

YEAR IN REVIEW 2019–20

Strengthening relationships in challenging times





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Acknowledgements

Relationship Matters acknowledges Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of the land from which we serve and respects their spiritual and physical relationship with their country. We are an access-for-all organisation. Our staff have a sensitivity to, and an awareness of, diverse communities including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) and culturally and linguistically diverse people.

We welcome LGBTIQ people at our services. We pledge to provide inclusive and non-discriminatory services to LGBTIQ clients.

The stories and quotes presented throughout the report are indicative of clients seen over the 2019–20 period. All photographs are of models.

Names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals. Statistics are taken from the 2019–20 Performance Monitoring and Review Survey and internal data processes.

About Relationship Matters

Relationship Matters aims to promote safe, respectful and fulfilling relationships and supports Victorian couples, families and the community. We are committed to supporting all relationships through life's changes. Each life stage comes with unique challenges and transitions and we support people during every stage in life.

Relationship counselling

Specialised couples counselling, family counselling and individual counselling, including counselling for children and adolescents.

Dispute resolution and mediation services

Assistance for separating couples, families, older people and community members in resolving conflict and reaching agreement on a wide range of issues. Services include family dispute resolution for parenting and property matters, child-inclusive practice, lawyer-assisted mediation and restorative practice.

Relationship education

Evidence-based education programs, seminars and workshops for couples, parents and individuals.

Intercountry Adoption Family Support Service

A free, independent, nationwide service providing post-adoption support to families formed through intercountry adoption, including adoptees of all ages, expatriate adoptions and support for couples and individuals in the pre-adoption phase.

Family violence prevention programs

A leading provider in Victoria of Men's Behaviour Change Programs, including partner contact support. Services include prevention seminars and workshops held in schools and workplaces, and intensive family-based interventions and support.

Accessible Psychological Interventions

Support for people impacted by mild or moderate mental health issues, through evidence-based services available to those living or working in the Frankston and Glen Eira local government areas.

Employee Assistance Program

Counselling and Critical Incident Response services supporting organisations across a range of industries and sectors.

Business services

Workplace training, e-training, coaching, mediation and investigation services.

Specialist services

Authorised provider of the VicRoads Safe Driving Program.

2019–20 highlights

Rebranding to Relationship Matters

533

Accessible Psychological
Interventions program
clients supported

**37.8%
increase**

in Intercountry Adoption
Family Support Service
counselling clients

Service delivery via
telehealth



Five-year
strategy developed

81,328
unique visits to our website

94,833
people reached through
our Facebook posts

10,723
clients supported

40,348
hours of support provided

Chairperson's report



I am proud to present the Year in Review 2019–20 on behalf of Relationship Matters. In these unprecedented times, Relationship Matters has continued to strengthen our services to our clients and has supported our clients in these challenging times.

We undertook a rebrand of the organisation from LifeWorks Relationship Counselling and Education Services to Relationship Matters in November 2019. The rebrand better reflects our over 73-year heritage and emphasises our client focus. The rebrand was an opportunity for us to reinforce the value of counselling, relationship education and mediation services that support strong relationships at work, home and in the community. I would like to thank our valued clients, partners and supporters for your continued loyalty to Relationship Matters.

2020 has seen the Board, management and team develop the strategic direction for the next five years. The strategic plan focuses on high-quality service provision with an innovative delivery edge and sustainable delivery through market research, funder relationships and systems excellence. The strategic plan will be the blueprint for the organisation heading into the new decade with innovation and service excellence.

Relationship Matters has proved itself adaptable and flexible with significant growth in our diverse programs, our geographic reach, workforce diversification, a successful rebrand and transition to remote modes of service delivery during the COVID-19 crisis.

I would like to welcome Mr James McCarthy OAM to the Relationship Matters Board.

I sincerely thank my fellow Board members for their guidance, support and leadership of the organisation. In particular, I acknowledge the invaluable work of the Finance, Risk and Audit Committee and the Clinical Governance Committee.

I take this opportunity to congratulate Janet Jukes, our CEO, for her leadership and commitment to delivering a successful result during such a challenging financial year.

I also acknowledge the team behind her for their achievements throughout the year, especially the delivery of exceptional services to our clients who were supported seamlessly during this global pandemic. We look forward to continuing to strengthen the relationships of our clients and support them to overcome these challenging times.

Andrew Brookes
Chairperson

CEO's report



There's no doubt that this year has been one of the most challenging we have ever faced. I would like to thank the Board and the entire Relationship Matters team for their efforts and achievements during the year.

Despite the challenges, I am pleased that we were able to deliver a positive result for the 2019–20 financial year, with a turnover of \$7,813,816, a 7% increase in client numbers and an increase of 18% in the number of sessions compared to 2018–19.

The successful launch of the new brand identity of the organisation led to an increase in brand awareness and engagement among clients, partners and funders.

In these uncertain times, people have accessed our counselling, education and mediation services due to the pressures on their relationships with their family, community and workplaces. I am deeply thankful to our dedicated team who, despite a sudden increase in demand and the challenges of adapting to working from home and online service delivery, continued to provide professional and nurturing support to all our clients.

Thank you to all our staff and associates for their energy and adaptability during a time of unexpected challenges. I also thank our stakeholders, partners and senior executive team for their support and dedication. I am grateful to the Board of Directors for their vision, commitment and guidance that ensures the best outcomes for our clients and staff. We are confident that Relationship Matters has the right foundation, strategy and skills to grow in coming years.

On behalf of Relationship Matters, I express my gratitude to our Chair, Andrew Brookes. Andrew has served on our Board since 2007 and steered Relationship Matters as the Chair for more than three years. We thank him for his extraordinary leadership and genuine dedication to improving the organisation and for supporting us to reach greater heights. We wish him the best in his future endeavours.

Relationship Matters looks to the future with anticipation and remains dedicated to strengthening the relationships of our clients. We will continue to deliver high-quality services with agility, innovation and commitment.

People will continue to seek mental health and counselling support as a result of the health, social and economic consequences of COVID-19. We encourage everyone to reach out early for support.

Janet Jukes
Chief Executive Officer

Couples



OUR SERVICES

Our **Men's Behaviour Change Program** (MBCP) is a 20-week group program that addresses intimate partner violence by using a gender lens to challenge thoughts and behaviours. It helps men to develop new ways of dealing with strong emotions and accept responsibility for their behaviour. This model has also been used with individual men when there are barriers to group work, such as acquired brain injury or limited English language skills. Recently, we were given the opportunity to work with men who were on Community Correction Orders.

'Prepare-Enrich' Committed Couples is designed to help couples celebrate their strengths, identify their growth areas and learn to communicate better.

Couples counselling can be provided at many stages of a relationship. The power of this work lies in helping couples to stop talking about 'the problem' and start talking about 'the relationship'. Understanding each other can significantly reduce the impact of the problem.



Chamila and Suresh came to Relationship Matters for couples counselling because they were concerned about their relationship. Since the birth of their first child, they had been in constant conflict. At intake, the counsellor recommended they both complete the Gottman Relationship Checkup assessment after their first counselling session.

The Gottman Relationship Checkup is a new and comprehensive evidence-based online assessment tool developed by the Gottman Institute. It supplements and incorporates more than 20 years of therapeutic work and research into a reliable, user-friendly diagnostic tool and set of reports. The assessment is designed to enhance therapeutic outcomes by guiding and alerting practitioners to the key clinical indicators that are acting as either inhibiting or protective factors in a relationship.

The results of Chamila and Suresh's assessment were sent directly to the counsellor, with feedback and recommendations for further counselling. The assessment noted differences in the way Chamila and Suresh approached conflict, with conflict avoidance (stonewalling) from one partner and a critical narrative from the other. The assessment also identified key issues in their relationship that needed attention, based on Gottman's Sound Relationship House theory. The therapist was able to work on issues faced by the couple in how they expressed fondness and admiration and showed trust and commitment.

Both Chamila and Suresh reported that having a clear therapeutic goal and a plan to help them resolve and address their relationship issues was very useful. As therapy progressed, they changed the dynamics of their relationship, became more supportive of each other, expressed affection and improved their problem-solving skills.

Parents

OUR SERVICES

Families formed through intercountry adoption, and adoptees of all ages who have been impacted by intercountry adoption, require specific and targeted support. Our unique **Intercountry Adoption Family Support Service (ICAFS)** is a free Australia-wide service that offers adoption-competent counselling, information, support, case management and online education resources.

As of July 2019, more resources were committed by the Department of Health to the ICAFS program and there was an astonishing 86 per cent increase in our counselling services to ICAFS clients. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this community has been significant, but our capacity to respond to the challenge of providing an effective yet human-focused online service has been seamless.

Our podcast *Matters of Adoption* looks at the many and varied perspectives and opinions around intercountry adoption in Australia. The first episodes explore the practitioner's perspective and future episodes will include the voices of all involved.

Relationship Matters supports the parenting journey with a range of programs for different parenting stages. **Bringing Baby Home** supports expecting parents in their transition into parenthood. **Roadworthy for Dads** is designed for fathers to improve their parenting skills. **Tuning into Teens** supports parents to nurture and guide their teenagers. **Keep Calm and Parent On!** helps parents manage their responses to children calmly.





Steve began the Roadworthy for Dads journey when his wife and 18-month-old son returned to Hong Kong while he was still living in Australia. 'I hardly get to talk to my son longer than 20 seconds before my ex-wife pulls the phone away. I want to develop a relationship with my son.' Steve enrolled in the program to help him strengthen his relationship with his son and understand more about child development, as well as to meet and share his experience with other fathers.

As the group progressed, Steve started to engage and open up. He came up with strategies to respond to emotions – his own, his former partner's and his son's.

In the final weeks of the program, Steve noted that he was able to spend more time with his son on the phone and the conflict with his former partner had reduced. Steve was also able to manage the complex emotions he was experiencing when he spent time with his son. He was feeling more hopeful for the future and what it held for him as a parent.

In his feedback, Steve said that talking about emotions was important for him and his family. 'My dad never talked about emotions or anything like that. I think I learned to hide how I was feeling with my family. It has caused me problems with my relationships and I don't want that for my son.'

Schoolmates and siblings

OUR SERVICES

The **Accessible Psychological Interventions** program provides counselling to people with a mild to moderate mental illness. It is funded by the Commonwealth Government and administered through the national network of Primary Health Networks (PHN). It is a free service and people can self-refer or be referred by a general practitioner or another referral service or individual. Services are provided from our offices in Frankston and Caulfield South and outreach has also been done to local aged care facilities. We have supported a diverse range of clients aged from 4 to 89 years old.

Relationship Matters has talented specialist **child and family therapists**. We support clients to manage changes in family structures, anxiety, depression and behavioural difficulties. Family therapy is a type of **psychological counselling** for people in close relationships who wish to improve their communication and resolve conflicts.

Mary (12) was referred to the Accessible Psychological Interventions (API) program. Her brother was seen by another counsellor in the API program. Mary's mother was a single parent with three children, and was struggling with her own mental health issues. She had bipolar disorder and was not able to cope with her own health and wellbeing, particularly during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Mary had been self-harming, at times that often correlated with her mother being more distressed. Mary had a total of 15 sessions with the API counsellor. During the course of her counselling, Mary became more stable and her self-harming behaviour decreased significantly.

The counsellor organised extra support for Mary's mother and continued to support the family by providing family therapy and additional relationship education programs. Supporting both Mary and her mother was very important in their journey to recovery. As Relationship Matters provides many different support services, we were able to provide them both with educational and counselling support.

Mary's case highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of issues faced by some clients. It illustrates the additional work and time that can be required to work with other services to provide supportive services to vulnerable children and their families. It also shows how we can link clients from one service with other internal services to offer comprehensive support for the whole family.



In 2019–20 we delivered the **VicRoads Safe Driving Program** to 379 participants throughout our sites, including regional Victoria. This court-mandated program is undertaken by drivers who have been found guilty of high-risk driving offences. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for these programs remained.

In an effort to meet some of this demand, and in line with restrictions, we brought the program online for the first time. While we had to reduce the number of participants in the groups from ten to six, we were able to consistently run multiple groups each week while ensuring the high quality of the program was maintained. The feedback from facilitators and participants has been very positive.



Workmates



OUR SERVICES

Our **Employee Assistance Program** (EAP) helps employees cope with issues or stressful situations at work or at home. This short-term, solution-focused therapy allows employees to seek help during the early stages of a problem and prevent it from becoming more serious. The EAP is delivered to more than 180 organisations and includes 24/7 access to counselling, a specialised Manager Assist service and Critical Incident Response. A survey of EAP clients found that 81 per cent believed that, as a result of EAP counselling, they were better able to cope positively with the issues they were experiencing.

Workplace Services provides teams and team leaders with a range of services including training, coaching, supervision, culture audits and mediation services. We work with our EAP clients and other organisations to provide tailored solutions to promote workplace wellbeing, harmony, productivity and leadership. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our facilitated group debrief and wellbeing discussions were in demand. Our two-hour training program 'Managing mental health in the workplace' was also very popular. In 2019–20, we delivered 391 hours of workplace services.



Sarah (28) lives with her partner and her two children (3 and 18). After an argument with her partner and consuming significant amounts of alcohol, Sarah made a serious attempt to take her own life. Thankfully, after Sarah rang a family member, emergency services were called and the attempt was unsuccessful.

Sarah contacted her employer the next day and explained that she needed time off. She was encouraged to seek assistance from Relationship Matters, who provided her workplace with the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

The Relationship Matters counsellor supported Sarah to monitor future suicide risks and

develop a detailed safety plan. Sarah also worked on relationship conflict strategies, self-regulation techniques and a range of strategies to help her return to work.

Following the six EAP sessions, Sarah was referred to the Accessible Psychological Interventions program at Relationship Matters and was further supported to deal with a range of psychosocial and mental health related concerns. Sarah is doing well, and recently returned to work after two months of leave. She has been referred to a Relationship Matters relationship counsellor and will be seen by another couples counsellor under the Family and Relationship Services program.

Separated parents



OUR SERVICES

Family dispute resolution can help parents who have separated make arrangements for their children, even when the circumstances are difficult. All parents attend an intake and assessment session to ensure that our services can be offered safely and in a way that does not put vulnerable people, especially children, at risk. Our mediators also work with parents to provide information and referrals when additional support is required. Parents can return to review parenting arrangements when circumstances change, or when new arrangements would be better suited for the children's ages and stages.

Joseph and Sofia had three children – Mila (13), James (12) and Aisha (8). When Joseph contacted Relationship Matters for family dispute resolution he hadn't seen his children for three years.

Joseph had a turbulent past, with a long history of drug use. He had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder while he was in the relationship with Sofia, but had been erratic with his medication use. After one incident, Sofia called the police and took out an Intervention Order.

Joseph felt he had hit rock bottom. However, he was referred by a magistrate to both a Men's Behaviour Change Program and a drug rehabilitation program. It had been a long road to recovery, but he was finally in a good place and ready to reconnect with his children.

When Sofia attended the first family dispute resolution session, she described many years of living with Joseph's erratic and often violent

behaviour, often exacerbated by his addiction to amphetamines. The children had witnessed this violence and were afraid of their father. They had been in counselling for the past few years to deal with the trauma. Sofia was cautious about Joseph coming back into their lives and retraumatising them, but she also knew the children missed their father.

After the initial assessment, the mediator organised a joint session for both parents. Initially, they were in separate rooms as Sofia was still very wary of Joseph. As the sessions progressed, they were able to meet in the same room and, with the mediator's assistance, they worked out a plan to reintroduce the children safely to their father. The first steps were video calls, emails and cards.

Joseph and Sofia agreed to come back to review their agreement after three months and discuss their next steps.



Almost 40 per cent of Australian children can expect to spend time in a family that differs from the traditional nuclear family. This includes families where children live with only one parent, or where they share time between two households.

Despite separation becoming much more common for Australian families, it is still a major life stressor with many challenges, including ongoing conflict between parents. Our **Parenting After Separation** program is one of the many ways we support families to make positive life changes. This program provides tools and strategies to help parents manage parenting from a distance, conflict with their former partner and their children's reaction and responses to separation.



Ageing parents

OUR SERVICES

As the family life cycle evolves, so do the issues that can develop with older family members. Adult children often take on responsibilities relating to the care of their elderly parents. Conflict can arise between siblings around decision-making, especially those related to late-in-life and end-of-life care. Sometimes family hurts and conflicts that have been lying under the surface become more obvious at these times.

Family mediation offers a safe, respectful forum for people to discuss and reach agreements on issues they may face at later life stages. The mediator is an impartial third party who helps family members discuss their concerns and assists them to communicate with one another and explore their options. This is a low-cost forum that helps families make agreements and solve problems without resorting to expensive and divisive legal processes. Mediation helps improve communication and restores and repairs relationships.



Nearly everyone faces a challenge or crisis at some stage in their life. Social or emotional difficulties, problems with addiction, loss, bereavement and relationship issues are just a few examples. Elderly clients experience loss of youth, challenges that come with changes in physical ability and sickness, and issues relating to death and dying, chronic illness and disability. **Counselling** is effective for older adults, and the benefits include increased connection and a sense of wellbeing.



Raj moved into assisted care in 2019 after the death of his partner of 40 years. After the initial settling-in period, his moods were very low and he didn't socialise like he used to. He argued with his children and isolated himself from his family and friends and the support network where he lived.

Raj's son was concerned about his father's wellbeing and arranged counselling. Initially, Raj came to the Relationship Matters offices. He was experiencing grief and loss due to the death of his partner, which had been compounded by the move to a new living environment. With the impact of COVID-19, Relationship Matters supported Raj through our telehealth services,

and provided Raj and his family with individual and family counselling.

The counsellor helped Raj come to terms with his grief and new living conditions using a strengths-based approach. Raj started to feel better about his situation. He was able to manage his mood swings and could better regulate himself when he felt lonely or isolated. The counsellor also held joint sessions with Raj's family to make sure they were aware of his concerns, social isolation and grief issues. With the counsellor's assistance, Raj and his family worked on a plan of social engagement, activities and wellbeing that helped Raj adjust to his new living arrangements.

A new brand for a new decade

We have a new name that reflects our focus on supporting and promoting healthy, respectful and fulfilling relationships at all life stages.

The process of rebranding has been an opportunity for us to look forward and choose a new name that speaks to future generations about the value of counselling, relationship education and mediation services to support strong relationships at work, home and in the community.





Five-year strategic plan



OUR COMMITMENT

MISSION

Relationship Matters aims to promote safe, respectful and fulfilling relationships and supports couples, families and the community.

We are committed to supporting all relationships through life's changes. Each life stage comes with unique challenges and transitions and we support people through every stage in life.

VISION

Relationship Matters serves the community by promoting positive relationships for the achievement of wellbeing and the fullness of life. Relationship Matters reflects a compassionate concern for those experiencing relationship difficulties, isolation and hurt and celebrates the joy of positive relationships.

We are the relationships people who build connected families, workplaces and communities.

OPERATIONAL MISSION

We deliver counselling, dispute resolution and group programs to help people improve their communication and relationship skills and to reduce conflict and hurt.

We try to find new areas of need and new ways of doing our work to meet different ages and life stages.

We work from an evidence base, evaluating and redesigning our work to make sure it's effective.





OUR VALUE PROPOSITION

Focused service excellence with an innovative delivery edge

OUR SERVICE STRATEGIES

1. Client and market development

Innovate/expand delivery to younger, high-growth corridors and regional markets

2. Services and program delivery

Focus on innovative service responses to community crises

3. Services and program design

Focus towards the early stage of the needs and life continuums to prevent future harm

OUR BUSINESS MODEL

Sustainable delivery through market research, funder relationships and systems excellence

OUR BUSINESS STRATEGIES

1. Funding

Strengthen funding networks and income pipelines

2. Workforce

Recruit and upskill the workforce to meet service needs and innovative delivery modes

3. Systems

Strengthen business systems to meet strategic needs in response to increased risk and innovation

Financial report

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the financial year ended 30 June 2020

	2020 \$	2019 \$
Revenue	7,813,816	6,944,097
Expenses		
Employee benefits	(5,151,368)	(4,703,365)
Advertising and marketing	(149,088)	(46,473)
Depreciation and amortisation	(567,858)	(179,423)
Contract and partner service delivery	(324,383)	(790,880)
Employee development and training	(18,148)	(38,921)
Occupancy	(70,969)	(594,881)
Finance	(34,226)	(7,937)
Other	(669,001)	(579,671)
Operating surplus before tax	828,775	2,546
Total comprehensive income for the year	828,775	2,546

Statement of financial position
as at 30 June 2020

	2020 \$	2019 \$
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	1,912,287	697,061
Financial assets	1,384,171	1,862,878
Receivables and other assets	442,376	188,171
Total current assets	3,738,834	2,748,110
Non-current assets		
Other assets	11,849	11,162
Rights of use asset	1,294,527	–
Property, plant and equipment	254,131	303,613
Intangible assets	11,777	23,912
Total non-current assets	1,572,284	338,687
Total assets	5,311,118	3,086,797
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	413,119	390,732
Revenue in advance	262,074	336,759
Provisions	415,896	331,838
Lease liability	424,192	–
Total current liabilities	1,515,281	1,059,329
Non-current liabilities		
Provisions	106,472	113,956
Lease liability	947,078	–
Total non-current liabilities	1,053,550	113,956
Total liabilities	2,568,831	1,173,285
Net assets	2,742,287	1,913,512
Members' funds		
Accumulated surplus	2,742,287	1,913,512
Total members' funds	2,742,287	1,913,512

Team Relationship Matters

Our Board

The Relationship Matters Board is comprised of non-executive directors who are committed to the vision and mission of the organisation. Board members generously volunteer their time and professional expertise to drive the strategic focus and overarching aims of the organisation.

- Sally Baker
- Andrew Brookes
- William Couche
- Vicki Davidson
- Marika Hubble-Marriott
- James McCarthy OAM
- Brooke Pearson
- Rev. Stuart Soley

Our management team

- Janet Jukes, Chief Executive Officer
- Peter Seligman, Executive Manager, Clinical Practice and Outcomes
- Julie McPhee, Executive Manager, Finance and Corporate Services
- Cath Tregillis, Executive Manager, Dispute Resolution and Education
- Ann Smith, Executive Manager, Service Development and Quality
- Priscilla Floyd, Manager, Workplace Services
- Shini Kelly, Manager, Marketing and Communications
- Adrian Harris, Manager, City and North Region
- Archana Bhat, Manager, Western Region
- Evan Nathanson, Manager, South East Region

Thank you

We would like to thank the individuals and organisations who have supported us in 2019–20. In particular, we would like to thank our funders:

- Australian Government Department of Social Services
- Department of Health and Human Services, Victoria
- Corrections Victoria
- Anglicare Victoria: Communities for Children
- South Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network.

We also thank our partners and those organisations with whom we have worked closely over the past financial year including:

- Anglicare Victoria
- Latrobe Health Centre
- No To Violence
- National LGBTI Health Alliance
- Women's Legal Service Victoria
- Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
- Thorne Harbour Health.

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

Relationship Matters acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

Melbourne City

Level 4, 255 Bourke Street
Melbourne 3000

Frankston

White Street Mall
Frankston 3199

Glen Eira

3/944 Glen Huntly Road
Caulfield South 3162

Wyndham

1 Johnson Avenue
Hoppers Crossing 3029

Wangaratta

15-17 Ely Street
Wangaratta 3676

Other locations

Broadmeadows, Geelong,
Moonee Ponds, Prahran, Preston

For the National Intercountry Adoption
Family Support Service call 1300 543 396

1300 543 396

www.relationshipmatters.com.au
info@relationshipmatters.com.au



RelationshipAU



relationshipAU



relationshipmatters



1300 543 396

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