



“
I know who I am
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Victorian Aboriginal
Child Care Agency

Annual Report
2010/2011

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I know who my
mother was and
I know where
I come from as an
Aboriginal man

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Link-Up client, 2011

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Welcome

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is the lead Aboriginal child and family welfare organisation in Victoria, protecting and promoting the rights of Aboriginal children and young people, providing programs to reinforce Aboriginal culture and encourage best parenting practices, and advising government in relation to child abuse and neglect in the Aboriginal community.



respect



mina pawa

I know who I am

Looking at VACCA today, you might find it hard to imagine our small grass-roots community beginnings 35 years ago in 1976. Since then, our limited program of foster care services has grown from the ground up, developing a body of knowledge along the way and blossoming into a widely respected organisation that cares for Aboriginal young people and families.

VACCA was born of an urgent concern in the Victorian Aboriginal community about the number of Aboriginal children being removed from their families and usually adopted or fostered with non-Aboriginal families. Failed adoptive and foster care arrangements meant many of these young people were homeless and, more importantly, unaware of who they really were or where their families came from.

Today VACCA is made up of researchers, policy advisors, advocates, child welfare workers, social workers, film makers, artists and musicians. Our experience has taught us what it means to provide culturally appropriate, competent

services; what it means for Aboriginal children and young people to feel safe, to realise their cultural identity and discover family; what it means for Elders to pass on positive parenting skills, knowledge and cultural values to the next generation of Mums and Dads; what strong family connections mean for the wellbeing of the Aboriginal community in Victoria.

VACCA's holistic approach to protecting children is grounded in this body of knowledge. Our research work and university partnerships inform our publications and policy advice; our services are designed to address a breadth of human needs from safety to cultural wellbeing and expression,

and our training programs share expertise with mainstream organisations, equipping them to provide culturally sensitive support to Aboriginal children and young people.

The self-determination we talk about in our mission is closely related to safety and wellbeing. That an Aboriginal child feels safe from harm is a basic human right, but a child's health and wellbeing in the future depends on many more complex things – things that most children take for granted: knowing who they are and where they come from, knowing they are part of a family and a community, knowing they can proudly express their cultural identity in a safe environment.

These are the foundations for wellbeing that VACCA builds with children and families every day; and this is our vision of a stronger, more connected Aboriginal community.

This annual report is for our staff, partners, supporters and professional colleagues. Its vivid photographs of Aboriginal children and Elders present, at first, a stark contrast. But the words we chose for each portrait represent connection: between traditional and contemporary Aboriginal culture; between past, present and future; between youth and maturity and the valuable lessons learned along the way.

VACCA continues to advocate for improvements in the rights and the lives of Aboriginal children. We are today, as we were 35 years ago, the Aboriginal community's voice calling for an end to neglect and abuse.

An early photograph of VACCA staff, circa 1978



Purpose

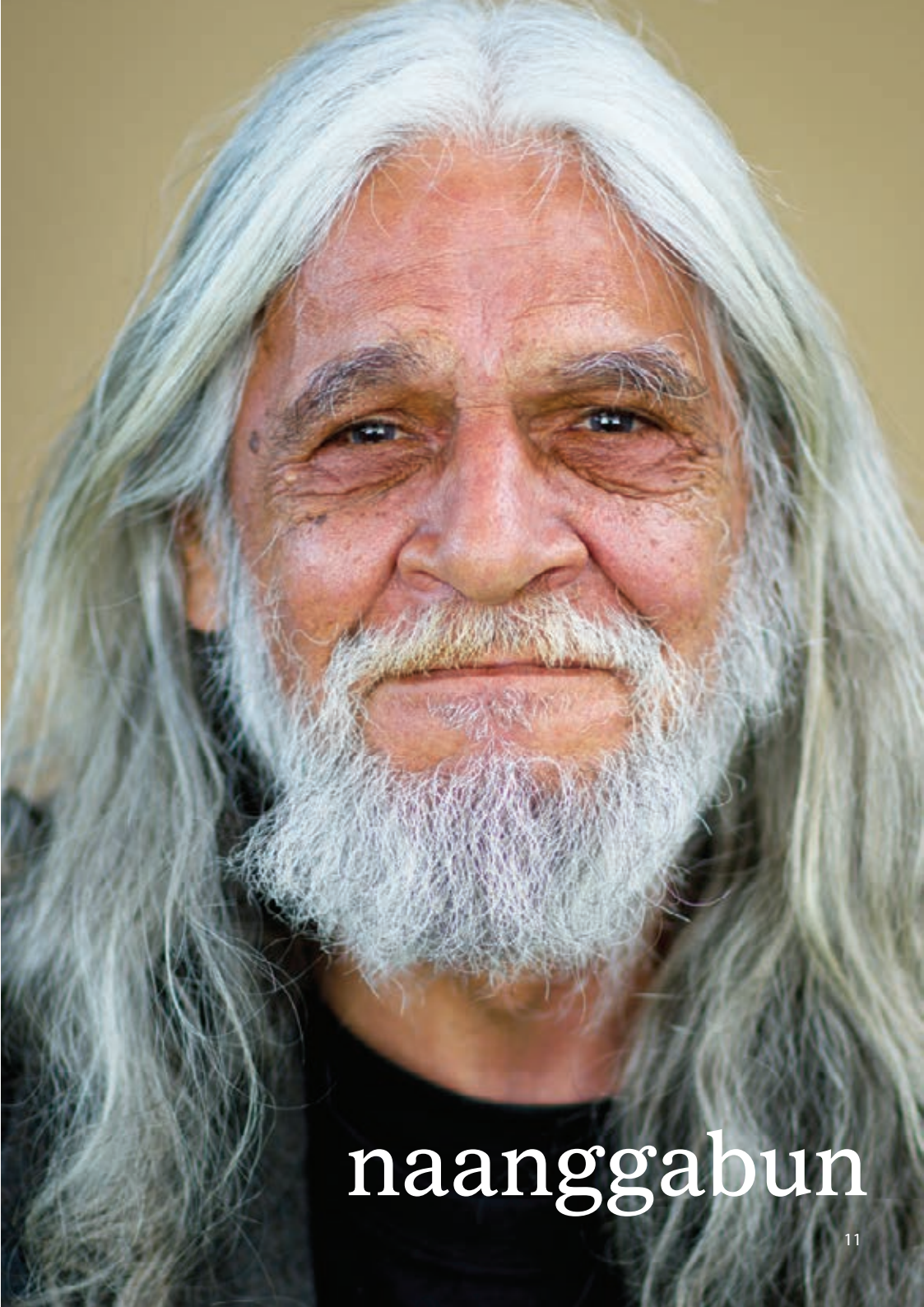
We are a statewide Aboriginal community controlled organisation whose mission is to advocate for the rights of Aboriginal children, young people and families, and provide them with services premised on human rights, self-determination, cultural respect and safety.

Vision

Our vision is a community that is strong in culture; that values their children and young people, and recognises the importance of the whole community in raising children and keeping families together.



wisdom



naanggabun

Chairperson's Report



I am pleased to present the 2010–11 Annual Report to the membership of VACCA.

This report details the overall achievements of the Agency and provides an opportunity for staff to share some of VACCA's fine accomplishments over the past 12 months with the community. It describes the challenges the Agency has to overcome to achieve outcomes for the most vulnerable and those at risk, and fulfils our reporting responsibilities in relation to outcomes achieved by the different programs and services offered to our community.

Given the high levels of risk and vulnerability involved in the field of child welfare, it is critical that all aspects of our operations and management are led by a strong Board of Directors acting within governance systems. Over the last 12 months we have worked tirelessly to meet both our contractual obligations towards VACCA's funding bodies, and to meet our broader governance responsibilities as an employer and service provider to children in our care and within the Aboriginal community.

I feel a great sense of pride in the staff and leadership group of VACCA, for their attention to detail and for their constant

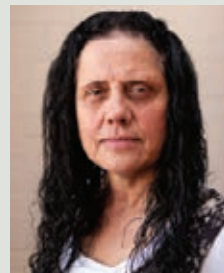
commitment to driving innovation and service excellence.

I want to thank VACCA staff for their hard work this year, which has resulted in considerable advances towards us meeting our strategic objectives. We are developing our business planning systems, which will give us improved management capacity in implementing agency-wide planning. The development of the Agency's new strategic plan provides us with an opportunity to review our performance and set the agency direction for the future.

I trust you enjoy reading this report and, again, I extend my congratulations to staff and to our CEO, Muriel Bamblett and her leadership team for their management during 2010–2011. I also want to congratulate Muriel on her induction into the Victorian Women's Honour Roll, and to thank each of my fellow Board members for their hard work throughout the year.

Deidre King
Chairperson

CEO's Message



It gives me great pleasure to provide this report to the Board, VACCA's membership, the Aboriginal community of Victoria and all our partners and supporters.

Our central purpose as an Aboriginal community-controlled agency is to contribute to making Victoria a safer environment for our children – by delivering programs and services aimed at protecting children. Culture also plays a key role: we embed culture in all our programs in recognition of Aboriginal people's rights to their culture, and our services are culturally attuned to empower our families and communities to look after our own.

In an environment where we have statutory and regulatory compliance as well as community protocols and expectations to respond to, we need a strong sense of direction underpinned by sound management and systems. We are also strategic and collaborative in making resources go further to meet the increasingly complex needs of those who use our services.

Our services to our communities demonstrate our success in pursuing Aboriginal approaches to program design and service delivery. We have

strong partnerships that bridge cultural divides and are working on the ground to better support our children and families. Government and non-government agencies are putting our children first and putting aside past differences. There is cause for optimism, there is hope and there is purpose because so many people have made the choice to play their part for our children.

VACCA is privileged and also challenged by having not only programs for children, young people and families but also, through our Link-Up service, programs to reunite separated families. We see the Link-Up service as part of our continuum of care for Aboriginal families as they seek to regain access to their stolen or removed ones. Link-Up healing camps go beyond providing a service: they keep faith with our Stolen Generations and, we hope, provide a sense of community for those who had been removed from their community.

I believe that VACCA is fulfilling its role by continually working to address gaps in services for the Victorian Aboriginal community in the field of Aboriginal Child Welfare. Our wide range of services for children, young people and families include; child protection, placement

CEO's Message - continued

services, family violence, youth homelessness, family support, parenting support and supported playgroups for early years children.

VACCA contends that governments in Australia have contributed to the current level of vulnerability that exists for many Aboriginal families. Commonwealth and State governments have a responsibility to resource the work of Aboriginal child welfare agencies, who oversee and facilitate the development of the safety and wellbeing capacity of our parents and communities to improve the lives of children. VACCA receives 14.2 per cent of its income from the Commonwealth through FaHCSIA and OATSIH and 78.7 per cent of its income from the

Department of Human Services. VACCA's challenge is to increase our capacity to attract funding from alternative sources. Currently 7.1 per cent of our funding is from the private sector, primarily through philanthropic funding from the ANZ Trustees, which has strengthened our research and policy capacity. We also get pro bono support from Blake Dawson, whose high level advice helps strengthen our operations.

VACCA's role in advocacy and policy formulation continues to develop and a major focus this year was our presentation and response to the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry.

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Working with families and children at risk, and those who are in care, means we have to be concerned with many different aspects of their lives. VACCA has limited capacity to address broader issues that impact on Aboriginal children, young people and their families and this necessitates that we work strategically with other sectors such as health, education and housing.

VACCA enjoys positive relationships with all mainstream community sector organisations, particularly Berry Street Victoria and MacKillop Family Services. We also believe it is critical to build cultural resilience through our cultural activities and festivals and to participate in events such as NAIDOC and National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day.

There have been many highlights in 2010–2011. The VACCA Staff Conference in June was undoubtedly one, as was the visit of Cindy Blackstock, a Gitskan woman from Canada, which we co-sponsored and hosted with Berry Street Victoria. Cindy delivered a powerful speech to the sector on child welfare from a Canadian Indigenous perspective. The consultations, research and writing of the Cultural Safety Report, funded through the ANZ Trustees with the support of the State Government, was another significant achievement for VACCA. This report stands as a landmark in research from an Indigenous perspective.

VACCA has also cemented its role in the Southern Metropolitan Region, and made significant progress towards increasing its capacity and profile in the Eastern Region. With State and Commonwealth Close the Health Gap funding, we have

been able to work with the community to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for our young people. Major initiatives underway include the development of our new strategic direction, the introduction of a new management structure and improvements in our financial management systems. There is also a strong desire across VACCA to realise the Moondani Aboriginal Family and Children's Centre – and an air of excitement now that we have the Indigenous Land Corporation's in-principle support to make it a tangible reality.

We continue to address our ongoing challenges, focusing on recruiting and retaining Aboriginal staff to provide the best support for children and young people in care. We are also developing an Aboriginal therapeutic response across VACCA for children and young people in care; a key part of addressing years of unresolved trauma for a community that is in a constant state of grief and loss.

I think the ultimate challenge is the one posed by Cindy Blackstock: VACCA's capacity to deliver poverty reduction supports and services given the over-representation of poor Aboriginal families in the child protection system.

In closing I want to thank the Chairperson, Deidre King and the Members of the Board, VACCA staff, the Executive Managers, Connie, Peter, Nigel and Teresa for their hard work and commitment to achieving our vision.

Muriel Bamblett
CEO

The Board



Deidre King (*Gunditjmara*)
Chairperson

Currently employed as CEO of the Aboriginal Community Elders Service. Previously employed at the Aborigines Advancement League (AAL) as the Home and Community Care Manager. Is on the Board of Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL).



Rod Monohan (*Taungurung*)
Vice-Chairperson

Currently employed as the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer with the Preston Police Complex. Previously employed at Australian College of Environmental Studies and VACCA.



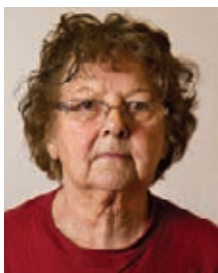
Ralph Bamblett (*Wiradjuri & Gunditjmara*)
Director

Currently employed as the Koorie Engagement Support Officer with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Previously employed at the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association and VACSAL.



James Atkinson (*Yorta Yorta & Bangerang*)
Director

Currently employed as Manager, Koorie Education with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Was a member of the Koorie Leadership Program and has worked with a number of Aboriginal organisations across the State.



Marg Stewart (*Taungurung*)
Secretary

Currently retired but was employed at the Bert Williams Centre and the Melbourne Juvenile Justice Centre. Was extensively involved with young people in the juvenile justice system.



Eric Harrison (*Yorta Yorta & Wotjabaluk*)
Treasurer

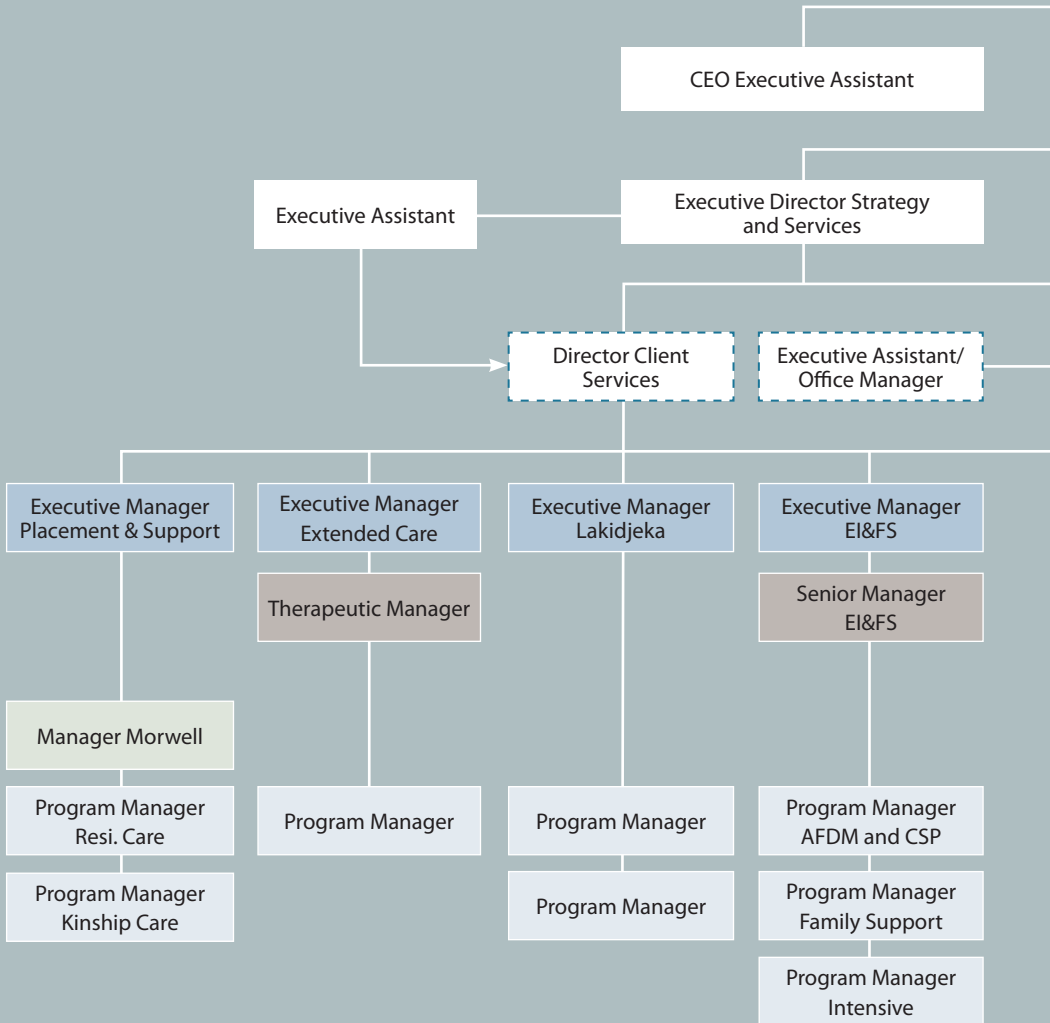
Was employed with VACCA for eight years in the Link-Up Program. Currently undertaking Governance training.



Daniel Kelly (*Mutti Mutti & Wamba Wamba*)
Director

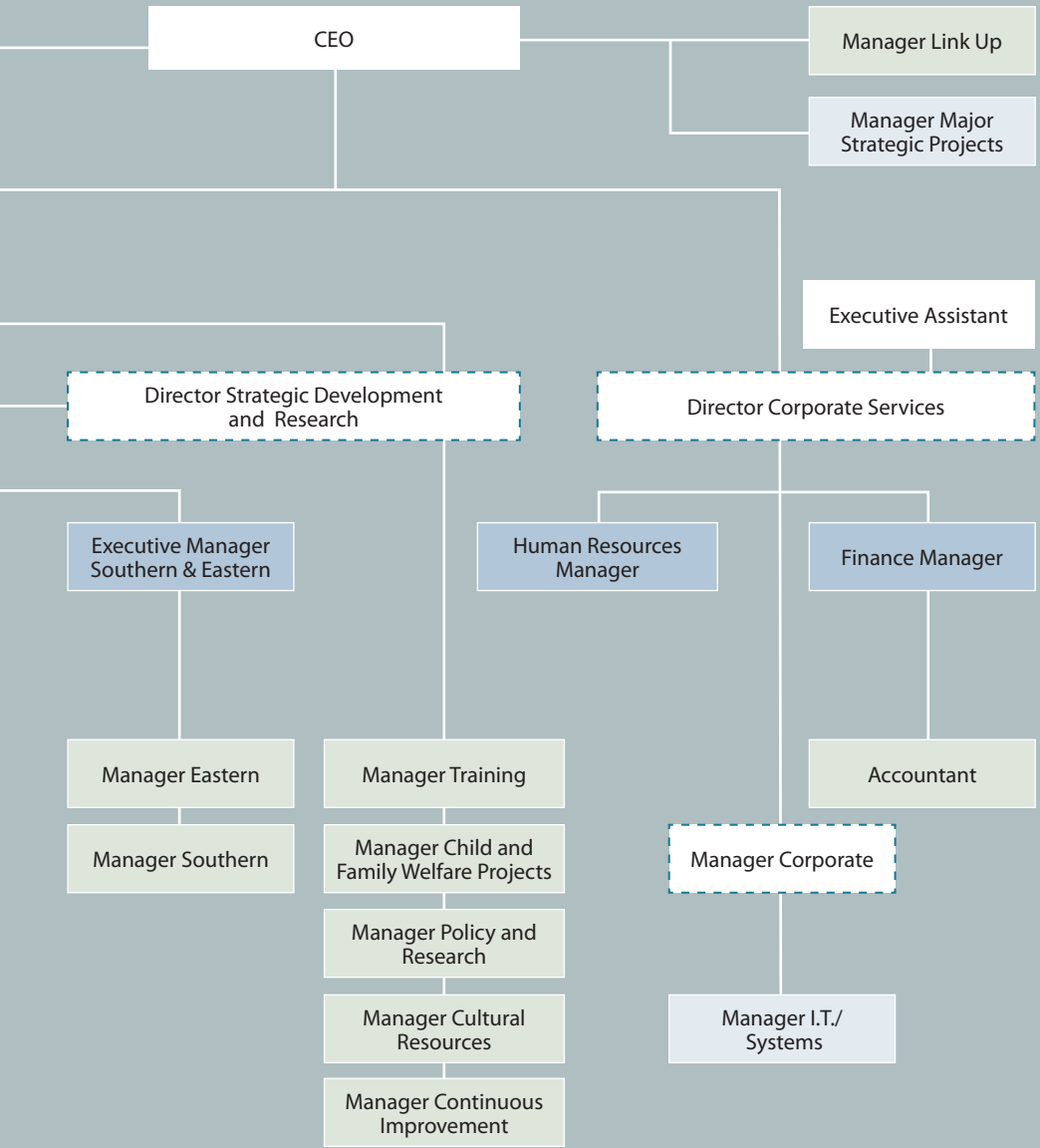
Currently employed as Manager of the Balranald Aboriginal Health Service. Previously employed at Mutti Miah Family Preservation and at VACCA.

Our Structure



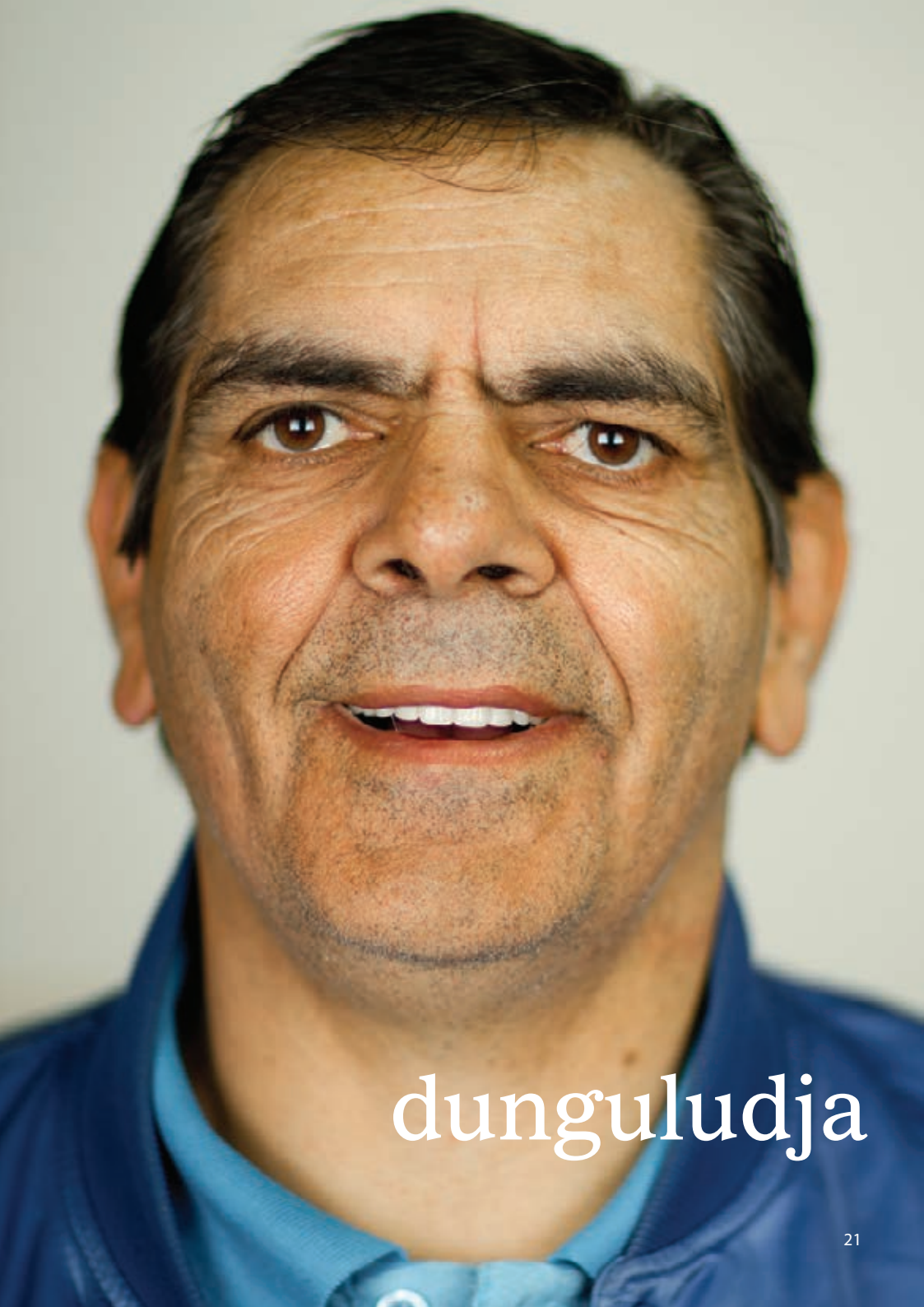
Senior practitioners and Team Leaders

Case Workers



strength





dunguludja

Corporate Services

The year to the end of June 2011 has been a big one, with some exciting new developments for VACCA Corporate Services. As a result of the team's hard work, we have new state-of-the-art information and communication technology, including a new server; we are archiving old records as part of an overall document management project; we have developed a Workforce Capability Framework and started developing our Business Planning and Budgeting System, which we expect to be implemented by July 2012.

For the 2010–2011 reporting period the corporate team were involved in the following major projects.

Human Resources

Our staff numbers have increased by almost 20 per cent over the last 12 months. Key initiatives of the Human Resources team have been the collation of evidence for the DHS Standards internal review, the continuous update of the VACCA Policy and Procedures framework, and ongoing operational recruitment tasks. We have also been involved in investigations, occupational health and safety initiatives and the provision of targeted advice regarding award interpretation and other matters.

Staff Satisfaction Survey

VACCA undertook its second Staff Satisfaction Survey early in 2011. Overall results indicated that the vast majority of staff enjoy working for VACCA, are attracted to working for a community based organisation and intend on staying with VACCA. Areas of focus over the next 12 months will be addressing staff professional development needs, stronger supervision practices and ensuring greater compliance in all areas of staff wellbeing. We also aim to increase the number of Aboriginal staff we employ, including the number of senior positions they occupy. In common with other agencies in the child protection area, recruitment and retention of staff is also a challenge.

Workforce Capability Framework

VACCA conducted workshops in February and March involving staff across all levels and programs to develop a draft VACCA Workforce Capability Framework. This will be used by VACCA in reviewing its remuneration practices, in establishing professional development plans for staff, for recruitment and in structuring career pathways. It captures the nuances of the agency, its identity as an Aboriginal organisation and relevant sector capabilities.

Upcoming projects include a review of the 2009 VACCA Workforce Strategy and the launch of an Employee Assistance Program.

Finance

VACCA's operational budgets and the Business Plan for 2011–12 were completed in June 2011 and endorsed by the VACCA Board in September 2011. Managing budgets through improved IT-based reporting and management is also an ongoing objective of the Business Planning project.

Part of this process is the drafting of a Business Requirements document that captures VACCA's work processes to help identify where improvements can be made and to assist in deciding what IT systems we need to acquire to support it.

Information Technology

Computer Replacement Program

New computers have replaced the ageing hardware in our Southern Region Office, Family Support/Early Intervention, Link-Up and Morwell.

Helpdesk Implementation

To better service and manage staff computer support requests, we have been trialing and testing a Helpdesk Software solution. Further trials and tests will follow once the server infrastructure upgrade project has been completed. In the meantime, we have implemented a temporary helpdesk solution that has allowed us to provide a better service to staff.

Internet Infrastructure Upgrade

Works to upgrade VACCA's internet infrastructure are progressing steadily and will improve connectivity to essential services like CRISS/CRISP & organisational data access from branch offices.

Fleet Management System

We are currently trialing a fleet management system that will provide staff with a simple, easy to use car booking system that also manages incidents, servicing, infringements and leases. Over the last twelve months, VACCA's fleet of motor vehicles has increased from 65 to 73. We are seeking to consolidate fleet providers as we move from an ownership to a leasing approach to vehicle management. VACCA is also implementing a comprehensive motor vehicle policy and refining and developing improved fleet management practices for our growing fleet.

Records Management

VACCA has undertaken a comprehensive archiving initiative. This is the first stage of this project, which will be followed by the selection of an electronic document management system and further work on document control.

Meeting our internal and infrastructure needs is critical to enabling our future development. VACCA Corporate Services is also developing in a way that is culturally appropriate and sensitive to needs in our sector. This means continuing to support all our staff to ensure we develop them as a strong, committed, highly skilled and qualified VACCA Team that continues to respond to the needs and wishes of the Victorian Aboriginal community.

New Programs and Initiatives Unit

The New Programs and Initiatives Unit at VACCA is the incubator for many of the Agency's new developments and initiatives. The program's objective is to ensure that VACCA's practices and current service-mix achieves our aim of cultural excellence as a means of protecting, promoting and contributing to Aboriginal children's culture, safety and wellbeing.

We work to improve organisational systems so they reinforce our cultural standards and priorities. Externally, our partnerships within the child and family sector and the Victorian Aboriginal community strengthen our service delivery and ensure that more Aboriginal children, particularly the most vulnerable, have their needs met by the broader sector.

VACCA is committed to providing a culturally strong, positive, vibrant and professional working environment for all of its employees. Their work is critical

to the health of our Aboriginal children and therefore the future of our Aboriginal community.

The various activities we run and spirit of the staff keep our workplace vibrant. However, being the size we are in 2011 means we need to work hard at keeping our internal culture vital and focussed on our cultural objectives. This led to the first ever all-staff conference to listen, learn, acknowledge and celebrate our Work on the Lands of Many Clans in Victoria.

One member of staff remarked:

'It was so organised and professionally executed. I think New Programs and Initiatives should be extremely proud of their work. It was great to see so many proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people together – so strong in their culture and identity. It was great to see the non-Aboriginal staff involved in activities and showing such amazing respect for our culture. I think we have a very strong and amazing collective of dedicated, passionate and intelligent workers – we should be very proud.'



VACCA kids decorate and stitch together pieces of possum skin at a possum-skin cloak workshop

Key unit achievements this year included:

- assisting in the establishment of the full suite of the Kinship Care Program components
- developing a plan to increase VACCA's services to Aboriginal children and families in the Eastern region
- supporting the development of the Child-focussed Family Violence Program in Gippsland
- compliance with DHS requirements to meet registration standards
- assisting Aboriginal services taking responsibility for Aboriginal children on Children's Court Protective Service Orders
- redeveloping the Community Support Service to become Koorie Connect; and
- development of Program Service Manuals.

We also continued to provide high-level policy and program advice to the CEO, and have played a major role in supporting Aboriginal children's rights within the child and family sector.

The year was also notable for our development of:

- The Statewide Case Contracting Guide for Aboriginal Services and a two day training package delivered to Aboriginal services across Victoria funded to provide Kinship Care.
- The Building Respectful Partnership Guide. This guide was developed in partnership with Berry Street and MacKillop Family Services. This valuable tool improves outcomes for Aboriginal children and families by assisting mainstream organisations on their journey to Aboriginal cultural competence.

New Programs and Initiatives Unit - continued

- Cultural resources for Aboriginal children entering out-of-home care as part of the Including Children Project to embed the Charter of Children's Rights within our practice across the sector.
- A coordinated response to the State Government's Inquiry into Victoria's Vulnerable Children.

Our commitment to enhance and support our work within the broader Aboriginal community in Victoria was demonstrated through:

- The amazing work done through our Culturally Strong Koorie Kids Having Fun project. The project includes a busy calendar of activities that range from cooking and life skills, cultural camps, health screening, cultural arts and the healthy eating circus program with

Westside Circus. Funding from Close the Health Gap enabled us to provide more activities more frequently. The culmination of this year's activities will be the Children's Cultural Festival in October 2011 and the Children's Art Exhibition at Bunjilaka in November 2011.

- Delivering the Koorie FACES family strengthening program to Aboriginal people within three correctional facilities – Barwon, Dame Phyllis Frost and Mangoneet Correctional Centre.

We are proud of our work this year and are very excited about the future. We have a very committed and hard-working team and we would not have achieved what we did without their skill, vision and dedication.

The finished possum-skin cloak in all its painted glory



Placement And Support Unit

The focus of the unit is on providing culturally relevant care and support to Aboriginal children and young people who cannot live with their parents. Usually the children are on protective orders issued by the Children's Court, but some children are voluntarily placed.

We provide a range of programs such as Aboriginal Therapeutic Residential Care, Kinship Care, Foster Care (known as Extended Care), Permanent Care, Leaving Care and other support programs. Some children are in our placements for a few months; some for many years.

Therapeutic Residential Care program

The Therapeutic Residential Care program consists of two group homes accommodating four children in each. The children in the group homes are generally those with the most complex needs who cannot live in a home-based care placement. The children are cared for by therapeutically trained and dedicated staff who work 8–10 hour shifts. Aboriginal Therapeutic care is based on the premise that children who come into care are traumatised, and that strengthening an Aboriginal child's identity and cultural

connections is critical to the child's healing and wellbeing. There is a high degree of consistency in how the residential teams work. The children's challenging behaviour is managed by providing a nurturing environment, enabling the child to have as much contact with their Aboriginal family and community as possible, and by helping the child to understand their own behaviour and that of others.

Precious moments with the children are when they laugh, have fun, and are able to enjoy being children. Rewarding moments are when a child is able to remain calm in a difficult situation and attend school full-time, is able to express their worries and fears, and lets you know that they feel safe and loved.

Aboriginal Kinship Care program

VACCA's Aboriginal Kinship Care program is for extended family members who care for their family's children. Many grandmothers, aunts and uncles and cousins care for Aboriginal children. This year we signed contracts to provide monitoring and support to 42 children in DHS Kinship Care placements. 30 of these are in the North West DHS region.

Placement And Support Unit - continued

As an Aboriginal service working with Aboriginal families, we have been able to provide a much higher level of support and help to the kinship carers, children and the children's parents.

The greatest joy for the Kinship Care team is return of a child to their parent's care, as happened on one occasion this year. Other joys are the resolution of conflict between family members and the child being able to enjoy as much contact as possible with their parents.

Best of all, our Kinship Care Program provides self-determination to Aboriginal families caring for their Aboriginal children.

Extended Care program

The Extended Care program has been responsible for the care and placement of over 100 infants, children and young people.

Looking after children requires a dedicated and professional care team including the children's parents, foster carers, caseworkers, child protection workers and various specialists, like trauma counsellors and art therapists.

An important part of monitoring the children's wellbeing and development is watching how they perform at school, both socially and academically. We are very proud that the children in the Extended Care program are achieving at expected academic levels – or at an appropriate level given their histories – and that all children are enrolled in school or kinder programs. We believe that a positive school experience is a key to building problem-solving skills and resilience.

This year we continued to support and develop children's cultural identity. Children and carers participated in a range of cultural activities and events including; attending plays such as Krakouer, the Bangarra Dance Group performance at the Arts Centre, didgeridoo and choir performances. Through The Books in Home program, they were provided with cultural story books, learned how to cook food in the ground, enjoyed playing Koorie ball games and explored the cultural sights of Port Phillip Bay.

We have also tried to build the children's family knowledge and to ensure that children have regular contact with their families and extended families. We continue to develop tools and plans that capture the children's stories and ensure strong cultural connections.

Leaving Care program

The Leaving Care program continues to work with Aboriginal young people leaving care. This year we held our first three-day Leaving Care Camp for young Aboriginal woman. The location was a house overlooking the great ocean road and beyond. The focus of the camp was healing and self care, with the girls exploring meditation, massage, art therapy and beauty.

Adolescent Community Placement House

The Adolescent Community Placement House has continued to provide adolescents in care with a very safe and secure placement option. The carer is a strong Torres Strait Islander woman who has created a nurturing and culturally strong place for young men. Although

the transition from childhood to adolescence is a difficult time for young Aboriginal men, the carer has created a strong network of positive role models using culture and an emphasis on sport and recreation. The house has been open for 15 months and has just undergone a review that will guide the development of the program and hopefully attract more funding.

This year we attracted additional funding to provide therapeutic services to children in our care and to increase the number of children that we can care for. This new funding means our targets increased from 52 to 64. We have the expertise to care for these children, but we cannot do it without foster carers. Foster Carer recruitment activity resulted in eight new carers; however, this is insufficient to meet the needs of children who require a home-based care placement. Foster care recruitment continues to be our biggest challenge.

Permanent Care program

The Permanent Care program assesses carers who want to make the transition to permanently caring for a child.

Permanency planning for children in long term placements is an important milestone for children and their carers. This year we completed 16 assessments however, not all these were approved as the cultural safety of children could not be assured. We have recently commenced a long overdue review of the program and hope to make recommendations to DHS with regard to extending the support offered to families who are caring for Aboriginal children on permanent care orders.

Koorie Cultural Support program

The Koorie Cultural Support program supports Aboriginal children who are placed with non- Aboriginal carers in mainstream placements. This program is going from strength to strength ensuring that carers and caseworkers have excellent information about children's families and cultural activities and information that will maintain their connections to family and community.

Finally I would like to acknowledge the wonderful staff and carers who have dedicated their time, energy and enormous patience to caring for our most vulnerable but also most remarkable children.

Rewarding moments are when a child is able to remain calm in a difficult situation and attend school full-time, is able to express their worries and fears, and lets you know that they feel safe and loved.

Link-Up Victoria

“
I can't see my country,
but I can feel my country
and feel my family”

Sight impaired Link-Up client at her reunion, 2011

To work at Link-Up you need to have a mighty strong heart, one that is prepared to care for and support our clients on their journey of hope, discovery, loss, reconnection – and for too many of our clients – one of great sadness for loved ones that are gone. We work with some clients whose traditional connections stretch across Australia. Every one of them has a story to tell and for all of them it is a half finished story, with gaps and question marks.

At Link-Up the first major part of our work is to help clients fill in the missing pieces, answer their questions about who they are, connect them to country and culture, find out what went on when they were adopted or removed, and help them confirm what their heart always secretly wanted to know: that they were loved

and they were missed by their mother or father, by their family and community.

Sometimes our clients are looking for brothers or sisters or any other biological family, an uncle or aunt, anyone who has a blood connection to them, anyone who can give them back a missing piece of their lives.

When we interview for caseworkers, we tell applicants that we are looking for someone who will be persistent and determined, someone who will never give up on their client, especially when tracking down precious records like birth certificates, wardship files, adoption records and photographs (most treasured of all).

The second major part of Link-Up's work is to organise reunions between our clients and their newly found family members.



Caseworkers work closely with their clients and the unmet family to ensure that their first meeting goes smoothly and lives up to everyone's expectations. There is always a lot of emotion attached to reunions, none of them are the same, and they are the most challenging but rewarding part of our work.

2010-11 highlights

This year Link-Up worked with 181 clients and arranged 10 Reunions – five in Victoria, one in Northern Territory, one in South Australia, one in New South Wales and two in Queensland.

Major activities undertaken during the year include:

- Sorry Day Event held at Northcote Town Hall, Melbourne
- Film project commenced and to be completed in 2011
- First Operational Plan developed
- Reunion Packs now provided to every new client
- Information Packs circulated to the community
- Feedback System project commenced and to be completed in 2011
- Memorandum of Understanding project commenced and to be completed in 2011
- Policy and Procedures Manual completed
- Resource Library established
- Administration Manual completed.

Lakidjeka Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice & Support Service

The Lakidjeka Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice & Support Service (ACSASS) program is legislated to provide cultural advice and consultation to the Department of Human Services Child Protection on significant decisions relating to Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria. Lakidjeka is a Yorta Yorta word meaning 'the child or children' and given the work of Lakidjeka we believe the title is very appropriate.

ACSASS is a unique program that other states and territories look to for best practice in increasing capacity to include Aboriginal people in joint decision-making processes. Lakidjeka ACSASS workers are skilled Aboriginal workers who ensure that Child Protection decisions are made with the advice and knowledge of Aboriginal people. As well as working in a partnership arrangement strengthened by protocols and legislation, workers also provide relevant cultural and local community knowledge.

The program operates on a statewide basis and has 11 sites across Victoria. There are 30 staff, which include eight team leaders (supervisor/

caseworkers), 10 caseworkers and eight case administrators. All supervisor and caseworker positions in Lakidjeka ACSASS are exempted under the Equal Opportunity Act 1995 and workers must be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Any report (notification) on an Aboriginal child to Child Protection must be discussed with Lakidjeka, from the outset through to case closure. Major decisions should not be made without the involvement from Lakidjeka. Regardless of where the child or young person resides – at home, with extended family or in care – Lakidjeka is expected to provide ongoing advice.

The program manages a number of risks both at a casework and program level, including managing complex and high-risk clients, and staff recruitment and retention issues. Inadequate resourcing and workload issues place significant strain on workers and their ability to provide meaningful consultation.

True consultation asks 'what do you think?' and 'what do you know?' rather than 'we've decided' or 'just letting you know that this is what we have decided to do'.

Key program statistics this year included:

- Lakidjeka provided consultation and advice on approximately 2711 new reports and 53 unborn reports at the point of Intake. This was an increase of approximately 14 per cent from last year.
- Approximately 45 per cent of those new reports were jointly investigated by Child Protection and Lakidjeka workers, the rest were assessed as not needing formal Child Protection investigation.
- At any point in time workers across the state hold approximately 1390 open cases, with average caseloads being 100 cases per worker in metropolitan regions and 40 per worker in rural regions.
- Workers also participated in one Child death review, two formal case reviews and over 50 quality-of-care reviews.

ACSASS is a unique program that other states and territories look to for best practice in increasing capacity to include Aboriginal people in joint decision-making processes.

Key achievements this year included:

SNAICC Conference

Lakidjeka staff attended the SNAICC Conference in Alice Springs, Northern Territory. Some staff delivered a well received presentation on the Lakidjeka program, highlighting how the partnership arrangement with government can work.

Staff wellbeing and planning

The difficulty of the work and the isolation means that staff wellbeing and support is a priority for Lakidjeka. Two of the highlights for staff have been their attendance at a three-day staff wellbeing and team building retreat in Echuca/Moama, and the unit meeting in February held in Ballarat.

VACCA Conference

The VACCA Conference provided a great opportunity for Lakidjeka staff to participate and feel connected to the rest of our organisation. Along with a number of VACCA staff, some Lakidjeka workers undertook formal leadership roles at the conference, delivering keynote and workshop presentations and facilitating and scribing for workshops.

United Nations Rights of the Child, The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle and the VACCA/DHS Protocol guide our practice.

Policy, Research and Communications Unit

The Policy, Research and Communication Unit was established on July 2008 after VACCA received three-year funding of \$450,000 from the ANZ Bank Trustees' Victorian Aboriginal Granting Program – specifically; the Ella and Mitchell Brazier Fund, the Sir John Minoque, Leigh and Marjorie Bronwyn Murray Trusts, and the GT and L Potter Charitable Trust. We are currently in dialogue with the ANZ Trustees seeking a further three years of funding.

The aims of the unit include:

- Expanding and maintaining policy, research and communication capacity for VACCA.
- Enabling VACCA to undergo research projects according to its strategic objectives.
- Enabling VACCA to develop an approach to research informed by Aboriginal cultural norms and academic standards.
- Developing and disseminating research findings that promote Aboriginal cultural resilience and therefore have a positive impact on government policy formation.

Key unit achievements this year included:

- Successful dissemination of last year's major project on cultural safety including presentations to the Joint Departmental Senior Policy Officers Group on Aboriginal Affairs, the Aboriginal Justice Forum, the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Victorian Branch of the Commonwealth Indigenous Co-ordination Centre. (Material from our report will also be referred to at length in this year's Australian Human Rights Commission Social Justice Report.)
- Ongoing research into the relationship between community trauma and lateral violence using the cultural safety framework released last year and to be finalised in early 2012.
- Ongoing participation in research partnerships with La Trobe University and Melbourne University.
- Policy submissions to Federal and State Governments and the Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Expert Panel.
- A successful Statewide Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations Forum on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples at the AAL.

- Ongoing research into the cultural dimensions of Aboriginal Guardianship (Section 18) funded by DHS due for completion at the end of this year after the successful study tour of Canadian Aboriginal child and family welfare services.

Our continuing partnership with Berry Street and La Trobe University will further develop cultural wellbeing assessment indicators, which we have called the Cultural Yarn, and which will be trailed at VACCA and Take Two. The Social and Emotional Wellbeing Indigenous Network Group (SEWING) Circle will be the key reference group for VACCA's research unit. With La Trobe we hope to co-employ one researcher next year.

The unit has ongoing involvement in the Who Am I? ARC Linkage Grant with Melbourne University, the Centre for Excellence, DHS and others. It focused

on creating a web-based archive, archive practices support and record keeping practices support to enable out-of-home care services to provide a sense of identity for former clients.

The unit participated in Take Two/ La Trobe University's Small Talk Project on the speech and auditory needs of children in care.

The unit also participated in the development and governance of the Certificate and Diploma in Child and Family Welfare with La Trobe University, Bouverie, Melbourne University and Take Two, including co-delivering with Take Two in 2011. The unit assists the CEO with presentations to the Diploma and Certificate classes for each subject unit. The unit has an ongoing role of facilitating cultural input into course material with the CEO.

Submissions, conferences and workshops

The unit provides ongoing policy advice, conference and speech presentation, and policy submission drafting to the CEO. 2010–11 submissions, conferences and workshops included:

- DHS-Department of Health seminar March 2011.
- Talk by Manager to Homelessness forum in May.
- Contribution to our Submission to the Vulnerable Children Inquiry.
- Talk to Child Protection and Justice forum in June.
- Child Public Health elective at the Royal Children's Hospital in July.
- Community Paediatrics Seminar programme at the VAHS in August.
- Magistrates workshop in August.
- Sharing Indigenous Ways of Helping and Healing Conference, Canada in September.
- Submission to the Constitutional Recognition Expert Panel.
- Submission on the Victorian Human Rights and Responsibilities Charter.
- Submission to 'Failure to Protect' Inquiry.
- Co-ordination of VACCA presentation to AAV review of infrastructure needs of Aboriginal organisations.

“
I know who
I am now,
thank you”

Link-Up client, 2011

Southern VACCA

Southern VACCA was established in 2000 and is located in Dandenong South, on the border of the Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung Lands of the Kulin Nation. The Southern Region covers a very large area from South Melbourne to Pakenham and the Mornington Peninsula.

Our services provide support to Aboriginal children, young people and their families who are struggling with a range of issues. Often our families are involved with Child Protection Services and have complex needs.

We provide a culturally relevant support service that often involves advocating and negotiating for and on behalf of families. Although mainstream services often do their best to help, they don't have a full understanding of the cultural context and some of the historical issues, such as the Stolen Generations, which still has a major impact on Aboriginal communities today. We are trained to work with families who are struggling with the effects of trauma and grief. We employ staff who live in the local community and are able to inform non-indigenous staff on how to engage and work with families in a culturally relevant way.

Our aim over the next 12 months is to relocate to another site, so that we can bring children, young people and families to the service. With our pending move, we are excited at the prospect of creating a culturally safe and welcoming setting, where Aboriginal people will feel comfortable and supported.

2010-11 highlights

In the Southern Region, our program achievements during 2010–11 included:

Family Services

Wilka Kwe means 'Turn around Friend'. Wilka Kwe is a family support service, whereby families work intensively with a case worker for a period of three months. Whilst involved with the Wilka Kwe program, a family is given the opportunity to be assisted in addressing behavioral issues and developing parenting skills. Case workers work as part of a broader team, and have the flexibility to assist with morning and evening routines and provide parents with one to one input. Referrals can be made by Child Protection, the community or self.

Family Coaching program

Family Coaching Victoria (FCV) program provides a similar service to Wilke Kwe. Family Coaching is completing its first year as a pilot project. FCV provides a more intensive service for up to 12 months, if needed. Family Coaching can only accept referrals from Child Protection if it is likely that a child will be removed from their family or to reunify a child with their family if it is the first time the child has been placed out of their family's care.

Koorie Connect program

Our Koorie Connect staff spend most of their time based at other agencies. Their job is to engage with individuals and families and refer them to whichever program best suits their needs. For example, one worker spends a lot of time at the health service and Centrelink. As people come into these agencies, they might be struggling with housing, health, employment or other issues. The Koorie Connect worker will engage with

individuals and link them up with the most relevant Aboriginal or mainstream service.

Out of Home Care

The Out of Home Care program in 2010-11 comprised the following:

Fostercare: The Southern Out of Home Care Program includes Fostercare, which provides nine placements for children and young people. This program includes an ongoing recruitment campaign, as well as the regular training and support of existing carers. Although Fostercare generally provides care for children who have been removed from their families, it can also offer respite to families who are experiencing difficulties without Child Protection involvement.

Kinship Care: The Kinship Care Program provides support to Aboriginal children and young people living with extended family members or friends and aims to maintain children within their family and community networks as an alternative

This page: A serene moment at the VACCA Children's Festival

Opposite: a traditional dance workshop at Songlines Aboriginal Music



to mainstream placements. The program provides long-term support to children involved with Child Protection or short term assistance to those not involved with Child Protection. The Kinship Care program also provides an information and advice and cultural connections service for children and young people.

Cultural Support Program

The Cultural Support Program is a key component of the Out of Home Care system for children and young people who are placed in mainstream agencies with non Aboriginal carers.

Play Group

Southern VACCA Playgroups have Koorie Kids Playgroups with 33 families participating in the southern region: Frankston, Cranbourne, Pakenham and Tootgarook. The Southern VACCA Playgroup Program has partnerships with local councils, health organisations, Aboriginal health teams, and works

with speech pathologists, occupational therapists, family specialists and our in-house VACCA staff team. Many playgroup activities involve cultural activities. We also provide family support for families whose children attend playgroup.

Aboriginal Family Decision Making (AFDM)

The AFDM Program engages with the family networks of children and young people involved with Child Protection and helps them to develop a suitable and culturally safe plan of action for the care of the child or young person.

Aboriginal Liaison Worker (ALW)

The ALW provides consultation to community-based intake teams and mainstream family support. The ALW ensures that a culturally informed and relevant service is provided to Aboriginal families referred to mainstream Family Support Programs.



Morwell VACCA

Our small, busy office is a place where Aboriginal community members of all ages drop in for a coffee, to ask for assistance, or to access a service.

The Morwell VACCA office provides the following programs: Leaving Care, Kurnai Youth Homelessness Service, and Family Violence Services, which includes a Community Development Worker involved in establishing an Aboriginal Women's Refuge in Morwell. Our newest position is a Child's Advocate/Support Worker for Children who have experienced Family Violence.

Our small, busy office is a place where Aboriginal community members of all ages drop in for a coffee, to ask for assistance, or to access a service. We are currently looking for a larger office for our work.

Most of the programs at Morwell are funded under the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP), which is managed by the DHS Office of Housing. This year Marion McNeil was promoted to the role of Program Manager and Lorena Thompson took on the role of Team Leader.

We have done amazing work with our Leaving Care clients; young people aged 16–18 who have to leave their placements and move into independent accommodation. They are supported in their personal development and assisted to access suitable housing. The worker has plans to conduct a Life Skills program once we are in a building with more space and we hope to obtain funding for VACCA to participate in a Head Lease agreement for two properties to house young people.



The different faces of VACCA

As key players in the area of Indigenous Family Violence our staff have participated in the Project Control Group for the Gippsland Indigenous Family Violence Refuge for women and children. Plans are well underway for the construction of the refuge in Morwell and should be complete by the end of 2012. We have also secured properties for family violence clients using the 'A Place to Call Home' program.

Feedback from clients assisted by the Kurnai Youth Homelessness Service is consistently positive and they are often grateful for our support in achieving stable, affordable housing for themselves.

The Morwell office is well placed to develop other housing options, such as an Aboriginal Youth Refuge, and will continue to provide casework support for young people aged 18–21 who have been in state care.

The Youth Services and Family Violence Services workers at Morwell are a hard working team, committed to their clients and to the community, and ably led by Marion and Lorena. They have developed strong partnerships with police, government and other agencies to provide an effective service in the Latrobe Valley and surrounding shires.

Early Intervention and Family Services

Our Early Intervention and Family Services (EI & FS) program supports Aboriginal parents in nurturing and caring for their children. We offer programs to prevent family breakdown and we work with families where Child Protection are involved. The Aboriginal Family Decision Making program helps families participate in the decision-making process about children.

EI & FS has moved into a new and exciting phase with increased funding to enable us to work more closely with families in a range of settings – from one on one in-home support to group based, and child focussed programs. We have improved our service response to families in need of parental, educational and cultural support, and strengthened our workforce by providing professional development opportunities for staff.

The range of programs provided by EI & FS is varied and includes Commonwealth funded early childhood and parenting program such as; Supported Play Groups, Indigenous Parenting Support Service and Emergency Relief. Our DHS funded programs are Family Coaching, Aboriginal Restorations, Aboriginal Family Decision Making, Cultural Support Plans, Child

FIRST, and Family Violence. The richness and diversity of our programs provides families with a range of options for culturally responsive support in times of need, delivered by a dedicated and skilled workforce.

The benefit of the intensive parenting programs is the practical and skill based approach that builds on the family's strengths, hopes and capacity to achieve positive change. Recently, a mother of three shared her experience of working with the Restorations Program. The intervention was focussed on working with Mum to build on existing strengths and increase her confidence with routines, praise and positive role modelling for her and her children. Mum's progress through the change process was driven by her commitment, and supported professionally by a Restorations Worker.

Aboriginal Family Decision Making (AFDM) builds on strengths in kinship networks to meet the safety and stability needs of children within their broader family network and community. The commitment of AFDM Convenors was demonstrated recently when a three-year old Aboriginal boy who had been

in long term foster care was successfully reunited with his maternal uncle in remote Western Australia. The young boy is thriving in the care of his extended family and now has the opportunity to develop a sense of cultural connection and belonging; an outcome celebrated by everyone involved in locating family members.

We are currently delivering three playgroups at separate locations across the region. Playgroups provide families with culturally enriching activities in a safe, fun and empowering environment. Infant Health and Dental Services recently attended Playgroup, and this has led to families working with Maternal Health and children attending Dental Care appointments. Our new initiatives in this area include plans to facilitate Cultural Camps for families and provide a mobile interactive preschool children's program.

Another exciting initiative is the work of Westside Circus in partnership with EI & FS. This is a group program that promotes family engagement and interaction, confidence building, healthy eating and

physical fitness. There has also been a strong focus on circus skill activities that support children's emotional, psychological and physical development. Circus runs every Monday and offers transport to attending families.

A highlight from our third term was a four-year girl whose newly found skills made her Mum very proud. Mum had a long history of acting negatively towards her daughter, and she spoke of the importance of the circus program at a group session. Her expressions of pride demonstrated the shift she was able to make by participating in this program.

A further key initiative in EI & FS is the review of Aboriginal Liaison Worker, Child FIRST role, and the development of an Aboriginal Client pathway for families subject to Child FIRST referrals. This work is critical to ensuring mainstream services support Aboriginal families in a culturally appropriate way.

EI & FS recognises the importance of building and investing in a resilient and stable workforce. The program has

The commitment of AFDM Convenors was demonstrated recently when a three-year old Aboriginal boy who had been in long term foster care was successfully reunited with his maternal uncle in remote Western Australia.

Early Intervention and Family Services - continued

employed a Principle Practitioner for professional development and case management. This role has introduced Reflective Practice in a team setting, giving workers the chance to develop creative ways of working with families that have multiple complex needs. A training program is being developed and will be delivered in the next 12 months.

Over the last year, the Family Violence partnership between VACCA and Berry Street has provided our families with a more positive and unified service, and strengthened the partnership between the two organisations. A new co-facilitated women's exercise group has been a great outlet for women within the program to help gain confidence and independence.

Over the last year, the Family Violence partnership between VACCA and Berry Street has provided our families with a more positive and unified service, and strengthened the partnership between the two organisations.

The Family Violence program continues its work, including Dads and emphasising their important role in supporting and nurturing their families. Family violence workers look forward to new and exciting training opportunities in the year ahead as they consider ways to help the program build on its success.

EI & FS is committed to the delivery of a quality service to Aboriginal children, families and community, and will continue to lead and demonstrate progressive ways of supporting vulnerable families and improving children's quality of life.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank staff for their significant contribution to meeting the needs of Aboriginal children and families. EI & FS is committed to delivering a respectful, cultural, and flexible client-focussed service. We are proud of our families' hard work and commitment, and grateful to them, for allowing us to work with them in their homes and be a part of their journey.

Financial Summary

Summarised Statement of Income and Expenditure for the Year Ended 30 June 2011

	2011 \$	2010 \$
Total Income	14,368,489	11,624,760
Total Expenses	12,650,193	10,509,897
Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to members of VACCA	1,718,296	1,114,863

Summarised Statement of Financial Position (Balance Sheet) as at the Year Ended 30 June 2011

	2011 \$	2010 \$
Total Current Assets	8,590,174	6,404,989
Total Non-Current Assets	708,848	864,223
Total Assets	9,299,023	7,269,212
Total Current Liabilities	2,972,185	2,750,929
Total Non- Current Liabilities	762,606	1,146,169
Total Liabilities	3,734,791	3,897,098
Net Assets (Liabilities)	5,564,232	3,372,114
Total Equity	5,564,232	3,372,114

The above statements only provide a summary of the financial performance and position for the financial year ended 30 June 2011. For more detailed statements see the Annual Financial Report for the year ended 30 June 2011, which includes the Director's Report, Statement of Comprehensive Income, Statement of Financial Position (Balance Sheet), Statement of Cash Flows, Notes to the Financial Statements Auditor's Independence Declaration, Directors Declaration and Independent Auditor's Report to Members.

confidence





nyabun bambunj

VACCA Elders

Pages 4 and 5

respect : mina pawa

Aunty Pauline Cassidy

Language : Kala Lagau Ya

Araguna woman,

Badu Island, Torres Strait

Pages 10 and 11

wisdom : naanggabun

Uncle Larry Walsh

Language: Taungurung

Pages 18 and 19

strength : dunguludja

Uncle Graham Cooper

Language: Yorta Yorta

Pages 42 and 43

confidence : nyabun bambunj

Aunty Fay Muir

Language: Boonwurrung

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