

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD CARE AGENCY ANNUAL REPORT 2018 - 2019



Accessibility

We are committed to providing accessible services to all community members. If you have difficulty with this report, please contact us on 03 9287 8800 and we will arrange assistance.

Diversity and Inclusion

We appreciate and welcome diversity in all its forms, including staff and service consumers, and believe this makes our teams, services and organisation, stronger and more effective.

Privacy

In the interest of our client's privacy and protection, names have been changed.

Photography

Deon Van Den Berg / Bronwen Davies

Thank you to the community members and staff who volunteered and gave permission for their photographs to be published.

Artwork and design

Dixon Patten





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We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands that we work on, and recognise the continuing connection to Country, waters and communities.

We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; and to Elders both past and present, and to their children and young people who are our future Elders and caretakers of this land.

THEME: LANGUAGE

Language is invaluable as a way to express our identity and connection to our culture, who we are and where we come from.

Language contributes to the empowerment, wellbeing and strengthening of our communities. Speaking in language is a way for us to maintain links to our ancestors and keep words alive that have been used for thousands of years.

There are 38 language groups across Victoria. Many of these are divided according to clan groups and Traditional Lands. These language groups also fall into 11 language group families which share words, grammar and sounds. [1]

2019 is the United Nations International Year of Indigenous Languages. In light of this, we reflect on the importance of language as not only a tool for communication, but also a repository for identity, culture and traditions.

[1] All data from the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages vaclang.org.au

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ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Artist: Dixon Patten Tribes: Yorta Yorta and Gunnai

This artwork represents this year's annual report theme of languages. It also depicts VACCA's commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

The artwork depicts our Country, culture and ceremony, and how language plays an important role in education and connection.

The pathways and feet represent the journey of children and young people. Although clients come from different areas, VACCA ensures they have connection to mob and Country wherever possible.

The boomerangs represent returning to culture for guidance. The shields represent resilience, and personal and cultural strength. The leaves represent growth as an organisation and helping children, young people and their families.

Each language group in Victoria has been included to represent our diverse families, tribes, nations and communities across the state.







INTRODUCTION

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is Victoria's leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family services organisation, and largest provider of family violence services.

We are a state-wide Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation serving children, young people, families and community members. For over 40 years we have been promoting the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

We work towards promoting the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and the healing of community through strengthening the safety, wellbeing and cultural connectedness of our vulnerable community members, particularly children and young people.

We now deliver over 50 programs across Victoria primarily through our offices in Chirnside Park, Dandenong, Frankston, Melton, Morwell, Preston, Wangaratta and Werribee.

Alongside our out-of-home care programs, Link-Up program and Ngarra Jarra Noun redress support program, we provide a range of services including family violence, intensive family support, justice, early years, youth, homelessness and housing support. Our cultural programs for young people include Art Mentoring, Koorie Tiddas Choir, Return to Country programs and Cultural Camps to mention a few.

Our service approach is based on our cultural protocols and customs. There is no single answer to the complex issues faced by some members of our community. However, self-determination does empower us, as people and as a culture. We have a right and responsibility to ensure our community members are empowered and have a voice.



CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

The overriding theme for the financial year 2018-2019 has been one of implementation. The state and federal elections brought with them a pause in the reforms of the previous years as we worked on delivering the new programs which were funded as well as existing programs.

Alongside this we continued to build on our work of embedding culture in our program delivery through our major project Cultural Therapeutic Ways, incorporating the elements of a Model of Care that outlines the intersection of cultural practice with self-determination and trauma informed theories; a new Monitoring and Evaluation Framework; and a new database to track how programs are working towards outcomes and self-determined goals.

Our back of house infrastructure has also been moving ahead. It is future proofing us for the next five to ten years.

Our core service in the out of home care area still remains our main operational activity.

Our advocacy for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to self-determination also means we have been very active in governance structures and processes across government. Our CEO has been tireless in her commitment to this role and has been making an incredible contribution to ensuring jointly developed strategies and plans in government have every chance of success. The wellbeing of our children and young people demands this cross-sector engagement and partnerships.

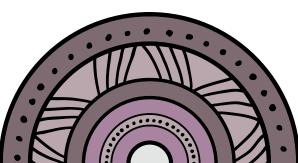
We have been strongly encouraging treaty advancement in our state as we see this framework as safeguarding and protecting Indigenous rights in Victoria for the long-term. There is still a lot of work to be done in this regard and we will continue our involvement and support for treaty.

As a Board, we take a holistic view of the needs of our children, young people and families. We know that having a healthy environment for our children and young people to grow up in requires a family that has housing, jobs and income, good health, education, and is able to live their lives engaged with their extended families, other community members and their land and culture. VACCA as a service for our children, young people and families, will always look for opportunities to strengthen our service offerings based on this view.

We continue to be deeply concerned about the numbers of Aboriginal children and young people entering the child protection system. We share the responsibility of addressing this with our community, the government and our sector, including other Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and mainstream community sector organisations. That is why our advocacy is broader than our interests as an organisation, and our collaboration and partnerships extends to the sector as a whole. We believe that the reforms that have been implemented will show results in due course.

I am proud to be the Chairperson of VACCA and to work with extraordinary people around me including our CEO Aunty Muriel Bamblett, the members of our Board and all of the VACCA staff. I want to thank them all and those who support us, including our funders and partners, and invite you to read our report for last financial year.

James Atkinson VACCA Chairperson



CEO REPORT

Since joining VACCA as CEO twenty years ago, there have been times when the plight of many of our children and families have seemed overwhelming and the work we do appears to have little impact. There are also the days when we see the joy we bring to the lives of many children, young people and families, and the broader community. For me however, it is our work to embed Aboriginal culture in the lives of children, young people and families often when they have very little exposure to culture that is the most fulfilling.

This year the way we have been applying Aboriginal culture to all aspects of our work and services has been a revelation. From our cultural activities, Cultural Camps, programs such as Cultural Support Planning, Kinship Family Finding, Return to Country, and Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making, to engagement in the community and new internal cultural work through measures to change our model of care and practice – these are all perfect examples of the work we do, which is leading us into spaces I had not anticipated. Aboriginal child welfare as a practice is taking shape and that is the most exciting thing about our work because it is liberating for all involved.

We are also in a period of reform and I know that achieving change can be a lengthy process. There are many factors that need to be present in order to make change happen, especially in the field of Aboriginal rights, and in the case of VACCA, specifically in child welfare. I do believe that for reform, especially one based on our human right of self-determination, needs to have policy-makers in place who agree with and support that change. In other words, governments who support the same directions. Furthermore, it requires, in our case, the existence of strong Aboriginal organisations who are willing and able to take on the change that is advocated. Policy reform also needs resourcing, including funding, training and collaboration, and partnership on a service level.

For many years, we have pushed the boundaries of the general understanding of what is possible in child welfare in Victoria and I believe we are now at the point where we have agreement that a different approach is necessary – from shifting the emphasis to prevention, and to implementing a cultural approach to supporting our children and young people in care and prioritising their reunification. However, the most significant has been our work in transferring to full guardianship and taking greater control and decision-making of Aboriginal children as well as the transitioning of Aboriginal children to the care of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

Having established some basic principles, we still need to apply these to the day-to-day work of supporting our clients.

Last year we continued to build on the reforms introduced by the Victorian Labor Government

in child welfare and Aboriginal affairs. The Advancing the Treaty Process is as much a part of the change we want as the child welfare reforms. The treaty process has entered a new phase with the elections of First Peoples' Assembly representatives, including myself. The year ahead will set the groundwork for the eventual treaty discussions based on a treaty negotiating framework.

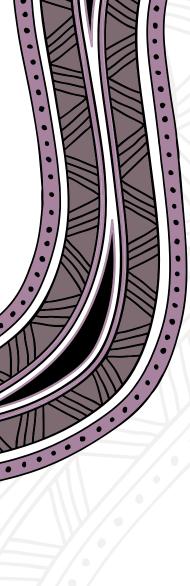
I am pleased to highlight in this report examples of the work we are doing at VACCA that is contributing to the change I speak of. This year I have been in my role at VACCA for twenty years and I have seen many challenges but my overriding experience has been the ability of our workplace to allow our Aboriginal staff licence to use our culture in innovative ways to bring about better outcomes and change the trajectory of so many lives. I want to once again thank my Board and Staff for their continued support, hard work and commitment to the children, young people and families who are our clients, and the broader community – and thank our clients and community for making the journey with us.

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Prof. Muriel Bamblett AO







BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Our Board of Directors is responsible to govern the strategic direction of VACCA; to ensure compliance with reporting bodies; to respond to community expectations; and to ensure we provide excellence in service delivery.



James Atkinson – Chairperson Yorta Yorta / Bangerang

James is a former CEO of the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative and was previously employed as Manager, Koorie Education at the Department of Education and Training. James has worked across the Education sector, including early childhood, schools, TAFE and higher education, in policy development, stakeholder and project management. He has extensive organisational experience and has served on Boards at a state and national level. James was one of the founding members of the first Victorian Aboriginal Youth Advisory Committee and a participant in the Koorie Leadership Program.





Tony Lovett – Vice Chairperson Gunditjmara

Tony is employed as a Community Services Officer with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd (VACSAL). Tony is Chair of the Grampians Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory committee and Co-Chair of the Aboriginal Justice Caucus.

Jason Kanoa – Treasurer Gunditjmara / Bunitj

Jason is employed as the General Manager Operations at the Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation. Prior to this, Jason was CEO of the Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative. Jason has been employed as a Senior Project Officer, Indigenous Family Violence, at the Department of Health and Human Services, and with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) as the Koori Caucus Executive Officer.

Elaine Taylor - Secretary Wamba Wamba / Bunnerong

Elaine is currently serving as an Elder on the Koori Court, and has been actively involved in the Dandenong Aboriginal community for most of her life. Elaine has worked in a number of Aboriginal organisations including VACCA. She is a long-standing Board Member for the Dandenong and District Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd.

Deidre King – Director Gunditjmara

Deidre was employed as CEO of the Aboriginal Community Elders Services Inc (ACES). Prior to this, Deidre worked at the Aborigines Advancement League (AAL) for 17 years, and at VACCA. Deidre is a Board Member of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd (VACSAL).

Margaret Atkinson – Director Yorta Yorta / Taungurung / Wurundjeri

Margaret is employed as a Wurreker Broker with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI). She was previously employed at the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd, and at VACCA for over nine years.

Rodney Monohan – Director Taungurung

Rod was employed as the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer with the Northcote Police Complex. He was previously employed at VACCA for 12 years and was instrumental in implementing the Lakidjeka ACSASS program across the state. Rod has also been employed at Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) and Aboriginal Community Elders Services Inc (ACES) and has served as a Board Member of a number of Aboriginal organisations including Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd (VACSAL), Aborigines Advancement League (AAL) and Chair of the Taungurung Clans Aboriginal Corporation.





OUR VISION

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination – Live, Experience and Be.

OUR PURPOSE

Supporting culturally strong, safe and thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

OUR PRINCIPLES



Self-determination

We believe in the fundamental right of self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We are committed to strengthening understanding and empowerment in the exercise of rights and discharge of associated obligations as First Peoples.

*

Respect

We pay respect to the individual and collective cultural rights, obligations and responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our operations, management and in the delivery of our service. We show respect to each other, our partners and the community we serve.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural observance

We believe that compliance with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols, cultural practice and ceremony is integral in helping us achieve successful outcomes for our community and especially for our children and young people.



Best interests of the Child

Our children and young people have the right to be heard, to be nurtured and safe; to optimal life opportunities (education, healthcare and development of social and emotional wellbeing); to their identity and connection to their community and to be with their own families.



Excellence

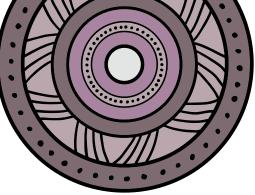
We believe that the community we service expects and is entitled to a high quality and professional service that is culturally embedded.



Healing and empowerment

We use a strengths-based approach and aim to provide empowering, healing services to repair damage done to the Stolen Generations and the community by policies of removing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and disenfranchisement of our community.





OUR PERFORMANCE

Our annual year performance shows how we have continued to contribute to our aim of embedding self-determination and culture across our service to the community, and in our relationships within our sector.

In the first year of our Strategic Plan for 2018–2021, we have seen greater control of Aboriginal services and measures that support the principle of self-determination being implemented at government and non-government levels.

We commenced implementation of Cultural Therapeutic Ways, an organisation-wide cultural therapeutic framework. This will work towards embedding culture across our programs, services and operations.

Family violence reforms and child protection have been priorities with Family Violence Therapeutic programs established across all regions. Areas of this work also aligns with *Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way: Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families*, the new Aboriginal 10-year family violence agreement for 2018–2028 which was launched during the year.

We delivered cultural activities at all our locations – with increased community engagement through these activities.

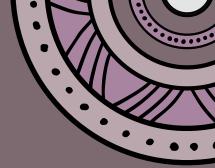
To view VACCA's Strategic Plans visit: vacca.org/strategic-plans











OUR ANNUAL REPORT: AT A GLANCE

This year's annual report is structured around our five Outcomes Framework domains: Self-determination; Embedded culture; Wellbeing; Safety; Strong organisation.

These allow us to understand, measure and control outcomes – with a focus on individuals and the community.

Self-determination

We work to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development as Victoria's First People. As part of this, we aim to build a thriving community where members exercise their collective rights, including the right to self-management.

In this section we highlight our advocacy work for treaty, and updates on our Nugel and Lakidjeka programs.

Embedded culture

We believe that culture defines who we are, how we think and what we value. Cultural identity is a key positive facet that builds resilience and positive self-identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Community, kinship and family connections are an important foundation for healthy communities.

In this section we highlight our Cultural Therapeutic Ways approach; Return to Country programs; Deadly Story; NAIDOC Week; and our cultural strengthening programs and activities including Cultural Camps, Koorie Tiddas Choir, and the Art Mentoring Program and Narrun Yana.



Wellbeing

We want to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's connections to family, culture, Country and community. Our work helps to improve the physical, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of our clients. This, in turn, helps communities grow in strength, resilience and healing.

In this section we highlight Ngarra Jarra Noun – redress support program; Out-of-Home Care programs: Foster Care, Therapeutic Residential Care, Permanent Care and Kinship Care; Kinship Family Finding; Link-Up Victoria; and the Aboriginal Children's Healing Team.

Safety

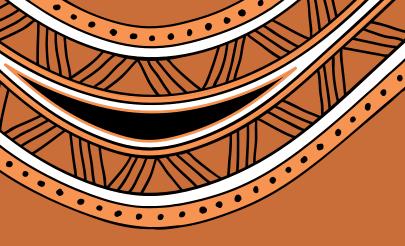
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the right to feel safe and exercise the same rights and freedoms as all Victorians. We help our clients to feel safe and support them to make safe lifestyle decisions through family and community relationships.

In this section we highlight our Family Violence Therapeutic Programs: Healthy Respectful Relationships Camps, and Strengthening Cultural Safety in Family Violence Services Program; and homelessness programs: Wilam Support Service and Kurnai Youth Homelessness.

Strong organisation

We have developed a reputation as a well-respected organisation. This demonstrates the strength of VACCA as an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation to the wider Victorian community. Our work builds social capital in communities by responding to the needs of the vulnerable people we serve.

In this section we highlight workforce achievements; staff development; external training; Mollie Dyer Awards; the Royal Commission into Mental Health; Our DHHS accreditation; preparing for future service demands; Information Technology Strategy; and the Financial Report.



SELF-DETERMINATION



We work to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development as Victoria's First People. As part of this, we aim to build a thriving community where members exercise their collective rights, including the right to self-management.

Our work helps empower the community to understand and use their rights. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it means people can take control of their lives and practice their culture and customs.

After decades of advocacy by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the Victorian State Government is listening and has agreed to negotiate Australia's first treaty with the First Peoples.

This is a clear expression of self-determination. It also means Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can negotiate Native Title or Recognition and Settlement Agreements.

Highlights

Along with the first steps in negotiations for a state treaty in Victoria, this year we completed research into the role of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Community Service Organisations in the process of treaty.

This year our Nugel program supported 30 children; five children returned to the care of their parents; three children participated in Return to County trips; and seven children no longer have statutory involvement.

Our Lakidjeka – Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice Support Service, responded and provided advice and consultation on approximately 7,845 Child Protection reports.







TREATY

This year marked the first steps in negotiations for a state treaty in Victoria. This followed the passing of Australia's first ever treaty legislation, the Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Bill 2018 passing through Victorian Parliament on 21 June 2018.

The Act was the result of the work of over 7,000 Aboriginal Victorians who have worked with the Victorian State Government to progress treaty over the past two years. These were the initial stages ahead of the nomination and selection of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria by community members later in 2019.

To support the work of treaty, we received funding to undertake engagement and research activities. During the year we undertook research into the role of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Community Service Organisations in the process of treaty and in a future treaty framework.

As part of the research, we completed a state-wide consultation with a number of key stakeholders including the Treaty Advancement Commissioner, Jill Gallagher, and then CEO of Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative, James Atkinson, amongst others, during August to October 2018.

We also facilitated yarning circles and morning teas in each region, hosted with Aboriginal leader and consultant, Jason Mifsud. These covered a broad discussion around what treaty is, the role of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, and the treaty process to date.

To help further inform employee awareness of treaty, we developed and distributed a range of resources and information guides. We encouraged staff and community to be engaged throughout the treaty process and will provide support throughout the Assembly elections.



NUGEL

Nugel is a Wurundjeri word meaning 'belong'. Nugel aims to create self-determining families, children and young people, and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to oversee and support our kids in care.

As the first of its kind in Australia, Nugel enables Aboriginal organisations to take responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people on Children's Court orders.

Through Nugel, we advocate for the importance of keeping our children and young people connected to community, culture and family. With this focus, we aim to keep siblings connected; commit to finding family and community networks; pursue family reunifications where possible; and involve families in decision making.

This year Nugel supported 30 children; five children returned to the care of their parents; three children participated in Return to Country trips; and seven children no longer have statutory involvement.

Since becoming operational in November 2017, Nugel has provided services to 44 children. A second Nugel team was established this year, to become operational in July 2019.

In-house legal service

VACCA's in-house legal service, which has an approach based on Human Rights, has continued to strengthen Nugel's reputation as a model litigant with Magistrates and practitioners at Marram-Ngala Ganbu at Broadmeadows Children's Court.

A Nugel court report template was designed and introduced with permission from the Magistrates, and has received positive feedback. The Koorie Services Coordinator at the court has indicated that the only cases they have seen where children have gone from a care by Secretary order to a family preservation order, have been Nugel clients.



"Our children will know who they are and where they belong. They will take pride in their cultural identity and will grow up strong and resilient".

> - CEO Muriel Bamblett reflecting on Nugel

ISABELLA'S STORY

When Isabella was transferred into the care of Nugel, she was living with her mother Sharon and extended family on a family preservation order.

Isabella's mother separated from her father early in the pregnancy and concerns were raised regarding her ability to take care of her.

Sharon had experienced a history of family violence and mental health concerns that re-emerged after giving birth.

Shortly after Isabella's transfer to Nugel, a breach of the family preservation order occurred, and she had to be removed from her mother's care and placed into foster care.

After being placed in care, Nugel was able to find Isabella's father. As a result, it was decided that he and his family were able to provide the best care for Isabella, where she is now living.

Although Sharon is no longer the primary carer, support services previously linked with Sharon and her family have continued, in addition to working with Isabella's father and his family. Nugel has been committed to strengthening the relationship between Isabella and Sharon, and contact has now become unsupervised.

Nugel have been able to wrap VACCA support services around the entire family. Both parents are now linked into the Cradle to Kinder program and the supported playgroup; have engaged with parenting assessment and skills development services; and continue to engage with the same maternal and child health nurse.

Sharon's mother also continues to access VACCA's Integrated Family Services.





LAKIDJEKA: ABORIGINAL CHILD SPECIALIST ADVICE SUPPORT SERVICE (ACSASS)

Lakidjeka is our Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service which provides specialist advice based on the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Advice from Lakidjeka is provided when the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Child Protection make decisions regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's safety and wellbeing.

This year Lakidjeka responded and provided advice and consultation on 7,845 Child Protection reports. The program also continued to exceed targets set by DHHS at both Intake and After Hours.

This year we were successful in receiving recurrent funding for seven of the eight non-metro areas: Inner Gippsland, Outer Gippsland, Ovens Murray, Goulburn, Barwon, Central Highlands and Wimmera South West. The Loddon area is now provided by Njernda Aboriginal Cooperative and Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-Operative.

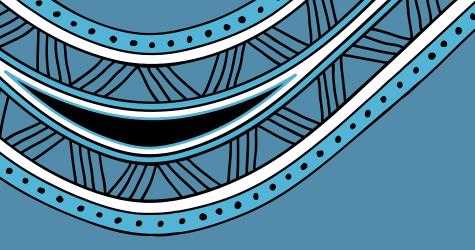
We continue to receive funding for the four metropolitan areas.

Self-determination informs Lakidjeka

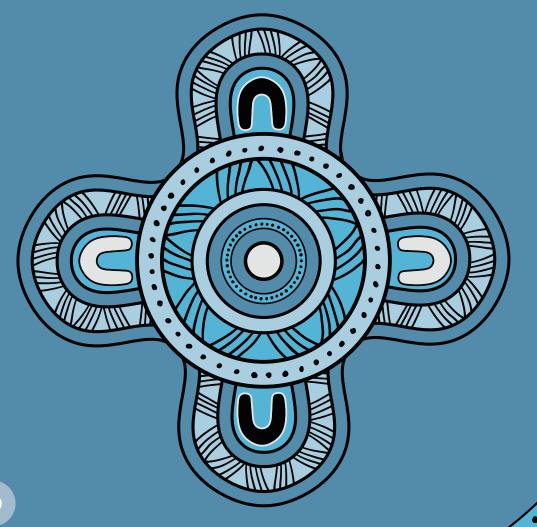
Advice from Lakidjeka to Child Protection focuses on all aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's safety, including their cultural safety, the right to grow up with their family, and to remain within their community when they are unable to safely remain with family.

Through its advice and consultation to Child Protection, Lakidjeka plays a critical role in embedding our Cultural Therapeutic Ways approach in the delivery of services. Although largely state-wide, Lakidjeka services are locally delivered and are strong in their connection to culture, community and Country.





EMBEDDED CULTURE





We believe that culture defines who we are, how we think and what we value. Cultural identity is a key positive facet that builds resilience and positive self-identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Community, kinship and family connections are an important foundation for healthy communities.

We want to both recognise and celebrate the inherent value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. For centuries, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been practicing and rejuvenating culture to pass on knowledge that promotes healing.

We exercise cultural protocols within our work in everyday practice and work to strengthen the community through cultural connectedness.

Highlights

This year we started implementing Cultural Therapeutic Ways. It places our community at the centre of the way our services are delivered, with culture as the dorrong – the heart – of program design.

Our Return to Country activities have been a significant and integral part of connecting children and young people in out-of-home care to their home and Country.

We also continued to run a number of programs to strengthen culture within our communities, including: Art Mentoring Program, Narrun Yana, Koorie Tiddas Choir, and Cultural Camps for children, young people, young men and women, and foster carers.





CULTURAL THERAPEUTIC WAYS

Cultural Therapeutic Ways is a whole-of-agency approach which began in 2017. It guides our practice of healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, community and carers who come into contact with our services. It also creates a safe and supportive workplace for our staff.

This year we started implementing the approach by engaging with staff across the organisation, to prioritise and share existing Aboriginal practice and wisdom. It is scheduled to be staged over the next four years.

This has involved strengthening existing practice guided by culture, selfdetermination and trauma informed theories. For others, it has involved identifying areas that need to be strengthened and drawing on wisdom from Aboriginal-led teams to support best practice.

As the intersection of culture, Cultural Therapeutic Ways sets a new precedent for developing an evidence base for Aboriginal-led program design. In the context of our current growth, it cements Aboriginal principles, values and wisdom at the foundations of existing and future practices.

This approach puts clients first and has been driven by several factors, including our commitment to make our workplace more inclusive through improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff wellbeing, and supporting non-Aboriginal staff in their cultural practice. Equally ensuring we deliver culturally appropriate services designed by listening to the voice and needs of families, children and young people we work with.

Implementing this approach will also enable us to build a strong foundation to respond to the growing pressures of the current funding environment, to design programs informed by an Aboriginal evidence base.

As an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation, it is critical that we lead in this space, and advocate for culturally appropriate, safe and competent evaluation approaches. This project is another significant step of self-determination within practice and advocacy as we work together to heal, protect and connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and individuals.

Outcomes Framework

This year we started working towards building an evidence base by developing an Outcomes Framework. With a newly expanded and highly skilled Monitoring and Evaluation Team, this is being driven alongside the introduction of Cultural Therapeutic Ways.

It will enable us to build a strong foundation for developing an evidence base of Aboriginal-led programs and practice with three interrelated components:

- a Model of Care that outlines the intersection of cultural practice with self-determination and trauma informed theories;
- a new Monitoring and Evaluation Framework;
- and a new database to track how programs are working towards outcomes and self-determined goals.

While a focus on monitoring and evaluation of outcomes is new for VACCA, the collective cultural wisdom we are drawing upon is not – it is old wisdom presented in new ways.

This is a significant aspect of this work as we embark on a self-determined journey to measure outcomes in culturally appropriate ways.

Cultural Therapeutic Ways possum skin cloak artwork

The accompanying possum skin cloak artwork symbolises VACCA's Cultural Therapeutic Ways in the way it wraps services and community together to provide healing, protection and connection.

Artist Emma Bamblett designed and named the cloak *YINGA*, a Wemba Wemba word meaning 'this way'.

• •

RETURN TO COUNTRY

Our Return to Country programs are a celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practice and an integral part of connecting children and young people in out-of-home care to their home and Country.

Return to Country programs recognise the impact of disconnection to identity, health and wellbeing – and are about knowing who you are, where you come from and what this means.

Throughout the year we supported Return to Country's across several regions. This year we were also awarded a major grant from Gandel Philanthropy towards our Return to Country program.

Return to Country programs incorporate people, land, water, language, kinship systems, lore, knowledge, beliefs and spirituality. It is about shared history and shared memories, healing and resilience, survival and pride.

Children and young people are provided the opportunity to travel to their home Country to meet Elders, visit sacred sites, share knowledge and learnings about songs, stories, art, places, plants, animals and natural resources. It helps create culturally strong and empowered children, young people and families.

RECONNECTING TO COUNTRY IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

During the year we were able to reconnect two young people to their family and Country in the Northern Territory.

The two unrelated young people, Lucy aged 16 years and Micheal aged 17 years, had developed a sibling-like bond through living in out-of-home care together since an early age.

During the year we arranged a Return to Country trip for Lucy. Micheal was invited to join Lucy on the trip to ensure he didn't feel left out.

We were able to locate and connect Lucy with 35 family members in Tennant Creek, siblings in Darwin and Elders in Alice Springs. During Lucy's visit with Elders, they were able to give Lucy her totem and skin name, as well as speak with her in language.

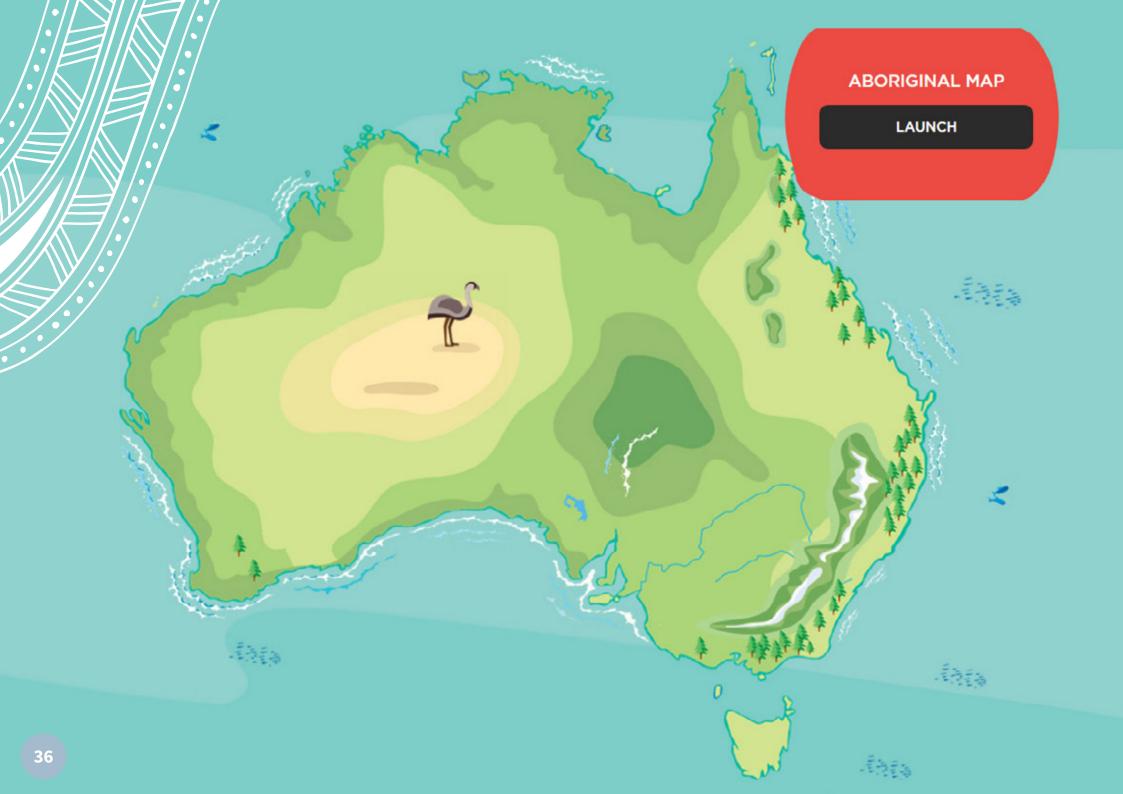
On the trip to Alice Springs, the case worker was able to locate eight of Micheal's relatives overnight after finding out his birth-father was from Alice Springs.

As a result, Micheal was able to connect with Aunties and first cousins in Alice Springs and more family in Ali Curung, four hours north of Alice Springs. He also joined his family on a trip to Uluru.

Both Return to Country's were arranged through existing connections of the case worker who had previously worked with community in the Northern Territory.

They were emotional and amazing journeys for Lucy and Micheal, who are both still connected with family.







DEADLY STORY

We launched Deadly Story in November 2017 with our partners SNAICC, Koorie Heritage Trust, the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owners Corporation and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Deadly Story is a cultural information website designed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care, connect with their culture, community and Country.

It continues to reach children, young people, carers and practitioners through its online presence. The most popular feature during the year highlighted NAIDOC Week events and stories. This shows positive cultural connection and increasing cultural understanding among young people and practitioners.

The website continues to grow with new features to assist followers to stay up to date with cultural events across Victoria. During the year, the Country page was expanded to feature an interactive mapping tool, linking viewers to relevant community organisations, to assist with cultural planning across Victoria.

In September 2018, Deadly Story launched an Instagram account, which grew to 1,455 followers by 30 June 2019. This was part of a strategy to reach and increase engagement with young people. Used to highlight significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, places and events, the account continues to grow its audience, and engage with existing and new followers.

The Deadly Story newsletter subscriptions also grew to 939 subscribers.

Visit Deadly Story at deadlystory.com or on Instagram via @deadlystory

DEADLY STORY

NAIDOC WEEK 2018 - Because of her, we can!



Because of her, we can!

The theme for 2018 NADDOC week is Because of Her, We Can, This theme aims to centrole "the Invaluable coethibutions that Abertginal and Terres Strait Subnet weeken have made - and continue to make - to our communities, our families, our rich history and to our nation."

To cellibrate NAISOC week, Deady Story In honouring some of the anazong women who have weeked to make the Voldman Konso Community shrong. Because there are so many incredible somes in our Community in Viroloni, we have not been able to include all their achievements in this feature article. We will continue to highlight the stores of deadly women in the harburk.

Deadly Story would like to thank Yolanda Finetta, Georgia Capocchi-Hunter, Winnie Bridie and all the fantastic wome profiled for their work in developing this feature article.







ART PROGRAMS

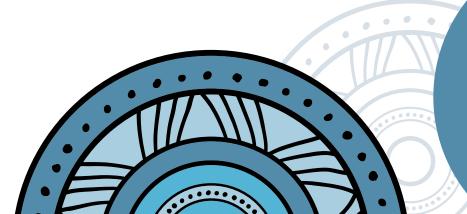
Aiming to embed connection to culture, arts and crafts activities are incorporated into several programs we provide, including Cultural Camps and playgroups. Two examples of art-specific programs we run for young people are the Art Mentoring Program and Narrun Yana.

In its fifth year, the Art Mentoring Program provides young people aged 15–21 years the opportunity to develop their arts practice and techniques; learn about arts and culture, and the broader arts industry; and work with established artist mentors, Maree Clarke and Peter Waples-Crowe.

Through the program we collaborate with different institutes to create educational opportunities. This includes Victoria University's Moondani Balluk unit to support participants in a certificate in General Education; and the Melbourne Museum's Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre to gain knowledge and skills.

In August 2018, we had our 2018 VACCA Mentoring Program Exhibition 'Heritage by Art' at Neon Parlour in Thornbury. It celebrated the work of six young people exploring their culture and identity through different mediums. In May 2019, students also exhibited for Yirramboi Festival in the Melbourne CBD.

Stemming from the Art Mentoring Program, Narrun Yana Art Collective is a safe space for young people to work together in a creative environment that supports economic independence, as well as professional development opportunities within the arts and cultural sector.



"I feel proud seeing my artwork up on the street. The biggest inspiration for my artwork was the one who gave us our land rights, Eddie Mabo. He inspired me to do my art, and I hope my art can inspire other people too."

 Art Mentoring Program participant reflecting on Yirramboi Festival





NAIDOC WEEK 2018 - BECAUSE OF HER, WE CAN

Each year we celebrate NAIDOC Week as it is a significant time for our children, young people, families and community to come together and celebrate culture.

This year we hosted NAIDOC Children's Day events which involved cultural activities based on the theme *Because of her, we can*. Activities included painting, screen printing, dancing, music, face painting and photo booths.

Over 2,000 children, young people and family members participated in this year's events across the regions. These events and activities help strengthen a strong connection to culture, Country, community and family which is critical for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in care.

KOORIE TIDDAS CHOIR

The Koorie Tiddas Choir program works to build the selfesteem, identity, confidence and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and young women, through connection to culture and community through music.

This year the Koorie Tiddas Choir had seven participants and started at the beginning of Term 3, 2018. Throughout the year, the Choir had sessions with Lou Bennet, who taught them a song in Yorta Yorta language, and pop duo, The Merindas. The Merindas are Candice Lorrae of Jawoyn and Thursday Islander heritage, and Nyoongar Ballardong Whadjuk woman, Kristel Kickett.

The program is designed around learning language and incorporating language into song. Musicians are invited to work with the girls to either write songs in language or to write a song and then have it translated into language by an Elder.





CAMPS AND ACTIVITIES

We run a range of camps and cultural activity days throughout the year with a focus on embedding connection to culture and promoting healthy relationships and lifestyles.

We provide camps to a number of groups including children and young people in care and transitioning to leaving care; young men and women; and foster carers.

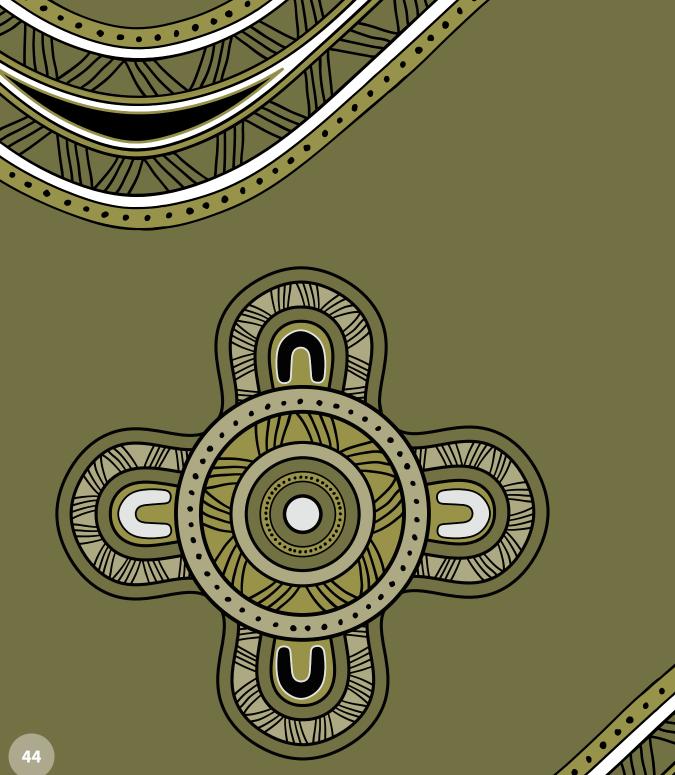
There is also the opportunity for past camp participants to build their leadership skills to become future leaders.

Camp activities include:

- Painting, dancing, cooking bush tucker, rock climbing, spear hunting, traditional games
- Knowledge sharing and learnings about songs, stories, art, sacred places, plants, animals and natural resources
- Engaging with and learning from Elders about the significance of local heritage, stories, totems and examples of clan obligations with the aim to foster long lasting connections with culture.



"You can be proud of the skin that you can wear, and you can wear your skin anywhere, and just be proud, and it doesn't matter what people say, because they can never take away your skin colour or who you are" – Cultural Camp participant



WELLBEING



We work to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's connections to family, culture, Country and community.

Our work aims to improve the physical, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of our clients. This, in turn, helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members grow in strength, resilience and healing.

Highlights

This year we launched Ngarra Jarra Noun, a program designed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people applying for redress through the National Redress Scheme.

Our Barreng Moorop Youth Justice Program worked with Indigenous Hip Hop Projects on writing, recording and filming a song, *Standing Proud*. This provided participants with the opportunity to talk about what is important to them, where they find strength, and the importance of connection to culture.

This year Link-Up Victoria supported 13 reunions, including 16 clients. These reunions highlight how the story of the Stolen Generations is not over and we are still bringing our mob back home.

Our Link-Up team also organised a number of healing activities and special events for the Stolen Generations for the National Apology Anniversary and National Sorry Day, as well as a Back to Fitzroy Reunion.



NGARRA JARRA NOUN – REDRESS SUPPORT

Ngarra Jarra Noun means to remedy / heal in Woiwurrung language. Launching in July 2018, Ngarra Jarra Noun was created to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people applying for redress through the National Redress Scheme.

The redress scheme was set up to acknowledge the harm done to people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse. Ngarra Jarra Noun have worked to ensure the scheme is accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, and to support them through the application process.

Potential clients include survivors aged over 18 years who experienced institutional child sexual abuse in an institution that has joined the scheme. Institutions include schools, religious organisations, sporting clubs and out-of-home care providers. Many clients through this program are survivors of the Stolen Generations.

Many clients are suffering from significant trauma and disadvantage as a result of their abuse. It is imperative to have a tailored assistance program that recognises survivors' trauma, experiences and healing journey in a culturally safe and supportive way.

This year Ngarra Jarra Noun has supported over 65 clients.

Cultural healing programs

Ngarra Jarra Noun provides cultural healing programs to clients who have received redress and choose to access counselling and psychological care components of the National Redress Scheme.

The Victorian State Government has established a Restore Victorian Redress Counselling Service – a consortium of five organisations, including VACCA. This means Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors have the option to access mainstream counselling or cultural healing.

Cultural healing programs include camps where survivors stay on Country and attend community healing gatherings. The cultural healing programs have been evaluated by La Trobe University in partnership with VACCA and found that by strengthening culture and connection, all survivors benefited from participating and survivors were empowered to continue healing.

The team strives to ensure that for each of their clients, taking the redress journey contributes to healing.



STOLEN GENERATION SURVIVORS HEALING THROUGH NGARRA JARRA NOUN

Three women who experienced institutional child sexual abuse and are Stolen Generation survivors, attended Ngarra Jarra Noun's women's day program and a cultural camp.

Each of the three women are mothers, and two are grandmothers. All have carried significant responsibilities and stressors through caring for family and the broader community. In addition, other significant stressors have included community obligations; regular attendance to funerals and Sorry Business; and the daily experiences of casual and systemic racism.

Each of these women felt the programs had significant impact on their wellbeing, especially being able to share with other women, in a space they were able to connect and feel supported. These experiences helped each woman develop hopes for the future and continue on their healing journey.

After the healing programs, Edith enrolled into a course as part of her desire to be a natural therapist. She now believes education is the way forward, having previously believed this was not possible due to lack of opportunities growing up.

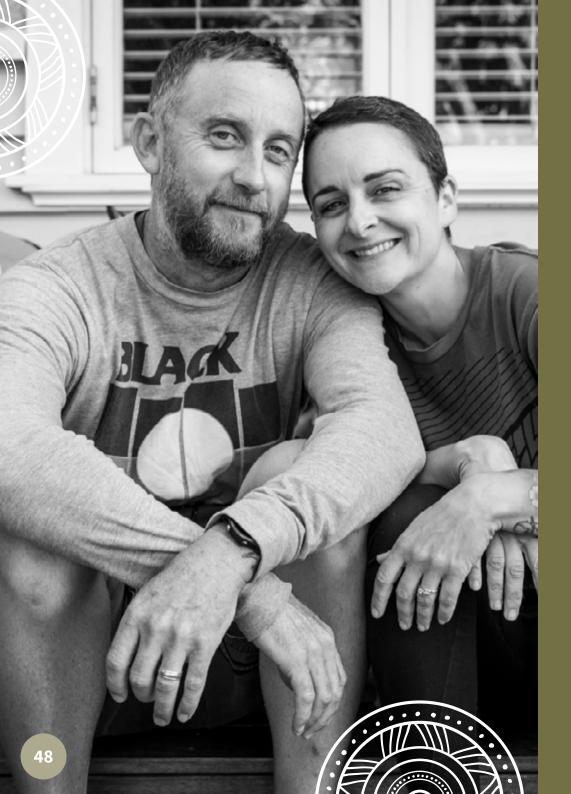
Pam's art is being exhibited at a local exhibition.

Beth was invited to speak at a Sorry Day event about her experiences of the Stolen Generations, in which she felt honoured.

Edith and Beth both reflected on the role of cultural connection and knowledge, which resulted in healing and increased inner strength:

"Knowing culture is powerful, it helps you know your strength" – Beth

"Connecting to culture is the best way to heal, needing to feel safe to identify, needing to know your culture to identify, acknowledge and having that idea of those in the group having each other as a support by the end of the program." – Edith





FOSTER CARE

At VACCA, we aim to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people placed in the care of their extended family or with members of their community. Where it is in their best interest, children and young people are reunited with their families as soon as possible.

Foster care at VACCA is a way of providing culturally safe homes for children and young people who cannot live with their birth families.

This year our foster care recruitment team accredited 24 new carers, with a total of 74 household carers; received 115 direct enquiries through the VACCA website and 194 enquiries through Fostering Connections; delivered 12 *Our Carers for Our Kids* training sessions to potential carers across all regions; and trained other Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in foster care and kinship care.

During the year a foster care program was established in our Morwell office and we are planning to establish another program in our new Wangaratta office next year.

To help raise awareness of foster care and to expand recruitment, we have had an active presence at a number of events, including Dreamtime at the G, NAIDOC Week events, and a number of community festivals. We also had a series of information sessions at each VACCA office.

This year we also worked with 11 Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and the Department of Health and Human Services to develop a new foster care assessment tool.

THERAPEUTIC RESIDENTIAL CARE

Our therapeutic residential care service provides placements for young people aged 12–18 years, who cannot live with immediate or extended family. Provision of service is therapeutic-based, with priority placed on providing a trauma-informed practice.

Residential care offers specialist interventions from a range of practitioners including a therapeutic specialist, support staff, education support workers and dedicated case workers. Working in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the program accepts young people on statutory orders, referred by DHHS Placement Coordination Unit.

This year outcomes for our clients have included greater access and respite with family members; reunification with family; establishing home-based care arrangements, including foster care and kinship care; and progression to independent living arrangements.

A new model of care, which holds culture at the centre of all service delivery was developed during the year. The model is better equipped to appropriately address the needs of our client cohort.

Leaving care program

Leaving care programs support young people in out-of-home care aged between 15 and nine months to 21 years.

Through the program, young people are provided with the opportunity to develop appropriate independent living skills; complete referrals to service providers; and develop post-care plans for stable housing and accommodation.

The program is voluntary, and participants are engaged through self-referral or through the DHHS Placement Coordination Unit.



PERMANENT CARE

Our permanent care program strongly advocates that, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in care, long-term stability is achieved through permanent family and community connections.

This year we received 24 referrals which resulted in nine permanent care orders. Permanent care provides children and young people in care a sense of safety and security in the knowledge of who they are and where they come from, a sense of belonging and connectedness to family, community and Country.

Siblings perform in Tanderrum 2018

This year a group of siblings supported through the permanent care program, performed at the annual Tanderrum event at Federation Square for the third year in a row.

During the year, with the consent of the children's mother, the children travelled to New South Wales to visit their grandfather's Country.

We have been supporting the children, who have been on Permanent Care Orders since 2014.



KINSHIP CARE

Our kinship care program provides care and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who are unable to live with their parents, and alternatively cared for by a relative, a close friend or member of their community.

Children and young people may be in kinship care due to a number of reasons including concerns for their protection or to provide their parents with a break as a result of challenging circumstances.

Services provided through kinship care include placement support and case management; information and advice to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal kinship carers and permanent carers; support kinship care families; cultural connection support; group support and activities.

This year we were also successful in the reunification of a six-year-old child back into his mother's care after being in a kinship placement for three and a half years.

KINSHIP FAMILY FINDING

Our Kinship Family Finding Program aims to find Aboriginal family connections to ensure a suitable kinship placement can be provided for children and young people who are in out-of-home care or at risk of entering out-of-home care.

The Kinship Family Finding Program build genograms back to apical ancestors and aims to include as many living relatives as possible. Research of genograms looks for a child's ancestors in order to connect back to family, community, Country and culture.

During the year, the program has connected genograms and found genealogical links between different families for at least 10% of referrals from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). This has been beneficial for opening a range of possible placements and care opportunities with kin that had never been known or investigated before.

During the year, the program has also been able to expand 32% of genograms received from DHHS, resulting in connecting to family previously not known.

The program established and manages the first specialised Victorian Aboriginal Kinship Finding Database.





LINK-UP VICTORIA

Link-Up Victoria's main focus is supporting the Stolen Generations to find and be reunited with their family.

We assist the Stolen Generations to confidently reclaim their identity; to wholeheartedly embrace their heritage; to happily return back into the caring arms of their people; and to proudly walk on their traditional Country, sometimes for the very first time.

This year Link-Up supported 13 reunions, which included 16 clients. These reunions confirm that the story of the Stolen Generations is not over and we are still bringing our mob back home.

In response to the ongoing call for justice by the Stolen Generations, we will continue to advocate for a Victorian Stolen Generations compensation scheme from the State Government. Other states have completed or are about to complete theirs, and this is long overdue for Victoria.

Healing activities and special events

Each year Link-Up organises healing activities and special events for the Stolen Generations, to ensure their history and stories are never forgotten. This year we partnered with the City of Darebin and Connecting Home to commemorate the 11th anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations on 13 February 2019.

For National Sorry Day, we partnered with the City of Yarra and held an event at the site of the Stolen Generations Marker created by Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi artist Reko Rennie called Remember Me, in Atherton Gardens, Fitzroy, on 26 May.

A Back to Fitzroy Reunion lunch was held on 31 May to celebrate the history of the area, which was well received by the community due to the importance of keeping this history alive, with members of the community requesting Link-Up to host it again.

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN'S HEALING TEAM

Our Aboriginal Children's Healing Team operates from a basis that acknowledges the long-term traumatic impacts of colonisation, genocide and dispossession, as well as the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. A sophisticated understanding of the trauma of dispossession and loss of culture and Country is central to the philosophy of the work we do.

The Aboriginal Healing Care and Culture model enhances therapeutic care services to cater to the diverse cultural and healing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families.

Underpinned by a biopsychosocial framework, the healing team applies an integrated culturally grounded, trauma-informed and healing-driven approach to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This means that culture provides the foundation for the clinical work we do.

The healing team acknowledges that cultural identity represents who we are and where we have come from, and that connection to people and to Country is central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.





BARRENG MOOROP YOUTH JUSTICE PROGRAM

We partner with Jesuit Social Services and the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service to deliver Barreng Moorop Youth Justice Program. This program provides integrated and intensive case management support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, aged 10–14 years who are vulnerable or at risk of being involved with the justice system.

During the year we worked to support 10 young people who participated in a series of cultural activities including learning language, particularly with Uncle Bill Nicholson on a cultural day at the Bush Hut. We also collaborated with Indigenous Hip Hop Projects on writing, recording and filming a special song, *Standing Proud*.

The program aims to bring together different service providers and the family around the young person in a comprehensive way, to provide wrap-around support. We recognise the importance of engaging with all members of a family including siblings, parents, carers, and Elders. They are also provided access to relevant welfare, housing, family and education services.

Standing Proud music video

In January 2019, we collaborated with mentors at Indigenous Hip Hop Projects through our Barreng Moorop Youth Justice Program to create *Standing Proud* – a song about what is important to the young people involved, where they find strength and the importance of connection to culture.

A range of activities to create the song included several writing workshops, performing, studio recording and making a music video.

To view the video, go to youtube.com and search: Standing Proud – VACCA

> "You know, no one's gonna hold you down, oh, spirits standing all around, so cultures connecting us right now, and we're standing proud, say it loud". – lyrics from Standing Proud

KOORIE WOMEN'S DIVERSION PROGRAM

Our Koorie Women's Diversion Program in Gippsland aims to prevent Koorie women from having further contact with the justice system.

The program has become a well-known service in the judicial system in the area. Magistrates, judges, lawyers and police regularly ask for our service involvement, and know our staff by name.

Of the 28 women who have engaged with the program since January 2019, none have returned to prison.

Brenda's story

A Gunaikurnai woman who had been involved with the justice system was referred to the Koorie Women's Diversion Program, after receiving a heavy community corrections order.

Brenda had a long history in out-of-home care, had experienced family violence with her baby's father; was experiencing homelessness; using drugs heavily; and facing jail time.

To support Brenda, VACCA made a referral to Koorie Youth Homelessness which led to long term housing; assisted her attendance to alcohol and drug counselling; helped her access a psychologist; and provided assistance for her to attend community work hours.

We assisted Brenda in accessing a solicitor for family court. Her partner was eventually located, and she was granted supervised visits with her daughter, which turned into supervision overnight access on weekends. After the corrections order was successfully completed, Brenda was granted shared custody of her daughter.

Brenda is now connected back with her family and has exited the program.





Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the right to feel safe and exercise the same rights and freedoms as all Victorians.

We aim to help our clients to feel safe and support them to make positive lifestyle decisions through family and community relationships.

Highlights

During the year we successfully completed a two-year pilot delivery of our innovative Family Violence Therapeutics Programs in June 2019. During the pilot, we supported 881 children, young people and adults.

We successfully delivered Healthy Respectful Relationships Camps across all regions for young people aged 14–17 years who are connected through out-ofhome care, family services and family violence programs. We also continued to deliver our Strengthening Cultural Safety in Family Violence Services.

We continued delivering our homelessness programs, Wilam Support Service and Kurnai Youth Homelessness.





FAMILY VIOLENCE

Our support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and individuals seeks to address the drivers of family violence. It aims to promote healing and treatment responses in a culturally safe and appropriate way.

This year we delivered programs to families affected by family violence through:

- Primary prevention programs.
- Family violence early intervention.
- Intensive family violence case management.
- State-wide women's and children's crisis service.
- Family violence therapeutic and group work programs.

We aim to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities are safe, healthy and free from violence by providing culturally appropriate and trauma-informed responses to families at risk of, or experiencing, family violence.

Family Violence Therapeutics Programs

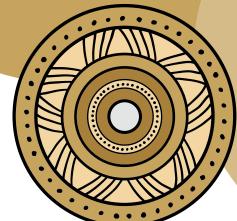
This year we successfully completed the two-year pilot delivery of our innovative Family Violence Therapeutics Programs in June 2019. During the pilot we engaged with 881 children, young people, and adults impacted by, or at risk of, the impacts of family violence.

Through the programs we developed strong relationships, with a focus on enhancing cultural connection, belonging and pride, and emphasising their role as protective and healing factors.

The therapeutic model includes group therapy, and individual and family counselling. Therapy embeds culture by inviting Elders to attend group sessions and participate in yarning circles, telling stories, smoking ceremonies, didgeridoo making, traditional wood carving, possum skin cloak making, basket weaving, jewellery making, traditional dance, and arts and crafts activities. The programs aim to provide a deep therapeutic journey of healing and breaking the cycle of violence. An evaluation of the programs highlighted that its use of culture across all therapeutic practices makes it distinctly different to mainstream programs.

It is run in the inner-Gippsland, Northern, Southern, Western and Eastern regions.

"I believe what it's done to me is made me realise about my birth-given human rights that everyone else has, that we all have our own rights. And that what this program has done has made stop...second-guessing myself...and [it] just made my judgement better... So, the moment I felt that something was wrong and it can go the wrong way, I want to actually address it, speak up, but also do it in a way where I get my point across but I don't go over the line and become like them."



"You know what I'm saying? ... be calmer and put my foot down... People treat you the way you let them. So, when you want to try and re-educate people, they're not very impressed. So, it's about just being persistent and not actually being kind of black and white... And doesn't matter if they're family, friends, this, that, anyone. It doesn't matter who you are. If you do the wrong thing, then I'm not going to have it around me and my family anymore... then I let myself down and then I let my family down. So, I won't be doing that for anybody anymore."





Healthy Respectful Relationships Camps

We have successfully delivered one and two-night family violence prevention Healthy Respectful Relationships Camps across the regions. These camps are for young people aged 14–17 years who are connected through out-of-home care, family services and family violence programs.

Culture underpins the camps with the focus on yarning up on healthy respectful relationships and breaking the cycle of family violence.

Participant feedback highlighted that campfire yarns were a favourite activity, as well as developing a better understanding of the different types of family violence.

Strengthening Cultural Safety in Family Violence Services

Strengthening Cultural Safety in Family Violence Services provides state-wide support for services offering family violence support services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Cultural safety education and consultations, or advice, is provided to mainstream family violence services by Cultural Safety Advisors. It focuses on how to build cultural safety capacity, and how to complete cultural safety assessments and action plans.

It aligns with the Department of Health and Human Services' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework and *Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way*, a ten-year family violence agreement for 2018–2028.

The assessment tool covers five standards for mainstream organisations to assess and develop action plans to build cultural safety capacity and culturally safe environments.





HOMELESSNESS PROGRAMS

Our homelessness support services, Kurnai Youth Homelessness and Wilam Support Service, help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people address the drivers of homelessness. We help find secure, long-term housing and provide support to build their life ahead.

Wilam Support Service

Our Wilam Support Service helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander singles, couples, families and young people aged 17 years or older, who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, find stable housing. We also help clients connect with their culture and identity.

During the year we supported 113 cases; responded to 114 additional queries; supported 32 people into emergency accommodation; supported 14 people into longer term accommodation; and supported four homeless people into stable housing.

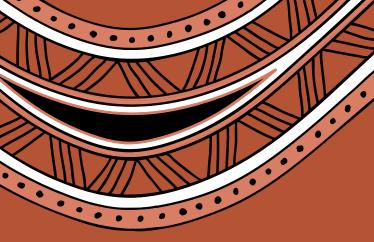
In addition to housing, our Wilam Support Service team supports people with housing referrals and can also provide assistance in helping people keep their tenancy. This includes help with Centrelink, employment, life skills, budgeting, cleaning, and mental health support.

Kurnai Youth Homelessness

Our Kurnai Youth Homelessness program helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, find long-term affordable housing.

During the year we supported 25 clients above our initial targets with a total of 121 clients; secured 20 transitional housing properties; and four long-term housing properties for several clients, including singles and families with kids.





STRONG ORGANISATION



We have developed a reputation as a well-respected organisation. This demonstrates the strength of VACCA as an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation to the wider Victorian community.

Our work builds social capital in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by responding to the needs of the vulnerable people we serve, as well as offering opportunities for economic advancement for the whole community.

Highlights

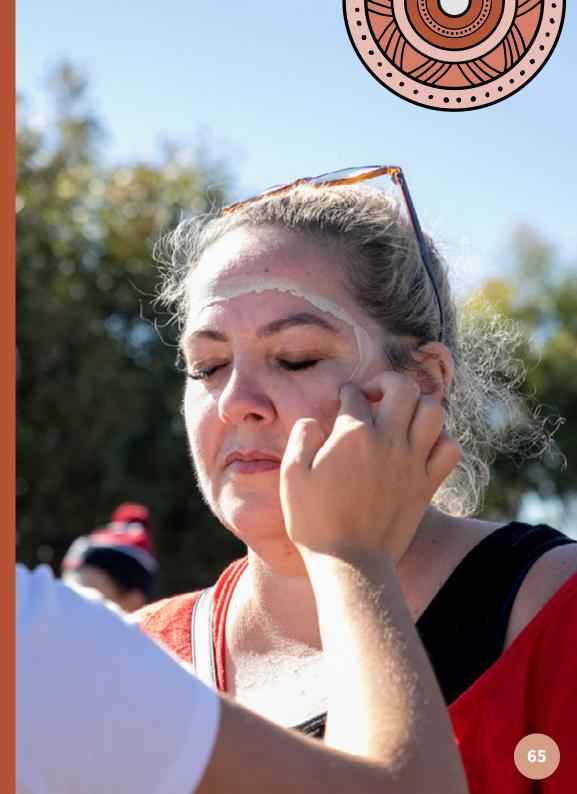
During the year we had an increase in staff with 260 new recruits – of these, 109 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. To help increase employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, we have continued supporting student placements, internships and traineeships, with 31 participants this year.

We facilitated 80 internal training sessions to VACCA staff and 63 training sessions to different external organisations including Berry Street and Triple R Community Broadcasters.

We also celebrated the first Mollie Dyer Awards, in honour of our extraordinary founder. The awards celebrate work excellence in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

Other highlights include:

- Completing a projections project for the next five to ten years.
- Completing research and a response to the Victorian State Government's Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.
- Re-accreditation as a DHHS funded agency.
- Started implementing our Information Technology Strategy 2019-2022.





OUR PEOPLE

This year we moved into the final year of our Organisational and Workforce Development Plan. The plan focuses on strengthening our workforce capability, wellbeing, and increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, career opportunities and leadership.

We had an increase in staff with 260 new recruits joining the organisation during the year – this included 109 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

By the end of the year we had 564 VACCA employees, including 252 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. This places VACCA as one of the largest employers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by a community organisation in Victoria.

To further increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, we have continued supporting student placements, internships and traineeships, with 31 participants during the year. We were also active leaders in shaping the Victorian State Government Aboriginal Workforce Strategy.

We have focused on student and staff wellbeing, and career development pathways to ensure all staff receive appropriate guidance and support throughout their journey at VACCA. With a focus on wellbeing within the Workforce Development Plan, we welcomed a new Healthy Workplace and Wellbeing Coordinator to establish a new Wellbeing Unit.

In October 2018 we distributed a staff survey which had a 61% participation rate. 67% of respondents indicated that VACCA is a 'truly great place to work'.





STAFF DEVELOPMENT

As we undertake work critical to the future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and the broader community – professional development of our staff is a priority.

To upskill VACCA staff, we secured agreements with Swinburne University to deliver the Diploma of Community Services, and La Trobe University to deliver the Graduate Certificate in Family Therapy, in 2017.

Following this, our first group of 26, including 25 Aboriginal staff, successfully completed their diplomas; and nine staff completed their graduate certificates this year. To celebrate this extraordinary achievement, we held a special event at the Melbourne Museum.

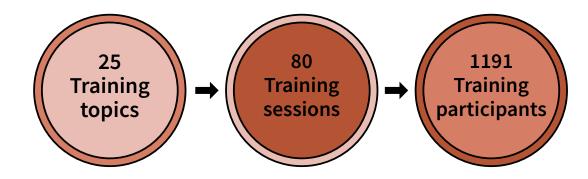
To continue staff development as part of our Organisational and Development Plan, our second cohort of 40 students commenced their diploma studies and are expected to complete studies in 2020.

We continue to offer student placement and traineeship programs, creating important pathways for our future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community services sector workforce.

Throughout the year, we facilitated 80 training sessions to VACCA staff on 25 different topic areas, with a total of 1,191 participants. Training included Cultural Awareness, Family Violence, Introduction to Child Protection and Wellbeing and Supervision.



Training snapshot: 1 July 2018 - 30 June 2019





EXTERNAL TRAINING

We are committed to raising awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in Victoria, outside of the organisation through our Cultural Awareness Training.

During the year we facilitated 63 training sessions to different external organisations, with a total of 1,098 participants. Training included Cultural Awareness, Yarning Up on Trauma and Nikara's Journey.

Organisations we provided training to include Berry Street, MacKillop Family Services, Triple R Community Broadcasters, City of Darebin and Anglicare.

The Yarning Up on Trauma program which was originally developed as a partnership between VACCA and Berry Street, and delivered nationwide, is now delivered exclusively by VACCA.

External training snapshot: 1 July 2018 - 30 June 2019



INCREASING CULTURAL AWARENESS AT TRIPLE R

Established in 1976, Triple R is one of Australia's leading community radio broadcasters, and this year their staff, broadcasters and volunteers participated in our Cultural Awareness Training.

A group of 21 completed the training to help expand their knowledge of Australia's history and deepen their relationship with First Nations volunteers and community. The session was well received, with plans for future training sessions.

During the year Triple R also supported VACCA initiatives and was a main present collection point for our first Christmas Gift Appeal, which saw VACCA collect over 4000 presents for children, young people and carers.

Our CEO, Muriel Bamblett, has also become a regular guest on Triple R with interviews on The Breakfasters about the Christmas Gift Appeal (19 November 2018) and National Reconciliation Week (27 May 2019) and The Grapevine about the Closing the Gap Refresh (18 February 2019). "It was an enjoyable introductory course that I'd recommend to any workplace. For many the course sparked a greater awareness of First Nations cultures, and for some a far greater engagement in First Nations communities and education."

> – Dave Houchin, Triple R Station Manager



MOLLIE DYER AWARDS

In November 2018, we celebrated the inaugural ceremony of the Mollie Dyer Awards, in honour of our extraordinary founder, Aunty Mollie Dyer. The awards celebrate work excellence in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families to feel safe, strong and proudly connected to culture and community across Victoria.

Community Award

Recipients of the Community Award were Aunty Melva Johnson and Aunty Laura Bell.

Aunty Melva Johnson was recognised for being a champion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health through the establishment of community services around Echuca.

Aunty Laura Bell was recognised for the implementation of educational, legal and cultural initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Community Regional Award

Recipients of the Community Regional Awards were Aunty Elaine Taylor, Lowana Moore and Aunty Geraldine Atkinson.

Aunty Elaine Taylor has been a Director of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and the Aboriginal Youth Support & Recreation for four years. She is also a Director of Dandenong & District Aborigines Co-operative.

Lowana Moore was recognised for her work at the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc (VAEAI) for over 20 years.

Aunty Geraldine Atkinson was recognised for her career which has been devoted to expanding the possibilities available for Koorie people through education.

Employee Award

Emma Bamblett, our state-wide Aboriginal Cultural Planning Coordinator, received the Employee Award. She is an acclaimed artist and strong advocate for the cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care. Aunty Mollie Dyer is remembered as a courageous advocate for the rights of Aboriginal children and families. In 1976, alongside other Victorian Aboriginal community members, she founded VACCA – the first Aboriginal run agency to support Aboriginal children and families.



ROYAL COMMISSION INTO MENTAL HEALTH

On 24 February 2019, the Victorian State Government announced the Royal Commission Inquiry into Victoria's Mental Health System, which will provide recommendations to the Victorian State Government by October 2020.

During the year we submitted a response based on our unique position as an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation providing services across the state for children, young people, families and community members.

The submission included case stories highlighting current challenges in supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; as well as practices and supports that hold promise for addressing those challenges. It was one of over 2,500 submissions to the Commission.

We contend that the social and emotional wellbeing needs of our children, young people and families are not currently being met by the mental health service system, it is not responsive to the specific needs of the Victorian Aboriginal community.

Aboriginal children and young people are vulnerable to a lifetime of social and emotional wellbeing concerns due to the early exposure to risk factors creating a pathway into poor mental health and mental illness.

Over-representation of Aboriginal young people in out-of-home care and the criminal justice system as well experiences of childhood trauma and family violence can have a detrimental effect on their development and overall social and emotional wellbeing.

Extract from the submission executive summary

To view the submission visit rcvmhs.vic.gov.au/submissions

DHHS ACCREDITATION

This year VACCA became a re-accredited Department of Health and Human Services funded agency in March 2019.

This was achieved through meeting compliance requirements to maintain quality accreditation in November 2018. Meeting contractual obligations through accreditation enabled VACCA to apply for reaccreditation with DHHS.

The DHHS Standards represent a set of quality standards required by organisations delivering services to clients, in ensuring that the following is promoted and upheld:

- Empowerment: People's rights.
- Access and Engagement: People's right to access transparent, equitable and integrated services.
- Wellbeing: People's right to wellbeing and safety.
- Participation: People's right to choice, decision making and to actively participate as a valued member of their community.

PREPARING FOR FUTURE SERVICE DEMANDS

To provide organisation leaders the opportunity to strategically consider VACCA's future service provision over the next five to ten years, a Service Demand Projection project was established in partnership with Social Ventures Australia.

This involved developing a forecasting model to investigate and analyse Aboriginal population growth over the next 10 years, as well as the impact on service demand across key service sectors in Victoria.

Our future organisational needs will impact the current operational model. However, future infrastructure requirements will depend on the strategic decisions regarding future service provision and model of care.

As part of this work, it has been estimated that in correlation with an increase in demand in existing services, VACCA will continue to grow substantially.



POSSUM SKIN CLOAKS

Possum skin cloaks have been utilised as a way to empower and strengthen culture in the workplace and community within our Western Region.

During the year a project to create a possum skin cloak centrepiece which captures individual staff stories was initiated. Art sessions in a culturally safe space will be facilitated for staff to capture their stories, together. The cloak will soon sit in the Werribee boardroom, to show our strong cultural leadership to stakeholders.

In addition, a men's group who support and mentor each other culturally through activities and advice, also work with possum skin and clapstick burning, to provide to children and young people in care within the region.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY 2019 - 2022

Implementation of our Information Technology Strategy started this year. This plan defines Information and Communications Technology and Information Management strategies and projects, building upon the previous four year ICT Strategy.

The new strategy looks to enhance VACCA's technology to meet future growth demand and to ensure existing business systems continue to support our core processes over the next three to five years.

Priorities over the next four years are outcomes monitoring and reporting, interoperability, unified communications, technology training and education, and future capability.



FINANCIAL REPORT

This financial year was of continuous growth, with the gross operating income of \$58.6 million and a net operating surplus of \$1.49 million.

A number of new programs were rolled out during the year including Targeted Care Packages; a second Nugel team; and establishment of the new Wangaratta office.

We will continue to receive additional funding for a third team in Nugel and family violence services in 2019/20, as a result of the Victorian State Government's *Roadmap for Reform* commitment.

The largest growth has been the continuation of the transfer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to VACCA's responsibility.

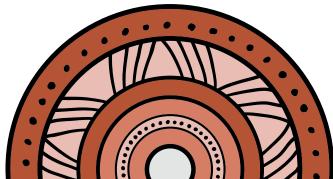
It is expected that the *Roadmap to Reform* and ten-year family violence plan will continue to have a significant impact on the operations, workforce and potential future growth of the organisation, over the next three to five years.

Gross operating income compared to previous year

\$43.9 million > increased 33% to \$58.6 million

Gross operating income over five years

\$21.9 million > increased 167% to \$58.6 million



Summarised statement of Financial Position (balance sheet) as at the year ended 30 June 2019 (\$)

	2019	2018
Total Current Assets	29,385,883	23,630,003
Total Non-Current Assets	3,903,705	2,435,373
Total Assets	33,289,588	26,065,376
Total Current Liabilities	24,345,263	18,178,850
Total Non-Current Liabilities	340,006	782,169
Total Liabilities	24,685,269	18,961,019
Net Assets (Liabilities)	8,604,318	7,104,357
Total Equity	8,604,318	7,104,357

Summarised statement of income and expenditure for the year ended 30 June 2019 (\$)

	2019	2018
Total income	58,619,881	43,964,159
Total expenses	57,120,040	43,044,590
Net income	1,499,841	919,569



THE YEAR AHEAD

As we head into the new financial year, we start the second year of our 2018–2021 Strategic Plan period.

We also commence implementing our Service Demand Projection plan. Research completed during the year identified what the community needs on a regional and time-based scale, and on population projections.

Community support

At a client service level, Nugel will continue to expand, with the transfer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to VACCA playing a key part of our operations.

To continue building resilience and connections to culture, we will strengthen our cultural activities and camps for children and young people.

We will pilot two new youth-focused initiatives: a Youth Through Care Model; and an Integrated Youth Team in the South. We will also commence operations of a new family services model and develop our model of care.

Advocacy

Following our submission to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health Service, we will continue to be engaged and contribute to the final report. The outcomes of this Royal Commission is important for service responses later – with the interim report expected in late November 2019, and the final report in October 2020.

We will continue to support treaty at the state level and constitutional recognition at a federal and national level – along with the establishment of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria later in 2019.



Organisational development

In partnership with Melbourne Polytechnic, we will commence an accredited Diploma of Leadership and Management program for staff. The course will be customised with input from some of our senior leaders.

Following on from the initial stages of implementing our Cultural Therapeutic Ways approach during the year, we will progress the development of an Aboriginal approach to evidence informed services. We will also develop a new four-year Organisational Development Strategy by June 2020.

Additional goals for the year ahead include:

- Finalising our accountability and monitoring framework.
- Plan and implement a new finance system upgrade.
- Progress and roll out a new client database system.
- Roll-out SMS critical messaging across all sites after a successful pilot in our Eastern Region.
- Relocate approximately 120 staff to new premises in Morwell and Chirnside Park.
- Perform a comprehensive audit and analysis of all VACCA information software solution systems.
- Continue implementing our Information and Technology Strategy.







THANK YOU

We would like to take this opportunity to say thank you.

We are very grateful for the contribution our supporters, donors, fundraisers and clients make to VACCA and the work we do.

The invaluable support we receive helps assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families to heal and connect with culture.

Programs you have assisted us in supporting include Books in Homes, Narrun Yana Art Collective, Koorie Tiddas Choir, Return to Country and Cultural Camps. We have also seen amazing support for our NAIDOC Week events.

We have a range of useful educational resources and merchandise available online, visit vacca.org/shop.

Support us

Over the past year we have increased our engagement with many individuals, groups, businesses and workplaces through our new initiatives, Morning Tea for Culture and Christmas Gift Appeal.

Ways you or your organisation could help include adding support of a program or campaign to a Reconciliation Action Plan; workplace donations or building a partnership with a program; or leaving a gift in your Will.

If you or your organisation would like to support us – we are always happy to connect with you.

For more information visit vacca.org/support-us



SUPPORTERS & FUNDERS

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

VACCA would like to acknowledge and thank all Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and groups we collaborate and work with across the State of Victoria.

Partners and sector organisations

Anglicare, Australian College of Agriculture and Horticulture, Berry Street, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Centre of Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Child First Partners, Community Housing Ltd, Djerriwarrh Health Services, ECMS, Elizabeth Morgan House, Family Life, Food Ladder, Foster Care Association, Fostering Connections, Gateway Community Health, IPC Health, Jesuit Social Services, Latrobe Valley Community Health, La Trobe University – Bouverie Centre, Life Without Barriers, MacKillop Family Services, Merriwa Industry, Orange Door, OzChild, Quantum Support Services, Queen Elizabeth Centre, Swinburne University, Save The Children, Social Ventures Australia, SMA Multidisciplinary Centre, Salvation Army, Upper Murray Family Care, Uniting Vic Tas, University Of Melbourne – Centre for Training and Research in Developmental Health, Westcare, WestCASA, Women's Health West, Youth Support and Advocacy Service, Youthworx.

Philanthropy

Creswick Foundation, Gandel Philanthropy, Healing Foundation, Inner North Community Foundation, Packer Family Foundation and Crown Resort Foundation, Sidney Myer Fund, St Kilda Football Club, The Geo Group, Nelson Alexander, Preston Toyota, Toyota Fleet Management, Kia Motors Australia, GM Leasing, REA Café, Team Ellis Gym Melton, Impact For Women. Pro bono services: Ashurst, Neon Parlour

Supporters and fundraisers: Triple R Broadcasters (3RRR), Evelyn Hotel, Gasometer Hotel, Lucky Coq.

Government

Federal Government Departments: Department of Social Services, Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, Department of Education and Training, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Local Government Councils.

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency acknowledges the support of the Victorian State Government and Creative Victoria.







STAY IN TOUCH

Become a member

We invite all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years and over to become members of VACCA. Members have voting rights at our Annual General Meeting.

Information on membership can be found at vacca.org/membership

Feedback

We are always interested to hear how we can improve our services to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and community members living in Victoria.

All feedback is welcome via vacca.org/feedback or feedback@vacca.org

Our locations

Chirnside Park Suite 1.01, Level 1, 20 Fletcher Road, Chirnside Park VIC 3116 Ph: (03) 8727 0200

Dandenong Level 2, 1-7 Langhorne Street, Dandenong VIC 3175 Ph: (03) 9108 3500

Morwell 25-27 Rintoull Street, Morwell VIC 3840 Ph: (03) 5135 6055

Ovens Murray Suite 3, 27 - 29 Faithfull Street, Wangaratta VIC 3677 Ph: (03) 5756 9000 Frankston Suite 4-6, 108-120 Young Street, Frankston VIC 3199 Ph: (03) 8796 0700

Melton 43 Bakery Square, Melton VIC 3337 Ph: (03) 8746 2776

Preston 340 Bell Street, Preston Victoria 3072 Ph: (03) 9287 8800

Werribee 75-79 Watton Street, Werribee VIC 3030 Ph: (03) 9742 8300



Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency Co-operative Limited ABN 44 665 455 609 340 Bell St, Preston 3072, Victoria

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Connected by culture