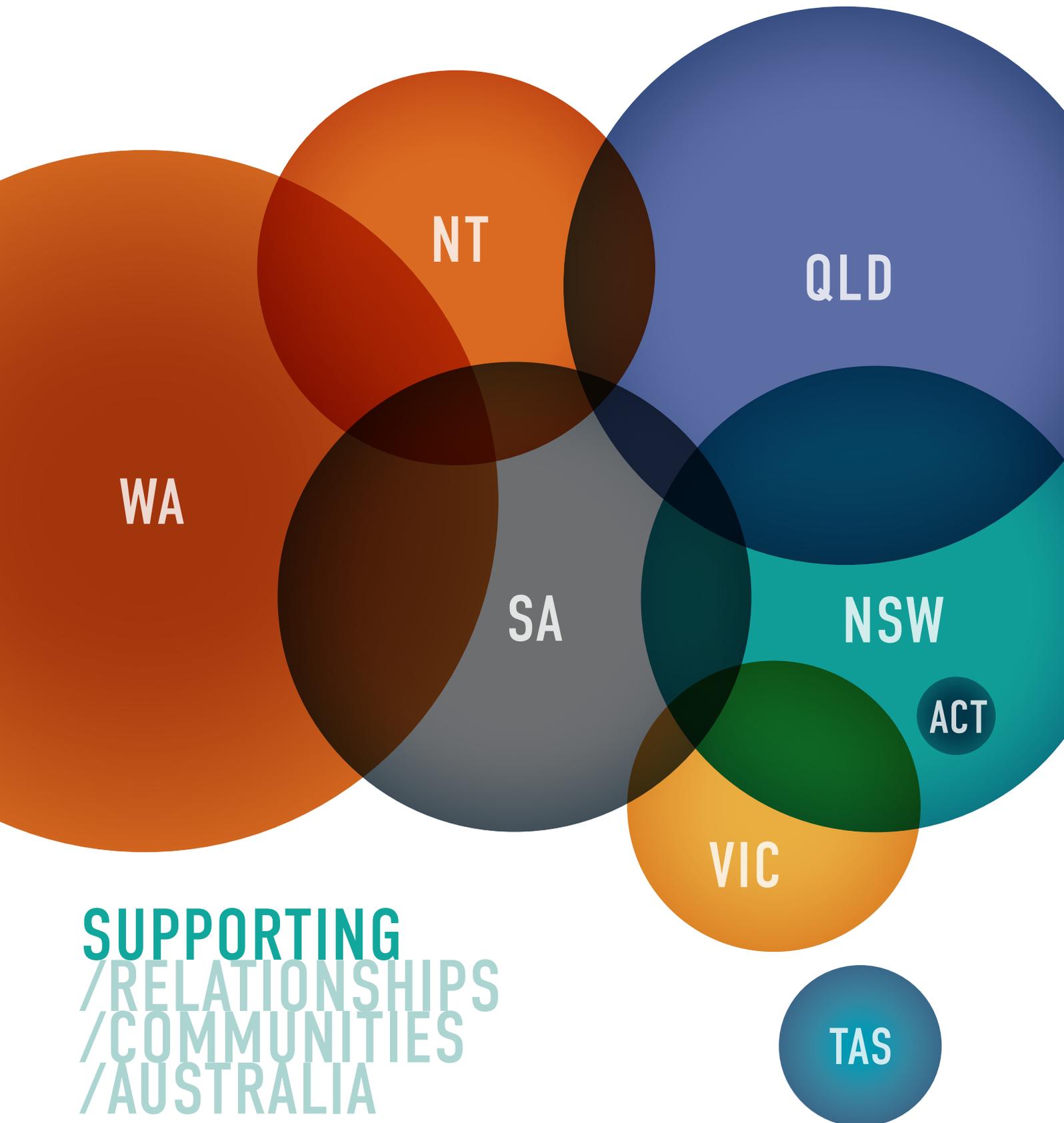


Relationships Australia[®]

ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20



SUPPORTING
/RELATIONSHIPS
/COMMUNITIES
/AUSTRALIA

Relationships Australia[®]

/CHAIR'S FOREWORD

The 2019-2020 financial year will long be remembered as a period of upheaval and uncertainty, punctuated by drought, bushfires and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of these events on Australians, and their ongoing effects which are likely to be felt for years to come, demonstrate the critical importance of healthy relationships in our society.

Relationships Australia's work with clients and the broader community this year has highlighted the resilience and strength that comes from connection, both within families and to the broader community. Healthy and safe relationships are a crucial foundation for the wellbeing of all Australians.

Services across the Relationships Australia federation are informed by this knowledge, and our commitment to maintaining fit-for-purpose services for all of our clients has been our top priority during this period.

On behalf of the National Board of Relationships Australia, I celebrate the hard work, commitment and enthusiasm of our workforce across the country. Relationships Australia staff and volunteers adapted their services, displayed innovation and creativity, and exhibited their own resilience and strength when the need was most dire. Our connection to community and localised, client-focused services has ensured that Relationships Australia remained a trusted and responsive source of support for so many Australians.

In response to the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic, the Federation mobilised a number of strategic working groups, complementing our existing suite of national Networks and Communities of Practice. Drawing on the experience of staff from around the country, these working groups focused specifically on key services and areas experiencing the most demand. This enabled us to maintain collaboration at the national level and promoted information sharing across our network. Each Relationships Australia member organisation applied this shared knowledge at the local level to ensure the best possible service options were available to clients wherever they needed them.

A combination of telephone, web-based and, in some limited circumstances, ongoing face-to-face offerings, meant that our clients and the broader Australian community were supported in vital service areas including mental health, family relationships, gambling and addiction, and family violence. At all times, our commitment to the health and safety of our staff and our clients has underpinned our services.

Meanwhile, across the country we maintained a commitment to research, data collection and evaluation to ensure that our work is informed, and that key information can be provided to decision makers across both State and Federal governments as they also adapt to these uncertain times.

Over the following pages, we are proud to present a range of case studies and examples of the work of our state and territory member organisations, and to highlight some of our initiatives at the federal level. As we look to the future and consider the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on Australia, we are confident of our capacity to innovate and respond to changing needs and of our ongoing commitment to supporting healthy relationships for all Australians.



Dr Ian Law
Chairperson

YEAR IN REVIEW



**NICK TEBBEY NATIONAL
EXECUTIVE OFFICER
RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA**

Inclusive services supporting Australians

In December 2019, Relationships Australia member organisations commenced providing services to clients affected by the Disability Royal Commission. These services, funded by the Department of Social Services, deliver dedicated counselling and other support to Australians living with a disability who have suffered trauma, neglect or abuse, and their support people. As the Royal Commission continues its important investigation across the country, Relationships Australia is committed to ensuring anyone who lives with disability receives inclusive, appropriate and tailored support. As a crucial component of the development of these services, Relationships Australia is committed to ensuring inclusivity and accessibility. This has resulted in enhancements to both physical property and websites, and our staff have received tailored professional development training to ensure the best levels of support are available across the country.

The 2019-2020 financial year also saw the continued roll-out of Senior Relationship Services across the country, offering a variety of Senior Relationship Services that assist older people and their families to prevent and resolve family conflict, plan for the future, improve communication skills, make decisions that protect the interests, rights and safety of family members, have difficult conversations and reduce the risk of abuse of older people, including emotional and financial abuse. With funding provided by the Attorney-General's Department across four Relationships Australia member organisations, and a range of complementary services and funding models being implemented by our member organisations across the country, we are ensuring that older Australians have access to fit-for-purpose support and services designed to enhance and ensure their well-being and that of their relationships.

Informing policy through evidence-based submissions and advocacy

During 2019-20, Relationships Australia engaged with a range of Parliamentary Inquiries, Royal Commissions and government consultations. Drawing on the expertise and experience of practitioners across the country, and building on the evidence collected over 70 years of delivering services to vulnerable Australians, we were proud to make contributions to the following:

- / House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence
- / Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety – further submission
- / Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security in relation to the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Amendment Bill 2020
- / Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee Inquiry into the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia Bill 2019
- / Department of Social Services – Consultation on the Intercountry Adoption Family Support Service
- / Enhancing protections relating to the use of Enduring Power of Attorney (EPOA) Instruments – Consultation Regulation Impact Statement

- / Joint Select Committee on Australia's family law system
- / ACT Government – review of domestic adoption processes
- / Treasury – pre-budget submission 2020
- / Productivity Commission – Mental Health Draft Report
- / Australian Human Rights Committee – Free and equal in dignity and rights – A national conversation on human rights
- / Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights – Inquiry into Quality of Care Amendment (Minimising the Use of Restraints) Principles 2019
- / Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety submission

Throughout our submissions, Relationships Australia seeks to uphold and respect the rights of all people, in all their diversity, to live life fully and meaningfully within their families and communities with dignity and safety, and to enjoy healthy relationships.

A commitment to fundamental human rights, to be recognised universally and without discrimination, underpins our work.

We look forward to further opportunities to engage with policymakers in the design of services and systems that put the well-being of the individual at the core, and promote healthy and safe relationships as a crucial foundation of Australian society.

Combating Loneliness through Social Connection

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, following a devastating summer of drought and bushfires, demonstrated the crucial importance of social connection in a time when communities and individuals were at their most vulnerable.

Relationships Australia has been a key participant in the ongoing national discussion about the health and social risks posed by loneliness. Our work with universities and service providers, as well as our ongoing Neighbour Day campaign, looks to develop practical tools and programs that can address loneliness and establish healthy and safe relationships as the foundation of the Australian community.



Relationships Australia's response to Covid-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the wellbeing of clients has remained Relationships Australia's highest priority. Throughout the unfolding events, we have been dynamic and community-focused in our response to ensure that clients' needs are met, whilst adhering to changing health guidelines. Across Australia, each organisation has developed creative solutions to continue supporting healthy relationships.

Key stakeholder engagements

Over the past year, we participated in a range of consultations in the Attorney-General's and Social Services departments and with stakeholders in our traditional areas of work. These have included consultations on program redesign and outcome measurement, as well as increasing access to services for vulnerable groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, culturally and linguistically diverse clients, and those affected by bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key consultation engagements include:

- / Mental Health Australia – various matters including the Multicultural Mental Health Forum
- / Australian Human Rights Commission – Human Rights Forum
- / Attorney-General's Department – Elder Abuse Prevention Forum
- / Families Australia – Consultation on the Framework for Protecting Australia's Children
- / Disability Royal Commission – forum on provision of counselling services to people affected by the Royal Commission.

Others include the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Family Relationship Services Australia, Health Justice Partnerships, Aged and Community Services Australia and the Australian Council of Social Services.

On issues impacting the work of Relationships Australia and the broader sector, including the impending cessation of the supplementation payments supporting

the implementation and maintenance of the Fair Work Commission's 2012 Equal Remuneration Order, Relationships Australia has engaged in ongoing advocacy with relevant departments and politicians including the Minister for Social Services, the Attorney-General, the Minister for Aged Care and linked with our colleagues across the sector to ensure this crucial matter receives the consideration it requires.



Monthly Survey

Relationships Australia monthly surveys continue to operate as a method of gaining valuable insights into the experiences, perspectives and observations of our clients and the general public. In 2020, the majority of our surveys have investigated the impact of natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic on relationships and mental health. Our monthly surveys have proven popular with academics, government and the media, providing unique and useful data to inform discussion and research.

Details of the surveys conducted during 2019-20 can be found on our website. A sample of key findings includes:

AUG/SEP
2019

Parenting

Parenting is complicated. This survey explored people's experiences with parenting, supporting their children, understanding their needs and disciplining them.

- / **50%** of respondents noted they had difficulty knowing how their child is feeling.

OCT/NOV
2019

Social media's effects on relationships

This survey explored the impact social media has had on people's relationships with their significant other, family and friends and the techniques people use to monitor its usage.

- / **44%** of respondents felt that social media had a negative impact on their close relationships
- / **Half** have argued about social media use with their partner.

JAN/FEB
2020

How does neighbourhood identification affect feelings of belonging and trust?

People's perceptions of their neighbourhood affects the way in which we conceptualise belonging. In turn, this can mediate loneliness in communities. This survey explored people's sense of belonging and trust within their neighbourhoods as a possible antidote to the loneliness epidemic.

- / **74%** of respondents identify with their neighbours
- / **65%** trust their neighbours
- / People who identify with their neighbours are **20%** less likely to identify as lonely
- / People who identify as lonely are **20%** less likely to feel that they could turn to their neighbours for help.



YEAR IN REVIEW

MARCH
2020

How do moments of crisis affect our relationships with our neighbours?

Natural disasters have an enormous effect on the collective psyche of a community. This survey explored the changes people experienced in their relationships with their neighbours and communities following the catastrophic 2019/20 Summer Bushfire season in Australia.

- / **83%** of people who experienced a change in their relationships with their neighbours experienced a positive change
- / People who have more opportunities to meet others in their community were **2.9 times** more likely to experience positive community relationship changes.

APRIL
2020

Have the COVID-19 workplace changes affected people's mental health?

This survey explored the changes to working environments occasioned by the first wave of COVID-19 restrictions, causing widespread job loss and working-from-home mandates. It illustrated that workplaces, and the relationships we develop there, play an important role in our mental health.

- / **63%** of respondents had experienced changes to their mental health in response to changes in their working conditions.

MAY
2020

Have the COVID-19 restrictions affected relationships?

This survey explored how the COVID-19 restrictions affected people's close relationships, especially with those they live with, including their partners and families. We found that there were significant challenges to these close relationships, however some people managed to use this time to positively improve their relationships.

- / **20%** of respondents who were challenged by their living arrangement still managed to create positive changes to their close relationships
- / **42%** of people experienced a negative change in their relationship with their partner.

Where you can find more information

For more information on the work that we do you can visit Relationships Australia's website at relationships.org.au or call us on **02 6162 9300**

JUNE
2020

What effects will the easing of COVID-19 restrictions have on people's relationships and mental health?

This survey explored how people felt about the imminent lifting of Covid-19 restrictions in various states around Australia. In particular it looked at previous activities people enjoyed doing and their current feelings towards them, the time which people thought it would take them to recover and what affect lifting restrictions would have on their close relationships

/ **60%** of respondents said that they feel the same as other people in their social circles about lifting restrictions, while **29%** were less eager and only 11% felt more eager to lift restrictions

/ Even when COVID-19 is managed, **9%** of respondents said they would never again feel comfortable in crowds.



Young Australians

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), Families in Australia Survey, reported that 43% of respondents (or their partner) either lost employment, had reduced hours or wages during this period. Predicting this and acknowledging that the mental health of adolescent children is significantly affected by job loss and extended periods of unemployment, as well as the increased risk of family dissolution, Relationships Australia South Australia (RASA) responded to maintain connections with children and their families through their various programs. Time for Kids, in lieu of their traditional Easter giveaways sent out individually addressed letters to all the children in the program. Their post-adoption support service ran online yoga classes and drumming groups and students who have no access to study spaces at home have been given COVID-safe access to the RASA offices to complete their work.



Neighbour

Promoting Connection in a time of unprecedented disconnect – Neighbour Day 2020

Neighbour Day 2020 occurred during a global pandemic, and against the backdrop of a range of concerns about social isolation and increased disconnect across communities. The Australian Government's response to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus involved international and state border controls and escalating restrictions on social gatherings and ultimately, personal movement. By late March, and coinciding with Neighbour Day 2020, Australians were encouraged to stay home, unless absolutely necessary to go out.

It was soon identified that these circumstances had the potential to lead to social isolation and increased experiences of loneliness across the Australian community as families, neighbourhoods and social groups were forced to remain physically distant.

As a result, the 2020 Neighbour Day campaign became a catalyst for discussions about maintaining connection, supporting each other and ensuring healthy and safe relationships as a key protective factor for the mental health of all Australians.

Why social connection?

Neighbour Day is a national campaign, run annually by Relationships Australia and is used as a community-development tool to positively influence individual and community wellbeing. The 2020 theme was 'Social Connection', and prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we encouraged people to take 'in person' actions to 'Create Connections'. The annual campaign demonstrates our values in action and builds on the Neighbour Day 2019 theme of 'Loneliness – what neighbours can do to create connections'.

Prior to COVID-19, the Neighbour Day 2020 campaign focused on the multitude of ways that Australians could prioritise social connection. These included ideas, stories and Very Neighbourly Tips to create new friendships, groups and communities; our annual Tell Us Your Story competition; a Create Connections Challenge; Cafés Creating Connections video series and the launch of our Café Conversations Project. Community Service Announcements featuring Neighbour Day Ambassadors Costa Georgiadis and Natalie Ahmat focused on providing support during tough times, and particularly highlighted the importance of community as we emerged from a summer punctuated by bushfire, drought and flooding.

The Café Conversations Project saw the Neighbour Day campaign enlist the support of cafes across the country. As public spaces, cafes serve as community hubs and offer valuable opportunities to connect. We connected with the café industry and invited cafes to implement a range of activities in the days and weeks leading up to Neighbour Day. To support and inspire cafes to get involved, we provided a free information pack with ready to use resources and ideas. Forty-nine cafes registered for the Café Conversations Project prior to the imposition of the 'no public gathering' rule by the government in response to COVID-19.

Day

When knowing your neighbours becomes a necessity

In early March, everything changed. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, or perhaps because of it, interest and engagement in the Neighbour Day 2020 campaign increased. Social connection, healthy relationships and knowing your neighbours became a necessity for many people. The coronavirus pandemic and related social distancing restrictions required the campaign to pivot its focus away from physical interaction and, instead, to encourage people to make social connections by other means. #CreativeConnections was born.

#CreativeConnections

#CreativeConnections provided timely support and ideas to achieve and maintain social connection within the rapidly changing guidelines, as well as free resources to help people do that safely. We amplified messaging about the necessity of healthy, supportive and respectful relationships with the people with whom we live, and those around us, especially the elderly and vulnerable – and importantly, the need to look after each other (safely) during these challenging times.

The need for creativity to achieve social connection was highlighted when physical distancing rules were introduced. This resulted in increased stakeholder appetite for useful information and support and greater interest by the media. When many were at a loss for what to do, the Neighbour Day campaign provided weekly website updates, a series of new #CreativeConnections tips, bimonthly #CreativeConnections Editions of Verandah enews, and daily social media support with good news stories and ideas on how to stay connected.

Media Highlights

- / Radio, television, print/online media, website traffic and social media promoted the campaign with Neighbour Day features on The Project on TEN, The Point on NITV, ABC News, Channel Seven and Seven News.
- / New Public Information Messages (PIMs) were produced for radio and broadcast a minimum 7,413 times on 417 stations around Australia, equating to 61 hours 47 minutes of airtime.
- / A total of 757 radio stations / markets broadcast Neighbour Day interviews with either Costa Georgiadis, Natalie Ahmat or Nick Tebbey. Coverage was across commercial, ABC, community and Indigenous radio networks and stations across Australia.
- / Radio interviews and new Community Service Announcements focused on several themes, including 'why building healthy relationships are so important' to 'the importance of establishing and growing relationships with your neighbours and communities', through to 'how we stay connected during the current COVID-19 crisis'.
- / The SBS Foundation offered to air #CreativeConnections TV Community Service Announcements (CSAs) pro bono. We swiftly produced CSAs for television focusing on social connectedness and growing healthy relationships within the context of the pandemic. These CSAs currently air on SBS TV, NITV, and ABC TV.

Key stakeholders

Relationships Australia is grateful to the many valued stakeholders who supported this year's unique campaign. Neighbour Day Ambassadors **Costa Georgiadis** and **Natalie Ahmat** were pivotal in their support for our new approach, as were a number of high profile Very Neighbourly Organisations (VNOs), who stepped up this year to support Neighbour Day on social media and join in the Create Connections Challenge. These included: R U OK?, Nextdoor, NAPCAN, Conservation Volunteers Australia, Welcoming Australia, Playgroup Australia, Lendlease, Neighbourhood Watch Australasia, Thread Together, Queensland Families and Communities Association, FerosCare — Be Someone For Someone, VICSES, CFA, COTA QLD, Neighbourhood Connect, and Act Belong Commit WA.



Neighbour

Another major element of the Neighbour Day campaign is to work with local government and state/territory instrumentalities to promote social connection. Despite the COVID-19 restrictions, **Healthy Tasmania** in partnership with Relationships Australia Tasmania, and **VICSES** each did a fantastic job adapting messaging for their respective Neighbour Day challenges, generating TV (news), radio, print and online media for Neighbour Day.

Councils, as key stakeholders in Neighbour Day, actively engaged with the existing and updated messaging and ongoing promotion of the importance of ongoing social connection. Resilient Sydney (led by **City of Sydney**) promoted Relationships Australia's Neighbour Day #CreativeConnections messaging direct to the 37 Sydney Metro councils in the group, and the **ACT Government** Justice & Community Safety Directorate supported Neighbour Day engagement in the ACT.

Not everything that counts can be counted – especially during a pandemic

Relationships Australia and researchers at the Australian National University conducted a longitudinal Evaluation of Neighbour Day 2020 in the form of a two time-point quantitative study of Neighbour Day participants. The evaluation was unique, in that the first time-point took place in early March, before most Australians had modified their normal behaviour in response to COVID-19, and the second time-point took place throughout April, a period in which people were experiencing significant uncertainty and growing concern for the future.

Findings revealed that from early March to April, respondents reported:

1. A decreased sense of mental wellbeing
2. An increased sense of loneliness; and yet
3. An increased sense of neighbourhood satisfaction.

In April, during lockdown restrictions, the evaluation found that:

4. Greater neighbourhood identification was associated with better mental wellbeing.
5. This occurred in part due to greater perceived access to neighbours' support and reduced loneliness.
6. Multiple groups identification was positively associated with mental wellbeing.
7. This occurred in part due to greater perceived access to support from family & friends and reduced loneliness.

During this period of crisis, survey respondents saw the importance of connecting with neighbours for the benefit of their own wellbeing, and that of the broader community. Respondents described using a myriad of **creative ways to connect through virtual means** that complied with official guidance on social gathering restrictions. Compared to 2019, people reported that getting involved in **Neighbour Day was less about having fun and meeting new people, and more about reaching out to support neighbours.**

There are three key recommendations from the report:

1. Continue to promote the importance of social connection with neighbours throughout the year.
2. Continue to promote creative ways to connect with neighbours until the end of the pandemic.
3. Increase awareness of the importance of connecting with multiple groups.



Day



THIS YEAR /AROUND THE COUNTRY



“ I have been impressed and humbled by the determination, focus and dedication of our staff during the pandemic. We came together with common purpose and objectives, at all times holding the balance between meeting the needs of vulnerable Australians and care and safety of staff. It has been a time of inspiring collaboration, and has set us up well for the new, evolving community and service connections ahead. ”

ELISABETH SHAW CEO RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA NEW SOUTH WALES

Technology Enabling Strong Relationships in 2020

Relationships Australia New South Wales (RANSW) strategic plan to increase services for vulnerable and diverse communities was expedited during the COVID-19 pandemic. All relationship services previously offered in person were redesigned to enable telephone or online delivery. We have overcome issues such as variable internet speeds, cybersecurity and functionality of online platforms to support clients of different ages, locations, backgrounds and technical proficiency. We provided 22,692 sessions in all, of that 15,884 in person, and 6,808 online.

Online services

Online Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) and Counselling services: During lockdown, all parenting and property mediation services moved online. Individuals, couples and families met counsellors via video from their homes all over the state. We have enabled online adult counselling for remote families living significant distances apart. We conducted a phone shuttle mediation to arrange contact for an Aboriginal family, reuniting a parent and child separated since birth.

Online casework: Where face to face visits had become impracticable, separated families have been supported by enabling parents and children

to exchange letters, videos and photos through facilitated communication. Phone support has been provided for those abused in past care, or families who have had children removed. Our male victims of violence telephone support line assisted men to share accounts of violence and to access services which promote their safety.

Online groups and seminars: A number of people engaged in online groupwork. Groups were adapted for Parenting after Separation, Managing Anger and Handling Stress. Positive feedback was received such as “it has helped my relationship with the children ... Our home is now calmer”.

In cases of intimate partner violence, men and their partners have been supported through 1-1 casework either online or by telephone, to promote safer behavioural choices.

We have offered groups for specific communities such as our **Korean Support playgroup** and **Korean Post-natal Depression Mothers’ group**. Attending our **Chinese Circle of Security Parenting Program** one parent commented “I really appreciate the online parenting program, hearing about other mums’ experiences, and continuing to manage my relationship with my own mum, and I’m hoping my facilitator will arrange an online party”. A young male Aboriginal client seeking restoration of care of his baby was able to continue his parenting journey via the **online Circle of Security group**. Our Chinese Grandparents Support group overcame tech challenges to meet online and, in their

NSW

433
STAFF

22,689
CLIENTS

14
LOCATIONS

words, bring warmth to those living in the community". For a **single mother**, "doing the online course was important, as I didn't have to travel on the train late at night ... I wouldn't have been able to otherwise attend".

Online Training and Products: Digital products provide services for all our clients and we have adapted our website to provide improved access for those with visual impairment. We are developing a range of relationship support packages through the website including 'Building Stronger Relationships' videos: Managing Couple Conflict, Couple Communication and Couple Connection.

During this time, Relationship Australia New South Wales have proudly developed and delivered staff training in new ways of working, without compromising practice standards.

THIS YEAR /AROUND THE COUNTRY



IT'S BEEN AN EXTRAORDINARY YEAR THAT'S SEEN AUSTRALIANS FACE MULTIPLE UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES. IN QUEENSLAND, RAQ ADAPTED QUICKLY TO MEET THESE CHALLENGES, MOVING OUR OPERATIONS AND MOST OF OUR STAFF TO REMOTE WORKING. WE CONTINUED TO PROVIDE UNINTERRUPTED SERVICES TO OUR CLIENTS, AND ACHIEVED OUR BEST-EVER CLIENT SATISFACTION RESULTS, ALL WHILE NAVIGATING A RAPIDLY CHANGING ENVIRONMENT. WE CANNOT KNOW WHAT OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES AWAIT US IN THE COMING YEAR, BUT RAQ IS WELL POSITIONED TO WORK AS A MEMBER OF THE FEDERATION TO FACE WHATEVER THE NEXT YEAR BRINGS.

DR IAN LAW CEO RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA QUEENSLAND

Virtual Services support communities through lockdown restrictions

Undoubtedly, 2020 has presented a raft of unanticipated challenges for Australians, and especially for those people already facing hardship in its many forms.

In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the wellbeing of families, with many facing increasing financial, social and emotional pressures.

For families managing shared care, the rapidly changing lockdown restrictions made already complex arrangements even more worrying and confusing. As a result, some families faced increasing levels of conflict and the risk of violence meant urgent advice and information was needed to support vulnerable parents, families and children through this stressful time.

Relationships Australia Queensland responded rapidly to ramp up our service provision with our contact centre taking 20% more calls than average during the March to June period.

We also worked closely with the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department to create a website that complemented the Family Relationship Advice Line and provided clients with key information they were seeking.

Our Virtual Services team – especially those people servicing our Family Relationship Advice Line – worked hard to provide crucial information

and compassionate, professional support and referrals to our programs and other services.

As a result, our clients were in a stronger position to navigate this uncertain time. Our team met increased client needs, and provided access to urgent legal advice to reduce familial distress and conflict, leading to better outcomes for children and their parents.

Callers responded positively to our efforts with client satisfaction reaching an impressive 97.5% in June, the highest number ever recorded for Relationships Australia Queensland.

What makes this achievement even more significant is the way the Virtual Services team came together while facing a range of challenges of their own. Throughout this period, over 80% of the Relationships Australia Queensland workforce, including most of the Virtual Services call centre, transitioned to working from home.

Having embarked on a journey of business transformation in late 2019, we were well positioned to pivot our service delivery models, maintain continuity of employment for our people, and offer uninterrupted services to our clients during this time.

Flexible working arrangements not only ensured the safety of our staff, but it also allowed them to provide virtual counselling to clients located in rural and remote areas of Queensland – many who were already facing isolation challenges.

QLD

475
STAFF

78,194
CLIENTS

26
LOCATIONS

That there were minimal disruptions to our contact centre during such a time of change is a testament to the dedication of the employees acting as the first point of contact for struggling Queenslanders.

“I’m so proud of the way the team has stayed supportive and together through such a rough year. Truly the amount of effort put in week-on-week is mind-blowing,” said Joshua Ellis, Head of Virtual Services.

The past few months have showcased the dedication and resilience of Relationship Australia Queensland’s employees, as well as their passion for connecting with vulnerable members of the community when they really needed assistance.

Despite the enormous challenges, it’s been a heartening reminder that our mission has never been more important – our relationships and community connections are a lifeline.

THIS YEAR /AROUND THE COUNTRY



▲▲ INCREASED DEMAND FOR OUR SERVICES DURING THE PANDEMIC HIGHLIGHTS THE STRESS FAMILIES HAVE BEEN UNDER. COLLABORATION, CARE AND SUPPORT, FOUNDATIONS FOR POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS, HAVE ENABLED STAFF TO MEET SERVICE DEMAND WHILE AT THE SAME TIME DEALING WITH THE IMPACT OF THIS CRISIS ON THEIR OWN FAMILY. AS AN ORGANISATION AND AS A COMMUNITY WE HAVE DEMONSTRATED HOW MUCH WE CAN ACHIEVE WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER. ▼▼

DR CLAIRE RALFS CEO RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Launch of Ngartuitya Family Group Conference

On Monday 10 February 2020, Relationships Australia South Australia (RASA) hosted **Yara Palti** on Kurna Country (Adelaide Plains of South Australia) to celebrate the start of a new service, **Ngartuitya Family Group Conference (FGC)**.

Ngartuitya (*nar too it yah*) is Kurna language and means 'for the children'. This new program is designed for families when there are child wellbeing and safety concerns identified by the Department of Child Protection. Ngartuitya FGC supports families to take the lead in decisions about parenting their children safely. It allows families to make voluntary arrangements for their children's care that are consistent with the priorities outlined in the Children and Young Person (Safety) Act 2017 (CYPS Act).

To support the start of the service, we hosted **Yara Palti**. **Yara** means individuality and reciprocity; **Palti** means ceremony. Guided by local Elders Lewis Yerloburka O'Brien AO, Major 'Moogy' Sumner AM, Michael Kumatpi Marrutya O'Brien, and Katrina Karlapina Power, Yara Palti invited participants to share responsibility for the emotional and physical safety of children. Our Aboriginal Leaders, Jo Wilmott OAM (Practice Manager Aboriginal Programs and Policy) and Sarah Decrea (Manager Aboriginal Family Practice), worked with the Elders to make Yara Palti happen.

E.N. Kropinyeri's 1923 petition to repeal the *Aborigines (Training of Children) Act* was distributed to participants as a reminder that Aboriginal Elders have fought the forced removal of their children for at least one hundred years. John Stanley, Willy Rankine and Leonard Campbell delivered the original petition to the Governor and the SA Parliament on 21 December 1923.

Traditional Sister Baskets were given to Cathy Taylor (Chief Executive, Department for Child Protection), April Lawrie (Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People), and Claire Ralfs (CEO, RASA). The gifts to the senior executives serve as a daily encouragement to focus on and work for better outcomes for all children at risk of removal. They also symbolise the importance of re-establishing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural authority and governance.

SA SNAPSHOT
AS AT 30 JUNE 2020

SA

338
STAFF

15,621
CLIENTS

7
LOCATIONS

THIS YEAR /AROUND THE COUNTRY



■ ■ AT RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA TASMANIA WE'RE COMMITTED TO HELPING PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES THRIVE. OUR VALUES GUIDE US IN THIS VITALLY IMPORTANT WORK AND EVERYDAY OUR AMAZING STAFF DEMONSTRATE THESE VALUES THROUGH THEIR ENGAGEMENT WITH THOSE WHO SEEK OUR SUPPORT. OUR CLIENTS ARE OUR NUMBER ONE PRIORITY AND THEY ARE AT THE CENTRE OF EVERYTHING WE DO.

WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION OF OUR COLLEAGUES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, THIS UNITY ALLOWS US TO CONNECT PEOPLE AND EMPOWER COMMUNITIES. ■ ■

DR MICHAEL KELLY CEO RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA TASMANIA

New Beginnings at Relationships Australia Tasmania

Relationships Australia Tasmania entered 2020 with many changes. With Rick Marton in his first year as our Board President, we said good-bye to Mat Rowell, our CEO of over ten years, and welcomed Michael Kelly in his place. With new leadership comes new ways of thinking, and this is reflected best in our new Strategic Plan 2019-2024 which centres around four key values: *Willing to serve; People matter; Looking forward; and In it together.*

The values of our strategic plan are at the forefront of our minds when deciding how to support those in our community who need it most. In October 2019 we received funding to begin implementing a Frontline Service for the Disability Royal Commission which will help support individuals living with a disability who have been affected by the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, and their carers and/or families. We also received funding to provide an Elders Relationship Service, which will help support elderly persons in our community at risk of abuse.

Our values are at the heart of what we do every day. However, it is safe to say that COVID-19 has put these new values to the test in a way that no-one was expecting. Our leadership and management teams worked cohesively to provide the necessary communication, guidance, and decision-making, and our staff provided the willingness and dedication to support our clients and community. We were able to swiftly transition many of our services to telehealth formats and continued providing essential care to our clients.

In April we announced the decision to waive client fees for 3-months, and by mid-April, 85% of our staff were working remotely from their homes. We were also pleased to have received two Essential Technology grants, which helped to equip our practitioners with quality technology, ensuring clients continued to receive high levels of care and support throughout this turbulent time.

The impact of the COVID-19 on rates of domestic violence is concerning. In June we received funding to be invested into our MENS behaviour change program in the form of a tailor-made 'App' for clients to use alongside the program, and informational flyers targeting perpetrators of mild to moderate domestic violence to be distributed around the state.

TAS SNAPSHOT
AS AT 30 JUNE 2020

143
STAFF

7,250
CLIENTS

5
LOCATIONS

TAS

Although COVID-19 meant that our group services were temporarily put on hold, we are currently working hard to ensure these programs are resumed in the safest way possible. Looking forward, we are exploring what a 'new normal' should look like at RA Tas, with input being sought from clients across programs as well as our staff across all levels of the organisation.

All of this would not have been possible without every single one our staff whole-heartedly embracing new leadership, new pathways forward, and what it truly means to be *In it together*.



THIS YEAR /AROUND THE COUNTRY



IT IS DURING TIMES OF ADVERSITY THAT YOU GET TO UNDERSTAND THE METTLE OF THOSE AROUND YOU. DURING THIS PARTICULARLY CHALLENGING TIME FOR VICTORIA, RAV SERVICES CONTINUED WITHOUT A MOMENT'S INTERRUPTION AS WE REALISED WE WERE A CRITICAL PART OF THE SOLUTION. I AM IMMENSELY PROUD OF THE DEDICATION AND COMMITMENT SHOWN BY OUR STAFF AND THE WILLINGNESS AND ADAPTABILITY OF THE THOUSANDS OF CLIENTS WHO SOUGHT AND RECEIVED ASSISTANCE.

DR ANDREW BICKERDIKE CEO RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA VICTORIA

In response to COVID-19 and the resulting restrictions, Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) swiftly transitioned from face-to-face family dispute resolution (FDR) to telephone and video (online) service delivery modalities, to ensure the ongoing provision of high-quality, accessible support throughout the pandemic.

Supported by online training, practice guidelines and manuals, and a team of senior clinicians, our FDR practitioners delivered more than 3600 mediation sessions throughout the three-month period to which COVID-19 restrictions applied during the financial year.

The new service modalities have been associated with a range of benefits for clients, including increased perceptions of safety, particularly for vulnerable clients, who do not need to be in the same room or building as the other party, can participate in shuttle FDR, or can elect not to be visible to the other party during the virtual appointments. Clients often feel more comfortable and less intimidated in their own environment without having to engage with the other party face-to-face.

The impact of geographical location and barriers is also reduced, enabling service delivery for clients and practitioners who are located in different and geographically diverse locations, clients in remote or rural locations, and clients who can conveniently attend appointments virtually from their home or workplace. Such benefits are illustrated by a case involving five participants in five different locations; two

parents, two co-FDR practitioners and a child consultant. The consultant provides information to parents about children's development and needs, to inform parenting decisions that are in the children's best interests. Legally-assisted cases can also have lawyers virtually online or telephone appointments, which can help to enhance lawyers' availability for their clients.

The screen-sharing tools available in online FDR enable practitioners to present and discuss educational materials with clients in real time, including written and video resources. Screen-sharing also allow both parties and the practitioner to view live working documents, such parenting agreements, and for property matter cases, formula-based spreadsheets that can quickly and accurately document assets and values, and cost settlement options.

While telephone-based appointments have proven to be highly accessible, online service delivery provides practitioners with additional visual information about clients' responses and environment, providing greater capacity to safeguard privacy and confidentiality. Video also makes it easy for practitioners to manage clients' communication, and challenging or unhelpful behaviours, using mute functions, and waiting and breakout room. To meet the needs of parents with children at home, we can adapt our model by providing short breaks to enable parents to regularly check on children in other parts of the home, and offering shorter but additional FDR appointments for parents with younger children who need more frequent supervision.

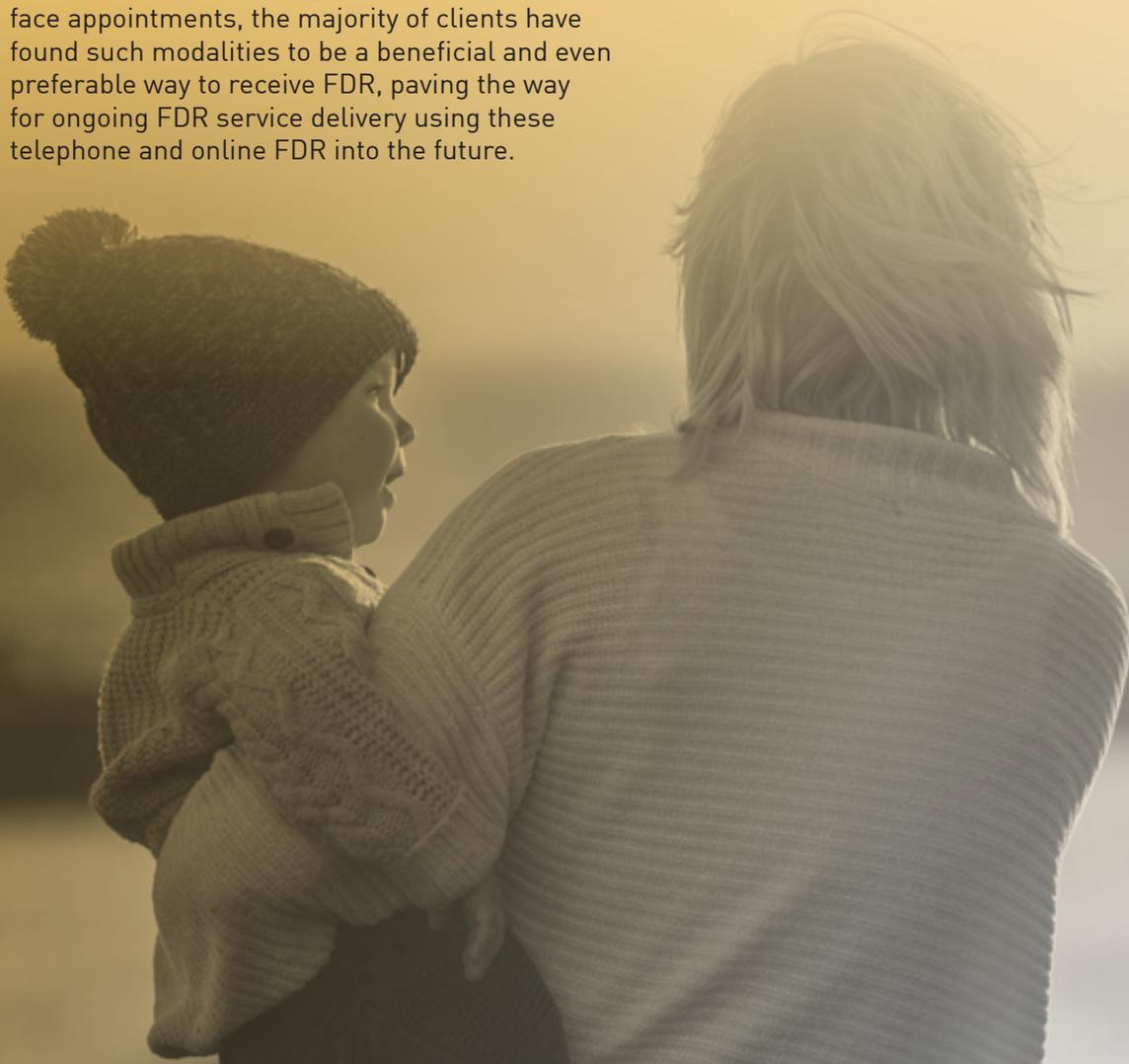
332
STAFF

22,621
CLIENTS

16
LOCATIONS

VIC

Clients have expressed gratitude for the ongoing availability of our FDR services during a time when so many other services have not been available despite additional challenges that are common as a result of COVID-19. While FDR delivered remotely can be associated with technical difficulties not present during face-to-face appointments, the majority of clients have found such modalities to be a beneficial and even preferable way to receive FDR, paving the way for ongoing FDR service delivery using these telephone and online FDR into the future.



THIS YEAR /AROUND THE COUNTRY



THE MAJOR CHANGES AND INTERRUPTIONS WE HAVE ALL EXPERIENCED AS A RESULT OF COVID-19 CANNOT BE UNDERSTATED. SEEING THE WAY OUR PEOPLE HAVE ADAPTED AND CONTINUED TO DELIVER THEIR IMPORTANT WORK IN DIFFERENT WAYS HAS BEEN INSPIRING. THE SUPPORT OF OUR NATIONAL COLLEAGUES DURING THIS TIME HAS ALSO BEEN INVALUABLE IN ENSURING WE ARE ABLE TO PROVIDE DIRECT DELIVERY OF SERVICES TO PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES HELPING TO DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS, WHILST KEEPING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SAFE.

TERRI REILLY CEO RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Virtual Parenting Time – Child Contact Services during COVID-19

Following parental separation, it is important for a child's wellbeing and development, that they remain connected with significant people in their lives. Child Contact Services (CCS) provides a safe and supportive way for children to move between separated parents and maintain relationships with parents and family members they do not live with.

COVID-19 restrictions presented a number of challenges for the CCS sector, including evaluating and acting on the safest way to deliver supervision services while adhering to physical distancing guidelines. Western Australia's intra-regional border restrictions created additional barriers, and children that would normally visit parents or family living in different households were sometimes unable to do so during the lockdown period.

In order to provide a way for parents and children to maintain regular contact, Relationships Australia WA utilised digital platforms to offer virtual visitation, otherwise known as 'virtual parenting time'. This communication allowed the facilitation of contact between children and their parents or other family members that they no longer live with. Each online visit was held for an hour, with children aged 5 years or over.

CCS support workers reviewed each family to determine if virtual visits were safe, including reviewing the reasons for being referred to a CCS, the current and historical patterns of visits and the capacity to provide safe, trauma informed virtual visits. Children visited a designated centre with their residential parent and were set up in a room with a supervisor and computer monitor. After the residential parent had left the room, the CCS supervisor would call the other party online via WebEx, using a password protected meeting link.

Online service delivery brought with it unique challenges and CCS staff were clear with all service users that, while everything would be done to promote the privacy and confidentiality of conversations and contacts, there was no guarantee that it would not be contravened by parties.

To monitor these challenges, CCS staff were the sole host of the contact and managed all participants in the virtual visitations. No other party was able to join, host or facilitate these contacts without pre-approval from CCS staff. In addition, CCS staff ascertained who was in the rooms at each house/site at the time of the call, and 'visitors' were vetted and approved as per standard CCS procedures. All online supervision was consistent with the Children's Contact Services Guiding Principles Framework for Good Practice (2018).

WA

314
STAFF

23,831
CLIENTS

24
LOCATIONS

Research has shown that the use of online technologies can be positive to maintain parent-child contact where there is a pre-existing positive relationship between parents and children. By implementing virtual contact sessions during COVID-19 lockdown, parents and family members were able to achieve a measure of 'face time' with their children, in circumstances where they would otherwise be unable to see them, enabling all parties to maintain their relationships through consistent and regular levels of interaction.

As COVID-19 restrictions ease in Western Australia, face-to-face visitations are able to be safely conducted in line with guidelines. Virtual visitations will remain available as an option to children and families accessing CCS, where appropriate.



THANK YOU
THE CHILDREN FROM
SWAN VIEW

THIS YEAR /AROUND THE COUNTRY



IT IS A PRIVILEGE TO HAVE JOINED RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA NORTHERN TERRITORY DURING THE 19/20 FINANCIAL YEAR ALONGSIDE A HIGHLY PROFESSIONAL TEAM WITH EXPERTISE IN CLINICAL SKILLS, MEDIATION, TRADITIONAL AND OTHER CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE, CORPORATE SKILLS AND DIVERSIFICATION INTO RELATED SERVICE AREAS. I LOOK FORWARD TO 20/21 WITH MEASURED CONFIDENCE ALONGSIDE MY STAFF AT RANT AND THOSE ACROSS THE RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA FEDERATION, AS WE CONTINUE TO PROVIDE ESSENTIAL SERVICES TO PEOPLE ALL AROUND THE NATION.

MICHAEL MEEGAN CEO RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA NORTHERN TERRITORY

Relief for Refugees, Migrants and Temporary Visa Holders

Relationships Australia NT (RANT) enjoyed a year of growth, flexibility and change. This included the commencement of new services, welcoming a new CEO and responding to the needs of vulnerable people in times of crisis.

In late October 2019, RANT welcomed Michael Meegan as the new Chief Executive Officer following the retirement of long-term CEO Marie Morrison. Mr Meegan has worked in social justice and with Aboriginal people for many years across many sectors. He has experience in private practice, mediation, conflict resolution, and in senior management and executive positions with Aboriginal corporations.

This year has also seen an expansion in services funded by the Department of Social Services. Senior Relationships Services and Counselling and Support for People Affected by the Disability Royal Commission were both launched in 2019.

The initial COVID-19 lockdown period in the Northern Territory proved to be a difficult time for many Territorians, particularly for recently arrived migrants, refugees and temporary visa holders. Many people could not access the funded support available to Australian citizens and permanent residents.

In response to the needs of the Northern Territory's Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community during this time, Relationships Australia NT announced the intention to provide an emergency relief service to the CALD community. From May 2020, staff resources were diverted to offer an initial support service for CALD community members living in Darwin.

Eligible clients can access a free-of-charge 30-minute phone or video consultation with a trained social worker. The initial consultation can be used to speak about concerns related to the COVID-19 crisis like unemployment, isolation and health risks or other personal and relationship issues in the person's life. In many cases, warm referrals are made to connect the client with relevant ongoing support for their issues.

Speaking to the clients is Relationship Australia NT's CALD support worker, Gazi Yeasman. Gazi is a trained social worker with longstanding experience working with the CALD community and services in the Northern Territory.

Chief Executive Officer, Michael Meegan welcomed the new service: "Gazi's skills and relationship with the CALD community and provides immediate and practical support for vulnerable Territorians and we are very proud to be offering this service during this time."

NT SNAPSHOT
AS AT 30 JUNE 2020

NT

68
STAFF

3,901
CLIENTS

3
LOCATIONS



THIS YEAR /AROUND THE COUNTRY



■ I AM PROUD OF EACH MEMBER OF THE RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA CANBERRA AND REGION TEAM. TOGETHER WE HAVE FACED A DIFFICULT YEAR, AND TOGETHER WE HAVE UPHELD OUR CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO PROVIDING PROFESSIONAL AND TIMELY SUPPORTS TO THOSE IN NEED. IT HAS BEEN A YEAR OF CHALLENGES BUT AS PART OF THE BROADER FAMILY OF RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA, WE HAVE ALL WORKED TIRELESSLY TO SUPPORT PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITIES WHO ARE EXPERIENCING VULNERABILITY THIS YEAR. ■

ALISON BROOK CEO RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA CANBERRA AND REGION

This year has seen an incredible convergence of natural disasters and extreme weather events across the area served by Relationships Australia Canberra and Region (RACR). To follow these events, people in our area are dealing with the stresses associated with the global pandemic that continues to disrupt the lives of those throughout our nation and beyond.

Where there are many families coming to terms with their losses concurrently, whole communities continue to be impacted. In this year's case, people living in areas impacted by the 2020 bushfires (across much of RACR's footprint) were left reeling after the fire fronts passed, then many faced other extreme weather events of damaging hailstorms and heavy rain, leading to ongoing challenges.

RACR worked closely with locals on all fronts, including with young people during the bushfires through our Wagga Wagga headspace team.

Just at the time people and communities may have started their difficult road to recovery, they were forced into the first strict lockdown because of COVID-19. Children were unable to attend school, and adults unable to attend work. In many cases, this occurred in temporary housing – with families living in tents, caravans and other short-term housing. Pressures for many have come to a boil.

Post the bushfires, our Dhunlung Yarra counselling team from Deakin ACT travelled to the south coast to work with local Aboriginal communities at the request of a local elder. However, this was unfortunately also put on hold as COVID-19 struck.

RACR counsellors, mediators, mental health workers and support teams have been dealing with a huge increase in demand for services, and with people bringing enormous complexity in terms of their trauma, family dynamics, housing stress, financial burdens and a pessimism about their future.

The combination of back to back natural disasters and extreme weather, as well as the ongoing stressors and challenges of a worldwide pandemic, makes for an usual and obviously very stressful time. Suicide prevention has been a major part of what RACR practitioners have had to deal with.

As we have seen from previous disasters, people often cope well during and in the direct aftermath of a disaster, but once the emergency vehicles and community supports have departed, families members are left to deal with their individual and collective trauma and grief responses to what has taken place. Add the layer of complexity arising from COVID-19, and we are seeing a greater and extended need for support at an individual and community level.

127
STAFF

7,710
CLIENTS

8
LOCATIONS

ACT

Many members of RACR on the south coast, living around the ACT and in the Riverina were also impacted directly by the fires on their homes, and homes of close family members. Staff at RACR have upheld their high professional standards and continue to do an incredible job, supporting individuals and communities through grief and loss, while they themselves were also dealing with our own grief associated with the situations.

It has certainly been a year of challenges, but we are buoyed by the resilience and strength of our staff, and the ability of local communities to rally around individuals and families in crisis.



Digitalisation of the workforce

Across Australia, COVID-19 brought about an urgent digitalisation of the services sector. Relationships Australia Tasmania (RA Tas) moved all services to telephone and online delivery. This was a considerable shift from the way RA Tas had previously been operating, requiring a significant modification to systems, processes and protocols. This has initiated a change in RA Tas service delivery that will remain beyond the immediacy of the pandemic. The shift means RA Tas can move from its previous centre-centric, face-to-face delivery to a service model that presents a range of options and modes to clients, providing them with greater accessibility and increased connection.

Despite concerns about 'digital refugees', especially among older Australians, research has found that since the beginning of the pandemic, there is a willingness to embrace technology, especially among traditionally technologically adverse groups. This provides hope that digital platforms will be able to support face-to-face service delivery in the future.

Grief and loss during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a fast-changing situation, requiring Relationships Australia Canberra & Region (RACR) to change their service delivery within a limited time. While RACR staff and clients have quickly adapted to online and telephone service delivery, an increase in clients experiencing feelings of grief and loss has been seen across all services. This is exacerbated for people seeking support from the RACR ACT Coronial Counselling Service supporting those who are impacted by a death being investigated by the coroner. The pandemic has added additional stressors to the grief and loss experienced by RACR coronial clients, such as the loss of work, undermining social structures, leading to increased loneliness, and physical isolation. Experiencing multiple losses in this pandemic is detrimental to mental and physical health, putting people at risk bereavement overload.

Demand for coronial counselling services and increased frequency has risen during the pandemic, particularly for older people who have been more isolated. Isolation has resulted in increased loneliness, people grieve, talk, and share together, and without natural supports of friends and family this grief can be prolonged with greater complexity.

RACR has moved to increase grief and loss supports, checking in with bereaved clients to help construct scaffolding and break loneliness, and the introduction of short group grief and loss programs to build understanding and build connections with similarly affected people.

Continued care for high-risk and remote clients

Many made grave predictions about the risks associated with lockdowns across Australia for those experiencing family and domestic violence.

Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV), who deliver a significant proportion of Victoria's Men's Behaviour Change Programs, Family Safety Contact Services and Men's Case Management programs opted to suspend their face-to-face delivery in March 2020 as a result of restrictions and a prioritisation of client and staff safety. This left approximately 900 men who use violence and their affected family members fearing they would be without services. In prioritising the ongoing delivery of services, RAV developed a Telephone Holding Model for men and an elevated model of family safety contact for women and children impacted by family violence. A minimum of weekly contact is provided to men and increased contact is provided to women and children through the Family Safety Contact Service. RAV staff members are allocated individual clients and arrangements are in place to support the telephone model, so that men are held accountable throughout the pandemic, and women and children have ongoing access to support.

Parenting during the pandemic has been especially stressful, as school closures send children home and physical distancing measures force families to stay apart.

In response, Relationships Australia Queensland (RAQ) moved their Parenting orders program delivery to videoconferencing for groups partway through their program when the lockdown commenced. For groups operating in more remote areas, this has extended the reach of serviceable areas and increased the convenience for these clients.

For clients of the trauma services in South Australia, Relationships Australia South Australia (RASA) has been conducting weekly short telephone welfare checks. Other clients, such as older Australians and people living with a disability, have received care packages with food and household cleaning items from the RASA offices. Each of these initiatives, as well as many others, have gone a long way to ensure that those most at-risk during these isolating times are still receiving support.

Providing space for support

During Covid-19, people of all ages and stages have felt the significant impacts of the pandemic on their mental health.

In response, Time 2 Talk, a free telephone support service was started by Relationships Australia NSW (RANSW) to assist individuals, couples, families, households and teams during the pandemic. The advice provided helped New South Wales residents build a renewed sense of structure and reclaim control over their lives during these challenging and uncertain times.

Additionally, RANSW, in response to the climate emergency, bushfires, flooding, drought and pandemic affecting their clients, developed seminars and ongoing programs to address collective community trauma. Programs aim to support families, communities and workplaces to respond to eco-anxiety, grief or anger, and generate resilience to the changing conditions. The programs seek to create space for discussing the mental health side effects that accompany the current experience.

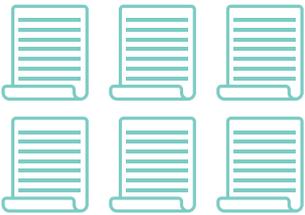
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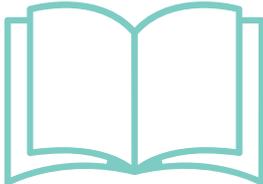
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