

CONNECT

March 2024

INSIDE:

A sanctuary for families
Aged care support and more...



CatholicCare
VICTORIA

Strengthening families & communities

Welcome from the CEO

I hope you've had a fruitful start to 2024. It's been a busy start of the year for our CatholicCare Victoria team, with a range of celebrations and events.

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the three-year anniversary since our merge to become CatholicCare Victoria.

The ongoing support from our partners and funders, donors, volunteers, staff, parishes and schools, has enabled us to continue disrupting disadvantage and work towards building thriving communities for all.

In February this year, we held a Charity Art Exhibition fundraiser for our refugee and asylum seeker services. We are very grateful to the late artist Kathleen J Boyle, who left her personal artworks to CatholicCare Victoria for this cause. We were joined by many of our partners and supporters for this special event, which was generously hosted by our law firm, Gadens.

Gadens proactively undertake pro bono work in the refugee and asylum seeker space, and we thank them sincerely for hosting this event in their magnificent office.

We are also excited to announce the formal opening of our new Geelong Family Relationship Centre, to provide counselling, post-separation services, aged care supports, youth empowerment, and refugee and asylum seeker services to the local community.

With over 51 years supporting the Geelong region, we know our new Centre will empower us to continue supporting more people in need, and help them to live life to the full.

In closing, I want to thank each of our supporters, partners, and stakeholders for your unwavering support. Your dedication to CatholicCare Victoria and our mission to serve those in need is nothing short of inspirational.

36,170 people across Victoria were supported through CatholicCare Victoria during the last financial year, thanks to your support.

Let us remember that by working together and amplifying our impact, we can truly make a difference and bring about the positive change our community so desperately needs.

Thank you for being a critical driving force behind our mission. Together we can build thriving communities by disrupting disadvantage. Together, we can create a brighter, more hopeful future for all Victorians.



Agnes Sheehan, CEO of CatholicCare Victoria.



James and Biljana from Gadens, with Sally from the CCV Board.

Christmas Food Hampers



CDF team who volunteered with packing hampers.

With support, the CatholicCare Victoria team successfully prepared and delivered 620 food hampers to families who were facing financial hardship, homelessness, mental health issues, domestic violence and those from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds.

2023 was challenging for many Victorians, especially with the cost-of-living crisis. Ensuring everyone is able to enjoy Christmas as a time of hope, peace, joy and great love, is important to us at CatholicCare Victoria.

“The food hampers were thoughtfully prepared and full of generous offerings ranging from necessary food staples to special treats for the family.

Our families absolutely LOVED receiving them. As we delivered them, we had the pure pleasure of sharing in the joy of families receiving and unpacking them too. It was such a heart-warming experience and an incredible practical help to vulnerable families, who are really struggling to make ends meet, in very challenging economic times,” Sally-Anne, CatholicCare Victoria staff member.

The hampers were delivered to families across Victoria with the help of various CatholicCare Victoria teams in; Bairnsdale, Ballarat, Bendigo, Dandenong, Geelong, Pakenham, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Warragul and more.

We would like to thank the Catholic schools who participated in the ‘Carry a Can’ campaign and the students and families who donated food items for the food hampers. The generosity of students and the school community has made a significant impact on the lives of many who are finding the cost of living is making feeding their families a challenge.

Thank you to our food suppliers, notably Food Factory Sales and Ital Food Group, who provided us with discounted food items.



Michelle Ross-FitzGerald, Matthew Cassin (CEO), Kristen Sikora, Brendan Hoy from CDF.

We are very grateful to Catholic Development Fund (CDF) for charitably supporting this initiative. Special thanks to the amazing CDF staff who donated food and volunteered their time to prepare and pack the food hampers. We thank CDF for their continued support of our vision and mission.

A sanctuary for families

Families & Individuals

"We are very socially disadvantaged up here in Wangaratta. We've got some of the highest rates of family violence and child protection involvement up this way."

Our Children's Contact Service (CCS) in Wangaratta was established in June 2023 with funding from the Australian Government, to enhance support services for separated families across the nation.

Children's Contact Services enable children from high-conflict, separated families to visit their non-resident parent, in the safety of a supervised and neutral environment.

Before the establishment of the CCS in Wangaratta, children living locally were waiting up to six months to spend time with their non-resident parent. Furthermore, the nearest service was located in Albury - one hour away.

"If our CCS wasn't here, there would be a lot of children who wouldn't be able to form relationships with their non-resident parent. Those relationships would break down because if you get a child who's not able to see a parent for 6-12 months due to wait lists, the relationship disintegrates," says Jason, Team leader of the Wangaratta CCS.

The majority of families we're working with utilise our CCS once a fortnight to spend time with their non-lived-with child. But our team also provide additional supports, to help parents work towards self-management of contact arrangements.

"Quite often the mums are heightened when they come here. There's a lot of anxiety, a lot of angst, a lot of fear. We do a lot of work with the mums to manage how they're feeling and to get them into a safer space. And eventually, some move to self-management because of the support we've been able to provide them with," says Jason.

Our CCS centre consists of two large indoor contact rooms, where we facilitate contact sessions and offer a range of activities to ensure positive engagement between parents and children.

These activities include cooking, arts and crafts, reading books, playing board games, and TVs and video games too.

But with Wangaratta being a rural community, many of the children and parents that attend our CCS are very outdoor orientated and find being outside very familiar and comfortable.

"So spending time outdoors is an important step in building rapport between children and the parent that they often have had no contact with for a long period of time," says Jason.

The children who attend our CCS have offered thoughts on what they would like to see in the outdoor area. We are very grateful to AccessEAP, for their generous support towards developing the outdoor area and playground. From a cubbyhouse and slide, a BBQ, basketball ring, floor and wall pot planters, and tables and chairs, we are now able to turn our outdoor space into something parents and children can enjoy together. CatholicCare Victoria would like to thank Bunnings Wangaratta for providing the items.



Damanu Dance Group at the CCS launch in Wangaratta.

The journey to a new life

Multicultural

At the age of ten, Vinith spent 42 days at sea with his mother and sister. His mother made the difficult decision to leave Sri Lanka to offer them a safe, and better life in a new country.

Now, after finishing high school in Victoria, Vinith is studying his third year of construction management at Deakin University and will graduate next year. But his journey wasn't easy.

"I wasn't sure if I'm going to go university because of my visa condition. It doesn't let me go out, because I have to pay four grand per unit, which comes up to 16 grand per trimester, which is not money we've got. Luckily I got my scholarship, so now I'm studying," says Vinith.

Vinith accessed support from CatholicCare Victoria's Settle Well program during high school, to help him reach his education and career goals.

The Settle Well program supports students from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds, who are at risk of disengaging from school and community, and who attend North Geelong Secondary College or Northern Bay College.

The program began as a specialised trauma-informed counselling service, and has evolved to empower young people to thrive in their new communities.

"At the very beginning, everyone was uncertain what was going to happen. Because we didn't really know much about the country and we saw people getting sent back, so we were all just worried. We spent 42 days coming here, given up everything back home and we might get sent back," says Vinith.

Once the family was released from the refugee camp, Vinith's mother chose to move to Victoria, where Vinith attended English language school to prepare him for his new life in Australia.

"It's hard at the beginning because not a lot of kids understand you. You can't really get across what you're trying to say, and you get quite frustrated."



Vinith, Settle Well program participant

But now, with support and empowerment from the Settle Well program, Vinith is working towards his dreams.

"I'll get a job as a construction manager. That's my goal. And hopefully soon I'll get a job in the construction industry, work my way up because I've got one year [of study] left to go."

Students who attend the Settle Well program are often dealing with an array of challenges which impact their education and wellbeing. Some of these challenges include limited English language skills, due to disrupted education; difficulty concentrating in class, due to trauma backgrounds associated with their refugee journeys; and isolation and disengagement, due to language barriers and cultural differences.

The Settle Well program supports many young people like Vinith to improve personal wellbeing and community connectedness, access education support, and find pathways for their career goals.

CatholicCare Victoria would like to acknowledge the generous support of our community partners and volunteers who contribute to the program and the students.

We thank our generous philanthropic supporters of the Settle Well program, including the Noel and Carmel O'Brien Family Foundation, Anthony Costa Foundation, Australian Community Foundation, Geelong Community Foundation and Give Where You Live Foundation.

Supporting children's mental wellbeing

Youth



With over 75% of mental health issues occurring before the age of 25, it is evident that anxiety and other mental health challenges are becoming increasingly prevalent.

Ellie was 10 years old when she first experienced panic attacks; a symptom of anxiety.

"I was feeling like, I didn't know why I'm feeling this way, but it was just something that's making me feel down and making me feel upset. Sometimes there was not something to distract me, so I just start crying," says Ellie.

Ellie's mother, Jem, shared that she initially struggled to afford support for her daughter:

"Initially we were referred to a psychologist and the appointments were \$170. I put it off for a while and it made me feel awful because I was like, well, if I can't afford this for my child, what kind of mother does that make me?" Jem said.

CatholicCare Victoria offers a range of free and affordable services to support mental health

and wellbeing for young people. These include our Family Wellbeing Support Service, Family and Relationship Counselling, and School Counselling program; which offers support to students, as well as families and school staff.

"School Counsellors act as a useful resource for healthier communication styles. It helps children have sound emotional regulation, understand their thoughts, emotions and how they interact with others," says Angela, Senior Manager Schools Unit at CatholicCare Victoria.

"Children and families learn to implement effective coping mechanisms to manage stress, loss, or challenging life transitions. These skills are vital in their understanding of their world and how they can navigate future difficulties."

Our School Counsellors and Mental Health Practitioners have noticed an alarming rise in anxiety levels for students and young people:

"It's fairly common for children to not know what their anxiety triggers are because there's usually not a trigger. It's because they're becoming aware of emotions and these parts of the brain are now growing. We're seeing it a lot, especially after COVID-19." - Jasmine, Practitioner Family Wellbeing Support Service, CatholicCare Victoria says.

Our extensive hands-on experience working with students, families and schools has also revealed an increase in ADHD and Autism diagnoses; self-harm tendencies and suicidal thoughts; and interpersonal struggles such as bullying and peer pressure.

CatholicCare Victoria's School Counsellors are supporting students to work through these challenges, as well as other challenges around family relationships and breakdown, trauma and grief, gaming addiction, and school attendance and engagement.

Providing more than Aged Care Support

Homes

Advanced care finder was designed to address the gaps identified by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety from 2018 to 2021.

“The aged care system is complex, and many elderly people find it overwhelming to navigate, due to cognitive and physical decline or inadequate IT skills,” Barbara, Advanced care finder Case Coordinator explains.

Adjacent challenges that an elderly person might face often reflect broader systemic issues in the community; including homelessness, isolation, mental health or cognitive issues, social exclusion, hoarding and a lack of health and community services in rural areas.

Scott*, in his late 70’s, was living in a public housing unit. He would often visit our CatholicCare Victoria office to access food parcels, when our receptionist noticed that he might be needing other assistance. She subsequently referred him to our Advanced care finder program.

Upon receiving Scott’s case, our Advanced care finder Case Coordinator, Sue, visited him in his home only to find that his living conditions were severely compromised due to a running kitchen sink and a flooded bedroom from ongoing plumbing issues lasting over nine weeks. Despite seeking prior help elsewhere, Scott’s situation hadn’t been addressed, forcing him to have showers at his local church.

Sue spent over a month trying to get Scott’s plumbing issues resolved, and currently she is working on getting a reimbursement for the resulting gas bills he has accrued. Additionally, Sue registered Scott with My Aged Care and attended an Aged Care assessment with him to receive a Home Care Package, that would assist him with personal care and home maintenance.



Betty and Mel from the Advanced care finder team

Without family members or emergency contacts to rely on for support, as well as having a 10-year history of incarceration, Scott had been left socially isolated and in a vulnerable position.

“Our staff work with a person-centred approach and empowerment in mind. There's a lot of adjacent things apart from aged care services that people might need support with, and that they can be connected to while waiting for an assessment,” Gavin, Advanced care finder Team Leader says.

“Whether it's allied health services, GPs, community support groups or even social activities, we can help connect them.”

“Our team makes sure that they've got ongoing support and care and helps discuss whether they want to remain in the home, or whether they might need to move into residential aged care. But essentially, the goal is to support them to access services that otherwise they probably wouldn't be able to access by themselves” says Gavin.

* At CatholicCare Victoria, we respect everyone who comes to us for help. Many are working towards a fresh start in life. So, while the stories are true, the client's name has been changed to protect their privacy. Thank you for your understanding.

Our amazing supporters, thank you!

You help us continue our work with:

FAMILIES & INDIVIDUALS

Healthy families shape our emotional bonds, mental health, goals, and values. They can offer us the security, support, and love that we need to thrive.

We see families as a key influence on the health and wellbeing of both individuals and their communities.

Our programs assist families to navigate relational challenges, parent well, increase their emotional intelligence, and find healthy ways to deal with conflict.

Where the family unit has broken down, we offer services that assist with parenting arrangements, dispute resolution, and escaping family violence. We champion wellbeing and inclusive growth.

YOUTH

The challenges of disadvantage can hit young people especially hard.

In a critical period of their life, our work with youth is one of the most strategic ways that we can disrupt the cycle of disadvantage and empower our young people to reach their full potential.

We're here to provide support to children and young people to improve their health and wellbeing; to develop their education, training and career pathways; and to get them active within the community.

Our services assist vulnerable young people across Victoria.

MULTICULTURAL

Australia is home to the world's oldest continuous cultures, as well as Australians who identify with around 300 ancestries. This means that every family and individual will have unique challenges and needs.

Without CatholicCare Victoria's support, these challenges can form barriers to personal wellbeing, social participation, education, training, and employment.

We provide on-site support within schools, specialised trauma-informed counselling, advocacy and case management, financial and material aid, and referrals to other community services. Because everyone deserves the opportunity to build a brighter future.

HOMES

A home is a haven and a safe comfort zone. A place to live with our families and pets, or enjoy with friends. A place to build memories and to build our future. A place we can make our own.

But not everyone can afford or access suitable accommodation in the private rental market. Many need support to maintain their accommodation, too. With thousands of Victorians experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness, support is needed more than ever before.

We assist families and individuals to find options for long-term, affordable accommodation, and support them to overcome barriers to sustainable employment and independent living.

