

Relationship Matters
Annual Report 2023-2024

We welcome everyone
— you will be seen,
heard, and respected.



relationship
matters
Counselling & Mediation

Acknowledgment to Country

Relationship Matters acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We pay respects to Elders past and present, recognising that this land was never ceded and always was, and always will be, Aboriginal Land.

Diversity & Inclusion

At Relationship Matters, we believe in the power of diversity. We welcome you, no matter your age, gender, sexuality, race, culture, ability, religion, or background. Everyone deserves fair treatment and equal chances. We work hard to make sure you feel respected, valued, and heard. Your unique experiences make our community stronger and help us serve you better. Here, you belong and can thrive.

LGBTQIA+ Inclusion

We are committed to providing a safe, inclusive, and affirming environment for all LGBTQIA+ people. We fully support people of all gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations. At Relationship Matters, you will be respected, supported and valued.



LOCATIONS

Melbourne City

Level 4, 255 Bourke Street, Melbourne 3000

Frankston

Level 1, Suite 4-6, 108-120 Young Street, Frankston, 3199

Geelong

112 McKillop Street, Geelong 3220

Glen Eira

191 Balaclava Road, Caulfield North 3161

Wyndham

1 Johnson Avenue, Hoppers Crossing 3029

Wangaratta

Suite 2, 8-10 Tone Road, Wangaratta, 3676

Preston

648 High Street, Reservoir 3073

Moonee Ponds

Level 1, 5 Everage Street, Moonee Ponds 3039

Annual Report 2023-2024

Contents

About Us	4
Chairperson's report	6
CEO's report	8
Strategic Priority 1: Client Services	10
Strategic Priority 2: Partnerships and Advocacy	22
Strategic Priority 3: Organisation and People	28
Financials	36
Gratitude to Our Dedicated Team	38



About us

Relationship Matters is a not-for-profit organisation with over 77 years of experience in promoting healthy, respectful and fulfilling relationships within the Victorian community while building connected families, workplaces and communities.

At Relationship Matters everyone is welcome. You will be seen, you will be heard, you will be respected.

Our Vision

A caring,
compassionate
and just society

Our Values

Equity & Inclusion: Celebrating diversity, empowering all

Empathy and Compassion: Making a positive impact, one caring interaction at a time.

Excellence & Integrity: Delivering outstanding results with professionalism and trust

Curiosity & Courage: Embracing challenges, driving innovation, creating change.

Our Strategic Priorities

Client Services

- We will innovate and grow our services to reach more people and meet their diverse needs
- We will ensure that our services are integrated and seamlessly wrapped around our clients
- We will strive for excellence through quality and best practice.

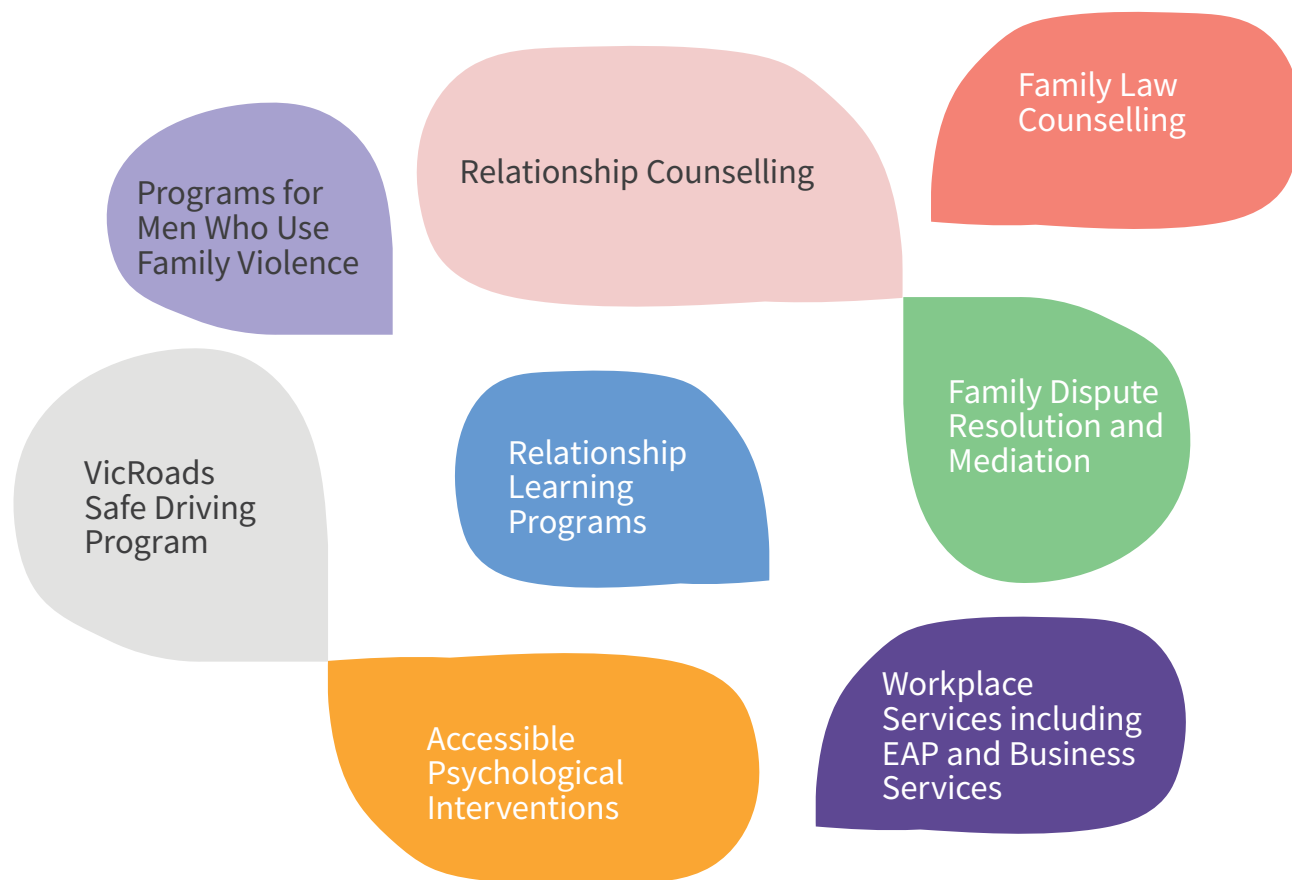
Partnerships and Advocacy

- We will invest in current and build new relationships, adding value and leveraging new opportunities
- We will embed evidence and measure impact to improve services and influence change.

Organisation and People

- We will foster an inclusive and supportive team culture where everyone is valued, respected and empowered to excel in their profession
- We will strengthen our financial viability and ensure that we have the resources we need to make a positive impact
- We will raise our profile by enhancing communications and promoting our brand
- We will optimise systems and processes for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

What we do



Board of Directors

The Relationship Matters Board of Directors plays a crucial role in the governance and strategic oversight of the organisation.

Comprised of non-executive directors who are passionate about the organisation's vision and mission, each board member brings a wealth of professional expertise and insight to ensure the organisation's objectives are met with integrity and focus. Their commitment to effective governance includes setting the strategic direction, overseeing policy development, and ensuring accountability to stakeholders.

Board Members generously volunteer their time and professional expertise and demonstrate a deep dedication to fostering strong, resilient relationships within the community, all while maintaining the highest standards of governance and operational excellence.

- James McCarthy OAM, Chairperson
- Nima Riazati, Chairperson of Finance, Risk & Audit Subcommittee
- Annette Jones, Chairperson of Governance Subcommittee
- Sally Baker, Director
- William Couche, Director
- The Reverend Dr Wendy Crouch, Director
- Catherine Allison, Director

Chairperson's Report

As Chairperson of Relationship Matters, I am proud to report on a year of remarkable resilience and achievement. Despite unprecedented challenges, our organisation has not only persevered but thrived, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to excellence in service provision and a deep passion for our clients.

This year, we faced a significant financial challenge - a projected budget deficit that necessitated a comprehensive organisational restructure. I am pleased to report that we navigated this complex process with minimal disruption to our core services. Our practitioners and clinicians continued their vital work uninterrupted, while we implemented strategic changes at the leadership level. This restructure was not just about cost-cutting; it was a bold reimagining of our organisation to better serve our community in the years to come.

I want to personally commend our outgoing executive team – Ann Smith, Cath Tregillis, Luis Menezes, and Matt Needham - for their exceptional leadership and support during this transition. Their dedication laid the groundwork for our new, streamlined structure. We welcomed Karen Iatrou as Executive Manager of Corporate Services and Wendi Hobbins as Executive Manager of Client Services, both of whom bring fresh perspectives and invaluable expertise to our leadership team.

But the true heroes of this year have been our staff. Their resilience, adaptability, and unwavering commitment to our clients have been nothing short of inspirational. They did not just weather the storm of change - they embraced it, emerging stronger and more united than ever.

I am particularly pleased to announce that in September, we officially opened our new office in Frankston. This

milestone is another shining example of our Board's strategic vision to strengthen the organisation while making significant investment decisions for a sustainable future. The Frankston office is our second property purchase, following the acquisition of our Geelong office in 2022. These investments demonstrate our commitment to establishing a strong, permanent presence in the communities we serve, ensuring long-term stability and growth for Relationship Matters.

In November 2023, we launched our ambitious new Strategic Plan. This is not just a document – it is a roadmap for transformation, outlining bold initiatives that will reshape how we serve our community. We are not just adapting to change; we are driving it, positioning Relationship Matters at the forefront of family and relationship support services.

Our Board has been instrumental in charting this new course. At our March 2024 planning session, we identified key focus areas that will define our future. We are placing a renewed emphasis on diversity and inclusion, recognising that our strength lies in our ability to serve all members of our community. We are also intensifying efforts on service integration, breaking down silos to provide more comprehensive, holistic support to those who need it most.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all our Board Directors for their tireless work, dedication, and support throughout this challenging year. Your guidance



and expertise have been invaluable in navigating these turbulent times and setting a clear course for our future.

In addition, I would also like to thank Sally Baker for her exceptional nine years of service on the Board of Relationship Matters. During her time with us Sally has been an instrumental force in guiding the organisation through significant transitions, including changes in leadership and a revitalisation of our branding. Her unwavering commitment, strategic insight, and passion for our mission have helped shape the direction of Relationship Matters and strengthen our impact in the community. We are incredibly fortunate to have had her leadership and support, and we are grateful for the lasting contributions she has made to our organisation.

I must highlight the exceptional work of our Board Sub-committees. Under Nima Riazati's leadership, the Finance, Risk and Audit Sub-committee has steered us through financial challenges with precision and foresight. The Governance Sub-committee, led by Annette Jones, has ensured that our organisational structure and policies are robust, transparent, and fit for purpose in this rapidly changing landscape.

A special note of thanks goes to our CEO, Maya Avdibegovic. Her ability to inspire and guide our team through significant changes have been truly remarkable and her strategic insight and innovative approach have been crucial in positioning Relationship Matters for future success.

As we look to the future, I am filled with optimism and excitement. The challenges we have faced have only served to highlight the strength, innovation, and dedication that define Relationship Matters. We are not just weathering change - we are embracing it, shaping it, and using it as a catalyst for growth and improvement.

To our staff, our partners, our stakeholders, and most importantly, to the community we serve - thank you. Your trust, support, and collaboration have been the foundation of our success. As we move forward, we do so with renewed purpose and energy, ready to make an even greater positive impact on the lives of those we serve.

The coming year will undoubtedly bring new challenges, but it will also bring unprecedented opportunities. With our revitalised structure, our clear strategic vision, and our unwavering commitment to excellence, Relationship Matters is poised not just to meet these challenges, but to exceed all expectations. We are not just ready for the future - we are actively shaping it, and I invite you all to be part of this exciting journey.

James McCarthy OAM
Chairperson

CEO's Report

In my second year as CEO of Relationship Matters, I am proud to reflect on a year of significant operational progress and service innovation. Despite facing considerable financial challenges at the outset, our team worked tirelessly to ensure that our clients remained our top priority throughout this challenging period. We have not just persevered but thrived, which allowed us to not only stabilise our position but also expand our reach and impact in the community.

This year, we supported nearly 13,500 individuals, couples, and families across our various programs. This impressive figure underscores the vital role we play in our community and highlights our ability to adapt and grow even in the face of adversity.

We made significant progress in expanding and adapting our programs to meet the evolving needs of our community. In response to the diverse needs of our clients, we introduced group therapy sessions alongside individual sessions within Accessible Psychological Interventions (API) program. This innovative addition not only allowed us to reach more people but also fostered valuable opportunities for peer support and shared learning. Furthermore, we recognized the unique challenges faced by women who are misidentified as perpetrators of family violence, a group that is often invisible and vulnerable. To address this critical gap, we modified our existing Sea Change program specifically for these women. These innovations reflect our dedication to evolving our services and deepening our impact in the community. We remain committed to providing targeted support that meets the diverse needs of those we serve.

With the new organisational structure, including our new Executive Managers and the renewed Leadership team, we embarked on the journey of embedding

the organisational culture that is truly based on the revised organisational values, and the principles of care, transparency and accountability.

Internally, we focused on strengthening our systems and processes to enhance our operational efficiency and effectiveness. Embarking on the journey of developing our new client management system, improving our internal processes and structure, and striving for excellence in practice have already resulted in positive impacts on experiences of our clients.

Alongside these operational enhancements, we placed a strong emphasis on building the skills and capabilities of our team. We rolled out an extensive professional development program, with a particular focus on family violence and inclusion. These initiatives have significantly strengthened our team's capabilities, ensuring we are well-equipped to address the complex and diverse needs of our clients.

While focusing on internal improvements, we also worked hard to raise our profile within the sector and broader community. We actively participated in professional networks and high-profile conferences, presenting our work and showcasing our services. These efforts have not only increased our visibility but have also opened doors to new collaborative opportunities, allowing us to extend our impact even further.



I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to our funders and stakeholders for their unwavering support and collaboration. It is truly inspirational to be part of this broader community of allies working towards a common goal. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to our Chairperson, James McCarthy, and the Board Directors for their visionary leadership, strategic direction, and strong governance that enable us to thrive. Finally, to our exceptional staff, you are champions—your expertise, passion, and dedication are nothing short of remarkable and have been instrumental in our success.

Most importantly, I want to acknowledge our clients, whose strength and resilience continue to inspire us every day. We are truly privileged to work alongside you, supporting you as you navigate life's challenges and build stronger, healthier relationships. Your trust in us and your commitment to growth are what make our work meaningful and impactful.

As we move forward, we remain committed to our vision of a caring, compassionate, and just society. The challenges we have faced have only strengthened our resolve to make a positive difference in the lives of those we serve. With our dedicated team, innovative approaches, and strong partnerships, I am confident that Relationship Matters is well-positioned to continue making a significant impact in our community.

Thank you all for your continued support and trust in Relationship Matters. Together, we are building a stronger, more connected community, one relationship at a time.

Maya Avdibegovic OAM
Chief Executive Officer





Client Services

Strategic Priority One

We will innovate and grow our services to reach more people and meet their diverse needs

We will ensure that our services are integrated and seamlessly wrapped around our clients

We will strive for excellence through quality and best practice

2023-24 Highlights

Delivered
13,126 sessions
to **4,589** clients

12

Bespoke VIP
business services
events

12+

EAP monthly employee
information sessions
for our clients

Achieved a remarkable

432%

increase in social media
reach and doubled our
engagement rates.

Satisfaction score

97%

POSITIVE

Delivered

13,300

hours of support to
Family Violence Program clients

Delivered **521**
counselling
sessions to **229**
LGBTIQ+ clients.

Our clients

Gender

49%

FEMALE

48%

MALE

3%

OTHER

Disability:

3.5%

Employment status

72%

EMPLOYED

25%

NOT WORKING

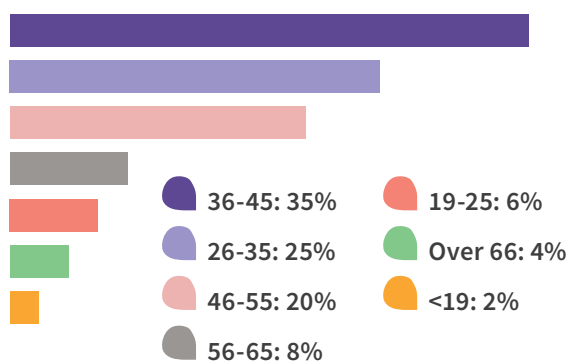
2.5%

SELF EMPLOYED

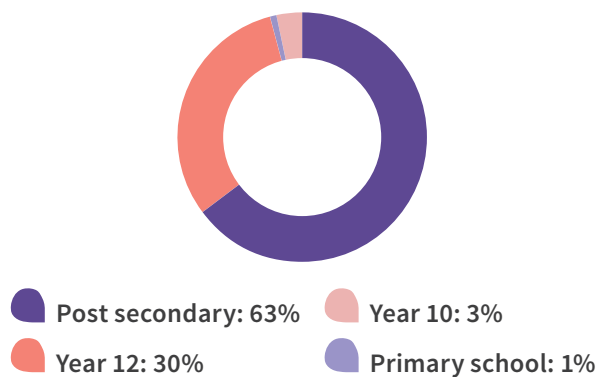
0.5%

STUDENT

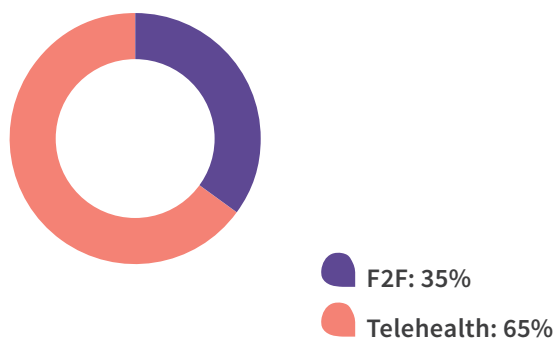
Age



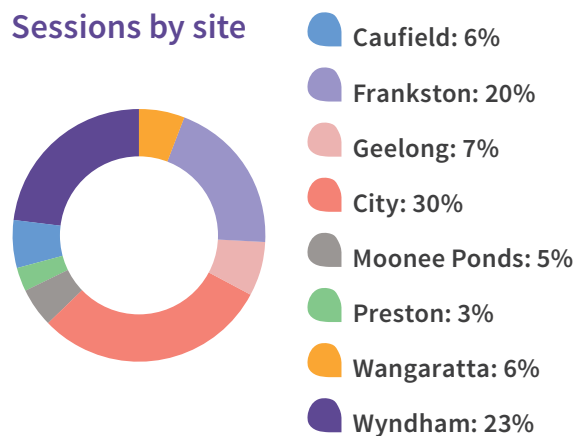
Education level



Mode of Delivery



Sessions by site



Client Services

Relationship Counselling

Our Family and Relationship Service provides essential counselling support delivered by qualified and experienced counsellors. We are dedicated to helping families, couples, and individuals through various stages of their relationships. We prioritise creating a safe and respectful environment for open and honest conversations.

Our counsellors are skilled in addressing a range of challenges, including:

- Communication difficulties
- Intimacy concerns
- Transitions in family life
- Conflict resolution
- Trauma recovery

By offering tailored guidance, our counsellors aim to help clients rebuild trust, improve understanding, and develop healthier, more fulfilling relationships. We are committed to supporting our clients with compassion and professionalism as they work through their unique challenges.

“When everything in my life goes to ‘hell in a handbag,’ counselling with you keeps me above water. Without the consistency and familiarity, I would be lost.” (Counselling client)

“A big thank you! I couldn’t have gotten through without you, and I’m also not sure where (our marriage) would be.”
(Family Law Counselling Client)

Case Study: Couple Counselling without the Couple

At Relationship Matters, we recognise the challenges families face, especially when family violence is involved. This case study highlights how our compassionate approach helped Mark and Pipa, a couple with three young children, find the support they needed.

Initially, Mark reached out for couple counselling without disclosing any family violence. Our standard procedure requires both partners to contact us separately to ensure safety. When Pipa called, she courageously revealed the presence of family violence in their relationship. Our Client Services Officers explained that a Regional Manager would need to conduct a further screening before proceeding.

During the screening, Pipa shared her experiences of coercive control and described the difficult choices she made to protect her children. After fleeing to her mother’s home following a recent incident, she was understandably worried about the impact on her kids. With our support, Pipa connected with the Orange Door for safety planning and began individual counselling.

Recognising the complexities of their situation, our manager spoke with Mark as well. He acknowledged his struggles with substance use and violent behaviour, expressing a sincere desire to change for his family’s sake. With guidance, he enrolled in a 20-week Men’s Behaviour Change Program and attended a Tuning into Kids education program.

Through our integrated intake processes, we ensured that both Mark and Pipa received tailored support that prioritised safety while addressing their unique needs. This case exemplifies our commitment to fostering healing and empowerment for families facing adversity.

*names have been changed to protect privacy

Family Law Counselling

Our Family Law Counselling service continues to be a cornerstone of support for families navigating the intricate landscape of separation, divorce, child custody, and parenting arrangements. With a commitment to accessibility and efficacy, we offer expert guidance that is both affordable and impactful.

Our highly skilled counsellors excel in crafting constructive solutions, placing the well being of children at the forefront of every decision. This child-centric approach ensures that families emerge from challenging transitions with resilience and clarity.

In 2023-24, we made significant strides in enhancing our counsellors' expertise:

- Expanded ability to support an increasingly diverse clientele.
- Strengthened our ability to assist clients affected by family and domestic abuse.
- Implemented advanced training programs to stay at the cutting edge of family law counselling practices.

Through these initiatives, we have reinforced our position as a trusted resource for families seeking professional, compassionate guidance during critical life changes.



Family Dispute Resolution

Our Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) program helps families resolve conflicts and reach agreements outside of court. It involves a neutral third-party mediator who facilitates respectful discussions between separated couples on important matters such as children and property.

A mediator will encourage open communication and promote collaborative problem-solving, with a goal of reaching mutually acceptable solutions. FDR is typically less formal, less expensive, and quicker than traditional legal processes, and it prioritises the best interests of children involved, aiming to maintain positive family relationships.

In 2023-24 we developed relationships that allowed us to offer affordable legally assisted FDR for our clients. Legally assisted FDR involves legal professionals working alongside mediators to provide advice, clarify legal rights and explain the legal implications of decisions, which provides a fairer and more equitable outcome for all parties.

“Yesterday went much better than I thought... I’m so grateful to you. You were so respectful, kind and made me feel very supported, even though you were acting on behalf of both of us. Thank you so much.”

(Family Dispute Resolution client)

We also strengthened our child inclusive practice in the FDR Program, ensuring children’s voices, feeling and perspectives are heard and considered during mediation. Counsellors from our counselling program were trained in this approach and worked with the mediators and families to actively engage children in decisions affecting their relationships.

Case Study: Sarah’s Journey Towards Resolution

This client story follows Sarah, a resilient woman navigating the complexities of a property matter after a long marriage marked by significant mental health challenges and allegations of family violence, including financial abuse.

Until recently, Sarah faced homelessness and had limited family and professional support. Although her income exceeded the thresholds for fully funded services, it was not enough to afford a private lawyer, leaving her feeling trapped and uncertain about her future.

When Sarah first approached our Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner (FDRP), it became clear that she was struggling. Our team recognised that she presented challenges during assessments, which led to concerns that her case might not be suitable for progression. However, rather than dismissing her situation, we felt it was essential to explore every possible avenue for support. The FDRP consulted with our Dispute Resolution team to find a way forward.

After thoughtful discussion, we decided to offer Sarah an initial mediation session in an online and shuttle format. This approach created a safe space for her to share her story and gain crucial information about the asset pool—information that had historically been limited due to financial abuse. This newfound knowledge significantly increased her chances of securing legal representation and taking control of her situation.

At Relationship Matters, we are deeply committed to providing compassionate support tailored to each individual’s needs. While not all issues were resolved in this process, Sarah’s journey exemplifies our dedication to empowering vulnerable clients like her. By offering a safe and flexible process, we help individuals take essential steps toward resolution and regain a sense of agency in their lives.

*names have been changed to protect privacy



Relationship Learning Programs

Our Relationship Learning programs aim to equip individuals and couples with essential skills for building and maintaining healthy relationships. These programs are designed to improve communication, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, and foster stronger connections within families.

The programs are delivered online or through self-paced learning modules, which means people living in both metropolitan and regional areas have access to the full suite of programs.

In 2023-24 we delivered 817 sessions across 61 programs for over 600 participants:

- 37 Parenting After Separation Programs
- 15 Tuning into Teens Programs
- 4 Tuning into Kids Programs
- 3 SeaChange Anger Management for Women Programs
- 1 Roadworthy for Dads Program
- 1 Making Step Families Work Program.

Parenting After Separation

Helps separated parents adapt to new challenges including developing effective co-parenting strategies, managing anger and conflict with the former partner and supporting children through this difficult time.

SeaChange – Anger Management for Women

An emotional regulation program designed for women, this program helps women learn and recognise triggers for anger, manage their responses and improve their emotional wellness.

Tuning in to Kids

Aimed at parents with children aged 5-12, participants learn how to build positive relationships, stay calm when dealing with difficult behaviours and improve listening skills.

Tuning in to Teens

Aimed at parents with children ages 12-17, participants learn how to better cope with teen challenges and discover skills of emotional regulation.

Making Step Families Work

Helps step-families navigate the challenges of blended family dynamics including identifying challenges for children, strengthening family bonds and developing new step-family routines and traditions.

Roadworthy for Dads

Aimed at dads of babies to teenagers, participants learn positive communication skills, how to remain calm and handle conflict with respect, and what challenges to expect at different ages.

Circle of Security

For parents with children up to 5 years old, aimed at fostering secure bonds, understanding how to meet their emotional needs and building resilience in their children.

SeaChange Moving Forward

Designed as a safe and compassionate space to support women who have previously used force as a protective measure against the violence used against them or their children in intimate partner relationships.

Development of the SeaChange Moving Forward Program

SeaChange Moving Forward is a new program developed by Relationship Matters, evolving from the original SeaChange Anger Management for Women Program. This adaptation addresses a critical service gap identified in the original program, which was unsuitable for about 50% of potential candidates who were recent or current victims of family violence using force as protection.

The development process began with an extensive academic literature review examining women's experiences of anger, particularly those who use violence as victim-survivors. Key findings highlighted gender-based differences in anger expression, the impact of intersectional discrimination, and unique developmental factors affecting women's anger experiences.

The new program incorporates insights from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, adopting a trauma-informed and feminist lens. It focuses on understanding family violence, recognising red flags in abusive relationships, exploring the drivers of family violence, and connecting participants with support services.

SeaChange Moving Forward aims to provide a supportive, compassionate space for women to process their experiences and develop skills to overcome trauma. By addressing the specific needs of women who have used force in response to family violence, the program fills a crucial gap in support services, offering a pathway for participants to move forward in their lives and relationships.



Accessible Psychological Interventions

The Accessible Psychological Interventions (API) program provides free mental health support for vulnerable populations experiencing mild to moderate mental illness living in the Frankston or Glen Eira municipalities. Our team of compassionate psychologists use a range of effective and adaptable interventions such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, and Mindfulness-Based Interventions to support the individual needs of each client. In 2023-24, the API program introduced group therapy, allowing participants to share experiences in a safe and supported environment.

Women's Emotional Wellness

This emotional regulation and mindfulness program is designed for women experiencing mild to moderate mental health issues. The program helps women understand and recognise triggers for strong emotions, manage their responses and improve their emotional wellness. It also encourages the use of mindfulness to reduce psychological distress.

Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy

Is a group therapy program for depression and anxiety designed to assist individuals in shifting their relationship with the thoughts, feelings, and body sensations that contribute to anxiety and depressive relapse.

Tuning in to Kids

Aimed at parents with children aged 5-12, the program focusses on assisting parents to recognise, learn and help their children understand and manage their 'big emotions'.

In 2023-24, a total of five programs were delivered to 29 individuals and included:

- 3 Women's Emotional Wellness
- 2 Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy
- 1 Tuning into Kids

“Thank you so much for listening to my situations and helping me find ways to tackle situations. Really opened my eyes that I shouldn't be dismissive and always listen to the children.”

(Tuning in to Kids program participant)

Case Study: James' Journey to Wellbeing

James is a 12-year-old boy living in kinship care, accessing the Accessible Psychological Intervention (API) program to address externalising behaviors, including severe aggression towards peers at school. These challenges have been intensified by feelings of being misunderstood, stemming from his neurodivergence and socio-economic factors.

Through the API program, our clinician has worked closely with both James and his guardian to develop strategies for reducing outbursts, managing social interactions, and enhancing emotional regulation. The interventions are tailored to acknowledge James' unique living situation and cultural background, embracing his Aboriginal heritage and neurodivergence.

The results have been remarkable. James and his guardian report significant improvements in his behavior at school, including no violent outbursts and better coping strategies. He has successfully transitioned into secondary school, attributing this positive change to the support received through the API program.

This case highlights the importance of culturally sensitive, individualised support that recognises the complexities faced by children in kinship care. By fostering understanding and providing targeted interventions, we empower young people like James to thrive academically and socially, ensuring they feel valued and supported in their journey toward wellbeing.

*names have been changed to protect privacy

Family Violence (FV) Program

The Family Violence Program focuses on working with men who use violence against partners and children but also supports their affected family members. The program promotes accountability and the importance of building respectful relationships.

We offer men a range of interventions including a 20-week Men's Behaviour Change Program (MBCP), case management and ongoing engagement with trained practitioners post-MBCP completion.

Our Family Safety Counsellors (FSCs) provide essential support to family members impacted by family violence. They assess safety needs, develop crisis intervention plans, and offer emotional support to help clients

navigate their experiences. FSCs educate clients about healthy relationships and can connect them to community resources, including free legal assistance. Their work creates greater safety for victim-survivors, and in doing so, empowers them to have more agency in their own lives.

In 2023-24 we received funding to provide an additional 48 places for our Men's Behaviour Change Program, taking the number of MBCP participants to 295. In total, we provided more than 13,300 hours of support to men and their partners last financial year, reflecting the meaningful and important work for those affected by family violence. We are proud of the impact our Family Violence Program had in fostering safety and healing within our communities.

Case Study: Transforming Lives Through the Men's Behaviour Change Program

This case study follows David, a participant in our Men's Behaviour Change Program (MBCP).

David faced a significant challenge when work commitments required extended travel away from his home city. To ensure he could continue his progress, we arranged for him to attend remote one-on-one case management sessions instead of discontinuing his group participation. An unexpected circumstance delayed his return, leading to additional one-on-one sessions.

Upon returning home, David encountered another hurdle: his child from a previous relationship fell seriously ill and was hospitalised. With the other parent unavailable, David found himself at the hospital daily, sometimes overnight, which resulted in further one-on-one sessions.

Throughout this period, our discussions revealed a significant shift in David's perspective. He began to recognise that work and status had previously dominated his life, but now understood his role as a parent was to care for and support his children. David reflected on how societal expectations often leave men feeling that parenting is not their responsibility, allowing women to bear the emotional weight of family life.

David described the extended hospital stay as "the most stressful time of my life" but also acknowledged it as a transformative experience. He stated, "I need to show my family that they are important to me, more than money or myself." When our facilitator remarked on the positive changes he had made, he expressed regret for not understanding these lessons earlier in life: "I wish I knew this stuff when they were born. I didn't realise how much my behaviour affected them." His child even expressed surprise at their father's transformation and shared feelings of pride.

While MBCP may not work for everyone and results vary among participants, David's journey exemplifies the program's potential for meaningful change. When men commit to this journey, their partners, former partners, and children witness that change is possible—that abusive and controlling behaviours can be unlearned. Importantly, it sends a powerful message to other men and boys in their lives: they can choose to adopt different values and behaviours that foster respect and compassion within their families. This is the heart of our work at Relationship Matters—empowering individuals like David to build healthier relationships and create safer communities for all.

*names have been changed to protect privacy



“This program changed my life as well as the lives of others I may have affected.” (MBCP participant)

Vic Roads

The VicRoads Safe Driving Program is a court-mandated initiative for offenders convicted of specific high-risk driving offenses.

This group-based program:

- Provides information on high-risk driving and its consequences.
- Encourages participants to reflect on their beliefs, motivations, and behaviours.
- Helps identify strategies to change behaviour and avoid future unsafe driving.

The program is delivered through a combination of online and face-to-face sessions, catering to participants across various locations

Service Excellence through Quality and Best Practice

In 2023-24, we undertook several quality and service improvement projects aimed at enhancing our effectiveness and client experience. One of our primary initiatives focused on streamlining our information protocols to ensure compliance with both state and Commonwealth laws and improving the efficiency of response times.

We also reviewed our intake and assessment systems in 2023-24, identifying numerous opportunities to improve client pathways, reduce duplication and update data collection processes. The changes will be implemented, along with staff training in early 2025.

As part of our commitment to identifying and managing family violence risks, we invested in training all clinical and client facing staff in the Safe and Together model. We also reviewed how the MARAM tool was being integrated into our practice.

Additionally, we focused on the development of program practice guides. These guides serve as essential resources for our staff, providing clear guidelines and best practices to ensure consistency and high-quality service delivery across all programs.

We have initiated a review of our invoicing processes and are currently in the process of adopting a more efficient invoicing system. This ongoing effort aims to improve accuracy and reduce turnaround times for billing, enabling us to better manage our financial resources while meeting stakeholder expectations more effectively. Together, these initiatives reflect our dedication to continuous improvement, ensuring that we effectively meet the evolving needs of our clients and improve operational efficiencies.



Partnerships and Advocacy

Strategic Priority Two

We will invest in current and build new relationships, adding value and leveraging new opportunities.

We will embed evidence and measure impact to improve services and influence change.

Impactful Partnerships

At Relationship Matters, we recognise the transformative power of collaboration. Our partnerships with diverse organizations enable us to amplify our impact and enhance the lives of individuals across various communities. These alliances not only reflect our commitment to continuous learning and innovation but also embody our dedication to effective resource sharing. Together, we can achieve more than we could alone, fostering a supportive network that drives positive change and empowers those we serve.

LGBTIQA+ Support

Our partnership with Switchboard has allowed us to provide crucial support to the LGBTIQA+ community.

In 2023-24, we conducted 521 counselling sessions, assisting 229 clients.

Veterans' Wellbeing

Through our collaboration with Open Arms, we've extended our reach to veterans and their families.

This year, we supported 91 clients through 154 counselling sessions.

Therapeutic Family Violence Support

The Track Forward program, a partnership with Anglicare and Drummond St, has made a substantial difference in addressing family violence.

We contributed to 2,191 hours of care to 172 clients, offering crucial support to parents, children, and young people.



Our partnership with Creative Family Law Solutions ensures that mediation remains accessible even during peak demand. By matching our fees, they help us maintain affordability for our clients.

Affordable Mediation

Establishing a partnership with Creative Family Law Solutions in 2023-24 enabled us to offer an affordable and responsive option for clients as demand for mediation continued to grow. This partnership not only enhances our capabilities but also demonstrates our commitment to holistic, community-centered support. By working together, we are able to create more significant, lasting impacts in the lives of those we serve.

Participation in Local Networks

- Parent Zone Network
- Mornington Peninsula Youth Services Network
- Frankston Mornington Peninsula Child and Family Partnership Network Meeting
- Kingston Family Violence Prevention Working Group
- Inter-Secondary School Wellbeing Network
- Southern Peninsula Networking Group
- South East Collaborative Family Law Pathways Network Meeting
- Moonee Valley Family Violence Network
- Geelong/Colac Family Law Pathways Network
- Wyndham Family Violence Network
- Western Family Law Pathway Collaborative network
- Western Integrated Family Violence Committee
- State Parenting Education Network
- Anglican Diocese of Melbourne Prevention of Violence Against Women

TRACK Forward: Collaborative Therapeutic Support for Families

The TRACK (Therapeutic Recovery for Adults & Kids) Forward program exemplifies our commitment to collaborative partnerships and specialised expertise in family violence support. This innovative program is a joint initiative between Relationship Matters, Anglicare Victoria, and Drummond Street Services.

Program Overview:

- Funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH)
- Provides free therapeutic support for parents, children, and young people
- Aims to help clients transition away from the impacts of family violence and reduce reliance on support systems
- Offers flexible service delivery: individual, group, and family sessions

2023-24 Highlights:

- Exceeded targets by:
 - Supporting 172 clients
 - Delivering 2,191 hours of direct care

Client Demographics:

- 90% of referrals: clients under 12 and over 25 years old
- Innovation in Youth Engagement:
 - Focused on engaging young people (12-25 years)
 - Special emphasis on LGBTIQ+ youth inclusion

Enhanced Expertise:

- Staff participated in professional development to improve youth engagement skills
- Added a play therapist to the team, expanding therapeutic approaches.

This collaborative effort demonstrates our ability to adapt to client needs, exceed service targets, and continuously enhance our expertise in trauma-informed care. The TRACK Forward program stands as a testament to the power of partnerships in delivering comprehensive, client-centered support for those affected by family violence.

Advocacy

As members of several peak bodies, including Family and Relationship Services Australia, No To Violence, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, and the Ethnic Community Council of Victoria, we actively contribute to advocacy efforts across multiple sectors.

2023-2024 Highlights

Focus on Family Violence Programs:

- Participated in Melbourne University's evaluation of family violence perpetrator programs
- Contributed insights to the Western Integrated Family Violence Committee's submission for the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry on family violence data collection
- Contributed to No To Violence's submission to the same inquiry

These efforts aim to influence policy and enhance interventions for perpetrators of family violence, ultimately contributing to safer communities and better outcomes for those affected by family violence.

2023-2024 Initiatives

Family Law Reform:

- Contributed to the Family Law Amendment Bill No. 2 Advisory Group

This participation has enhanced our organisation's preparedness for implementing the amendments once enacted.





Organisation and People

Strategic Priority Three

We will foster an inclusive and supportive team culture where everyone is valued, respected and empowered to excel in their profession.

We will strengthen our financial viability and ensure that we have the resources we need to make a positive impact.

We will raise our profile by enhancing communications and promoting our brand.

We will optimise systems and processes for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Organisation and People

Building a Robust Foundation for Success

In the past year, our organisation has made significant strides in strengthening our core, fostering a diverse and inclusive environment, and positioning ourselves for sustainable growth. Our achievements reflect our commitment to excellence, innovation, and the well-being of both our staff and clients.

Cultivating a Dynamic and Inclusive Culture

We have successfully created a vibrant organisational culture that celebrates diversity and nurtures talent:

- Implemented all-staff professional development days featuring inspiring speakers and engaging activities, receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback.
- Revamped our orientation program to ensure a warm welcome for new team members.
- Established a Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, underpinned by a revised Diversity Statement.
- Developed targeted learning and development opportunities to enhance leadership and team capacity.

Strengthening Operational Excellence

Our focus on operational efficiency and financial stability has yielded impressive results:

- Conducted a thorough review of our financial position, implementing robust budgeting processes and transparent financial management systems.
- Invested in cutting-edge back-office systems for finance and human resources, enhancing efficiency and compliance.
- Made strategic property investments in Geelong and Frankston, with an eye on future expansion in growth areas like Wyndham.

Elevating Our Brand and Communication

We've significantly enhanced our visibility and engagement:

- Achieved a remarkable 432% increase in social media reach and doubled our engagement rates.
- Developed new, inclusive brochures that better reflect our not-for-profit ethos.
- Launched staff and stakeholder newsletters to improve internal and external communication.
- Showcased our clinical expertise at national conferences, expanding our network and client base.

Optimising Systems for Future Growth

Our commitment to continuous improvement is evident in our systems and processes:

- Initiated the development of a state-of-the-art Client Management System to enhance service delivery and reporting capabilities.
- Strengthened cybersecurity measures to protect sensitive information and maintain stakeholder trust.
- Conducted a comprehensive review of policies and procedures to reinforce governance and ethical practices.

These achievements underscore our dedication to creating a strong, adaptable, and forward-thinking organisation. With our robust corporate systems, diverse and talented team, and commitment to excellence, we are well-positioned to make a lasting positive impact in the communities we serve.

Professional Development Days 2023 and 2024

In December 2023, our organisation held a professional development day featuring a workshop led by Jason Clarke from Minds at Work. The workshop focused on enhancing workplace innovation and collaboration, equipping staff with effective strategies to improve team dynamics and cultivate a positive work environment. Following this engaging session, we recognised the hard work and achievements of our team members during the annual Staff Recognition Awards.

Our June professional development day focused on enhancing workplace inclusivity and awareness. Inclusion training delivered by our Chairperson, James McCarthy OAM, providing essential insights for fostering a welcoming environment. This was followed by Unconscious Bias Training delivered by Maria Dimopoulos AM from Myriad Kofkin Global to help participants recognise and address their own biases. A significant session on Transgender and Gender Diversity Awareness delivered by Tidge Backhouse from ACON's Pride Inclusion Programs deepened our understanding of LGBTQIA+ experiences and effective allyship. The day concluded with an entertaining 77-year retrospective of our organisation's history, accompanied by the greatest musical hits of each era. This comprehensive training equipped staff with valuable tools to contribute to a more inclusive workplace culture, while the musical journey through time added a delightful and memorable touch to the experience.



“I loved Jason’s presentation. I found him engaging & entertaining, and his content was thought-provoking. The mix of professional development in the morning with some fun activities in the afternoon worked well. Also, having a central location worked well.”

“It was amazing! Best PD day ever. Food was delicious. Loved Jason talk. Drag queen was amazing.”

Strengthening our Family Violence Capabilities

As a prescribed entity, Relationship Matters is committed to enhancing its family violence capabilities through comprehensive implementation of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) framework and Information Sharing Schemes and has taken significant steps to align its practices with these crucial initiatives.

Our organisation-wide MARAM implementation strategy reflects our dedication to addressing family violence effectively. For our DFFH-funded perpetrator intervention programs, we have adopted a comprehensive approach, while other programs focus on screening and identification. This tiered implementation ensures that all areas of our service are equipped to recognise and respond to family violence risks.

Relationship Matters has also committed to adopting the Safe & Together Model across the organisation, demonstrating our commitment to best practices in family violence intervention. We have set an ambitious goal to train all staff by the end of 2024, with managers and coordinators having already completed the intensive 4-day core training. Other staff members will complete an online module, ensuring a baseline understanding across the organisation. To reinforce this learning, we have introduced reflective practice sessions across all teams, fostering continuous improvement and knowledge sharing.

Our organisation-wide MARAM implementation strategy reflects our dedication to addressing family violence effectively.

Conference Presentations: Showcasing Innovation

At the 2024 Family and Relationship Services Australia (FRSA) conference in Melbourne, Relationship Matters delivered two presentations, highlighting our innovative programs and expertise:

SeaChange Moving Forward Program

Laurie Arrowsmith and Sabrina Mrozinski presented on this groundbreaking program supporting women victims of family violence who use force as protection. Key points:

- Attracted significant interest, particularly from Indigenous and CALD communities across Australia.
- Well-attended presentation with engaging discussion during question time.
- For more details on SeaChange Moving Forward, see page 18.



In May and June, we exhibited at two major national conferences in Melbourne, these events connected us with over 1,000 stakeholders, enhancing our outreach significantly.

Couple Counselling Without Seeing the Couple

Vivianne Watson and Adrian Harris shared their approach to managing risk in family violence situations while providing therapeutic interventions. This presentation:

- Focused on allowing couples to benefit from counselling through separate sessions as part of an integrated response.
- Generated considerable interest among conference delegates.

Conference Exhibition Booths

In May and June, we exhibited at two major national conferences in Melbourne: The Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference and the Family and Relationship Services Australia Conference. These events connected us with over 1,000 stakeholders, enhancing our outreach significantly. This enabled us to:

- Engage with attendees to discuss our relationship programs and initiatives.

- Generate numerous leads and schedule follow-up meetings with potential collaborators.
- Profile our CEO and Program Manager who were invited to participate in Vox Pop interviews to promote our organisation.
- Distribute over 400 giveaway bags containing information about our programs.

National Families Week

During National Families Week, the Regional Manager for City Southeast attended an event on May 13, 2024, at Orwil St Community House. This event was coordinated by Family Life and Frankston City Council and focused on the theme of “Celebrating Family Diversity and Connection.” An information table was set up to highlight Relationship Matters and its services.



Workplace Services

Strengthening Partnerships and Expanding Services: A Year of Growth and Engagement

Workplace Services, which include our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and Business Services, is a key social enterprise of Relationship Matters. We currently support 170 EAP customers, representing a total of 20,000 employees across both not-for-profit and for-profit sectors. What sets us apart from other commercial EAP providers is our team of permanent employees who deliver not only EAP services but also other funded programs, ensuring a high level of expertise and continuity. Our workforce benefits from extensive professional development support and their experience from working with complex family dynamics, which translates into more nuanced and effective support for workplace issues. Additionally, as a not-for-profit organization, our focus is on maximizing positive impact rather than profit margins. Revenue generated from Workplace Services is redirected to offset the costs of other programs and projects at Relationship Matters, reinforcing our commitment to community impact. This social enterprise model allows us to offer competitive pricing while maintaining high-quality, specialized services that go beyond traditional EAP offerings.

Key Highlights:

Strong Client Engagement: We've seen consistent, active participation from our EAP clients, with high open rates for communications and robust attendance at online events.

Expanded Service Offerings: We've successfully launched a comprehensive suite of business services, including:

- Four 90-minute online training sessions
- Eleven versatile products available in both online and face-to-face formats

Popular Topics: Our most sought-after offerings include “Dealing with Difficult Clients” and “Managing Stress and Building Resilience,” reflecting the current needs of today's workplaces.

Expertise Showcase: Recent information sessions on topics such as Yarning Circles, Workplace Mediation, and Mental Health First Aid have attracted high-level executives, including CEOs, demonstrating the value and relevance of our services.

Innovative Approach: Our online delivery model has proven highly effective, offering convenience and accessibility to our clients while maintaining the quality and impact of our sessions.

Looking Ahead:

As we move into the next fiscal year, we are poised for further growth. Our strategy of building trust and credibility through high-quality, expert-led sessions is yielding tangible results. We're seeing increased demand for our services and are excited about the potential for new partnerships.

Our commitment to addressing diverse workplace needs is reflected in our expanded portfolio, which now includes specialised topics like neurodiversity, LGBTQI+ support, and Indigenous cultural awareness. This comprehensive approach positions us as a versatile and indispensable resource for organisations seeking to create more inclusive, resilient, and high-performing workplaces.

By continuing to leverage our strengths in content creation, expert collaboration, and flexible delivery methods, we are confident in our ability to meet the evolving needs of our clients and drive positive change in workplaces across the nation.

Training Packages: Available Online or In-Person



Enhancing Workplace Wellbeing: EAP Innovations

Empowering Through Information: EAP Sessions

Our monthly EAP information sessions have proven to be a valuable resource for our clients, particularly Human Resource and People & Culture Managers. These sessions offer:

- In-depth understanding of Relationship Matters' unique social enterprise model
- Insights into how EAP services can be tailored to specific workplace needs.
- Opportunities for clients to engage directly with our experienced counsellors.
- Clear demonstration of the quality and depth of our non-commercial approach.

By educating our clients, we empower them to make informed decisions about employee wellbeing, leading to more effective implementation of EAP services across diverse workplaces.

Tailored Solutions: Sector-Specific EAP Design

Recognising that one size does not fit all, we have successfully developed and implemented bespoke EAP services for specific sectors. This approach offers:

- Customised support addressing unique industry challenges
- Flexible delivery models, including on-site counselling and telehealth options
- Integration of sector-specific topics such as vicarious trauma management
- Enhanced employee engagement through tailored, opt-in programs

Our sector-specific EAP design demonstrates our commitment to meeting the evolving needs of modern workforces, ensuring that mental health support is both accessible and relevant to each client's unique context. Through these initiatives, we continue to strengthen our position as a leading provider of innovative, effective, and compassionate employee assistance programs.

Financials

As at 30 June 2024

Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income For the Year Ended 30 June 2024

	2024 \$	2023 \$
Revenue and other income	6,914,875	6,930,762
Employee benefits expense	(5,459,525)	(5,263,566)
Advertising and marketing expenses	(32,049)	(20,871)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(466,743)	(491,944)
Contract and partner service delivery	(231,348)	(159,372)
Employee development and training expenses	(53,822)	(38,818)
Occupancy expenses	(248,344)	(172,794)
Net gain/(loss) on financial assets at FVTPL	10,357	8,517
Finance expense	(48,443)	(19,932)
Other expenses	(352,003)	(370,263)
Operating surplus before income tax	32,955	401,719
Income tax expense	-	-
Net surplus for the year	32,955	401,719
Other comprehensive income, net of income tax		
Items that will not be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss	-	-
Items that will be reclassified to profit or loss when specific conditions are met	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	32,955	401,719

Statement of Financial Position
As at 30 June 2024

	2024 \$	2023 \$
Assets		
Current Assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	2,977,027	3,037,245
Trade and other receivables	217,072	156,923
Other financial assets	1,204,625	1,165,707
Other assets	56,214	26,407
Total Current Assets	4,454,938	4,386,282
Non-Current Assets		
Property, plant and equipment	2,076,843	2,209,290
Right-of-use assets	1,306,216	300,547
Other assets	9,966	8,170
Total Non-Current Assets	3,393,025	2,518,007
Total Assets	7,847,963	6,904,289
Liabilities		
Current Liabilities		
Trade and other payables	438,377	336,727
Borrowings	40,000	40,000
Contract liabilities	139,356	183,381
Lease liabilities	301,561	253,679
Employee benefits	356,723	503,659
Total Current Liabilities	1,276,017	1,317,446
Total Liabilities		
Non-Current Liabilities		
Borrowings	510,000	550,000
Lease liabilities	1,070,815	65,801
Employee benefits	2,143	15,009
Total Non-Current Liabilities	1,582,958	630,810
Total Liabilities	2,858,975	1,948,256
Net Assets	4,988,988	4,956,033
Members' Funds		
Accumulated Surplus	4,988,988	4,956,033
Total Members' Funds	4,988,988	4,956,033

Gratitude to Our Dedicated Team

In this section, we express our heartfelt appreciation to all the staff members whose unwavering commitment and hard work have significantly contributed to our organisation's success. Their dedication to supporting our clients and fostering a positive environment has been instrumental in achieving our goals. We recognise and celebrate their efforts, which reflect the core values of our organisation. Thank you for your passion, resilience, and teamwork!

Abbey Newman

Adrian Harris

Andrew Duff

Anne Karlake

Anthony Lekkas

Anuradha Krishnan

Bijan Asgari

Cameron Atkinson

Carly Elias

Charlotte O'Donnell-Young

Cheryl Wise

Conor O'Neill

Daniel Dowd

Danny Blay

Deborah Friend

Despina Tokatlidis

Dimitrios Bouras

Donna Waihape

Dulguun Dashdondog

Emma Webb

Feyrouz Khayat

Fulya Burcu Vurdal

Giselle Merlino

Guy Penna

Hannah Shaw

Haran Singham

Helen Boyle

Janet Smith

Jeffrey Katz

Jennifer Butler

Jennifer Hall

Jill Lane

Jill Ringrose

John Kelleher

Karen Harrison

Karen Iatrou

Kavita Amrick Singh

Kerry Coghlan

Kiran Dhavala

Laura Sykes

Liam Murray

Lizabeth Gonzalez Naranjo

Lynise Pamment

Maggie Dryburgh

Margaret Hodge

Marion Leonard

Mark Thompson

Mark Vincent

Marney Bowden

Mary Karambilas

Mary Rahilly

Matheesha Caldera

Maya Avdibegovic

Melanie Chan

Michelle Lewis

Michelle Rajkovaca

Michelle Woolstencroft

Nhi Tran

Nicola Byrne

Rashmi Baijnath

Roslyn Nimmo

Sabrina Mrozinski

Shannon Katunin

Shilpa Alla

Sky Simpson

Susanna Sibillin

Tanya De Mel

Thomas Selby

Vicki Kyritsis

Vivianne Watson

Wendi Hobbins

Zehra Yalcin

The Power of Small Gestures: Creating Safe Spaces

Last week, an encounter at our Geelong site reminded me of the profound impact that small, thoughtful actions can have on those we serve. As I wore my rainbow flag and pronoun badges, a young visitor taught me an invaluable lesson in compassion and inclusivity.

A 10-year-old child, whose parents had just finished a session, approached me asking to use the bathroom. I warmly welcomed them, showing them the way and waiting nearby to ensure they felt comfortable and safe.

Initially, the child appeared visibly nervous, with a pronounced stutter that seemed more like an anxious tic. However, something remarkable happened after they emerged from the bathroom. Their eyes lit up upon noticing my badges, and they eagerly shared about their own rainbow-adorned hat. As they enthusiastically described their collection, I noticed their stutter had completely disappeared, replaced by confident, flowing speech.

This experience serves as a reminder of how seemingly small gestures can create a welcoming environment where people feel safe, accepted, and valued. By simply wearing those badges, I had unknowingly opened a door for this child to feel comfortable and express themselves freely.

As we continue our important work, let's remember that every interaction is an opportunity to make someone feel seen, heard, and respected. Sometimes, it's the smallest things that make the biggest difference in creating a truly inclusive and supportive space for all who come through our doors.

Regional Manager, North & West



relationshipmatters



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