Children, Youth and Families Quarterly update

It takes a community

ISSUE 1 July-September 2021





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

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 and 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.

We believe

Together, we can change lives for the better.

Front cover: Gibbah Gunyah dancers share traditional dance at the Elders Acknowledgement Lunch. **Pictured at top, from left:** Rosalind Sapolu, Service Manager Families Together Moreton Bay CYF, Keith Culley, GM Operations CYF, Aunty Ruth Hegarty (guest speaker), Dena Dodd-Ugle (organiser of the event), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Officer, CYF, Sally Edwards CYF Regional Manager, Gemma Squire, Service Manager Brisbane & Moreton Bay Foster and Kinship Care Services, CYF, and Kelly Selman, Service Manager, Moreton Region, CYF.

We would also like to acknowledge the community groups that joined us at the lunch: Balaangala Community Group (a major sponsor – Aunty Flo Watson), the Pumanyngan Elders, Mindle Bygul Aboriginal Corporation, Queensland Health, Metro North, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Team, University of the Sunshine Coast (event was held at the Caboolture campus), Deception Bay Community Youth programs, Pumicestone Indigenous Education and Employment Committee, Centrecare, Redcliffe Youth Justice, Australian Community Support Organisation, Caboolture Youth Justice Service Centre, Bunnings – Morayfield store, The Gibbah Gunyha Dancers; and Torres Strait Islander singers.

Message from our new CYF Director, Mike Folland



During my first few months in the role, I've reflected a great deal on how our team needs to be set up to ensure we can deliver for the complex and changing needs of young people, families and carers well into the future.

CYF has grown significantly over the last few years and the challenge of ongoing future growth and new directions from government will require innovation and nimble leadership.

"... our dedicated team strive to ensure the voices of children, young people, foster and kinship carers, and families are heard."

I am highly motivated to position Churches of Christ to be at the forefront of care for children, young people and families, reducing the intergenerational cycle of abuse and trauma.

Cultural practice

I am particularly passionate to help strengthen existing cultural practice and find new paths to reduce the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system.

Over the course of my career, I have lived and worked in various South Pacific countries, including in Vanuatu, where I oversaw a Churches of Christ managed health clinic,



and Papua New Guinea, where I developed an initiative to establish water rights for Indigenous river communities with Origin Energy. These experiences ground my cultural awareness, and my engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here in Australia.

Churches of Christ Highlight

Over four years ago I was given the opportunity to lead the commercial bid for the Youth CONNECT Social Benefit Bond, a world-first innovative program for young people transitioning from out-of-home-care into independent adulthood. It is a highlight of my time here at Churches of Christ to have played a role in establishing this program, which is now supporting more than 300 young people to develop the life skills they need to thrive as adults. From finding adequate housing, gaining and keeping employment to making social connections and managing a budget effectively.

Hope for the future

Across all of our services, our dedicated team strive to ensure the voices of children, young people, foster and kinship carers, and families are heard. Through listening to their experiences and understanding their journey, we support them to belong, grow, connect and thrive in their community.

When I think about shaping the future for young people, I approach it with a deep sense of hope. Hope for meaningful change, and hope for healing and connection.

Welcome CYF GM Operations Kerith Culley

Kerith joins us after her most recent role with Mater Health, as Director Administration, delivering significant organisational and leadership development across a broad range of services and departments. She has extensive senior level experience in allied health, including clinical health, employment services and occupational rehabilitation.

Kerith brings to Churches of Christ substantial leadership experience, HR management, business and financial governance practices.

Welcome CYF GM Strategy, Support and Assurance Grant Hawgood

Grant brings with him more than 25 years' experience as a psychologist, including 12 years of leadership and executive experience, in both public and not-for-profit (NFP) service organisations across child protection, mental health, and drug and alcohol services. He is passionate about delivering improved clinical governance and client outcomes.

Grant most recently held senior management roles in the NFP sector, overseeing risk and compliance, quality and practice improvement for clinical services; and upskilling management in financial literacy, analysis and performance monitoring.



She has established a track record and reputation for transformational leadership, helping organisations deliver customerfocused outcomes and empowering her team to take continuous improvement by the reins to move the organisation forward.

We look forward to Kerith leading our existing team of high performing Regional Managers through significant change and growth in the child protection area.



We look forward to Grant's contribution to the team and providing leadership across our business support, research, innovation, practice improvement, quality and compliance capabilities.

"I am very excited about the future. We are invited to care for some of the most vulnerable young people in our communities. This is a deeply humbling invitation extended to us with the recognition and respect of the whole CYF team."

Mike Folland, CYF Director



50

years of delivering support and care to children, young people and families across Queensland



503

families in Intensive Family Support services supported across the state



1408

general and kin carers supported across the state



534

young adults supported in our Next Step Plus and Youth CONNECT services



108

young people supported in our Residential and Supported Living services at any one time



632

team members supporting children, young people and families, 4064 organisation wide



Elders acknowledged for connecting children to culture

Twenty-two Elders from Kabi Kabi / Gubbi Gubbi Country (Moreton Bay region) and Jagera / Yuggera Country (North Brisbane), were formally recognised at an Elders Acknowledgement Lunch on Wednesday 15 September.

The 2nd annual event, organised by Churches of Christ's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Officer and proud Iman woman from Iman Country, Dena Dodd-Ugle, was also highlighted by an address from award-winning author, 92-year-old Aunty Ruth Hegarty.

Dena said, "This event is an opportunity to thank local Elders for all that they do to build resilience in our kids and connect them to their culture."

Guest speaker and Elder, Aunty Ruth, of Gungarri Country (Mitchell) shared her personal experience of the Stolen Generation and the essential role Elders play today, especially for young people.

"This event is an opportunity to thank local Elders for all that they do to build resilience in our kids and connect them to their culture."

"Our mob have been here a long time. Sharing our traditions, our wisdom, our hopes and our experiences with young people will help build their future; they are our future."

Dena echoed these comments, saying, "The time our Elders spend with young people helps them connect to their community and culture and to acknowledge that we are the oldest known civilisation on Earth. "Elders take our kids on excursions and camping trips to Country where they share our traditions, culture, languages and Dreamtime stories. "Elders also share their knowledge and wisdom with our organisation to ensure our team understands the significance of events, such as NAIDOC Week; building cultural awareness within our organisation and the broader community.

"To be able to acknowledge the important work our Elders do with such a powerful guest speaker, Aunty Ruth Hegarty, was truly an honour."

Aunty Ruth, well known for her non-fiction titles, such as *Is that you, Ruthie?*, was awarded at the 1998 Queensland Premier's Literary Awards and also the Queensland Greats Awards.



Pictured above, from left: Moreton Bay Regional Councillor Brooke Savige, a proud Narungga woman, shared her story as a 14-year-old, reading Aunty Ruth's book, Is that you, Ruthie? (pictured right, guest speaker at the event), and how it changed her life reading about Aunty Ruth's experience and history of the Stolen Generation.

Pictured, opposite page: Gibbah Gunyah dancers share traditional dance at the Elders Acknowledgement Lunch; Aunty Sue Williams and Aunty Marj Grant (Cowburn) celebrate the Elders acknowledged; Aunty Deb Nagas one of the Elders; and a group shot—a wonderful day to celebrate, acknowledge and thank the Elders for the important work they do to support young people to be culturally safe and connected to community.

We thank you: Aunty Barb Hubbert, Aunty Dawn Murphy (Enoch), Aunty Deb Nagas *(pictured below)*, Aunty Francis Visini, Aunty Jacque Kina, Aunty Karen Brown (Brady), Aunty Lynelle Mace, Aunty Barbara Wharton, Uncle Charles Passi, Aunty Chez Graymore, Aunty Deb DeBree, Uncle Gordon Cowburn, Uncle Michael Connolly, Uncle Mick Douglas, Aunty Phillipa Cole, Uncle Ron Powell, Aunty Sharon Flynn-O'Brien, Aunty Veroncia Andrew, Aunty yOni Yinnar, Aunty Ruth Hegarty and Aunty Lynn Chapman.

NAIDOC

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ItTakesaCom

SPOTLIGHT: Kinship Carer Twenty-one-year-old sister the key to her family's heart

University student, Zara (21) and her partner Matthew (23) of Townsville are kinship carers to Zara's three siblings and wouldn't have life any other way.

Around two years ago, Zara's siblings, Felicity* (16), Joey* (11) and Emily* (8) found themselves in a cycle of abuse that began at birth, one which Zara was very familiar with.

"My maternal siblings and I have always experienced a home environment featuring drug abuse, alcoholism, violence and minimal, if any, parental guidance," Zara said.

"It was a real cycle of abuse.

"Our mum had moved away and the children stayed with their dad for a while, but he broke parole and was reincarcerated. This is when we stepped in.

"We started with the kids staying with their paternal grandparents on weekdays and Matt and I would care for them on the weekends. We then decided to become the primary care givers, so we transitioned to that, keeping up regular visits with their grandparents.

Zara says the toughest time for her and Matt was when her siblings first started living with them full-time.



"We were dealing with children that had been living with trauma their entire lives," Zara said.

"We had to show them what a 'normal' life looked like.

"We implemented a daily routine of breakfast together, going to school, dinners together, and showers every night.

"It was such a big learning curve for us all. But with respite support from their grandparents, Matt's caring family, helpful teachers at school and our amazing Churches of Christ case worker, Bridget, we got through it.

"My sister, Felicity, had started going down a dark path ... and now she is sitting her ATAR and getting great feedback from her teachers... it's like she's another person."

"Having Bridget as our support worker from the beginning has been the greatest help, the kids love her and she doesn't feel like an intrusion.

"If we ever need help, we contact Bridget and she gives me the answers or contacts the department for us. She always gets back to us on the same day, always there, always reliable.

"My sister, Felicity, had started going down a dark path with drugs, and hardly passing at school. And now she is sitting her ATAR and getting great feedback from her teachers.

"She's in the process of finding a job and gaining her driver's licence; it's like she's another person.

"We are so grateful for all the support."

*names have been changed for privacy reasons.

Pictured left: Matt and Zara are kinship carers to Zara's three siblings and wouldn't have life any other way.

SPOTLIGHT: Young People Jake's story

Jake, 25, has been in out-of-home care for 13-and-a-half years. For the last few years, he has transitioned to living independently with support provided from Churches of Christ.

Jake is now training to be a youth worker and wants to share his life skills and experience with young people in similar circumstances. He wants to make a difference.

"I just think it would have had such an impact on me, when I was in care, if support workers around me could personally understand what I was going through," Jake said.

"That's why I've decided to study a Certificate IV in Youth Work.

"Don't get me wrong; I am so grateful for the consistent and above and beyond care I received from Churches of Christ youth workers, Darren and Dan.

"We had our ups and downs, but the communication was always honest, with no BS.

"They spoke to me as a human being, and always with respect.

"Something I will always remember from that time is: 'if a young person is old enough to be told about something, they are old enough to be a part of the decision-making process.'

"I've never forgotten that and I truly believe everything happens for a reason; that's part of what I want to share."

Jake met youth worker Darren when he was 12-years-old and built a sort of brotherly relationship with him.

"When I was about 16, we decided—that is the Supported Independent Living Service (SILS) Team Leader, my youth workers and I—it was time to try supported independent living.

"We started with one night a week to get a feel for it over the course of a few weeks.

"Once every two weeks, we'd go shopping with a set budget and get food to cook for dinner that night.



Pictured above, from left: At the Queensland Child Protection Week dinner, Gary Edwards, CEO Churches of Christ, Jake Shields — youth advocate and guest speaker, Rachel Robinson, Regional Manager, Children, Youth and Families, Churches of Christ.

"I now live by myself and love it. I'll definitely be hitting up Darren and Churches of Christ for work placement for my training when it's time.

"I've also volunteered for many years with CREATE Foundation, the care sector's peak body, and I'm a big believer in encouraging young people to have a voice.

"... I'm a big believer in encouraging young people to have a voice."

"I've had the opportunity to meet with government ministers and directors-general and be on focus groups to share my experiences.

"I think sharing my knowledge will make a massive difference to another young person's life. To let them know that they should always ask for help, especially with your youth workers; they'll point you in the right direction.

"To not be afraid to voice your opinion: You have a voice.

"And most importantly, never give up."

SPOTLIGHT: Service Area Family Day Care The one who teaches children good manners

Congratulations to one of our Family Day Care (FDC) educators, Norma Hastings from Gin Gin Family Day Care Services for being awarded 2021 Regional Educator Award – Queensland at the Excellence in Family Day Care Awards.

Family Day Care Australia's Excellence in Family Day Care Awards are celebrating 10 years and the only national awards dedicated entirely to the family day care sector.

Norma, 61 of Mundubbera, has been working with us since 2018. Norma spent a lot of time in hospital as a young girl, and was so positively impacted by the level of care she received, she decided she wanted to be a nurse when she grew up.

Following 35 years as a registered nurse, Norma still felt that need to help children, and her work with us began.

Norma shares her story:

"After finishing up nursing, I still felt that I could help working families in my local area by providing nannying services," Norma said.

"I soon became so busy, I couldn't cope with the demand!

"I could see families with both parents working and a real need for care for young children before they go to our Mundubbera Kindergarten and Pre-school.

"I'm known around town as: The one that teaches the kids good manners."

"That's when I contacted Churches of Christ's Maryborough office and with their help, decided to set up Family Day Care in my own home.

"I care for my husband Neville, and it's like that ABC TV show, Old People's Home For 4 Year Olds.

"The children love it when he reads them stories."

Norma teaches basic life skills to the children, like learning left from right, how to tie shoes, write their name and pack their school bags.

"On a Tuesday we go on our weekly outing down the street and the children will tell us which way to turn, to help in teaching left from right," Norma said.

"We'll go to the supermarket walking up and down aisles and have a treat on Tuesdays at the local bakery.

"I'm known around town as: The one that teaches the kids good manners."

Congratulations also to FDC Coordinator, Zowie Simpson from the Maryborough office for being awarded an Emerging Star Award at the 2021 Excellence in Family Day Care Awards. Go team!



Pictured above, from left: Rebecca Westendorp, Service Manager, Early Childhood Services, Wide Bay, with Norma Hastings, FDC Educator, Gin Gin Family Day Care Services. Rebecca says: "the families in Norma's care agree she thoroughly deserves all recognition. We are very proud of Norma and the quality of care that she provides to the children in her community."

NEWS AND EVENTS



Our own master chefs

Our Families Together team *(pictured)* from the Jamboree Heights office have been hosting a family-focused cooking group every Tuesday lunch for families that we work with.

Acting Manager Todd Shepherd said as well as teaching affordable recipes, families always leave with a family-sized meal they've cooked themselves for dinner that night.

"Our 'family feeds' cooking classes, run weekly until the end of the year. The focus is on cost-effective and easy-to-make recipes, new cooking skills and kitchen safety.

"We usually have three families with stations, including electric frying pans set up to cook and one of our staff cooking alongside. We go through everything from ingredients preparation to safe storage."

Upcoming events

9th SNAICC National Conference, 6-9 December

2021, the largest of its type in the southern hemisphere, now fully virtual; this year's theme: Our Children Matter: Innovative approaches to new world challenges. snaicc.org.au/conference

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women launches the UNITE to End Violence against Women campaign, 25 Nov-10 Dec, incl. the International Human Rights Day, 10 December. un.org/en/observances/endingviolence-against-women-day

A stitch in time

Warmest congratulations and a heartfelt thank-you to the Care to Quilt Group at Caloundra Church of Christ on nearing 4000 quilts for children in foster care.

Mike Folland, Director, Children, Youth and Families said the skill, compassion and genuine care are evident in every stitch and shine through in each unique creation.

"These quilts give children something of their own to treasure and remind them they are loved and supported by their community. This work offers a sense of home and hope and is an inspiring demonstration of bringing the light of Christ to these children."



International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPwD), 3 December annually, is a United Nations observed day aimed at increasing public awareness, understanding and acceptance of people with disability. idpwd.com.au

Safe barriers, save lives

Drowning continues to be one of the leading causes of accidental death for Australian children under 5 years of age. Now is the perfect time to do a safety check at your home or business. kidsafe.com.au/safe-barriers-save-lives



Queensland Child Protection Week

'Caped crusaders' highlight child safety during awareness week

The Burdekin Families Together team dressed as superheroes, and invited families they work alongside (*pictured*) to join them for a dressup morning tea during Queensland Child Protection Week, 5-11 September.

Sharon Lowe, Regional Manager, said the week, is a chance to highlight the important role we all have in keeping children safe in our community, while raising awareness of support available for families.

"It can feel overwhelming without extra help and guidance; Families Together is a free service that provides flexible, practical and intensive support tailored to the individual needs of families.

"We focus on strengthening families and building the capacity of families to support their children. Referrals to this agency or other family support agencies who support Burdekin families can be made through Family and Child Connect on 13 FAMILY (13 32 64).

"The week, is also an opportunity to celebrate and recognise our foster and kinship carers who tirelessly provide care for children that cannot live with their families."

Out and about

Our Early Childhood Services (ECS) Wide Bay team were flying our flag at local events during Queensland Child Protection Week (QCPW). At the Maryborough Act For Kids event, *(pictured bottom left)*, from left: Local Member Bruce Saunders, Zowie Simpson, Rhonda Campbell, Angela Steinberg, and Cassandra Wood (ECS Wide Bay team) plus Maree Harvey and Julie Chalmers (CYF, Foster and Kinship Service).

In previous years, Act for Kids has organised the Kids Connect carnival for QCPW. This year was extra special as it was co-hosted with the Fraser Coast NAIDOC Committee to also celebrate NAIDOC week. The union of the two services made for an awesome day in Maryborough filled with fun, laughter and a strong sense of community connectedness.

And at the rescheduled NAIDOC Week event at Hervey Bay, *(pictured below)*, from left: Netty Lee- Gadischke, Rebecca Nielsen, Kelly McIlrath, Zowie Simpson (ECS Wide Bay team) plus Tanya Winters and Casey Hay (CYF, Foster case workers). Great job, team!

Homefulness Week

New initiative

A wonderful new initiative from our Youth CONNECT team this year was Homefulness Week, which ran from 16 to 22 August.

The Youth CONNECT team, since the commencement of the program, has collaborated with the University of the Sunshine Coast's (USC) social research teams that identified the idea of 'homefulness'. This concept was born from USC research that discovered a strengthbased lens of home that considers both objective aspects of wellbeing and safety, as well as lived experiences, or where we feel 'at home', hence the term: 'Homefulness'.

The call was made across the organisation for donations of household items, such as arts and crafts items, indoor plants, and kitchen utensils; the Homefulness van (*pictured below*) stocked up for deliveries, as many clients don't have their own transport.

Across five days, the Youth CONNECT team visited about 30 young people in the Homefulness van. We received such a positive response from clients during this week.

Everyone visited was able to find multiple items, and some clients even offered to donate their own pre-loved décor.

Our team travelled from the Gold Coast, to Logan, Brisbane, then onto Ipswich, and up to Toowoomba. We visited clients at school and at work at their request with team members sharing how special the week was for them also.

Homefulness is a crucial concept for the Youth CONNECT program, and we are dedicated to helping clients find a sense of home.

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Stop and smell the roses

During August, there was a wonderful show of collaboration across our organisation, during Youth CONNECT's initiative, Homefulness Week, a collection drive requesting household items, indoor plants, books, paintings or prints donated to be delivered to our clients.

One example was from our Home Care Service in Townsville offering an array of crocheted blankets and ponchos made by our Home Care clients for Homefulnesss Week.

Homefulness (adjective): *The journey* of making one's house, one's place of belonging... a home.

James Hultgren, Senior Support Officer, Seniors Living (*pictured below*) said their team were so pleased to be able to support the incredible work that our Youth CONNECT team and Children, Youth and Families do.

"In Home Care, we're pretty passionate about Homefulness, so we are so glad that we can help support those working to build it in their lives.

"Despite the physical distances between us, we are connected by our mission: from our community to yours!"

Community Care

Coming of the light

Each year on 1 July, Torres Strait Islander peoples celebrate the Coming of the Light. This special day recognises the adoption of Christianity through island communities in the late 1800s. This year's celebration marks 150 years since Christianity was first brought to the islands.

The image is of an artwork we commissioned from Torres Strait Islander artist Rion Savage (*pictured below right with Churches of Christ CEO Gary Edwards*) to mark the significant milestone for both for Torres Strait Islander peoples and for Christianity in Australia. The artwork will be displayed at the Kenmore Campus.



Ailan way of life

We commissioned established Torres Strait Islander/Indigenous Australian illustrator and artist, Tori-Jay Mordey to portray work that represents meaning and is part of cultural identity for Torres Strait Islander families that we work with daily.

In September our IFS office in Caboolture held a morning tea to thank and acknowledge her beautiful artwork.

Tori-Jay shares the meanings of her paintings and a bit about herself.

Over the years I have honed my skills in digital illustrations, drawing, painting, printmaking and film while also expanding my skills as a mural artist.

A lot of my work revolves around human connection and exploring my racial identity.

In my illustrative work, I often combine stylistic cartoons and realism to capture the complexities of our emotions; distorting and exaggerating the characters in a way that helps express and expose their vulnerabilities.

Tell us about the paintings you have created for this space.

Ailan Way artwork by Tori-Jay Mordey The three pieces of work represents some of our cultural and ailan (island) way of living including bonding as a family and coming together as a community.

Canvas 1

Mother and daughter wearing Ailan dress (Western Island – Kolsal Sodh, Eastern Island – Au Gemwali). Ailan dresses can be worn to cultural events of significance, such as tombstone unveiling, feastings or community gatherings like going to church.

Canvas 2

Children star (titui titui) gazing. Torres Strait Islanders use the stars (e.g. Tagai star constellation) as guidance for seasonal changes and to guide us on our journeys and to bring us back home. The stars are part of our cultural connections to our myths, legends and storylines to warriors and totemic beings.

Canvas 3

Boys Ailan dancing. Children are taught dancing from a very young age. Ailan dancing is performed at significant cultural events and celebration. The dance movements and singing tell stories of our sea journeys, seasonal changes and at times when creating fun; to demonstrate energetic rhythmic motions. Our storytelling through dance connects us to the sky, land and sea.





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It takes a community to bring joy this Christmas

Help us wrap up the year by bringing joy to children, young people and families across Queensland.

MAKE A DONATION

WATCH THE CHRISTMAS APPEAL VIDEO

Featuring Churches of Christ CEO Gary Edwards and Children, Youth and Families Director Mike Folland.



Thank you for your support

You can connect with us on our Children, Youth and Families Facebook or our LinkedIn pages to keep up-to-date with the moments we share.

Every child, young person and family deserves to grow, belong, connect and thrive in their community find out more at **ItTakesaCommunity.com.au**

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