



Annual Report
2023–24

looking back looking forward

75 years of making a difference

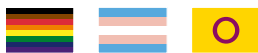
Contents

- 2 A timeline of success: 75 years of never standing still
- 6 President's foreword
- 8 CEO's report
- 10 Our new Strategic Plan 2024–26
- 12 A celebration of growth across a lifetime
- 14 Our impact, far and wide
- 24 Mediation matters: FDR making a difference for separated couples, kids and families
- 30 Mental health, family violence and the courts: Family Advocacy and Support Services
- 32 Respect and Connect: Supporting students now, for healthy relationships throughout life
- 33 Taking brave steps: Support after family violence
- 35 Nurturing relationships: Working with First Nations communities
- 37 YES: Addressing the mental health needs of Gippsland's 'missing middle' young people
- 38 We see you: An Open Place for Forgotten Australians
- 41 Responding to complex needs: People impacted by forced adoption, and National Redress Scheme applicants
- 44 Culturally connected: In-language Vietnamese family violence program
- 45 Levelling the playing field: Gender equality in sport
- 47 Knowledge and impact: Driving change and demonstrating client outcomes
- 51 Proud and inclusive: Rainbow initiatives
- 52 Leading learning: Empowering professionals across Australia
- 54 Diffusing family violence: Working with men in correctional facilities
- 55 Our identity: Dedication at the core of our success
- 58 Leading with vision: Our Board
- 59 Financial performance



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways of Australia. We support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination and culturally safe services. We are committed to encouraging a culturally safe and supportive environment for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who access our services or engage with our organisation.

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



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



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

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.

ABN 51 263 215 677 | ACN 628 873 941

Acronyms and initialisms

FASS	Family Advocacy and Support Services
FDR	family dispute resolution
FRC	Family Relationship Centre
LGBTIQA+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other sexually or gender diverse
MBCP	men's behaviour change program
PHN	Primary Health Network
RAV	Relationships Australia Victoria
YES	Youth Enhanced Service

Back in 1948, we began our journey as the Marriage Guidance Council of Victoria.



A timeline of success: 75 years of never standing still

Time and time again since we first began in 1948, we've actively stepped up to face challenges and serve our clients. Shaped by evidence, research and changes in the community, we've adapted and evolved throughout our history, always prioritising the safety, experiences and needs of our clients.



1986–1988

Responding with leading training

We began delivering mediation and couples counselling training for the social services and legal sectors.



1984

Pioneering mediation

With high divorce rates, and despite considerable community and sector criticism, we introduced mediation to Australia.



1993

Inaugural funding for family violence

We were one of the first organisations to receive Australian Government funding for family violence prevention programs.

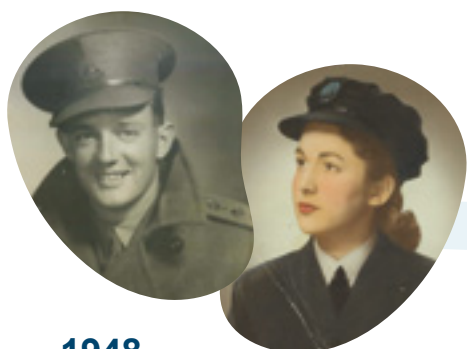


1994

A new name for a new future

Reflecting our increasingly broad range of services, we became Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) and part of the new Relationships Australia federation.

Highlights from three-quarters of a century



1948

A new post-war 'crisis'

After World War II ended, a new challenge emerged, as many couples and families struggled to adjust and re-establish their relationships. With increasing marriage breakdowns, Melbourne's first Marriage Guidance Council was established to offer counselling and relationship education to couples and families.



1955

Funding recognition

The Minister of Health provided our first government grant of \$1,500.



1975

'No-fault' divorce introduced

The *Commonwealth Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) was introduced and, along with it, the principle of no-fault divorce. It resulted in an increase of divorce and a growing need for our counselling services.



1964

A stable home

We purchased our first centre: a grand Victorian house in Kew that still operates today.



2006

New centres for families

With funding from the Australian Government, we opened 4 new Family Relationship Centres to support separating couples and families, including with parenting and property disputes.



2008

Training a new generation

As a new Registered Training Organisation, we began providing nationally accredited graduate diplomas.



2012

Working with the courts

We began providing AccessResolve, which is a property mediation and conciliation service provided to court-ordered clients on behalf of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia.



2013

Children and mental health

We successfully tendered to deliver i-Connect, a Family Mental Health Support Service for children and young people in East Gippsland who are at risk of mental illness or affected by it.



2020

The pandemic emerges

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we quickly pivoted from delivering primarily face-to-face services to a hybrid model of in-person and telehealth services without ceasing services for a single day.



2019–2020

Forgotten Australians

We became the provider of Open Place, a support service for Forgotten Australians/Pre-1990 Care Leavers.



2022–2024

Mental health support and leading training

We began providing mental health support to family violence-affected clients at Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia circuit locations, through the Family Advocacy and Support Services (FASS).

Our range of professional training offerings expanded to include nationally accredited graduate diplomas and courses, a workshop and webinar program, self-paced courses, clinical supervision, leadership coaching and specialised contracted programs.



2014

Respectful relationships in schools

We developed an innovative healthy relationships program for schools. In the decade since, more than 12,000 students have participated in our Respect and Connect (formerly 'I like, like you') program.



2015

Focusing on the early years and specialist services

With a focus on healthy relationships, we began providing our 'early matters' early intervention and prevention program for families. We also commenced our specialist trauma-informed Forced Adoption Support Services.



2017–2020

Dedicated mental health services for young people

We successfully tendered to operate 3 new headspace sites in Bairnsdale, Wonthaggi and Sale.



2016

Prioritising safety

Building on our long history of whole-of-family approaches, we launched a Family Safety Model for working with family members affected by family violence. We also increased delivery of our men's behaviour change programs and services for victim-survivors.



2023–24

Celebrating a milestone

We marked our 75th anniversary and a lifetime of positively impacting the lives of Victorians.



Explore more of the changes across Victoria and our organisation

Read our special 75th anniversary feature. Scan the QR code or visit: rav.org.au/about/who-we-are



President's foreword

It has been a milestone year for RAV, as we marked our 75th anniversary, and celebrated our achievements and impact. It has been remarkable to look back on what we have accomplished over time as well as our recent achievements, while acknowledging the challenges we continue to face.



We have seen high rates of family violence, with an alarming number of women murdered as a result. RAV remains resolute in its commitment to addressing this pervasive issue, both through direct service delivery and work with the government and sector. We actively participated in the Australian Government's Family Relationships Services Program Review during the year, contributing our experience and insights to help shape a better support system for families experiencing distress. We successfully tendered for a new Youth Enhanced Service (YES) in Gippsland, allowing us to expand our reach and provide critical services for young people with mental health problems.

When looking through our archives, what is clear is that our organisation has a long history of evolving and diversifying its services to meet emerging needs. When I first joined the RAV Board in the early 1990s, we were a small organisation focused mainly on couple counselling and mediation, with family violence just

beginning to gain recognition. Fast forward to today, and RAV is largely unrecognisable from its beginnings.

In those decades we have grown from providing a handful of services to more than 120 different client services and professional training offerings. We extended our programs to include families and children, introduced programs for male perpetrators of family violence in the mid-1990s and set up Family Relationship Centres (FRCs) in the 2000s. Our expansion into dedicated mental health services began in the 2010s, and a suite of specialist services has been developed since then.

There has been significant growth in our workforce to 403 valued employees this year, and our number of sites has increased to 21, with additional outreach locations. This growth reflects our commitment to provide services to more people in more places. As a result of new funding opportunities and expanded services, our annual income has grown from \$3 million in 1995, to now more than \$46 million.

Recent decades have also seen clients presenting with increasingly complex needs that reflect challenges faced by the community and particular client groups, and demand for our services has never been higher. It is a testament to the vital role we play in supporting individuals and families during times of crisis and transition, as well as with prevention and early intervention programs. Alongside delivering services, it has become critical to demonstrate the impact of what we do. This year we published our first Social Impact Report, which highlights the tangible difference we are making in the lives of individuals, families and communities across Victoria.



The progress we've made speaks to the value and impact of what we do, and I'm immensely proud of the legacy we leave for future generations.

As the inaugural Chair of the National Council of Relationships Australia, I have had the opportunity to increase the collaboration and promote the work of the state and territory Relationships Australia organisations, and the importance of our Federation in delivering valuable services on a national scale.

Looking ahead, this year RAV developed a new Strategic Plan that will guide the organisation over the next 3 years. It focuses on emerging client issues and community needs, the breadth and growth of our service suite and funding sources, and on leveraging areas that resulted in the strong financial and operationally secure position we occupy today.

Alongside this, we are considering a longer-term plan to ensure that our vision and goals are aligned with what will be needed in the future. I am confident that RAV is in an excellent position both strategically and financially to continue its important work. With a strong foundation and a clear direction, the organisation is well-equipped to thrive in the years to come.

My role as Chair and member of the RAV Board will come to an end in October, after more than 30 years of service. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my Board colleagues for their commitment and willingly contributing their expertise. Our Board involves talented, collegial and forward-thinking individuals who drive RAV's success.

I'd also like to extend my sincere gratitude to Dr Andrew Bickerdike, our CEO, for his leadership and resilience, particularly during recent years which challenged so many in the sector. His guidance and steady hand has been instrumental in ensuring RAV remains at the forefront of service delivery and excellence.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the staff at RAV. Across the years, they have adapted when required, with a continuous focus on why we're here – to deliver high-quality services to those who need it most. It is their commitment that underpins RAV's success and ensures that we continue to make a meaningful impact on the lives of so many Victorians.

As I step aside, I leave with immense pride in all that we have accomplished together. I am confident that with the strong leadership of the Board, Andrew and our talented workforce, RAV will continue to grow, evolve and make a lasting difference in the years ahead. The progress we've made speaks to the value and impact of what we do, and I'm immensely proud of the legacy we leave for future generations.



Lyn Littlefield

Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM
President

CEO's report

This past 75th anniversary year has been one of reflection, celebration and growth. We were reminded of the long journey we have taken since 1948, when we began in response to post-war challenges facing couples and families. From our humble beginnings in marriage counselling, we have grown into an organisation that works with a diverse range of complex issues ranging from relationship breakdown to family violence, to mental health, dispute resolution and trauma.

We understand that relationships are at the core of individual, family and community wellbeing, and that by supporting individuals and families, we are strengthening and supporting healthy, cohesive communities.

As you'll read in this report, we marked our anniversary in a number of ways. Alongside celebrations of our past achievements, the year brought with it several key highlights during the year. We released our inaugural Social Impact Report, and accompanying 'How we create change' animation. The report is a powerful illustration of the real, measurable difference we make, not just in the short term. Our work is about creating lasting, positive impacts that ripple out to families and entire communities, across generations.

Other notable achievements include our certification against ISO 27001, a globally recognised standard for information security, and a successful International Organization for Standardisation audit of our quality management systems. The audits' findings reaffirmed that our systems and processes are robust; we prioritise protection of sensitive client, staff and financial data; and we are highly effective in delivering quality, client-focused services.

Within service delivery, we continued to grow, with a new service to address the growing need for mental health services for young people in Gippsland. This Youth Enhanced Service (YES) has been designed to offer much-needed support for those whose mental health needs fall outside the reach of existing service models. With peer support workers playing a central

role, our service is not only responsive but also grounded in lived experience. This report highlights this new YES service, as well as other programs that illustrate the breadth of our suite of services.

At the same time, we remain deeply committed to our work in the family violence sector, where the need has never been more urgent. The alarming increase in gender-based violence is a tragic reminder of the importance of the work we do. We stand alongside those experiencing family violence. We will continue to provide support, and to advocate for our clients' unmet needs, so as to effect real, systemic change.

We welcomed the opportunity to participate in the review of the Family Services Program during the year, which will shape future service delivery in ways to best serve Victorian families. Our partnerships with government and community organisations remain crucial to the ongoing development and delivery of our services, and we look forward to ongoing collaboration following the report's outcomes. We are grateful for the continued support of the Australian and Victorian governments, whose recognition of the value of our work has allowed us to serve our clients.

In this, our anniversary year, I also want to take a moment to thank all our funding bodies and the many partner organisations who have supported us across our history. It is through these and other relationships that we have been able to grow and innovate, and respond to some of the most complex challenges facing our clients and communities. Together, we



Looking back over the years, it is clear RAV has made many tough decisions that have been crucial to the organisation's growth and diversification of services.

have made a significant impact, and I look forward to continuing this work in the years ahead.

Looking back over the years, it is clear RAV has made many tough decisions that have been crucial to the organisation's growth and diversification of services. On each occasion, we have deliberately chosen to step out of our comfort zone in order to respond to emerging community needs. This success is a credit to the many Board members, leaders and managers who fearlessly stepped up to make these decisions, and, in doing so, shaped RAV into the organisation it is today. In particular, I extend my heartfelt thanks and recognition to our outgoing President, Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM, for her remarkable contributions over the past 3 decades. A steadfast leader on the Board who has provided valued counsel, she will be greatly missed when she departs the Board in October.

I extend my deepest gratitude too, to our incredible past and present staff members, whose unwavering commitment to our clients is inspiring. They bring our values to life every day, and it is their dedication, adaptability and focus on our clients that ensures we can continue making a meaningful difference in the lives of so many Victorians.

Thank you for your ongoing support.



Dr Andrew Bickerdike
Chief Executive Officer



Our new Strategic Plan 2024–26

The challenges of recent years reaffirmed the importance of the things many of us hold dear – connection, love, family, friends, safety and community, and never has the work of Relationships Australia Victoria been so relevant and important. Building on the successes in our history, our new Strategic Plan paves the way for a bright future.

It is timely that the development of our new Strategic Plan aligned with our organisation’s 75th anniversary. This significant milestone provided the opportunity to not only reflect on our past and celebrate our achievements, but also to look forward and consider what our clients will need from us in the years ahead, and how we can respond.



Read our plans for the future

View our full Strategic Plan at rav.org.au/strategic-plan

Goal 1

Enhance and Expand Established Client-Centred Services

Enhance and expand existing services, ensuring they are client-centred, contemporary and effective.



Goal 2

Develop New, Innovative Services

Design and deliver innovative and effective services in response to identified emerging needs and societal changes.



Vision

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

Focus

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

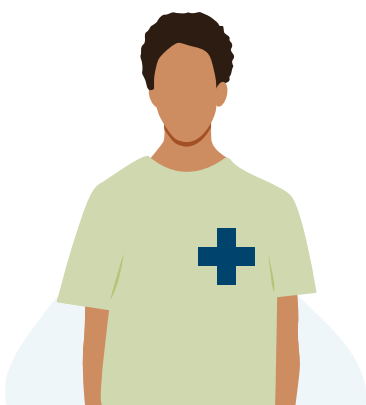
Values

Inclusiveness | Respect | Integrity | Transparency | Accountability
Effectiveness | Innovation | Compassion

Goal 3

Demonstrate and Highlight Service Impacts

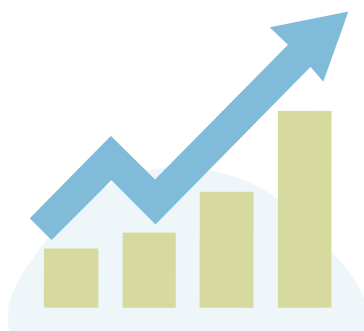
Evaluate our services and increase activities to communicate their outcomes and impact.



Goal 4

Enhance Financial Growth and Sustainability

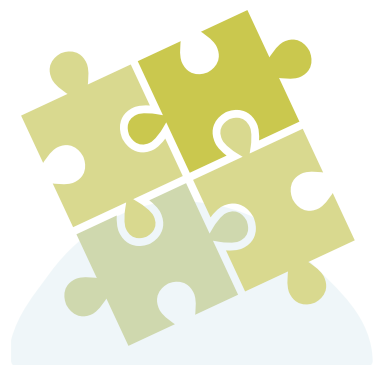
Strengthen our financial position and organisational capabilities.



Goal 5

Build Our People and Nurture Our Culture

Attract, support, sustain and develop a highly skilled, effective workforce.



A celebration of growth across a lifetime

This year, we proudly marked RAV's 75th anniversary through a number of events, initiatives and projects. We welcomed representatives of our funding bodies, partner organisations, stakeholders and other special guests to a celebratory event in October.

As well as celebrating our anniversary, the event recognised the important role of collaboration and relationships with other agencies and services in our success. Social psychologist and bestselling author, Hugh Mackay AO, provided an engaging presentation on the importance of connection, particularly as our communities change around us.

We also launched our inaugural Social Impact Report, 'How we create change' animation, and a video on our work and impact.

In December, close to 300 staff members from across Victoria joined together for a face-to-face celebration with RAV's Board members and special guests. It was a wonderful opportunity for colleagues from across teams, services, centres and regions to connect, celebrate our origins, history of adaptability, client-focused culture and impact, and look forward to our organisation's future.

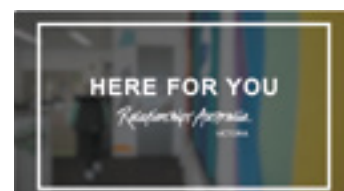
Then and now

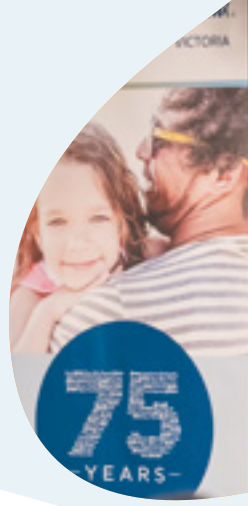
Our early years 1948		Today 2024
Volunteers	↔	400+ professional employees
Marriage guidance and education	↔	100+ diverse services and programs
Based out of volunteers' homes	↔	21 sites and additional outreach locations
Face-to-face sessions	↔	Hybrid delivery: Face-to-face, telephone and online
Response-focused	↔	Prevention, early intervention and tertiary-focused
Reliant on donations	↔	Primarily funded by the Australian and Victorian governments



See our dedication to our clients in action

Watch our video. Scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/RAVHereForYou





Come Working Making a Difference Responsible Excellence
 Integrity Diversity Resilience Equality Supportive Impact
 Evidence-based Relationships Supportive Mindset Health
 Ethical Safe year of health Resilient Mindset
 Evidence-based Relationships Supportive Mindset Health
 Ethical Safe year of health Resilient Mindset

High quality
 Resilient
 Evidence-based Relationships Supportive Mindset Health
 Ethical Safe year of health Resilient Mindset

Evidence-based Relationships Supportive Mindset Health
 Ethical Safe year of health Resilient Mindset

— YEARS —



In their words Hearing our client's voice

'I moved to Melbourne from the country when I was young and moved in with my boyfriend. He was charismatic and manipulative and over time a dark side began to surface in him. **Eventually the relationship became violent**, both physically and emotionally, and I became isolated from friends and family, having to hide my interactions with them from my partner. I couldn't work out why I didn't leave and would look at myself in the mirror saying to myself, "You're a smart, beautiful person; why are you putting up with this?" **This went on for nearly 5 years.**

Eventually, I made an appointment with Relationship Australia Victoria and **the counsellor helped me understand** the cycle of violence, which made so much sense to me **and took away the shame of weakness that I felt**. The counsellor didn't judge me or make me feel small, and I felt I could finally share what had been happening to me over the years. Seeking the support of a counsellor moved me forward when even a visit from the police [resulting] from worried neighbours didn't help. I found a strength inside me to tell this violent person to leave my life and I never looked back. **I've never forgotten the power of those sessions**; they were all I needed to reclaim my worth and **I'm forever grateful.**

– Counselling client from 1996

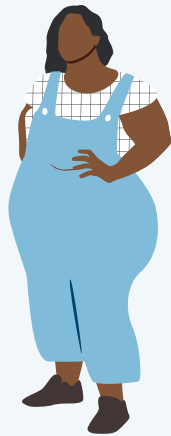
Our impact, far and wide

RAV in numbers in 2023–24

Services and programs

144

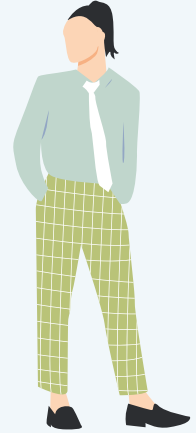
total services and programs



Workforce

402

staff members



66

client services



4.4

average years of service



65

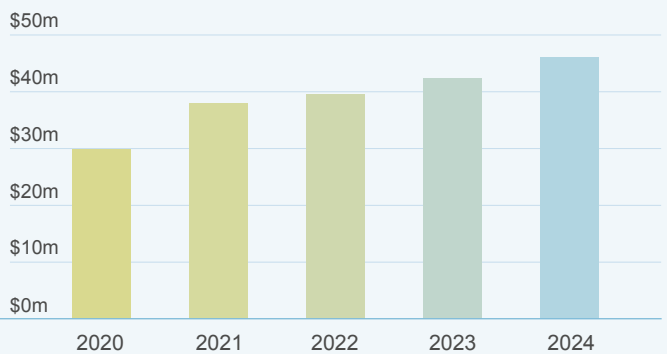
training programs

75%

of our managers are women

Income

\$46.1m



In their words

'I feel **proud** about being able to support change in families, particularly in the area of family violence, and the **quality and professionalism of staff** across the organisation.'

– Shelley, Centre Manager

In their words

'... staff indicate they enjoy working at RAV, with people describing how **everyone cares for the clients**. Staff also described supportive management and feeling connected to the organisation.'

– External auditor

Reach across Victoria

21

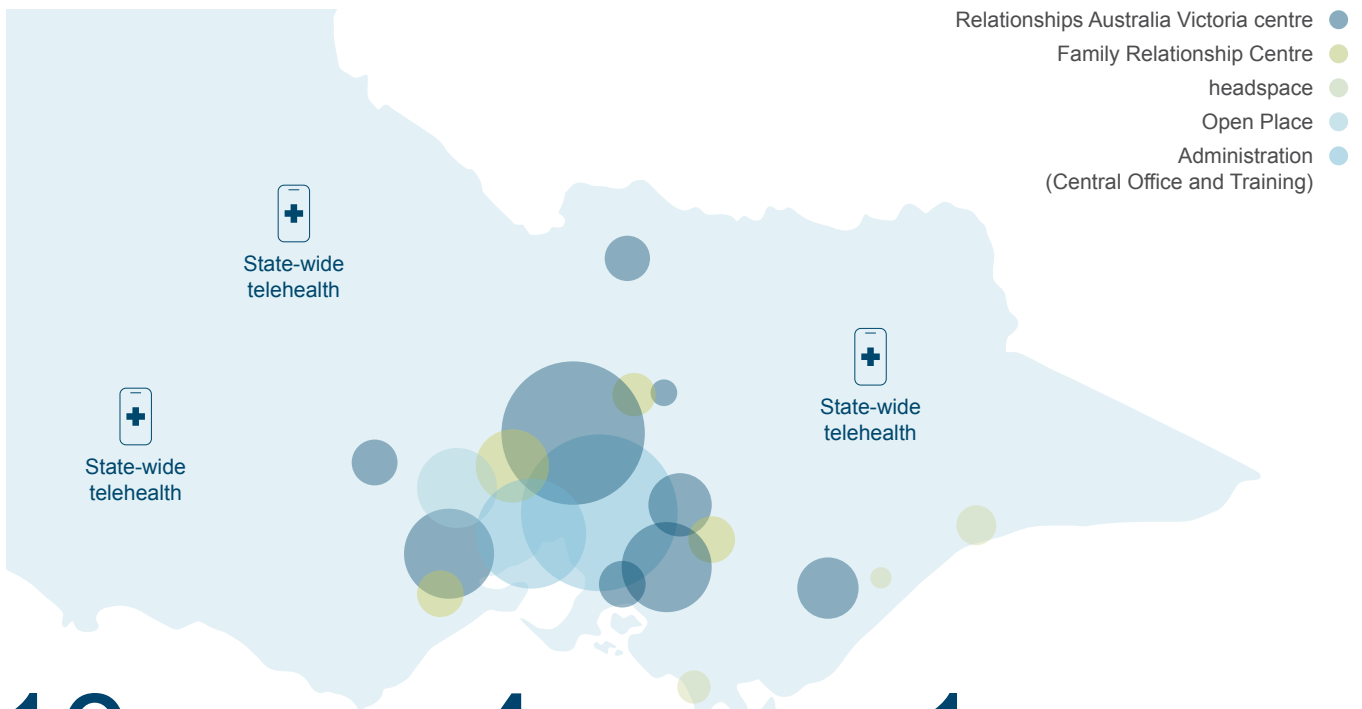
sites

14

metropolitan sites

7

regional sites



10

RAV centres

4

Family Relationship Centres

1

Open Place site

3

headspace sites

3

offices

17

additional outreach locations

Our impact, far and wide

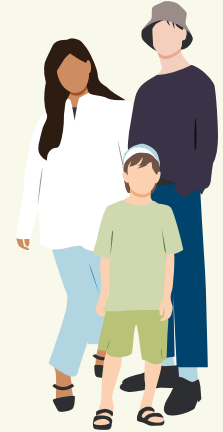
Our clients in focus

3,703

children and young people

34.2%

had mental health needs



1,881

aged 65 and over



46.1%

had family violence needs

3.1%

identified as First Nations peoples

11.2%

spoke a language other than English at home

24.1%

born overseas



83

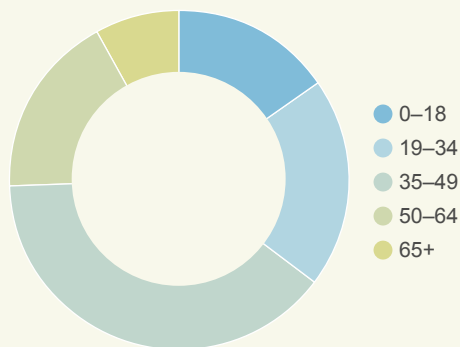
languages spoken at home, most commonly English, Dari, Punjabi, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Hazaraghi, Hindi and Arabic



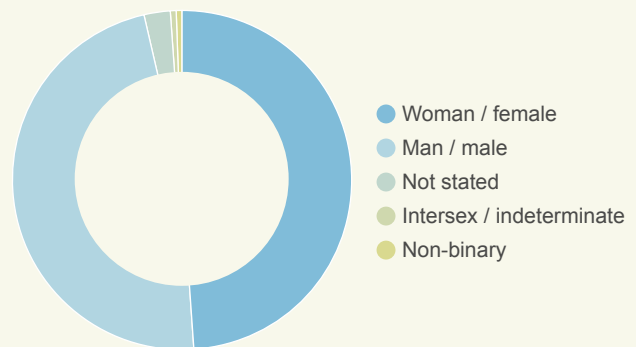
137

different countries of birth

Client age



Client gender





In their words

Hearing our client's voice

'Thank you so much for everything. You have been a **tremendous help** and have **relieved so much stress** for me and my family. I am **beyond grateful** for the invaluable support and guidance [my counsellor] has provided me with. [Their] **expertise and compassionate approach** have been instrumental in **helping me navigate complex family matters**.

From offering insightful advice to creating a safe space for open communication, [my counsellor] has **truly made a difference in my life**. Thank you for the positive impact you have had on my life.'

– Counselling client

A snapshot of client feedback

I felt listened and understood by the service

99.5%

of counselling clients agreed

99.5%

of family dispute resolution (FDR) clients agreed

97.9%

of Family Relationship Centre (FRC) clients agreed

I am better able to deal with issues that I sought help with

98.4%

of counselling clients agreed

98.5%

of FDR clients agreed

95.2%

of FRC clients agreed

I am satisfied with the service received

99.5%

of counselling clients agreed

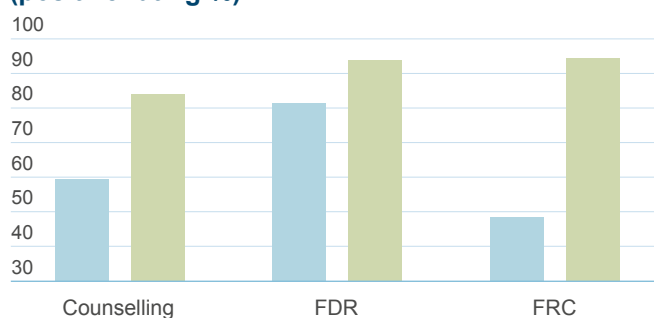
98.2%

of FDR clients agreed

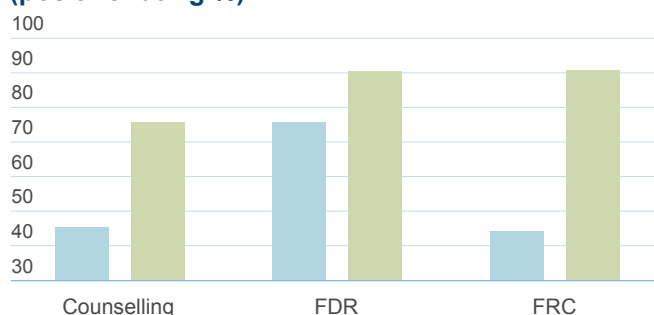
97.5%

of FRC clients agreed

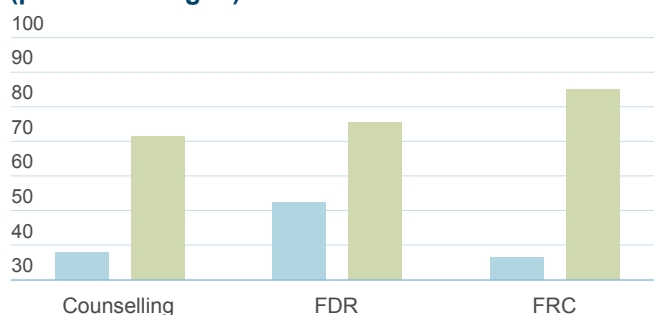
Clients' personal and family safety (positive rating %)



Clients' mental health and wellbeing (positive rating %)



Clients' family functioning (positive rating %)



● Before service ● After service

[Read more about how we're having an impact](#)

See page 47.



Our impact, far and wide

Our reach

23,906

total clients

1,515

family dispute resolution (FDR) clients

294

men's case management clients

829

men's behaviour change program (MBCP) clients

2,130

Open Place support service for Forgotten Australians

5,000+

registered Open Place clients



3,957

counselling clients



5,663

Family Relationship Centre (FRC) clients

309

family violence counselling clients

855

family safety contact service clients



1,177

'early matters' healthy and safe family relationships service clients

966

headspace clients

1,296

LINCS and LINCS in Families workshops for people on community correction orders

Our services

AccessResolve Property Mediation and Conciliation service

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

Connect Me

A free therapeutic case management, counselling and support program for children in Gippsland aged 4 to 11 years.

Counselling

For individuals including children, couples and families.

Diffuse

A 6-week healthy and respectful relationships pilot program for men in correctional facilities.

Disability Counselling and Support

For people who have had violence, abuse, neglect and/or exploitation perpetrated against them, and those impacted by the Disability Royal Commission.

early matters

A free healthy and safe family relationships service for families in Ballarat and Sunshine including:

- **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.

Family Advocacy and Support Services Mental Health Support

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

Family dispute resolution (FDR)

Mediation for parenting and property matters.

‘We need to acknowledge it’s OK to ask for help. Knowledge is power and the more knowledge you have in this area, the more successful you are going to be at co-parenting.’

– FDR and Parenting After Separation Seminar client

Family Relationship Centre (FRC)

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

Family Safety Contact

Support, safety planning, and risk and needs assessments for family members, partners and children of men participating in MBCPs, men’s case management and post-MBCPs.

Family Safety Model

Holistic support for the partners and family members of men attending our MBCPs, men’s case management and post-MBCPs.

Family Safety Navigation program

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

Family therapy

For families experiencing relationship challenges or changes.

Family violence counselling

A free therapeutic service for anyone aged 16 and over who is affected by family violence.

‘Engaging in **this program has made a very unexpected and profound impact on my life. So much so that the change is still happening today.**’

– Family violence counselling client

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

Focus on Kids

A webinar to support parents to understand their child’s experience of separation and the associated conflict.

‘I’ve learned **it is all about my children. The program gave me a better understanding of how to deal with issues, work together and understand how my children are feeling.**’

– Focus on Kids participant

Forced Adoption Support Service

Free counselling, emotional and practical support and information for people affected by past forced adoption policies and practices.

headspace services

Free or low-cost, early-intervention mental health services for young people aged 12 to 25 years, including mental health, physical health (including sexual health), alcohol and other drugs, or work and study support. Specific groups include:

- **AMPLIFY** – an LGBTIQ+ project/social group that plans and delivers social activities for LGBTIQ+ young people
- **Drumbeat** – an emotional-regulation skills group for disengaged students delivered with i-Connect
- **Games group** – for young people living with autism spectrum disorder
- **social-space** – a social connections support group
- **Unique but United (UBU)** – an LGBTIQ+ social group
- **Youth Advisory Groups** – groups of young people who provide vital input into the operation of headspace sites.

Healthy Clubs

Healthy relationship workshops for sporting clubs to prevent family violence.

i-Connect

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

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

Intercountry Adoptee and Family Support Service

Free support for intercountry adoptees and their families.

LINCS

Psychoeducational workshops for people who are subject to community correction orders, including specialist programs for First Nations men.

LINCS in Families

Psychoeducational workshops for people who are subject to family violence orders.

Man Up! Creating Respectful Relationships

A program that uses football as a vehicle to support respectful relationships between young people in south-east Melbourne.

Men’s behaviour change program (MBCP)

For male perpetrators of family violence.

‘My situation was really bad, I didn’t know what to say or what to do, I was really blank. [It] is really **[a] life-changing program** [in] the way they teach and let us follow step by step with different lessons. Through this I learnt a lot and still learning. I can see changes in me. My situation [is] getting better and better.’

– MBCP participant

Men Being Well

A free men's health and wellbeing promotion program.

Men's Case Management program

Individual support for men who want to stop their violent behaviour and are struggling with other challenges that are making this change difficult.

'I was absolutely stunned at the help I received, which helped me get back on my feet. The comfortable vibe and caring, listening experience was exceptional. **I never thought anyone could help me as much as [they] did.** Thanks a million.'

– Men's Case Management client

Open Place

A free support service for Forgotten Australians/Pre-1990 Care Leavers.

'To any of the **Forgotten Australians** out there who are thinking about getting some help or assistance in your life, I'd say to you, just come in and drop in, have a coffee, talk to the staff. ... **It'll definitely change your life.**'

– Anthony, Open Place service user

Opening the Doors

A free support group for women who have experienced family violence.

Parenting After Separation Seminar

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

'There was a lot of stress in our lives. It was suggested that I do [the Parenting After Separation Seminar] course, although I was initially reluctant. I found it **so beneficial** both doing the same course and getting the same information. **We are communicating so much better.**'

– Parenting After Separation Seminar program client

PREPARE/ENRICH

Relationship counselling for couples that have decided to marry or make a long-term commitment to each other.

Redress Support Services

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

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.

Respect and Connect

A skills-based schools' program for students on healthy relationships, gender equality, mental wellbeing, communication and managing emotions.

Right Now

A group for women who have experienced interpersonal trauma.

Support for Fathers

A national project supporting dads, father-figures and their families, and professionals who work with fathers including:

- **The DadMap** – a free 6-week program for separated dads and father-figures
- **DadStuff** – free workshops for dads and father-figures
- **Dads in the Workplace** – a program to help employers and businesses to support dads in workplaces
- **Working with Dads** – workshops for professionals and service providers.

'Acceptance of the situation I am in and **feeling better prepared emotionally** and as a father for the next stages, including family court proceedings.'

– A The DadMap participant on the most significant change experienced as a result of the program

Sustain

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

Tuning in to Kids®

An emotional intelligence parenting program, including specialised groups for:

- dads, with a dedicated program for Afghan dads
- Afghan women
- Vietnamese parents.

‘We were made most welcome by the women in the group, who expressed **heartfelt appreciation** for the opportunity for education and to share what the group enabled them to do. They talked about the program being their **first opportunity to explore their own emotional** experiences, as well as learn about how to support the emotional experiences of their children.’

– Tuning in to Kids® for Afghan women group facilitator



Tuning in to Teens®

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

‘**Every parent should attend a Tuning in to Teens® session.** Ours was highly engaging and insightful.’

– Principal of school hosting Tuning in to Teens®

‘It **helped me understand my teen’s behaviour** better and gave me valuable lessons on how I can better manage our relationship.’

– Tuning in to Teens® webinar participant

Women Making Choices

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

Workplace support services

Workplace programs including counselling, conflict resolution and post-incident debriefing for employees and workplaces.

You Are Not Alone

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

Our impact, far and wide

Professional training and development

Accredited training: Registered Training Organisation RTO 21977

- CHC81115 Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution
- CHC81015 Graduate Diploma of Relationship Counselling

Accredited programs: Other

- Mediation Training Course (CHCSS00142 Mediation Skill Set and National Mediator Accreditation System)
- Specialist Course in Integrative Couple Therapy

Customised training workshops

- Conflict Confidence
- Critical Incident Debriefing
- Critical Incident Training
- Dads' Mental Health
- Healthy and Respectful Relationships
- Healthy and Respectful Relationships – Facilitator Training and Skills
- How to Make Your Diverse Workplace More Inclusive
- Leading Difficult Conversations
- Managing Challenging Behaviours
- Managing Your Performance and Energy in the Workplace
- Mediating with Rainbow Families
- Mental Health Awareness and the Casual Counsellor
- Negotiation and Conflict Management
- Professional Boundaries in Therapeutic Practice
- Professional Boundaries Training
- Responding to Family Violence
- Responding to Family Violence in the Workplace
- Responding to Gender and Family Based Violence in the Workplace
- Supporting Grieving Clients
- The Accidental Mediator
- The Casual Counsellor
- Transitioning into Leadership
- Vicarious Trauma
- Working with Dads

Other specialist programs

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

Professional development webinars

- Addressing Masculinities and Working with Men to Prevent Violence Against Women
- Discussion with Sam Lane – Respect in Sporting Clubs
- In Conversation with Ann O'Neill: The Journey of Trauma Recovery through HOPE
- Motivational Interviewing
- Narrative e-Writing Intervention (NeW-I)
- Resist-Refuse Dynamics and Effects on Children
- Single Session Contact with Grieving Clients
- Supporting Parents and their Families Following the Loss of a Baby
- Supporting Separated Dads
- What Works for Men? Engaging Men in Prevention

Professional development workshops

- Advanced Property Training
- Facilitating a Therapeutic Support Group
- Managing Challenging Behaviours
- Mediating with Rainbow Families
- Negotiation and Conflict Management in the Workplace
- Parenting Coordination Course
- Supporting Separated Families
- Transitioning into Leadership
- Vicarious Trauma
- Working with Dads

Self-paced courses / micro-courses

- Casual Counsellor
- 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 FDR
- Professional Boundaries in Therapeutic and Care Work
- Understanding and Preventing Vicarious Trauma
- Understanding Grief
- Working with Clients Experiencing Grief
- Working with Dads

Mediation matters: FDR making a difference for separated couples, kids and families

Post-separation

1,515

family dispute resolution (FDR) clients

392

AccessResolve Property Mediation and Conciliation service clients



1984 – Pioneering mediation in Australia

The 1960s and 1970s were marked by rapid social change, as long-ignored issues began to surface and be addressed. For many couples, the focus shifted toward loving, healthy relationships rather than viewing marriage as an unbreakable contract. This shift was further reinforced with the introduction of the Commonwealth *Family Law Act* in 1975, which introduced the principle of ‘no-fault’ divorce. Prior to this, couples were required to cite reasons like adultery, cruelty or desertion to justify divorce. With the burden of proving fault removed, couples could formalise the end of their marriage without blame, opening the door to new beginnings.

This significant legal shift led to a rise in divorce rates and, at the same time, increased demand for relationship counselling. As we responded to the growing demand, we also recognised that staying together was not necessarily the best option for all couples. For those navigating separation and divorce, especially parents who had to establish post-separation co-parenting relationships, a new kind of support service was required.

In the early 1980s, we embarked on an ambitious project to introduce mediation—a process relatively unknown in Australia but gaining momentum in the United States. We undertook extensive international research and training, before returning to Australia to train all counselling staff in this innovative approach. Despite facing resistance from some in the community as well as the social services and legal sectors, we forged ahead, bringing mediation to Australia for the first time.

In their words

Hearing our client’s voice

‘I must admit, I came into the separation mediation process with a preconceived notion of what it was going to be about. I was so wrong!

My anxiety and nervousness [were] quickly quelled by ... our mediator. He explained the process thoroughly and gave **equal opportunities** for each side to speak and put their views forward **without feeling judged or minimised**.

The process was personal, yet structured. It was a **cheaper and more efficient** process than a legal back and forth with lawyers.

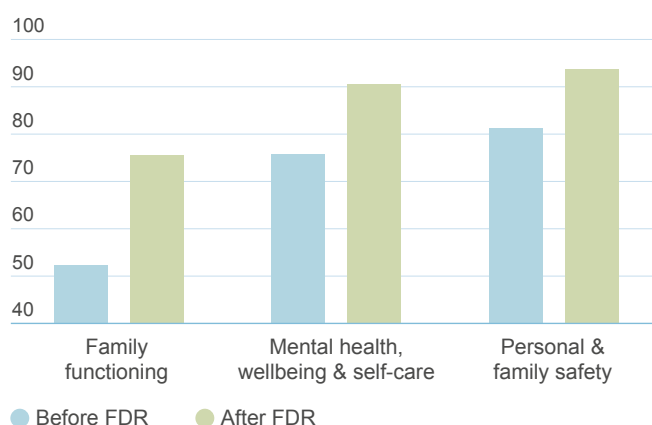
A huge thank you to the team but, in particular, to [the mediator] for his **kindness, gentle direction and assistance** in what made this process a far less overwhelming and worrisome task.’

– FDR client

Today, mediation—often referred to as family dispute resolution (FDR)—is a cornerstone of our organisation and of Australia’s family law system. It provides separating couples with a timely, affordable option for resolving disputes related to parenting and property, and offers an alternative to legal proceedings which can be costly, acrimonious and time-consuming.

As we were 40 years ago, we remain committed to ensuring this service is accessible and effective. Through continuous research and evaluation, we continue to refine FDR, and demonstrate the profound and positive impact it has on clients and their families.

Clients’ circumstances before and after FDR



Our FDR and mediation services

- **AccessResolve** property dispute resolution service, for court-ordered clients on behalf of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia. The service uses a lawyer-assisted conciliation model and achieves consistently high settlement rates of 70% and above.
- **At the Royal Children’s Hospital** as a free service for separating parents whose children are in-patients at the hospital.
- **Child-inclusive FDR**, in which a child consultant meets with the child to talk about their experiences and needs, and the consultant provides feedback to the parents.
- **Child-focused FDR**, in which a child consultant joins the FDR practitioner to provide additional support and information to parents. The child consultant helps parents to focus on their children’s needs by highlighting children’s development research and how conflict affects children. Child-focused FDR is suitable for pre-school age children or situations where children can’t take part in child-inclusive FDR.
- **Co-mediation**, in which 2 FDR practitioners, usually with complementary skills, work together to help clients discuss and resolve their family law disputes.
- **Court-ordered dispute resolution** for separating couples who are ordered by the court to attend dispute resolution to resolve their family law disputes. Clients sometimes attend FDR with their private lawyers.
- **Legally-assisted FDR**, delivered in partnership with lawyers who offer free legal advice and support during FDR, including advice on likely court outcomes.
- **Lawyer-inclusive FDR**, in which separating couples can attend sessions with their private lawyers. Lawyers offer support and advice, including advice on likely court outcomes.
- **Shuttle mediation**, in which the people involved are in separate rooms or participate in FDR via video, because of high conflict, family violence or other safety concerns.

Additional programs and services to support clients to participate in FDR

- **Parenting After Separation Seminar** online programs, which provide parents with key information and strategies to support children to adjust to separation.

‘**Children should be our first priority.** The program helped me understand the feelings of children during separation.’

‘I’ve learned to **put myself in my kids’ shoes** and to provide a safe harbour. I’ve learned about improving communication, and to **focus on [the] future not past**, [and] work towards cooperative parenting.’

– Parenting After Separation Seminar participants

- **Focus on Kids** webinars for parents to understand their child’s experience of separation and the associated conflict.
- **Family Safety Navigation**, which provides enhanced safety and wellbeing support for FDR clients who are impacted by family violence or have other complex needs.

‘I needed help with **mediation as communication in my relationship was completely broken down.** I was getting nowhere in my circumstance. I reached out to Relationships Australia Victoria and was provided with relevant and helpful information. I **felt heard.** Their involvement helped in creating a safe space to discuss [and] negotiate care and financial matters related to our child. The practitioner is extremely competent and fully capable of supporting me in achieving **the best outcome for my child.** I am very grateful for the service I have received.’

– FDR client

Parenting After Separation Seminar participants

83.4%

learned new co-parenting relationship skills



Focus on Kids webinar participants

88.7%

better understood the importance of keeping conflict and adult issues away from children



82.6%

gained insight into their children’s behaviour and emotions.

83.2%

had improved understanding of their children’s behaviour and emotions

‘Ambivalent clients, nevertheless, reported reduced acrimony as a result of their participation, providing support for Australia’s mandatory FDR settings. We conclude that **FDR is effective in improving post-separation relationships, as well as diverting families from lengthy and costly court processes.**’

– Heard et al. 2024¹

FDR for clients intending to go to court: More than just a tick-box exercise?

Separating parents are legally required to try FDR for parenting disputes before they can go to court. This can mean that FDR can sometimes be seen as a ‘tick-box’ exercise for parents who have no expectation of negotiating an agreement. With this knowledge we asked the question: Is FDR still valuable for these clients?

In 2023–24, we conducted new analyses with data from our national Relationships Australia FDR Outcomes Study 2017–19. We explored the outcomes of FDR for all 704 parents in the full sample, and compared these to the outcomes for a subgroup of 126 parents who told us during intake they wanted a certificate to proceed to court to resolve their parenting disputes. These ‘ambivalent parents’ may or may not have been open to negotiating in FDR, but still intended or expected to go to court. Of key interest was the change in the degree of acrimony, or ill-will or hostility that a separated person feels towards their former partner. Research shows that the level of acrimony is a crucial factor affecting the psychological wellbeing of separated parents and the adjustment of their children.

Remarkably, we found that despite their ambivalence towards FDR, more than half of these parents still reached a parenting agreement through the service. These parents also expressed high levels of satisfaction with the FDR process. Importantly, the parents reported reduced acrimony in their relationship with the co-parent, regardless of whether they reached an agreement or not, demonstrating that FDR can be beneficial even for clients with very low expectations of the service.

For parents who were ambivalent about FDR before proceeding to court:

73%

were satisfied with the FDR process

58%

still reached full or partial agreements in FDR

Acrimony between co-parents decreased, regardless of whether an agreement was reached.



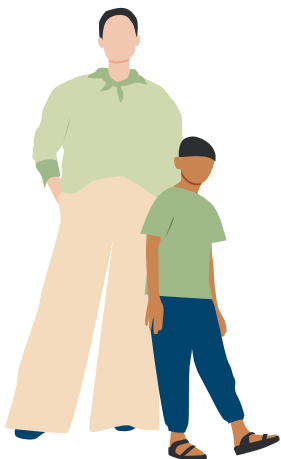
Read more about the benefits of FDR for ambivalent clients

Download our research summary on participation, agreement and reduced acrimony in mandatory FDR.

Scan the QR code or visit rav.org.au/about/research-evaluation/research-summaries



¹ Heard G, Lohan A, Petch J, Milic J and Bickerdike A (2024) ‘Participation, agreement and reduced acrimony through family mediation: Benefits for the ambivalent client in a mandatory setting’, *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 41(4):1–18, doi:10.1002/crq.21426.



Expanding access: Legally-assisted FDR with community legal centres

Some clients are unable to participate in the mainstream model of FDR, due to issues such as family violence, unequal bargaining power or other vulnerabilities. Having the support and assistance of a lawyer during FDR can support such clients to resolve their family law differences without proceeding to court.

In order to identify the value of lawyer assistance in FDR for clients, we continued our study of our Legally-Assisted FDR service that is provided in Sunshine in conjunction with community legal centres. Following interviews and a survey of clients, we presented our preliminary findings at the 2023 National Mediation Conference in New Zealand. Key results included clients' reports that their lawyer's presence helped them to focus on their children's needs (80%), understand their position (89%), and respond to proposals (87%), and avoid high legal costs (83%).

Such outcomes support clients to consider proposals made in FDR in the context of likely court outcomes, costs and time frames and, as a result, can support clients to reach agreements without proceeding to court.

'For many parents it works very well because they have the benefit of an impartial mediator, but they have the support and legal advice of the lawyer ... **It is not litigious, it's not confrontational – it's about finding a solution** and a way to parent their children.'

– Legally-assisted FDR practitioner

'With the lawyer there I was good ... because I didn't have to fight for myself. **I was not alone.** It was a team.'

– Legally-assisted FDR client

In their words Hearing our client's voice

'I came into the meeting so anxious; I finished the meeting feeling so good. I felt like I had someone on my side. I had some support, but both parties were completely taken into consideration and **everything was just dealt with... with such ease, and I was so thankful.**'

– Legally-assisted FDR client

Hearing children's voices: Supporting child-inclusive practices in FDR

We strongly believe that children should have a say in post-separation parenting arrangements, as their involvement benefits their wellbeing and sense of autonomy during and after family breakdown. In November 2023, we produced a report on children's voices in FDR through child-inclusive practices, which mapped different models of child advocacy in mediation. The results will support the increased use of child-inclusive practices in FDR within RAV, and will be shared more broadly with the sector.

'**We have found nothing but unequivocal support**, including from RAV's own practitioners, for the legal and ethical imperative **to increase and improve the ways in which children are heard** in post-separation parenting arrangements.'

– Genevieve Heard, Senior Researcher, and Melody Velasquez-Tan, Research and Evaluation Officer

FDR outcomes for Relationships Australia clients

We continue to work with data from the Relationships Australia FDR Outcomes Study 2017–2019, which is a national project on the outcomes and efficacy of post-separation FDR for parenting and property disputes. We investigated whether a shorter version of an existing 25-item ‘acrimony scale’ developed in the 1980s to measure conflict between separated parents could be beneficial in research and practice.

We developed and validated short scales measuring relationship hostility and parental co-operativity. These may be used to measure both the extent of negative feeling between separated parents and the capacity to work around this in the best interests of children. This capacity is important to the success of FDR, and it may be useful to know whether clients are ready to negotiate or need more preparation first. This process and its outcomes were published in the *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* in August 2023.

Post-separation co-parenting apps: Can they help families avoid conflict?

We continue to translate the outcomes of our Australian Research Council Linkage Grant research project on the role of post-separation co-parenting apps in reducing conflict. We presented at the 2023 Partnership of Victorian FRCs’ Good Practice Forum, and had a fourth article on the research published in the *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*. We are now exploring related research opportunities, including through an Australian Research Council grant application to test specific features of apps with clients.

Communication technologies: How are they used and misused after separation?

We’re disseminating findings from our study on the use and misuse of communication technologies among post-separation clients, including which technologies are used by our clients, how they are positively and negatively experienced, and why some technologies are preferred over others. The results can assist our sector and the legal sector in promoting positive co-parenting communication habits and tools. Our peer-reviewed journal article on the outcomes has been accepted for publication in the international *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* in September 2024.

Analysing the costs and benefits of FDR

Cost–benefit analysis is a comprehensive and evidence-based method for systematically evaluating the economic, social and environmental impacts of programs. This year, we advanced our project to demonstrate the value and impact of our FDR service, as well as report outcome measurement and qualitative data. The results of this project will guide the delivery of effective and cost-effective services, and allow us to articulate the impact of our programs within the sector and to government. It will also support us to illustrate the value of services to clients that, in turn, will help them to evaluate and make informed decisions about services and how to resolve their family law disputes.



Mental health, family violence and the courts: Family Advocacy and Support Services

Mental health

765

Family Advocacy and Support Services (FASS) clients



Clients navigating family law matters in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia often face complex challenges extending beyond the law, such as mental health concerns, family violence and more. The Family Advocacy and Support Services (FASS) Program, administered by Victoria Legal Aid and funded by the Australian Government, offers a unique, integrated approach to supporting families involved in family law proceedings who are affected by family violence – whether they have experienced it or are accused of using it.

As the provider of the free mental health support component of FASS, we recognise the profound impact that family violence and family law disputes can have on mental health and wellbeing. Our services not only work to enhance client safety, but also empower clients to effectively engage in legal processes, advocate for themselves and make informed decisions.

Our free program works with individuals with immediate or upcoming court matters, with the option of face-to-face, telephone and video support. Services are available at the permanent Family Law Registries in Melbourne and Dandenong, as well as in 7 regional locations across Victoria – Geelong, Warrnambool, Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton, Mildura and Morwell – when the Court is sitting on circuit.

Safety is a central focus of the program, which operates in partnership with Victoria Legal Aid, family violence services and community legal centres. This collaborative approach helps to enhance safety, ensure that clients receive comprehensive support without the need to repeatedly explain their situation, and works to prevent clients from ‘falling through the gaps’ of the support service system.

Our mental health support team employs evidence-based strategies, such as grounding and self-regulation techniques, to increase psychological safety and help clients to manage heightened emotions like stress, anxiety and fear. This assists clients to remain calm, prepared and focused, so that they can make decisions that are in their best interests.

In advance of court dates, we work to provide information, support and referrals about court processes, preparing for court, how to deal with seeing a former partner, who to bring for support and other relevant referrals.

In preparation for court dates, we provide clients with important information and referrals, helping them understand court processes, plan for their appearances and prepare for interactions with their former partners. We also discuss other support options, such as a support person for hearings, mental health plans and other low-cost services as needed.





Our program in action

Supporting Bec through the legal process

Bec*, a client who was navigating family law disputes over parenting and property matters after separating from her partner, was referred by the judiciary to our service due to concerns about the mental health impact of her experiences of family violence and coercive control. We supported Bec, who was representing herself, over 2 days of Court appearances.

Our mental health workers provided intensive support, working closely with FASS family violence workers and specialist services to create a safety plan for Bec. We facilitated external referrals for counselling and offered emotional support, including debriefing after court appearances. Additionally, we helped coordinate access to a FASS duty lawyer, and served as a practical liaison between Bec, the Independent Children's Lawyer, and her former partner's barrister. These actions helped to ensure Bec maintained agency and was able to fully participate in the legal proceedings.

For Bec, a key aspect of our support was the coordination of her and her former partner's arrival and departure from Court, to minimise unplanned interactions. This careful planning significantly enhanced her sense of safety, reducing the stress and anxiety associated with facing her former partner who had used violence, both in and around the courtroom.

– Client of our Mental Health Support component of the Family Advocacy and Support Services



In their words

Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia judge

'Throughout the trial, Family Law Support Services ('FASS') provided the mother with a support worker who sat next to her throughout the trial including as she was being cross-examined. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the FASS workers who were in the courtroom. During this trial at all times they were quietly giving the mother support which facilitated the running of the trial, particularly during periods where the mother became distressed and needed a break.

FASS provide an important service and enhance the Court's ability to deliver justice. Much of that work occurs outside the courtroom, but I always appreciate their quiet assistance in Court. The Court proceedings can be incredibly distressing and confronting for anyone, particularly in family law matters dealing with children and sensitive issues.'

– On RAV's Mental Health Support delivered through the Family Advocacy and Support Services. *Grossmann & Myles* [2023] FedCFamC2F 1492

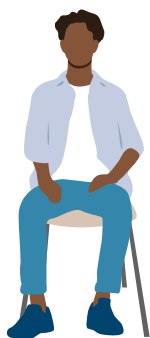
* Name changed for privacy.

Respect and Connect: Supporting students now, for healthy relationships throughout life

Prevention and early intervention

1,359

students reached in 2023–24



12,000+

students have participated since 2014

The program positively improves understanding of how gender stereotypes impact relationships.

Research shows that when young people develop the knowledge and skills that support respectful relationships, social engagement and emotional regulation, they are more likely to experience positive mental health, relationships and behaviours throughout their lives. Early adolescence is a critical period of social and neurological development, during which attitudes and behaviours around gender roles, stereotypes and relationships often become more entrenched and difficult to change. This stage of life presents a key opportunity to teach young people social and emotional skills that will benefit them in the long term.

For over a decade, we have been delivering our Respect and Connect program (formerly known as ‘I like, like you’) to secondary school students. This early intervention and prevention program focuses on the development of social and emotional learning skills such as self-awareness, emotional regulation and relating to others, both in real life and online, to enhance young people’s relationships and mental wellbeing. We recognise the link between rigid gender stereotypes, gender inequality, disrespectful attitudes toward women and the occurrence of family violence. As a result, the program uniquely focuses on 3 interconnected areas: healthy relationships, mental wellbeing and family violence.

Continuous evaluations, focus groups, emerging evidence and feedback from young people and school communities have guided the evolution of our program. This has led to the new name, Respect and Connect, and a curriculum focus on social and emotional learning, which is linked to improved mental wellbeing and reduced family violence. The program’s interactive design helps to build students’ competencies, particularly in self-awareness, social awareness and relationship skills.

In 2023–24, we expanded our program by adapting it for upper primary school students in years 5 and 6. This responds to evidence suggesting that teaching young people about gender equality and healthy masculinity is most effective between the ages of 10 and 14 years.

The Respect and Connect program consistently achieves strong positive outcomes. Evaluations from 2023–24 show significant improvements in students’ understanding of how gender stereotypes impact relationships, with school staff also reporting improvements in students’ skills for emotional regulation and communication.

‘I feel I can help those that I know that are in an abusive relationship.’

– School student participant of Respect and Connect

‘If we can provide young people with the foundational knowledge and skills early in life, it will set them up for success now and well into the future. These are known protective factors, and our program consistently demonstrates improvement in those skills and attitudes.’

– Sandra Opoku, Senior Manager Evaluation and Social Impact on the Respect and Connect program

Taking brave steps: Support after family violence

Family violence

Everyone has the right to feel safe and free from abuse and violence in their relationships.

72

children supported

136

adults supported



Family violence affects children and young people, even if it's not directed at them. They can be impacted if they hear, see or are exposed to the violent behaviour or its effects, such as seeing a distressed adult or damaged property.

This year, we delivered bRAVE Steps, a program for children aged 18 and under, who are affected by family violence. It is named after the bravery that young people demonstrate during their recovery journey. Children who have experienced family violence often have difficulty expressing their feelings in appropriate or helpful ways, and the program helps these children to talk about their experiences and to recognise, name and express their feelings. These skills help to improve their emotional literacy and ability to regulate their emotions and resilience.

The family-centred, trauma-informed and strength-based program provides up to 10 free counselling sessions to help address safety, social, education, trauma and family relationship issues. A range of counselling modalities to meet individual needs include creative, play, somatic, cognitive and behavioural therapy, mindfulness, and emotion-focused and narrative techniques. Psychoeducation and referrals to specialist services are also provided.

bRAVE Steps can help children who are:

- struggling with anxiety, stress, anger, sadness or other big feelings
- having nightmares or trouble sleeping
- arguing or losing patience more than normal
- experiencing issues with friends or peers
- feeling aches and pains, even when not sick
- struggling to adjust to family changes
- having issues at school, childcare or home.





‘I like to come to the sessions and talk about my feelings.’

– bRAVe Steps client, 8 years old

Integral to our program is the knowledge that many carers who have experienced family violence have post-traumatic stress disorder and are trying to navigate their own trauma. This can impact their ability to interact with and support their child. For this reason, counselling is also available for protective carers of children. By working with both children and their carers, we can support strong family relationships, and foster children’s healthy social, emotional, cognitive and physical development.

With significant need for accessible specialised family violence counselling, we provided up to 8 sessions of counselling to anyone aged 16 and over who had experienced family violence. Delivered since early 2023, this year the service offered face-to-face and online counselling across regions surrounding our Cranbourne, Kew, Shepparton and Sunshine centres. Demand for support from the program has been strong, with a high volume of referrals from both other RAV services and external services.

We also delivered our free online You Are Not Alone support group. Over 8 weeks, women strengthen resilience and regain their sense of self by connecting with others, learning skills and sharing their experiences.

bRAVe Steps and our specialist family violence counselling service is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.



In their words Hearing our client’s voice

‘I initially contacted Relationships Australia [Victoria] looking for marriage counselling, but as I shared small parts of my story with the intake team, they suggested I would be better supported through the [family violence] counselling stream. It has taken me some time to acknowledge and accept what my circumstances were, and **to understand the impacts of domestic violence and coercive control on my children and myself.**

The advice and support that I have received from the counsellor has helped me beyond measure, both in managing myself and understanding how best to support my kids through an extraordinarily difficult time. In particular, the insights [my counsellor] shared with me helped me work through many difficult scenarios, and also learn to accept there were many things I could not control. Above all, I had a trusted woman I could speak to who **genuinely cared about my wellbeing and my kids.**

Forever grateful for their support and the incredible work they do.’

– Family violence counselling client



Nurturing relationships: Working with First Nations communities

First Nations peoples

3.1%

of clients identified as First Nations peoples of Australia

8%

of our headspace clients in Gippsland identified as First Nations peoples of Australia



We have been listening deeply to the community and yarning with them to gain an understand of how we can respond to local requests to deliver culturally safe services to First Nations communities. Following the results of the referendum that failed to enshrine a First Nations Voice to Parliament in Australia's constitution, the importance of truth-telling is core in our work. RAV strongly supported the proposed change to the Constitution and we remain committed to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and to ongoing learning about First Nations culture and the challenges faced by First Nations peoples.

Our monthly staff Yarn Ups continued, enabling staff to come together and connect on a deeper level to discover how they can expand their knowledge and skills and be strong allies for First Nations peoples of Australia. The online and occasionally face-to-face gatherings are well-attended, with meaningful discussions leading to attendees sharing group messaging to their teams about the importance of allyship and how to be an active ally.

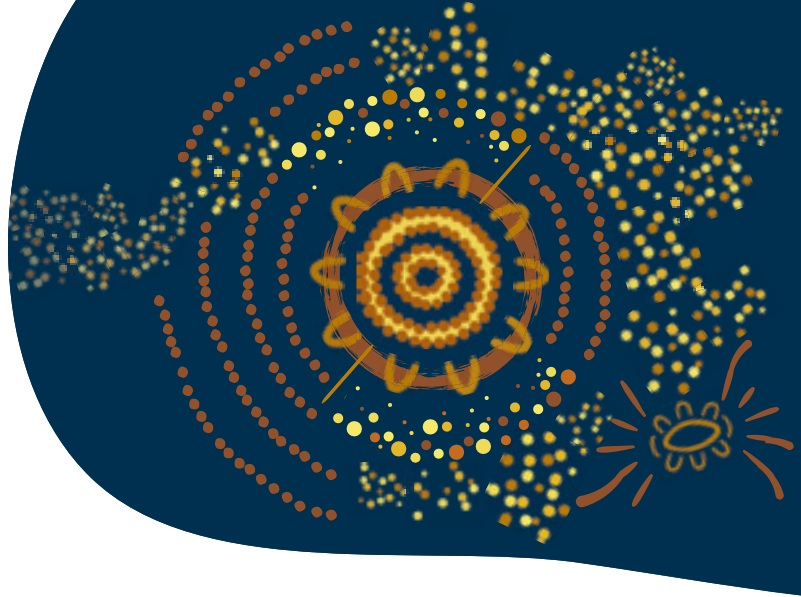
We welcomed new staff to our First Nations team during the year and focused on expanding our organisation's cultural fitness and awareness training. This was part of a national project being undertaken by the Relationships Australia Indigenous Network. The project has added depth to the collaborative work led by First Nations communities and also undertaken with them.

We introduced a new First Nations Leave Policy, which provides leave for First Nations employees to attend community, ceremonial and significant First Nations events.

In response to requests from local First Nations groups, including yarning circles at First Nations co-ops, we have delivered a variety of programs and activities across Victoria. This includes therapeutic case management for school students in regional Victoria, providing information and facilitated referrals at the Sisters Day Out® wellbeing workshop, and therapeutic case management and activities in a regional Victorian school to support students to re-engage with education. We have also supported local networks, acted as an auspice organisation for a Gathering Place when requested, and attended events in the community where deep listening occurs, to connect with and understand how we can support First Nations peoples.

Our staff have undertaken training in delivering a program focused on strengthening attachment in the first 1,000 days of a child's life – from conception to 2 years of age. This is in recognition of the importance of this foundational period on child development and wellbeing. In response to requests from local community, we will commence a pilot of this program in 2024.

Right: Artwork we commissioned, created by Emrhan Tjapanangka Sultan



We commissioned Emrhan Tjapanangka Sultan, a First Nations Engagement Specialist at RAV and a distinguished Aboriginal artist, to create a piece of art for our organisation. Emrhan is from the Western Arrarnta and Luritja people in Central Australia, and Kokatha people in South Australia. He is strongly connected to his cultural values and was taught, and given permission from his Elders, to paint the traditional style of the Western and Central Desert art from an early age. Emrhan's beautiful piece includes elements that represent our staff members, the places we gather and work, and our continuing journey supporting First Nations and non-Indigenous clients and communities.

We will continue to work in solidarity with all elements of 'Voice, Treaty, Truth' for First Nations peoples. Core to our Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities in Victoria, is to empower self-determination through all interactions, partnerships and services with First Nations peoples. We will continue to listen and learn, and take individual and collective responsibility for making change.

Our headspace Sale site works collaboratively with Victoria Police to support Gen C On the Go, a program for 11–17-year-old young people in Wurruk that's led by GippSport. Led by a trauma-informed youth worker, the weekly program is designed to provide positive engagement opportunities for at-risk young people. We provide mental health support to participants, which include almost 50% First Nations peoples. Program activities include visiting and learning on local Gunaikurnai Country through the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, with Aboriginal participants proudly sharing their Gunaikurnai Acknowledgement of Country at many sessions.

Key activities

- Monthly yarning circles for RAV's workforce.
- NAIDOC Week street march in Bairnsdale.
- Attendance at National Reconciliation and NAIDOC Week events across Victoria.
- 'Honoring our Elders' events.
- Hosting a 'chill-out' zone at the Indigenous Surf Carnival in Lakes Entrance.
- Stalls at Djirra Sisters Day Out events in Bairnsdale and Ballarat, the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative First Nations Community Sports Day in Bairnsdale and the Nakunbalook Cultural Centre in Sale, as part of NAIDOC Week.
- Attendance at local First Nations Networks, by invitation.
- Established a partnership with Banyule Council's Burrbunin Beek Community Centre to re-establish the Northern Metro First People's Network.

'I would like to acknowledge that having headspace as a stakeholder in our youth program at Wurruk is working its magic. I had a young person and their parent reach out to me this afternoon after an incident that took place at school today. After the parent spoke to school, it was recommended that their young person be offered support. Having made connections with a staff member through the Wurruk program, the young person would like to have an initial chat with headspace to get some much-needed support and a plan going forward.'

– Project Officer at GippSport,
lead agency of the Gen C On the Go program

headspace Sale is linked to headspace Bairnsdale and operated by Relationships Australia Victoria. All headspace services are funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. Administration of funding is carried out by the headspace centre's local Primary Health Network (PHN), in this case, Gippsland PHN.

YES: Addressing the mental health needs of Gippsland's 'missing middle' young people

Young people



Young people experiencing complex mental health issues who aren't able to access the support they need are often referred to as the 'missing middle'. These individuals have needs that surpass what primary health services such as GPs, private clinicians, headspace and school counsellors can provide. Yet their needs are not severe enough for tertiary health system services, such as through hospital. As a result, they frequently miss out on consistent, appropriate and timely care.

In Gippsland, where psychological distress among young Australians exceeds the national average, a new and innovative Youth Enhanced Service (YES) will soon be available. This service is designed for young people aged 12–25 years with severe or complex mental health issues, and will also support their families. Holistic mental health and wellbeing care will be delivered by a psychiatry-led multidisciplinary team, including mental health navigators, a youth alcohol and other drugs worker, and Eating Disorders Victoria, along with 2 youth peer workers who bring lived experience to mentor and support clients.

YES is for 12–25 year old young people who:

- live, work and/or study in Gippsland
- need more mental health support than is available through their doctor, school counsellor or headspace
- find it hard to access specialist services, such as those provided in hospitals.

Lived and living experiences are central to the YES program. Young people are co-designing the program, and youth and carer/friend advisory groups will inform ongoing service reviews and adaptations to ensure the program meets the evolving needs of young people.

The program will focus on service accessibility to ensure access regardless of the complexity of mental health issues. YES will be delivered through existing RAV and headspace centres, outreach in community settings and telehealth across 6 local government areas in Gippsland. The program will also connect young people to additional supports through collaboration with over 70 local organisations, schools, health services and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

'For young people in rural areas, travel and other factors can make it difficult to find and access support and appointments. That's why prioritising service availability and accessibility is central to our YES program.'

– Jo Huggins, Senior Manager Operations
Regional Victoria

'YES will help young people who have fallen through the gaps of mental health services feel supported, recognised and understood about their mental health and wellbeing.'

– Youth lived experience peer worker

The YES program launched on 1 July 2024. It is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. Administration of funding is carried out by Gippsland PHN.

We see you: An Open Place for Forgotten Australians

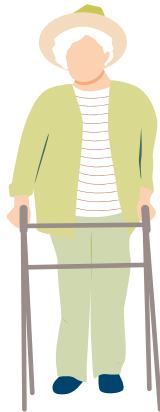
Trauma-informed

2,130

active service users

5,000+

registered service users



A key feature of our service is our drop-in centre in Richmond, Melbourne's inner-east. Here, service users can connect with other Forgotten Australians, use free laundry facilities, access computers and our library, enjoy tea or coffee, or have breakfast, lunch or snacks. Each Friday, we host a lunch where service users can catch up with each other and staff. The centre also offers activities such as walking groups and art therapy programs. These informal opportunities help provide Forgotten Australians with a sense of connection and community that they may not have experienced during their time in care.

Additionally, Open Place makes a difference by facilitating social support groups across 13 locations in regional and rural Victoria, offering further opportunities for connection and support.

Our specialised state-wide support and advocacy service, Open Place, is dedicated to improving the lives of Forgotten Australians – individuals who, as children, spent time in institutions, orphanages and other out-of-home 'care' settings before 1990. Many have experienced harm because of this 'care', including physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse. Forgotten Australians, also known as Care Leavers or Pre-1990 Care Leavers, often faced the additional trauma of being silenced or disbelieved when they tried to speak out about their abuse.

At Open Place, we are committed to providing care- and trauma-informed services that are accessible, welcoming and responsive to the needs of Forgotten Australians. We offer a safe place that recognises that something has happened that was not their fault.

We offer direct assistance and coordinate additional supports for our service users. These include counselling, health services, community education, help with applying for the National Redress Scheme, records searches and family reunions. Once a service user's time in care is confirmed, they can choose the services they wish to access.

'I would be more than happy for you to share my thoughts about how much you all meant to my Nan and continue to mean to many others. She always spoke of you very fondly. I hope you know how much she loved attending the Open Place functions. They were a massive highlight and something to look forward to.'

'I'm sure there are many, many people who would feel the same way as me about **how much it has meant to us and our loved ones** who lived at the Ballarat Orphanage. The **continued support and connection [to] Open Place**, and all their staff have given, has been truly amazing. I would be extremely proud to do your job ... as it is having a **profound effect** on many people.'

– Adult grandchild of an Open Place service user who has passed away

‘When you’ve **been a kid in care**, the messages that you get through your life growing up; they’re very damaging, destroying ones.

Open Place has helped me to see that I do have value, and that I can be myself and be accepted, and that I’m not in the way, and that people actually do like me. And also, to help me believe in myself, that I can actually accomplish anything if I put my mind to it ...

I can’t thank Open Place enough for what they do.’

– Tam, Open Place service user

On 8 February this year, Premier Jacinta Allan delivered a Parliamentary Apology on behalf of the Victorian Government to Victorians who experienced abuse and neglect as children in institutional settings before 1990. In connection with this apology, we provided extra support to Forgotten Australians, helping them share their stories with the Victorian Government, attend the apology event at Parliament House, and talk to staff at our drop-in centre as well as in Wangaratta, Sale and Ballarat, where the Parliamentary Apology was live-streamed.

We also shared information on advanced Redress payments, announced following the apology. These one-time payments are available to those who suffered physical, psychological, or emotional abuse or neglect as children in Victorian institutions before 1990, and who are now terminally or critically ill.

For those who grew up in out-of-home institutions, such events and programs can trigger complex emotional responses. Open Place remains committed to standing with Forgotten Australians every step of the way.

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.

Below: Open Place service users at the drop-in centre





In their words

Hearing our service user's voice

'I was in a pretty bad place in my life. I was always wandering around, walking. [I] had anxiety and depression and **happened to stumble across Open Place.** I saw the sign saying, "Forgotten Australians". I thought, well, I'm an Australian, I've been forgotten by a lot of institutions over the years. So, I walked in and ... somebody offered me a coffee and a little chat. They asked me about my life and have I been in the boys' home? I said, "yeah, I have". Based on that, [I] got the help I needed. **I thought, well, I've found a place that is for what I'm going through,** like spot on.

Open Place helped me by finding my records and helped me reconnect with my family ... some dental work that I needed as well, and a bit down the track, I was able to get myself a good counsellor and get some really good support there. That was all funded by Open Place as well, which I could never afford.

When I first encountered Open Place ... **I was very depressed. I had post-traumatic stress disorder.** Being on the pension at a young age, I was about 40, 41, which is not really common, but obviously I had to be on that to get extra support. **I wasn't able to find work. I was living in a house commission** environment where it was very unsafe, always encountering verbal abuse, physical abuse. So, I was always very on, how do you say, very stressed. Anywhere I went, I was always on the ball. I couldn't actually go anywhere and relax until I came into Open Place ... I know that the staff will help me at Open Place and they have and they still do.

I [now] live in a house in a private street. **I have a job. I have a car. My mental health is improved a lot.** There's still a long way to go with what happened to me in the past in different places. But Open Place is always a constant.

I'm a very different person. It's like once you strip back yourself, back to the bare minimum, that's when you find out who you really are and then you can start to build what you want, how you want to change.

To the staff who have helped me and continually helped me ... **thanks a lot for your support and understanding and listening.** Yeah, it's a big help, both mentally and emotionally.'

– Anthony, Open Place service user



Responding to complex needs: People impacted by forced adoption, and National Redress Scheme applicants

Specialist services

Forced Adoption Support Service

- Free and confidential
- Counselling and emotional support
- Information and referrals
- Advice and support on adoption-related issues
- Support with searching for records and family members

Between the 1940s and 1980s, forced adoption policies and practices in Australia led to unethical and often illegal adoptions. This profoundly affected mothers, fathers, children and extended families. After the Australian Government issued a formal apology in 2013, the need for specialised support for those impacted was recognised. In response, we became a provider of Forced Adoption Support Services in Victoria, offering assistance to mothers, fathers, adopted individuals and other family members.

Through our service, we work collaboratively with our clients, offering free complex trauma counselling, non-crisis therapeutic support, education and information services. Our services are available across Victoria, including face-to-face support at RAV centres, outreach in community venues, and via telehealth and online platforms. We also implement outreach initiatives that are culturally sensitive and appropriate for First Nations communities, ensuring that our services align with best practices.

Following the conclusion of the 'Inquiry into responses to historical forced adoption in Victoria' this year, the Victorian Government established a Redress Scheme for mothers who were forcibly separated from their babies under these policies. While this is a positive step forward, the Scheme has significantly affected clients and increased demand for services.

In response, guided by client feedback, ongoing reflection and a commitment to best practice, we

In their words

Hearing our client's voice

'... you are sooo beneficial for me. **I cannot begin to tell you the good that you do for me.** You are so knowledgeable about your area and chatting with other psychologists in the past they haven't been – **you by far excel and have such a knowledge base** that is way above everyone else, and the way that you connect with me because of that knowledge, and the way that you speak with me and know and respect that I can understand what you talk about, it is so beneficial. **You've given me something for the first time in 2 to 3 years ... tools I can really use that make sense to me.'**

– Forced Adoption Support Service Client.

have tailored our service delivery to better meet the unique needs of each client. This includes offering brief interventions to support clients at key stages of the Redress application process.

Some clients were telling us that they'd participated in 'talking therapy' for years without much changing for them. We listened to their needs and, as a result, introduced other approaches including art and somatic therapies, which have been positively received.

'**The sensorimotor art therapy has been life changing for me, I really loved it, thank you – your facilitation of the art therapy is amazing.'**

– Forced Adoption Support Service client

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

Redress Support Service

1 in 5

clients identified as First Nations peoples in 2023–24



Engaging with institutions or services can be challenging, frightening and distressing for those who have experienced child sexual abuse in an institutional setting, especially when there's a power differential. Deciding to apply for the National Redress Scheme, the Australian Government's response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, can also be a difficult and complex process.

Our Redress Support Service offers therapeutic counselling, information and referrals to help clients understand their options and decide whether to apply for Redress. If they choose to proceed, we guide them through each step of the process, from applying to receiving an offer from the Scheme, which could involve access to counselling, a Redress payment and/or a Direct Personal Response (an apology) from the responsible institution or institutions. The Scheme is available to Australian citizens or permanent residents born before 30 June 2010, who experienced child sexual abuse in an institution before 1 July 2018. It is designed to recognise the harm done to people who experienced sexual abuse as children and hold the institutions responsible to account.

We recognise the significant, long-lasting emotional, psychological and social impacts of childhood trauma and abuse. Therefore, our services are trauma-informed, survivor-centred and based on best practices for responding to trauma and its effects. We continuously reflect on client feedback and insights to ensure we meet their needs.

This year, we saw a three-fold increase in new clients, driven by factors such as growing awareness of the scheme, outcomes of other Redress applications and referrals from community groups. In response to this demand, we expanded our services and conducted specialised training, including on supporting men who were sexually abused as children, and understanding the gender-specific impacts on their experiences and support needs.

We also experienced a significant increase in First Nations clients accessing our Redress Support Services, as a result of word-of-mouth referrals and the option for clients to access support outside their local communities, which offers greater privacy.

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



The impact of Redress Support Services

In late 2022, we received a referral to support 68-year-old Alison*, who had experienced both familial and institutional abuse as a child and had been made a ward of the state. Alison had also been diagnosed with severe depression and anxiety.

Alison began accessing our counselling services through face-to-face sessions at a community centre close to her home, where she felt comfortable. In her first session, Alison shared that her entire life had been shaped by childhood abuse and that she was tired of living in pain. Given the trauma effects Alison was experiencing, the initial sessions focused on building trust, safety and stabilisation. The counsellor also provided resources, referrals and other supports to help Alison continue building her knowledge and resilience between sessions.

It took several sessions before Alison felt ready to start working on her National Redress Scheme application. As the application process progressed, the counsellor supported Alison's psychological safety by using grounding techniques, mindfulness, normalisation, psychoeducation and somatic resourcing.



In early 2023, Alison submitted her Redress application, designating RAV to act as her nominee in her best interests. Alison received regular updates on her application's progress and, in late 2023, she was notified of the outcome of her application: \$100,000 in recognition of the abuse she had suffered, along with the option of free counselling and a Direct Personal Response from the institution involved. The counsellor supported Alison to receive her offer, and provided ongoing support, a referral to the funded counselling service, and information about Direct Personal Responses and how we could further support her.

For Alison, the process of applying for Redress had been cathartic and very beneficial.

'I felt cared for and nurtured through the whole Redress process. It was something I hadn't experienced before. I had been to counsellors in the past, but I had never felt validated like this. Through the Redress service I felt very validated. Every person I've spoken to in this whole process has made me feel cared for.'

– Alison*, Redress Support Services client

*Name changed for privacy.

Culturally connected: In-language Vietnamese family violence program

Cultural and linguistic diversity

We strive to provide an inclusive and welcoming environment for staff and clients, with guidance from our Diversity Working Group.

Engaging clients in services is most effective when culture is considered and clients are able to participate in their primary language. The city of Brimbank, in which our Sunshine centre is based, is home to one of the largest Vietnamese communities in Victoria². Many of our centres deliver MBCPs for English-speaking male perpetrators of family violence; however, these programs are not always appropriate for Vietnamese men, as they are not tailored for Vietnamese participants' culture and language.

As a result of this knowledge, we offer a unique, 20-week program in Sunshine that is tailored for Vietnamese men who have used violent or controlling behaviours toward their intimate partners or children, and who want help to stop their use of violence. Delivered by 2 Vietnamese-speaking co-facilitators, the program addresses the unique cultural challenges faced by participants, including a limited understanding of the Australian justice system and family violence intervention orders. It helps participants overcome language barriers including the lack of accurate translations; for example, for the English word 'violence'. Facilitators also help clients to understand Australian customs and expectations, while considering the influence of honour and shame on their beliefs and behaviours.

The group program is open to both recent migrants and long-term residents, with referrals welcomed from local courts, police and Vietnamese practitioners.

This year, we piloted an approach of providing group participants with concurrent support through our men's case management program. Vietnamese-speaking practitioners collaborated closely with family safety practitioners to assess and manage risks, and help men understand and comply with intervention orders.

They also sought to address issues that could hinder participants' progress in stopping their use of violent and abusive behaviours such as housing instability, substance use, mental and physical health challenges, and cultural and language barriers.

Additionally, practitioners provided in-language support to family members experiencing violence, assisting them to obtain intervention orders and connecting them to other necessary services.



In their words

Hearing our clients' voices

Vietnamese men's behaviour change program participants:

'**Responsibility for harm caused sits with me**, not my family. I thought being the provider was enough. I was wrong.'

'I feel sad that the program is ending, even though I had felt uncomfortable and angry for being mandated to attend. The **safe, respectful and non-judgemental environment** of the group helped me to open up and share experiences.'

'Before the program I thought it was okay to use violence against my family and never considered the consequences. **I now no longer want to use violence** to solve my problems because I have learned **it does not solve anything and hurts my family**.'

² Victorian Government (27 March 2024) *Vietnamese community profile*, Victorian Government website, accessed 19 August 2024.

Levelling the playing field: Gender equality in sport

Working with sporting clubs

At our organisation, we know that:

- respect underpins gender equality and is essential for creating safe and fulfilling relationships
- positive relationships are fundamental for health and wellbeing, and are strongly linked with life satisfaction
- the formation of respectful relationships begins early in life
- sporting clubs and associations can play an important role in advancing gender equality.

These principles guided us in developing the Healthy Clubs program, aimed at preventing family violence through partnerships with sporting clubs and leagues across Victoria. Collaborating with 4 key partners, Healthy Clubs highlights the connection between gender equality, respectful relationships, and the prevention of violence against women, children and gender-diverse individuals.

We conduct on-site workshops addressing gender roles, building respectful relationships, fostering resilience and encouraging bystander intervention. Additionally, we assist clubs in creating gender equity action plans that cover culture, recruitment, leadership, participation and facilities, with a strong emphasis on intersectionality, cultural diversity and the development of culturally safe content.

Recognising that many fathers, particularly new dads, experience stress and feelings of being overwhelmed, we also focus on promoting positive forms of masculinity and supporting men with transitions into and through fatherhood. By supporting dads, we are, in turn, helping to nurture supportive and safe family environments, which are crucial for the positive mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Since July 2023, Healthy Clubs has delivered workshops to participants from the National Rugby League, Australian Football League and tennis clubs. With 280 attendees including administrative staff, coaches, leaders, young people, players, parents and supporters, the program has the potential to effect long-lasting, club and community-wide positive change.

‘Lots of women and gender-diverse people are wanting to play sport and they’re coming into clubs that are traditionally male-dominated. It’s a bit of a challenge for those clubs to make the shift to include those people. We talk about respectful relationships and building resilience so they can go out and have those conversations with each other in their sporting clubs, but also in their personal life and in their community.’

– Dom Alford, Programs Leader

Healthy Clubs is funded by the Victorian Government through the Preventing Violence Through Sport Grants Program.



Watch how sport can prevent family violence and support gender equality

Scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/RAVGenderEqualityInSport



Healthy Clubs program

In 2023–24

3

sporting codes

11

workshops



6

clubs

280

participants



Partners

Victorian
Amateur
Football
Association

Tennis
Victoria

Rugby
League
Victoria

Women's
Health in
the North

What can you do differently to support gender equality at your club after today's Healthy Clubs workshop?

'Support the girls and women more on and off the field and **create healthy relationships** with them like I have with the men at the club.'

'Ensure the club creates an environment where **everybody feels comfortable** being themselves.'

Knowledge and impact: Driving change and demonstrating client outcomes

Research, evaluation and social impact

Evaluating the outcomes of Communities that Care®

Government and community and social services sectors are increasingly focused on collaborative, place-based approaches to address complex social challenges in specific geographic areas. In the City of Yarra, we have actively participated in the Yarra Communities that Care® initiative, which is a collaborative, place-based effort to deliver evidence-based programs and messaging to families and communities since 2014. As one of 24 local partner agencies focused on strengthening family relationships, we are committed to supporting the healthy development of children and young people aged 8 to 14 years in the target area.

Building on the positive feedback and achievements from 2017 to 2022, this year we conducted an evaluation of the collaborative and coordinated approach of the Facilitator Network, which includes 15 active partner agencies. Together, these agencies work collaboratively with a shared purpose to deliver evidence-based social and emotional literacy messaging to families. Research shows that successful collaborations and strong support entities are crucial for making place-based approaches effective. Our evaluation aimed to understand the role of collaboration in contributing to systemic change and to identify lessons for future place-based initiatives.

Our evaluation process included interviews, semi-structured focus groups and a workshop with Network facilitators. The focus groups gathered evidence on the impact of collaboration on practice, the outcomes for families and the conditions that have enabled the Facilitator Network to be effective. The interviews provided insights into how successful coalitions are created and maintained, in supporting place-based approaches, being context- and location-specific and building on a strong sense of community.

‘Place-based approaches allow us to address complex issues in a sustainable and systemic way, working collaboratively with communities to address the root causes. By combining our efforts, we can maximise resources, scale impact and transform communities.’

– Sandra Opoku, Senior Manager Evaluation and Social Impact

Consistent with systems change frameworks, our evaluation revealed evidence of structural changes, which were reflected in improved practices, dedicated resources and support systems. All of these contribute to effective collaboration and transformative outcomes for the community.

The Yarra Communities that Care® Facilitator Network, with its emphasis on collaboration and community-building, serves as a valuable model for implementing best practices in place-based coalitions. It demonstrates the transformative power of closely connected coalitions of facilitators and stakeholders.

An evaluation report showcasing the positive outcomes of this initiative was published on our website in July 2024. Additionally, the results will be presented at the AES24 International Evaluation Conference later in the year.

This report marks the first step in defining, evaluating and refining our approach to place-based prevention and early intervention initiatives aimed at strengthening family relationships and improving wellbeing.

Yarra Communities that Care® reach and outcomes

81

participants with 140 children attended 11 'Tuning in' programs



98%

stronger connection with child after participating in a 'Tuning in' program

338

participants of 4 parenting-focused information sessions



'This course is incredibly valuable and worthwhile, and I cannot recommend it highly enough! I am so glad that I did it. It is helping me to improve my connection with my child, and it has given me important insights into my own emotions and behaviour – 10 stars.'

– Tuning in to Teens® participant

Collaborative delivery and facilitator network

5 facilitator development sessions

8 group supervision sessions

4 bi-cultural facilitators

11 partner agencies

20 partner schools

27 active facilitators



Right: Facilitators of our Diffuse program at the Relationships Australia federation's FRSA Conference 2024 stand



Men's behaviour change program development

Principles, practice elements and a well-defined program logic are vital for guiding consistent approaches, supporting practice improvements and informing evaluation while still allowing flexibility for local adaptation and innovation. These frameworks also support linkages between program processes and outcomes.

To inform the ongoing development of our MBCPs, we conducted an evidence review and workshop, focusing on the co-design of principles, practice elements, program logic and practice frameworks. This process identified 8 principles and 6 related practices, which were then tested and refined by our senior practitioners and practice specialists.

Supporting children and families to thrive

Early childhood is a pivotal opportunity for prevention and early intervention, offering significant returns on investment. Recognising this, we partnered with the Centre for Community Child Health at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, to inform the development of our future prevention and early intervention initiatives for children in their early years. The project includes a review of current evidence, and an iterative co-design process with parents and relevant stakeholders culminating in an options paper. The goal is to enhance outcomes for children and families by building on our experience in delivering existing programs, including our 'early matters' healthy family relationships program. It also supports our commitment to positively influence change that impacts not only our organisation and services, but the sector and community more broadly.

Explore the outcomes of our research and evaluation of FDR

Read more on page 24.



Our impact for individuals, families and communities

We published our inaugural Social Impact Report to illustrate how strengthening families and relationships leads to positive outcomes across 5 key domains: mental health and wellbeing, child wellbeing, personal and family safety, family functioning, and connection and belonging. Additionally, we launched a new 'How we create change' animation, visually demonstrating how and why we create change in the lives of individuals, families and communities.



Find out why and how we create change

Scan the QR code or visit socialimpact.rav.org.au



Sharing our knowledge

Snapshot translations of our research and evaluation

- Participation, agreement and reduced acrimony in mandatory family dispute resolution: Benefits for ambivalent clients
- Adapting men's behaviour change programs online: A developmental evaluation approach
- The use and misuse of communication technologies among separated clients
- The impact of COVID-19 on family dispute resolution clients in Victoria in 2020–21

To download our summaries, scan the QR code or visit rav.org.au/about/research-evaluation/research-summaries



Conferences and presentations

International

Heard G, Bickerdike A, Lindstrom J, Velasquez-Tan M, Hayes L, Moran C, Tom L and Bishop L (4 September 2023) 'Lawyer-Assisted Family Dispute Resolution: evaluating outcomes from a partnership model' [conference presentation], *National Mediation Conference*, Wellington, New Zealand.

National

Alford D (14 June 2024) 'Working with separated dads and father-figures' [conference presentation], *Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference*, Melbourne.

Heard G, Lohan A, Petch J, Milic J and Bickerdike A (12 June 2024) 'A tick-box exercise? Benefits of mandatory FDR for ambivalent clients' [conference presentation], *Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference*, Melbourne.

Heard G, Smyth BM, Payne JL, Irving MA and Althor G (16 October 2023) 'Post-separation co-parenting apps: what should practitioners know?' [conference presentation], *Partnership of Victorian Family Relationship Centres Good Practice Forum*.

Heard G and Velasquez-Tan M (14 June 2024) 'The child's voice in Family Dispute Resolution: Rethinking existing practices with evidence' [conference presentation], *Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference*, Melbourne.

Heard G, Zeleznikow J, Maxwell C, Wilson-Evered E and Bickerdike A (16 May 2024) 'The use and misuse of communication technologies among separated parents: understanding clients and future-proofing services' [conference presentation], *Family and Relationship Services Australia National Conference*, Melbourne.

McCord L and Pepperell L (14 May 2024) 'The Diffuse program – respectful relationships in prisons' [conference presentation], *Family and Relationship Services Australia National Conference*, Melbourne.

Opoku S (26 October 2023) 'Working with evaluation findings for continuous improvement', *Australian Institute of Family Studies, Evidence and Evaluation Support, Evaluator Community of Practice*, Victoria.

Journal articles

Heard G, Bickerdike A and Hebblewhite M (2024) 'Practitioner Impartiality and Client Self-determination in a Court-ordered, Lawyer-assisted Property Conciliation Model', *Australasian Dispute Resolution Journal*, 33(1).

Heard G, Lee E, Khoo ST and Bickerdike A (2023) 'Revisioning Acrimony: The Development and Validation of Short Scales Measuring Relationship Hostility and Parental Co-Operativity', *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 64(2–4):173–197, doi:10.1080/10502556.2023.2242752.

Heard G, Lohan A, Petch J, Milic J and Bickerdike A (2024) 'Participation, agreement and reduced acrimony through family mediation: Benefits for the ambivalent client in a mandatory setting', *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 41(4):1–18, doi:10.1002/crq.21426.

Irving MA, Heard G, Smyth BM, Payne JL and Althor G (2023) 'Post-separation parenting apps in the hands of family law practitioners: expectations versus experience', *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, 37(1), doi:10.1093/lawfam/ebad027.

Opoku S and Heard G (2024) 'Adapting a men's behaviour change program to online delivery using a developmental evaluation approach', *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, 24(1):40–55, doi:10.1177/1035719X231204392.

Reports

Relationships Australia Victoria (October 2023) 'Social Impact Report 2023', *Relationships Australia Victoria*, Melbourne, Victoria.

Webinars

Opoku S (13 March 2024) 'How developmental evaluation can be used to develop and adapt social service programs' [webinar], *Australian Institute of Family Studies*, accessed 12 August 2024.

Proud and inclusive: Rainbow initiatives

LGBTIQA+

29.3%

of our headspace clients identify as LGBTIQA+



Key achievements:

- **Practice hub:** We launched an organisational-wide hub of LGBTIQA+ practice resources.
- **Training:** We expanded our LGBTIQA+ training programs for administrative and clinical staff, to enhance inclusion and support best practice for working with rainbow families, couples and individuals.
- **Community engagement:** We proudly participated in the Midsumma Festival Carnival, Shepparton's Out in the Open Festival, the annual TransGathering and Transgender Victoria's Trans Fete.

Members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other sexually or gender diverse (LGBTIQA+) communities who access mainstream relationship support services may have less than optimal experiences because the services aren't sufficiently responsive to their needs. Our Rainbow Working Group works to improve the inclusivity and accessibility of our services for the LGBTIQA+ communities and support staff within the organisation. This group, which includes staff from across our services and centres, collaborates on initiatives that help rainbow clients and staff feel safe and supported when engaging with our organisation, while also promoting best practice by our staff.

Additionally, the Rainbow Working Group, in collaboration with our organisation's Diversity Working Group, began a project to develop access keys for our centres.

Access keys are designed to assist potential clients in understanding what to expect before arriving at our centres and service sites. They include details such as getting to centres and navigating parking, layouts and bathroom facilities. By providing these guides, we aim to enhance the accessibility of our centres and reduce barriers to service delivery for all clients.

'By providing staff with training, resources and access to consult with the working group, we create a stronger workforce and a safer service environment for people from marginalised communities.'

– Kiara, Rainbow Working Group member



Leading learning: Empowering professionals across Australia

Training and development

Our industry-leading training solutions are:

- timely
- convenient
- accessible
- high-quality
- evidence-informed.

Innovating digital learning solutions

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for new ways to access learning, making it more crucial than ever to offer a wider variety of learning tools and solutions. In response, we expanded our specialised learning solutions in 2023–24 to enable broader access to timely and affordable professional development and training.

Accredited training goes national

We introduced online intakes for several of our accredited training courses, including the CHC81115 Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution, CHC81015 Graduate Diploma of Relationship Counselling and our Mediation Training Course. This expansion enables us to support the growth of the social services sector workforce on a national scale.



Discover your next learning opportunity

Visit rav.org.au/accredited-training

Accredited training

71

students

8

intakes

5

Australian states and territories



‘I think generally RAV training is considered to be elite compared to other registered training organisations.’

– Student of our CHC81115 Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution

‘Training provided strong foundations, skills and knowledge to work with complex scenarios and ethical dilemmas important in working in this field. Training builds increasing confidence to work with couples, recognise and respond to family.’

– Student of our CHC81015 Graduate Diploma of Relationship Counselling

Online couples therapy training

We developed a new online course, Couples Counselling: A Contemporary and Client-Focused Approach, to support practitioners in responding to the unique challenges faced by modern couples. This 12-week program incorporates a blend of evidence-based, self-paced learning and practical, experiential activities. Students have access to extensive organisational and sector-specific clinical knowledge, as well as the skills and expertise of our facilitators, from the comfort of their preferred learning environments.

On-demand courses

Since December 2023, we have offered a new suite of self-paced professional development courses available to professionals across Australia. These courses can be completed at any time and place that suits the learner, and on completion participants earn a digital micro-credential badge to share with professional networks.

Self-paced and micro-course topics

- FDR micro skills
- Vicarious trauma
- Managing challenging behaviours
- Professional boundaries
- Leading difficult conversations
- Working with and supporting grieving clients
- Negotiation and conflict management.

Choose your first free, online micro-course

Start your learning at
rav.org.au/self-paced-courses



Diffusing family violence: Working with men in correctional facilities

Family violence

We deliver Diffuse, a 7-week psychoeducational program, to address family violence with men in 4 correctional facilities in Victoria. The program helps participants to understand family violence, reflect on their relationship experiences and explore ways to incorporate healthy relationship principles into their futures.

A key strength of the program is the consistency of participants across the 7 weeks, enabling men to work together, build rapport and share life experiences that enrich their learning.

The program's educational component enhances participants' understanding of stress and anger management, the development of healthy and respectful relationships, and how to challenge biases. It also covers the behaviours and legal definitions of family violence and, this year, integrated a new module focused on parenting and caregiving. Participants learn practical tools and strategies to support learning, and the development and maintenance of healthy relationships.

Program topics

- Relationships and me
- Understanding family violence
- Drivers of conflict and behaviour
- The family court system
- Communication
- Relationship strengths and values
- How to repair when things go wrong
- Parenting and fatherhood
- Support networks and strategies for success
- A framework for goal setting
- Managing self-care and building resilience.

Diffuse is funded by the Victorian Government Department of Justice and Community Safety.

In their words

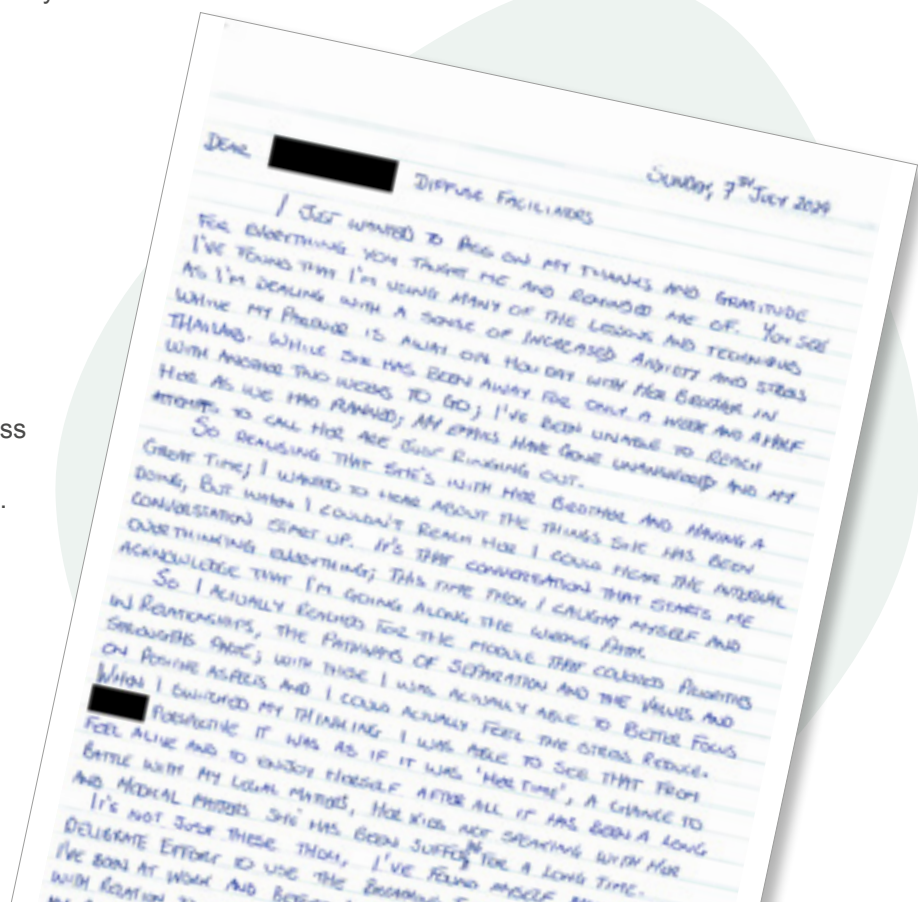
Hearing our clients' voices

'[It] made me realise the things in my life I need to change.'

– Diffuse participant

'Most of the participants said that their highlight of the program was realising that their past relationships were unhealthy than they anticipated. **They didn't realise they were committing acts of family violence.** They reported feeling more confident that they would be able to have healthier relationships moving forward.'

– Correctional facility employee



Our identity: Dedication at the core of our success

Workforce

402

staff members



274

full-time equivalent employees

28

employees promoted

4.41

years average length of service

87

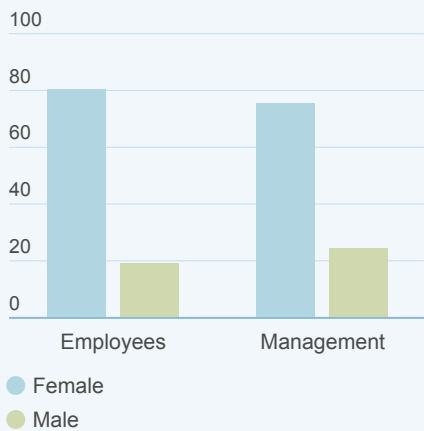
new employees

27.8%

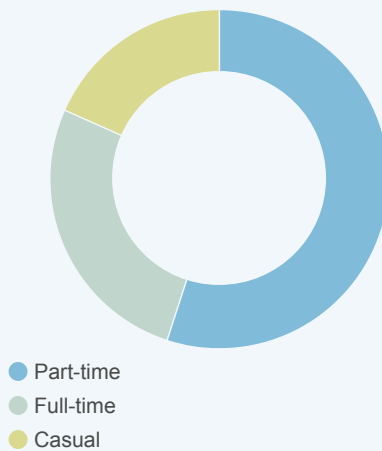
of staff members have worked with us for more than 5 years



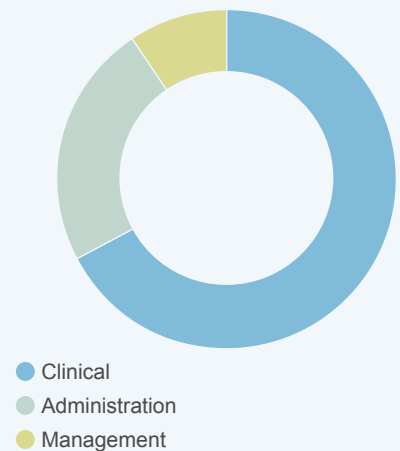
Gender (%)



Employment type



Role type





Our workforce

79%

are proud to work with RAV



84%

can arrange time out from work when they need to

91%

know what they need to do to be successful in their role

Our workforce development

219

professional development programs undertaken

5,426

hours of professional development and training received

We congratulate the 32 dedicated members of our workforce who, on the date of our 75th anniversary, had worked continuously with RAV for 15 or more years.

Our workforce is the foundation of our organisation. It is the skills, experience and commitment our workforce brings that enables us to support and have an impact for so many clients. In this year of our 75th anniversary, we acknowledge all those employees, past and present, who have contributed to RAV's success and the impact we've had in Victoria and across our history.

We aspire to have a high-performing culture and engaged workforce, and these attributes are illustrated in the results of a Staff Engagement Survey conducted this year, particularly in the key areas of alignment, teamwork and work-life balance. The results of the survey also provided opportunities for us to demonstrate our commitment to continuous improvement, especially in the identified areas of communicating our vision, and responding to new and innovative ideas.

Working with us

- Above-award remuneration
- Flexible working conditions
- Family-friendly culture
- Access to an Employee Assistance Program
- Additional leave entitlements including:
 - paid leave between Christmas and New Year
 - up to 4 weeks of flexible leave
 - 8 weeks of paid parental leave
 - personal leave
 - compassionate leave
 - work-related leave
 - special personal extended leave.

'I was very grateful for the flexibility provided to be able to accommodate the changing demands of [raising] my 4 children.'

– Employee of 15 years

Leadership



Dr Andrew Bickerdike
Chief Executive Officer



Shiranthi Sivarajah
Chief Business and
Financial Officer
Company Secretary



Amanda Goldstein
General Manager
Clinical Services



Carl Beeston
General Manager
Information and
Technology



Suzanne Ichlov
General Manager
Operations



Sharon Greenhill
General Manager
People and Culture



Anna Clarke
Senior Manager
Communications
and Marketing



Chris Lye
Senior Manager
Operations North and
Inner East Metro



Donna Plavljanic
Senior Manager Training
and Development



Jo Huggins
Senior Manager
Operations Regional
Victoria



Sandra Opoku
Senior Manager
Evaluation and
Social Impact



Suresh Ramachandraiah
Senior Manager
Operations South East
and West Metro



Alyson La'Brooy
Manager Family
Violence Services



Stefan Szarski
Manager Risk, Quality
and Compliance

Management*

Carolyn Last
Senior Manager Kew

Jackie Blake
Senior Manager
Southern and
Eastern Melbourne

Kylie Lancaster
Senior Manager
Gippsland

Lisa Stockheim
Senior Manager
Melbourne FRC and
Therapeutic Services

Michelle McDonald
Senior Manager
Open Place

Rose Byrnes
Senior Manager
Western Melbourne

Stuart Deagan
Senior Manager
Northern Melbourne

Cate Chaiyot
Manager Youth Mental
Health Services

Hayley Davidson
Centre Manager
headspace Bairnsdale
and headspace Sale

Jayne Ferguson
Centre Manager Ballarat

Jessica Macauley
Centre Manager
headspace Wonthaggi

Rosie Nugent
Manager Office
of the CEO

Sam Kaplan
Project Manager
Technology

Shelley Watson
Manager Shepparton

Tracy Hansen-Eales
Centre Manager Outer
East Metro Melbourne

Travis Nicholls
Finance Manager

Leading with vision: Our Board

Governance

Our Board is instrumental in advancing strategic priorities, monitoring performance and ensuring compliance. With the support of its 3 committees in governance matters, their expertise and leadership are crucial to our organisation's overall success.

Board members*



Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM
Board President

Member: Governance Committee, Clinical Governance Committee



Associate Professor Kaye Frankcom
Vice-President

Chair: Clinical Governance Committee



Professor Colin Royse
Board member

Member: Governance Committee



Professor Helen Rhoades OAM
Board member

Member: Governance Committee



John Lovell
Board member



Michael Hunt
Board member

Member: Audit and Finance Committee, Clinical Governance Committee



Michael Shaw
Board member

Chair: Audit and Finance Committee



Ronda Jacobs
Board member

Chair: Governance Committee

*As of 30 June 2024.

Financial performance

Summary statement of comprehensive income for the year ended 30 June 2024

	2024 (\$)	2023 (\$)
Revenue		
Grant funding	40,028,470	37,825,164
Client fees	2,042,260	2,074,172
Other income	4,074,574	2,588,891
Total revenue	46,145,304	42,488,227
Expenses		
Employee costs	33,453,991	29,266,376
Operating costs	9,820,079	10,225,572
Depreciation & finance costs	1,965,137	1,727,905
Total expenses	45,239,207	41,219,853
Surplus	906,097	1,268,374
Other comprehensive income		
Net gain on revaluation of non-current assets	1,145,000	–
Total comprehensive income	2,051,097	1,268,374

Summary statement of financial position as at 30 June 2024

	2024 (\$)	2023 (\$)
Assets		
Current assets	32,371,131	31,330,943
Non-current assets	11,358,021	10,940,410
Total assets	43,729,152	42,271,353
Liabilities		
Current liabilities	18,037,445	18,323,908
Non-current liabilities	4,187,280	4,494,115
Total liabilities	22,224,725	22,818,023
Net assets	21,504,427	19,453,330

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 2024 and the Summary Statement of Financial Position as at 30 June 2024 in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards.

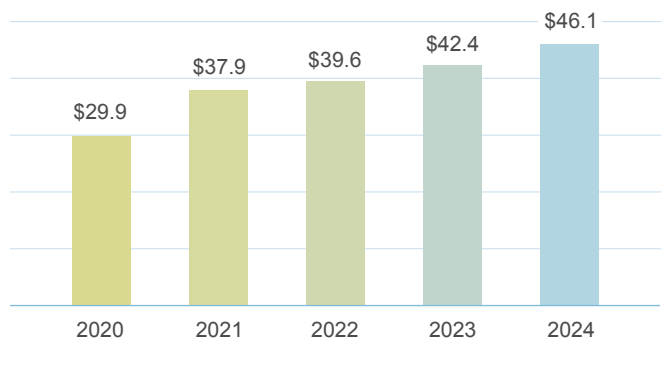
In our opinion, the information reported in the summarised financial report is consistent with the annual financial report from which it is derived and upon which we expressed an unqualified audit opinion in our report to the members dated 24 September 2024.

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.

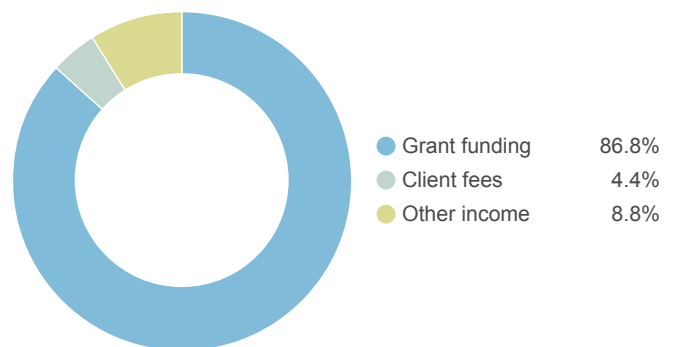
Grant Thornton Australia

Brock Mackenzie
Partner

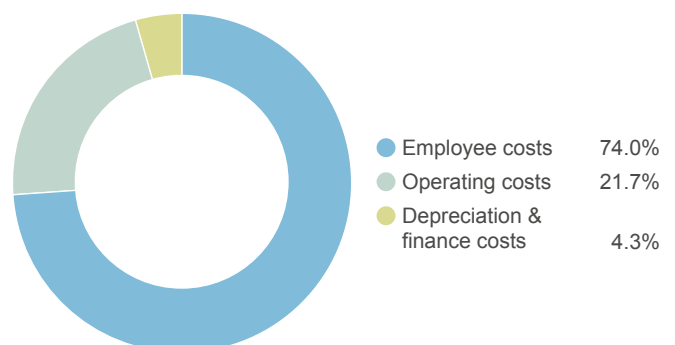
Revenue growth (M)



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

X: @RelAustVic

Scan the QR code or visit
www.rav.org.au/socials



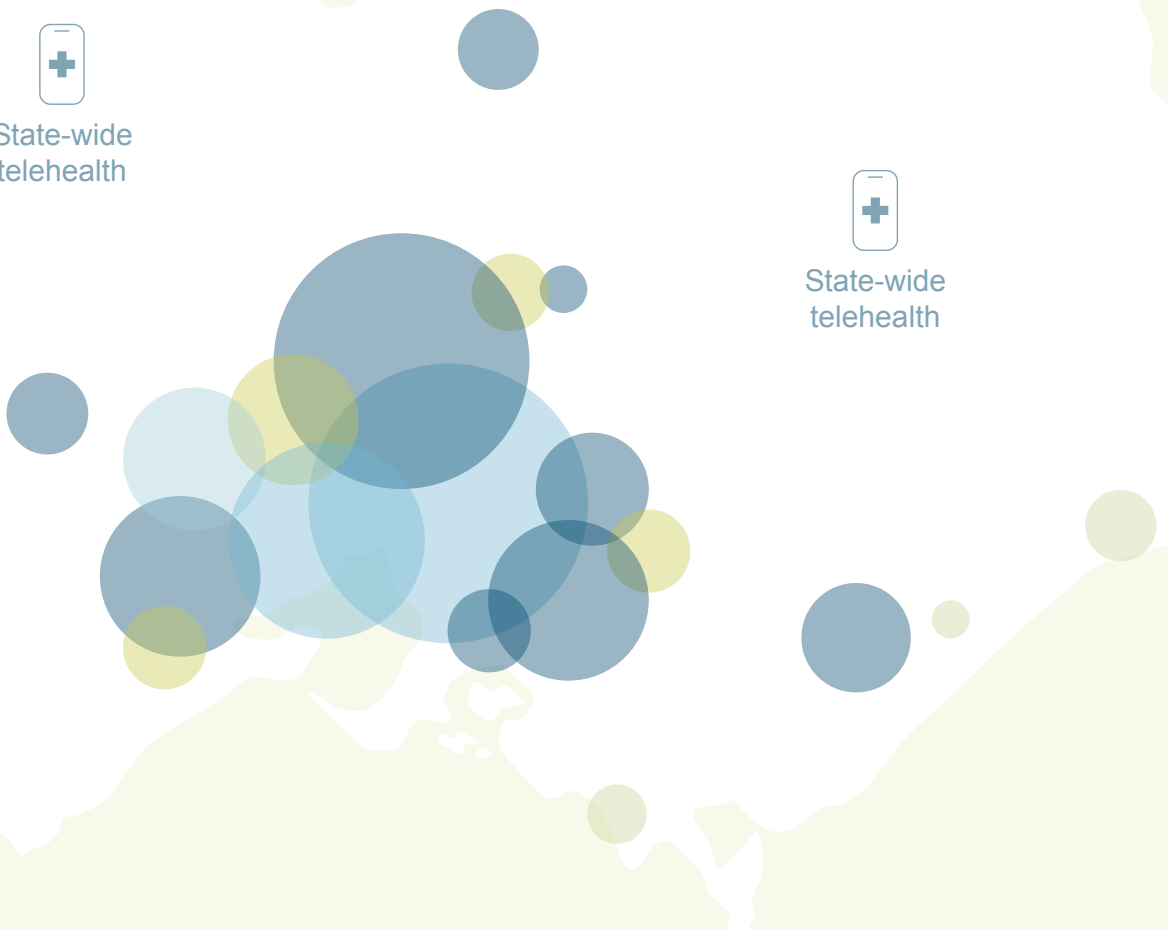
State-wide
telehealth



State-wide
telehealth



State-wide
telehealth



Wellbeing Making a difference Reputable Excellence
Integrity Diverse Possibility Equality Supportive Impact
Evidence-based Relationships Innovative Mental health
Ethical Safe pair of hands Relevant Helpful Skilled
Essential Opportunity Experienced Transformative
Effective Collaborative
High-quality Responsive
Community Progressive
Respectful Vital
Safe Child-focused
Considered Equity
Relevant Inclusive
Clients Trusted Flexible
Wellbeing Caring
Making a difference
Reputable Excellence
Integrity Safe Diverse
Possibility Equality
Supportive Impact
Ethical Evidence-based

Excellence Integrity Diversity Possibility Equality
Caring Wellbeing Making a difference Trusted
Supportive Impact Ethical Evidence-based
Relationships Innovative Mental health Reputable
Helpful Skilled Essential Opportunity Experienced
Transformative
Vital Effective
Collaborative
High-quality
Responsive Community Progressive Respectful
Child-focused Considered Safe Equity Inclusive
Flexible Clients Trusted Relevant Wellbeing
Caring Inclusive
Excellence Integrity
Diverse Possibility
Supportive Impact
Equality
Ethical Relationships Evidence-based Mental health
Innovative Making a difference Safe Reputable
Safe pair of hands Essential Opportunity
Experienced Transformative Effective
Helpful Collaborative



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