

# Children, Youth and Families **Quarterly update**

## **It takes a community**

ISSUE 3

January-March 2022



## About Churches of Christ

Churches of Christ has a long and proud history of care. Active across more than 100 local communities in Queensland and Victoria for almost 140 years, we are an organisation dedicated to innovative and holistic support.

By empowering people to live hope-filled, meaningful lives, we are able to truly live our purpose – to bring the light of Christ into communities.

Through our local churches, and care and support services, we are able to assist tens of thousands of people each year.

Through inclusive, caring, compassionate environments that meet individual needs without discrimination or prejudice, we are helping to build a community where everyone is welcome.

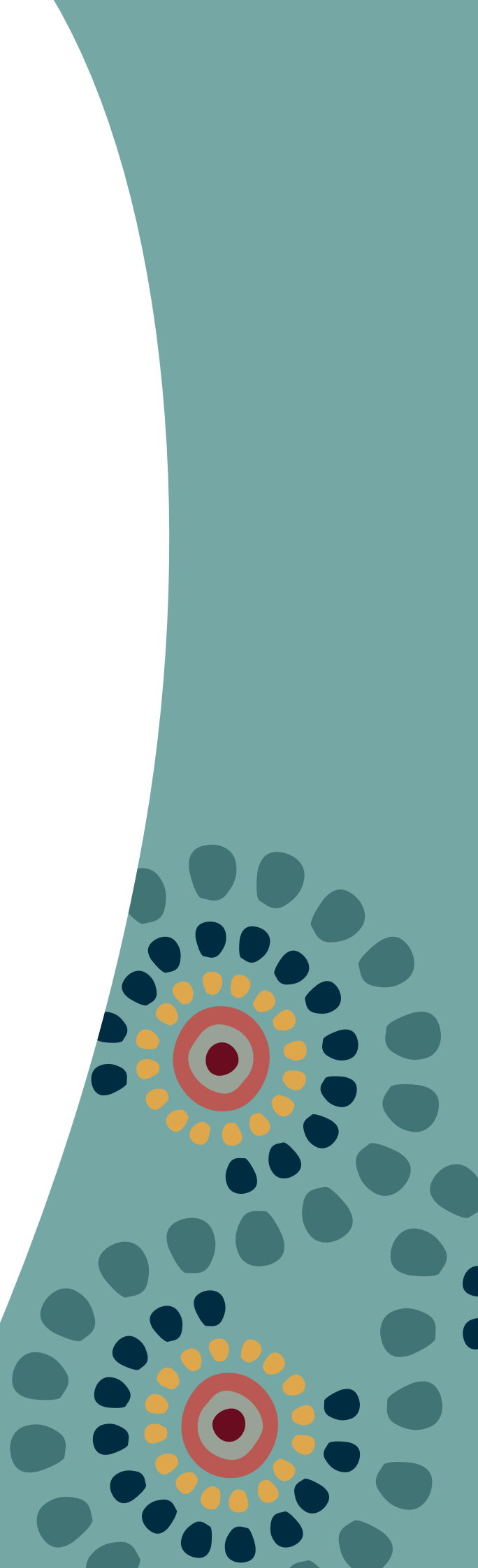
## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we stand and pay our respects to the Elders past, present and emerging, for they hold the memories, traditions, cultures, hopes and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We recognise, respect and celebrate the survival and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including recognition of those whose ongoing effort to protect and promote the world's oldest living culture will leave a lasting and proud legacy for their people.

## Connecting to culture

Churches of Christ Children, Youth and Families consistently creates and ensures opportunities for young people to enhance their cultural connection with their community. Connection to culture and community, and a strong cultural identity, helps young people become resilient adults.



# Message from our Director.

**Child, Family and Housing Services,  
Mike Folland**



Welcome to our third edition of *Children, Youth and Families Quarterly update*. We hope it finds you in safe and healthy environments, following a challenging start to the year with continuing COVID and flooding impacts.

As we face these challenges together, we acknowledge that May is Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Prevention Month, a time for us as a community to unite and state very clearly: Not now, not ever.

## Our Family Support Services

As part of the essential work of keeping children and young people safe, our seven Intensive Family Support programs work with families across the state to support early intervention and prevention of DFV. Our cover story on pages 4-5 features some of the initiatives we are delivering to support those that are impacted and to send a strong message that DFV is not tolerated in our community.

Our Spotlight stories in this edition include a wonderful foster carer family of eight that share the remarkable changes the foster parents have had the privilege to witness with the two young siblings in their care. We highlight one of our residential care homes as the teenage girls in their care head back to school. Our Youth CONNECT service features the story of \*Caleb as told by his case manager.

## Raise the age

During a time when the call to raise the age to 21 for statutory care continues across our state, our services, such as Youth CONNECT and Supported Independent Living are bridging that gap and contributing compelling evidence that transitional services work. Use the QR code below to watch a video on why transitional services are so important for vulnerable young people and the support services we currently offer.



**Mike Folland, shares the realities for young people in non-family-based care, or residential care, who no longer have access to a range of support and resources once they turn 18.**

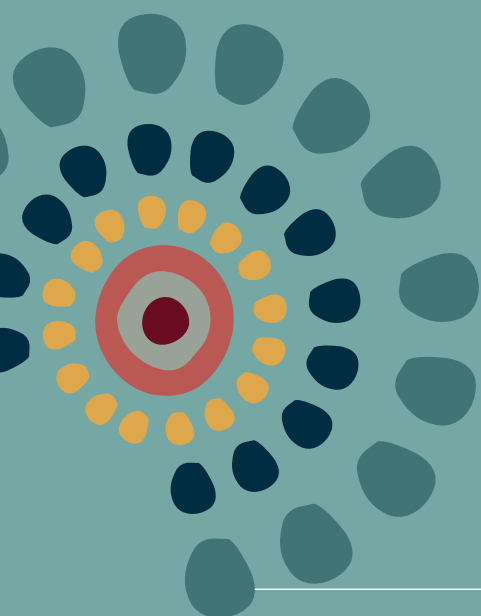
I also invite you to read Youth CONNECT's *Annual Investor Report* with statistics and positive outcomes for at-risk youth experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, aged 15 to 25-years-old, who we support with this program. Please see QR code below.



**A Queensland Government initiative, we deliver the Youth CONNECT program to vulnerable youth who are referred by the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs. Read the *Youth CONNECT Annual Investor Report*.**

## Thank you

We thank you as always for your continued support of the important work that we do in partnership with the Queensland Government to keep children safe and support vulnerable families to thrive in our community.



# Intensive Family Support.

## Supporting families experiencing domestic violence.

**May is Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month, which is aimed at raising community awareness and stating clearly that we do not accept domestic and family violence (DFV) within families and homes.**

As part of the support we provide to vulnerable families within our communities, we wanted to share how our Intensive Family Support program tackles the complex issue of DFV.

### **Supporting families to stay safe and together**

Our Intensive Family Support (IFS) teams work with families who can be referred by the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, Department of Education, Queensland Health, Queensland Police Service, community agencies, or, the families can also self-refer. We have seven IFS teams across Queensland.

Service Manager for IFS Bundaberg, Juanita Varley explains, "It's called Intensive Family Support because that's exactly what it is. The teams work intensively with the family to increase safety for children within the household. DFV is frequently a predominant factor that is experienced in many homes with differing levels of intensity.

"Intervention with the family can be up to nine months once the family has consented to engage with the worker as the service is voluntary. Our team's focus is on identifying the needs, worries and strengths to formulate a case plan in support of increasing the parenting capacity and protective needs of the children.

"IFS is part of a number of programs in the community that focus on prevention and early intervention for families."

### **Supporting our IFS team**

To ensure we are providing the best and most appropriate support to vulnerable families, each service has a DFV lead practitioner within each IFS team to support our case workers.

Juanita explains, "The DFV practitioner is an integral member of the team who supports and mentors team members in appropriate screening of risk and case planning where DFV is present in a family. Along with the Team Leader, they are key to support team members in debriefing, along with case planning, reviews and enhancing knowledge and skill levels. Teams work closely with other services, including the Vulnerable Persons Unit (Police) and local DV Service. Together they focus on an integrated response for families experiencing DFV to deliver the most service and a support at the time it is most required.

"Further to the work that our DFV practitioner engages with for our team and the community is a new support group that was identified as a need to support families in Bundaberg. We initiated a Survivor Group program, which was launched in DFV Prevention Month. This eight-week program focuses on providing education and information in a supportive group setting. During DFV Prevention Month our team and families also participate in organised DFVP Month marches and light a candle at the vigil for all those that have been lost."

### **Supporting our clients to support each other**

Our Burdekin team work in partnership with the Gudjuda Aboriginal Corporation to deliver the Burdekin IFS Service in Ayr.

The IFS team developed a workshop series targeting parents who are or have been directly impacted by violence within intimate partner and family relationships, called the 'Tea Party'. The program aims to provide information and support around DFV to women in an informative, fun and safe group environment.

It was a priority for the IFS team to create an environment that supports social connection and emotional support between peers. This was achieved by:

- Encouraging clients to invite a support friend or family member.
- Making the group a closed group to protect participants' safety (both physical and emotional).



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**"Domestic and family violence within our homes is not and will not be tolerated; not now, not ever."**



**Pictured above, the IFS team in Ayr that delivered the 'Tea Party' workshop, from left to right:** Lesley MacManus, Gudjuda Aboriginal Corporation embedded team member, Georgina Haines (former employee), Emily Vasta (former employee) and DFV practitioner Arsha Sajan.

**Pictured above right, from left to right from the 'Tea Party' workshop:** External consultant Mary Pearson, IFS DFV practitioner Arsha Sajan and Gudjuda Aboriginal Corporation team member Shiradean George.

With the group philosophy being to lead (walk in front), then support (walk beside), and to then encourage (walk behind), the service invited local specialists to co-facilitate each week.

As a result, the women who attended this workshop have since continued their own support group, and now attend and speak at community events to support other women within the local community directly affected by DFV.

Julie Teakle, Service Manager, Intensive Family Support, FNQ and NQ region said this was an innovative program which not only supported their clients, but also empowered them to speak up within their local community about DFV.

"By showing innovation through their work and being dedicated to carers, young people, and families, our IFS team in Ayr has made a real difference to supporting women experiencing DFV while providing a culturally safe space and connection."

### **Not now, not ever**

As part of our commitment to working toward a future where all people are safe, respected and free from violence and abuse we utilise organisational frameworks, tools and procedures to achieve this outcome.

Luke Tempamy Manager Business Development and Support explains, "Our team members are committed to non-violence, emotional intelligence, social learning, democracy, open communication, social responsibility, and growth and change when working with vulnerable families.

"These values ensure that we listen and encourage our clients' voices to be heard.

"We are dedicated to fostering a safe environment for our team members, and the children, families and community we serve.

"We do this under a framework that is based on an understanding of how traumatic events can impact the mind and body of vulnerable children, families and organisations.

"Our role is to provide a safe space for those in our community experiencing DFV to find continued safety and support, information, guidance and a pathway forward. Domestic and family violence within our homes and community is not and will not be tolerated; not now, not ever. DFV has no place in our society."

# Domestic and family violence prevention month.



**2.2M**

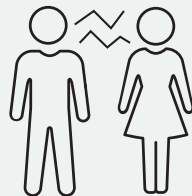
Australians have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a partner\*

**76%**



Females were more likely to have a hospital stay due to violence from a partner (76%) than males (30%)\*\*

**3.6M**



Australians have experienced emotional abuse from a partner\*

**55%**



Males were more likely to have a hospital stay due to violence from 'other family member' (55%) than females (18%)\*\*

## Impact of COVID-19

**42%**

Women who had experienced physical violence before the pandemic reported the violence from their partner had increased in frequency or severity during the pandemic.\*\*\*

**18%**

Women who had been in a relationship longer than 12 months experienced violence from their partner for the first time during the pandemic.\*\*\*

**3.4%** experienced physical violence and **3.2%** experienced sexual violence.

\* Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Personal Safety Survey

\*\* Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021 web report: Family, domestic and sexual violence data in Australia

\*\*\*Survey from the Australian Institute of Criminology, 12 months to February 2021

# Young father thrives with transitional service support.

## Our social benefit bond program, Youth CONNECT provides transitional services and support to vulnerable youth aged between 15 and 25.

During a time when the call to raise the age for out-of-home care from 18 to 21 is growing louder, one of our case managers shares the story of Caleb\* from the government-initiated program that is delivering transitional care in Queensland.

### Brian Girot, Case Manager, Youth CONNECT

*I first met Caleb when I was a youth worker in a residential home more than five years ago, when he was about 15-years-old.*

*Caleb battled substance abuse due to a traumatic childhood to cope and deal with what had happened to him. This is something we see fairly regularly.*

*As we had that past relationship, when I moved to a new role in Youth CONNECT, it worked really well to have that consistency for Caleb. It just really helps with the trust if you have that past connection.*

*Caleb had a partner with a baby on the way, which definitely gave him more drive and a purpose. So, working with him on his goals and mapping out a plan for him to support him with referrals to services as required, or providing guidance as to steps to take to meet his goal became more doable.*

*COVID lockdown in July 2021 was a blessing for Caleb, as his partner's family decided to take them both in when they were struggling and that gave him the opportunity of being in a safe home and a loving family environment. The acceptance of his partner's family has really been key to his success. He now travels one hour each way to get to work daily on public transport, as he is committed to providing for his partner and their new arrival.*

*Although Caleb graduated from the Youth CONNECT program at the end of February, he Facetimed me recently to introduce me to his new daughter and gave me a progress report on his work and life in general.*

*It's very rewarding for me to witness the person Caleb is growing into with support from us and his partner's family. He's shown strong signs of resilience, when only 12 months ago he was in temporary accommodation with friends, unemployed with continued substance abuse issues. Today, he and his partner are raising their first child together in a stable, supportive family environment.*

\*Name is de-identified for privacy reasons.



**Pictured above, the Youth CONNECT team members at the end of 2021, from left to right:** case manager Mel McKane, support worker Tonya Lake, case manager Evie Dulnuan, case manager Jasmine Taylor, team leader Nisveta Kospic and support worker Jamie Jayasuriya.

**Back row, from left to right:** case manager Brian Girot, case manager Ben Christie and current acting team leader Taylor Alapaki.

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**"It's very rewarding for me to witness the person Caleb is growing into with support from us and his partner's family."**

# Second generation foster carer helps young siblings thrive.

**Kym grew up with foster siblings, who remain an important part of family gatherings to this day. This childhood experience inspired her and husband Anthony to become foster carers in 2017, when just in their mid-20s.**

Since then, they have provided primary, emergency, and respite care while also raising their biological children.

Today, their family is comprised of eight children, including siblings Jennifer\* aged 11 and Benjamin\* aged seven for whom they are foster carers. Kym shares the challenges and rewards of being a foster care family.

## Routine is key

Kym says routine is essential in their home and emphasises the importance of all children being treated the same.

"Every child needs to feel equal in what is expected of them and what they can expect from us as their parents," Kym said.

"If one child has an after-school activity, then every child needs to have an after-school activity; it's that simple really."

When Jennifer and Benjamin arrived in their care just over a year ago, Kym observed they had no routine. Due to the chaotic environment they had been living in, Kym had to start with the basics for the siblings.

"Our home runs on routines," Kym said.

"Benjamin thrived having the routine, having a bed time, doing homework, having regular meal times, and it really made a difference.

"When it came to after-school activities, he wanted to try dance.

"We checked in with his biological father, who we have a good working relationship with. It's important the children see the adults getting along. He was very supportive of Benjamin trying dance.

"Benjamin loves it. He's made lots of friends – represented the school in a dance eisteddfod and thinks it's the best thing he's ever done in his life.

"He's such a wonderful kid. Seeing a child's life change is huge. Knowing that we have done something so that life is going to be a little bit easier—that's massive."



**Pictured above:** Kym and Anthony have been foster carers for more than five years.

## Children need to be children

When Jennifer arrived, she would not eat initially and, like her brother, was not aware of and did not follow any routines.

"When she first came, she had been the 'parent' in their situation previously, being responsible for the care of herself and her brother," Kim said.

"Jennifer was barely going to school. She engaged only with adults, as she didn't know how to be a child.

"When she saw in our home all the siblings following their routines, playing with each other, including a child her age, she could see it was safe to be a child. It really helped to have that same-aged sister to connect with and show her the way.

"She even loves eating all her vegetables at dinner now.

Following a year in their care, Kym can't believe the difference in the siblings. Jennifer is the vice-captain at her primary school, loves her after-school dance class and has represented her school district in cross country.

"It's a really nice feeling to go to school events and multiple teachers come up and say thank you for your efforts, you have no idea how much you've changed this child's life."

\*Names have been de-identified for privacy reasons.



# Giving teens a voice gets school year off to a fresh start.

**Dedicated staff, like self-professed 'mother hen' and Residential Case Manager, Cass Jackson, focus on building caring relationships and creating consistency for the young people in our residential care services.**

Cass explains the four female teens at her service, like many young people who come into our care, had experienced chaotic home environments that did not foster any sort of routine for things like meal and bed times, self-care routines or school attendance.

Heading into the new school year, Cass and her team worked with each young person to help them to action their departmental educational support plan. The plan maps out goals and identifies any funding that could be accessed, or support services the teens may require during the year. Importantly, the team empowered and trusted the young people in the decision-making process, and let them know they were listened to and cared for.

"Our youngest, age 12, was struggling to attend school last year," Cass said.

"With her transition to secondary school this year, she has been able to prove her independence by riding to and from school each day with friends.

"The excitement of riding has also resulted in her being up and ready to go in the mornings before the youth workers have even made their first coffee!"

Another of the older teens, age 17, was supported to have agency and a voice in her education as she explored the possibility of moving to a new school after struggling socially at her school the previous year.

Cass listened, and worked with her during the holiday break to visit other schools to try and help her find the 'right fit'. Having visited various schools and conducting her own research, she bravely proved her resilience by going back to her existing school and giving it another chance.

"While it is the same school, she has undertaken it with a new positive attitude and described it as a 'fresh start'. We are so proud of her," Cass said.

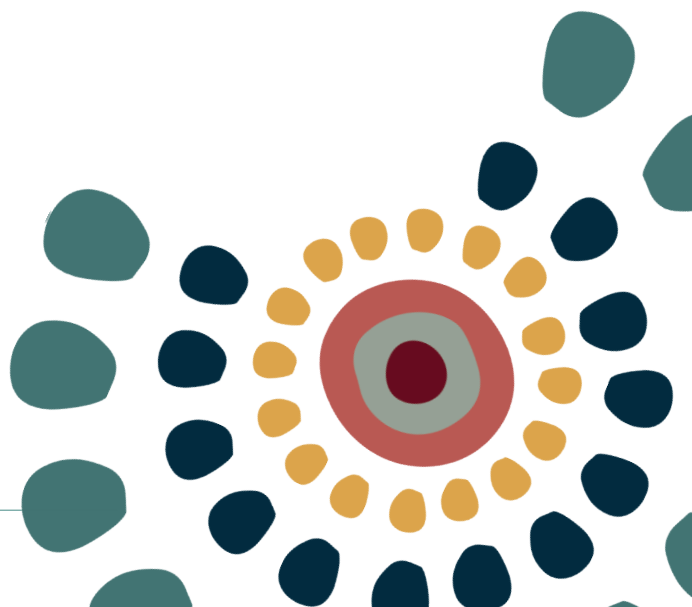
"It has been a great start to the school year all round, and just shows that what we do is really about connection and making sure the vulnerable children in our care know that we are here to listen and to support them; to help them thrive."



**Pictured above:** Cass Jackson, Residential Case Manager shares that it's been a great start to the school year for the children in her care.

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**"While it is the same school, she has undertaken it with a new positive attitude and described it as a 'fresh start'. We are so proud of her."**



# People and events.

## NATIONAL AWARD FOR CASE MANAGER

Congratulations to our Youth CONNECT Case Manager and Team Leader Taylor Alapaki for being recognised with the National Caseworker Award from CREATE Foundation during their Voices in Action conference. Wonderful recognition of Taylor's ongoing commitment to the vulnerable young people in our care. As one of Taylor's clients commented about his help with his studies, "Taylor is so supportive and looking forward to seeing me graduate, which motivates me." Great job, Taylor!



## A 'HOPPING' GOOD TIME DURING SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

Our Families Together team from the Jamboree Heights office hopped to it over the school holidays offering up cooking classes for eight to 11-year-olds and a separate session for those over 12 from families that we support. It was Easter chocolate crackles for the young children and spaghetti bolognese for older children, with extra made to take home for the families. One 12-year-old, was so impressed, they left a 5-star review on the white board! The classes, gave the parents an opportunity to meet other parents, and as one said, "we made some social connections and were glad we got to learn a few kitchen skills and techniques."



## LEGO THERAPY SUPPORTS VULNERABLE CHILDREN

A wonderful initiative from our Bundaberg Intensive Foster Care (IFC) service for children in the program in support of their emotional and social development. The team initiated a weekly therapeutic LEGO club, which assists with social skills and group interactions. Those who have participated, proudly show off their certificates to their friends who now also want to join this creative and inclusive activity.



## CULTURAL CONNECTION FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

Our Youth CONNECT team values and understands the importance of connecting young people with their culture. With 42% of the cohort identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, we are committed to creating opportunities to learn and connect.

As part of our commitment – the team, clients and their children, attended Ngutana-Lui, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Studies Centre located on Yuggera and Jagera Country. Ngutana-Lui means 'to teach'. Leading our learning journey was Eric, an Elder who shared teachings about traditional ways of living.

One client commented that she loved the day and loved introducing her daughter to places and experiences like this. A safe space, where her daughter will be able to grow up knowing her culture.



## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

We celebrated International Women's Day with a presentation from Peggy O'Neal, president of the Richmond Football Club. Peggy spoke about her journey as a woman in leadership. The theme for IWD 2022 was #BreakTheBias, which raises awareness about the bias women face and encourages people to take action for equality. We also provided a collection box at our head office for the Share the Dignity drive, which happens every March during IWD. We proudly partner with Share the Dignity to deliver personal hygiene products to those accessing our services. For more information, visit [sharethedignity.org.au](https://sharethedignity.org.au)



## TEAM BUILDING IN THE REGIONS

Our Fraser Coast regional CYF teams, including Family and Child Connect and Assessment and Connect teams recently undertook a two-day team building workshop with the DaV'ange Group. The workshop provided transformational learning with the focus on the Human Services sector. The team built connections while conducting some deep diving into the work we do, which left everyone feeling positive and energised.



## QUEENSLAND CHILD PROTECTION AWARDS NOMINATIONS OPEN

Nominations are now open for the Queensland Child Protection Awards recognising those individuals and organisations that work towards the safety and wellbeing of children. Nominations close on 27 May 2022. Good luck to all submitting nominations and applications. For more information, please visit [childprotectionweek.org.au/awards](https://childprotectionweek.org.au/awards)

## CPW 2022 Awards Applications NOW OPEN

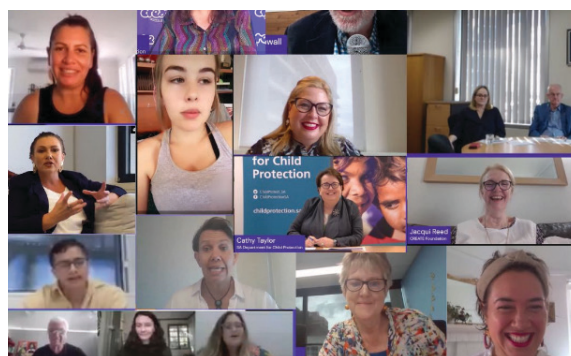


## YOUNG VOICES IN ACTION

Our Youth CONNECT team continue to impress presenting at CREATE Foundation's inaugural virtual national conference, Voices in Action.

The presentation produced by our collaborative research partnership with the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC), was titled, 'Supporting and Building Resilience Through Putting Relationships and Young People at the Centre of Practice.' Focusing on building relationships, including how to create an environment of cultural safety and connection.

**Pictured in bottom left-hand corner from left:** Dr Phil Crane and Rachael Stubbs our research partners from the USC with our own Alannah Grace presented.





Every child, young person and family deserves to grow, belong, connect and thrive in their community.

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