



Healing Together

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
Annual Report 2014/2015

Accessibility

VACCA is committed to providing accessible services to everyone. If you have difficulty in understanding this report, contact us on 03 9287 8800 and we will arrange assistance for you.

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.

Design

ACGD Design & Communications
creative@acgddesign.com

We would like to thank the children, carers, parents and families that appear in the photos of this report. As well as the contributing Indigenous artists.

We would also like to thank the contributing photographers who provided their photos for this report.



Healing together is what VACCA is about - workers and our clients - community members - are all healed through our work at VACCA because we all have our issues and difficulties we are living with. We all need a helping hand and support at various times in our life. As long as one of us is oppressed so are we all.

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Welcome

Welcome to this year's report. This section reflects on some of the important milestones and steps forward in our journey of healing together as a community.

Wominjeka and welcome...

Chairperson's Statement

I have pleasure in presenting our report for 2014-2015. Over the last year we have made remarkable advancements and have achieved a great deal.

During this period we have continued to do the things which will sustain us as a well-run organization into the future including addressing the way we can continue to meet our compliance obligations.

A central priority of our Strategic Plan for 2015-2018 is to maintain and increase the numbers of our Aboriginal staff as this is what makes us different. Over the next three years we also look forward to making significant advances in our service delivery as well as expanding the boundaries of what everyone understands as "Aboriginal Child and Family Welfare".

As a Board, we like to meet communities by holding our meetings in rural towns as well as in Melbourne. We look forward to more of these meetings.

In concluding, I want to thank our Board, our CEO, Aunty Muriel Bamblett and all our staff, volunteers and carers for all their hard work and dedication to VACCA.



James Atkinson
Chairperson

CEO's Report

This year's Annual Report fills me with joy and pride not just because of the theme we have chosen, but also because it shows off our children and young people and their talent.

The reporting period since July 2014 has been one of some change as well as frenetic activity. It has involved a lot of planning and thinking and of course activity delivering our services and cultural programs on top of the day-to-day tasks of running an organisation.

Last year was also a difficult year for me personally and I want to acknowledge the Board and VACCA management and staff for their enormous support throughout the year in ensuring that the services continued to be delivered to families and children who need that support.

There were notable points during the year that require mention, some are achievements of ours and others are key developments which have impacted on us.

From the Commonwealth Department of Social Services we received a substantial boost to our Emergency Relief Program which has been a very welcome development

The Commonwealth Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) funding round generated a lot of work for us and more than we could have anticipated. However, the outcome of all the work was that we were successful in securing increased funding from the IAS even though we did not receive funding for all the programs we sought. From the Commonwealth Department of Social Services we received a substantial boost to our Emergency Relief Program which has been a very welcome

development and means we have been able to extend our reach to families in need across various parts the State.

This brings me nicely to the other very important political development at the State level with the election of the Andrews Labor Government who made significant commitments to boosting child and family welfare as well Aboriginal affairs and family violence.

The Government, through Minister Jenny Mikakos made it very clear to us early on that her priority in her portfolio of families and children was to address the issues of Aboriginal children in the child protection system.

The government also extended funding for our Guardianship Trial which allowed us to gain further learnings in preparation for what we hope is an imminent implementation of Section 18, the Aboriginal Guardianship provisions in the Children Youth and Families Act of 2005.

Of course this assessment of 2014-2015 would not be complete without a mention of Taskforce 1000 the examination of the 1000+ Aboriginal children in child protection by the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People. The process has been a revelation for all involved with a great deal of work put into it. I want to congratulate Commissioner Andrew Jackomos for his work and look forward to the report that is expected next year.

Last year we also produced the Cultural Competence addendum for the DHHS Standards with the support of the DHHS which will take our sector another step closer towards creating a culturally safe service sector for our families and children. While we continue to seek Aboriginal services for Aboriginal people as a matter of principle and right we must also ensure that those who do provide services for our people do so in a way that is fair, just, inclusive and culturally safe.

An indication of our development as an organisation was underlined by our selection as one of the finalists in the Reconciliation Australia Indigenous Governance Awards.

It is reassuring to know that we are on the right track as we continue to grow which we did again last year. I am pleased to say that we have opened a service location in the west of Melbourne in Werribee offering services to those communities which are growing rapidly. Lastly, even though they may not all have received awards for their work I want to make special mention of our workers who work with our children and families. I hear their stories throughout the year and it heartens me to see their commitment to our children and families.



Muriel Bamblett CEO

Muriel Bamblett

Your Voice Matters (2014 Annual Report Feedback)

The feedback you provide enables us to improve our report so it best reflects the voice of our organisation and the community.



We received 43 responses about last year's Annual Report. Through these responses we identified a number of positive aspects, which included; the photos of children and families from our community, the easy to read text, and the use of diagrams and graphs to explain data about our organisation.

Some responses suggested the report should have more personal stories. In response to this we have included more case studies in this report for you.

There were also a range of suggestions about making Aboriginal Culture more present in the report. So we refreshed the design to feature artwork from our young people, staff and programs.

We will continue to seek feedback and work with you to make sure that the report meets its goals.

To give your feedback on this report you can:

1. Complete our 2015 feedback survey
2. Email feedback@vacca.org

John Elliott - Link-Up Program



Our Board

VACCA's Board represents our community, provides leadership, ensures our financial status is sound and meets all our legal obligations. They also keep us connected to our community by being true to our culture, history, aspirations and values.



James Atkinson
(Yorta Yorta/
Bangerang)
Chairperson

Currently employed as Manager, Koorie Education with the Department of Education and Training. Has worked across the Education sector from early childhood, schools, TAFE and the higher education in the fields of policy development, stakeholder and project management. He has a great deal of organisational experience and has served on Boards at a state and national level. Was one of the founding members of the first Victorian Aboriginal Youth Advisory Committee and a participant in the Koorie Leadership Program.



Helen Kennedy
(Trawlwoolway/
Plaimaitrenee)
Vice Chairperson

Employed as Manager of the VAHS Family Counselling Service. Has worked in the Aboriginal community controlled sector for the last 17 years in a range of capacities in Aboriginal health, education and training. Has a BA Psychology; MA Indigenous Leadership and has completed Governance training.



Deidre King
(Gundjinnara)
Treasurer

Currently employed as CEO of the Aboriginal Community Elders Service. Was previously employed at the Aborigines Advancement League for 17 years and worked at VACCA. Is a Board Member of VACSAL and is a member of Koolin Bait. Has completed an Advanced Diploma in Business Management and completed Governance training.



Margaret Atkinson
(Yorta Yorta/
Taungurung/
Wurundjeri)
Secretary

Currently employed with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. as a Wurreeker Broker. Was previously employed at the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-op and was employed at VACCA for 9½ years. Has completed governance training.



Daniel Kelly
(Mutti Mutti/
Wamba Wamba)
Director

Was employed as Manager of the Balranald Aboriginal Health Service. Was previously employed at Mutti Miah Family Preservation and was employed at VACCA for many years.



Jason Kanooa
(Gundjinnara/
Buntji) Director

Currently employed with VALS as the Koorie Caucus Executive Officer. Was previously employed with VACSAL as the Manager of the Aboriginal Centre for Males. Was previously employed with VASAR for 7 years. Has completed governance training and the Indigenous Leadership Network Victoria course.



Michael Graham
(Dja Dja Wung/
Wurundjeri)
Director

Currently employed as a Koorie Education Co-ordinator with the Department of Education and Training. Has over 20 years of employment in Aboriginal community controlled organisations including VAHS, VAEAL, VALS and VACCA. Was previously Chairman of VAHS and is currently on the Board of the Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-op.



Vision

Our children, young people, families and communities are thriving - culturally strong, empowered and safe.

Purpose

To strengthen the safety, wellbeing and cultural connectedness of Aboriginal children, individuals and families in their community.

Our Principles and Values

We believe in the principles of the right of Aboriginal people to self-determination and the rights of the child and we commit to uphold Victorian Aboriginal cultural protocols.





Our people

This section is about our staff, carers and volunteers. It describes their work, the importance of their work and lists some of the highlights and initiatives from the last year.

Emma - VACCA Staff

Orana Gunyah (Welcome, place of shelter/healing)

Our community needed an Aboriginal specific refuge to suit the needs of women and children escaping family violence. Some women in the Morwell community had been fighting for 20 years to provide a culturally specific family violence service for Aboriginal women and children.

Previously all refuges were communal and although a safer place for families to go to, our women would not feel able to stay in that environment and would return to the violence as an only option to them and their children.

Eventually last year we set up Orana Gunyah Orana Gunyah is a culturally specific 5 unit Crisis Accommodation Service for women and children escaping Family Violence.

There is 1 unit that is disability friendly with the option to expand for larger families and another 4 units able to sleep a family of 6.



Each unit is set up and equipped with all amenities they require, staff at Orana Gunyah make sure each unit is ready with everything the women and children require prior to arriving. The children are also given a very special bag from the Alannah and Madeline Foundation for them to keep.

Orana Gunyah has play areas outside and inside with a fully equipped activity room.

Activities are run for both women and children during the week, these include Culture, Family Violence and bonding activities.

This allows women and children to have the freedom to maintain a daily routine and access community activities.

It is well shown by the families we have already had stay with us that the need for a culturally appropriate, individualized and specialized service is needed.



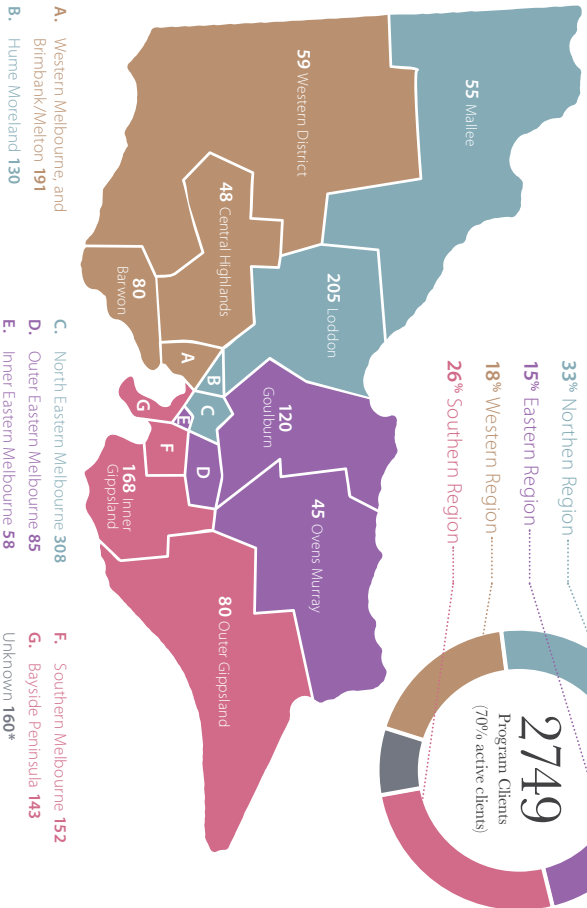
Our Clients and Our Staff

Last year we served almost 2,750 clients.

VACCA's history and development has had a two-fold pathway – we are an organization that believes in community advancement and not just assisting clients who are in difficulty. Second, we take existing models of service delivery and modify and adapt them to our circumstances and community, cultural needs and protocols. We are continuing to work on our data collection systems to improve our client data to complement our intimate knowledge of our community.

Our Clients across Victoria

by DHHS Area as of 31 July 2015 (active clients only)



*This discrepancy is due to clients located outside Victoria as well as some with insufficient information to determine their location.

The non-Aboriginal staff in our organization have a privileged place in the sense that they are entrusted to work with and for our community. We expect all our staff to create a culturally safe space for all – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Our community advancement objectives lead us to think and act beyond the services framework by engaging in community discussions about any matters that affect our families and children.

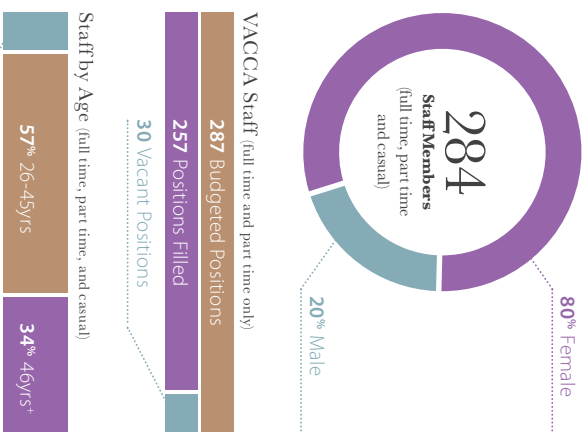
As an Aboriginal organization we also need to ensure that as we grow we continue to bring in more Aboriginal people. We have an organizational development approach that will address this as well as consider succession planning.

Our client profile is diverse including children and young people, carers and families. We support many people through our Emergency Relief service as well as our Koorie Connect Referral Service. Our Koorie Energy Efficiency Program (KEEP) also successfully met our targets. The diagrams on these pages show where we assisted our clients across Victoria. We were very pleased to open our first Western Region service location to support that growing community. Our community is also our client in the sense that we organize many cultural activities to offer children and families access to culture and community throughout the year.

VACCA's objective is to employ Aboriginal people in all positions. However this is not always possible in a sector that requires qualified staff and a high degree of compliance and regulation of services due to the need to manage risk to get the best outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

Staff Snapshot

(as of June 30 2015)



Our People

Highlights and Initiatives

A short piece about our people is never enough to praise the work of our Board members, staff, carers and volunteers. We are continually heartened by the dedication, commitment and passion that VACCA's people bring to their work.

We completed the second year of our Koorie Youth Traineeship (KYT) program developed in partnership with Mackillop Family Services. Two trainees have completed their traineeship and attained a Certificate 3 in Business Administration. One trainee has been placed in a permanent position at VACCA and placements are underway for another two across the organisations. Regrettably KYT was not supported by the Commonwealth and unless we find alternative sources it will cease to operate in 2015-2016.

Growing in size is not a sufficient measure of improvement. VACCA is also looking for quality improvements across all our services. This means consistent service standards that are culturally appropriate and competent as well as accessible. Systems play a significant role in enabling this. Over the last year we:

- Completed a Client Services review and restructure to address reform changes, and growing demands and expectations from Community and Government. This also resulted in the creation of a new unit, Client Practice Management, including the creation of an Internal and External Training unit.

- New recruiting software was purchased and installed to enhance VACCA's recruitment processes. Many manual processes have been removed resulting in considerable efficiency gains.
- Provided two in-services to over 260 staff from around the state.
- Provided internal training sessions to 224 staff covering Working Respectfully with Aboriginal Children and Families, Staff Inductions, Growing up our Boorais, Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid, Nikara's Journey and First Aid.
- For staff development and well being we continued to organise regional team building sessions and retreats for state wide programs.
- Continued support for an Employee Assistance Program service for staff.
- Strong staff well being practices continue with Influenza vaccinations available to staff, quarterly staff gatherings with presentations on healthy lifestyles, Salary Packaging, VHAS Yoga Lunchtime sessions, Cultural healing for our Southern regional office.
- Commenced development of a new online learning and development calendar for staff capacity building
- Introduced video conferencing capabilities for regional staff. This technology will be rolled out more broadly in 15/16.

Dr Alf Bamblett

Tribute

Uncle Alf Bamblett SM passed away on Saturday March 14th 2015. He was 71.

Uncle Alf was a man of strong principles and ideas many of which he successfully implemented over his lifetime. He was a proud Yorta Yorta/Bangerang/Wiradjuri man who kept everyone around him on their toes reminding us always to never forget why we are in our jobs in Aboriginal community service organisations.

For many community members he inspired, encouraged and helped in a personal way. Those in the wider community were also inspired by a man who has left a legacy that will live forever.

Uncle Alf was the Executive Officer of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL) a position which he held since its founding in the mid-eighties. During his life Uncle Alf was at the forefront of key areas of Aboriginal affairs developments at a Victorian and National level. This included the areas of Education, Employment, Justice and Health to name just a few. He was the first Commissioner for the Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Commission for Victoria during which time he led the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Uncle Alf was a passionate football fan and even though he followed an AFL team he put his heart and soul into the Fitzroy Stars.

Uncle Alf was a Director of VACCA for a number of years, National Executive Member of SNAICC, the Chairman of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association for 26 years and Chairman of the Aboriginals Advancement League for 20 years amongst his numerous voluntary commitments.

He was also the Chairman of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee through which he also contributed directly to the National Aboriginal Justice body. Uncle Alf also led the work of the Aboriginal Rights Solidarity Group in the late eighties leading up to and beyond the protests against the celebration of Australia's bi-centenary. He worked closely with the Trades Unions in Melbourne during this time and spent many hours travelling across Victoria speaking to community groups raising awareness.

Deakin University acknowledged his work through bestowing on him an Honorary Doctorate in 2004 and named a residential unit in his honour.

Even while he struggled with cancer over the last few years, Uncle Alf continued to contribute to the community he loved and served tirelessly.

Uncle Alf was, for those who may not know it, the devoted husband of Aunty Muriel Bamblett, VACCA's CEO. He was also father, grandfather and uncle to many family members in VACCA.





Shield Close Up Jolene Art - Mentoring Program

Leadership in Partnership

This section is about how we lead through our work inside and outside our organisation including the way we work in partnership.

Leading by example

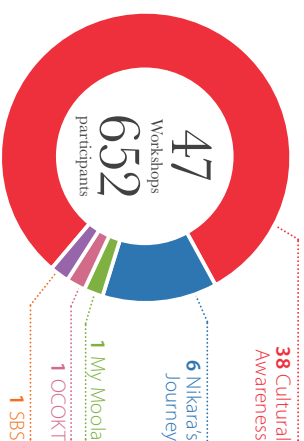
VACCA's directions over the years have been the result of strong leadership within the organisation and into the sector and beyond.

Our CEO and Board have had a clear sense of what is needed for our community. Our leadership is driven by our advocacy seeking improvements for our community. We are well aware of the impact of legislation and policy and service systems and structures on the day-to-day lives of our families and children. We work with our staff to be our advocates at every level we work. The scope of our leadership is most apparent through the work of our CEO and is clearly indicated by the Committees, Aunty Muriel is represented on:

- Roadmap for Reform Expert Advisory Group
- Placement Prevention and Reunification for Aboriginal Children
- Ministerial Advisory Committee for Children in Out of Home Care
- Victorian Children's Council
- Our Watch – Board Member and Finance and Risk Committee Member
- Secretary/Reform Dialogue
- Taskforce 1000 Steering Committee
- Aboriginal Education Strategy Steering Committee
- Koorie Heritage Trust Family History Program
- Coalition of Aboriginal Services Responding to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
- Ministerial Advisory Council on Homelessness (Families and Children Working Group)
- Aboriginal Community Elders Service
- Australian Institute of Family Studies Advisory Council
- Ministerial Advisory Group – Addressing Violence Against Women and Children
- Victorian Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee

- Northern Metro Aboriginal Strategic Governance Group
- Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum
- Human Services Aboriginal Roundtable – Cultural Responsiveness Working Group
- Aboriginal Justice Forum
- DHHS West Division Aboriginal Advisory Group
- NMI Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group

Training Workshops Delivered (Externally July 2014 - June 2015)



Abbreviations:
 OCOKT - Our Carers for Our Kids Training
 SBS - Step By Step Training
 ACCO - Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation

Participants Trained (Through workshops July 2014 - June 2015)



Aboriginal Cradle to Kinder (AC2K)

Program Overview

The Aboriginal Cradle to Kinder (AC2K) program in the northern metro region was launched in July 2014 to provide a four-year parenting intervention for vulnerable young mothers from pre-birth until their child reaches four years old. The program aims to work with 24 young mothers under the aged of 26 years old and their families. It is a voluntary support service that offers intensive in-home parenting practical support service.

“As soon as the kids get home from school they say they are tired now so they can go into their rooms and into their new bed”

Before AC2K was launched, most of the young pregnant women in the region were not eligible for family support services. There were also inadequate intensive and long-term family support services available for pregnant and young mothers leaving the Out Of Home Care (OOHC) system. Therefore, AC2K is now able to provide these vulnerable women and their babies with practical and holistic intensive family support services.

Our clients are primarily young women who are Aboriginal or pregnant with an Aboriginal child, and live in the northern region. Most of the clients have a report made to Child Protection regarding significant concerns for the unborn child or there are strong indicators for vulnerability for the unborn child. AC2K also accepts referrals for young mothers who have had a baby up until their baby is 6 weeks old. Priority for the program is given to women who are adolescent, have a learning difficulty and are or have been in the OOHC system.

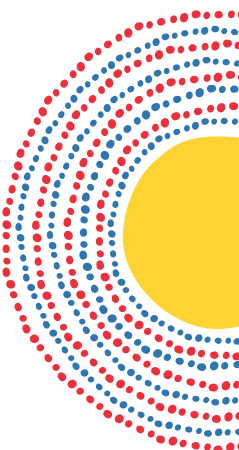
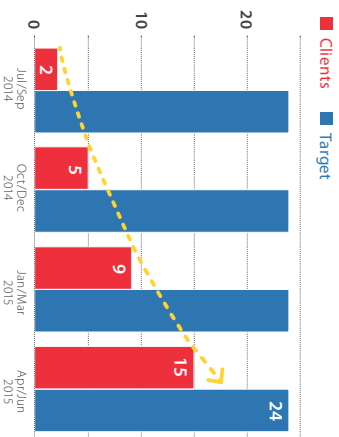
AC2K implementation in the North (1 year)

Twenty-two referrals were received and an additional 11 enquiries were made during the last financial year. We actively worked with 15 families; 7 were closed prematurely due to some families moving interstate and other families declining a long-term family support service.

From the referrals received, the following complexities were evident in our clients' cohort:

- Parental history of CP involvement (71%),
- Parental history of OOHC system (43%),
- Homelessness (47%)
- Under developed parenting capacity was significant,
- Disconnected from family and community,
- Experienced trauma,
- Parental mental health issues and substance abuse
- Family violence

AC2K Clients and Targets (by quarter 2014/2015)



Challenges experienced:

After the launch of AC2K program interventions, the aim was to promote the program and encourage referrals into the program. Referrals were received from Child Protection, hospitals, support services, community and from potential clients self-referring. As shown there has been a steady increase of clients, but with some challenges:

- families declining a four-year support service
- difficulties maintaining long-term engagement with clients
- families moving inter-state and to regional areas
- some families choosing not to identify as Aboriginal
- families mainly seeking support for their older children who are in the OOHC system, some of these children are in interstate placements
- difficulties engaging fathers in parenting work
- homelessness

Outcomes:

The impact of the AC2K intervention has resulted in significant positive changes in placement prevention and is influencing reunification of children for families that are engaged in the program. A review of the first 12 months of the AC2K program in the north has shown:

- 94% of infants were prevented from entering the OOHC system.
- There was a reduction of Child Protection involvement from 73% to 20%
- Two families are currently seeking reunification with their older children
- There was an increase in stable and secure housing from 47% to 80%
- There is a positive engagement of children in education (eg. childcare, Kinder) and health care supports (eg. MCHN)

Future goals:

The program aims to focus on the following goals in the 2015/2016 financial year and beyond:

- continue to work towards placement prevention of children
- strengthening clients' engagement with MCHN supports and early childhood education services
- providing practical education to develop parenting skills; including reading to their children and cooking
- supporting connections of families with their extended families and community
- actively engaging children in extra-curricular activities; eg. swimming
- implement more cultural activities for children and their families, including encouraging and facilitating return to country trips/visits





Our Services

This section is about the programs we run and the outcomes they have achieved for our children and families over the past year.

John Elliott - Link-Up Program

Our Activities and Services

Cultural Activities

VACCA continues to provide a range of cultural activities that connect Aboriginal children and youth to their culture and strengthen their identity. VACCA provides:

The Koorie Tiddas - A weekly choir program for Koorie girls including performance outcomes such as the opening of the new Koorie Heritage Trust building in September.

Family History Project – A family strengthening program which connects a sibling group (who are placed together) and their family to a cultural strengthening and healing based project in which one of the outcomes is a family history book that the family create together.

Possum Skin Cloak Project with Kinship Carers – Together a group of Kinship Carers create three possum skin cloak with guidance from Vicki Couzens and Esther Kirby, to be used by families for healing and celebrations.

Healing Stories - Working in partnership with Kids Own Publishing and VACCA playgroups families will create two books featuring stories about their connection to culture, community and family, that will be printed and sold to the broader community.

‘Children Of The Sun’ film - Children of the Sun film follows the journey of three young women who have been in VACCA out of home care over the last ten years. The film shares what is important to them and has kept them strong through challenging times. Both culture and family are strong themes and the girls reflect on how being culturally connected and knowing their identity has been critical to their wellbeing during their years in care.

KYLA – Koorie Youth Leadership Program - is a weekly leadership program for vulnerable Aboriginal youth to strengthen their connection to culture, community and family. Modules on financial literacy, health and leadership are also covered.

NAIDOC Activities - NAIDOC Activities were held in North, West, South and East regions; and also in Morwell.

Family Services Holiday Programs –
June: Cultural holiday day activity included jewellery making and weaving for a group of 10 young girls from the family services program.
September: Bush tucker day where boys and girls from the family services programs learnt about different foods from plants; how to use them and learnt to make and cook their own damper.

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

- | | | | |
|---------------------|---|-----------------------|---|
| Submissions: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preventing and responding to allegations of child sexual abuse occurring in OOHCC Working with Children Checks Child Safe Organisations Preventing Sexual Abuse of Children In OOHCC Redress Schemes Civil Litigation Experience of Police and Prosecutions | Presentations: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preventing and responding to allegations of child sexual abuse occurring in Out Of Home Care (OOHC) - 2 appearances Roundtable on Record Keeping Practices Redress and civil litigation Preventing sexual abuse (SNAICC) |
|---------------------|---|-----------------------|---|

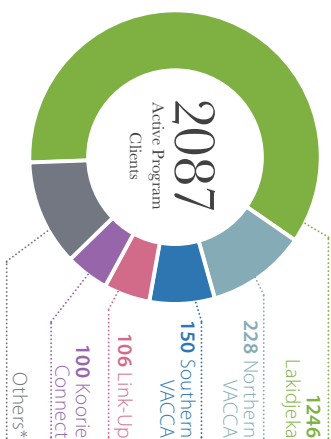
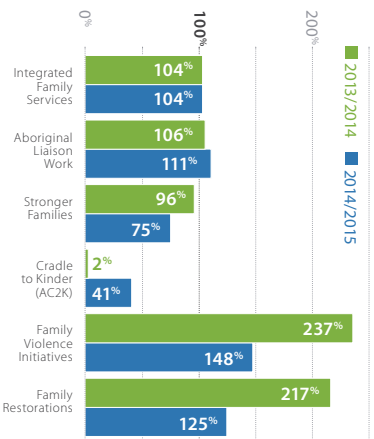
Our Services

Early Intervention and Family Services, 3 year summary of achievements to 2015:

- A steady increase in funding and new programs since 2011.
- Met/exceeded targets in most program areas.
- Significant restructuring and change within funding (un-costed and unfunded).
- Adoption of outcomes based service delivery, with the introduction of the Outcomes Star and Nursing Child Assessment Satellite Training (NCAST) in the Stronger Families, Cradle to Kinder (AC2K) and Family Mental Health Support Services (FMHSS) programs.
- The introduction of the Aboriginal Services Client Pathway.
- Seamless management of externally driven changes to the scope programs, such as the redevelopment of Aboriginal Family Decision Making (AFDM) into Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making (AFLDM), and changes in the Aboriginal Liaison Worker (ALW) role and focus.
- The introduction of new programs such as Family Violence, Koorie Youth Leadership in Action, Stronger Families, Cradle to Kinder, Services Connect and Family Mental Health Support Services, and the transfer of programs such as Emergency Relief and the Cultural Support Program into other VACCA Units. For example, the Family Coaching Victoria program transitioned into the Stronger Families Program.
- Significant restructuring of programs and services. For example, Playgroups were redefined and reoriented into an outreach model, with the support of the Playgroup Bus and early years resources.
- Restructuring of funding body geographical boundaries and the establishment of Child FIRST Alliances and Services Connect.

Clients per program

(by DHHS Area as of 31 July 2015)



*Others: 86 Eastern VACCA | 84 VACCA Morwell
41 Western VACCA | 24 Royal Commission Support
13 ER Northern | 7 Residential Care | 2 ER Eastern
*ER = Emergency Relief (No ER Western or Southern clients)

Services List

Following is a list of services available at VACCA. Contact your local office for further details of each service and the referral process.

- Early Intervention and Family Services**
 - Integrated Family Services (IFS)
 - Aboriginal Liaison Worker (ALW/ Child FIRST)
 - Aboriginal Stronger Families
 - Aboriginal Family Preservation and Restoration Service
 - Cradle to Kinder Playgroup
 - Koorie Connect
 - Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making (AFLDM)
 - Cultural Support Plan Worker
 - Alcohol and Drug Advocacy and Support
 - Emergency Relief
 - Koorie Kids Playgroup
 - Services Connect
 - Koorie FACES
 - Koorie Energy Efficiency Project (KEEP)
 - Windook Dads Group
 - Homework Club
- Specialist Programs**
 - Aboriginal Family Violence
 - Family Violence Case Management/Outreach
 - Family Mental Health Support Services (FMHSS)
 - Orana Gunyah Crisis Accommodation and Support
 - Koorie Kids Stay at School
 - Koorie Connect
 - Family Mental Health
 - Koorie Youth Leaders in Action (KYLA)
 - Kurnai Youth Homelessness
 - Balert Bubup
- Out of Home Care (OOHC), Placement and Support, Program and Services**
 - Residential Care
 - Therapeutic Residential Care
 - CIRCC Education Support
 - Extended Care (Home Based Care)
 - Aboriginal Adolescent Community Placement House
 - Kinship Care
 - Koorie Placement and Cultural Support
 - Leaving Care
 - Permanent Care
 - Aboriginal Children Healing Team
 - Foster Care Assessment and Recruitment
- Cross Program Services**
 - Lakidjeka (ACSASS)
- Additional Services**
 - Link Up Victoria
 - Koorie Childrens and Youth Programs

We offer over **40** programs and services
For more info
vacca.org.au

Lakidjeka (Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service)

The past

Lakidjeka ACSASS's origins are a part of the history of VACCA which was established in 1977. It grew out of concern from Aboriginal community and agencies that too many Aboriginal children were being placed in a non-Aboriginal care and away from community. Although unfunded, VACCA became the voice and advocate for Aboriginal children and young people in the welfare system.

Key drivers such as Community Welfare Services 'Directors Circular' in 1978, endorsement of Aboriginal Child Placement Principle in 1979, enshrining of this in legislation in 1989, the development of the DHHS/VACCA Protocol in 1992 and its review in 2001 have shaped Lakidjeka ACSASS

Strong and dedicated Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers in the past worked in VACCA's Child Care Service and later Lakidjeka Crisis Service which eventually in 2002 was funded by state government as Lakidjeka ACSASS and rolled out over a three year process between 2002-05.

In 2005, 26 staff across 11 locations responded and considered 1,184 reports. In 2013-14 27 staff at 11 locations responded to over 4,346 recorded reports and in 2014-15 responded to approximately 4,958 reports.

Since 2005, funding levels (now stretched to include admin and managers) have not increased to match increased numbers of reports and responsibilities.

The current

The current service operates as an advice and consultation service to Child Protection on significant decisions throughout the life of an open case of a child under orders.

ACSASS provides state-wide intake and after hours coverage (except Midura LGA), regional responses and secondary consultation where necessary. The commitment to maintain a strong Aboriginal voice is seen through the employment exemption which ensures Aboriginal staff are in caseworker, team leader and program manager roles.

Unfortunately, the issues of concern raised all those years ago are still relevant today and despite sound CP Practice Instructions, standards and legislative requirements, the strength of culture for children continues to be overlooked.

The future

The future of ACSASS is at a crossroad, how we ensure compliance with A.C.P.P and for Child Protection to comply with the Protocol and legislative requirements is a constant challenge.

Changes to the CY&F Act 2005 in 2016 regarding permanent care timelines are viewed as detrimental to Aboriginal community and families and ACSASS will need to re-prioritise work in this space.

However, until Aboriginal guardianship is realised the ACSASS program itself needs to remain as the independent specialist support service providing cultural advice to DHHS Child Protection.



Link-Up Victoria (2014/2015 Summary)

Link-Up Victoria has completed 12 family reunions for clients since July 2014 with all except two clients returning to Country. Many of these reunions have also included graveside visits to pay respects to family members that have passed away. The reunions have taken place on eleven of the traditional countries. Local Elders and Traditional Owners have been involved in Welcome to Country, sharing their knowledge, and showing clients around Country. We also worked with Interstate Link-Up services on a number of reunions outside of Victoria.

In the past 12 months Link-Up has successfully ran the following programs and events for clients and the community:

- Link-Up Victoria Exhibition titled: The Dividing Line – Journeys of the Stolen Generations – launched and on display during NAIDOC week at Melbourne Town Hall
- Family Research Workshops were conducted for VACCA staff and two community groups
- Presentation Skills workshop for clients who wanted to be able to share their stories
- Men's Healing Camp held on Wurundjeri Country
- Family Healing Camp held on Yorta Yorta Country
- Luncheon to commemorate the Prime Minister's Apology
- Involved in the Stolen Generations marker at Darebin Council
- 10-week Pottery Classes

We continue to receive positive feedback from our clients:

"I will be going back home and may move back home for my spirit"

"I have had the most beautiful time and really want to thank you all very much for your time to get this all done for me. I really do feel I am a person now."

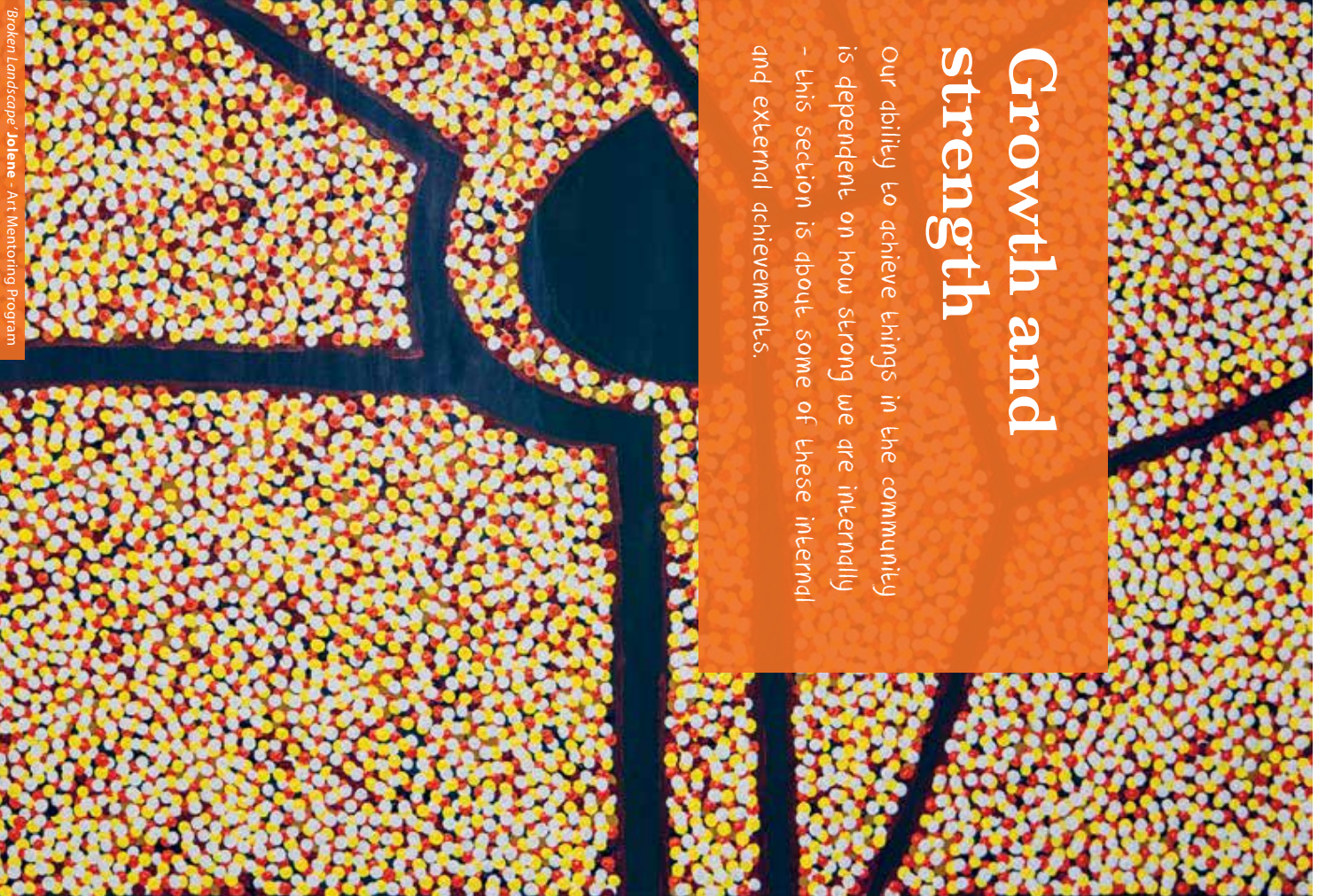
"Such joy and love was extended to me like I have never had before"

"Beyond Awesome"

We have been successful in securing 3 year funding under the PM&C Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

We are always looking to develop the skills of our team and currently have 2 of our staff completing their Diploma of Counselling through VACCHO – due to be completed at the end of this year.

Finally we wish to thank the staff and management for the wonderful support provided who helped ensure each client has the best possible reunion experience.



Growth and Strength

Our ability to achieve things in the community is dependent on how strong we are internally – this section is about some of these internal and external achievements.

Section 18: Aboriginal Guardianship



Aboriginal guardianship has been the term used to refer to Sections 18 (s.18) of the *Children, Youth and Families Act*. This section of the legislation allows the Aboriginal Principal Officer (or CEO) of an Aboriginal organisation to be authorised to perform the functions and exercise the powers of the Secretary for Aboriginal children on Children's Court Protection Orders.

For most children, their parent is their guardian. Sometimes, parents are not able to take care of their child and the child is at risk of being harmed. The responsibility for looking after these children has been held by the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

This 'guardianship by government department' has not been positive for Aboriginal children and their families - there are some Aboriginal children under state guardianship who do not see or know their family; they do not know their Aboriginal community or their culture.

When the section 18 powers are activated, an Aboriginal child living with their parents, the family can be supported and assisted by an Aboriginal organisation under the leadership of an Aboriginal CEO.

For a child who needs to live away from their parents for their safety and well being, an Aboriginal person will have day to day and long term decision-making responsibility for the child.

An Aboriginal 'guardian' will know and be involved with the child and will make sure the child knows their family, is connected to their culture and their country – wherever that is.

An Aboriginal 'guardian' will seek out and support the child's family to be involved in the child's life, taking care of the child wherever possible.

VACCA believe that this will make an enormous difference in children's lives – Aboriginal 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.

To prepare for the full implementation of section 18, VACCA operated a project to trial s.18 – Aboriginal guardianship – with a small group of Aboriginal children.

While DHHS 'signed off' decisions for children on the project, VACCA had a more pivotal role in decision making – assessing the child's safety, stability and development through the lens of the age and stage of the child, their gender and their culture and using family led decision making approaches to make decisions.

On the next page is one of the stories from the project.

Section 18... is the legal means through which the decision making over the wellbeing of Aboriginal children in welfare will be given back to the community.





Section 18: example from practice

'Sally' is ten years old and one of nine children. She and three of her older siblings were removed from their parents' care shortly after Sally's birth as a result of serious concerns related to her parents' substance use, the children's exposure to family violence and the family's transience. At that time, Child Protection assessed Sally's extended family as not appropriate to care for Sally and her siblings and they were placed together in foster care. Over the next seven years, Sally and her siblings moved from one placement to the next, with placements ending when there were concerns about the quality of care the children were receiving. During this time, there were attempts made to engage and reassess the parents; however this continued to be deemed inappropriate by Child Protection.

Following a recent foster care breakdown, VACCA were unable to find a placement for all siblings together and the children were separated into different placements. In her new placement Sally's behaviour became increasingly challenging and the carers soon decided that they could not care for Sally.

With s.18 involvement, VACCA were able to take a more decisive role in planning for Sally. Her case manager asked Sally what she wanted; she said she wanted to be with her family. VACCA convened a family meeting, involving Sally's parents and other family. Sally's maternal aunt said that she would like to care for Sally. VACCA assessed the aunt as suitable and Sally moved to live with her.

With a strong support network of VACCA's Stronger Families Program, VACCA's Aboriginal Children's Healing Team and the Bouwerie Centre, Sally has now been living with her aunt for almost 12 months; she has settled well in her new home and school and is having frequent and regular contact with her parents and siblings.

Names of the individuals above have been changed to protect their identities.

From the Evaluation

Project staff put a premium on the importance of building relationships with both children and young people and their family and extended family. Often this entailed repeated attempts to engage and re-engage with family members including family members who had not been previously engaged by the department or had been assessed as not suitable to care for children. Re-establishing such family connections was clearly aided by VACCA and project staff's deep knowledge of families in the Aboriginal community. Such knowledge is an invaluable asset to good practice.

(Naughton&Co. S.18 'As If' Project Evaluation Report (2015))

Financial Summary

2014/2015 saw another year of continued strong growth for the organisation with a healthy net surplus of \$130,128 achieved for the 12 months ended 30th June 2015.

A number of new programs such as Resicare Gippsland and expanded Emergency Relief across the state commenced during the financial year. VACCA was also successful in tendering for Indigenous Advancement Strategy programs under Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet funding.

The organisation continues to maintain a strong balance sheet, which is essential for the organisation's sustainability and longevity.

VACCA's gross operating income has grown 88% in five years, from \$11.6m in 2010 to \$21.9m in 2015. Gross operating income for the last twelve months increased by 7.7%.

With Growth and Sustainability remaining a key strategic priority, the next three years will see continued enhancement and investment in workforce development, core systems, and strengthened services to meet growing Community demands and challenges as well as Government service system reforms. A healthy balance sheet and strong reserves will enable this investment to occur.

Summarised Statement of Income and Expenditure for the Year Ended 30 June 2015 (\$)

	2015	2014
Total Income	21,906,602	20,312,412
Total Expenses	21,776,474	20,318,632
Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to members for VACCA	130,128	-6,220

Summarised Statement of Financial Position (Balance Sheet) as at the Year Ended 30 June 2015 (\$)

	2015	2014
Total Current Assets	9,165,128	7,602,735
Total Non-Current Assets	934,445	1,028,487
Total Assets	10,099,574	8,631,222
Total Non-Current Liabilities	4,066,709	2,734,236
Total Current Liabilities	562,035	556,390
Total Liabilities	4,628,744	3,290,626
Net Assets (Liabilities)	5,470,830	5,340,595
Total Equity	5,470,830	5,340,595

VACCA continues its journey of transitioning from a service delivery that matches the wider child and family welfare sector to one that truly delivers a holistic Aboriginal Child and Family Welfare Service.



Growth and Strength Highlights and Achievements

Highlights and Achievements for 2014/2015 year:

- Received a finalist award for the 2014 Indigenous Governance Awards (IGA), in the category of Outstanding Indigenous Governance. Chaired by Prof Mick Dodson and chosen out of 113 nominees. Several Board members and executive management attended the evening hosted at BHP Billiton's Head Office in Melbourne. VACCA Chair, James Atkinson, accepted the award from the Prime Minister.



- Partnered with National Australia Bank as a 2014 IGA finalist and working on selected projects to assist the organisation.
- Celebrated our first year of establishing a presence and operating in the West.
- Implementation of new asset management system, WSM, to enable efficient programming of asset maintenance and improved asset management across numerous sites throughout Victoria.

- Continued progressing VACCA's 5yr ICT strategy plan with major milestones achieved: co-location of VACCA's server infrastructure, appointment of a new WAN provider, installation of a new software platform to provide VACCA with intranet and e-learning capability.
- New video conferencing capability and improved mobility services for staff.

Successfully secured new premises for VACCA's Melbourne office and relocated 106 head office staff and Northern office staff to new contemporary accommodation in Preston.

- Considerable cost savings achieved through new negotiated mobile plans, and successful exemptions of motor vehicle registrations and property rates.
- Continued improvements in VACCA's information management: expansion of our client data base, improved archiving and document management.
- Development and finalization of VACCA's new 3year Strategic Plan, 2015-2018, which seeks to achieve stronger culturally embedded services, strengthening of our people through concentrated workforce development and succession planning, continued advocacy in Aboriginal Guardianship, Aboriginal service system accountability and sustainability through fundraising, social enterprise and continued systems development.



Tia - Art Mentoring Program

"Art is my healing and escape from the world. It creates a calm place and takes me to another world."
- Tia (Art Mentoring Program)

Planning for the future...

The new financial year has been a busy one for us with a number of statewide initiatives drawing us in over and above our regular work largely because of the election of a new State Government in November 2014. They include the Royal Commission into Family Violence, a number of reviews into Aboriginal services including a review of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, the formation of the Aboriginal Children's Forum, the Mental Health Plan and the Roadmap to Reform. The conclusion of our Section 18 Guardianship Trial and the imminent publication of the final report has given greater impetus to our campaign to have this provision of *The Children's, Youth and Families Act of 2005* fully implemented measures are designed to give effect to the acknowledgement of the right of Aboriginal people to self-determination that is contained in the original legislation.

We anticipate a continuing growth in demand for child and family support and child protection services indicated by the continued growth in numbers of Aboriginal children entering care.

The State and Commonwealth focus on family violence and ice addiction will offer additional opportunities for service responses and service reforms that are more targeted to our community.

The Royal Commission Into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse offers opportunities to strengthen our service responses as well as creating additional compliance demands on us.

The tighter government-funding environment will mean we will need to diversify our income sources if we are to promote and develop our innovative programs especially around cultural activities. This innovation will continue in our service responses.



We will continue to advocate for Aboriginal children at risk especially those in care seeking a return of all Aboriginal children in care to their communities. Self-determination through the full implementation of Aboriginal Guardianship is likely to offer our children better outcomes. However, obtaining Government and DHHS commitment to its full implementation continues to challenge us.

2015 is also the first year of our next three-year strategic planning period. During this period we will focus on VACCA service improvement on culturally appropriate, responsive and accessible services.

We will strengthen our efforts to keep children at home and reunify Aboriginal children in care with their families and work with our sector and governments in doing the same.

We will support and develop our staff to respond to the growing and changing need in community and improve our systems to enable and facilitate the growth we anticipate.

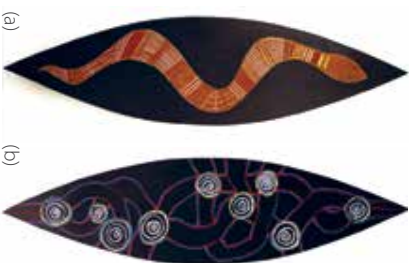
Between 2015-2018 we will be working towards increasing the numbers of Aboriginal people we employ and increasing the number of Aboriginal managers in the organisation.

Our advocacy will be based on improved research and evaluation of our services and increased understanding of community needs.

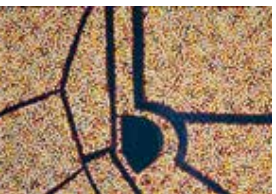
Contributing Artists



AALIYAH (Art Mentoring Program)
Birthplace: Ipswich, Queensland
Tribe/People: Bundjalung
Art: Painting; Earrings, Shield (a)



JOLENE (Art Mentoring Program)
Birthplace: Melbourne
Tribe/People: Yorta Yorta
Art: Painting, Shield (b)



EMMA (VACCA Staff Member)
Birthplace: Melbourne
Tribe/People: Yorta Yorta
Art: Painting



(c)
John Elliott (Link-Up Program)
Birthplace: Carlton
Tribe/People: Yorta Yorta



(d)
Art: Varnished Timber
Woodburn (c), Varnished Acrylic
Painting on Timber (d)



Latoya Pamela Lee Lovett
Brown (Polygroups)
Birthplace: Melb, Mercy
Tribe/People: Gunditjmarra
Art: Mixed Media Collage



TIA (Art Mentoring Program)
Birthplace: Melbourne
Tribe/People: Gunai/Kurnai
Art: Dot Painting



Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the assistance and support of the following:

Philanthropy

- Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
- Readings Foundation
- Gandel Philanthropy
- Helen McPherson Smith Trust
- Phyllis Connor Memorial Trust

Research funder and partner

- Equity Trustees

Government

- Commonwealth
- Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Department of Social Services
- State
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Justice

Other agencies

- Kildonan Uniting Care
- Anglicare Victoria
- Centre for Excellence
- Berry Street
- Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
- La Trobe Community Health Services
- Drummond Street Services
- Relationships Australia
- Jesuit Social Services
- MacKillop Family Services



For the current full list of our funders and partners, please visit our website www.vacca.org

"Art means everything to me! It makes me drift in to my own little world, which makes me forget about all the negatives and helps me stay positive.

- Jolene (Art Mentoring Program)



VACCA

Connected by culture

Serving Aboriginal Children
in the Community

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