating to others.

Many participants begin our MBCPs minimising their behaviour, blaming others, or not recognising what they have done as family violence at all. Across 20 weekly, structured sessions, they build insight into the impacts of their behaviour on partners, children and other family members. Participants learn practical strategies to help them regulate their emotions.

For some men, meaningful behaviour change also requires support to address practical barriers such as mental health concerns, alcohol and other drug use, housing instability, unemployment or financial hardship. Addressing these issues, alongside or before MBCPs, or as a standalone process, helps participants remain engaged in the process of change while reducing factors that may increase the risk of men perpetrating family violence.

Children, partners, former partners and family members remain at the heart of this work. By helping men understand what family violence is and its effects, including for children, we support men to create emotionally and physically safer family relationships. Research continues to show that children who have positive relationships with their fathers are substantially less likely to go on to use intimate partner violence themselves as adults. This reinforces the importance of fathers changing how they parent and use violence now, to interrupt the intergenerational impact of violence on children and the next generation of adults.

508

Men's Case Management clients

904

MBCP clients

986

Family Safety Contact clients

Our Theory of Change



We strengthened the evidence base for MBCPs through the co-design of a national Theory of Change, in partnership with Relationships Australia (RA) organisations and the Australian Institute of Family Studies (see page 64).

Safety for victim-survivors is central to our services. Through dedicated Family Safety Contact work, our practitioners engage directly with current and former partners and family members to:

- provide information
- assess risk
- support safety planning
- give them a direct avenue to be heard and to raise concerns
- improve safety for them and their children
- enable them to provide valuable feedback about changes occurring over time.



Team insights

We couple these programs with victim-survivors, so it's a wholistic sort of program, and that is because the main aim of this program is not only changing behaviour but it's making sure that victim-survivors and children are safe.'

– Alyson La'Brooy, Manager Family Violence Services

Men speak about not having spaces with other men to speak deeply about topics, that this is a unique space to listen and share experiences with vulnerability. There is something powerful, in men being able to talk and think about different perspectives and feel connected to other men. This can make them understand themselves more or learn to be more empathic to others.'

– Men's family violence practitioner

[I see] clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds acknowledging they only saw one way growing up, still holding and cherishing their cultural backgrounds but wanting to provide a safe and respectful place for their family members moving forward.'

– Men's family violence practitioner

Outcomes our practitioners commonly see with clients



- Better understanding of what family violence is, recognising their behaviour as family violence, and understanding the impact of their behaviour on partners, former partners and family members.
- Understanding of how their children experience family violence, and the importance of emotionally and physically safe family relationships.
- Shift from denial and blame towards genuine accountability.
- Willingness to be more vulnerable and talk about feelings, rather than suppressing their emotions.
- Improved emotional regulation and communication skills.
- Improved stability in relation to housing, employment and finances, which in turn reduces risk.
- Learning how to navigate distress or conflict without using controlling, aggressive or violent behaviours.

Learn more about programs for men who use violence



Content note: The following story shares experiences of family violence that some readers may find distressing. Alcohol and other drugs do not cause family violence, and they are never an excuse for it. Responsibility for family violence sits with the person who chooses to use it.

Stories behind the services

Dinesh: Reflections on 20-week journey



‘Tomorrow marks the end of my 20-week journey through the men’s behaviour change program, and I wanted to share why I came here, what I have learned and what I am taking away from it.

I am in this program because of my behaviour towards Belinda.

After returning home from a night out drinking, we became involved in an argument. During that argument, I held Belinda’s arms and pushed my body onto hers while she was on the bed. Later, I learned that I had also grabbed her by the arms and pushed her against a wardrobe. The frightening part is that I have no recollection of that moment. Knowing that I was capable of something I cannot even remember is something that still scares me today.

There is nothing I can say to justify my actions. There is nothing I can say that makes what I did acceptable.

Since that night, I have stopped drinking. Initially, that was partly due to the Intervention Order conditions that prevents me from being within 200 metres of my family if I have consumed alcohol. However, over time, remaining alcohol-free has become a choice. I never want to place myself, or the people I love, in that situation again.

The impact on Belinda is something I have had to face. I damaged her trust. I created fear. I gave her a memory of that night that she will likely carry for a very long time. Regardless of my intentions, my actions had consequences.

This incident was the final straw that brought me to this program. Looking back, I can see that emotional regulation has been a challenge for me for a long time. I would feel myself becoming worked up over minute things. I would allow anger to take control of my emotions and my behaviour. The regret would always come afterwards, words said or the actions. By then, the damage had already been done.

The truth is that I noticed these patterns years ago. I simply kept telling myself everything would be alright. I waited and hoped things would improve without actually doing the work required to change.

When I was first referred to this program, I looked for reasons not to participate. One of my concerns was that the program would involve contacting current and past partners. Eventually, I realised I was making excuses. The reality was that if I truly cared about the people around me, I needed to understand myself better. I needed to understand my patterns, my emotions and my behaviour. I came to see that the greater risk was not participating. If I did not learn how to regulate my emotions and address these issues, then I would not be the father, partner or person I wanted to be.

Before joining, I had assumptions about the men who attended this program. I thought the room would be full of violent and angry men and that I would somehow be different. I told myself that I wasn't the type of person who wanted to hurt the people I loved. What I discovered was something completely different.

The men I have met throughout this program have shown courage, honesty, vulnerability and accountability. Listening to their stories and experiences helped me understand that I am not different. We all arrived here because there were aspects of our behaviour that needed to change. We all arrived here because our actions had impacted others.

The men who shared their experiences gave me the strength to continue facing my own challenges. Through them, I learned that I am not superhuman. I learned that I have limits. I learned that I can become overwhelmed. I learned the importance of boundaries, self-awareness and self-care.

Most importantly, I learned that anger is a secondary emotion. That lesson alone changed how I see myself. Beneath anger there is often fear, shame, hurt, insecurity, frustration, disappointment or stress. Understanding this has allowed me to pause and ask myself what I am really feeling rather than simply reacting.

To the men who are new to this program, I encourage you to listen and to be open. The goal is not to prove that you are right. The goal is to understand yourself and to understand what you can do differently. The reason I kept coming back each week was simple: I wanted to become better. I wanted to be better for myself, my daughters, my family and the people around me.

This program has taught me that emotional regulation is a skill. It has taught me that my family should not have to walk on eggshells because of my mood, my stress or my inability to manage my emotions. That responsibility belongs to me.

One of the most eye-opening lessons from this program has been understanding that violence is not limited to physical acts. Violence can also be verbal, emotional, financial, sexual and coercive. I have learned that the impact of behaviour matters, not just the intention behind it.

As I finish this program, I do not see this as the end of the journey. I see it as the beginning of a new chapter of accountability, self-awareness and growth.

I cannot change the past. I cannot undo the harm I have caused. What I can do is continue applying what I have learned, continue being accountable for my actions, and continue working towards becoming the man, father and partner I want to be.'

Specialist support at Open Place



Childhood experiences can shape a person's life long after childhood ends.

By increasing understanding of the long-term impacts of institutional care, we can help Forgotten Australians receive the recognition, understanding and support they deserve.



More than half a million Australians spent time in orphanages, children's homes, foster care and other forms of institutional care before 1990. Today, many continue to live with the lifelong impacts of childhood abuse, neglect and trauma. Yet many Australians remain unaware that Forgotten Australians exist, or that specialist support is available.

'One woman who attended grew up in a state home and didn't even know she was a Forgotten Australian ... she didn't realise she was entitled to counselling, health support, redress or even to join a social support group.'

– Richard Dove, Open Place Coordinator
Community Education

Open Place is Victoria's specialist support service for Forgotten Australians (also known as Pre-1990 Care Leavers), based in Richmond. We provide a comprehensive suite of free services, including counselling, service navigation and advocacy, health support, redress support, records searches and family reunions, social support groups, community education, events and activities, and a dedicated drop-in centre.

13

support groups across Victoria



2,843

active service users

14,608

unique visitors to our
dedicated website



We have difficulty forming relationships and bringing up kids. We don't let anyone get too close to us. We push them away.'

– Forgotten Australian

Open Place supports adults who experienced institutional care in Victoria before 1990, or who now live in Victoria after growing up in institutional care interstate.

Many people come to Open Place believing they are alone in their experiences. Through counselling, social groups and other support services, people can find understanding, validation and a sense of belonging while receiving support to navigate the ongoing impacts of childhood trauma and look to the future they want.

We know that improving the lives of Forgotten Australians extends beyond the services we provide directly. Increasing community understanding helps ensure Forgotten Australians are recognised, treated with dignity and respect, and better supported wherever they access healthcare, community services and other supports.

Explore our Open Place



The Open Place suite of services is funded by the Victorian Government Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

We acknowledge the pain and loss of childhood experienced by Forgotten Australians, and we recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma.

Discovering that the abuse and neglect “didn’t just happen to them”, and that it was not their fault, and that there is a service that recognises this is empowering for many people who participate in Open Place services and connect with their fellow Forgotten Australians.’

– Michelle McDonald, Senior Manager Open Place

It is not enough to acknowledge the past, we must ensure that the trauma experienced by Forgotten Australians is understood, accommodated and never dismissed. Their voices must be heard, their needs respected and their dignity upheld.

– Ms Sarah Witty MP, Federal Melbourne for Melbourne



Open Place staff and service users with Sarah Witty MP, Member for Melbourne

Stories behind the services

David: Finding a new meaning in Christmas



1

For David, Christmas was one of the hardest times of the year. While he wanted to spend time with his children and grandchildren, he felt the day left him in an internal tug of war. Exchanging presents brought back painful memories of his own childhood, and the neglect and deprivation he experienced growing up in institutional care.

When he showed up to family celebrations, he didn't always feel festive, but didn't want to spoil the day for his children and grandchildren either. The days left him in pain and feeling lonely.



2

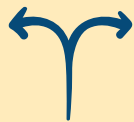
A week before Christmas last year, David spoke with his Open Place counsellor about wanting this year to be different. With his counsellor's support, he reflected on his own childhood experiences of Christmas, the experiences of his children and grandchildren, his contribution to making their childhoods different to his, and why his family kept inviting him to Christmas each year.

Together, they explored what Christmas meant to him, why it matters so much to his family, and how he could celebrate in a way that aligned with his own values.



3

Through these conversations, David realised he had choices. Rather than reliving the past, he could choose how he ‘showed up’ for his family. He could choose to take gifts that reflected what was important to him at Christmas. He realised that it was possible to celebrate in a way that was comfortable for him.



4

For David, Christmas meant family and love. He bought each family member a pair of matching socks, and for the first time in his life, he looked forward to exchanging gifts. When it was his turn, he asked everyone to remove their shoes and socks, and open their gifts at the same time. David asked everyone to put their new socks on, gather in a circle and hold hands, and he then led them all in singing We Are Family. There was laughter, tears, singing and dancing, all connected by his family holding hands together. His grandchildren later declared it the ‘best Christmas ever’, and the family captured the moment with a photo of everyone’s feet in a circle in matching socks.

For David, it was a realisation that, despite the childhood he experienced, he had a lot to celebrate, and had created something very different for the generations that followed that he had never had growing up: family.



Turning lived experience into community education

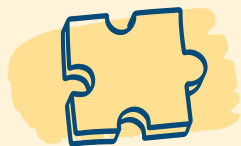
In November 2025, Open Place launched **to be seen**, the Forgotten Australians Community Education Report and Priorities.

Developed through consultations with Forgotten Australians across Victoria, the report captures what Forgotten Australians most want people to understand: **to be treated with dignity and respect, to have their experiences recognised, and ultimately, to be seen.**

The report and its 6 identified priorities are now guiding Open Place's community education and advocacy work. Forgotten Australians are sharing it in the community to help organisations and services better understand the lasting impacts of institutional care, and how they can respond with greater understanding and compassion.

195

Forgotten Australians
shaped to be seen



Education priorities

1. How can you still not know who we are?

Forgotten Australians want for all Australians to know the history of Forgotten Australians; for their traumas to be understood; and for Forgotten Australians to be treated with dignity, respect and understanding.

2. The tick-box

Forgotten Australians want a process to be able to identify as a Forgotten Australian at all services in Victoria, and to have this met with understanding and empathy.

3. The forgotten forgotten

Forgotten Australians want all Forgotten Australians to know they can identify as a Forgotten Australian and to be informed of the support available to them.

4. Healthy health services

Forgotten Australians want all health, mental health, dental, aged care and palliative care services in Australia to be compassionate and empathetic towards Forgotten Australians, and to develop practices to reduce and prevent re-traumatisation when accessing these services.

5. Education! Education! Education!

Forgotten Australians want the history, apologies, abuses and inquiries relating to Australia's 20th century institutional care system for children to be included in primary, secondary and tertiary education curricula in Australia.

6. We are family

Forgotten Australians want programs and projects to help them build a sense of belonging and identity within the Forgotten Australian community, within the wider community and within themselves.



Forgotten Australians will never get their childhood back. However, through active community education on the part of all of us, their story can be told and understood, and they can be treated with dignity and respect.'

– Michelle McDonald, Senior Manager Open Place



Request to be seen

Download your copy



Contact our Community Education Coordinator to request a printed copy of to be seen report, or book a free community education presentation for your organisation, service or community group.

Email info@openplace.org.au or call (03) 9421 6162.

Meeting people where they are

Our impact extends well beyond our service delivery rooms.

While face-to-face and online services remain at the heart of what we do, we also use digital channels to share trusted information, practical resources and professional expertise with people across Victoria and beyond. Through our websites, online services, social media, videos and digital resources, we're helping more people access support, strengthen their relationships, and build the knowledge and skills that contribute to healthier individuals, families and communities.



New videos and animations

Accessible digital resources to help people understand our organisation, services, and the connection between relationships and mental health.

Who we are

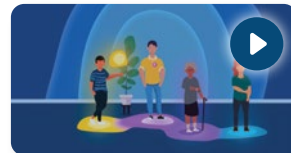
Watch: RAV in 60 seconds



Relationships and mental health

Relationships influence our development, identity and sense of belonging at every stage of life. These animations highlight how everyday interactions – from early childhood to older age – can build resilience and strengthen mental health across the lifespan.

Watch: How relationships shape mental health



Watch: Healthy relationships, stronger mental health



Lived experiences of separation

The RA Federation developed these 4 animations to support people experiencing separation and the professionals who work with them.

Explore the animations



Your choices after separation



Being flexible and adaptive for our child



My mob have my back



Our new normal



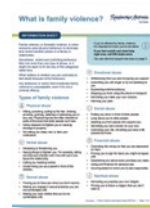
Digital engagement

Most frequently accessed online resources

1. Access: What is coercive control?



2. Access: What is family violence?



3. Access: Safe from violence – A guide for women who are separating or leaving a relationship



302,000

unique website visitors



824,000

website page views



1.3m

views of our social media content



Dedicated new website

We launched a new website for our Centre for Learning and Innovation, providing a new way to discover professional development and training opportunities, understand course outcomes and identify learning aligned to professional goals.

Visit learning.rav.org.au



Rainbow

Strengthening safety and inclusion for LGBTIQ+ people

When people experience genuine inclusion and belonging, they are more likely to seek support and engage with services.

By creating environments that are welcoming, respectful and culturally responsive, we can help ensure individuals, families, staff and community members feel safe, supported and confident to access the services they need.



For more than 10 years, our Rainbow Working Group has helped to make RAV a safe, inclusive and welcoming organisation for LGBTIQ+ people, their families and allies, and our workforce. The group works to identify and remove barriers to accessing services, strengthen inclusive practice and promote inclusion across the organisation.

Creating welcoming environments is about more than visible symbols of inclusion. It is about ensuring people feel respected, understood and safe when engaging with us. This helps reduce barriers to accessing services, and helps children and families know that their identities and family structures are respected and welcomed.

This year, RAV marked its 14th consecutive year of supporting the Melbourne Queer Film Festival and once again participated in Melbourne's annual Midsumma Festival, engaging with community members and service providers, sharing information about our services and strengthening connections across LGBTIQ+ communities.



RAV staff at the Midsumma Carnival

While completing a genogram (a visual representation of family relationships), one young client realised they did not have to identify as either male or female. Having the choice to identify their gender to reflect who they are helped them to feel safe and supported by RAV.



Practitioner insight

Our continued presence at the Midsumma Festival including the presence of staff who represent RAV, having pronouns added to our service request forms so clients have the option of providing this information from the first point of contact with our services, rainbow lanyards for all staff, supporting the Melbourne Queer Film Festival ... these are just some examples of our many achievements. I am really proud to be part of this journey and part of an organisation that embraces inclusion and diversity.'

– Archana Bhat, Rainbow Working Group Chair

**Strong relationships are
one of the most important
protective factors for children's
mental health and wellbeing**



Parents and families

It takes a village

Parenting was never meant to be done alone.

Through The Family Link, we're helping families build the connections, confidence and support networks that make it easier for parents and children to navigate challenges when they encounter them.



Raising a family can be so rewarding, but also challenging and, at times, lonely. The early years of parenting come with constant change, and families can benefit from support before challenges build up. Finding other parents who understand, feeling part of a community, and knowing where to turn for support can make all the difference to a family's relationships and wellbeing.

Through our Stronger Relationships project, we're focused on building stronger communities by helping families connect with each other, access support early, and create the everyday relationships that help children and families thrive.

The project involves the development, implementation and evaluation of new, evidence-informed initiatives designed to strengthen relationships not only within families, but also between families, communities and local services. One of these initiatives is The Family Link, a new pilot currently based at the Vickers Street Community Hub in Sebastopol, Ballarat.

The Family Link recognises that relationships, social connection, peer support and belonging are important protective factors for family wellbeing. It helps families connect with each other, take part in community life and find the right support when they need it.



The Vickers Street Community Hub, our home of The Family Link

Parents and families

Rather than being a service delivery-based initiative, it focuses on strengthening the everyday relationships that help families feel supported, understood and able to support others in turn.

At the heart of the initiative is a dedicated Social Connector who works to:

- encourage connections between parents
- increase awareness of local supports
- facilitate access to parenting programs
- provide opportunities for local families to engage with us and other parents in a safe and welcoming environment.

During the year, we established a new, weekly family drop-in program provided in partnership with Parent Place (City of Ballarat). We commenced co-designing peer support opportunities to further strengthen community connection and establish a more community-led model of family support.

In addition to The Family Link, we also partnered with the Department of Education, Mindful and local schools in the City of Whittlesea, to coordinate, implement and evaluate a whole-of-school approach to mental health and wellbeing. This includes parent education, teacher training and Feelings in Focus, a new 3-session social and emotional literacy program for upper primary school students.

Discover how we're strengthening relationships in communities



30+

families participated in our weekly family drop-in program in Sebastopol



Staff insight

Families often tell us that simply having somewhere welcoming to come each week makes a significant difference. The relationships formed through these informal connections can be just as valuable as formal support services.'

– Emily, Social Connections Officer

Community insight

The drop-in play sessions at the Vickers St Community Hub have been a fantastic way to connect with local parents and integrate into the local community. As someone who has recently moved to the Ballarat area this has been an amazing resource to have.'

– The Family Link participant

Tuning in to Kids® for Afghan Mothers



Tuning in to Kids® for Afghan Mothers program in Dandenong

Helping children understand and manage their emotions starts with supporting the adults around them.



By helping parents recognise, understand and respond to emotions, we are strengthening children's emotional wellbeing, building more connected families and creating lasting benefits that extend well beyond childhood.

Every parent wants the best for their child. For many Afghan mothers in Australia, parenting also means balancing the expectations and traditions of living in Afghanistan with the experiences, relationships and expectations their children encounter at school and in everyday Australian life. Our Tuning in to Kids® for Afghan Mothers program supports mothers to parent with confidence, providing strategies that help them understand emotions, strengthen emotional connection and support their children's emotional wellbeing.

Developed by the University of Melbourne's Mindful Centre, Tuning in to Kids® is an evidence-based parenting program that helps parents better understand and respond to their own and their children's emotions. It teaches practical emotion coaching strategies that strengthen parent-child relationships, support children's emotional development and help families navigate everyday challenges together.

Our program is uniquely delivered in-language by Afghan facilitators who understand the cultural experiences of the families they support. Delivered across the City of Greater Dandenong and the City of Casey, it creates a safe and welcoming environment where mothers can learn together, share experiences, build friendships and explore parenting approaches.

For many women, the weekly sessions become much more than a parenting program. The opportunity for

connection, paired with shared lunches and supervised children's activities, help build trusted relationships and reduce isolation, while providing a supportive space to reflect on parenting, family life and wellbeing.

Mothers who participate report:

- a greater understanding of their children's emotions
- improved communication with their children and partners
- greater self-awareness and emotional wellbeing
- improved confidence in their parenting.

Many also describe the program as one of the highlights of their week, with friendships and support networks continuing well beyond the end of the program.

Learn more about this evidence-based parenting program



Tuning in to Kids® for Afghan Mothers is funded by Mission Australia through Communities for Children and the Department of Social Services.

Participant insight

Before this program, I didn't always understand why my child was having big emotions. Now I know how to listen and help my child feel understood.'

– Tuning in to Kids® for Afghan Mothers participant

Sharing what works

Our facilitators highlighted the program in a presentation at the Family Relationship Services Australia National Conference in Brisbane, sharing insights into the importance of culturally responsive parenting programs, and their impact on children, families and communities.



City of Greater Dandenong Mayor, Sophie Tan, with members of the Afghan community

Coming together to celebrating community, culture and connection

This year, mothers who completed the program came together with their children, community leaders, local government representatives and local services to celebrate their achievements at Dandenong Memorial Hall.

Two mothers shared moving reflections on their experiences, and families enjoyed traditional Afghan

music, children's activities and opportunities to connect with local services in an environment that celebrated culture, community and belonging. The event highlighted not only the accomplishments of the mothers, but also the growing impact and reach of the program across the Afghan community.

Supporting families early through life's biggest early transitions

Strong family relationships aren't built by avoiding life's challenges, but by having the support to navigate them together.



Some of the biggest moments in family life also bring some of the biggest changes. Getting the right support early can help parents to gain skills and confidence, and support their children's wellbeing now and into the future.

We know there are times when family relationships can get stuck or feel stretched. Whether it's welcoming a new baby, starting kindergarten or school, becoming a stepfamily, navigating separation or coping with the loss of a loved one, these significant changes can be challenging for children and parents alike. Helping parents navigate these transitions before problems become more significant can bring families closer together and help children thrive.

For more than 10 years, our early matters program has been providing free parenting groups and family support services in Ballarat and Sunshine. The program gives parents practical strategies to better understand their children's emotions, strengthen communication, build parenting confidence and respond positively to the everyday challenges of family life.

1,036

clients supported



This year, we built on the success of early matters by introducing our new The Family Link initiative (see page 51), expanding our preventive approach to support relationships and wellbeing for families across Ballarat and surrounding communities.



Stories behind the services

Daniel and Natalie: Getting on the same page with parenting



1

When Daniel and Natalie became parents to twin boys in their early 20s, life changed quickly. The twins, Ethan and Liam, were born premature and both spent time in hospital, with Ethan undergoing major surgery. Like most parents, they were determined to provide their boys with a loving, secure family life, but the pressures of parenting placed increasing strain on their relationship.



2

Recognising that they were arguing more and with increasing intensity, with the boys often yelling at their parents to stop fighting, they sought support from our relationship counselling service.

During counselling, Natalie expressed that she was worried about the twins' behaviour and felt they struggled to understand or express their emotions. At the same time, she and Daniel found it difficult to agree on how to respond as parents. Daniel tended to be more relaxed in his parenting, while Natalie was more likely to take a disciplinary approach, making it hard to parent consistently.



3

Wanting support with these parenting challenges, their counsellor referred them to our early matters program, and they participated in the 8-week Circle of Security Parenting™ program.

Their counsellor and early matters practitioner worked closely together, providing coordinated support that explored both their parenting and the impact of their own childhood on their relationships with each other and their children. They provided strategies to enhance emotional regulation and connection within their family.



4

The early matters home visiting service gave the family practical, hands-on support to put these new parenting strategies into practice in everyday family life. During one visit, our practitioner noticed the twins gravitated towards Daniel for comfort or affection. Natalie was painfully aware of this, and it distressed her that her boys didn't go to her for physical affection.

Through play, books and puppets, we encouraged Natalie to reconnect with the boys with Daniel creating space for that relationship to grow.



5

While hesitant at first, over time the boys began seeking Natalie out for stories, cuddles and comfort. One breakthrough came when Liam unexpectedly ran to his mum and wrapped his arms around her in a bear hug.

The family started new routines to create time and space for dedicated one-on-one connection with each child every day.



6

Through relationship counselling and our early matters program, Daniel and Natalie invested time in their relationship and family, gaining a deeper understanding of themselves and each other; something they hadn't had the opportunity to do since their boys were born. They learnt to recognise when they were each becoming overwhelmed, communicate more openly and respond to each other with greater empathy.

By supporting both their parenting and their relationship at the same time, we helped the family reconnect and build a stronger, more connected foundation for Ethan and Liam across their childhoods.



Supporting people impacted by trauma, forced adoption and institutional abuse

By supporting parents, caregivers and families to recover from trauma, our therapeutic services support safer, more stable family relationships, and improved outcomes for children and future generations.



Between 1940 and 1990, many Australian women and infants were separated. Known as 'forced adoption', it was unethical and often illegal. Our Forced Adoption Support Services provide free counselling, support and information for people affected by forced adoption, including mothers, fathers, adopted individuals and other family members.

Find out more



The National Redress Scheme is the Australian Government's response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. We provide free and confidential information, advocacy and practical support for anyone making or considering making an application to the scheme, helping people understand their options, navigate the application process and access therapeutic support.

Learn more



Our Therapeutic Services team provides free, specialist support for people affected by historical forced adoption policies and practices, and people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse and are accessing the National Redress Scheme.

Many people accessing these services have lived with the impacts of trauma for decades and face multiple, overlapping challenges, including mental health issues, housing instability, legal issues and social isolation. Our practitioners work to improve clients' emotional wellbeing and confidence, and to access supports and navigate complex systems.

Forced Adoption Support Services are funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.



Redress Support Services are funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.



We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma.

We recognise those who had children taken away from them.

We would like to acknowledge the lived experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples of the Stolen Generations and those who had child sexual abuse perpetrated against them in an institution. We welcome all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples seeking the support of this service.



Practitioner insight

'Supporting mothers and adoptees impacted by forced adoption is deeply humbling. The courage it takes to revisit such profound injustice, to seek truth and healing, is extraordinary. Bearing witness to that strength is one of the greatest honours of this work.'

– Counsellor, Therapeutic Services

‘When families feel culturally safe and understood, they are much more likely to engage with support, and return when they need help.’

– First Nations Specialist



The RA Indigenous Network gathering in Melbourne

Walking alongside First Nations communities

Walking alongside First Nations peoples means listening first, acting with respect and recognising that trust is built over time.

Every step we take together strengthens our ability to provide culturally safe services where First Nations children, families and communities feel safe and welcome.



We know that providing a culturally safe service involves building genuine relationships over time: relationships in which we are open to listening, learning and taking responsibility for the ongoing work we need to do. This helps us to understand the work that needs to be done to reduce the barriers to accessing services, and the support needed to strengthen First Nations children, young people, families and communities.

Our First Nations engagement specialists, alongside our First Nations team, lead the cultural capacity-building across our organisation. They support program delivery, and teams across the state to build relationships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, Elders, local Gathering Places and community members.

Many First Nations peoples continue to face barriers when accessing mainstream services due to historical experiences, cultural safety concerns, service availability and a lack of established relationships and trust. We recognise that building trust cannot be achieved through programs alone. It is built through genuine engagement, consistency, respect and a willingness to listen to and learn from community.

Our First Nations Engagement Specialists work alongside families, communities and partner organisations to help people access our services in ways that feel welcoming, safe and responsive. All our client services are provided free of charge to First Nations peoples and their families, with community partnerships and local delivery helping to improve access across Victoria.

6

First Nations team members



884

First Nations clients



This year, we continued to strengthen cultural safety and responsiveness across our organisation through the launch of our CEO and Board Chair-endorsed Statement of Commitment to First Nations Peoples of Australia, and implementation of our new cultural capability framework, TRACKS (Truth, Respect, Accountability, Culture, Knowledge and Strength). Together, these initiatives are strengthening First Nations leadership, improving intake and referral pathways, helping to embed cultural safety across our organisation, and improving accessibility and trust for clients.



RAV staff with RAV Board member Michael Hunt, and Will Austin from Yarn Bark, following a yarning circle at the launch of our Statement of Commitment

Launching our Commitment

In November 2025, we officially launched our Statement of Commitment to First Nations Peoples of Australia at the Ballarat and Districts Aboriginal Cooperative on Wadawurrung Country. Following the launch, members of RAV staff and Board had a yarning circle to talk about and listen to how to honour this commitment. The statement reflects our commitment to walking alongside First Nations, holding self-determination at the heart of everything we do, and meaningful change across our organisation.

Read our Statement of Commitment



‘Our Statement of Commitment is about bringing us together as an organisation that stands side by side with community. It is about truth-telling, being transparent and showing respect. RAV should be proud of how far we have come. The journey has been long but exciting, and it continues to shape who we are.’

– First Nations team

We know that strengthening cultural safety means continuing to learn as an organisation. Our Board members and staff undertook Cultural Fitness training this year. Staff also participated in:

- monthly yarning circles
- the Walk for Truth
- a Treaty education webinar with the Gellung Warl (the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria)
- community events, joining local First Nations communities on National Sorry Day, and during National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week.

We attended community events including Djirra Sisters Day Out gatherings in Ballarat and Traralgon, where we shared information about our services; strengthened local partnerships; and connected directly with First Nations women, children and families.

Being involved and participating in these events enables us to connect with community in First Nations community places and spaces, and gives us opportunities to deepen our understanding of the ways of being and doing with First Nations communities and families.

In September 2025, we were proud to host the National RA Indigenous Network (RAIN) gathering on Wurundjeri Country in Healesville, bringing together colleagues from across the country to share knowledge, strengthen relationships, and continue important conversations about truth-telling and cultural safety across the RA Federation.



The most important part of this work is building genuine relationships with community over time.'

– Centre Manager



Research, evaluation and impact

Turning evidence into better services and outcomes

Research helps us understand what children, families and individuals need from our services, how they experience them, and whether our services are delivering the benefits we intend.

Through our dedicated research team, we explore issues affecting our clients; identify how we can fill gaps in the service system; and use what we learn to improve the quality and impact of our work, so we can fundamentally change lives for the better.

This includes research into services provided directly to children and young people; the adults who support them; and to individuals, couples and communities. This enables us to understand our clients' needs and experiences, and the outcomes of our work. It ensures our services are informed by evidence and best practice, and that practitioners have the knowledge they need to deliver high-quality, effective support.

We also focused on communicating the results of our research and evaluation through conference presentations, research summaries, journal articles and webinars, to strengthen practice within and beyond our organisation, and help more services to provide effective support to clients (see page 76).

Twelve months after our article on our national FDR Outcomes Study was published in *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, it ranked in the top 10% of most-viewed papers published in 2024.



The study found that after participating in FDR, parents who attend FDR wanting a certificate so they can proceed to court:

- still reach agreements (58%)
- express satisfaction with the FDR process (74%)
- record reduced levels of acrimony in their co-parenting relationship.

We also presented these findings at the National Mediation Conference in Sydney in September 2025 (see page 76).

Learn about our other research and evaluation projects



Understanding family and domestic violence

This year's family violence paper presents current evidence about family and domestic violence, to help support a safer future for all Australians. Achieving this requires sustained action: by people who use violence, in communities, and investment by governments in services that prevent and respond to violence.

Read the latest evidence on family and domestic violence



A theory of change to stop family violence

Ending family violence means preventing violence and holding people who use it accountable for changing their behaviour.

Women are disproportionately affected by family violence, while significant numbers of Australian children also experience it and are increasingly recognised as victim-survivors in their own right. For children and adults alike, the impact of family violence can be profound and lifelong.

As well as delivering programs that support victim-survivors, and providing MBCPs for men who use violence, we are investing in research to understand and strengthen the effectiveness of our MBCPs, to keep women and children safer.

MBCPs are widely delivered across Australia and internationally. They are an important service response for men who have used violence against current or former partners, and in some cases, their children. Usually delivered as face-to-face group programs, they seek to address harmful attitudes and behaviour, and improve the safety and wellbeing of women, children and affected family members.

Effective MBCPs help men to understand patterns of violence and their impact on women, children and affected family members. Participants develop self-awareness and take accountability for their use of violence. They practise emotional regulation, respectful behaviour and strategies to disrupt violence. As a result, MBCPs can help men to reduce or end their use of violent and controlling behaviours, keeping women and children safer – the ultimate goal of the programs.

Despite being widely used, there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of MBCPs. We know that they can lead to meaningful change in men's attitudes and behaviour. But across the sector and internationally, we don't know how often change occurs, for which men and under what circumstances, or what program features are essential to achieve this change. Past studies have often found it difficult to secure the involvement of enough group participants and their partners to generate strong data.

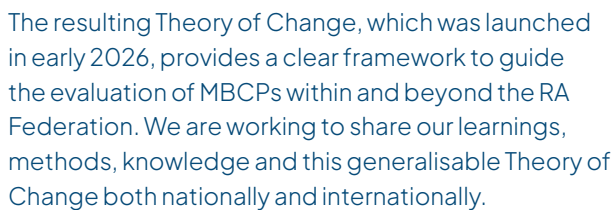
Sound evaluation of the programs, however, is critical to ensuring they effectively address the significant problem of family violence: specifically, men's violence against women and children.

On behalf of the RA National Research Network, and in partnership with the Australian Institute of Family Studies, RAV with RA NSW have led a project exploring what RA's MBCPs aim to achieve and how they aim to achieve it. The project uses a 'theory of change' – a comprehensive description of how an intervention is expected to produce positive change.

The individual state and territory RA organisations operate within different geographic and legislative contexts and under various funding models, however, they share a common goal of reducing violence against women and children. Across the country, RAs also share a common commitment to delivering high-quality services that make a genuine difference to clients and communities. This collaboration across the RA Federation provided an opportunity to undertake a large-scale study and strengthen the evidence for our programs, as well as advance Australian evaluation efforts, guided by a common theory of change.

'... evaluation is all about learning what's working and what could be better, and it's our hope that this work can contribute to that understanding and make a real difference to the safety of women and children.'

– Sharnee Moore, Program and Policy Evaluation, Australian Institute of Family Studies



Most MBCP participants have current or former partners, and many are fathers. Effective programs, supported by strong evaluation, can help reduce family violence and keep women and children safer. All family members, and future partners, stand to benefit from men's respectful behaviour within relationships. Everyone deserves the right to be safe, and live their lives free from violence.

– Dr Genevieve Heard, Manager Research

Download the Theory of Change.



Hearing the voices of children and young people directly

Studies indicate that children generally want a say in decision-making processes after separation and divorce, and are likely to cope better if they are consulted.

In 2025–26, we continued our project exploring ways of hearing from children when their parents are separating and participating in FDR.

Our international literature review identified considerable advocacy for children's participation in family mediation, but relatively little development or evaluation of practice models. A RAV report identified barriers to and opportunities for improving children's participation in FDR at RAV. We appointed a project officer focused on making our FDR services as child-inclusive as possible, and better communicating to parents and practitioners the benefits of giving children opportunities to be heard.

Alongside this FDR-specific work, we also developed a broader project plan that will guide the development of an evidence-informed approach to including the perspectives of children and young people in RAV services. A project officer will be recruited to design a process for consulting with children and young people about service design and delivery. This process will be documented and piloted alongside concurrent evaluation to inform learning, and support future use.

Learn more

Watch our webinar on children's voices in FDR.



Read our new research summary on child participation in family mediation.



Making FDR more accessible

We continued our study of our Legally-Assisted FDR service for parenting matters.

The service, which has been delivered since 2013 by our Sunshine FRC in partnership with community legal centres, provides lawyer support within mediation to make the process more accessible and equitable for vulnerable clients who need support, advice and advocacy. This includes clients with experience of abuse, for whom standard FDR may not otherwise be suitable.

Through a client survey, and interviews with clients and practitioners, we learned how the assistance of lawyers adds value to the FDR process, by enhancing clients' feelings of safety and confidence in participation and negotiation.

Most participants were satisfied with both the FDR process and outcomes, though mothers were significantly more satisfied than fathers. Notably, nearly 80% of clients reached full or partial parenting agreements through this service. This highlights the benefit of the service not only for parents, but also for children and young people, who are key beneficiaries when post-separation arrangements are resolved without the stress, conflict and expense of court proceedings. We also heard that clients' experiences improved when they felt adequately prepared, leading practitioners to place greater emphasis on addressing concerns and expectations before mediation.

In April 2026, we expanded our study to include property matters, and to measure outcomes for clients of 3 other RAV-operated FRCs now offering Legally-Assisted FDR.

Read our journal article on the community partnership that is supporting Legally-Assisted FDR



Learn more about our new Legally-Assisted FDR research outcomes



Partnership insight

My collaborative research with RAV on evaluating the Legally-Assisted FDR model and client experience has had a meaningful impact on my work at Monash Law Clinics. It has provided an opportunity to step back from day-to-day practice and critically reflect on how and why we deliver services in the ways we do. The insights generated through the evaluation are already informing improvements to our service provision and strengthening our ability to demonstrate impact. Looking ahead, this work will continue to shape a more reflective, evidence-based and client-centred approach to practice, ultimately improving outcomes for the communities we serve.'

– Jennifer Lindstrom, Legal Practice Manager and Principal Lawyer at Monash Law Clinics

The role of co-parenting apps

Many FDR clients are now enquiring about smartphone apps for co-parenting, with some separated parents now required by court order to use a co-parenting app.

As part of a research project led by the Australian National University, we surveyed family law professionals and found that most had encountered clients who want to use these apps. FDR practitioners and mediators were the most likely to report frequent contact with clients interested in using them.

In 2025–26, we continued disseminating findings from this study. Having previously published the views of family law professionals and the results of testing 9 popular apps, our most recent article from this study examined the experiences of separated parents themselves. Most high-conflict separated parents found using an app mostly helpful to their co-parenting relationship. But some reported a detrimental effect, with messaging functions and the ability to share access to features with third parties more likely than others to contribute to conflict.



Learn more about our research on the use and role of parenting apps after separation



Understanding our social impact

Our annual *Social Impact Report* brings together evaluation data, outcomes measurement and lived experience to demonstrate how our work positively impacts the children, adults, families and communities who use our services.

Explore the impact of our work in 2025–26



Beyond our services

Sharing knowledge, shaping change

Our knowledge and experience don't just shape the services we provide today. They also help inform research, practice and conversations that can improve outcomes for future generations.

Every day, we learn from the children, families and individuals who use our services, as well as through the research and evaluation we undertake. Sharing those insights beyond our organisation helps improve services, inform policy, strengthen professional practice, and support more people than we could reach through direct service delivery alone.

This year, we continued to publish practical resources for clients and practitioners, publish research and evaluation outcomes, contribute to professional peer-reviewed publications, present at conferences and deliver professional webinars.

We also participated in local, Victorian and national events and awareness initiatives. We engaged with federal and state parliamentarians, ministers and other decision-makers at centres across Victoria, sharing the experiences of our clients and the issues affecting children, young people and families. These conversations highlighted the complex needs facing our clients every day, including:

- family violence
- the growing number of people remaining under the same roof after separation because of housing affordability and cost-of-living pressures

- children's mental health
- the needs of Forgotten Australians
- the increasing complexity of clients' needs.

We were pleased to host one of the Australian Government's Healthy Men Community Conversations with the Hon Ged Kearney MP, Assistant Minister for Social Services and Assistant Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, and Dan Repacholi MP, Australia's Special Envoy for Men's Health. Together with local community members and organisations, we explored men's health and wellbeing, and the prevention of family violence, to help inform future government policy and programs.



RAV staff at the annual Walk Against Family Violence, representing RAV's commitment to ending family violence

New in 2025–26

2

resources for clients

2

submissions

2

journal articles

3

research and evaluation summaries

4

professional webinars

4

reports

10

conference presentations



Resources for clients

Men and separation: Navigating the future

This is a new edition of our easy-to-read resource to help men understand, navigate and move forward through separation in safe and in healthy ways. It offers clear, accessible information across key topics including:

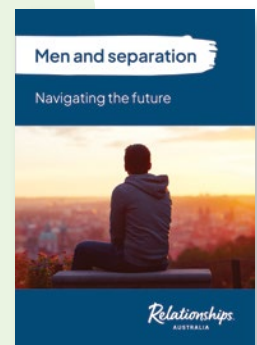
- men's experiences of separation
- emotional wellbeing
- co-parenting
- children's needs
- communication with former partners
- family violence
- financial and property matters
- where to find additional help and resources.

This latest edition incorporates updated statistics and research, and a more inclusive approach, acknowledging the diversity of families, cultures and gender identities. It aims to normalise the wide range of feelings and experiences men may have during and after separation.

'Life does get better. Separation provides the opportunity for ongoing personal growth. Don't go it alone, there is help out there. Use it to your fullest advantage.'

- 48-year-old man, 4 years after separation

Download Men and separation



Share the care: Parenting plan – Collaborative parenting apart

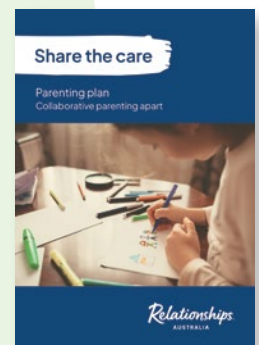
A new edition of this booklet was produced by the RA Federation. It provides information about what a parenting plan is, and tips for making decisions about parental responsibility for finances, children’s living arrangements and education. It includes practical guidance and templates to help separating parents communicate respectfully, make decisions together, reduce conflict and keep their children at the centre.

This latest version was written to meet the evolving needs of separating parents in Australia, with contemporary examples of topics parents may want to consider when negotiating a parenting plan. It also reflects recent changes to the *Australian Family Law Act 1975*.

‘Focus on the children, not on your past relationship. Children can cope with different rules as long as they are clear about what they are.’

– Share the care

Download: Share the care



Access our complete library of free booklets



Research and evaluation summaries

Download our summaries of our latest research and evaluation outcomes.

Lawyer-assisted family dispute resolution: Evaluating outcomes from a partnership model (July 2025)

Download



AccessResolve property dispute resolution for court-ordered clients: Practitioner views (July 2025)

Download



Models of child participation in family mediation: A review (July 2025)

Download



Journal articles

Heard, G., Lindstrom, J., & Petersen-Tan, M. (2026). 'Legally assisted family dispute resolution: A community sector partnership model'. *Journal of Social Welfare & Family Law*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09649069.2026.2660504>

Heard, G., Payne, L., Smyth, B., Irving, M., & Althor, G. (2025). 'Post-separation parenting apps: A survey of separated parents'. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 46(4). <https://doi.org/10.1002/anzf.70034>

Professional webinars

Catch up and watch our webinars highlighting the latest research, practice and innovation in relationships, family violence and FDR.

A theory of change for men's behaviour change programs

Dr Genevieve Heard (RAV), Dr Glenn Althor (RA New South Wales), Stephanie Fisher (Australian Institute of Family Studies), Sharnee Moore (Australian Institute of Family Studies), hosted by RA.

Watch



The child's voice in family dispute resolution

Dr Genevieve Heard (RAV), hosted by RA.

Watch



Finding the common ground: Developing a generalisable theory of change

Dr Genevieve Heard (RAV), Dr Glenn Althor (RA New South Wales), Stephanie Fisher (Australian Institute of Family Studies), hosted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Watch



Valuing family dispute resolution: A cost-benefit perspective

Dr Andrew Bickerdike and Sandra Opoku (RAV), hosted by RA.

Watch



The challenge for us was to try and develop a common or generalisable Theory of Change which articulates: what are men's behaviour change programs at their core, what do they aim to achieve, and how do they aim to do that? And we felt that if we could articulate the answers to those questions well, this Theory of Change could be useful not only across Relationships Australia, but within the sector more broadly as we strive to create a stronger evidence base for men's behaviour change programs.'

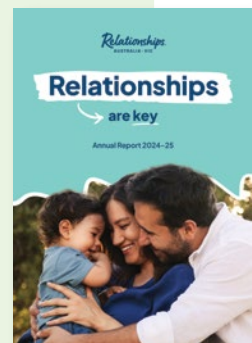
– Dr Genevieve Heard, Manager Research

Reports

Annual report 2024–25

Impact stories and evaluation data that highlight a truth central to our work: that positive, respectful, safe and fulfilling relationships are the key to health and wellbeing.

Download



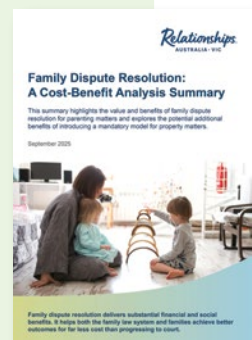
Family dispute resolution: A cost-benefit analysis summary – parenting and property matters

A summary report on the significant benefits of FDR for both parenting and property matters, for families, the family law system and the wider community.

‘The cost-benefit analysis demonstrates the significant economic and social benefits of family dispute resolution. Every dollar spent on the services returns over \$20 in benefits for families and the community as a whole, while also reducing conflict, enhancing communication and saving families an average of \$41,000 per case.’

– Sandra Opoku, Senior Manager Evaluation and Impact

Download



Social Impact Report 2025

Our third annual report that shares impact stories that amplify the voices of those directly affected by our services, illustrating how connection transforms lives and why nurturing it truly matters.

Download



to be seen: Forgotten Australians Community Education Report and Priorities

A roadmap for educating Victorians about the existence and needs of Forgotten Australians, many of whom were physically and sexually abused, neglected and abandoned. It includes the words of 195 adults who grew up in Australia's homes, orphanages and foster homes. What they want most is to be understood, to be treated with dignity and respect and to be seen.

Download



Conference presentations

Bickerdike, A., & Opoku, S. (2025 September 23). *Demonstrating the value and impact of family dispute resolution: A cost-benefit analysis* [Conference presentation]. National Mediation Conference, Sydney.

Heard, G. (2025 August 16). *Ways of hearing the child's voice in family dispute resolution: Mapping diverse international models* [Conference presentation]. Pacifica Congress Conference, Adelaide.

Heard, G., Bickerdike, A., & Hebblewhite, M. (2025 September 23). *Court-ordered, lawyer-assisted property conciliation: Which factors predict success?* [Conference presentation]. National Mediation Conference, Sydney.

Heard, G., & Petch, J. (2025 September 23). *A tick-box exercise? Benefits of mandatory FDR for ambivalent clients* [Conference presentation]. National Mediation Conference, Sydney.

Lindstrom, J., Apap, I., & Petersen-Tan, M. (2025 November 20). *Lawyer-Assisted Family Dispute Resolution Clinic – Evaluation of the partnership model and student experience* [Conference presentation]. International Journal of Clinical Legal Education Conference, Melbourne.



Dr Genevieve Heard, Manager Research, presenting at the National Mediation Conference 2025 with Dr Andrew Bickerdike, CEO, and Mr Mark Hebblewhite

Plavljanic, D. (2025 July 16). *Psychological wellbeing in the workplace* [Conference presentation]. Australian Cemeteries and Crematoria Association Conference, Brisbane.

Plavljanic, D., & Horter, A. (2026 March 17). *Psychological wellbeing in the workplace* [Conference workshop]. Funerals Australia National Convention, Sunshine Coast.

Plavljanic, D., & Pepperell, L. (2025 September 16). *Keeping your staff and workplace safe – Supporting psychological wellbeing* [Conference presentation]. Australian Cemeteries and Crematoria Association Conference, Sydney.

Szarski, L (2026 March 27). *Motivational interviewing – Applications in practice* [Conference presentation]. Maternal and Child Health Conference, Melbourne.

Warzak, M. & Mahboob, A. (2026 May 19). *Tuning in to Kids® for Afghan Mothers: More than a parenting program* [Conference presentation]. Family and Relationship Services Australia National Conference, Brisbane.



Marzia Warzak and Aisha Mahboob, Program Facilitators, presenting at the Family and Relationship Services Conference

Submissions

July 2025: Submission to the Productivity Commission's Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement Review.

December 2025: Submission to the Australian Government Department of Social Services consultation on A New Approach to Programs for Families and Children.

February 2026: Submission to Mental Health Victoria for the Department of Health on The Future of Psychosocial Supports in Victoria.

Read our submissions



Media

We shared our expertise through local, state and national media. We provided trusted commentary and practical insights on topics including mental health, family violence, relationships and separation, psychological wellbeing and Forgotten Australians, helping to inform public understanding and contribute to important community conversations.



We call for a preventive public mental health approach, with a focus on strengthening healthy relationships, improving social connections, increasing early intervention, and providing universal access to psychosocial supports.'

– RAV's Submission to the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement Review, July 2025



In the media

People that are willing to change their behaviours ... that's one of the most important things about a behaviour change program – it's that those who are willing and motivated to actually change their behaviour are much more successful in these programs than those who are coming in with those pushback attitudes.'

– Alyson La'Brooy, Manager Family Violence Services

The conversation around workplace mental health has shifted considerably in recent years. We're moving beyond awareness into action, particularly in sectors where emotional labour isn't just part of the role, it's the foundation of it.'

– Donna Plavljanic, Senior Manager Learning and Innovation

Increasingly complex client needs require skilled and confident practitioners

High-quality professional development has never been more important, and we're committed to equipping professionals with practical, evidence-informed skills to support children, families, couples, individuals and workplaces.

7

graduate diploma intakes

7

accredited training courses

23

public training courses

42

customised training programs

64

accredited training graduates



Building capability for a changing sector

Across community, social services and legal sectors, professionals are working with increasingly complex client needs, while demanding roles and responsibilities often affect their own wellbeing. Building a skilled, sustainable workforce is critical to ensuring that these sectors can continue to meet the needs of children, families and individuals by providing high-quality support.

Through our Centre for Learning and Innovation, we work with government, community organisations, workplaces and practitioners to strengthen capability across these sectors. Our learning spans nationally recognised qualifications, professional development, customised training, supervision and workplace mediation, combining evidence-informed knowledge with practical skills that can be applied in real-world settings.

This year, we delivered more than 60 customised training programs and public training workshops, alongside accredited, nationally recognised courses, and qualifications and training in areas including:

- FDR
- mediation
- relationship counselling
- family violence
- leadership
- conflict
- mental health first aid
- vicarious trauma.

Our work also extends beyond developing professional skills. Through clinical supervision and other workforce services, we help practitioners reflect on challenging work, strengthen their practice and look after their wellbeing. We also help organisations through workplace conflict resolution, mediation and critical incident de-briefing services.



It was valuable to gain a greater understanding of the mental health risks associated with working in our industry and the importance of recognising these risks in ourselves and our colleagues.'

– Customised training client

Top 5 sectors accessing our training



Education and training



Cemeteries, crematoria and memorial services



Local government



Community services and not-for-profit



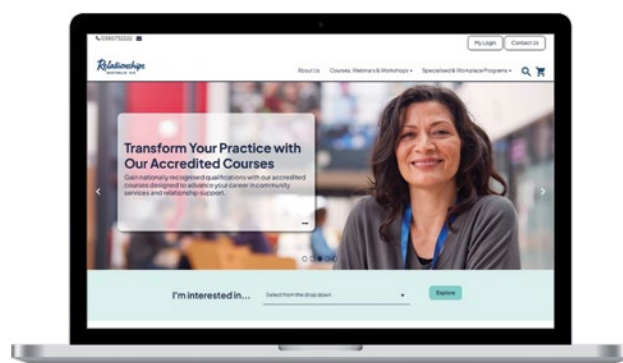
Health

A new home for professional learning

This year, we launched a dedicated website for our Centre for Learning and Innovation, making it easier for practitioners and organisations to find professional development that meets their needs.

The new website brings together nationally recognised qualifications, specialist practitioner training, practical workshops and tailored organisational learning in one place, providing clearer pathways to professional development.

Explore our new learning hub



Leading the Change

Safe and respectful communities don't stop at the workplace door.

In partnership with the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, we're supporting leaders in the manufacturing, construction, retail and hospitality sectors to help prevent gendered violence and build safe, respectful and inclusive workplace cultures.

Everyone has a role to play in preventing gendered violence. We were engaged as the principal delivery partner for the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Lead the Change – Gendered Violence program. Through the delivery of workshops, webinars, training and practical resources for board members, executives and senior leaders, as well as frontline staff, the program is designed to help create safer workplaces from the top down. Across all workplace levels, participants take responsibility for modelling respectful behaviours; promoting accountability; and embedding safety, inclusion and gender equality into their workplace culture and practice.

Executives and senior leaders deepen their understanding of their obligations as employers, and identify practical, high-impact actions to strengthen oversight and accountability, improve policies and reporting mechanisms, and shift organisational cultures.

Across all levels of the workplace, participants gain a greater understanding of gendered violence and build practical skills to help prevent and respond to it. This includes strategies for leadership, teamwork, upstander behaviours and trauma-informed responses, as well as the confidence to contribute to workplace cultures that are safer and more inclusive of people of all genders.

By equipping organisations with practical knowledge and tools, Leading the Change helps participants create positive change in their workplaces, while contributing to the broader prevention of gendered violence in our communities.

Training supports participants to:

- understand the types, drivers and warning signs of gendered violence
- recognise legal and workplace obligations
- strengthen workplace policies, reporting pathways and organisational culture
- build practical skills to promote safety, respect, inclusion and accountability.



The feedback demonstrates that the program is providing practical value to participants and contributing to increased awareness, capability and confidence in addressing gendered violence within Victorian workplaces.'

– Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry



Learning and Innovation opportunities

Accredited training

Nationally accredited and delivered through our Registered Training Organisation RTO 21977, which is regulated by the Australian Skills Quality Authority.

- CHC81115 Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution
- CHC81015 Graduate Diploma of Relationship Counselling
- Mediation Training Course: CHCSS00142 Mediation Skill Set and Australian Mediator and Dispute Resolution Accreditation Standards

Accredited programs: Other

Evidence-informed, nationally recognised and nationally accredited.

- Specialist Course in Integrative Couple Therapy
- Couples Counselling Course: A contemporary and client-focused approach

Customised training

Developed and delivered to meet the unique needs of organisations, services and staff.

- An Introduction to Grief
- Assessing Risk and Risk Management
- Case Formulation and Documentation
- Commissioners' Coaching Session
- Couples Who Separate 'Under One Roof'
- Critical Incident Debriefing
- Dad's Corner – Strategies to Help Manage Your Child's Emotions
- Effective Brief Contact in Single Session Work
- Effective Debriefing Skills
- Facilitating a Therapeutic Support Group
- Financial Hardship
- Healthy Clubs
- Leadership Masterclass: Leading with Impact
- Leadership Masterclass: Transitioning into Leadership
- Leadership Masterclass: Vicarious Trauma for Leaders
- Leading Difficult Conversations
- Maintaining Personal and Professional Boundaries
- Managing Challenging Behaviours

- Managing Difficult Conversations
- Managing Vicarious Trauma
- Mental Health in the Workplace
- Motivational Interviewing
- Navigating Adult Relationships
- Negotiation and Conflict Management
- Psychological Wellbeing in the Workplace
- Reflective Practice Webinar – Working with Diversity
- Responding to Disclosure Training
- Responding to Family Violence
- Responding to Family Violence in a Community Setting
- Responding to Family Violence in the Workplace
- Responding to Gender-Based Violence
- Support a Mate
- Supporting Grieving Clients
- Supporting Women in Custody
- The Accidental Mediator
- The Casual Counsellor
- Vicarious Trauma
- Vicarious Trauma and Burnout
- Working Effectively with Presentations of Grief in Single Session Contexts

Professional development webinars

On-demand webinars on a diverse range of topics, presented by leading national and international professionals.

- A Strengths-Based Approach to Reintegration – Working with a Corrections Cohort
- Aboriginal Mental Health
- Addressing Masculinities and Working with Men to Prevent Violence Against Women
- Child Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Constructive and Cooperative Conduct in Challenging Communications
- Counselling Contemporary Families and Couples
- Counselling Series: Webinar Recording
- Discussion with Sam Lane: Respect in Sporting Clubs
- Family Dispute Resolution – Advanced Property and Financial Matters
- Family Law Reforms – In Discussion
- FDR/Mediation Skills Series: Webinar Recording
- Grief Series: Webinar Recording
- Healthy Relationships for Families, Communities and Workplaces
- Humanistic Mediation and Viking Mediation
- In Conversation with Rosie Batty AO – Raising Awareness and Action Concerning Family Violence
- Leadership Series: Webinar Recording
- Life Transitions and Mental Health
- Making Space for Peacekeeping: What Can We Learn from Mediation in Remote Communities
- Making Your Diverse Workplace Inclusive
- Managing Challenges When Transitioning Back to the Workplace
- Men's Lived Experience of Suicide
- Motivational Interviewing by Jeff Roberts
- Narrative e-Writing Intervention (NeW-I)
- Online Counselling – Issues and Considerations
- Parental Bereavement Experience of Child Loss: An International Systematic Review
- Psychological Wellbeing in the Workplace
- Raising Children with Disability: Supporting Fathers
- Reflective Practice: Considering Diverse Perspectives
- Reintegrating Children Back to School
- Resist-Refuse Dynamics and Effects on Children
- Responding to Sudden Disclosures – When Your Clients Say They Are Not Okay
- Single Session Contact with Grieving Clients
- Single Session Thinking: Understanding the Basics of Engaging in Brief Therapy
- Supporting Co-Parenting Relationships
- Supporting Parents and Their Families Following the Loss of a Baby
- The GROW Coaching Model
- The Journey of Trauma Recovery through Hope
- Thrive – How to Optimise Your Performance and Energy for Long-Term Wellbeing
- Understanding Coercive Control
- Understanding Prolonged Grief
- Unresolved Grief in the Couple Following a Miscarriage, Stillbirth or Other Perinatal Loss
- What Do the New and Emerging Family Law Reforms Mean for FDR Practice? (Panel Discussion)
- What Works for Men? Engaging Men in Prevention
- Working with a Correctional Cohort and Leading Groups
- Working with Family Violence Behaviours and Developmental Disorders
- Working with Men Series: Webinar Recording
- Working with the Impacts of Trauma and Loss
- Working with Young People in CARE Schools: An Alternative to Jailing Our Kids

Professional development workshops

Online and in-person training for individuals, teams and workplaces.

- Advanced Mediator – Practicum Certificate
- Advanced Property in Family Dispute Resolution
- Clinical Group Supervision series (Family Violence; Personality Disorders; Working with Couples)
- Critical Incident Debriefing
- Facilitating a Therapeutic Support Group
- Hearing Children’s Voices in Family Law Disputes – for Independent Children’s Lawyers
- Introduction to Contemporary Family Systems
- Introduction to Working with Couples
- Managing Challenging Behaviours
- Mental Health First Aid
- Motivational Interviewing
- Negotiation and Conflict Management in the Workplace
- Parenting Coordination
- Single Session Contact in Therapeutic Work
- Supporting Separated Families
- The Casual Counsellor
- Transitioning into Leadership
- Understanding Grief
- Vicarious Trauma
- Working with Dads

Self-paced courses and micro-courses

Online and on-demand courses.

- Conducting Family Dispute Resolution Online
- Leading Difficult Conversations
- Managing Challenging Behaviours
- Negotiation and Conflict Management in the Workplace
- Professional Boundaries in Therapeutic and Care Work
- Property and Financial Matters in Family Dispute Resolution
- The Casual Counsellor
- Understanding and Preventing Vicarious Trauma
- Understanding Grief
- Understanding Professional Boundaries in Therapeutic and Care Work
- Working with Clients Experiencing Grief
- Working with Dads



**Behind every child,
young person, individual and
family we support is a skilled,
compassionate workforce
making that support possible.**



Working with purpose

A skilled, experienced and supported workforce is an important protective factor for children and families who use our services.

Our people are driven by the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of our children, families and communities. They are at the heart of the positive impact we create across Victoria.

Supporting our staff allows them to support our clients, and in turn, our communities. We're proud to foster an inclusive and supportive workplace that recognises the importance of work-life balance; invests in professional growth; and reflects our commitment to respect, gender equality and the right of every person to be safe in their relationships.



Our staff

396

valued employees

14

promotions



87

new employees



4.1

years – average
length of service



37.1%

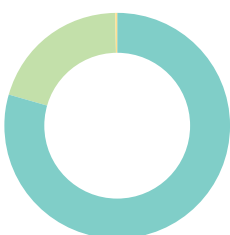
staff with 5 or more years
of experience at RAV

284

professional development
programs accessed



Gender



- Female
- Male
- Gender-diverse

Employment type



- Part-time
- Full-time
- Casual

Our employee experience

Values and community impact

- Values-driven work that has a real impact
- Evidence-based, evaluated services
- Client-responsive approaches



Career development

- Career growth opportunities
- Ongoing training and professional development
- Best-practice clinical supervision



Culture and work environment

- Supportive team culture
- Positive work-life balance
- Recognition of achievements



Compensation and benefits

- Competitive salaries
- Salary packaging
- Flexible working arrangements
- Generous leave provisions, including paid parental leave for primary and secondary carers



Diversity and inclusion

- Commitment to gender equity at all levels
- Core Inclusion Training
- Specialist working groups



First Nations cultural competency

- Staff yarning circles
- Recognition of First Nations community and cultural responsibilities



The work we do matters because people matter. Behind every service, decision, report, problem and strategy is a person whose experience deserves recognition, compassion and respect.'

– Lisa Stockheim, Senior Centre Manager

What our staff know

- Children notice conflict more than adults realise.
- Early support makes a difference.
- Healthy relationships are key to health and wellbeing.
- Connected services improve access to support.



Find out why people choose to work with us



Senior leadership*



Dr Andrew Bickerdike
Chief Executive Officer



Suzanne Ichlov
Chief Operating Officer



Shiranthi Sivarajah
Chief Business and
Financial Officer
Company Secretary



Carl Beeston
General Manager
Information and Digital
Services



Amanda Goldstein
General Manager
Clinical Services



Sharon Greenhill
General Manager People
and Culture



Jo Huggins
General Manager Client
Services and Business
Development



Suresh Ramachandraiah
General Manager
Client Services



Anna Clarke
Senior Manager Strategic
Communications,
Brand and Advocacy



Sandra Opoku
Senior Manager Evidence
and Impact



Donna Plavljanic
Senior Manager Learning
and Innovation

* As of 30 June 2026

Governance

Our Board*

Oversight and strategic direction that support our goals and objectives.

The Board's areas of focus this year included the advancement of strategic initiatives, robust risk management and an ongoing commitment to the delivery of high-quality client services.

The work of the Board is further strengthened by its 3 Committees: the Audit and Finance Committee, the Clinical Governance Committee and the Governance Committee. Each plays a vital role in enhancing governance practices within their respective areas, ensuring accountability, compliance and continuous improvement across RAV.



Ronda Jacobs
President



Associate Professor Kaye Frankcom
Vice-President
Clinical Governance
Committee Chair



Michael Hunt
Governance
Committee Member



Brendan Kay
Appointed April 2026



John Lovell
Retired October 2025



Professor Helen Rhoades
OAM
Clinical Governance
Committee Member



Professor Colin Royse
Governance Committee
Chair



Michael Shaw
Audit and Finance
Committee Chair



Michael Wootten
Audit and Finance
Committee Member

* As of 30 June 2026

Financial performance

Summary statement of comprehensive income for the year ended 30 June 2026

	2026 (\$)	2025 (\$)
Revenue		
Grant funding	43,970,618	40,864,146
Client fees	2,146,201	2,039,839
Other income	4,819,208	4,564,450
Total revenue	50,936,027	47,468,435
Expenses		
Employee costs	35,817,808	34,224,868
Operating costs	10,934,163	10,265,160
Depreciation and amortisation	1,883,430	1,832,825
Total expenses	48,635,401	46,322,853
Surplus	2,300,626	1,145,582
Other comprehensive income		
Net gain on revaluation of non-current assets	-	-
Total comprehensive income	2,300,626	1,145,582

Summary statement of financial position as at 30 June 2026

	2026 (\$)	2025 (\$)
Assets		
Current assets	37,208,528	35,002,549
Non-current assets	10,844,923	11,985,331
Total assets	48,053,451	46,987,880
Liabilities		
Current liabilities	18,866,356	19,646,152
Non-current liabilities	4,236,460	4,691,719
Total liabilities	23,102,816	24,337,871
Net assets	24,950,635	22,650,009

Independent Audit Report to the Members of Relationships Australia Victoria Limited

We have audited the summarised financial report of Relationships Australia Victoria Limited comprising the Summary Statement of Comprehensive Income for the year ended 30 June 2026 and the Summary Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2026 in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards.

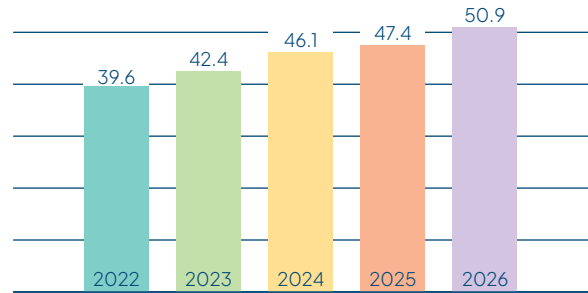
In our opinion, the information reported in the summarised financial report is consistent with the annual financial report from which it is derived and upon which we expressed an unqualified audit opinion in our report to the members dated 22 September 2026.

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

Grant Thornton Australia

Brock Mackenzie
Partner

Revenue (\$M)



Revenue



Expenses



Central Office

1183 Toorak Road
Camberwell
Phone: (03) 8573 2222
enquiries@rav.org.au

Victoria-wide

Phone: 1300 364 277
www.rav.org.au



Social media

Facebook: @RelAustVic
Instagram: @RelationshipsVic
LinkedIn: Relationships Australia Victoria
YouTube: @RelationshipsAusVic



ISO 9001

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