

# Children, Youth and Families Quarterly update

## It takes a community

ISSUE 4  
April-June 2022



## About Churches of Christ

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

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

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

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

## Acknowledgement of Country

Churches of Christ acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we stand and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging for they hold the memories, traditions, cultures, hopes and aspirations of First Nations People.

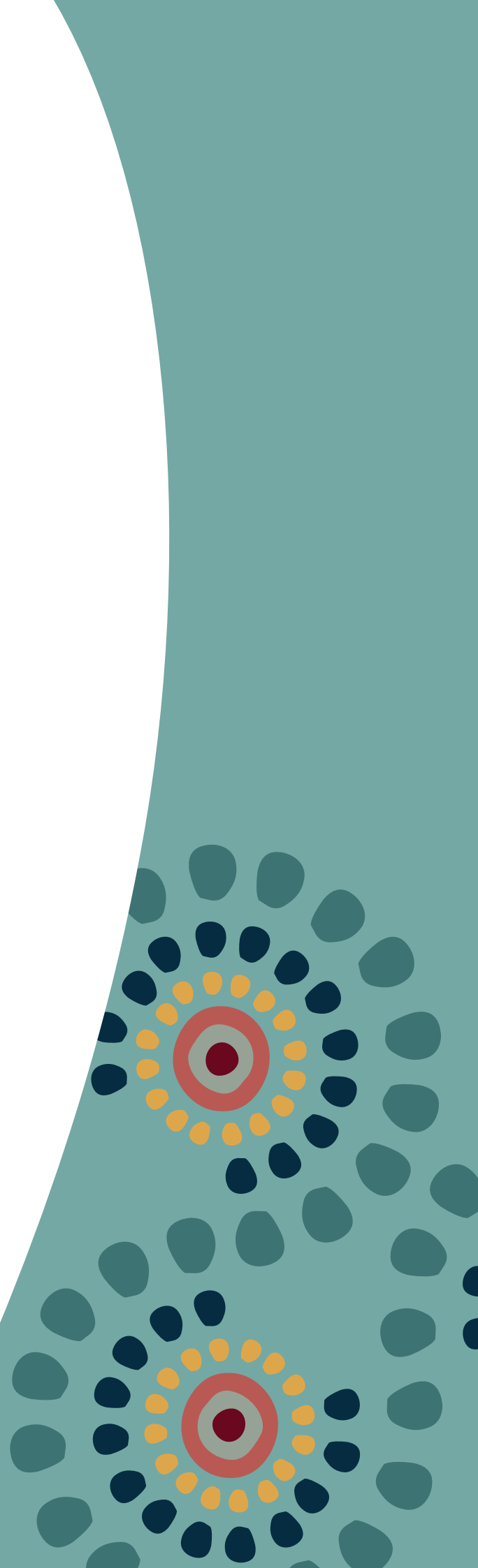
We acknowledge and recognise the resilience of generations of First Nations People and stand with you now and always.

We are committed to walking alongside First Nations People to establish a foundation of trust and to taking meaningful action to preserve, affirm and promote the world's oldest living culture.

## 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.

**Front Cover:** Basket weaving as part of National Reconciliation Week activities on the Gold Coast.



# Message from our Director.

**Child, Youth and Families  
and Housing Services,  
Mike Folland**



Wonderful news to open this fourth edition of the CYF Quarterly update, is that the Queensland Government has committed to raising the age for care to 21. We have been talking about the need to raise the age for young people in family-based and out-of-home care for such a long time, to witness this commitment brings much hope for the future.

We proudly support young people to transition from the child protection system through our Youth CONNECT program. Through our collaborative research partnership with the University of the Sunshine Coast we have research, surveys and evidence that highlights why support past the age of 18 works for this cohort. If you work in the sector, the *Youth CONNECT Process Evaluation report* is a must read. You can find out more on page 7 of this update.

## **Celebrations and acknowledgements**

In May we celebrated our 1011 foster and kinship carer families during Queensland Foster and Kinship Carer Week (30 April – 7 May), with events and activities to recognise the important contribution they make every day to children and young people in need.

We also stopped, listened to and acknowledged the history and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples during National Reconciliation Week (27 May – 3 June). As part of the week, I took part in a Yarning Circle at our Kenmore Head Office alongside my colleagues in the Executive Team, local Elders and other invited guests. A sincere thank you to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Officers, Dena Dodd-Ugle and Jacob Spall for facilitating this.

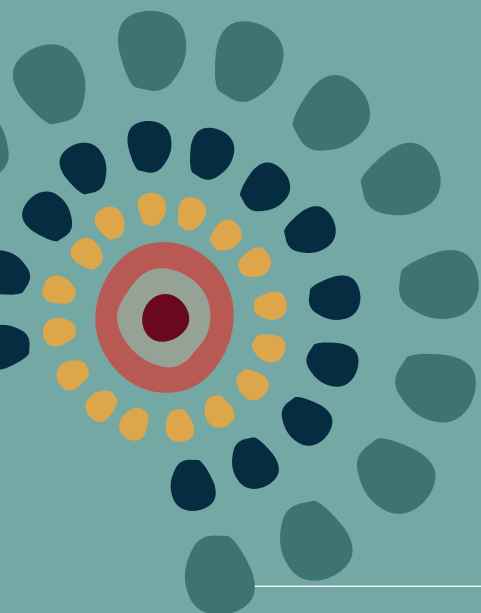
Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Officers organised an extraordinary number of events, workshops, yarning circles and other activities to mark the week. You can view images of and read about these events from page 4.

## **Meaning of happiness**

In this edition, we also share a heart-warming story from our Counselling, Intervention and Support program on the Fraser Coast about a nine-year-old boy who we worked with to help understand what being 'happy' means (page 9). You can also read a profile on one of our foster care families and run through what has been happening in our People and Events section.

## **Thank you**

We thank our Queensland Government partners that help us to provide the support needed for the vulnerable children and young people in our community. Thank you.







# Marking National Reconciliation Week.

**As part of our commitment to create culturally safe environments for our team and the young people we support, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Officers were among many of our staff who acknowledged and celebrated National Reconciliation Week (NRW) with various events and activities.**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Officer, Joshua Maher from our Brisbane South East Foster and Kinship Care team organised an event at the Gold Coast and also invited his team members to a community event.

"I was happy and surprised to see so many of our staff attend the NRW event held by community group Gunya Meta," Joshua said.

"It was heart-warming to see non-Indigenous staff engaging externally, it really demonstrated what Reconciliation means to them through their actions to want to learn and listen.

"This year's theme, 'Be Brave. Make Change' is really about us all taking action, to make change."

Joshua invited his dad, as a member of the Stolen Generations, to share his story at an NRW event he organised at Tallebudgera Leisure Centre. It was a great turnout with community organisations, such as CentaCare, Gold Coast Health, Kalwun Health Service, Bond University and the Department of Child Youth, Justice and Multicultural Affairs hosting information stalls and activities.

Joshua believes NRW, Sorry Day and Mabo Day are important to continue the work of building better and stronger relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous people.

"This will result in better outcomes, not just for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but for our nation."

The Central Queensland region organised a march across Forgan Smith Bridge in Mackay, which made the local television news (see QR code), as well as a yarning circle and hand prints on NRW banners.

The Fraser Coast region held an event to assist in building cultural capability for team members. The Moreton Bay region held a morning tea with local Elder and member of the Stolen Generations, Aunty Flo Watson, who shared her story. They also attended the Murri Expo in the lead up to NRW.

These are just a few of the events to commemorate and celebrate the week across our state. You can see an array of the images from the week on the opposite page.



**Find out more about NRW.**



**Our CYF team in Mackay made the TV news.**





**Pictured above:** National Reconciliation Week activities took place across our services, including – clockwise from top left – Moreton Bay, Mackay, Logan and the Gold Coast.



# Thanking our carer families.

**As a leading provider of foster and kinship care in Queensland, we took the opportunity during Foster and Kinship Carer Week (30 April – 7 May 2022) to show our appreciation for our amazing 1011 carer families.**

With activities including appreciation dinners, pamper packs, and morning teas, we were able to acknowledge and sincerely thank those who open their hearts and homes to children and young people in need.

At the Mackay Carer Appreciation Dinner, carers could relax and enjoy the dinner, with free childminding on the night. We were proud to partner with Marabinda, Life Without Barriers and the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs to organise this special event.

Jonelle Nielsen and her husband Anthony attended the Appreciation Dinner. The couple care for two young siblings, aged just six-months and two-years.

Jonelle has been a carer with us for six years. Working as a school chaplain and supporting children in care first led her to consider fostering.

"To give kids that safe place really was my driving thought," Jonelle said.

"We hope they'll know they are loved, build physical and emotional resilience, and become happy and achieving young people. I really just want to smooth the road for them."

Jonelle's favourite thing about being a foster mum is the love that she feels for each child who comes into her care.



"Some of the behaviours are challenging. This is when I look to Churches of Christ for encouragement, advice, training, and resources.

"Outside of family, Churches of Christ are my first go-to if I need help or back up with anything. I always go to our case worker for advice."

In Queensland, there are 5900 foster and kinship carers who have opened their homes and hearts to more than 10,000 children and young people in need. We support a significant number of children and young people in need and are committed to equipping and walking alongside carers throughout their journey.



Case worker, Bridget shares her thoughts on the importance of foster and kinship carer families for our community.

**Pictured, clockwise from bottom left:** Bryan Smith, President of Queensland Foster and Kinship Care with Cindy Kember, Service Manager of Mackay Foster and Kinship Care; Guests enjoying the Mackay Carer Appreciation Dinner; The dinner was a chance for carers and supports to come together during Foster and Kinship Carer Week.



# Dreams for a life surrounded by children fulfilled.

**Renae and Josh Webb-Pullman, longed to start a family and have a home filled with children, and opened their home and hearts as foster carers before welcoming biological twins.**

Becoming foster parents opened the way for them to build a loving family and at the same time help children in need. Renae and Josh currently care for six-year-old twin boys and an 11-year-old girl who they have had since they were babies, alongside their 14 year-old twins.

"We have some amazing support from our local Intensive Foster Care (IFC) program, with our case worker coming twice a week to assist one of the twin boys get ready for school," Renae said.

"It just helps so much for that morning rush. With challenging behaviours, we know our case worker is going to understand and come up with a specific plan for each child's needs.

"It really does take a village though, as they say, team work with the department, our care provider, other therapies and agencies can access – we couldn't do it otherwise."

Renae said the boys benefited recently from the LEGO therapy classes held by the IFC team in Bundaberg.

"It was very clever to use play as a medium to teach team work, but also the twins had the opportunity to work separately, to be independent of each other, which was great," she said.

Renae believes it is the love and connection they feel towards all of the children, and knowing that they're giving them a family and the best chance of reaching their full potential for their future, that helps to keep them motivated.

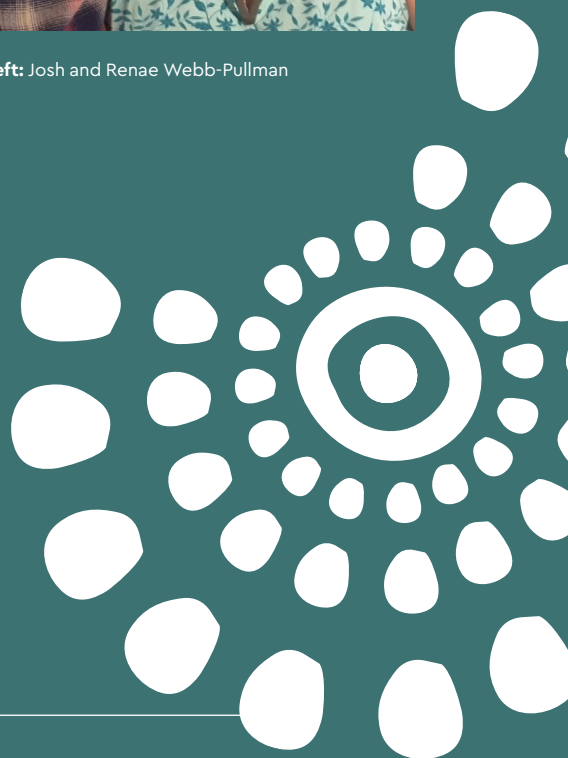
"We have challenges with autism and in utero teratogens, so we are grateful to access a lot of

training, especially around trauma-informed care and therapeutic crisis intervention.

"If there is one thing that I would want for the future for the children in my care, it would be for school staff to be trained in trauma-informed care and better funding for more help for the children that need it in the classroom."



Pictured above, from left: Josh and Renae Webb-Pullman



# Why Transitional Services work for young people in care.

**The Queensland Government have made the commitment for young people in out-of-home and family-based care to have their supports extended to the age of 21 from 1 July 2023.**

When young people in non-family-based care, or residential care, turn 18, they lose access to a range of supports and resources that other young people may have.

Our Director, Mike Folland, has shared his own personal experience of supporting his children as they found independence after turning 18.

"I have adult children myself and when they grew up and left home to live with friends, if it didn't work out, they came back home," Mike said.

"They had a safety net.

"A few months later, they'd try again. They went through that very normal process of building independence and resilience."

Mike said that for young people who have been in the child protection system, when they turn 18 and head out into the world, it can be a real challenge for them when they don't have that safety net of a home to go back to if they are living with friends or acquaintances and it doesn't work out.

"We recognise we need to help those young people in their transition to independence."

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**"We recognise we need to help those young people in their transition to independence."**

One program assisting young people to transition to adulthood after leaving statutory care is the Youth CONNECT program.

Youth CONNECT is our innovative program currently supporting 300 young Queenslanders aged 15 to 25 in Townsville, Logan, Gold Coast and Ipswich who have recently left residential care, foster care or the youth justice system.

In a world-first, this six-year program (three groups over three years) is being funded by social impact investors, and backed by the Queensland Government social benefit bond. This program is designed to help participants achieve stable housing, employment, education and work readiness, and personal development – including cultural strength-building.

As part of our collaborative research partnership with the University of the Sunshine Coast, a process evaluation report was completed of young people who have taken part in the program. The process evaluation includes analysis of feedback from more than 80 stakeholders through interviews, focus groups and surveys, as well as analysis of administrative data.

As one client said, "It's thanks to my case manager not giving up on me and managing to connect me with some of my network, that I could start ticking off some of my goals."

If you work in the care sector within transitional services or use Participatory Action Research within your program design, this report will be an interesting read for you.



To find out more, read the report.



Mike Folland, Director Child, Family and Housing Services shares his thoughts on transitional support services for vulnerable youth.



# The meaning of happiness.



**When Damian\* (nine) completed the Sanctuary Feelings Sheet with his Youth Worker Dennis as part of a youth work session at our Counselling, Intervention and Support program, he stated that the feeling he liked the most was 'angry' and replied 'I don't know' to the phrase 'I can sometimes make people smile by...'.**

When Dennis asked Damian to elaborate on each of the questions on the feelings sheet, he showed a limited understanding of even the most basic human emotions. He expressed that he didn't like feeling happy because "you don't see where you are going and you bump into things" – which appeared to align more with excitement than happiness.

Senior Case Worker, Maree, reviewed the feelings sheet with Dennis.

"It was possible that Damian felt more comfortable with anger due to his past experiences," Maree said.

Maree suggested that as part of his youth work sessions, Damian could gain more awareness and acknowledgement of happy states. To encourage this, Dennis prompted Damian each week to reflect on three things that had made him feel happy.

Dennis also took lots of photos of Damian smiling and placed them in a photo journal so that they could reflect on the photos and Damian could make the connection between his facial expressions and the word 'happy', normalising the word and feeling so that he is comfortable with the concept and how he sees himself.

"It was important for Damian to gain a positive acceptance of happy feelings, which would also enhance his self-esteem and resilience into the future as he grows and matures," Maree said.

Throughout the intervention period, Damian stated the times he felt happy were going to Aussie World for the day with his youth worker, playing games with friends and helping his younger sister.

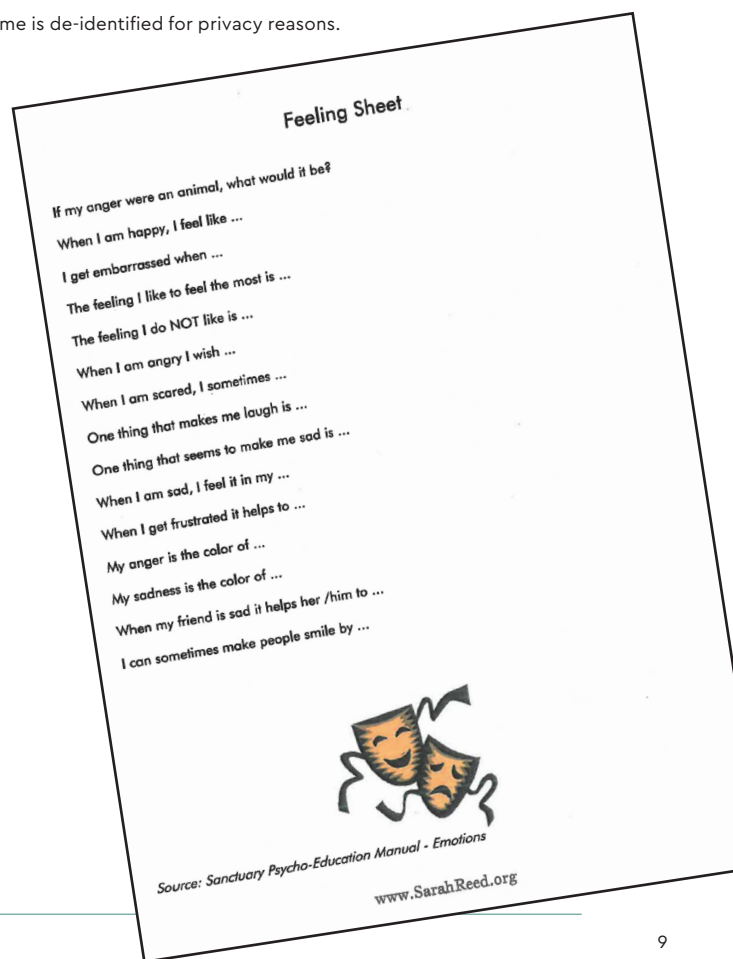
Each week, Damian was also asked to complete one 'kindness action' towards someone else each week which were recorded in his journal. During the final reflection in April 2022, Damian openly and thoughtfully picked the happy face emoji out of five possible choices to express that he had lots of happy



**Pictured above:** The Fraser Coast Counselling and Intervention Service.

feelings during that month and that doing kindness actions for others 'was the best happy feeling' he had felt, because it made people smile.

\*Name is de-identified for privacy reasons.



# People and events.

## MOTHER'S DAY

Gearing up for their Mother's Day Pamper Day for foster mums in the Redlands, our team collected pamper items donated by the Redlands Church of Christ and the Redland Community Centre – thank you!



## QUILT CONNECTION

Youth CONNECT client Krysten received a beautifully crafted quilt, which provides connection to her Aboriginal culture and allows her to pass this connection on to her two-year-old son and household.

Kyrsten described the quilt as an item within her home that reminds her every day that she is Aboriginal and that she is proud to be Aboriginal.



## KOKODA CHALLENGE

Children, Youth and Families South West participated in the Kokoda Challenge again in 2022. Two teams tackled the 30km challenge on 13 August in Brisbane.

They took part under the names 'Desert Daisies 1' and 'Desert Daisies 2', which holds significance to the teams as it symbolises resilience and growth in the face of adversity.





## GENEROUS DONATION

When Westside Church of Christ heard that one of our foster families needed an iPad for a young boy in their care, they were quick to step in and help the family out. The child's case worker, Casey, said the iPad will enable him to access homework and other educational resources, making a positive difference to his life. Thanks to Westside Church of Christ for your selfless generosity!



## MURRI EXPO

Our Moreton Bay Foster and Kinship Care Services team attended the Murri Expo 2022, showcasing services available for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the region. We held a colouring-in competition, which gave time for expo-goers to sit, have a yarn and network, while creating artworks for the chance to win a prize pack. Special thanks to Moreton Bay Regional Council and Morayfield Sport & Events Centre for hosting and to our Caloundra Church of Christ Quilting Group for the lovely handmade quilt for our prize pack!



## TEAM-BUILDING BY THE RIVER

Our Brisbane IFS Families Together team recently enjoyed a team-building day of dragon boat racing followed by relaxing Tai Chi on the river banks, hosted by Brisbane Typhoon. Staff did really well as they raced with momentum up and down the Brisbane River. It was a fantastic day of appreciation for our hardworking staff.





**CHURCHES**  
of **CHRIST**



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

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