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Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
Annual Report 2012/2013





Despite colonisation and dispossession, Aboriginal communities and families in Victoria are culturally strong and connected and committed to reviving Aboriginal culture through language, arts and other forms. The right to practice culture with family and community is about being connected by culture and strengthening bonds across generations. This is essential to healing and keeping communities strong.



If we are to truly understand and support Aboriginal children and young people's journey through trauma we must listen to their hopes for the future and nurture their talents. Whether these talents are used to contribute to the local community or to have a hand in shaping our physical and social landscape, the right to justice and equality is essential to realising ambitions.

Welcome

VACCA is the lead Aboriginal child and family welfare organisation in Victoria, protecting and promoting the rights of Aboriginal children, young people, families and the community.

We provide programs and services to strengthen Aboriginal culture, encourage best parenting practices and advise government on strategies to strengthen vulnerable Aboriginal children and families.

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OUR RIGHTS MATTER

VACCA's 2012/13 annual report explores the subject of children's rights. Many of us might immediately think of basic human rights, such as the right to be free from harm or the right to food and shelter. While these will remain essential to VACCA's purpose, the civil, political, economic, and cultural rights set out in the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People tell a much bigger story.

In 1989, world leaders passed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child underlining a global move towards viewing children as human beings with rights.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People declares the minimum requirements to meet the basic needs of survival, dignity and wellbeing; the freedoms and access to resources and facilities that Indigenous people seek to have recognised as legislated rights by the Australian government.

We believe that recognising and acting to uphold Indigenous people's rights is key to healing Aboriginal children and families who have suffered neglect, separation and cultural disconnection. In our 37 years of caring for Aboriginal young people and families, we have seen how connection to family, community and culture is the foundation of a deep, durable wellbeing and an internal strength that helps children get through trauma and cope with and the challenges of life as they grow. Seen in this light, rights are integral to a more holistic concept of a child's safety.

Echoing an increased global awareness of children's rights, VACCA has grown from an organisation focused on meeting Aboriginal children's core needs of safety and security to adopt broader terms of reference: that Aboriginal children should be able to reach their potential with the security of knowing who they are and where they come from, and that they should enjoy the pride that comes from practising their culture and having it respected by those around them.

It's not surprising that many of the key principles behind children's rights in the UN Conventions and Declarations chime so clearly with VACCA's vision of safety, self determination and cultural respect. Twenty-six years on from the day the UN first passed the Convention, our annual report reaffirms the importance of recognising the broad spectrum of children's needs, including their culture, as rights.

In the portraits of VACCA kids that punctuate the pages of this report, we visualize children's rights – something that can be invisible or unknown – as handwritten banners; a tangible and personal message. The children appear in different public places because their rights apply in a range of contexts, and because rights need public support and local legislation to be upheld.

We believe that recognising and acting to uphold Indigenous people's rights is key to healing Aboriginal children and families who have suffered neglect, separation and cultural disconnection.

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Our purpose

We are a statewide Aboriginal community controlled organisation whose purpose is to strengthen the safety, wellbeing and cultural connectedness of Aboriginal children, individuals and families in their community.

Our vision

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



To have land
and native title
rights acknowledged
and
recognised

Land and Native Title rights provide a tangible connection to land and are the inheritance of all Aboriginal children. All Aboriginal children have the right to enjoy the benefits of land and native title rights and to have these acknowledged and recognised by those around them.

Locations



Care and support



We offer a growing range of programs and services to meet the diverse needs of Aboriginal children, individuals and families in Victoria. Healing Aboriginal children and members of the Stolen Generations who have experienced trauma takes special, culturally attuned care. We protect and support children as they grow, helping them flourish and become tomorrow's strong, culturally connected families.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT



For those who know us, VACCA can mean many different things. It largely depends on why you have come into contact with us. Even among our friends, clients or funders, few have a comprehensive view of what we are: we are one of the largest not for profit Aboriginal organisations delivering child and family welfare services in Victoria, and we are a Stolen Generations re-unification service provider. Our work touches many people, from the children in our care to the families and adults connected to them.

VACCA's objectives include the preservation, strengthening and protection of the cultural and spiritual identity of Aboriginal children and we aim to provide culturally appropriate and quality services that are responsive to the needs of Aboriginal communities.

We provide a broad range of services to Aboriginal people and the community based on our right to self-determination, addressing inequity and improving outcomes for individuals, children, young people and families. Services and programs

are planned in response to changing client needs and direct service is supported by a broad range of community initiatives aimed at addressing gaps in life outcomes for Aboriginal people.

VACCA experienced significant growth over the past three years and our restructure in 2012 was in response to this growth. It now has a strong leadership group to support the CEO as the agency moves into its next phase. The Board have an ongoing commitment to ensure the agency has the resources necessary to meet our corporate responsibilities over the next 12 months, with systems upgrades and new infrastructure planned for Human Resources, Finance systems and Information Technology, among other projects.

As we look to VACCA's operations we see that it is continually evolving. We have established a child and family welfare presence in the Eastern Suburbs in 2012 at Ringwood. Our Southern VACCA services moved location in late 2012 and a number of VACCA's placement and support services also moved to co-locate with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service in Preston. The agency's long term vision to create the Moondani Aboriginal Children's and Families Cultural Centre in the northern region, whilst progressing, is still some time away from realisation and this presents some challenges for VACCA in ensuring it has sufficient office space to support its workforce in the short to medium term.

Although we bear the outward appearance of other community service organisations we are clearly different. As well as objectives that seek to alleviate identified disadvantage, our organisation seeks

to represent and express the political aspirations of Aboriginal people. We play a significant role in community development. We bear the indelible marks of kinship and the social structure of the communities we serve, which in turn influences our accountability channels. We exist within a sector that is often under-resourced relative to the complexity of issues facing our children and families, often lacking the capacity to cater for the demand for services.

The Board takes its responsibility to protect the rights of Aboriginal children seriously, and we are proud this year of the agency's approach to this report in pursuing and supporting those rights.

This year I had the pleasure of being appointed by my fellow members to the position of chairperson to the board of VACCA and along with Deidre King celebrated 10 years of service on the Board. Unfortunately Deidre has recently resigned from the Board. On behalf of the Directors I would like to thank Deidre for her commitment to VACCA.

In closing I congratulate the team at VACCA and thank our sponsors, funding bodies and stakeholders for their continued commitment and support of our very important role across the Victorian community.

James Atkinson
Chairperson

CEO'S MESSAGE



VACCA is a Victoria-wide child and family service provider offering a diverse range of services that include support for Stolen Generations. We have grown rapidly over the last 10 years and have responded to the challenges this brings. Continued growth will be accompanied by a qualitative change in our service offerings. This change will build on our holistic cultural service model as we adapt to address the changing nature of the issues facing Aboriginal children and families.

For a community-controlled Aboriginal organisation firmly rooted in the Victorian Aboriginal community, we need to keep pace with and respond meaningfully to the current and future needs of our people. Although we function within a service sector characterised by the abuse and neglect of children, family violence and drug and alcohol abuse, our past and our aspirations are clearly linked to the Aboriginal people and culture of Victoria, and their regeneration.

VACCA approaches child and family welfare in a holistic way. Our work with vulnerable and at risk Aboriginal children, young people and their families

includes interventions to address child, parent and family related factors to protect the child and prevent child abuse. We also promote child wellbeing by addressing broader societal, systemic and community factors that cause harm to Aboriginal children and young people or affect their ability to function equitably within their capabilities. Therefore we are concerned with the rights and needs of Aboriginal children; their safety, wellbeing, health, education and future. We also work with families on those areas and issues that contribute to their over-representation in areas such as family violence, juvenile justice, homelessness and mental health.

Apart from VACCA's mix of family support services, child protection and out of home care services, we strongly emphasise cultural activities, community development and capacity building. Cultural activities are embedded in all our programs and are highly successful in engaging children and young people.

We observe community cultural protocols that pay due respect to the different nations and tribes of Victoria and Australia. This recognition of identity is important for the development of the children we work with and in the way we deliver services. We run community cultural activities to celebrate key events in Victoria including National Aboriginal Islander Children's Day, NAIDOC and Reconciliation Week, and have a role in advancing the Aboriginal community's interests through offering employment and training. Every year we also celebrate the National Apology to Aboriginal communities and our Stolen Generations and we commemorate Sorry Day to mark the launch of the 'Bringing Them Home' report. Advocacy and policy work is also a key part of our role and has contributed significantly to improvements in government and non-government services to Aboriginal children and families.

In March this year VACCA had an accreditation review against the Quality Improvement Council Standards and Accreditation Program and Quality Improvement

and Community Services Accreditation's Department of Human Services Standards Accreditation Program. The review team noted a number of key strengths, with comments that pay tribute to our hard work: "VACCA's capacity building for their community and the wider community (for everyone); our depth of service provision to build a better future for the community; of our contribution to high level policy and practice reform in the Child and Family Welfare sector; our capacity to partner to achieve best outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people, and their families; and of our commitment to best practice therapeutic approaches in working with children and young people, including therapeutic in-house support and external access to skilled practitioners." Staff across VACCA are to be congratulated for their ongoing commitment and support in the delivery of quality services.

As ever, our priority areas challenge us to be innovative in developing initiatives or programs designed to bring about change while meeting the cultural needs of Aboriginal people. This approach is being applied to our new Family Violence facility for women and children in Morwell, our Aboriginal Guardianship program and our work in developing an Aboriginal child and family services outcomes framework.

The appointment of Andrew Jackomos as this nation's first Aboriginal Children's Commissioner is to be celebrated; VACCA is committed to working with the new Commissioner, the Commonwealth and State governments, the sector and partners.

We acknowledge all our staff, volunteers and stakeholders for their contribution to the success of VACCA; to our Board who give so freely of their services to our Agency and to the broader Aboriginal community who support us, we extend our thanks.

Muriel Bamblett
CEO

THE BOARD



James Atkinson (*Yorta Yorta/Bangerang*)
Chairperson

Currently employed as Manager, Koorie Education with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Has worked across the education sector and served on boards at a state and national level. Was a founding member of the first Victorian Aboriginal Youth Advisory Committee and a participant in the Koorie Leadership Program.



Margaret Atkinson (*Yorta Yorta/Taungurung/Wurundjeri*)
Vice Chairperson

Currently employed as Administration/Receptionist at the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-op in Morwell. Was employed at VACCA for nine and a half years. Has commenced governance training.



Jason Kanoa (*Gunditjmara/Bunitj*)
Treasurer

Currently employed with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited's Aboriginal Centre for Males as Manager. Was previously employed with Victorian Aboriginal Youth, Sport, and Recreation for seven years. Has completed governance training and the Indigenous Leadership Network Victoria course. Plays with the Fitzroy Stars Football Club.



Jenny Kirby (*Barkindji/Ngemba*)
Secretary

Currently employed at Bert Williams Aboriginal Youth Service in the Koorie Youth Justice area. Was previously employed at Yappera Children's Service for many years. Has completed a Social Work Degree.



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

Currently retired but was employed as Manager of the Balranald Aboriginal Health Service. Was previously employed at Mutti Miah Family Preservation and worked at VACCA.



Deidre King (*Gunditjmara*)
Director

A board member of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited and the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service. Employed as CEO of the Aboriginal Community Elders Services. Previously employed at the Aborigines Advancement League for 17 years and worked at VACCA. Completed governance training and holds an Advanced Diploma in Business Management.



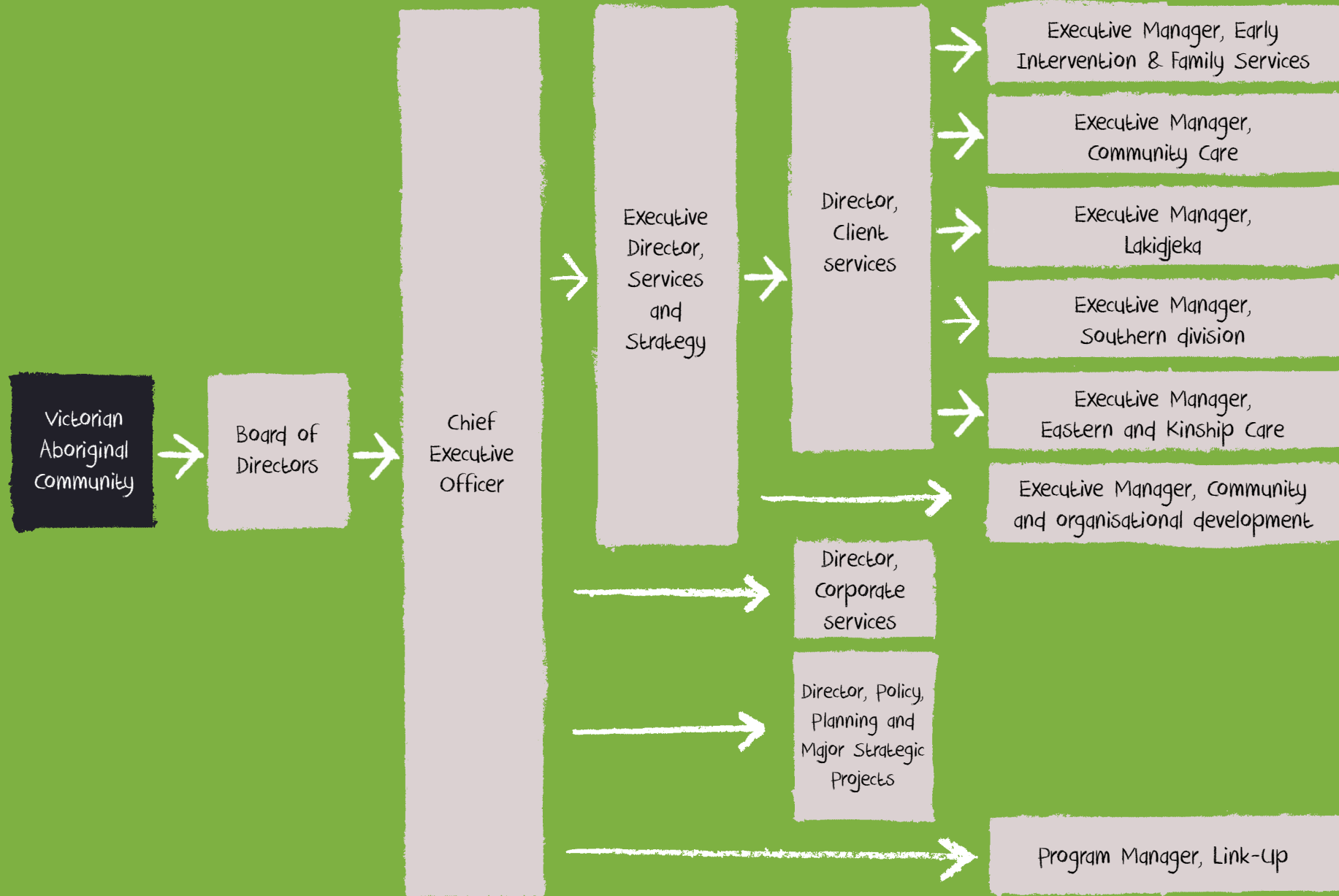
Rod Monohan (*Taungurung*)
Director

Currently employed as the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer with the Northcote Police Complex. Was previously employed at ACES and worked at VACCA for 12 years.

Apart from VACCA's mix of family support services, child protection and out of home care services, we strongly emphasise cultural activities, community development and capacity building.

Muriel Bamblett, CEO

Our structure



Our programs and services

Client services

Link-Up, a service for members of the Stolen Generations

Lakidjeka Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice Support Service (ACSASS)

Early years / Playgroups

Integrated Family Services

Intensive Family Support services

Family Mental Health

Family violence

Orana Ganyah Crisis Accommodation and Support Service, Morwell

A Place To Call Home

Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making

Youth Services / Homelessness

Recruitment, training and cultural safety for carers

Extended Care

Permanent care and stability planning

Adolescent Community House

Residential Care program

Leaving Care

Kinship Care

Cultural Placement and Support

Reconnection to country cultural support

Aboriginal Children's Healing Unit

Section 18 Guardianship Project

Community development and support

Koorie Connect

Community development programs

Cultural programs

Cultural resources

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Corporate and internal services

Continuous Quality Improvement

Child and family welfare projects

Human Resources

Finance

Facilities and contracts

Information Technology

Information Management

Internal and external training

Organisational development and partnerships

Communication and Marketing



Possum-skin cloak project

'Being part of this project has helped me grow as a person actually. I've learnt more about my culture.' *Sharna, 16*

'Making the possum-skin cloaks has helped me explain my feelings. It has made me feel proud!' *Ruby, 12*



To enjoy a
childhood without
Fear

Aboriginal children have the right to enjoy a childhood without worry or fear. A stable home life and loving adults are vital for cultivating a child's sense of play. With consistent adult care and support, and regular contact with children their own age they can explore the world around them and develop relationships, free from the stress of danger or neglect.

CORPORATE SERVICES

VACCA's reputation for the work it does with Aboriginal children, young people and families remains strong, and its partnerships within the Aboriginal community continue to flourish. Our vision for cultural connectedness, wellbeing and safety for our people is at the heart of all that we do.

Our workforce are key to realising this vision, and VACCA's HR strategy focuses on enhancing skills, resilience, and employment opportunities, increasing representation of Aboriginal Leadership within the organisation, and improving Aboriginal staff retention and recruitment.

Financial position

Total income for the 2012/2013 year increased by 14.81 percent to an actual income of \$18.3 million. Our overall financial results were a net operating deficit of \$399,501 after a depreciation expense of \$315,197. This result fell within our budgeted expectations where the organisation had planned and provided for substantial investment in core infrastructure. The roll out of a new finance system – and a HR and payroll system – to manage growth was a large factor in the net operating deficit.

VACCA continues to have a healthy balance sheet, which is vital to ensure the organisation can navigate the difficult economic environment ahead.

Workforce and infrastructure initiatives

- Implemented a new finance system that efficiently accounts for and reports on more than 70 programs.
- A new system to centralise information about VACCA's clients will allow better analysis and understanding of our client base.
- Relocated our southern regional office to Dandenong, as well as co-locating our Community Care program with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service in Preston to accommodate growing staff numbers.
- Increased investment in mobile technology for staff to improve remote access to work-related information.
- 25 staff attended the fifth Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care annual conference in Cairns, with many invited to run workshops, presentations and an interactive stall.
- Delivered Information Management training to all staff and completed an IT Directory restructure.
- Influenza vaccinations and health checks for all staff continued as part of our staff wellbeing practice.

- Strengthened VACCA's governance with a Risk Management Audit Sub Committee as well as a Policy Committee.
- Strengthened our supervision practice with a new Supervision Framework and guidelines.

Celebrating success

- Obtained agency accreditation from Quality Innovation Performance (formally QICSA) in March 2013. VACCA achieved 'exceeding expectations' ratings for five quality standards audited.
- Implemented a Koorie Youth Traineeship program in partnership with Mackillop Family Services. The goal of the program is to provide employment opportunities, skills development and a Business Certificate 3 qualification for young Aboriginals.
- Fleet Coordinator, Melinda Brown was nominated for the Australasian Fleet Management Association Fleet Manager of the Year Award.

EARLY INTERVENTION AND FAMILY SERVICES

The Early Intervention and Family Services (EI&FS) team work with families to promote family wellbeing, participation in the broader community and to offer support in accessing other services. Through its programs, EI&FS provides families with a range of options for culturally responsive support in times of need, with a focus on positive parenting and family interaction to promote children's development.

Integrated Family Services

In the past year EI&FS have partnered with Berry Street, Child FIRST and Child Protection to deliver the L17 Triage Pilot Project. The project concerns L17 reports received by police relating to family violence incidents received by Child Protection that do not meet its threshold for investigation.

VACCA's presence at triage meetings provided Aboriginal families with cultural consultation, advocacy services and a seamless pathway to appropriate programs within EI&FS. Through early intervention and an individually targeted service response, it is anticipated that families will have less need to involve Child Protection.

Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making

The Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making (AFLDM) Program underwent statewide service reform in line with a new government model of convening conferences in the Investigation Phase of Child Protection.

The target group are children who are subject to a protective investigation where the protective concerns have been substantiated, as well as families identified for possible closure or families that require further protective intervention after substantiation.

This model is delivered in partnership with the Community Convenor, Department of Human Services (DHS) Convenor and an Elder. It has been operational since January 2013, with 35 referrals (35 families, 81 children) received.

Koorie Youth Leadership in Action

The Koorie Youth Leadership in Action (KYLA) Program is focused on the strengths of each young person and their capacity to make positive choices. The program promotes culture and an intrinsic understanding of each person's place in the community as essential elements in building a secure self-image. This self-image is the foundation for mature and positive choices in life.

The program was developed for young Koories aged between 10–17 residing or attending school in the north or west metropolitan regions of Melbourne who are experiencing personal challenges and a disconnection from education, employment and community.

Early Years

The Early Years program provides four parent-supported playgroups in the north and west. This year, playgroups in Darebin, Hume and Whittlesea local council areas were joined by a new playgroup in Melton. The program has given us greater levels of access to the local Aboriginal community, making it our most successful venture to date.

We are also creating a curriculum-based program that will engage other agencies and, in conjunction with families, provide a strong base for further engagement. Specialist program facilitators will provide services such as maternal and child health, school readiness, medical and dental, art, language and literacy, and educational programs to support parents with children in their early years while providing a strong cultural base.

'I learned to be a role model to my son, be confident in who I am, and how to talk to my boy about his culture.'

Participant in VACCA's Koorie Faces program delivered by John Wayne Parsons and Namatjira Morgan at the Wangaratta Justice Centre.

EASTERN VACCA

Located in Ringwood, Eastern VACCA have been instrumental in developing VACCA's presence in Melbourne's inner east. Following a period of rapid growth, all programs are operating and we are already seeing the positive results achieved by families working with Eastern VACCA staff. Our focus this year was on strengthening links with other agencies in the region and with the Aboriginal families we support through our range of services. Our partnerships with mainstream agencies also allow us to reach more Aboriginal families and provide training for non-indigenous staff caring for Aboriginal children.

As well as advocating for Aboriginal children in out of home care and empowering families, reuniting family members is an important part of our work, and vital for healing children and young people who have experienced the trauma of separation.

Highlights and achievements

- The opening of our new office marked the start of a busy and successful year.
- As part of Child Protection Week, the Eastern VACCA office hosted an afternoon attended by senior regional DHS staff and the director – a great way to celebrate our work.
- We obtained funding to run the Koori FaCES Program, a five-week intensive parenting program for the eastern community.

- Eastern VACCA's Integrated Family Support (IFS) program increased its business by over 65 percent, with 1.6 Family Support workers who provide support and advocacy to families. This is proof of the community's increasing confidence in IFS services and a remarkable achievement.
- With a full time worker in the Aboriginal Liaison Worker (ALW) role, referrals into our IFS program have increased to an average of one new referral a fortnight. The presence of our ALW at eastern Child FIRST sites, Connections UnitingCare, and Anglicare has enhanced awareness of resources and services available to the eastern Aboriginal Community.
- The ALW developed relationships with Cradle to Kinder, working closely with young mothers expecting or with young children.
- Our Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making (AFLDM) program remains pivotal for creating referral pathways into Eastern VACCA programs. Through AFLDM, Eastern VACCA recently supported the reconnection of three children with their paternal family in Cairns, with the support of our IFS program.
- Eastern VACCA's Cultural Support Program program has undertaken cultural support plans for all the children in the eastern region on Guardianship Orders.

- The Koori Cultural Support and Placement Program (KCSP&P) has advocated strongly for children in care and has seen the commencement of sibling access for three children in two out-of-home care placements.
- KCSP&P has established sound links with Anglicare to support their non-Indigenous workers caring for Aboriginal children, and access to the VACCA training unit ensures Anglicare workers have the opportunity to undertake appropriate foster care training.

'People said to me VACCA could help me and I thought no way. Now you guys are the only people I trust.'

Grandmother, Dhum Djirri Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making

Aboriginal children are entitled to social services and resources that are the foundation for healthy growth and positive choices in later life. These include access to education and healthcare, the development of social and emotional wellbeing, and access to high quality, culturally responsive and competent community services (mainstream and Aboriginal).



To grow up
strong
and
healthy

MORWELL VACCA

VACCA Morwell provides child and family services to the Aboriginal community in the Gippsland region. This year was marked by an expansion of our services, with a new facility in Morwell for women and children fleeing family violence, a new contract to manage a statewide crisis accommodation and support service, and involvement in a new area of work through a partnership with Latrobe Community Health Service.

Providing a culturally appropriate service response with Aboriginal staff remains central to what we do, whether we are combating violence against women, supporting families of young people with a mental illness or helping children leaving state care.

Highly competent, dedicated Morwell staff continue to help Aboriginal young people and families while adapting to a changing work environment and responding to the personal challenges of our work.

Highlights and achievements

- Winning the contract to manage Orana Gonyah, a new statewide Aboriginal Women and Children's Crisis Accommodation and Support Service being built in Morwell. Construction is well underway, as is the program development work, including recruitment and training of staff. The refuge is expected to be operational in early January 2014.
- A new partnership with Latrobe Community Health Service to co-deliver the Targeted Community Care (Mental Health) Program. The program provides a targeted approach to supporting Aboriginal children and young people who have a mental illness or are at risk of mental illness, while supporting their family.
- Conducting a very successful two-day camp for young people leaving care. The focus was on adventure activities, personal development and creating links with a range of local service providers who can assist young people in their pathways to good health, education, housing, and wellbeing.
- Initiating the inaugural staff retreat at Wattle Point, which enabled staff to get away together for the first time for a mix of work, cultural and wellbeing activities. Staff said that they felt refreshed and were able to recharge their batteries.

Bianca, 11 years old

Bianca is progressing really well at school after starting the year with intensive in-school support from the Martial Arts Therapy Program, and has now transitioned to having an integration aid. Bianca started the year having a one-on-one worker with her at recess and lunch times to help with her social interactions, and now she has a small group of school friends that she can play with independently. She is now doing five full days at school and the principal and teachers are really proud of her achievements since starting primary school.

Bianca recently nominated herself for student council, giving a wonderful speech about why she should be elected, noting her strengths as, 'being able to help you with anything at any time' and having a great sense of humour. She continues to amaze her care team with her progress.

SOUTHERN VACCA

Southern VACCA provide a range of child and family services to the Aboriginal community in Melbourne's inner south. 'Connected by Culture', VACCA's brand tagline, has become something to live and work by, and this year's achievements and celebrations are testament to the importance of culture in engaging children and young people and fostering a strong link between VACCA and the Aboriginal community.

Positive feedback from our funders and auditors, successful partnerships, and official recognition of our work drive us to provide better care and continue responding to family needs with innovative programs and services.

Highlights and achievements

- Running our first cultural camp in Grantville for children in out-of-home care. The connections children made with each other and the staff and volunteers have been fantastic and parent feedback was excellent.
- Putting together an event in partnership with the Cranbourne Botanical Gardens, Communities for Children, Best Start, Southern VACCA and the City of Casey as part of NAIDOC week.

- Co-hosting an event for the National Aboriginal and Islanders Children's Day in partnership with the Dandenong and District Aboriginal Co-Op, a first step in cementing a meaningful partnership between our local co-op and Out of Home Care.
- Out of Home Care provided the Books in Home program to 33 children to date. This has proven to be a favourite for families, with 50 children on the list for the next run.

- Recruitment of foster carers continues to challenge us and affects the number of placements we can provide. We are assessing and training five new carers and have seen an increase in our kinship carers, where children remain in the care of their families.

- Two Southern VACCA team leaders were trained in and delivered our first Koorie FaCES program last year, with the second program starting in October 2013. This program is an important tool for creating a welcoming path and fostering a strong connection to VACCA in the community.

- The Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making program has taught us much about assisting our families to navigate systems and negotiate in the best interests of our children. It also presents opportunities to enhance other professionals' understanding of culture and alternate ways of doing business.

- We continue to develop key partnerships. Aside from those already mentioned Southern VACCA also secured a full time position based in Doveton with Family Life's SHINE program.
- Southern VACCA were proud recipients of the Regional Koorie Community Justice Children and Youth Award 2013 and a statewide certificate of appreciation.

In memory of Uncle Reg

Our planning day in November 2012 was to be the last time we would see our much loved and respected Elder, Uncle Reg Blow. Although we knew he had been unwell we hadn't realised that Uncle Reg had discharged himself from hospital to fulfill his endless commitment to our community. We were transfixed by his wisdom and knowledge and enjoyed everything he passed on to us. Sadly, he passed away six weeks later and his loss was felt throughout Southern VACCA.

LAKIDJEKA ABORIGINAL CHILD SPECIALIST ADVICE SUPPORT SERVICE

Celebrating 10 years

Lakidjeka Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice Support Service (ACSASS) meets the obligations of the VACCA/Department of Human Services (DHS) Protocol through its Intake, after hours and regional services across the state.

One of our highlights this year was Lakidjeka's 10-year anniversary. The partnership between VACCA and the state government began in 1978 and was further strengthened by the 1992 Protocol between VACCA and the Department of Health and Community Services. Initially the protocol was unfunded and VACCA utilized commonwealth funding to deliver what was known then as the Lakidjeka Crisis Service. Our CEO Muriel Bamblett spoke of VACCA's determination to ensure the protocol was acknowledged and appropriately funded by state government. A joint review process was undertaken with Aboriginal communities known as *The Continued Journey*, which confirmed the need for a new and resourced protocol, and further lobbying ensured that the report's recommendations became a reality.

Thanks to people such as Muriel, Connie Salamone, Rodney Monohan from VACCA and Jeannie McIntyre and Wendy Mayne from DHS, a further protocol was developed in 2002, which alongside the Mildura Aboriginal Cooperative finally saw the funding of what we know as Lakidjeka ACSASS.

Throughout its 10 years ACSASS has provided ongoing advice and case consultation directly to Child Protection on culturally appropriate intervention in respect of all significant decisions.

Children's rights

Despite the challenges encountered in the last 10 years, Lakidjeka maintains that all Aboriginal children and young people's rights should be upheld and that they are entitled to have specialist Aboriginal workers advise Child Protection on how to best meet their needs and keep them safe.

A service recognised for its best practice by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), and the Australian Human Rights Commission, Lakidjeka will continue to advocate for Aboriginal children regardless of where they reside as part of VACCA's vision of self-determination and the realisation of Aboriginal Guardianship. A recent SNAICC report looking at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in child protection decision making titled 'Whose voice counts?' echoes our concern that funding for the protocol has not increased since 2005, despite increased demand for the service.

Other highlights for the year

Given the particularly challenging nature of their work, the wellbeing of Lakidjeka workers is a priority. Throughout the year workers participated in a number of wellbeing activities and meetings (a memorable example being a trip away to the snow to run our own version of 'The Amazing Race').

Some workers attended the SNAICC Conference in Cairns, while others demonstrated the work of Lakidjeka through presentations at other local and interstate conferences.

While some would not describe being involved in agency Registration and Standards as necessarily a highlight, it did provide an opportunity to actively reflect and improve a number of our systems and processes. Where possible we used a team approach in developing our manuals and service information, enabling us to embed a strong Aboriginal voice throughout and bringing us back to our purpose: protecting the safety and cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people – our clients.

LINK-UP

We work with the Stolen Generations – any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander who was removed, adopted, fostered or placed in an institution. In our work we are continually amazed by the resilience of our people, and the strong bonds between families who were kept apart but always longed to be with those that share their bloodline.

Highlights and achievements

- There were nine reunions held during the year, including a total of 13 clients who met family or who held a graveside reunion with a found loved one.
- In February our book 'Where Were You?' was launched at Federation Square at an event marking the fifth anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations. In the book Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people across Victoria reveal where they were and what they felt when the then Prime Minister of Australia, Hon. Kevin Rudd made the National Apology.
- In March we held a healing camp for clients at Queenscliff that included cultural and recreational activities. Based on feedback it was a very successful event that created many happy memories.

- In April a pilot Culture and Art Healing program was held in Shepparton. A first for Link-Up, it taught us much about engaging with the Bringing Them Home worker and the local Aboriginal community to produce a program for the Stolen Generations in country areas.
- In May we marked Sorry Day with morning tea at the Link-Up office followed by a major event co-organised with Connecting Home at the Melbourne Museum where speakers included a former client who told her poignant story about finding her family.

Client reunions are the focus of our work. No client reunion is the same, just as no client's story is the same. But there are the common themes of loss, trauma, frustration, anger and hopelessness.

As a program, Link-Up is keen to improve what we do and how we do it especially because it means we can provide a better service to the Stolen Generations. During 2013 Link-Up not only received a good result from the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Risk Assessment but also received great feedback from the Quality Innovation Performance assessors who conducted the audit of VACCA against the Quality Improvement Council standards. This was a great outcome for Link-Up and for VACCA.

'For a first review against the QIC and DHS standards VACCA did extremely well with particular strengths in collaboration, strategic positioning, contributing to good practice and building the capacity of its community. The team also noted its strength in understanding and supporting, not only Aboriginal people, but the wider welfare community involved in supporting its client group. Of particular note was the demonstrated commitment to ensuring that children and young people remained connected to family, friends and community in situations where they could not live at home.'

Quality Improvement & Community Services Accreditation [2013] Final Department of Human Services Accreditation Review Report. Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. 12–15 March 2013

Family networks are key to creating resilient strong communities. The culture and identity for Aboriginal children and young people is part of a deep spiritual connection to Country and their ancestors. Knowing who they are and where they come from; knowing about their culture, their Elders and our strong Aboriginal leaders: this knowledge and connection to culture gives them the strength and support to look to the future with confidence.



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING UNIT

VACCA's Training Unit provides staff with a variety of training programs from induction to casework. Externally, the unit supports mainstream agencies to develop their own cultural competency and work towards respectful and culturally safe engagement.

The Community Development Unit provides a consistent service to families that need emergency relief, and referrals to a range of mainstream and Aboriginal services through the Koorie Connect service. As well as the Koorie FaCES family-strengthening program, the unit now offers a new financial literacy program called My Moola. Funding to develop an energy efficiency program has also been secured.

Highlights and achievements

- Delivering 28 training programs for staff, including inductions, a workshop for non-Aboriginal staff starting at VACCA, an introduction to casework for Aboriginal staff, Understanding childhood development training, first aid and mental health first aid.
- Providing two staff in-services to bring over 200 VACCA staff together and provide a space to connect, celebrate achievements and share a unified vision.
- 11 VACCA staff completed certificates in Advanced Office Administration and a Certificate IV in Child, Youth and Family through Kangan TAFE.
- Delivering foster carer training to non-Aboriginal VACCA and external foster carers.
- Delivering 12 workshops to Anglicare, Mackillop, Oz Child, Vincent Care, The Smith Family and the Queen Elizabeth Centre, including the rollout of four programs to Family Life.
- Delivering two DHS-funded Train the Trainer programs in foster care recruitment and assessment.
- Delivering board training and Leading a culturally competent organisation training to Mackillop Family Services, Anglicare and Oz Child.
- Delivering four financial literacy programs for Aboriginal community members and secured funding for four more programs over the coming financial year.
- Delivering four Koorie FaCES family strengthening programs within five Victorian Correctional centres.
- Delivering Koorie FaCES Train the trainer programs to four Victorian accredited childcare organisations wishing to deliver the program in their own region.
- Securing funding for the Koorie Energy Efficiency Project in partnership with Kildonan UnitingCare, which will employ two community development workers to provide energy efficiency community information workshops and conduct home energy audits until 2016.
- Koorie Connect provided a service to over 1150 community members through referrals to mainstream and Aboriginal services, emergency relief, phone and internet access, and a range of support options.

COMMUNITY CARE

Community Care is an amalgam of programs including the Aboriginal Children's Healing Team, Foster Care, Permanent Care and Stability Planning, Leaving Care, Residential Care and Cultural Support programs. The Aboriginal children's healing team are a central point for developing an integrated, culturally appropriate and trauma-informed approach to working with Aboriginal children and families across VACCA, combining theories of trauma, neurobiology, attachment, and resilience to help understand and respond to Aboriginal children's trauma.

Children who have experienced significant trauma have different needs and we must combine good strong cultural practices with theory to make a lasting difference.

Highlights and achievements

- In February VACCA relocated Community Care staff to an office in Preston with improved amenities and a closer link to community.
- At the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care conference in June, Yolanda Finette and Kalimna Jackomos presented VACCA's model of cultural support planning to an overwhelmingly positive response. Organisations across the country have since contacted program staff for advice on how they can implement the model.
- Receiving funding to develop a Connection to Country pilot program, which will organise trips for out-of-home care children to reconnect to family, community and traditional lands.
- Embedding cultural support planning across all programs, particularly for children in out of home care. As well as creating a meaningful cultural journey for children, the cultural support plan becomes a document that they live and breathe everyday – and a tool for empowering them in the process.
- Organising the first reconnection trip for two out-of-home-care children to Far North Queensland as part of the Connection to Country pilot program. The program organises trips across Australia to reconnect children to family, community, culture and their traditional lands.
- As part of VACCA's continuous quality improvement, the Residential Care program was subject to review, which recommended ways of enhancing the operation of the program. We have implemented many of the recommendations and will be ensuring residential care is a key focus for the next year.
- Funding of residential services is a significant issue across Victoria. As part of a coalition of residential services seeking more appropriate funding, VACCA been involved in a costing exercise that shows significant additional funding is required to sustain good quality care in the future.
- Entering a partnership with Berry Street which will enable VACCA to continue to case manage a sibling group one of whom is in Berry Street's care. Both agencies see this partnership as a means of enhancing expertise and sharing resources in working with very vulnerable children.
- Presenting at this year's all-staff in-service, residential care staff demonstrated the complexity of their work and their commitment to improved outcomes for the children in residential care.

Connecting to Sea Country project

'What I learnt is to respect the land and the baang (water); to think about the barerarengar (Country), warreeny (ocean); to look after our bubup (children).

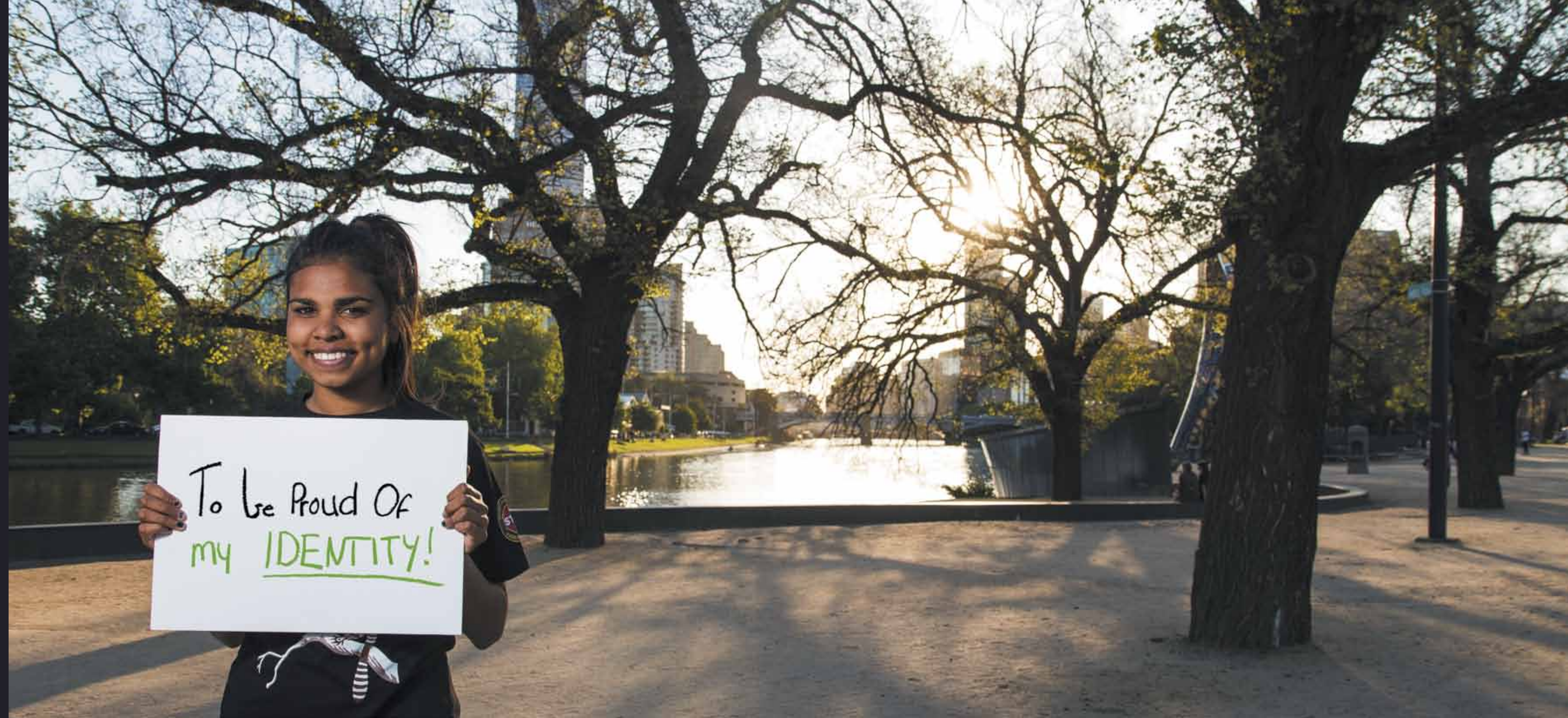
Maria, 15

'I learned the importance of sharing stories. If they aren't shared they'll be lost forever!'

Latisha, 12



Aboriginal children and young people belong to one of the oldest living cultures in the world. They have the right to their Aboriginal identity and to be valued and respected. Aboriginal children and young people have the right to participate in their culture, express their identity and feel proud.



VACCA CULTURAL PROGRAMS

At VACCA we believe the key for young people to have a strong future is to have a strong culture, to know where they come from, who they are and to be proud to say that they are Aboriginal.

Our cultural programs provide opportunities for Aboriginal children and young people to connect with Elders, musicians and artists from the community so they can learn about and actively contribute to their own culture in ways that are relevant and meaningful to them.

Our cultural programs aim to:

- Strengthen young people's experience, understanding and knowledge of Aboriginal culture.
- Build respectful relationships with local Aboriginal Elders and artists who become positive role models and mentors to the young participants.
- Support young Aboriginal people to participate in, and contribute to the maintenance and revival of, Victorian Aboriginal cultural practices and arts.



Tegan, 14 years old

Teachers at Victorian College for the Deaf consistently praise Tegan for her eagerness to learn, and to understand new ideas – she loves to read. Recently Tegan led her class through a lesson about the Dreamtime, recounting her experiences participating in the possum-skin cloak workshop run by VACCA and a cultural dance at Eastland shopping centre with the Mullum Mullum Centre. She was nominated to attend an interstate deaf athletics competition, and is entering an AUSLAN competition where she is signing a dreamtime story. Tegan is a real inspiration and a kind hearted, proud young Aboriginal woman who always gives new challenges a red-hot go.

KINSHIP CARE

The Kinship Care program is based on our strong belief that keeping Aboriginal children connected to their Aboriginal family and culture is critical to their health and wellbeing.

Our greatest achievement this year has been reuniting children and sibling groups with their Aboriginal families and community: a 12 year old having increased access with her mother and siblings; six children having regular sibling and parental access; another six children having established siblings access; five children having reconnected and access with their mum and siblings; four children being permanently placed with their Aboriginal family members. The commitment of Kinship Care staff to achieving these outcomes is outstanding.

Highlights and achievements

- Supporting the reunification of children back to their parents as part of a process of family healing.
- Four of our young people proudly represented their views to the National Children's Commissioner.
- One kinship child attended an overseas trip with his carer – an amazing experience and a success for the child. Kinship staff later nominated the carer for an Aboriginal Kinship Carer's award.
- Kinship kids played an important role in the Possum Skin Cloak cultural activity that recently culminated in a children's exhibition at the Melbourne Museum.
- Kinship kids attended cultural events, such as AFL Dreamtime and NAIDOC week events, and one particular child will participate in a traditional dance performance at VACCA's upcoming Wominjeka festival.
- Participating in a statewide evaluation of the Aboriginal Kinship Care model to obtain evidence to support our request to extend funding for key service components beyond June 2014.
- The Kinship Care team leader and program manager's strong role in the ongoing development of the Guardianship Project, with some kinship children now being case-managed by the Guardianship Team.
- Hosting a recent Aboriginal carers gathering where a new online resource called 'Supporting Carers' was launched to great response from Kinship Care - and mainstream kinship carers.
- The wonderful, creative work to strengthen the relationship between six siblings in four different placements will be recognised in upcoming DHS publication 'Good Practice: a statewide snapshot'. The article will also acknowledge the good collaborative work between the Kinship Care and the NW Community Care programs.
- Lastly, we congratulate Kinship Team Leader Lace Curphey who we sponsored on her walk from Sydney to Melbourne to raise funds for cancer research – 'A Million Steps for a Cure'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

Funders

Philanthropic

- ANZ Trustees
- Flora and Frank Leith Trust
- Inner North Community Foundation
- John T Reid Charitable Trusts
- Kimberley Foundation
- Kmart, Traralgon
- Lions Club, Traralgon
- Rotary Club, Drouin
- Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
- Newsboys Foundation
- Phyllis Connor Memorial Trust
- R. E. Ross Trust
- Soroptomists International (Gippsland)
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation

Government

- Victorian Department of Human Services
- Victorian Department of Justice through the Koori Justice Unit

- Victorian Department of Health through Closing the Health Gap
- Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
- Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing
- Australian Government through its Indigenous Cultural Support Program
- Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body
- Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations
- Melbourne City Council

ProBono

- Anglicare
- Ashurst Lawyers
- Charcoal Lane, Mission Australia
- Essendon Football Club
- Fenton Communications
- Footscray Community Arts Centre
- Minajalku (Victorian Aboriginal Health Service)
- Nelson Alexander Real Estate
- Stralliance
- Youth Worx
- Zen Architects

Partners

- Aborigines Advancement League
- Anglicare
- Berry Street including Take Two
- Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Melbourne Museum
- Child FIRST partners
- Jesuit Social Services
- La Trobe University
- Mackillop Family Services
- Queen Elizabeth Centre
- Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
- Songlines Aboriginal Music
- Uniting Care
 - Kildonan
 - Gippsland
 - Connections
- Victorian Aboriginal Community Service Association Limited
- Victorian Aboriginal Health Service
- Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
- Westcare

SUPPORTING VACCA

VACCA is largely dependent on government funding, however our most innovative programs are supported through independent sources of funding including philanthropy. Money is not the only way you can help.

Here's how you can help make a positive difference to the lives of the Aboriginal children, young people and families we work with.

Become a foster carer

Foster carers come from all types of backgrounds and families. What is important is that foster carers can provide a safe and nurturing environment for children and young people who need care and can go on a journey that is both difficult and rewarding and believe that they can make a positive difference in a child's life.

Volunteer at VACCA

VACCA is always looking for volunteers to help with activities and projects. We run various community events and programs throughout the year and are always looking for people to donate their time to support us.

Corporate giving

Corporations and businesses can help us through:

- Workplace Giving
- Volunteering
- Partnerships
- Gifts in Kind
- Pro Bono Services

Donate funds or goods

All donations are tax deductible as VACCA has DGR status.

Leave a gift in your will

For more information about how you can support VACCA in these or other ways contact us through:

Web: www.vacca.org
e-mail: supportus@vacca.org
Phone: 03 8388 1855 and ask for Deon or Nigel.



Aboriginal children and young people have the right to the best possible education, which means going to a school that meets their needs and helps them to reach their full potential. They should have every opportunity to achieve their dreams and grow up strong, smart and deadly.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Summarised Statement of Income and Expenditure for the Year Ended 30 June 2013

	2013 \$	2012 \$
Total Income	18,304,851	15,943,078
Total Expenses	18,704,352	15,761,190
Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to members of VACCA	-399,501	181,888

Summarised Statement of Financial Position (Balance Sheet) as at the Year Ended 30 June 2012

	2013 \$	2012 \$
Total Current Assets	8,243,452	8,970,210
Total Non-Current Assets	1,165,527	1,001,855
Total Assets	9,408,979	9,972,065
Total Current Liabilities	3,456,399	3,361,372
Total Non-Current Liabilities	605,854	864,481
Total Liabilities	4,062,253	4,225,853
Net Assets (Liabilities)	5,346,726	5,746,212
Total Equity	5,346,726	5,746,212

The above statements only provide a summary of the financial performance and position for the financial year ended 30 June 2012. For more detailed statements see the Annual Financial Report for the Year Ended 30th June 2012, please contact VACCA on vacca@vacca.org.

Aboriginal children have the right to be heard, to be nurtured and safe, and be free from violence, abuse and neglect. As a right, safety is not restricted to being free from physical and mental harm. Our children also have a right to cultural safety: to freely practice their culture, to have it respected, and to live without racism or discrimination.

