



# 2023 Victorian Protecting Children Awards

Winners and finalists

OFFICIAL

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## Robin Clark Leadership Award

### Winner – Robin Clark Leadership Award

#### **Kirstie Lomas, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing**

A highly respected leader in Victoria's child protection program, Kirstie champions practice excellence and drives reform. Kirstie joined DFFH's Office of Professional Practice in 2017 and has held the positions of Statewide Child Protection Principal Practitioner and Acting Chief Practitioner.

Kirstie led the establishment of a Court Practice Advice and Support Service to enhance practitioner skills in court practice and to influence best outcomes for children, young people and families.

Kirstie's vision and commitment to stronger, evidence-informed practice resulted in the development of the SAFER Children Framework, the risk assessment approach for Victorian Child Protection Practitioners. Through continued practice leadership, Kirstie remains central to SAFER's successful implementation.

During the challenges of the pandemic, Kirstie provided leadership and guidance to ensure practice continuity and consistency for vulnerable families.

Kirstie exemplifies dedication and professionalism, always centering Child Protection practice on the best interests of the child.

### Finalists – Robin Clark Leadership Award

- Anne Tidymann, Odyssey House Victoria.
- Dr Lyndal Peake, DPV Health.
- Gaynor Wiggins, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

## Robin Clark Making a Difference Award

### Winners – Robin Clark Making a Difference Award

#### **Gippsland Anglicare Victoria Multisystemic Therapy Team, Anglicare Victoria**

This team provides evidence-informed interventions to improve outcomes for high-risk young people.

They have supported 33 high-risk young people and their families, with promising outcomes:

- 73 per cent of the young people assisted now participate in education
- efforts to reduce recidivism has resulted in 76 per cent of the young people with no new arrests
- work on family preservation saw 73 per cent of young people living at home at the end of intervention.

By equipping all family members with decision-making skills, the team empowers families to manage and respond to their children. The team also helps families set expectations, follow through with incentives, and build their family support network.

#### **The Cornelia Program – Launch Housing, Royal Women's Hospital and Housing First**

The Cornelia Program is a partnership between Launch Housing, Housing First and the Royal Women's Hospital.

This model of care program provides pregnant women and new mothers experiencing homelessness or insecure housing with a supportive pathway.

The program includes 12 months safe accommodation, specialist maternity health services and support to access other health and psychosocial programs. Women are then supported to find long-term stable housing with their babies.

To date, the program has supported 66 women and their babies. Of the 40 women and babies who have exited the program, 21 have moved into community housing properties, 9 have moved into public housing properties, 3 have reunified with family and 3 have moved into private rental properties.

## **Finalists – Robin Clark Making a Difference Award**

- Woodend Road, MacKillop Family Services.
- Youth Disability Advocacy Service.

## **Minister’s Award for Excellence in Protecting Children**

### **Winner – Minister’s Award for Excellence in Protecting Children**

#### **Vincent Shin, WEstjustice**

Vincent’s legal career has focused on improving life and justice outcomes for children and young people.

Vincent joined WEstJustice in 2015, working in the new School Lawyer Program in the western suburbs of Melbourne. Vincent’s work involves assisting students with their individual legal issues, as well as training students and staff to understand young people’s rights and responsibilities, and how to self-advocate and find assistance.

Over the past three years, Vincent has developed the first out-of-home care legal clinic, leading a team to deliver legal education, advice and case work to young people in residential care.

Vincent uses compassion and expertise to deliver human-centred solutions to complex challenges.

### **Finalists – Minister’s Award for Excellence in Protecting Children**

- Olivia Sandri and Caroline Sullivan, Berry Street and Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.
- Stop It Now! Australia, Jesuit Social Services.
- The Wattle Project, Berry Street.

## **Carer Award**

### **Winner – Carer Award**

#### **Leonie Patterson, OzChild**

Leonie was accredited as a foster carer in 1985. In 38 years of caring, Leonie has provided a nurturing, stable and safe home for over 300 children.

Leonie is actively involved in the lives of these children, as well as their biological families. Leonie takes the children to contact visits, educational and medical appointments, cultural activities, and advocates for their needs at care team meetings. Leonie’s home has even been modified to make it accessible for children with disability.

Committed to ongoing development as a foster carer, Leonie participates in training, including training on the cultural needs of Aboriginal children.

Leonie is a member of OzChild’s Carer Consultation Group and a key contributor to OzChild’s ‘Thriving Families’ carer strategy.

Leonie is courageous, humble and always prioritises the needs of children.

## Finalists – Carer Award

- Amy Baudinette and Colin Cheater, MacKillop Family Services.
- Emily White, OzChild.
- Sue and Lee Wakeman, MacKillop Family Services.

## Chief Practitioner’s Award

### Winner – Chief Practitioner’s Award

#### **Laura Temple, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing**

Laura is an exceptional and dedicated leader who facilitates a culture of acceptance, support and warmth that practitioners report makes them feel safe.

Admired for a calm and patient demeanour, Laura leads with empathy, care and collaboration.

Laura is quiet and courageous and has established robust and effective systems that are responsive to the needs of the workforce.

Regarded as always approachable and authentic, Laura does a lot behind the scenes to make things easier for others, without expectation of praise.

Laura cares deeply for staff, children, young people, families and the community. This is seen in exemplary practice, language and a dedication to excellence.

During challenging times, Laura’s focus on creating a fair culture, promoting staff retention and prioritising wellbeing is unwavering.

### Finalists – Chief Practitioner’s Award

- Kaitlin Kearney, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.
- Natasha Dean, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.
- Samantha Davis, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.
- Victoria Hingston, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

## Engaging Kids in School Award

### Winners – Engaging Kids in School Award

#### **Education Pathways Program, Launch Housing**

The EPP is an initiative of Launch Housing that focuses on supporting primary and kindergarten children experiencing homelessness and family violence to engage in education.

The team includes education pathways program facilitators, a speech pathologist and a psychologist. They work in partnership with kindergartens, schools and other agencies to help children overcome learning gaps.

Support also includes assisting caregivers in navigating enrolment requirements and providing school related materials, like uniforms and stationery.

The team also supports capacity building with school teams around best practice supports for children who have experienced trauma.

The initiative was evaluated and found significant improvements in attendance and engagement with education. In 2022-2023, the EPP team supported 121 children and their families.

## **Transforming Educational Achievement for Children at Risk (TEACHaR) Leadership Team, Anglicare Victoria**

TEACHaR is a ground-breaking program providing young people in out-of-home care with individualised support from a registered teacher.

The program is overseen by a group of eight qualified teachers. All are highly experienced in trauma-informed practice and are dedicated to achieving best outcomes for young people in care.

Growing the program from a small pilot in 2010, TEACHaR now employs 25 teachers who support 250 students annually across Victoria.

Evidence shows TEACHaR is highly effective in engaging young people in learning, building their aspirations and setting them on pathways for success. Young people have shared that they value the individualised approach and building of trusting relationships, and that the program motivates them to pursue their educational goals.

## **Finalists – Engaging Kids in School Award**

- Re-engagement and Community Safety Team, Junction Support Services.
- Waratah Special Development School.

## **Keeping At Risk Young People Safe Award**

### **Winner – Keeping At Risk Young People Safe Award**

#### **Sergeant Jason Doyle, Victoria Police**

Sergeant Doyle has demonstrated exceptional care through supporting a young Aboriginal person who has complex support needs.

The young person lives in residential care and had frequent contact with Victoria Police. Jason's involvement resulted in reduced frequency of police contact and celebration of the young person's positive achievements.

Jason improved Victoria Police understanding of the young person's complex needs by promoting trauma informed communication.

Knowing the young person loves dogs, Jason organised visits with Police dogs and Border Force training puppies, as well as work experience at a dog grooming service.

Jason supported the young person's connection to their community and significant improvements in their quality of life. In response, the young person has expressed feeling heard and cared for.

### **Finalists – Keeping At Risk Young People Safe Award**

- Adrienne Walker, MacKillop Family Services.
- Barwon Residential Care, MacKillop Family Services.
- Care Team Family Support, MacKillop Family Services and Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

## **CREATE Positive Impacts Award – CREATE Foundation**

### **Winner – CREATE Positive Impacts Award – CREATE Foundation**

**Sajja Naboulsi, Anglicare Victoria**

Sajja is a youth worker, criminologist, and proud long-time foster carer. Sajja's passion for, and happiness in, giving back to the community and making a difference in young people's lives just keeps growing.

Sajja has faced many personal difficulties and traumatic events, yet despite this, Sajja never gives up and chooses to keep moving forward.

Between work, university and caring for family, Sajja fostered a baby. As an advocate for family reunification, Sajja also helped the baby's mother with her support needs.

Sajja is as an incredible leader and asset to young people, always putting them first and giving to others, and is an inspiration to our community.

## **Finalists – CREATE Positive Impacts Award – CREATE Foundation**

- Daniela Neumann De La Barrera, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.
- Pamela Fauvrelle, HomeGrown Fitness.

## **Child and Youth Empowerment Award – Commission for Children and Young People**

### **Winner – Child and Youth Empowerment Award – Commission for Children and Young People**

#### **Kirra Horley and Monique Balfour – Take Two Program, Berry Street**

Kirra is a Youth Focused Peer Support Worker and Monique is a Clinical Team Leader.

Together, they have demonstrated excellence in their work for the 'In Our Own Right – We Are Leading Change' project.

They developed a series of listening sessions aimed at capturing the insights of children and young people impacted by family violence.

Guided by the belief that children and young people with lived experiences are agents of change, they approached their work with dedication.

Through inclusive sessions, they prioritised the comfort, safety, accessibility and empowerment of the participants.

Findings were shared across multiple channels and the expansion of the project will see sector resources developed. Their work embodies the transformative power of lived experience and the value of it being integrated into practice.

### **Finalists – Child and Youth Empowerment Award – Commission for Children and Young People**

- Vincent Shin, WEstjustice.
- YACVic Participation and Development Team, Youth Affairs Council Victoria.

## The Walda Blow Aboriginal Children and Young People Award – Commission for Children and Young People

### Winner – The Walda Blow Aboriginal Children and Young People Award – Commission for Children and Young People

#### **Darren Atkinson, Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation**

Darren 'Dozer' has worked at Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation (MAC) for over two years and was quickly elevated to Senior Advisor of Cultural Planning.

Uncle Dozer is passionate and well respected within MAC and the community, particularly for ongoing efforts to support Aboriginal children in out-of-home care to stay connected to culture.

When Dozer commenced, the Ovens and Murray region was fifteenth out of 17 in the state for Culture Support Plans compliance, sitting at 51 per cent. Dozer was instrumental in the compliance lift to the current 72 per cent and number two position.

On a personal commitment level, Dozer and Mrs Atkinson have been kinship carers to a young boy for the past 6 years, since he was 8 months old. They have raised him to be a happy, proud and exceptional individual.

#### **Finalists – The Walda Blow Aboriginal Children and Young People Award – Commission for Children and Young People**

- Strong Brother Strong Sister.
- Sue Lovett.

## Leaving a Legacy Award – The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

### Winner – Leaving a Legacy Award – The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

#### **Connie Salamone, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency**

Connie's life has been devoted to working in the child and family sector. In 2002, Connie commenced with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and went on to hold responsibility for VACCA's front line services.

Connie was instrumental in VACCA being authorised in the Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care program, cultivated the development and inclusion of cultural elements across child protection training and practice, and led the development of an Aboriginal Evidence base across VACCA's work.

Connie is an exceptional leader and advocate for the rights and wellbeing of Aboriginal children, young people and families. Connie has a strong sense of the importance of culture, system reform and addressing the distinct needs of Aboriginal people.

Connie has been a strong advocate of the need to invest in Aboriginal children and young people as 'just and right thing to do'.

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In this document, 'Aboriginal' refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 'Indigenous' or 'Koori/Koorie' is retained when part of the title of a report, program or quotation.

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