



VACCA

Connected by culture

celebrating

**40 YEARS**

of service

# Annual Report 2016 - 2017



# Margaret Elizabeth Tucker MBE (28-3-1904 – 23-8-1996)

Aunty Marj Tucker Patron of VACCA



The official Patron of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is Aunty Margaret Elizabeth Tucker (Lilardia), MBE.

Aunty Margaret Tucker was born in 1904. When Margaret was thirteen years old, she was snatched from school by the police and taken forcibly from her Aboriginal parents to be trained as a domestic servant.

Throughout her life, Aunty Marj (as she is affectionately called in the community) was determined to be united with her family. Her heartfelt concern for children who are separated from their families, motivated her to dedicate her life in the hope that one day all Australians will live together in harmony.

Aunty Marj was also particularly known for her musical talents as well as her political activism and involvement with such organisations as the Aborigines Advancement League and the Aboriginal Welfare Board in support of Aboriginal rights.

# CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF SERVICE

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## Wominjeka and Welcome

Wominjeka and welcome to the fortieth annual report of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. It will give you an idea of the wonderful things we have been doing in the last year and more. It also contains the wisdom of our Elders who have been part of VACCA over the life of our organisation.



# Chairperson's Statement



It gives me great pride to be associated with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) on its 40th anniversary and I am very pleased to present the annual report for 2016-17.

Times of rapid growth present challenges for any organisation, and last year presented some for VACCA. The State Government's policy of self-determination has had sweeping impacts across many sectors including ours. Opportunities like this occur once in a generation, and our response has been to roll out much-needed programs and services in family violence and child and family welfare. This process has involved significant expansions in staff numbers and consequently, a demand on systems and back-of-house functions. VACCA has risen to this challenge.

During times like these, we need to be attentive to compliance with standards, regulations and legislation which are all designed to improve the safety of children in our care and our other clients. We are also very aware of the need to take care of our staff without whom we could not provide the excellent services we do. Our staff are committed, passionate and dedicated to the children and adults with whom we work.

What we've achieved during 2016-17 would not be possible without the leadership and commitment of my fellow Board of Directors. This group of dedicated people provide their time and expertise on a voluntary basis and I want to commend them for this and their personal support to me as the Chairperson.

Lastly, I want to note and praise the tireless work of our CEO, Aunty Muriel Bamblett, who has devoted her life to VACCA for the past 20 years. Aside from being our CEO, Aunty Muriel was also Chairperson between 1997-1999. To have her leadership and continuity for half the life of VACCA has been a real strength and advantage for us. Her ideas and drive to achieve change in Aboriginal services for the benefit of our children and families has been a key factor in the improvements we are seeing in Victoria.

I invite you to join in celebrating our 40 years of service and thank you for your support and contribution to our achievements.

**James Atkinson**  
Chairperson



## CEO's Statement

Reflecting on our fortieth year in existence, and the road we have travelled it would be easy to highlight significant events and achievements however none of this would have been possible without the collective effort of our staff and directors. While I do not minimise our achievements they were only made possible by the people who have been through VACCA's doors.

Over the recent years we have been able to take advantage of changes in government policy because we are in a position to do so as an organisation.

This is because we have systems and staff who can respond to them by designing and implementing new programs and services. Supporting and enabling these services and programs is our Corporate Services Team including HR and Finance, Fleet management and Facilities management. And finally at the service end of the process we have dedicated, highly committed staff who's social justice principles result in making a real difference in the lives of community members.

I am very proud to say that responding to government initiatives created unusually high demand on our staff and infrastructure over the last twelve months but we rode this wave and have incorporated the new levels of activity into our day to day functioning.

Against this backdrop is a churning policy environment which does not stop.

Self-determination has been talked about since the years of the Whitlam and Fraser Commonwealth governments in the seventies. Treaty has been talked about since the Hawke government in the eighties. Both of these matters have been discussed in the abstract and yet now here we are decades later coming to grips with both of these concepts. The reality almost never matches up to the what we imagined and it is proving to be the case with both these matters as we grapple with the most basic of issues of who will represent us in the negotiations with government.

Although we may have thought that getting government to agree to support self-determination and negotiating a treaty was difficult, we are finding out that the really hard work began when the government agreed to support these demands.

We are in uncharted waters with both matters. We have been guided by thousands of years of culture and traditions in arriving where we are today but to safeguard our future we need to apply our ancient knowledge to the contemporary setting. In working through these processes we need to ensure that we do not set the benchmark too low and that we don't leave anyone behind because this is about taking all our people forward and not about the individual.



Aunty Muriel with Deputy Vice Chancellor Shane Houston of the University of Sydney after she was admitted to the degree of Doctor of Letters in Social Work (honoris causa) in April 2017.

The twelve months of this financial year has been one of following up the work of two key platforms of government policy and budget measures.

If 2015-2016 was about our contribution to the development of the government's policy approach to child welfare, family violence and Aboriginal affairs. 2016-2017 was when the actual work of implementing the reforms began. We rolled our sleeves up and got down to the work which has been eagerly anticipated.

I am most proud of our work to change the focus of child welfare to include strong cultural practices and of the changes made through increased funding for ACSASS, Cultural Support Planning, Cultural Portal, Family Finding, Return to Country and Children in Aboriginal Care (Section 18). We also are seeing significant action from government and CSO's in transitioning Aboriginal children back to the care and control of the Aboriginal organisations state-wide.

At VACCA we expanded our family violence services and continued to work with government on co-designing the new Hubs, began a concerted effort around foster-care recruitment, worked with our partners to begin the process of transitioning Aboriginal children to the care of ACCOs; discussed and debated the detail around Treaty development and worked with government on what self-determination means for us across all areas of our lives and what this means for government legislation, policy and program design.

I am proud to be the CEO of VACCA celebrating our 40th birthday. I am excited about where we are today on the verge of change that will take Aboriginal child and family welfare services in a direction which we want.

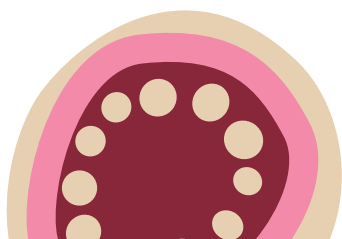
I want to thank all our staff for their work in bringing us to this point and look forward to moving on from here with them. To our Chairperson and our Board Directors, I want to express my deepest gratitude for their support and guidance and for the crucial role they play in ensuring our governance is of the highest standard.

VACCA through support from government, philanthropy, our community sector partners and the Aboriginal sector looks forward to the year ahead and thanks them for their ongoing support.

**Muriel Bamblett**  
Adjunct Professor AM CEO

## CEO Committees and Representative Groups

- Social Services Taskforce
- Roadmap Implementation Ministerial Advisory Committee
- Roadmap for Reform Universal Services WG
- Aboriginal Family Violence Steering Committee
- Aboriginal Children's Forum
- Aboriginal Council for Educational Research (ACER) Indigenous Education Advisory Board
- Commonwealth Redress Scheme Advisory Council
- Aboriginal Treaty Interim WG
- LOOKOUT Expert Insights Group
- Ministerial FV Prevention Taskforce
- Marrung Central Governance Committee
- Monash Uni Indigenous Advisory Council
- LaTrobe Social Work Course Advisory Committee
- Victorian Children's Council
- Taskforce 1000 Governance Committee
- NM Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group
- Indigenous FV Partnership Forum
- Aboriginal Justice Forum
- NM Aboriginal Strategic Governance Group
- Aust Institute of Family Studies Advisory Council
- ACES
- Aboriginal Health & Wellbeing Strategic Framework Expert Panel
- Transitioning Aboriginal Children to ACCO's Steering Committee
- ATSI WG Third Action Plan – National Framework
- Family Matters Champions Group
- Care not Custody WG (RIMAG Sub WG)
- Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health Initiative SC
- S18 Steering Group
- AFLDM Project Advisory Group (DHHS)
- Family Violence Child Protection Partnership
- Aboriginal Children and Families Strategy Action Plan



## Our Board

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



**James Atkinson** Chairperson (Yorta Yorta/ Bangerang)

Employed as Manager, Inclusive Education Practice Unit, Professional Practice and Leadership Division with the Department of Education and Training. James has worked across the Education sector from early childhood, schools, TAFE and higher education in the fields of policy development, stakeholder and project management. James also has a long track record of working for and with Aboriginal community organisations such as VACCA, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) and Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) and as a board member of others.



**Helen Kennedy** Vice Chairperson (Trawlwoolway/ Plairmairrener)

Employed as a Principal Policy Adviser, Aboriginal Social Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health with DHHS. Helen was Manager of the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) Family Counselling Service and has worked in Aboriginal Affairs for the last 16 years in a range of capacities in Aboriginal health, education and training.



**Deidre King** Treasurer (Gunditjmara)

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



**Jason King** Secretary (Gunditjmara)

Previously employed as CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS). Jason was on the Board of Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Incorporated (VACCHO) and National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) and was previously employed at VACCA.



**Margaret Atkinson** Director (Yorta Yorta/ Taungurung/Wurundjeri)

Employed as a Wurreker Broker with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI) Margaret was previously employed at the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-op and was employed at VACCA for over 9 years.



**Jason Kanoa** Director (Gunditjmara/Bunitj)

Employed as CEO of the Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative. Jason was employed as a Senior Project Officer, Indigenous Family Violence at DHHS and with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) as the Koori Caucus Executive Officer.

Rachael Drewitt elected to the Board in November 2016 resigned in May 2017 leaving a vacancy.



## Vision

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

## Purpose

To work towards the healing of Aboriginal community through strengthening the safety, wellbeing and cultural connectedness of vulnerable community members particularly children.

## Our Principles and Values

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

## Our People

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is now the largest organisation of its kind in Australia. We are an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation that support and advocate for the Aboriginal community. Our strength lies with our people. Our team is committed to the organisation's vision and values; advocates for our children and other vulnerable community members; and shows respect for, observance and compliance with Aboriginal cultural protocols, practice and ceremony. Our Aboriginality is what distinguishes us from mainstream services and what enables us to deliver the positive outcomes we achieve for our people.

## Our clients and our staff

VACCA continues to roll out its organisational and workforce development plan across the Agency. The plan's purpose is to strengthen our workforce capability through Aboriginal staff numbers, career opportunities and leadership opportunities within the organisation. Our achievements and developments to date are many and lay the foundations for VACCA to build upon its workforce plans, now and into the future.

Throughout the past year, VACCA has experienced incredible growth. The organisation's workforce increased by more than 31 per cent. This means that nearly 4000 Aboriginal children and families could be supported across the state, an increase of 16% when compared to the last financial year.

The scope and breadth of VACCA's services mean that it can provide holistic practice and implement programs that focus on early intervention and lead on self-determination. VACCA now has an office in Frankston, which is highlighted later in this report.

As VACCA continues to grow, we maintain a focus on recruitment of Aboriginal staff members who represent 51 per cent of our team. VACCA has exceeded its internal training targets with 660 participants.

As an organisation, VACCA actively supports our team to develop career pathways. This includes up-skilling and supporting team members to gain formal qualifications within their field. VACCA now has more than 25 team members who have undertaken

formal study in the past year. The organisation continues to support young Aboriginal people to develop career pathways and has continued to offer Aboriginal Traineeships as well as work experience placements.

At the start of 2017, VACCA implemented a new client services structure to support the substantial growth of the organisation. The new structure supports continuity of service and efficacy across its practices. A new director role was created to enhance practice and client service development. In addition, the Office of the CEO was created.

VACCA created the new role of Director of Family Violence, in response to increased response to family violence within Victoria.

As VACCA grows, it continues the emphasis on corporate support systems, including client data systems, that provides an intimate knowledge of the community. The focus on internal communications means that staff now have intranet access so they can more readily share information.

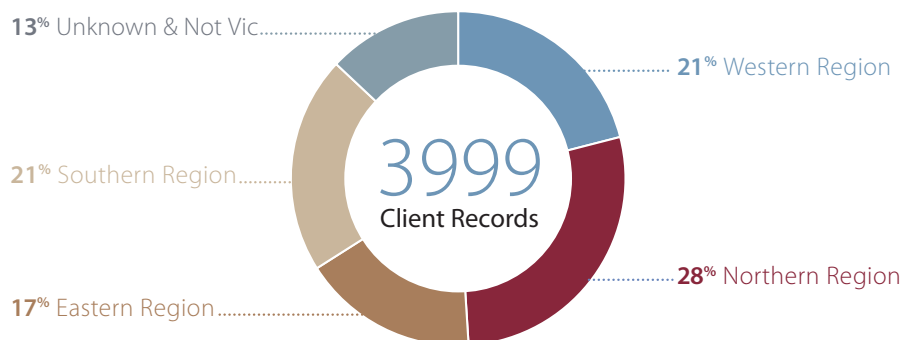
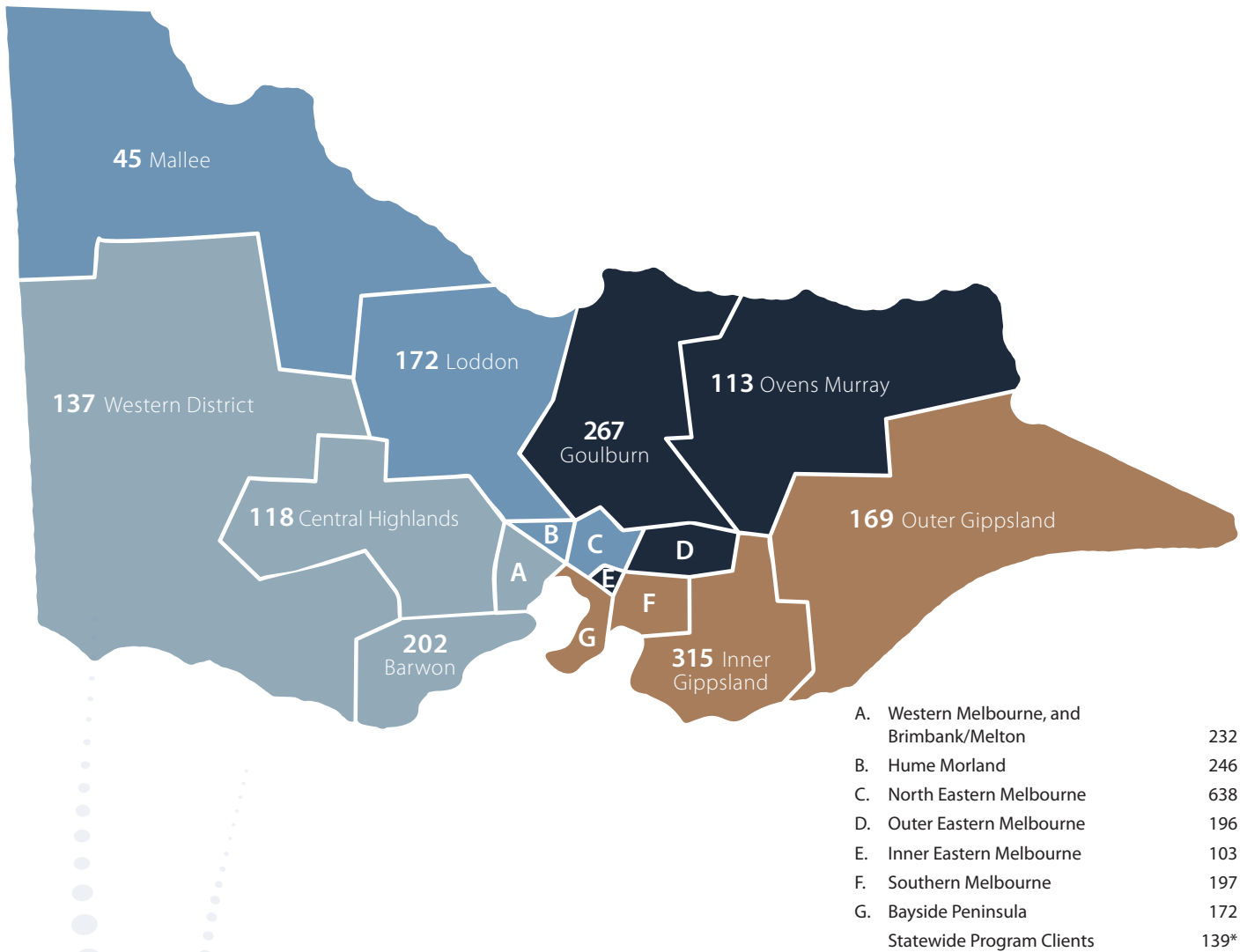
And VACCA continues to improve its environmental footprint through our Sustainability Plan and Committee who are also working on a procurement strategy.

VACCA operates under the premise that community is the backbone of the organisation. The support provided by the community is why VACCA is able to celebrate 40 years of service this year.



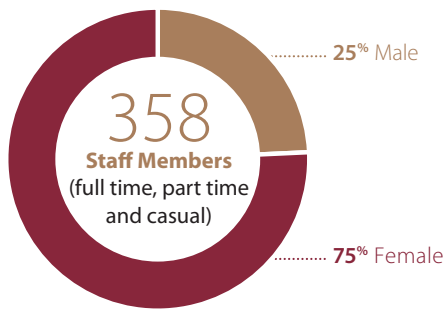
## Our Clients across Victoria

by DHHS Region and Local Government Area as of 30 June 2017 (active clients only)

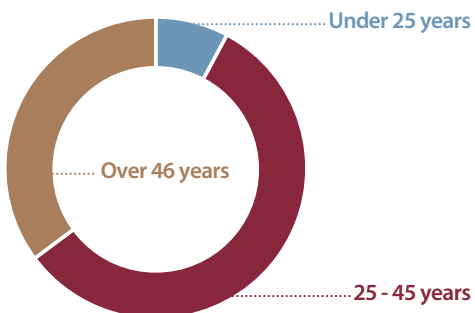


## Workforce highlights

### Staff Snapshot



### Staff by Age (full time and part time only)



- Designed a detailed three-year organisational and workforce development plan, identifying five key focus areas to progress the workforce vision.
- Developed an overarching learning and development policy promoting the need for continuous learning.
- Developed study and financial assistance policies to support staff pursuing further qualifications.
- Expanded VACCA's recruiting team to pursue a more systematic and specialised approach to recruiting. VACCA's workforce increased by 31 per cent to 350 staff members.
- 40 new Aboriginal staff members were employed increasing the portion of VACCA's Aboriginal workforce to 51 per cent of the organisation.
- Commenced an Aboriginal student internship program and Aboriginal student placement program. Five placements have been organised.
- Strengthened the induction program, introducing mandatory core client services modules, on the job learning and shadowing for new staff.
- Designed an intensive caseworker development training program and "Transition to Leadership" training program for staff.
- 35 VACCA residential care staff have progressed to obtain tertiary recognised qualifications - Certificate IV in Child, Youth and Family Intervention. All staff are expected to complete the course in 2017.
- Continued provision of high quality, well regarded internal training.
- Revised and simplified VACCA's Annual Performance and Development Appraisal along with specific associated training rolled out across the Agency.
- Completed a third year of the Koorie Youth Traineeship program, a partnership between Mackillop Family Services and VACCA.
- Developed a draft Wellbeing Plan to further support staff's emotional and social wellbeing at work. Strong wellbeing practices continue with influenza vaccinations available to staff, quarterly staff gatherings with presentations on healthy lifestyles, salary packaging, and Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) yoga lunchtime sessions.
- VACCA encourages the professional development and further education of staff. Approximately 20% of staff this year have undertaken formal qualifications, external short courses or attended conferences.

celebrating

**40 YEARS**  
of service

## Stories from our life members

### Ron James



Ron James is a multi-clan descendent of the Yorta Yorta, Gunnai Kurnai and Barapa Barapa clans. Ron became a VACCA Director in 1981 and spent 14 years on the board stepping down in 1995. At the same time, he was also the President of the Aborigines Advancement League (AAL) while working at the Aboriginal Housing Board. Ron was also a founding member of VACSAL. Ron became a VACCA Life Member in 1995.

"I've always been actively involved in Aboriginal affairs as a result of my grandfather, Shadrack James, who actually started a lot of these things here in Rumbalara. He did a lot of writing for William Cooper. In fact, he's William Cooper's brother in law." Ron went onto to serve 32 years in various roles in government, and has dedicated his life to championing the rights of Aboriginal communities both in Victoria and nationally.

Ron first met with Aunty Mollie Dyer when VACCA was based on Gertrude St, "I met with them before I got involved in Aboriginal affairs, actively involved, so that was a real eye opener. Mollie Dyer actually set the parameters of making the links between government and the community. She was someone that didn't go out and attack. Mollie Dyer was someone that actually went out and negotiated. She was a very good negotiator and so I think that's where the VACCA really got its grounding."

In those early days Ron reflects that "we were learning and finding our way in those days. But still very, very political. I think that was the part of VACCA that was really significant in them days was you had people in there like Marj Thorpe, Peter Rotumah and others that were prepared to challenge the establishment and the organisations. I think the key to VACCA in them days was they maintained that role. They always focused more -there was a political side of it, but their main focus was on child protection."

When asked to identify what was VACCA's most significant achievement without hesitation Ron declared, "I think the most significant achievement for VACCA was the adoption, you know we opposed adoption, so we played a key part, a key role in stopping that. I think the other key achievement of VACCA would be the involvement in contributing to the setup of other Aboriginal childcare agencies around the country. The importance of VACCA's role today is contributing to policy."

Ron's message of celebration for VACCA's 40th Anniversary is to *"I think just reflect and be proud of where VACCA's gone from those earlier days in the '70s when it was set up to where it's got to now and I think it's ... I think we've got to make sure that it does get big, but we still recognise and acknowledge where we're from."*

# Our Programs

VACCA now delivers more than 50 programs across the state. VACCA's experience and expertise in the delivery of therapeutic interventions are underpinned by culture, connection, and healing. VACCA designs develops and delivers programs with self-determination and an understanding that the intergenerational trauma experienced by our community requires intergenerational and community healing. We bring knowledge and appreciation that this healing occurs in the context of relationships, connection to culture, community, and land. And we acknowledge the resilience of Aboriginal cultures and strengths within our community.



## Foster Care

VACCA has established a foster care recruitment assessment and training program to focus on recruiting more foster carers for Aboriginal children in care. Each region now has dedicated resources to recruit and train foster carers. The newly established Client Services Practice and Development division provides program oversight to ensure a consistent approach to recruiting, training and supporting foster carers is provided. In addition, VACCA commissioned a review of its foster care program with the view of growing and developing the program. The program will now be responsible for supporting foster carers from non-Aboriginal services who will transfer to VACCA.

### *Celebration of our carers*

*VACCA would like to pay tribute to the many foster carers and kinship carers that help raise our kids.*

I have been a Foster Carer for VACCA for eight years. During that time I have had 39 children come into our care both respite and long term. The role as a foster carer at VACCA has at times been incredibly challenging but the rewards have been well worth it. As an Aboriginal carer it has been a privilege to have children come into my care who have been in mainstream placements with limited knowledge of their cultural heritage. My family and I have been able provide all children with knowledge, education and cultural experiences that has provided them with a strong connection to their history and culture. I can proudly state that all children that leave our home know they are Aboriginal and they feel proud and strong of their Aboriginality. I love seeing the difference in a child from when they arrive to when they leave.

*Val regarding her experience as a carer at VACCA.*



## Transfer of case management of Foster Care to VACCA

Central to VACCA's work is the importance of connection to family, community, and culture as essential to Aboriginal children's, safety, stability and ensuring that they have an ongoing sense of belonging. The Victorian Government's recognition that Aboriginal children and young people are more likely to thrive and achieve better outcomes when they are safe and cared for in a culturally connected environment is a positive step forward.

The Victorian Government has supported a commitment to advancing Aboriginal self-management and self-determination for Aboriginal people in Victoria. An example of this in practice is through the transition of care and case management of Aboriginal children from government and non-Aboriginal organisations to ACCOs. As Victoria's largest Aboriginal child welfare agency, VACCA will play a key role in this process.

Whilst VACCA continues to successfully deliver services, in accordance with DHHS standards—and at the same level as other community service organisations—our cultural expertise ensures that all Aboriginal children and young people have access to strengthening their own Aboriginal culture.

This is an exciting and positive advancement for Aboriginal people in Victoria and is strongly supported not only by organisations such as VACCA but by many service providers.

### **Government reforms support self determination and connection to culture**

Every Aboriginal child has the right to learn, practice and pass on their culture. Connection to culture is widely regarded as key to improving health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal children, families, and communities. The Victorian Government's reform agenda recognises the importance of cultural connection for children's long-term well being and is promoting Aboriginal self-determination and management.

A key strategy is supporting and facilitating Aboriginal communities, through ACCOs. This strategy will increase decision-making responsibility including planning, care and case management for vulnerable Aboriginal children subject to protection orders. This work will support self-determination and self-management of Aboriginal communities, help address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out of home care, and improve outcomes for vulnerable Aboriginal children and their families.



## Nugel and connection to culture

To make a difference in the lives of Aboriginal children on Protection Orders, VACCA needs to act differently. The VACCA Nugel program has made a commitment that children and families will feel involved in decision making, their voice will be heard and respected. Children in the program will grow up resilient with self-belief and identity, knowing who they are and where they belong. When VACCA communicates with families it will be clear, honest and respectful, understanding the importance of consultation on all occasions. VACCA will be honest with families about issues of safety and will assist them to get help and work through the concerns. VACCA will advocate for children to return home if it's safe for them to do so, and VACCA's practice will be grounded in an Aboriginal approach with relationships at the heart of everything it does.

## Nugel (Formerly Section 18 - Children Youth and Families Act)

In June 2016, the Hon Jenny Mikakos MP, Minister for Families and Children, announced key initiatives to support the empowerment of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to lead the delivery of services and support for Aboriginal children and young people at risk of entering, or in, out-of-home care.

Section 18 of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (The Act) allows the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to transfer specific functions and powers for an Aboriginal child on a Children's Court Protection Order, from DHHS to the Aboriginal CEO of an Aboriginal Organisation. VACCA completed a successful pilot program where 46% of the children were able to safely return to the care of their parents or family.

As a result of the successful pilot program in 2015-2017, VACCA was funded to implement 'Section 18' for 35 children. Since June 2017, VACCA now refers to the program as the VACCA Nugel program. This is from the Woiwurrung Language of the Kulin nation, Nugel means "belong".

The VACCA Nugel program involves significant responsibilities for children. The CEO and her delegates will now hold responsibilities previously held by the Secretary of DHHS, such as case planning and initiating court action. This includes making decisions about where and with whom the child lives, who the child can visit, where the child goes to school, their medical care and plans for their future. This is a new and exciting progression providing VACCA with an opportunity to do things differently for its children.

Due to the enormity and complexity of preparation for authorisation, no clients were engaged through this period. However, VACCA has successfully recruited the majority of Nugel positions in preparation for implementation. The program includes a dedicated program manager, team leader, and four caseworkers. The Nugel team has transitioned to sit within the Northern VACCA structure to ensure adequate support and integration with other complementary services delivered. The anticipated commencement of the program delivering services to clients is now in November 2017.

## VACCA In-house legal service

As part of being authorised under section 18 of the Children Youth and Families Act 2005, VACCA requires its own legal representation in the Children's Court.

Establishing an in-house legal service that can grow, as the number of children authorised under the Nugel program grows, will enable VACCA to provide legal advice and representation to the Nugel program. It will also empower VACCA in its broader role in the political arena to advocate for Aboriginal rights, law reform, and self-determination.

Having in-house legal services also means creating a model of legal service that is culturally appropriate, consistent, accessible and ongoing in its approach. VACCA's new in-house legal services part of the Client Services part of Client Services, Practice, and Development division at VACCA.

Alongside Nugel, establishing a legal service is a momentous achievement for an ACCO, and makes self-determination a reality for VACCA and the community it represents.

## Lakidjeka Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service (ACSASS)

In 2016-17, Lakidjeka ACSASS responded to approximately 6,437 reports, compared to 5,893 reports the previous year. Lakidjeka provided advice to Child Protection about whether these reports on Aboriginal children and young people should progress to be investigated. The service is crucial to clients as it aims to ensure that only those reports which cannot be managed by local support services, community and families, progress further for Child Protection investigation. Only when Aboriginal children and young people are believed to be at significant risk should an investigation take place.

The majority of these reports were taken by central Intake workers and additional reports also taken by senior workers who provide an 'After Hours Response'. The After Hours service provided consultation on 747 children.

This work provides a crucial diversion role away from Child Protection where it is safe to do so. Of all reports 40 per cent progressed to further investigation.

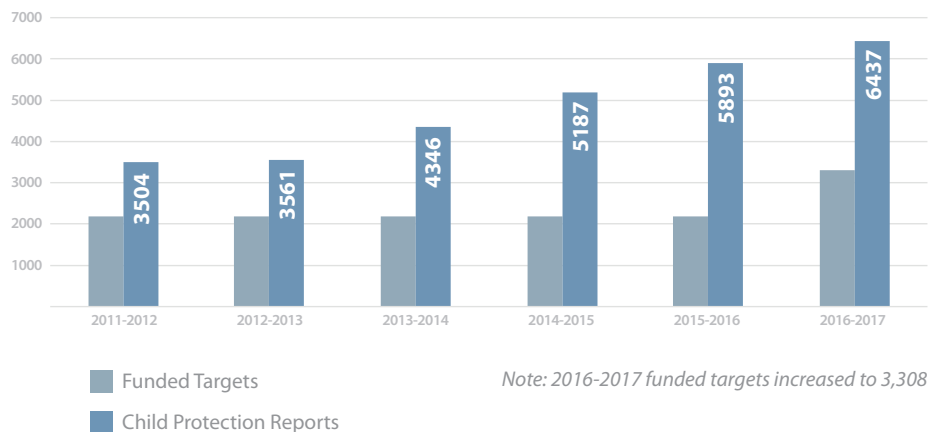
In addition to this function, Lakidjeka provides consultation to child protection on all key decisions for children and young people whilst they are involved with child protection. The establishment of two additional Lakidjeka teams - one in the western metropolitan area (now based at Werribee) and the other in the eastern metropolitan area (based at Ringwood) has improved Lakidjeka's local service delivery. This improved service delivery has been commended by stakeholders, Government, and community. These improvements were made possible through the increase in Lakidjeka ACSASS statewide funding announced in April 2016, and received in October 2016. The additional funding will continue to be made available for the 2017-18 financial year.

All Lakidjeka team members who undertake work with Child Protection are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Staff live in and are connected to their local community and some staff work and live on country.

The funding also enabled extra Lakidjeka ACSASS positions to be built into the statewide intake and most rural teams. There is also a dedicated position to finding family members in the early stages of cases being opened. While recruitment to positions can at times be difficult, increased investment in human resources are seeing some early benefits and new staff have joined the team.

This funding increase will result in more accessibility of Lakidjeka workers on the ground for Child Protection to consult with.

## Lakidjeka Funded Targets compared to reports taken by Lakidjeka



## Royal Commission Program

VACCA's Royal Commission into Institutional Response to Child Sexual Abuse support service has had another very busy year. As the Royal Commission begins to wind-up (concluding in December 2017), VACCA turned its focus onto transitioning clients, some of whom have been working with VACCA since 2013.

In total, VACCA has provided information and support to 85 Aboriginal people across Victoria and into NSW. VACCA's Royal Commission Program included providing information about the Royal Commission and what is involved in "telling your story" so that those impacted could make an informed decision about whether to come forward or not. VACCA has also provided support services to people in their private session, assisting them to access their records and making referrals to legal supports for those who wish to consider civil action against those agencies who were charged with their care.

VACCA continued to respond to Issues Papers and have input into Consultation Papers put out by the Royal Commission. It also attended and gave evidence in Public Hearings as required. VACCA provided submissions to four of the five Consultation Papers; seven of the 11 Issues papers, and gave evidence in five of the 57 Public Hearings held. Through the CEO Professor Muriel Bamblett's role on the Advisory Group, VACCA contributed extensively to the Research Report titled "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and child sexual abuse in institutional contexts".

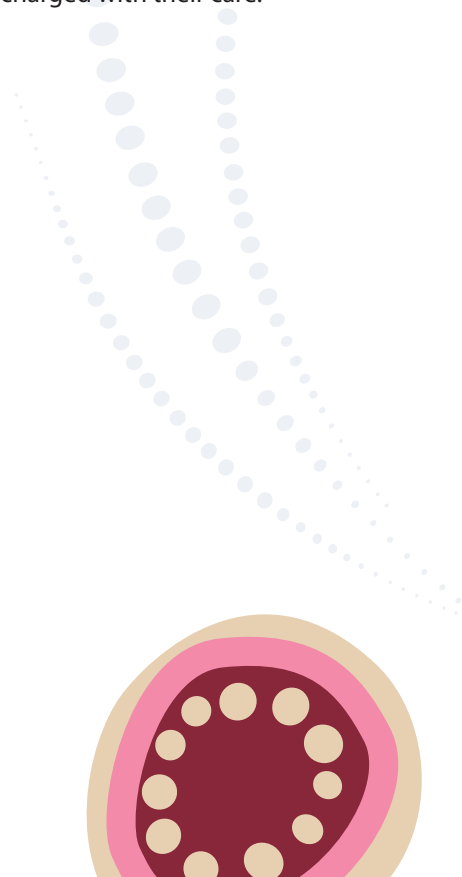
This component of VACCA's work has now concluded as the Royal Commission prepares its final report to the Commonwealth Government. The report is anticipated to be many volumes with a very large number of recommendations in a number of areas. VACCA is hopeful the recommendations will reflect the range of issues and concerns that have been raised by many clients. Of note is the issue of records and how devastating it can be for a client to be told there appears to be no record of their time in care, despite their clear recollection of being visited by "welfare" in their childhood.

## Target Care Packages

Targeted Care Packages (TCPs) help young people aged from 4 to 18 years old who have been in residential care to move towards independent living, move to living with their families or others. These packages also help young people not to enter Residential Care by providing intensive support to them and their carers. Aboriginal children requiring TCP's are exclusively referred to VACCA in Melbourne metro and inner Gippsland and through these packages, our team is helping Aboriginal families regain control of their children's lives by making the families central in the decision-making process.

VACCA now has a dedicated Targeted Care Package team that provides support across the North, South, East, West and Gippsland regions, and has established relationships with local agencies and DHHS in the regions.

TCPs have a strong cultural component and through these packages, VACCA can promote a child's links to their Aboriginality and their community. Through a cultural focus, and provision of Aboriginal mentors, TCPs are helping to strengthen the next generation of community members. The TCP team has achieved positive life changes for its clients and is providing them with a culturally strong future.



A 17-year old young woman had been in residential care for several years. She had complex and challenging behaviours at both the residential unit and at school. A TCP was designed to meet her needs, including a strong cultural activity component, an Aboriginal mentor, and a placement within an Aboriginal family. This young woman is now much more settled and better connected to community and culture and is re-engaged with her education and study.

# CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF SERVICE

## External Training

In 2016/2017, the external training unit had another successful year delivering a record number of 157 training sessions to 2214 participants.

2017 started off with the 4B Cultural Support Planning rollout, which saw the unit deliver 47 sessions over a period of six weeks to 1137 staff around the State.

The Child Safe Standards Project was another successful project involving delivery of eight sessions to 20 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO's). This project involved VACCA consulting with ACCO's and training them to then train their staff in their organisations to ensure compliance with the child safe standards.

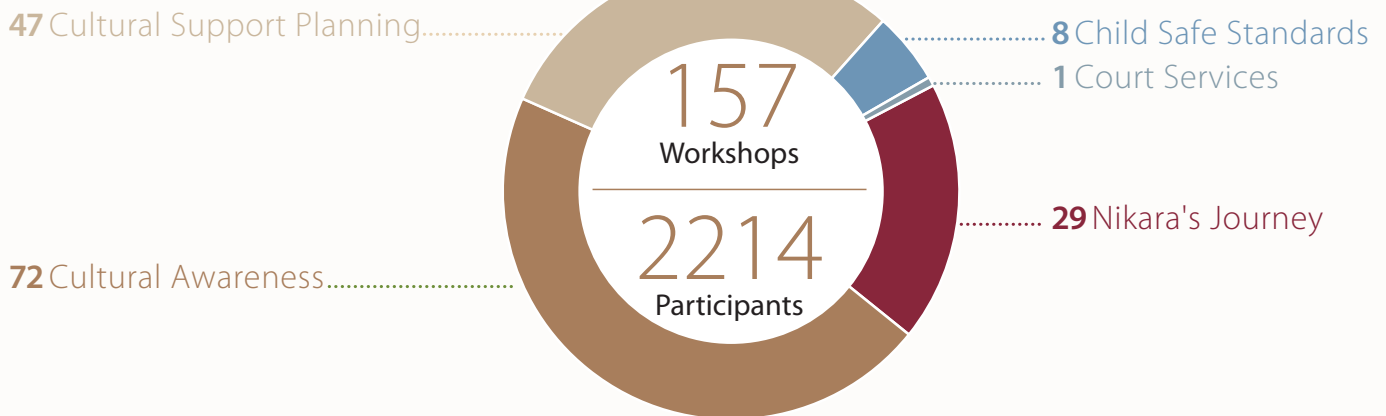
Other external training contracts VACCA continues to deliver is providing Berry Street staff with monthly cultural awareness training, and cultural awareness sessions for Mackillop Family Services to all their staff twice a month in their regions.

The unit has expanded each year and now employs seven Aboriginal staff to support the large amount of training that occurs each week across the state.

The external training unit has also successfully implemented an online registration system which will support the unit to provide more effective promotion and marketing and support the unit in providing a timely, professional service to our external stakeholders.

This is a very exciting time for the unit and VACCA as each year continues to grow.

## Training Workshops Delivered (Externally July 2016 - June 2017)



## Family Violence Therapeutic Teams

Currently, in Victoria 88 per cent of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care have experienced family violence. VACCA continues to build its knowledge and program delivery in the area of family violence and its devastating impact on Aboriginal children, women, men, and families. VACCA understands that primary prevention, early intervention, and tertiary responses must be culturally safe, appropriate and relevant to the needs of Aboriginal families.

VACCA's expertise in this area has attracted significant investment for the Family Violence Aboriginal Therapeutic Interventions Demonstration Projects. These projects aim to deliver against the Royal Commission's recommendations along with the Family Focused Therapy Programs to assist children and their parents overcome trauma and increase their safety. This is funded under the Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children 2010 – 2022.

VACCA believes that strategies and initiatives developed and led by local Aboriginal people are the most appropriate for addressing violence impacting Aboriginal families. VACCA is excited to be developing trauma-informed therapeutic approaches to working with Aboriginal families impacted by family violence within a broader framework of culture, connection, and healing.

VACCA's family violence team for these demonstration projects now includes 23 staff and is piloting services in 5 regions.

### **#Whatyoudontsee family violence campaign.**

#Whatyoudontsee family violence campaign features four short clips that focus on an Aboriginal family and their exposure to family violence. The clips were developed by VACCA to target the Aboriginal community. Most family violence clips focus on the impact on the adults and the impacts on children can be forgotten. This campaign focuses on one Aboriginal family and tells the story of the family violence in the home and the impact that it is having on the children and the children's relationships in and outside the home. These impacts include lack of concentration and unsettling behaviour at school, anxiety, anger, repeating learnt behaviour and the cycle of family violence.

The campaign was viewed publically at the SNAICC conference 2017 but will be officially launched late 2017.



VACCA acknowledges that violence is not normal or customary in Aboriginal culture and communities. Rather, this has primarily come about as a legacy of the genocidal violence that was perpetrated on Aboriginal nations and peoples through the practices of

European colonisation, forced child removal into abusive institutions and severing of ties to family and country, and the attempted eradication or assimilation of Aboriginal people over hundreds of years and many generations.

# Link-Up Victoria

National Link-Up Network  
Leadership Group and Lorraine  
Liddle Executive Director VACCA



The start of the year was very exciting for the Link-Up program because firstly, Link-Up was successful in recruiting new staff to all our newly created positions and secondly, the changes that were made are definitely providing Link-Up with the best opportunity to improve how it delivers services to the Community. The new positions are focused on specific areas of Link-Up's work and they enable staff to become more specialised, therefore more expert and knowledgeable about their area of work and consequently better armed to support our clients.

The Reunions Officers are responsible for planning and running reunions, and for the 2016/17 year, Link-Up conducted 11 reunions which supported a total of 43 clients. Six reunions were held interstate and remaining five were held in Victoria.

There is no reward greater in Link-Up's work than bringing a client and their family together on their traditional country. For some of the clients it has been a somewhat arduous journey, one full of stops and starts and for others, it can be a very short journey, but for all of them, we know it does

## Importance of our Partners

All of our programs are reliant on the good working relationships built up over time with key partners. In early 2017, Link-Up hosted a meeting of the National Link-Up Leadership Group Network which comprises representatives from all the Link-Up services from across Australia. The meetings were attended by representatives from Link-Up's funding body and guest speakers were from the Healing Foundation and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

Bringing Them Home (BTH) workers are established all over Australia and this network is an essential resource for Link-Up's program. Link-Up relies on BTH workers to provide local support to clients, assistance with various client or family issues, support for clients at reunions and assistance for clients family who live interstate and are waiting for a reunion.



Western Australia Reunion at Wangkatjunka Community 130 ks from Fitzroy Crossing

## Supporting our clients journey to reclaim their Aboriginal heritage

The focus of the Link-Up program are reunions. Reunions are about supporting clients' to reclaim their Aboriginal heritage, to know their connections, to learn about their traditional culture and country and to be reunited with their family. The Client Support Officers and the Administration and Records Officer positions are devoted to undertaking all the necessary research required to confirm and locate a client's family and establish their traditional connections. The Client Support Officers also carry out the sometimes lengthy task of trying to track down a family member (or members) who were removed as a baby and adopted out to a family who in some cases don't want them to be found.

take a lot of courage for our clients to take the final steps towards their reunion. All of Link-Up's clients are an inspiration, and it is Link-Up's motto... "it is an absolute honour to work with clients and to support them to meet their family, to walk on their country and to know their culture".

Link-Up believes that reunions provide much-needed healing for clients, for their family, for their community and traditional owner groups. Reunions don't heal all the wounds but they do bring closure to some of the pain of being separated from family; they can establish strong connections between family and they enhance knowledge about traditional culture and country to clients who often know very little about their culture.



Daria Atkinson Bringing Them Home Worker Metropolitan Region at VAHS Link Up Victoria Connecting Home National Sorry Day event at the AAL. Photo by Tyson Austin

## 20th Anniversary of the Bringing Them Home Report

2017 marked the 20th anniversary of the Bringing Them Home Report, so it was important that Link-Up commemorated the National Anniversary of the Apology held on 13th February, National Sorry Day held on 26th May and Reconciliation Week in the last week in May.

## Our Programs

### Out of Home Care, Placement and Support

- Kinship Care
- Kinship Care Reunification
- Extended Care (Foster Care)
- Therapeutic Residential Care and Residential Care
- Lead Tennant
- Leaving Care
- CIRC Education Support
- Family Finding
- Targeted Care Package (TCP)
- Permanent Care
- Cultural Support Planning
- Koorie Placement and Cultural Support
- Foster Care Assessment and Recruitment
- Return to Country

### Early Intervention and Family, Adult and Youth Services

- Early Years Support
  - Playgroups
  - Aboriginal Cradle to Kinder
  - Footprints For Success
- Family Support
  - Integrated Family Services
  - Family Mental Health Support
  - Aboriginal Stronger Families
  - Family Restorations
  - Footprints for Success
  - Child First
- Youth Support
  - Empower Youth
  - Staying Strong Camps
  - Homework Club
  - Youth Mentoring
  - Books In Homes
- Adult Support
  - Windook Dad's Group
  - Better Futures
- Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making

### Family Violence

- Orana Gonyah Crisis Accommodation and Support
- Integrated Family Violence
- Family Violence Case Management/Outreach
- Family Violence Therapeutic Services

### Specialist Programs

- Family Mental Health Support Services
- Homelessness Support Services
- Kurnai Youth Homelessness
- Wilam Support Service
- Koorie Kids Stay at School
- Koorie Connect
- Emergency Relief

### Justice Programs

- Koorie Women's Diversion
- Beyond Survival Program
- Barrug Mooup Youth Justice
- Staying Strong
- Local Justice Worker Program
- Kickback

### Cultural Strengthening Programs

- Possum Skin Cloak
- Koorie Tiddas Choir
- Art Mentoring

### Client Services Practice and Development

- Aboriginal Children's Healing Team

### Lakidjeka ACSASS

### Link-Up Victoria

### Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

### Research, Policy and Advocacy

### Nugel (formerly Section 18)

### Internal and External Training Programs

### Resource Development

### Legal Services

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**40 YEARS**  
of service

## Stories from our life members

### Aunty Fay Carter



Aunty Fay is a respected Elder of the Yorta Yorta – Dja Dja Wurrung clans. She was born in Echuca in 1935. Aunty Fay was a VACCA Director from 1980 – 1991 including seven years as Chairperson from 1983-1990. Aunty Fay was inducted as a Life Member in 1995.

Aunty Fay reflected on how her family history and upbringing led her to be involved with VACCA, "My interest in the child care agency was due to my background, I think. I was raised in a fringe dwelling situation. Our family walked off from the Cummeraganja walk-off in 1939 - I was four years old then and then we became fringe dwellers and I was raised on the flats at Mooroopna and I think I could say that I was privileged - even though it was hard times - I was privileged to have old people around me and my grandmother, who did most of our growing up - my grandmother raised 19 children on that river bank, keeping them away from welfare.

And so, what I learned from my grandmother and the old people gave me a good standing in - like a good way to live my life from then on. And I always tried to pass those values on to my children. When I look through my families, my extended families, none of them have lost a child to welfare and I put that down to our background, being raised and being involved with old people and you know, taking on their teachings and their values and carrying that through. And then when you look at the families that aren't coping, you can see that they have lost that - that is broken down in their family - and I think that's got a lot to do with losing their children to foster care and to the welfare."

Upon reflection of VACCA's significant achievements Aunty Fay highlighted, "I was pleased to be involved in the child placement principle that we worked on and got it through as an Act, really."

*"My hope would be that we didn't need an organisation like VACCA, but that's just too much wishful thinking. VACCA could be connected more to fixing the family, healing the family. Let's see how we can keep the child in the family, instead of removing the child to another family. How we could work with the family and coordinate all the different programs that are established now for the issues that are affecting the family, like the drug and alcohol issues"*



# Children & Youth Programs and Education Programs



## Koorie Tiddas Youth Choir

The choir is led by young girls, Aboriginal musicians, and Elders. It works to build self-esteem, confidence, resilience and a sense of identity through connection to Aboriginal culture. It also aims to connect the local community, learning the traditional language, acquiring music skills and encourage members to perform their own songs.

## Koorie Kids Stay At school

The Koorie Kids Stay at School Program is an intensive trauma-informed education program that supports vulnerable Aboriginal young people who are at risk of disengaging from school to support them to stay in school and improve their educational outcomes. The program has been running since July 2015 and throughout this period VACCA has worked with 25 kids intensively. Outcomes have included transitioning children from primary to secondary school, finding resources to support that transition to identify schools that best meets students needs. This program also provides trauma training in conjunction with the healing unit to ensure Aboriginal children are supported in the school environment.

## Books in Homes

VACCA has run the Books in Homes program since 2006 to not only inspire a love of reading in the school-age children in our programs but to also help nurture a connection to community and culture. Three times a year, children receive a catalogue from which they choose three books. A celebration is organised to hand out the books.

## Art Mentoring Program

The Art Mentoring Project is a 16-week program that connects young Aboriginal aspiring artists with prominent art mentors. The initiative allows young people to strengthen their cultural knowledge and identity. This program was delivered once in the northern region and culminated in an exhibition at Blak Dot Gallery where the artists sold over \$3000 worth of art and printed cushions and tote bags.

## Narrun Yana Art Collective

Narrun Yana is a deadly collective of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists based in Melbourne. From the Woiwurrung Language of the Kulin Nation, Narrun Yana means Spirit Journey. Together the collective create a wide range of art, design and new media works that reflect their journey from out of home care into their futures as strong young members of the community. Narrun Yana is a safe space for young people to work together in a creative environment that supports economic independence, as well as professional development opportunities within the arts and cultural sector.



# VACCA Client Services

VACCA provides most of its client services from its regional sites based in Preston, Werribee, Dandenong, Frankston, Ringwood and Morwell.

## Northern VACCA Client Services

This financial year, VACCA increased its programs and services to support more children and families.

Significant work has taken place to prepare for the transfer of case management from mainstream organisations to VACCA—with the north leading on this initiative. It is expected that approximately 50 children will be transferred to the case management of VACCA by the end of the year and that all Aboriginal Children will be case managed by an ACCO by 2024.

### Cradle to Kinder

The Cradle to Kinder initiative works with mothers in the early years of a child's life to give the child the best chance of meeting developmental milestones. The Northern Aboriginal Cradle to Kinder team has worked with many families and has succeeded in preventing any families (despite them initially being considered high risk) from progressing into statutory child protection service. New Cradle to Kinder programs is being established in other regions based on the success of the northern program.

## Northern Community Engagement

Four programs are delivered through the adult community engagement team including Koorie Connect, Emergency Relief, Wilam Support Homelessness Service and four playgroups out of the Western and Northern Regions.

The homeless service assists community members gain more stable housing and have other needs met through our case management service. Playgroup helps families and children to connect with culture in a supportive environment and promotes school readiness as an outcome. Families who previously had little knowledge of the education system being have been able to go on and enrol their children in kindergartens and primary schools.

Koorie Connect can be quite intense at times with community members presenting with a multitude of issues. Clients in need of advocacy use the service and are empowered to advocate for themselves at the end of their engagement.

Emergency Relief assists with stability when clients are in financial crisis.

## Wilam Support Homelessness Service

The Wilam Support Homelessness Service in the northern metro area has been running for more than 12 months and has been a resounding success. Hitting well above the required targets, staff have been inundated with families and individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Under this service, staff assist with housing applications, assist in securing private rentals and transitional housing and work in conjunction with other agencies to access crisis payments. These payments assist families in crisis with temporary accommodation.

225 clients received a service from the Wilam Support Homelessness Service in the 2016-2017 financial years. This is more than double the target of 100.

### Playgroup

Four Koorie Kids Playgroups run from Monday to Thursday in the north-west metro area. The program is well attended with hundreds of individuals attending the sessions each year. Staff facilitate a culturally safe and curriculum-based program. It is embedded in culture and has an emphasis on early childhood development and child health.

The northern playgroup has expected targets of 40 families per year but the actual attendance is in excess of 400 individuals attending per year.



## Eastern VACCA

Eastern VACCA has experienced an increased demand for services with staff continuing to engage with the community in-line with culturally safe service delivery model. The team's focus on community engagement including attending community lunches, events and engaging and meeting with families in a location that where they feel safe has meant the Aboriginal community are feeling supported and safe when accessing services.

The Eastern team has also improved collaboration and partnerships with DHHS, Eastern's mainstream service providers' and other Aboriginal community controlled organisations in the eastern region. The team have been able to effectively mobilise to help clients in need including securing funding for two vehicles and a motorised scooter for three families. There has also been an increase in delivery of Emergency Relief services.

In order to listen to and respond to community needs Eastern VACCA hosted a community forum which was attend by the VACCA Board and CEO. Eastern VACCA also hosted the Aboriginal Children's Forum in Healsville. Eastern VACCA also had a record number of attendees at the Christmas party and NAIDOC Children's Day events.

I'm Charlotte, an Integrated Family Services (IFS) support worker in the eastern region currently assisting Melissa and her family. Melissa's youngest child is 12 years of age and her eldest is 14. Melissa is a single working mum who is a strong independent Aboriginal woman dedicated to her children.

Unfortunately as most single parents would testify, money is always in short supply and making ends meet week-to-week is a matter of juggling dollars and cents just to get food on the table, and meet basic daily living costs.

Unexpected costs, like a car breaking down, can push families into financial crisis and be socially isolating. In Melissa's case we were fortunate to be aware of funding available through Eastern Domestic Violence Outreach Service for women who had been exposed to family violence.

Upon being told that her application had been successful Melissa's joy was visible, and she was overwhelmed with tears of happiness. A reliable car has now been purchased, and Melissa will no longer have to struggle to get the children to school, to after school activities or to work.



# CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF SERVICE



## Southern VACCA

Southern VACCA serves a community extending from the southern suburbs around Dandenong all the way into the Mornington Peninsula. Southern VACCA has been fully involved with the Government's 'Road Map to Reform' demonstration projects. These projects are aiming to test evidence based programs such as Leaving Care, Mentoring; new models of residential care, new responses to sibling groups coming into care and programs designed to better support carers.

These programs will continue for the next 12 months and will be subject to rigorous evaluation to test their applicability to other geographical sites. Southern VACCA is also working closely with mainstream service providers to ensure Aboriginal people are delivered culturally appropriate services across the region.

VACCA has also opened a new Frankston office to ensure Aboriginal people in the Bayside Peninsula will have direct access to VACCA services.



## VACCA Inner-Gippsland

VACCA inner-Gippsland has made significant strides in building strong responses to youth crime. This included the establishment of Kommel Community work site which is aimed at combatting the low levels of participation of Aboriginal people in mainstream community work programs. There are culturally appropriate and meaningful activities for Aboriginal people to give back to their community. This includes a fruit and vegetable garden for delivery of fresh healthy food, painting, woodburning of shields, yidaki making (an instrument of the Yolngu people of North East Arnhem Land), and the delivery of 340 boomerangs to a local primary school.

## Southern VACCA

Southern VACCA successfully launched the Empower Youth Program. The program addresses the need for culturally proficient, trauma-informed services and cultural programs. These programs are aimed at supporting vulnerable Aboriginal young people to engage or re-engage in education, training and career pathways. It is expected that the program will support a minimum of 50 young people in the next year. Aligned with VACCA's focus of self-determination, the program supports young people to develop their own Aspirational Plans—where they identify goals and activities that they would like to pursue in the areas of health and wellbeing, community participation, education and training and pathways to employment.

## Western VACCA

Western VACCA continues to go from strength to strength. In the 2016- 2017 financial year Western VACCA increased the programs being delivered to support Aboriginal children and families in the region. Western VACCA experienced a deeper level of engagement with the local Aboriginal community with several Aboriginal staff members coming on board who live in the region. Western VACCA also further strengthened connections with other Aboriginal agencies. This increased awareness of services and engagement has allowed the team in the west to provide Emergency Relief, Koorie Connect, and family support services to more than 200 families.

This year the team has grown by 24 new positions, The total number of Western VACCA staff is now 47 with an expectation that this will grow with the Transition of Aboriginal Children in Out of Home Care to Aboriginal agencies. Western VACCA also had three students on placement, two of whom are Aboriginal.

Western VACCA continued to see an increase in attendance at community events. It held a Christmas party, participated in the Footscray Wominjeka Festival, held a community BBQ in Brimbank, a NAIDOC children's event, and a children's disco for our Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) event. These events strengthen and bring together the Aboriginal community, while providing cultural expression and appreciation.

## Footprints for Success

The Footprints for Success program is part of a consortium of 16 agencies. It has four staff who have reached out to mothers with young children who need help in accessing early childhood services such as the maternal and child health nurses, medical specialists, playgroups, child care and kindergarten services. The program co-locates with the Aboriginal health team at Co-Health, Braybrook Hub as well as the Werribee Mercy Hospital on various days of the week.

Since the commencement of the program VACCA has been able to engage many community members into early years' services and in particular, has seen a significant increase in kindergarten enrolments and playgroup participation, as well as ensuring attendance at maternal and child health appointments and pre and post-natal hospital appointments.

Staff have taken mothers and babies to Tweddle Child and Family Services for assistance with parenting skills, sleep clinic and training on childhood developmental stages and linked them into other services. Staff have also linked their families to Aboriginal community activities.

Western VACCA continues to build its program to recruit foster carers in the region to provide foster care placements for Aboriginal children. The team anticipates increased involvement with the Melton Aboriginal community with a Melton VACCA office planned to open in October 2017.

celebrating

**40 YEARS**  
of service

## Stories from our life members

### **Bobby Nicholls**



Bobby Nicholls is a proud Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung and Wadjabalok man, nephew of Sir Douglas Nicholls. He was a Director of VACCA for 10 years, first joining in 1981. Bobby was inducted as a VACCA Life Member in 1995. Bobby has been a member and Director of a number of ACCOs including the Aborigines Advancement League and the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria and has been employed by both community organisations and government. Bobby has recently been heavily involved in native title whilst also being employed by the Department of Human Services in Hume.

Bobby reflected how Aunty Marj Tucker and Aunty Mollie Dyer were mentors to him, "our organisations wouldn't be in existence today without those people, they were the driving force behind VACCA being established. I know it's a very hard task in terms of working with young children and vulnerable children, but at the end of the day, I think one of the things is that I think it's made people stand up and listen to what VACCA's been trying to do. So, I look at them and I hold them up in high esteem because they were the fighters, because they believed in what they fought for, they fought government; white policies and all that sort of stuff."

"They've given me the strength and courage to be where I am today. Some of what I call the old soldiers have passed on, but the legacy still lives with us. People like when I reflect back on Aunty Marj and Mollie Dyer and the late Stuart Murray, and Elizabeth Morgan. They were some of my rocks, and without them I probably wouldn't be who I am today, because they've given me the strength and also the respect. I'm very proud to be a Life Member of Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency, and I hope that others come on and contribute towards what we've done over the years. Have we come a long way? Yes, we have. And the struggle's been there."

*"In 40 years, I have one wish in my lifetime, whilst I'm still surviving, is that I hope that no child is ever removed from their parents and I'm hoping that with greater education for our people, young, especially our younger families of today, that we learn from our mistakes."*

## Remembering Community Members

We remember and acknowledge community members who formerly worked at VACCA who have entered the Dreamtime.

### Aunty Esme Thompson

Aunty Esme Thompson (nee Thomas) was born in 1946 to Cecil Thomas of Wallaga Lake (NSW) and Florence Atkinson of Cummeragunja (NSW). A respected community Elder, she spent five decades working across Gippsland with local Aboriginal communities in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations to strengthen and heal families. Aunty Esme, along with others, was instrumental in having the Morwell Aboriginal Co-operative registered in 1976.

As a Community Development Worker with VACCA, she was a founder and leader at Orana Gunyah (meaning Welcome, Place of Shelter) a crisis accommodation and support service in Morwell for Aboriginal women and children experiencing or escaping family violence.

Aunty Esme was a woman who achieved much and inspired many. She will be greatly missed by her family and friends, her Community and her colleagues at VACCA.

### Aunty Elvie Kelly

Aunty Elvie Kelly, another former staff member who worked at VACCA in the late eighties and nineties. Elvie was a calm and strong presence in the organisation, who was a key part of VACCA in those days and is fondly remembered by all those who worked with her.

### Aunty Lola James

Aunty Lola James worked at VACCA for a number of years when we it was based in Fitzroy. She was a vibrant and vocal person who cared a great deal for the children she worked with, her family, friends and fellow workers.

### Aunty Joyce Smith

Aunty Joyce Smith worked for VACCA from the early nineties into the 2000's. She was a committed and passionate worker who also contributed to the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry in Victoria.

# Connection to **Culture**

*"In my life, I never really had family around to connect me with my culture. VACCA helped me to know who I am, and it's because of VACCA that I've been able to find out where my people are from, my family and to stay connected with my family." – Ruby 19*

For Aboriginal people, land, the kinship system and spirituality are the foundations on which culture is built. Culture influences thinking, communication and values. Research shows that positive cultural connection for Aboriginal children promotes resilience when dealing with trauma.

VACCA believes that for an Aboriginal child to grow into a strong Aboriginal adult they should be supported to learn about, maintain and grow in their knowledge and connection to land, family, community, and culture.



## **Cultural Day Connects Young Mothers to Country and Each Other**

Bush tucker, cooking, medicinal tea, music, traditional crafts and a common connection allowed the young mothers who attended VACCA's Cradle to Kinder cultural day to create life-long memories with their young children and develop a sense of kinship with other Aboriginal parents.

The initiative is one of more than a dozen of VACCA's early intervention programs but is unique in its delivery of practical education to aid in the development of parenting skills and to provide a holistic support service from pre-birth that is ongoing until the children turn four years old.

VACCA caseworker Alyssa brings more than ten years' experience working in welfare to the program and was one of the team who lead the coordination of the cultural day.

"We had a fantastic day with our mothers who learned how to use local 'bush tucker' ingredients in cooking and also for medicinal use such as in teas to reduce pain, de-stress and heal ailments," said Alyssa.

"The children were also engaged with sensory play, touching, smelling and tasting the native ingredients."

"A number of the families in our program are isolated because of limited transport and they don't have the opportunities to connect as readily with other parents. Cultural days allow them to connect and build relationships with other Aboriginal parents and spend valuable and special time with their children away from the daily stresses of life with young children."

Sadly many of the young mothers in the program have experienced trauma, family violence and homelessness and more than 70 per cent have been in the child protection system during their own childhood and adolescence.

"Many of the young parents in our program may not have had good parenting role models growing up, so we focus on holistic parenting strategies," said Alyssa.

"We are finding that there are very few families disengaging once starting the program and for the majority of parents they are very engaged and want to stay involved and continue to learn."



## VACCA and Berry Street launch Victorian first program that prioritises finding family

In Victoria more than 1700 Aboriginal infants, children, and young people require child and family welfare services and are living in out-of-home care which includes Kinship Care, Foster Care, and Residential Care.\*

VACCA and long-time partners Berry Street are introducing a Victorian first pilot program that prioritises the need of finding a family for children in out-of-home care.

VACCA CEO Professor Muriel Bamblett explains that many young children can stay in multiple placements for an extended period. During this time their social connections can be disrupted and consequently, they can lose their connection to family, community, culture, and country.

“When there is family violence, abuse or neglect of children –at times involving drug abuse, alcohol abuse or mental illness – there can be a breakdown of extended family relationships and divisions that can lead to parts of the family being cut off from each other,” Professor Bamblett said.

“Central to VACCA’s work for the past 40 years has been the importance of connection to family, community and culture as essential to Aboriginal children’s safety, stability and ensuring that they have an ongoing sense of community and belonging.”

The aptly named Family Finding Model developed by Kevin A. Campbell offers methods and strategies to locate relatives and people who have been significant in the child and the family’s life.

VACCA and Berry Street are planning to conduct an internal evaluation examining the implementation and impacts of the program and will include both quantitative and more qualitative measures of the effectiveness of the program.

“The Family Finding model has been successfully developed and implemented in the USA and Canada. The project pilot is currently being set up and, if fully funded, this first phase will run until June 2018” Professor Bamblett said.

Currently, the program is jointly funded by VACCA and Berry Street and if the trial is successful VACCA hopes the program can be offered on an ongoing basis.

## Merinda’s story

VACCA was humbled to share an incredible story of strength, resilience and the importance of connection to culture through a video on our social media channels.

Merinda Dryden, a young Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Warrung woman bravely shared her experience of growing up under the care of the ‘Department’ since age three.

Merinda explained how connection to her culture and education provided hope and allowed her to heal old wounds.

Incredibly the video struck a chord with many people and was viewed more than 66 000 of times!

## Helping mum helps kids

“Through my role as a caseworker with the Integrated Family Services team at VACCA, I have had the pleasure of working with and getting to know a single mother with adult and teenage children, who also cares permanently for her granddaughter on a kinship placement. Mum has experienced a number of battles in her own journey but has shown to have a high level of resilience and has always persevered. One of mum’s goals that we identified was to be connected to community and culture as she has never had the opportunity before, didn’t know how or where to start and was incredibly isolated.

This goal was a significant one for her as she also suffers from social anxiety and isolation and this along with the pressures of trying to keep her family together were a distraction and a challenge for her to overcome in order to prioritise her needs in this area. Initially, we identified that her home and gardens in the house that she is living in were quite a mess and this was impacting her ability to function and prioritise other goals. Working with her on this and getting her to enjoy the outdoor areas of her home whilst building a relationship with me as a caseworker was the first step in improving her overall feeling of wellbeing, safety and giving her some hope moving forward.

Following this, we were able to get mum and her granddaughter to leave the home and come along to our “Engaging Families” activities followed by NAIDOC activities and introduce them to people living within the communities they are from. Through this and her continued participation in cultural activities in the local community, mum is becoming a very proud and strong Aboriginal woman, exploring her identity and actively working to reduce her isolation by connecting with other community members. Mum now independently attends every cultural event we organise. She walked the NAIDOC march with so much pride that I was proud to stand next to her. It is still an ongoing journey of discovery, but one that I am proud to take with her.”

celebrating

**40 YEARS**  
of service

*Founder and life member*

**Mollie Dyer**



Aunty Mollie, a proud Yorta Yorta woman, and the daughter of the late Aunty Marj Tucker, a prominent Aboriginal leader and who would herself become a Patron of VACCA, was born in 1927. Aunty Mollie spent the majority of her life in Melbourne fighting for the rights of the Victorian Aboriginal communities; however her influence was on a national scale. She had six children of her own and fostered twenty. She visited the United States and Canada on several occasions and used her experience there to help fundamentally influence change and develop an Aboriginal child are family welfare model appropriate for Australia. Aunty Mollie believed that, "Our kids are the most viable enterprise we can be engaged in." This was her unwavering belief and focus in her drive to improve the lives of Victorian Aboriginal families, their children and communities. Her determination to change and break cycles of racism was paramount, "As long as I have breath in my body I'll speak out against those forces trampling us, whether those forces be black or white."

Aunty Mollie played pivotal roles in the establishment and operations of other organisations including the United Council of Aboriginal Women, the Aborigines Advancement League, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, the Aboriginal Hostels Ltd and the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care.

In 1980 Aunty Mollie was awarded the Order of Australia, the International Year of the Child Award and the Advance Australia Award, all for her dedication to services for children. She was also awarded the Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE), which her mother had already been awarded. Initially she declined this award and later accepted it, "... on behalf of all the people, Koorie and non-Koorie." Aunty Mollie was a courageous advocate for the rights of Aboriginal children and families. Her unwavering belief in the strength of Aboriginal community and culture fed into her passionate and tenacious approach to negotiating with and advocating for the Aboriginal community with government.

The legacy of Aunty Mollie can be voiced in her own words "When people co-operate and try and solve problems, rather than condemn each other, things happen." Aunty Mollie's autobiography "Room for One More: The Life of Mollie Dyer" was published in 2003, an engaging and insightful life story which showcases the undeniable impact and legacy of a life committed to bettering the lives of Victorian Aboriginal peoples.

Aunty Mollie was inducted as a VACCA Life Member in 1995. This year VACCA is thrilled to be launching the Mollie Dyer Award for service in Aboriginal Child and Family Welfare.

# Events and Fundraising



## VACCA Christmas parties

Each year VACCA hosts Christmas parties in each of its regions with entertainment healthy food and a special visit from Koori Santa!

VACCA CEO Professor Muriel Bamblett explains that for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who don't live with their families Christmas can be a very sad and lonely time.

"Christmas is a time that we associate with family and words like joy and hope. However, for some of our young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children they don't experience those feelings," Professor Bamblett said.

"Central to VACCA's work for the past 40 years has been the importance of connection to family, community and culture as essential to Aboriginal children's safety, stability and ensuring that they have an ongoing sense of community and belonging.

"With an increase in Aboriginal young people in out-of-home care, there is increasing pressure on VACCA and other community organisations to provide gifts for the state's most vulnerable children. With the help of our partners and donors last year VACCA provided 300 gifts to children and young people.

"Aunty Narelle Slater has worked at VACCA for seven years and knows that the gift the children receive at Christmas is more than 'just a toy or a book or their favourite team's football jumper' it's a gift of hope and a reminder that our community cares.

"To see the absolute joy on the children's faces when Santa calls out their name and how grateful they are is an incredible feeling.

"Last year, I can remember seeing this young girl who was ten years old receive this big gift—the gift was big relative to her height—I'm not sure what it was but as soon as she received it she went running across the room yelling out, it brought her so much joy."

## NAIDOC Week

This year's NAIDOC week was a great success with VACCA children's day events hosted in each of its metropolitan regions, many of which had record numbers in attendance. Activities included face painting, emu feathered headbands, ball pits, ceramic boomerangs, show bags and many more highlights. The feedback received was very positive across the board. It was also great to see so many staff members in attendance at the NAIDOC march on the 7th July. The march departed from the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service in Carlton and continued through to Parliament House ending at Federation Square. It was estimated that more than 5000 people were in attendance.



## National Reconciliation Week: 'Fractured' film screening

VACCA and Link-up Victoria, together with partners Ashurst (who provide pro-bono legal support) organised a special screening of stories from the film "Fractured" on 31st May, during Reconciliation Week.

The film was produced by VACCA and tells the stories of the Stolen Generations – Aboriginal people who grow up in care, separated from family, community, traditional country and culture.

The film highlighted how difficult the journey to find and reconnect with family can be, and demonstrated the resilience of Aboriginal people as they proudly reclaimed their identity, community, and culture.

# CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF SERVICE

## National Reconciliation Week charity event with PAWN AND CO.

On Friday 2 June, VACCA was fortunate enough to partner with local iconic venue Pawn and Co. for a Reconciliation Week charity event. Pioneered by Henry Purcell, a VACCA staff member and one of Pawn and Co.'s resident DJ's, the night provided a unique opportunity to celebrate Aboriginal art, music, and culture as well as promote Reconciliation among the wider community.

The night featured a line-up of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal DJ's, including Seth and Sam Nolan, Gaz Kempster and Aves Volare. Musicians included Brent Watkins and Warrabaa Boney performing on the didgeridoo.

Henry, who also DJ'd on the night, described it as a huge success with Pawn and Co. generously donating all ticket sales and door entry prices to VACCA.

"I'm sure that everyone who came along will have taken something individual away from the night, and that's the way that other people will become educated. And that's the way that other people become aware of some of the more contemporary Aboriginal issues concerning Australia," Henry said.

"It was great to be able to bring contemporary Aboriginal culture into a space where it rarely gets seen, and for Aboriginal people to celebrate that with the wider community as well."

Pawn and Co.'s General Manager, James Austin was ecstatic with the end result stating that "VACCA does such amazing work for Aboriginal families and community, so it gave the Pawn family immense pleasure to have the opportunity to collaborate on this first-of-its-kind event".

Together VACCA and Pawn and Co. were able to raise \$6,600 on the night, which will help to fund VACCA's cultural programs.

## Staff Awards and Presentation

### VACCA Staff and Carers Recognised at the Robin Clark Awards

The Hon Jenny Mikakos MP, Minister for Families and Children officially launched Child Protection Week in Victoria at the 2016 Robin Clark Protecting Children Awards.

VACCA was pleased to have three staff members and two carers selected as finalists for the awards. The awards recognise service excellence across the child protection sector throughout Victoria and celebrate the important and varied work undertaken in child, youth and family services.

### VACCA Finalists

Minister's Award for Innovative Care  
Lowana Moore – Winner

Lowana took on the care of her uncles five children who had been in out-of-home care despite having never met them. Once Lowana became involved with VACCA she received a call about another cousin who was seeking permanent care—Lowana made it a priority to find out how many cousins she had in care—approximately 40 in total. Lowana committed to connecting her cousins to family and culture. Since 2009, Lowana has organised two return to country trips with a focus on supporting the children to learn their traditional dance and their Wemba Wemba language. Lowana has committed to making the return to country trips annually.

Robin Clark Leadership Award  
Carer's Award

Mary Edwards – Highly Commended  
Robin Clark Making a Difference Award  
Wendy Lovett – Highly Commended



## NATIONAL SORRY DAY

To commemorate National Sorry Day, VACCA's Link-up Victoria program organised some of Melbourne's most iconic venues including the Melbourne City Town Hall, The Arts Centre, the water fountain at Parliament Gardens and VACCA head office, to be lit-up in purple.

# Financial Summary - 2016/2017

The 2016/17 financial year was a year of continuing strong growth for the organisation, with gross operating income exceeding \$30.1m, with a healthy net operating surplus of \$825,000 for the year.

A number of programs have commenced or expanded during the financial year, with a greater emphasis on Family Violence and Kinship Care services, under State Dept Health and Human Services and Commonwealth Dept Prime Minister and Cabinet. The increase in these services will continue in 2017/18 financial year, together with increased funding for Youth Justice programs under State Dept of Justice.

VACCA's gross operating income has grown 89% in five years, from \$15.9m in 2012/2013 to \$30.1m in 2016/2017, an average of 18% pa. In that same period, staff numbers have increased by 135, from 215 to 350, an increase of 63%. Gross operating income for the last twelve months increased by 24%.

With growth and sustainability remaining key strategic priorities, the next three years will see continued enhancement and investment in workforce development and strengthened services to meeting growing community demands and challenges. Government service system reforms will also lead to increased demands, in funding and services provided to our community.

A healthy balance sheet and strong reserves will enable VACCA to continue to grow to meet increasing demands placed on the organisation, and are essential for the organisation's sustainability and longevity.

## Summarised Statement of Income and Expenditure for the Year Ending 30 June 2017

	2017	2016
	\$	\$
Total Income	30,110,371	24,323,920
Total Expenses	29,285,278	24,435,661
Total comprehensive income for the year attributable to members of VACCA	825,094	-111,741

## Summarised Statement of Financial Position (Balance Sheet) as at the Year Ending 30 June 2017

	2017	2016
	\$	\$
Total Current Assets	16,993,208	10,587,548
Total Non-Current Assets	1,256,496	869,821
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>18,249,704</b>	<b>11,457,369</b>
Total Current Liabilities	11,325,082	5,436,719
Total Non-Current Liabilities	739,994	661,295
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>12,065,076</b>	<b>6,098,014</b>
<b>Net Assets (Liabilities)</b>	<b>6,184,628</b>	<b>5,359,355</b>
<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>6,184,628</b>	<b>5,359,355</b>

Note - VACCA has corrected its annual leave and long service leave provisions to align with AASB 119 Employee Benefits. This has resulted in a correction (reduction in net income) of \$189,124 to the comparative year's (2016) financial results.

## The year ahead...

- The year ahead will be one of rolling-out and bedding down new initiatives especially the family violence and Nugel program. Integrating new staff into VACCA and across our programs will mean that our HR and Organisational Development and Training Unit staff and systems will continue to play a very important role in our operations to support our current 400 plus staff complement.
- Workforce Development plans developed in the previous year will also continue in their implementation. We will also further our preparations for sector requirements for qualified staff recommended initially by the Royal Commission into Family Violence but now more widely accepted. We support this objective however, we need to introduce it into our sector in a way that builds on the capacity of our current staff. This is a process that will be introduced gradually.
- 2018 also holds the promise of our next independent external audit against the DHHS Standards. The whole organization is in a better state of readiness for this having had a diligent Quality Unit behind our work. The ever-increasing demands of compliance are a fact of life for our sector and we are confident that we are meeting these demands including Child Safe Organisations standards.
- Discussions about the Treaty will advance further with the anticipated formation of a permanent representative body to negotiate the terms of the treaty with the State Government.
- The latter half of 2018 will include the State elections and quite likely Federal election. We are hopeful that all parties will take a bi-partisan approach to the reforms that have been in train over the last two to three years as we see them as extremely positive for the Aboriginal community across Victoria.
- Next year we also commence consultations to prepare our next three-year strategic plan 2018-2021.
- We will conclude our 40th anniversary events with our Gala Fundraising Dinner which will be a time to celebrate our work and achievements with many, including those in our sector and in government who have been strong partners and supporters of VACCA over the last four decades.



We thank you for continuing to provide feedback. It is only with your support that we can ensure this report reflects the organisation's voice and meets our goals.

To provide feedback on this report, you can:  
Email us: [feedback@vacca.org](mailto:feedback@vacca.org)

## Acknowledgements

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For the current full list of our funders and partners, please visit our website [www.vacca.org](http://www.vacca.org)

### Donors:

- Bell Charitable Fund
- Lost & Found Market - Donation
- William Lopez - Give it back benefit
- Tsfr Melton Bequest
- Abbotsford Convent
- Pawn and Co.
- Crown Resorts Foundation
- Packer Family Foundation
- City of Melbourne
- ANZ Staff Foundation
- Inner North Community Foundation

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### Government

#### Commonwealth

- Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Department of Social Services



### Other agencies

- Anglicare Victoria
- Centre for Excellence
- Berry Street
- La Trobe Community Health Services
- Drummond Street Services
- Relationships Australia
- Jesuit Social Services
- MacKillop Family Services
- SNAICC
- OZ Child



# VACCA

Connected by culture

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