

2021 Victorian Protecting Children Awards

Winners and finalists

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# Robin Clark Leadership Award

## Winner – Robin Clark Leadership Award

**Beth Allen, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing**

Beth’s leadership has been truly transformational and inspirational for the children and families sector in Victoria.

Throughout her 38-year career, she has championed system-wide reforms, ensured the voice of the client is at the centre of decision-making, and used evidence-based models to deliver earlier help for families – all with the goal of keeping children safe and connected.

She is an agile leader with excellent communication, leadership and stakeholder management skills. She has significant experience in the development of legislation, policies and programs concerning vulnerable children and families. She is committed to continuous improvement, informed by evidence and the client voice.

Beth was instrumental in the early design and implementation of Victoria’s process of deinstitutionalisation. She has also overseen Victoria’s permanency reforms, which introduced significant legislative changes to promote permanency for children.

She remains a passionate advocate for reforms to transition the care of Aboriginal children to Aboriginal organisations, including the landmark initiative that authorises Aboriginal organisations to assume full responsibility for Aboriginal children.

She is a compelling and empathetic advocate for child protection workers, whose day-to-day work is often confronting and traumatising. She has overseen significant improvements in the quality and quantity of our child protection workforce while working hard to create conditions that will encourage our very best workers to remain in the field.

## Highly Commended – Robin Clark Leadership Award

* Aileen Ashford, Kids First Australia.

# Robin Clark Making a Difference Award

## Winner – Robin Clark Maing a Difference Award

**Staughton Road, MacKillop Family Services**

The team of carers lead by Jacqueline Anile at Staughton Road have done remarkable work to improve the school attendance of the four young women living in the home. The team uses the sanctuary model of care, and they have created a strong expectation for the four young people to attend school.

All four young people have had a marked improvement in their engagement with school, with some going from no school attendance at all to now consistently attending every day. The team has also worked hard to ensure the young people have respectful communication and conversations with one another, which has led to a largely harmonious home despite the individual trauma and other needs of the residents.

Improved and sustained school attendance benefits these young people in every area of their lives.

The thoughtful intervention of the team has improved the quality of care received by the young people. It has led to a marked improvement in their outcomes. They now have a safe and consistent base from which to reengage with their families and their community. This house stands out as an impressive example of high-quality care for young people in residential care.

## Highly Commended – Robin Clark Maing a Difference Award

* HEALing Matters, Monash University.

# Carer Award

## Winner – Carer Award

**Kristine and Rick Foord, OzChild**

Kris and Rick care for four children, three of whom have significant disabilities. When they agreed to take on the second-youngest child, they did so knowing she was not expected to live past her first birthday. They put aside their own emotions about this and have committed to making every day special for her.

Days turned into weeks, appointments turned into therapies, and every little snuffle, gargle and seizure was attended to with around-the-clock love, care and precision. Kris and Rick were stretched beyond their physical and emotional limits, and they never left her side through countless hospital admissions, one of them would be with her.

With their persistence, focus and ability to identify and action the slightest deterioration in her, she has recently celebrated her ninth birthday. They have also committed to providing ongoing care for their eldest foster child, who recently turned 18. He has a severe intellectual disability that prevents him from doing many things. Every outing needs to be carefully planned around his medical needs meaning the family is limited in where they can go because few places provide appropriate changing rooms or power sources for equipment. Despite all this, they would not change anything for the experience of caring for these beautiful children.

# Education Initiative Award

## Winner – Carer Award

**Education First Youth Foyer – Shepparton, Berry Street**

The Shepparton Education First Youth Foyer in Yorta Yorta country places young people aged 16–24 years firmly at the heart of its model, helping them overcome barriers to education and attainment.

The Youth Foyer provides young people with up to two years of safe, stable accommodation while they work towards independent living. In return, young people must engage in ongoing education and training and regularly meet with their youth development worker.

Foyer has built a reputation as a safe, supportive space for young people in the Goulburn region, with well-established networks to other agencies and links with the broader community. Most importantly, Foyer alumni share many stories of the Foyer team going above and beyond their job descriptions to improve their lives. The meaningful relationships Foyer team members have forged with the young people they support have had transformative effects.

The team’s efforts have encouraged many young people to thrive, and they have gone on to achieve higher levels of education, engage with full-time employment, get their licence and purchase cars, move into their own homes, start their own businesses and – in some cases – return to Foyer as ambassadors and mentors for other young people.

# Minister’s Award for Innovation in Protecting Children

## Winner – Minister’s Award for Innovation in Protecting Children

**Caring Dads, Kids First Australia**

Caring Dads is an Australian-first, 17-week early intervention program that engages fathers who have used family violence. It helps them develop child-centred fathering skills and to take responsibility for the effect of their violence on their children and their children’s mother.

A 2020 University of Melbourne evaluation demonstrated the program was associated with an overall reduction in violence, and an increase in men’s ability to reflect on harmful fathering practices. The Caring Dads team has shown incredible skill and insight, undertaking complex and potentially high-risk work that requires comprehensive knowledge of family violence, interagency relationships and child development.

The project is the result of an innovative funding model that brings together the Victorian Government, the community sector (Kids First) and philanthropy (Gandel). This tripartite relationship is a model for unpacking complex issues in a sophisticated and joined-up way.

A new partnership with Odyssey House Victoria, the University of Melbourne and others will enable Caring Dads to make the crucial link between men’s use of violence and misuse of alcohol and other substances. Caring Dads’ impact means that children and families feel safer, and fathers can begin to take action to improve their relationships with their children and children’s mother. It represents a major advance in addressing family violence.

## Highly Commended – Minister’s Award for Innovation in Protecting Children

* Power to Kids: Respecting Sexual Safety, MacKillop Family Services.

# Supporting Young People in Care Award

## Winner – Supporting Young People in Care Award

**Bonnie O’Leary, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing**

Bonnie is the Aboriginal Liaison Officer for Secure Care. She is a Gamilaraay Aboriginal woman from Tamworth who is strongly connected to her own culture, and she is passionate about supporting young people in Secure Care to have this same opportunity.

Together with the Aboriginal community, including Aboriginal artists and young people, she designed and implemented a Gathering Space at the young men’s unit. It is made up of a circle of stones, with a number of animal totems between them. Native plants and stunning artwork surround the area. It is clear that young people feel safer in this space, because they use it often and show respect when in it. Bonnie is in the process of completing a Healing Garden at the young women’s unit.

In addition to this work, she has been instrumental to fundamental changes within Secure Care, including changes in infrastructure. She brings her life experiences, her work in the community with Aboriginal young people and her extensive knowledge of the department to her role in Secure Care.

Her vital contribution ensures young people have culturally safe places, and that her colleagues in Secure Care and Child Protection are supported to better understand what it means to be culturally sensitive.

## Highly Commended – Supporting Young People in Care Award

* Youth Services, Child and Family Services Ballarat.
* Nicholas Varcoe and Kade Rzepecki, Berry Street.

# CREATE Award – CREATE Foundation

## Winner – CREATE Award – CREATE Foundation

**Murray Geddes**

Murray has worked in education for more than 35 years and has seen the positive impact connection with education and all that it involves can have on a young person. As the SEVR LOOKOUT Centre principal, Murray has had the privilege of working with an incredible team to improve the educational outcomes and life choices available to young people in statutory care. Along the way, he has had the

opportunity to meet and work with some exceptional young people, carers and other professionals working in this space. Murray believes that every kid deserves to be given the support they need to

thrive. He is committed to creating opportunities for young people to have their voices heard, including supporting young people who use LOOKOUT services to speak to over 600 education professionals, including their teachers and principals, at the *LOOKOUT Annual Conference.*

# Modelling a Generous Community Award

## Winner – Modelling a Generous Community Award

**Morgan Cataldo**

Morgan is currently the Senior Manager Youth Engagement at Berry Street, one of Australia’s largest independent family service organisations. Her work here includes supporting and developing Y-Change, which engages, trains, and employs young people to use their lived experience expertise to drive social, organisational and systemic change.

Morgan is someone with lived experience of being a ‘service user’ herself over many years and sees her work as giving back to the community in the hope that the next generation of young people have a clearer path to follow. Morgan has over 10 years’ experience working within the for-purpose sector and has worked in a range of organisations supporting those with lived experience to have influence including Melbourne City Mission, Launch Housing, and YLab Global.

In the past five years Morgan has worked with a number of organisations, in a consultative capacity, who are seeking to partner with people with a lived experience relevant to their purpose. Morgan is recognised for being fiercely committed to supporting and empowering young people. She consistently mentors young lived experience advocates, in and outside of her professional roles, connecting them with consultative work, offering coaching and reflective practice, and referring young people to support services across her network when they need them.

Morgan goes above and beyond, and this award recognises her hard work, passion, significant contribution and personal commitment towards elevating the voice and views of children and young people in Victoria.

# Walda Blow Award

## Winner – Walda Blow Award

**Kristen Munro**

Kristen has made a significant contribution to Aboriginal families in and around West Heidelberg as the lead facilitator of two Aboriginal-specific playgroups. The groups provide a trauma-sensitive, culturally-safe space and care pathway for vulnerable Aboriginal families and their children.

Her dual role as an early year’s worker and supported playgroup facilitator means she can walk beside families to access crucial maternal and child health, medical and allied health professionals. She has worked hard to develop these extended networks to ensures families feel safe and supported. She has worked with services to ensure continuity of care for families from pregnancy through to school age and beyond, forging trusting relationships with the most vulnerable families. She was pivotal in the development of the Djiak-Djirri ABC book and poster.

The playgroup families worked with Banyule Community Health’s We Love Stories Initiative to develop their own early literacy resources. These resources increase support for children’s pre-literacy development, celebrate local Aboriginal families and culture and help engage vulnerable families in playgroups.

Her dedication and deep care for the families she works with means families can stay together, connected to community and culture. She promotes families’ self-determination and self-empowerment, enabling families to take control of their children’s health.

# Leaving a Legacy Award

## Winner – Leaving a Legacy Award

**Luke Rumbold**

Luke Rumbold has devoted his life to the care of children and young people in rural Victoria during his 40-year career. Graduating as a Social Worker from the University of Melbourne in 1980, Luke was first employed as a Community Based Case Worker by Mallee Family Care in Kerang.

In 1984, Luke moved to Wodonga to take up the role of Director of Upper Murray Family Care (UMFC). With 37 years at the helm, it is rare for an individual to leave such an enduring and remarkable footprint on an organisation and their local community.

As well as expanding its reach to become a cross-border organisation, UMFC also extended its services from legal and family law to disability care and child and family services.

The sector has benefitted from Luke’s involvement serving on Boards with the state (CFECFW) and federal (FRSA) peak bodies. As Luke contemplates retirement, the child and services sector acknowledge his lasting legacy not only on UMFC, his local community, and throughout regional Victoria.

# Chief Practitioner’s Award

## Winner – Chief Practitioner’s Award

**Sinead Grene, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing**

Sinead is an outstanding Senior Practitioner in the North East Melbourne Area, supporting and challenging care teams to continually work above and beyond to achieve the seemingly impossible. She works tirelessly and purposefully, and her respectful persistence makes the difference to every family and young person she works with.

She leads by example and is an exceptional team member, role model and mentor. These qualities are demonstrated daily and are well recognised throughout the sector and among external stakeholders. She regularly receives accolades from these partners, citing her collaboration, kindness, ability to listen and to work together with a focus on the needs of young people and their families.

One of many outstanding examples of Sinead’s practice is her work with a young person estranged from her family in New Zealand. A violent relationship compounded the young person’s vulnerabilities and complex trauma. Sinead’s persistence to build a genuine relationship with the young person empowered her to refuse violence as the norm in her relationships, to be the key member of her own care team and to take control of her future. Sinead, together with the care team, successfully assisted this young person to transition to independence. She is now thriving – safe, stable and planning for her future.

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In this document, ‘Aboriginal’ refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. ‘Indigenous’ or ‘Koori/Koorie’ is retained when part of the title of a report, program or quotation.

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