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| 2024 Victorian Protecting Children Awards  |
| Winners and finalists  |
| OFFICIAL |
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# Robin Clark Leadership Award

## Winner: Robin Clark Leadership Award

**Sue Sealey, Anglicare Victoria**

Sue has been an exceptional leader and social worker for 37 years, working tirelessly at Anglicare Victoria and in the broader sector.

Sue’s innovative leadership and emphasis on client empowerment have set an example for others to follow.

Sue’s work across the sector is pivotal, including as the Chair of Fostering Connections and supporting the Wungurilwil Gapgapduir Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in care.

Sue is an active board member at the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare. Sue is also a member of the Residential Care Learning and Development Strategy Committee, working to support the learning and needs of residential care staff.

Under Sue’s leadership, Anglicare Victoria has successfully adapted international evidence-based models to drive better outcomes in crucial areas like family reunification, family violence and education.

Sue’s dedication has ensured improved outcomes for many thousands of children, young people and families.

## Finalists – Robin Clark Leadership Award

* Tobias Earnshaw, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
* Graham Boal, MacKillop Family Services
* Megan Hanley, Junction Support Services

# Robin Clark Making a Difference Award

## Winners - Robin Clark Making a Difference Award

**Joint winner 1: Integrated Health Systems for Children in Out of Home Care, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Mildura Rural City Council, Mildura Base Public Hospital and Sunraysia Community Health Services**

The Integrated Health Systems for Children in Out of Home Care Project worked collaboratively across the local out-of-home care service system in the Mildura local government area.

The aim was to ensure healthcare for children and young people in out-of-home care was equitable and efficient.

The project empowered carers to be involved in children’s healthcare journeys and supported children to have their own healthcare stories. The project supported 56 children aged 0-6 years and their siblings.

In many children’s lives, parents act as their health navigator, managing appointments, advocating for their health and holding records. This project strives to give carers the same opportunities to play a part in the children’s lives.

Through the project, health information was gathered for children and recorded on the CRIS system, to build a health profile for each child to ensure their journey was captured.

**Joint winner 2: Putting Families First Team, OzChild, Youth Support and Advocacy Service, Australian African Foundation for Retention and Opportunity, Charis and Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency**

Putting Families First (PFF) is a collaborative team that includes staff from OzChild, Youth Support + Advocacy Service, Australian African Foundation for Retention and Opportunity, Charis, and Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.

PFF works alongside more than 20 community service providers to connect families to the right support, at the right time.

Services are tailored to the unique needs and cultural contexts of each family. At the time of nomination, PFF had supported 283 individuals across 58 families. Of these, 74% were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and 5% were First Nations families.

The team’s cross-functional approach brings together experts from various fields to provide holistic support. PFF works to address the immediate challenges faced by families to lay the groundwork for long-term stability and wellbeing.

Success stories range from children re-engaging with school, to families achieving stable housing and employment. The transformative impacts extend beyond individual families by fostering a stronger community.

## Finalists - Robin Clark Making a Difference Award

* Baptcare Home-Start Volunteer Mentor Program, Baptcare
* A Better Life for Foster Kids

# Minister's Award for Excellence in Protecting Children

## Winner: Minister's Award for Excellence in Protecting Children

**Berry Street’s Take Two South Metropolitan Leadership Group, Berry Street**

The Berry Street Take Two South-Metro Leadership Team developed and delivered a targeted, therapeutic intervention program for babies, children and carers.

Collaborating with child protection from Bayside Peninsula and Southern Melbourne areas, the team addressed a recognised gap in services for vulnerable babies and children (0-5 years).

Their therapeutic service uses evidence-informed approaches to address mental health impacts from trauma experienced through abuse, neglect, family violence or adverse experiences.

The team worked to provide a safe space where babies, children and carers felt comfortable engaging with new people. This tailored early intervention has resulted in many positive outcomes.

Babies and children have displayed more playfulness and joy in their relationships with carers. Similarly, carers have reported feeling more confident in their parenting abilities and are developing more connected and attuned relationships with their child.

The team engaged and empowered the carers, championed the voice of the child and promoted self-determination.

## Finalists - Minister's Award for Excellence in Protecting Children

* Detective Senior Constable Kiara O’Gorman, Victoria Police
* Detective Sargeant Narelle Kolpin, Victoria Police
* Loddon Care Hub, Anglicare Victoria

# Foster Carer Award

## Winner – Foster Carer Award

**Meaghan Lewin, Upper Murray Family Care**

Meaghan is a long-term foster carer for Upper Murray Family Care who is committed to providing the best possible care for vulnerable children.

One of the young children who Meaghan cares for was diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer. Meaghan put everything else on hold for 10 months to be by the side of the child.

Initially when the child was unwell, Meaghan took them to several medical appointments, only to continually be told not to worry and be given misdiagnoses.

The child was not able to articulate how they felt but after Meaghan’s constant advocacy and insistence, the child was finally correctly diagnosed, flown to a hospital and a tumour was discovered.

Meaghan stayed by the child’s side through numerous chemotherapy sessions which required hours of driving and waiting. Following surgery and remission, the child is now back at school and able to enjoy being with their friends.

## Finalists - Foster Carer Award

* Emilie and Laurent Michaille, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
* Kelly Van Den Meiracker, Anglicare Victoria

# Kinship Carer Award

## Winner – Kinship Carer Award

**Edward and Te Tapu Tapara, Anglicare Victoria**

Te Tapu and Edward exemplify unwavering commitment, compassion and excellence in care.

The pair have 6 biological children and despite the demands of raising a large family, they provide full time kinship care to 4 more children, and respite care to an additional 4 children from their family.

Navigating challenges such as complex family dynamics and behavioural issues, and the logistics of caring for a large group under one roof, the pair remain steadfast in providing a stable, safe and consistent environment.

Their dedication extends beyond health checks and physical care to supporting each individual child’s emotional healing journey and needs.

Te Tapu and Edward have consistently demonstrated a willingness to provide kinship care without hesitation. In the past, they also cared for 3 other children who were reunified with their parents.

Te Tapu and Edward empower all the children in their care, providing a safe, loving and stable environment where the children can thrive.

## Finalists: Kinship Carer Award

* Jessica and Danni Brennan
* Kate Gathercole

# Engaging Kids in School Award

## Winners - Engaging Kids in School Award

**Joint winner 1: Kyra Dawson, Berwick Secondary College**

Kyra has been a wellbeing team member at Berwick College for 7 years and has led the team for 4 years. Kyra is part of the Koorie Education Team and leads Respectful Relationships in the school.

As a social worker and through unwavering dedication, Kyra has supported hundreds of students, including young people in out-of-home care, to stay engaged with education despite many barriers.

Kyra works diligently to build the capacity of over 120 staff at Berwick College to understand the impact of trauma informed approaches.

Kyra has implemented several programs to support positive outcomes for young people and their families and carers. This includes student coffee cart programs with certified barista training, parent forums, facilitating psychologists and organising events for students.

Families and young people remain in contact with Kyra years after they have left school to share their thanks for the support they received from Krya.

**Joint winner 2: It Takes a Village to Educate Our Kids, Wimmera South-West, Department of Education**

In 2024, the South-West achieved the milestone of all young people across residential care services in being engaged in education or employment pathways.

This was achieved through a partnership approach between Mackillop, Mpower and Brophy, Mackillop Education, LOOKOUT, the Health and Education Coordinator, Placement Coordination Unit, and child protection.

It took passion, a focus on solutions and out of the box thinking to engage young people in education and challenge the barriers – all while listening to the voices of the young people.

An example of a great outcome was achieved for a young person who had been excluded from 2 schools due to bail conditions and has now re-engaged with their learning.

The team took a tailored approach to implement education into the young person’s home, leading to a seamless transition into virtual learning. The young person also started their own small business and is expected to return to school in the near future.

## Finalists - Engaging Kids in School Award

* Family Wellbeing in Schools Program, Anglicare Victoria
* Refugee Minor Program Education and Training Advisors, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

# Keeping At Risk Young People Safe Award

## Winner - Keeping At Risk Young People Safe Award

**Senior Constable Emma Fordham, Victoria Police**

Senior Constable Emma Fordham is exceptional at positively engaging with young people with complex child protection involvement and extensive trauma histories.

Emma supports young people in the Greater Dandenong, Casey and Cardinia areas, building rapport, developing trust and helping young people understand their self-worth.

Emma goes above and beyond to extend understanding and learn how to best support at risk young people to flourish in challenging and dynamic situations.

An example of a positive outcome was when Emma engaged with a child who was subject to extreme exploitation risk. Emma earned the child’s trust and empowered them to move away from high-risk behaviours. The young person has re-engaged with school activities, welfare referrals and support programs.

Educating others on how to effectively engage with at risk young people to ensure better outcomes is part of Emma’s legacy within Victoria Police.

## Finalists - Keeping At Risk Young People Safe Award

* Berry Street’s Comans Street Residential Team, Berry Street
* Tamara Mitric, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
* Senior Constable Vanessa Ferraro, Victoria Police

# CREATE Positive Impacts Award – CREATE Foundation

## Winner - CREATE Positive Impacts Award – CREATE Foundation

**Sophie Doyle, MacKillop Family Services**

Sophie has shown unwavering support and care as an advocate, a support person for families, and a listening ear and shoulder to cry on.

Sophie has been described by a young person as taking all that cloudy darkness above their heads and using its rain to water them to help them grow.

The young person recounted how even when they felt like they had no hope, Sophie continued to advocate for them until they were found a loving home and carer.

From regularly visiting the child at respite placement when their carer was hospitalised, to taking the child for a much-needed break, Sophie’s care and support was unwavering.

Sophie has helped the child gain their self-confidence back, and the child now hopes to be just like Sophie in the future.

## Finalists - CREATE Positive Impacts Award – CREATE Foundation

* Luke Burnham & Janelle Burnham
* Janette Airey-Graham, Upper Murray Family Care

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

## Winner - Child and Youth Empowerment Award

**Brave Foundation**

Founded, designed and led by people with lived experience of young parenthood, Brave Foundation (Brave) supports young parents and parents to be, to create happy, healthy and connected families.

Brave’s flagship program, Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens (SEPT) is an evidence-based mentor service co-designed with young parents. SEPT provides mentoring and support services to parents aged 25 and under who had their first child in their teenage years.

Emphasising youth empowerment, Brave engages young parents in decision making through its Model for Participation. This process ensures the direct and ethical involvement of young parent participants in organisational decision-making.

The Empowering the Voices of Young Parents Advisory Group also exemplifies this commitment, engaging past participants in activities, ranging from consultation to strategic project planning and media engagement.

Brave also amplifies young voices on local, state and federal stages for advocacy, consultation and experience sharing.

## Finalists - Child and Youth Empowerment Award

* Alexandra Hacking, Uniting VicTas
* Beat the Time Team, Australian African Foundation for Retention and Opportunity

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

## Winner - The Walda Blow Aboriginal Children and Young People Award

**Garinga Bupup, Early Intervention Program, Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-operative**

The Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative (BDAC) Garinga Bupup team has shown exceptional effort and excellence in practice by implementing a wraparound, culturally driven approach to early intervention support.

The Garinga Bupup program stands out for its approach to forging familial relationships with expectant mothers, and creating a sense of community, trust and comfort in the mothers they work with.

Their holistic approach enhances family outcomes, allowing mothers to make informed choices that improve child wellbeing and safety outcomes, and keep families together.

The strong community presence of the team has fostered an environment where expectant mothers are comfortable enough to self-refer to the program.

This shows the team’s commitment to creating a supportive environment where women feel empowered to seek help and make decisions about their wellbeing and that of their children.

The team’s efforts achieved a 63% diversion rate, empowered mothers and built trusted connections with the community.

## Finalist - The Walda Blow Aboriginal Children and Young People Award

* Jessica Gilmour, Adolescent Family Violence Youth Worker, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

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

## Winner – Leaving a Legacy Award

**Dr Joe Tucci**

Dr Joe Tucci was a deeply passionate, tireless and fearless advocate for children’s rights and needs. Dr Tucci passed away in March 2024 following a short illness.

As a registered psychologist and social worker, Dr Tucci had over 30 years of experience in child protection, working therapeutically with children, leading research into child abuse and consulting across governments.

Dr Tucci was a driving force behind the establishment of the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse. Dr Tucci served as the inaugural chairperson and developed a clear vision and national commitment to end child abuse and improve the lives of children, young people and families.

Dr Tucci’s leadership and direct contribution to a range of areas, including disclosures of child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviours research, form a critical foundation for achieving this vision.

As CEO of the Australian Childhood Foundation, Dr Tucci was an international leader in models of prevention and repair of childhood trauma.

# Chief Practitioner’s Award

## Winner - Chief Practitioner’s Award

**Fiona Poon, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing**

Fiona is a remarkable leader, whose responsiveness, authenticity and care is known across the Outer East and wider child protection and care services.

Seen as a calm in the storm, Fiona gives everyone equal time and is always patient despite changing circumstances.

A committed advocate for the voice of the child, Fiona attends the homes of young people to actively hear their views and to plan in support of their wishes.

Focussed on improving outcomes and empowering cultural safety, Fiona was working with 2 young people who had been subject to long term orders. Fiona explored their reunification back to country and community.

Fiona navigated barriers and logistics with integrity and passion. Fiona worked with stakeholders with clarity of planning, mobilisation of resources and transparent communication.

Both young people are now living with family and the support has been transferred to agencies within the community who have wrapped around them and their families.

## Finalists - Chief Practitioner’s Award

* Christie Gardiner, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
* Kerryn Stafford, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
* Macarly Fontana, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
* Tamara Fish, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

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