

2022 Victorian Protecting Children Awards

Winners and finalists

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# Robin Clark Leadership Award

## Winner – Robin Clark Leadership Award

**Deb Tsorbaris, Centre for Excellence in Child & Family Welfare**

Deb demonstrates outstanding sector leadership, powerful advocacy, and an ability to bring together diverse stakeholder groups to champion the rights of vulnerable children, young people and families. Deb insists on the best evidence being used to underpin policies and programs, reforms and decision-making across all sectors. Through the establishment and development of the Outcomes, Practice and Evidence Network, Deb has overseen a significant cultural shift in the way evidence is understood, translated and used.

Under Deb’s leadership the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare is widely recognised for its education and awareness raising in child rights, safety and wellbeing. Deb has forged mutually respected relationships with Aboriginal colleagues through Beyond Good Intentions, support for transitioning Aboriginal children to Aboriginal care, and arguing for proportionate fundings for Aboriginal Community Controlled agencies.

Deb has long been a champion of children’s and young people’s voices being incorporated into policy and program decision-making, particularly young people in care and parents who have been involved in child protection. Further, Deb has led the innovative “Voice of Parents” project to provide a structured and safe avenue for parents to be heard.

## Finalists – Robin Clark Leadership Award

* Abbie McMurrick, MacKillop Family Services.
* Leah Waring, North East Support and Action for Youth (NESAY).
* Lisa Ranahan, Key Assets Victoria.
* Margarita Frederico AM, La Trobe University.
* Phuong Truong, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

# Robin Clark Making a Difference Award

## Winner – Robin Clark Making a Difference Award

**COVID-19 Emergency Response for Child and Young People (CERCY), MacKillop Family Services and Ability Assist**

CERCY is an emergency response model providing safe accommodation to children and young people involved with child protection who need alternate care to safely isolate or quarantine due to COVID-19.

The model started with one house in September 2020 and grew to six CERCY homes. Almost 150 people aged 0-17 years have been placed within the CERCY model. All staff in CERCY houses work tirelessly to ensure the health and wellbeing of children in their care, who were often required to isolate for up to 14 days.

CERCY maintained a consistent staffing group enabling staff to implement successful strategies to support unwell, scared or traumatised young people and work alongside any established care teams to minimise the possibility of further trauma.

Staff encouraged children and young people to participate in education, cooking and where appropriate develop independent living skills, as well as participate in games, activities or watching movies. Many children and young people had such a great experience, they went as far as making ‘thank you’ cards for the staff.

The CERCY team’s adaptability, cultural respect and child-centredness has contributed to the success of the model.

## Finalists – Robin Clark Making a Difference Award

* Backpacks 4 Vic Kids (B4VK).
* Case Management Team 2, Case Contracting and Junction Support Services (Wodonga), Department of Families, Fairness and Housing & Junction Support Services.
* Family Preservation and Reunification Response Loddon and Mallee teams, MacKillop Family Services.
* Keeping Families Together Team, Child and Family Services (Cafs), Ballarat.
* Southern Melbourne Complex Care Team, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.
* Southern Melbourne Child Protection Leadership Team, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

# Minister’s Award for Innovation in Protecting Children

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

**Emma Toone, Berry Street**

Emma has been instrumental in the implementation and growth of Child Parent Psychotherapy (CPP) across Victoria and Australia. The program focuses on some of the highest risk children aged 0-5 years and supports families to make sense of their experiences of trauma and violence. Emma’s leadership and advocacy has significantly contributed to the broader growth of this evidence-based model. Emma’s role in CPP implementation and workforce support has resulted in two-thirds of CPP clinicians in Australia currently serving families in Victoria. More than 60 children and their carers have directly benefited from CPP delivery within Berry Street’s clinical therapeutic program, Take Two.

Emma’s broader advocacy has helped grow CPP to a point where 200 families nationally and 130 families in Victoria have been supported. Emma’s dedication to growing CPP is critical to meeting needs identified by several Royal Commissions. Emma has worked in partnership with the Australian Association for Infant Mental Health in SA to establish a national community of practice to support workforce sustainability. Emma’s contribution to building a pool of Take Two staff with CPP practice excellence has helped embed systemic change and improve outcomes for children and their families.

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

* Amanda Stacey and the Anglicare Victoria COMPASS team, Anglicare Victoria.
* Barak Ben Or, OzChild.
* Emily Unity, Royal Children's Hospital.
* Integrated Family Services Leadership Team, Windermere Child & Family Services and the Parenting Research Centre.
* Lilydale Youth Hub Support Team, Lilydale Youth Hub.
* Positive Parenting Program (Triple P), Berry Street.

# Chief Practitioner's Award

## Winner – Chief Practitioner's Award

**Natasha Sergent, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing**

Natasha is a navigator for the Aboriginal Family Preservation Response (AFPR) program and works collaboratively with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA).

Natasha is innovative and is consistently exploring new ways to increase the visibility of the AFPR program and strengthen the partnership between Child Protection, Lakijeka, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and families. Natasha developed a monthly newsletter which highlights the program activities, celebrates professional practice and the strong collaboration in achieving positive outcomes for families.

Natasha provided guidance and support to an AFPR worker and child protection practitioner over eight months, where the parents were working towards reunification of their three children. The parents had advocated strongly to be part of the AFPR program, identifying they felt ready to make the necessary changes.

A readiness assessment undertaken by Natasha and Lakidjeka determined the parents’ demonstrated motivation and readiness for engagement with the program.

The strong partnership between Natasha, the AFPR worker and child protection led to positive outcomes for the family. There was a gradual transition for the children to be reunified into parental care with ongoing support from the VACCA, AFPR program and child protection. This year, the family were able to spend their first Mother’s Day together in three years.

## Finalists – Chief Practitioner's Award

* Chloe Desira, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.
* Claudia Evans, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.
* Mary Taouk, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.
* Sharni Credlin, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

# Carer Award

## Winner – Carer Award

**Toni and Paul Gauntlet, MacKillop Family Services**

Toni and Paul are foster carers of two teenagers who presented with very significant mental health concerns leading to inpatient stays, suicide attempts, significant dissociation and splits of personality as well as long periods of struggling to eat, talk or sleep. Their advocacy and dedication to these teenagers has helped them to thrive far beyond the proposed outcomes expected by professional assessments. They have shown exceptional effort and care in every way, providing a safe and nurturing environment and building lasting, meaningful relationships.

Toni and Paul’s consistent encouragement has supported the teenagers to be confident in their educational skills, resilience to challenges and increased their motivation to succeed. Both teenagers have reached a point of ongoing stabilisation. As a result of their time with Toni and Paul, the teenagers attend school full time and have stable and manageable mental health. They have also achieved goals such as joining the school student representative council, making friends, joining local and state sports teams, winning competitions and one was made a class captain. Toni and Paul’s willingness to make changes has ensured the needs of the teenagers are met and they are now both healthy and capable.

## Finalists – Carer Award

* Amanda (Ama) Hargreaves, Anglicare Victoria.
* Brian Taylor and Patricia Cody, Berry Street Foster Care.
* Helen Sutton, Child and Family Services.
* Shokoofeh Azar, Carer.
* Vanessa Michel and Hamish Millar, MacKillop Family Services.

# Engaging Kids in School Award

## Winner – Engaging Kids in School Award

**VACCA Education team, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency**

In 2020, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) created a small, dedicated Education team to enhance the provision and quality of learning opportunities and supports for Aboriginal children and young people. The team has engaged case workers and carers to develop a greater sense of shared ownership for improving educational outcomes, developed a VACCA-wide Education Working Group, a targeted communication plan, and user-friendly and culturally strong education resources. A new, comprehensive education strategy is also being implemented so children and young people supported through VACCA’s programs successfully engage in education, are supported to celebrate their cultural identity, and develop the skills to participate fully in society.

Since the team was established, there have been increased rates of individual education plans and school attendance. In one example, the team worked collaboratively to make complex assessments to help a young child re-engage with school. The team also developed resources to support children with developmental concerns and diverse learning needs. These resources support Aboriginal families to navigate the early years system and promote the importance of reaching out and getting support as early as possible. The team creatively and effectively build educational awareness and capability for workers and carers.

## Finalists – Engaging Kids in School Award

* Brona Walshe, MacKillop Family Services.
* Education Pathways Program, Launch Housing.
* Kiley Walkerden, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.
* Lisbeth De Kok, OzChild.
* Luke Hayes, Parkville College.
* Veronika Shlimkevych, WAYSS.

# Keeping At Risk Young People Safe Award

## Winner – Keeping At Risk Young People Safe Award

**Emily Nester, Berry Street**

Emily has been led coordinator for the Multi Agency Support Team (MAST) – a youth crime prevention partnership model in the Ballarat area – since 2017. Emily’s efforts have seen the model lift practice standards across the sector. All in-scope children at risk of contact with the justice system are now being seen, heard and supported within the local service system.

Emily established the MAST Panel, a solution-focused platform comprising of clinical, welfare, drug and alcohol, disability and education sector leaders, all collaborating to build the strengths of children, young people and their families.

Emily also co-designed the referral processes with the local Orange Door and created a MAST Plan for children focusing on causations of offending and protective factors in children’s lives. Emily initiated a partnership with Federation University to inform activities, capture outcomes and increase understanding of project strengths and barriers. Emily works collaboratively with multiple agencies, supporting them to strengthen protective factors for at-risk children and families. Emily has been instrumental in challenging language used within the sector when referring to at-risk children. Emily has developed a new Community Connector program to train university students as mentors, connecting them to children who lack positive adult mentors in their lives.

## Highly Commended – Keeping At Risk Young People Safe Award

* Phipps Crescent Residential Care House, Berry Street.

## Finalists – Keeping At Risk Young People Safe Award

* Clarendon Street (North) Team, MacKillop Family Services.
* Lisa Sheasby, CareChoice.
* MB Care Team, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Lighthouse Foundation and Austin Health.
* Michael Carroll, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.
* Western Region Intensive Case Management Services (ICMS), Berry Street.

# CREATE Positive Impacts Award – CREATE Foundation

## Winner – CREATE Positive Impacts Award – CREATE Foundation

**Kellie Addicoat, MacKillop Family Services**

Kellie has been recognised by a young person as one of the most amazing people and advocates they have ever met – a friend, carer, motivator and maternal figure. Kellie started as a casual worker for the then 10-year-old and eventually began working respite, becoming the full-time carer of the young person’s home.

“I will forever value the work Kellie did for me and my foster siblings…she gave me the experience of many kids my age I was sad I couldn’t get from my own family… Kellie is a home, she’s a mother to all of us.”

Years later, Kellie has guided the young person through their education, played a vital role keeping them on track with year 12 during lockdown, gone with them to pick up the keys to their first apartment, helped them move into their new home and assisted in creating their leaving care plan to best achieve their goals.

“Kellie always goes above and beyond for young people in their care… Kellie is like a soothing balm, the sound of waves crashing ashore and the sense of floating that comes with a nap in the sun after a long day of swimming.”

## Highly Commended – CREATE Positive Impacts Award – CREATE Foundation

* Gillian Walker, OzChild.

# Children and Youth Empowerment Award – Commission for Children and Young People

## Winner – Children and Youth Empowerment Award – Commission for Children and Young People

**Ministerial Youth Advisory Group (MYAG)**

Since 2019, the Ministerial Youth Advisory Group (MYAG) has provided a forum for young people aged 14 to 22 from the CREATE Foundation. The MYAG meets bi-monthly with the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services and senior representatives from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) to provide advice on enhancements to the out-of-home care system.

Through the MYAG, children and young people with lived experience in out-of-home care have had the opportunity to have their voices heard and use their expertise to influence change.

Since its commencement, the MYAG has identified numerous significant matters requiring attention and has provided important advice on how to best support children and young people during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through MYAG, young people with experience in the care system shaped amendments to legislation about out-of-home care and highlighted experiences of young people leaving care and the need for solid support and choices.

The MYAG’s efforts highlight the value children and young people offer when they can share expertise with policy makers and contribute to shaping the legislation, policies and programs that impact them.

## Finalists – Children and Youth Empowerment Award – Commission for Children and Young People

* Emily Unity, Royal Children’s Hospital.
* North East Melbourne Area Case Management Team 3, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

# Walda Blow Aboriginal Children and Young People Award – Commission for Children and Young People

## Winner – Walda Blow Aboriginal Children and Young People Award – Commission for Children and Young People

**North East Melbourne Practice Leader Aboriginal Family Led Decision Maker Convenors, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing**

Vicki Ross, an Aboriginal woman from South Australia and Amanda Tully, a Gomeroi woman from New South Wales, are powerful trailblazers leading the way to ensure the voices of Aboriginal children, their families and community are heard. Their strong relationship with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) Community Convenors enables conversations with families to occur, for voices to be heard and for culture, community and family to be prioritised.

One example of this was when Vicki and Amanda, along with VACCA Community Convenors, reunified a young child with their grandmother and siblings on Country in Cairns. This young child had spent their young life in care and through the dedication and persistence of Amanda and Vicki, was introduced to siblings, extended family and remains with their grandmother in Cairns.

Vicki and Amanda are a formidable team facilitating family meetings, which reconnect children with families and culture. They say they are privileged to share families’ journeys, they are ‘taught by culture’ and effectively guide colleagues to deeply listen, support and learn.

Vicki and Amanda are led by culture and teach us that we must be guided by the voices of families and children to determine their own futures.

# Leaving a Legacy Award – Centre for Excellence Child and Family Welfare

## Winner – Leaving a Legacy Award – Centre for Excellence Child and Family Welfare

**Gerard Jones**

The Centre for Excellence’s Leaving a Legacy Award goes to Gerard Jones, former Deputy CEO at MacKillop – a true pioneer in child and family services. Gerard passed away earlier this year, but his legacy lives on.

Gerard’s many achievements included:

* Directing the redevelopment of residential care services and leading the development and implementation of the Therapeutic Residential Care Model, while at the Victorian Department of Human Services.
* Leading the residential care capital project redesign which improved the living environment of residential homes.
* Building valued partnerships across the sector and between agencies – notably, forming trusted relationships with Aboriginal communities across Australia.
* Bringing the Sanctuary Model to Australia.
* Project managing a $13 million progressive major redevelopment at Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre.
* Leading the redevelopment of MacKillop Education schools in Victoria and the trauma-informed approach to education, now known as ReLATE.
* Serving as an active Board Member to the Centre for several years.

The Centre would like to remember Gerard Jones for his life-long commitment to improving the lives of at risk children and young people

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Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

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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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