

Children, Youth and Families Highlights and Achievements Summary

July 2021-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

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

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

Connecting to culture

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

Message from Director Children, Youth and Families and Housing Services.

For over 50 years, Churches of Christ has been a respected provider of services for children, youth and families across Queensland. We are committed to developing our services into the future and supporting more families and young people to access and receive the supports they need.

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 communities.

In the past year, we have adjusted our leadership structure to ensure we are best placed to respond to the changing and growing landscape of our industry.

In June 2021, I was appointed Director for Children, Youth and Family Services, and I have subsequently appointed two general managers to guide our group – Kerith Culley, General Manager Operations, and Grant Hawgood, General Manager Strategy Support and Assurance.

As the new leadership team, we have been building the strategies to direct our services so that we can respond with agility to the changing needs of our communities and children, young people and families in their time of need.

We are planning for the changes coming, including the move of services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to Indigenous organisations, in a move that we fully support.

We continue to support young people to be culturally safe and connected. This work is strengthened as we partner with others to find new paths to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system. This past year, we have partnered with the University of the Sunshine Coast to develop ways of working with Indigenous young people transitioning from out-of-home care that enhances their cultural connection.

With a large cohort of young people supported through our transition services, we were glad to hear that the Queensland Government has committed to increase the age for care to 21. We have been talking about the need to raise the age for a long time and to witness this commitment brings hope for the future for the young people we support. We look forward to learning and understanding more about what this will look like as the Government implements their commitment.

One of our lead programs supporting young people as they transition from statutory care is the Youth CONNECT program. We have welcomed the final group of young people to the program while farewelling the first cohort to have successfully completed their three-year journey. To the young people who completed their program, I wish them all the best as they start the next phase of their lives as independent adults and hope the foundations laid and networks made serve them well in the coming years.

We have had many opportunities to celebrate our outstanding carers, staff and young people throughout the year, including Foster and Kinship Carer Week, Child Protection Week and our Shining Star Awards. We have so many people who make a truly amazing contribution every day and leave a lasting impact on the lives of children and young people. I sincerely thank all of our foster and kinship carers and staff for everything they do.

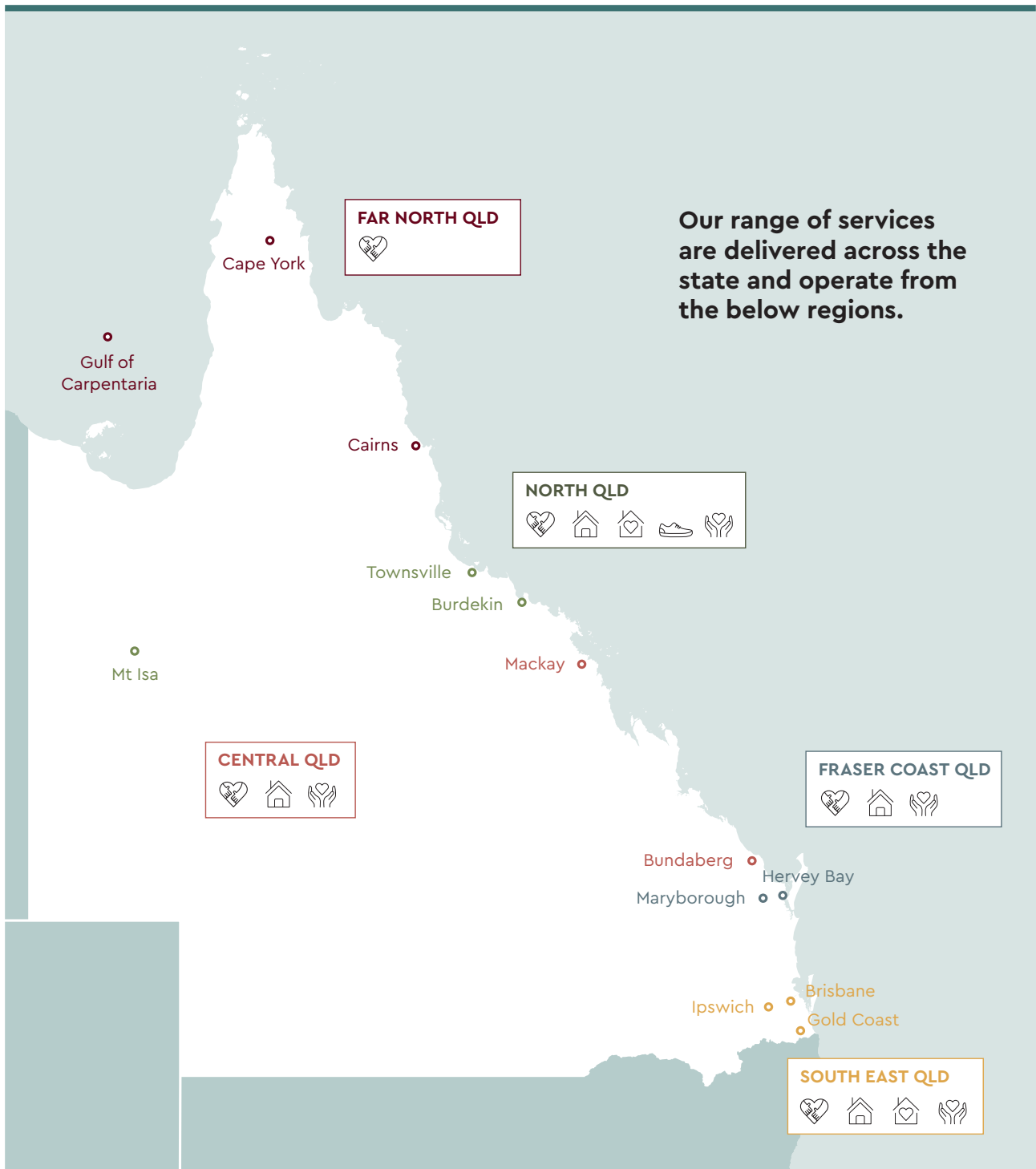
We thank the Queensland Government for their continued and ongoing support of our services that support children, young people and families in our communities who are experiencing vulnerabilities.



MIKE FOLLAND

Director Children,
Youth and Families
and Housing Services
Churches of Christ

Our services and locations.



Our services:



Family-based care



Residential Care



Next Step Plus



Youth CONNECT



Family support

Churches of Christ is one of the largest providers of alternative care for children in the statutory care system in Queensland.

They are also a leading provider of family support services and transition to adulthood programs and believe that every child, young person and family deserves to grow, belong, connect and thrive in their community.



3697

children, young people and families supported.

503



vulnerable families assisted through family support services.

1432



Foster and Kinship Carers.



224

young people living in residential and supported living homes.



2845

children and young people in Family-based care.

500+



team members across Queensland to deliver these services.

125



Active Youth CONNECT clients.



Message from General Manager Operations.

Over the past year, I have relished the chance to get out to our services and regions to spend time with team members, carers and children and young people.

The Better Together events brought teams together to hear from our Chief Executive Officer, Gary Edwards, and other executive members about what is happening across the organisation, while also providing valuable opportunities for networking and connection.

The Queensland Foster and Kinship Care Conference dinner was also an invaluable opportunity to meet carers, other support organisations and departmental staff. The sense of community and compassion between carers and those in the industry was truly evident. It is a sign of the passion they share for supporting children and young people in need.

Our vision for Children, Youth and Families is to ensure every young person we support has an individual plan to help them thrive, not just survive. Following a comprehensive review of our business in 2021 and 2022, a number of key actions were identified to set us up to deliver on that vision. We reviewed operations to ensure it was fit-for-purpose to enable us to deliver best practice service delivery and set us up for long-term growth. This change was also informed by our Child-Centred Care model which places the child at the centre of our decision-making.

As a result our six current geographic regions are now re-aligned around three state-wide functional streams. Each function is headed up by a State Manager who oversees that stream across all of Queensland. I have welcomed the appointment of three State Managers;

Linda Smith, State Manager Foster and Kinship Care Services; Sally Edwards, State Manager Residential Services; and Helen Warneke, State Manager Family Support Services. CYF is now best placed to meet the needs of children and young people in our care, and impact the lives of more young people, by proactively leading the industry in transitioning young people to sustainable family care, building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships, and responding to the changing nature of families.

We are also pleased to be one of the top providers of care for children, young people and families. I'm really optimistic and energised to embark on our journey into the future of Child-Centred Care.



KERITH CULLEY

General Manager Operations
Children, Youth and Families
Churches of Christ

Message from General Manager Strategy, Support and Assurance.

With Children, Youth and Families being a part of a large, multi-faceted organisation, there was a broad opportunity to find efficiencies and chances to collaborate with others. This year, I have focused on finding new ways to share knowledge and resources with other areas of the organisation.

I have also wanted to build our thought leadership presence in the child protection sector. We have an amazing wealth of knowledge amongst our team that deserves to be shared with our peers. A great example of this is the work of Program and Practice Development Support Officer Alannah Grace, who co-authored an article with Phil Crane from the University of the Sunshine Coast, and Jurrbal woman Tammy Wallace. In their article, they examined the multi-faceted approach our Youth CONNECT program has taken to cultural practice. They also presented 'Supporting and building resilience through putting relationships and young people at the centre of practice' at the CREATE Foundation's inaugural virtual national conference in April 2022.

At Churches of Christ, one of our five core values is 'Safety'. We prioritise safety in all that we do: safe culture, safe places, safe relationships, safe care. We nurture the wellbeing of our people and those we serve and support. This year in Children, Youth and Families, we have also focused on the physical safety of our team and how we can reduce injuries. As part of this, we have implemented a quarterly workplace safety census. This survey examines injuries across our regions. In the final quarter of 2021, there were no injuries reported among our staff. We have continued

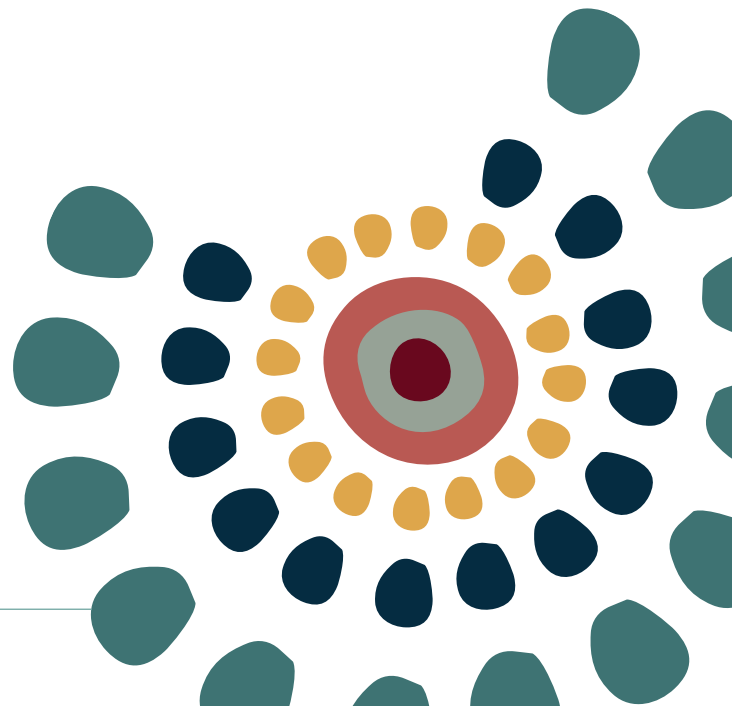
the initiative to ensure our people are safe and supported to provide the high-level support and care to the children, young people and families we serve daily.

I look forward to continuing to work on the foundations built in my first year with Churches of Christ in supporting our team to deliver the best possible care rooted in best practice.



GRANT HAGWOOD

General Manager Strategy,
Support and Assurance
Children, Youth and Families
Churches of Christ



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 2021.

The second 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.

"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 to right: 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.

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 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 Children 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.



Pictured above: The Mackay CYF Team as they took part in the march across the Forgan Smith Bridge.



Find out more about NRW.



Our CYF team in Mackay made the TV news.

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.

"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



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

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 de-identified for privacy reasons.

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 dress-up 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 above), 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!



Queensland Foster and Kinship Carer conference.

Following various date changes, due to COVID-19 impacts, the fourth time was the charm for the Queensland Foster and Kinship Carer (QFKC) conference.

Held at the Novotel Sunshine Coast from 5-7 November 2021; we finally came together to discuss the challenges, initiatives, research and opportunities for change to keep our children safe and to provide an environment in which they can thrive.

Churches of Christ Director – Children, Youth and Families and Housing Services Mike Folland said the QFKC conference was a wonderful opportunity to listen and to learn.

"We have a lot of history," Mike said.

"Churches of Christ have been involved in foster care for more than 50 years. We are one of the largest foster care providers in Queensland and we take our responsibility to support foster and kinship carers and the children they support seriously.

"What's more important is doing whatever we can to help young people to find a new hope for the future, a new sense of safety, and so foster and kinship care, within that home-based care environment is absolutely vital.

"That's why the QFKC conference is a significant opportunity for us as care providers to do a lot of learning, a lot of listening.

"It's a chance to hear what people who are actually providing that care have to say, and what questions they have, what support they need, what resources they need.

"It gives us time to engage with other service providers and to hear how they're going.

"And, also, to connect with our state government department friends with whom we share a very close relationship to provide care.

"So, for me—it's all about learning and listening."

The conference theme: The Challenge of Change Shaping the Future was the result of feedback from the QFKC's 2019 carer forums. The feedback identified the challenges for carers, agencies and departmental staff, as well as positive changes that can shape the future and enhance the lives of our children and young people.

Churches of Christ CYF General Managers Grant Hawgood and Kerith Culley attended their first QFKC conference dinner and both said it was invaluable to meet carers, staff from other care provider organisations, and departmental staff.

"To meet these people who are all deeply committed to the wellbeing of our children and young people and to listen to the dedication to their work was inspiring to be around," Grant said.



"It was so worthwhile to meet so many carers and witness how enthusiastic they were to meet other carers. You could really sense the understanding and compassion between them," Kerith said.

"It was great to hear from some inspirational speakers, such as football legend Steve Renouf (pictured above) and meet some of our own staff that volunteer for the conference, including our Regional Manager Linda Smith. The sheer size of the event was amazing."



Watch one of our kinship carers, Zara from Townsville who shared her experience during the welcome reception at the QFKC conference.



Watch video of our Director Mike Folland sharing his thoughts on the importance of foster and kinship carers at the QFKC conference.

Foster carer. It's a family affair.



Genevieve (52) and Daniel Pitcher (60) have been general foster carers for more than seven years, with their two daughters (18 and 19), and a grandson and granddaughter growing up with foster siblings.

The rewards

For Genevieve, one of the greatest parts of being a foster carer is the relationships she has maintained with children, even after they have returned to their birth families.

"The best part is when I get a phone call from Brent*, who I had from the age of four months to three and a half years and is now 12, asking to stay for the weekend. I have maintained close contact with Brent and his biological family since then."

Brent* and his little sister Jodie* stay with the Pitchers on school holidays and have done so since they returned to their family many years ago.

"We know that, as a family, we have helped reunite Brent with his family, while still also helping him be the most amazing young man," Genevieve said.

"I can see him growing up, and although loving him was very easy, letting him go was hard. We must give credit to his dad. Brent's Dad and his new family have embraced us and we will always be part of their lives."

The challenges

Genevieve says the most challenging thing about being a carer can be the impact it has had on her biological children.

"Foster caring does impact on our family – but I'm very lucky and blessed that my girls support what we are doing as a family," she said.

"In fact, my 19-year-old daughter and I did a 'Who's in charge' eight-week training course together to help us understand how best to build healthy relationships with children dealing with past trauma.

"This was an awesome and practical course and I was so proud that my daughter wanted to do it with me.

"The foster kids are a part of our family for the rest of their lives. I still have the original photos of my first children in care with me up on my wall, and explain to the kids that once their photo goes up on my wall it never comes down; they are a part of our family.



Pictured above: Genevieve with one of her grandchildren.

The supports

"Although I have my Certificate III in Child Care, Disability and Aged Care, and I am always open to doing more training, you definitely need that extra support that Churches of Christ can provide.

"I love the workers at our local office, I am always popping in and we have our support worker, Jackie, who is always there.

"She knows me and the kids in my care. She can be the go between for us and the department to follow up anything we need or any concerns we have.

Just knowing I can call her and bounce any issues I have or just for somebody to talk to. It really makes a difference.

Making a difference

"Sometimes, we are lucky we get to see these children again. Sometimes, the parents allow that, but quite often that's not the case. This is the heartache of our family and the reality of being a foster carer," she said.

"It is a reality that some foster children will come out of their time in foster care stronger, and knowing they are loved and have attachments to the foster families. But sometimes the trauma they have experienced will take a lifetime of therapy to mend.

"My hope is that we help a little bit by giving them love, structure and a sense of family."

Reaching milestones warms case worker's heart.

Since 2014, Cassie Mayes, 32, has been a Fostering Case Worker at Churches of Christ's Arana Hills office supporting foster and kinship carers to provide safe and stable homes.

Reaching milestones for children, like learning to crawl or walk, tie shoelaces, or achieve reading levels are essential markers to ensure they are on track and thriving.

"I just love seeing the kids reach their milestones," Cassie said.

"For teenagers when they are hitting puberty, it is a challenging time for them, and is just not fun. But it is just so great to see them being able to navigate it (puberty) within a supportive environment. That's what we love to see."

Cassie completed her Diploma of Youth Work, when Churches of Christ was highly recommended to her as the best place to work within the care sector. It took two years, but Cassie finally secured a position and now wouldn't work anywhere else.

Cassie explains the fostering and kinship care process:

One of the ways that we first get involved and support kinship carers is when the department has assessed a need to remove a child from an unsafe situation. For potential kinship carers, the department will ask in the first instance if any family can be identified to care for the children.

A Provisional Approval Assessment is undertaken by the department and the family members that have agreed to be kinship carers for a 30, 60 or 90-day approval process. While the provisionally approved carers are being assessed as potential full-time kinship carers.

So, it's only when the Child Safety Department has

been activated, and Placement Support Services has referred it to us, that we then become the agency for the kinship carers.

Then we will visit their home and explain the whole process from here, make sure they have a copy of the department handbook and help them complete all the paperwork.

We go through the allowances, who and when permissions need to be given for certain situations, such as vaccinations or haircuts. When and how they need to report an incident and file an incident report if a child in their care has hit their head or has been hospitalised for some reason.

We're basically there to support the kinship carers and answer any of their questions and give them as much information as they need. We hold their hand (metaphorically) every step of the way. Side by side, making sure they feel safe and comfortable to come to us with any queries.

Once we completed the assessment and the kinship carers have come on board with us, we liaise with them daily, if required and basically stay with them until the child turns 18-years-old, or they are reunified with their parents or the placement ends for some reason.

We liaise with all stakeholders for the kinship carers and are basically there till the end.

We endeavour to provide one case worker for the entire process, to keep that consistency for the kinship carers and the children. Consistency, stability and a friendly face are so important during this process and we do everything we can to provide that.

With other aspects of the process they may be encountering lots of different support workers in different situations, so we try very hard to keep the one case worker for the entire time they are with Churches of Christ.



For potential foster carers the process is different. Foster carers have to go through training before a child is placed. They need to do pre-service training and an assessment of their home. And then go through the full general foster carer assessment, which then goes to a panel for the department to approve.

There can be emergency placements, short and long-term placements and respite placements for foster families that just need a break for a short time, like a weekend or school holidays.

A foster carer can request what type of placement they would prefer, which we follow when placing children for foster care.

If it is an emergency placement, the kids might be coming and going and it might be quite chaotic, so we may need to give more attention at this time. To make sure all participants feel safe and comfortable."

Cassie loves working with the kids and witnessing their progression and improvements during care.

"My favourite part of the job is working with the kids and seeing them living their best lives with their carers," Cassie said.

"That they can be children, and have a childhood and not worry about adult responsibilities like having a safe home and food.

"Watching them grow up with their own little individual personalities is really just so lovely. I can't express it more than that.

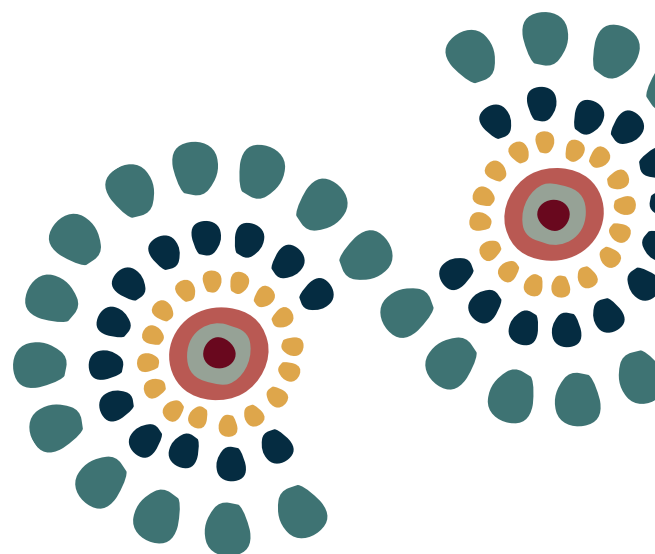
"Reaching their milestones, as I mentioned, and seeing them able to grow in a safe environment and to develop on par with kids that haven't undergone trauma is so heart-warming and rewarding.

I would seriously not work anywhere else, and I encourage those in our community who can consider becoming kinship or foster carers to do it.

"Providing a safe and caring home for a child to thrive and belong to their community, makes all the difference in the world."

For more information about becoming a foster or kinship carer, please visit cofc.com.au/foster-care

Pictured top, from left to right: Case Worker Cassandra Mayes; Service Manager Gemma Squire; Team Leader Belinda Reber and Case Worker Beth Murphy from CYF's Brisbane Kinship Care Service.



Intensive Family Support.

Supporting families experiencing domestic violence.

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

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

Supporting families to stay safe and together

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

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

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

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

Supporting our IFS team

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

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

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

Supporting our clients to support each other

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Not now, not ever

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bringing joy at Christmas.

LAKES CHURCH IN CAIRNS TAKES FLIGHT WITH CHRISTMAS JOY

Members of The Lakes Church in Cairns kindly donated 25 Christmas Hampers to our Cape York Foster and Kinship Care Service. These hampers were gifted to our carers and children in care as part of Christmas celebrations that occurred in seven communities across Cape York.

The hampers were generously freighted into each community by East Air // Weipa Air who donated the freight costs. Various people and agencies met the plane in each community to assist with Christmas party arrangements, helping us bring Christmas joy to our carers and young people across Cape York.



MORAYFIELD STATE SCHOOL CONTRIBUTES

A huge thankyou to the students and families of Morayfield State School for their incredible contributions to our Christmas Hamper drive this year. These hampers will be gifted to our families in need in the Moreton Bay region. This is the third consecutive year Morayfield State School has donated to our service, we are so grateful for their support.



LOCAL CHARITY LIVES UP TO ITS NAME

Local charity, Baby Give Back stayed true to their name with carloads of donations for our team to distribute for the families we support at Christmas. Pictured is the IFS team at Jamboree Heights Lauren and Todd with another delivery. We are so grateful for all their contributions – they made a real difference for Christmas.



ST JAMES RETIREMENT VILLAGE DONATE GIFTS

Residents and staff at our St James Retirement Village presented giftboxes full of children's toys to our Townsville foster care team. We support over 120 children and young people in the Townsville area, which made a significant impact at Christmas.



THANK YOU TO ALL

And at head office, across our Kenmore campus, 440 gifts were donated for Children, Youth and Families and Youth CONNECT, as well as \$285 in cash donations to distribute to our local services in time for Christmas.

Thank you to all who participated in bringing joy to the young people and families we serve at Christmas.

The meaning of happiness.



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

When Dennis asked Ben to elaborate on each of the questions on the feelings sheet, he showed a limited understanding of his emotions. He expressed 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.

In discussing how best to support Ben, Senior Case Worker, Maree, reviewed the feelings sheet with Dennis.

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

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

Dennis also took lots of photos of Ben smiling and placed them in a photo journal so that they could reflect on the photos and Ben 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 Ben 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, Ben 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, Ben 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, Ben openly and thoughtfully picked the happy face emoji out of five possible choices to express that he had lots of happy feelings



Pictured above: The Fraser Coast Counselling and Intervention Service.

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.



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'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."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

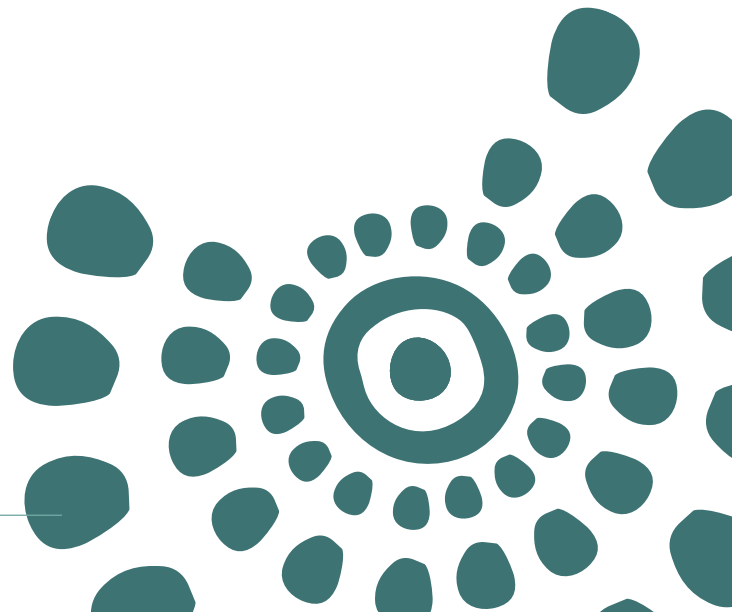
"While it is the same school, she has undertaken it with a new positive attitude and described it as a 'fresh start'. We are so proud of her," Cass said.

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



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

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





Digi Youth Arts Annual showcase.

In December, we held our Digi Youth Arts (DYA) end of year showcase for 2021.

DYA have hosted various weekend workshops with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in care in the South West region. We are so proud of the creative young minds behind these beautiful artworks and grateful to those at DYA who have taught and mentored our young people to unlock their creative potential.



"We are so proud of the creative minds behind these beautiful artworks."

Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination policy.

As a mission-led organisation committed to working together with our partners to help communities thrive, we believe we all have a role to play in keeping each other, our clients, and the community safe.

To continue to operate safely and maintain service levels in an unpredictable COVID-19 context, we made the decision to mandate the COVID-19 vaccine for all staff in December, with all staff now fully vaccinated. This decision was informed by public health advice and scientific evidence, and is grounded in our value of Safety – to protect the health and wellbeing of our team and the vulnerable young people and families we support.

We were committed to engaging with our team by enlisting third party experts in health, law and change and resilience that provided accurate information and supported our team. This is an extension of our values of Unconditional Love and Mutual Trust.

We are very grateful to our team for their understanding and support as we continue to work together to protect our clients, the community and each other in our 'new normal' COVID-19 operating reality.

Young father thrives with transitional service support.



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

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

Brian Girot, Case Manager, Youth CONNECT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Name is de-identified for privacy reasons.



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

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

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

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 strength-based 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.

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 Homefulness 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 above*) 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!"



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

Youth CONNECT brings Christmas joy.



Wrapping up a successful year for the Youth CONNECT clients and team.

In 2021, we celebrated alongside our clients as they welcomed new babies, started studies, passed driving tests and bought first cars. Our team was privileged to be on-hand to provide support and guidance to help them achieve these milestones.

The 1 December 2020 to 30 November 2021 reporting year has recorded the first cohort of graduating clients in the Youth CONNECT program. The program reported a 37.14 per cent success rate for the first payment period of the program, significantly exceeding initial expectations of 20 per cent. We have witnessed positive and inspiring outcomes for the young people in the program and have celebrated graduations for 49 clients at the end of November 2021.

Christmas joy

Christmas 2021 was a different one for many reasons. For most of us, we were grateful if we could meet face-to-face with loved ones. Although for the more than 200 young people our Youth CONNECT team serves, it can be an especially isolating time of year, even without adding the challenges of a global pandemic.

During Churches of Christ's Annual Christmas Appeal, the Youth CONNECT team were determined to ensure that the 15–25-year-olds we support each received a Christmas present this year. And, so began the Christmas Drive.

The call went out to the broader team at our Kenmore head office with gift tags added to Christmas trees on all the floors for the Annual Appeal, with the age demographics and suggestions for gifts included.

Gifts came rolling in for our young people. We received everything from gift cards, phones, homewares, children's toys, handbags and personal care items and much more. We were humbled with the response from team mates across Kenmore head office and noted when people know what they can do to help they really go above and beyond.

During three days, travelling across the Gold Coast, Logan, Ipswich and Toowoomba, our team went from house to house delivering the donated gifts to our clients. Some clients couldn't wait and unwrapped the gift straight away, while others said they would wait, so they had something to open on Christmas day.

One client asked why people would want to do this for them. The answer: "So you know that there are good people out there, you may not see them, but you know they are there."

Pictured above: Youth CONNECT clients accepting Christmas presents for their families.

Scan the QR code to watch our Director Mike Folland share the history and impact of Youth CONNECT.



People and events.

NATIONAL AWARD FOR CASE MANAGER

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



TEAM BUILDING IN THE REGIONS

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



LEGO THERAPY SUPPORTS VULNERABLE CHILDREN

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



CULTURAL CONNECTION FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

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

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

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



A STITCH IN TME

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."



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.



KOKODA CHALLENGE

For the fifth year running teams of determined young people took part in the Kokoda Challenge.

On 13 August, two teams from our Children, Youth and Families (CYF) service competed in the 30km life-changing experience in Brisbane.

Two young people aged 15 and 17 from our Bundamba Lodge residential care service took part in the challenge, and were joined by CYF team members Jacob Spall, Claire Rowlands and Molly Robinson across the two teams.

The team names, Desert Daisies 1 and Desert Daisies 2, were inspired by the artwork of Indigenous artist Uncle Alan Parsons, which tells a story about resilience and flourishing even through hardships.





CHURCHES
of **CHRIST**



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

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