



Uniting Vic.Tas

# Annual Report 2019/20



Uniting is the community services organisation  
of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania.

# Uniting

# Who we are

We act with impact and strive to make a difference in local communities across Victoria and Tasmania.

**Uniting Vic.Tas is the community services organisation of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania. For over 100 years, we have helped individuals, families and communities thrive, with services that build independence, confidence and capability. We do this in the following areas:**

- Child, Youth and Families
- Community Wellbeing and Capacity Building
- Housing and Homelessness
- Alcohol and Other Drugs
- Mental Health
- Disability
- Early Learning
- Aged and Carer
- Business and Social Enterprises

We work in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's First Peoples and as the traditional owners and custodians of this land. We celebrate diversity and value the lived experience of people of every ethnicity, faith, age, disability, culture, language, gender identity, sex and sexual orientation. We welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender diverse and non-binary, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people at our services. We pledge to provide inclusive and non-discriminatory services.

The work we do in the community is all about giving people the support they need to live happy and fulfilled lives. We strive to be people-focused and rights-based, as recognised and expressed in international declarations, treaties and covenants that aim to ensure peace and equality among all.



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# Chair's Report

Uniting Vic.Tas has a proud history of standing up for vulnerable and marginalised people and communities, coupled with a bold and exciting vision for the future of community services.

We are now well into our inaugural Strategic Plan, which sets out how we bring our purpose to life - one organisation working to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice. Our ambition is framed by two key objectives: to change lives and communities, and to change how we work.

We aspire to ensure vulnerable people have safe and secure housing, and to offer place-based services to them, right across Victoria and Tasmania, so that each person can reach their full potential. This is the focus of our housing strategy, *Making Housing a Priority*, in partnership with Uniting Housing.

Only by bringing together the expertise of our employees and the lived experience of our consumers can we make a real impact on people's lives. We continue to build our consumer partnerships, so our work truly reflects the needs of those who use our programs and services. We bring a consistent approach to the governance of partnership activities to ensure safety and wellbeing.

At a personal level, I am proud of our work on the *Uniting LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Action Plan*, which started in early 2020. This plan will ensure we become a safe and welcoming environment for all. We want the consumers and communities we work alongside, and our workforce to know that they are free from discrimination based on sexuality, gender or identity.

We are bold in advocating for change to government policies that are not in the best interests of those we work alongside. We developed 13 submissions to government inquiries in 2019/20, which helped to shape a number of

positive outcomes for our consumers. I would like to thank our CEO Bronwyn Pike for her leadership in Uniting's advocacy.

I am proud of our employees, volunteers and supporters and would like to thank each of you for the incredible work you have done and continue to do to support our consumers. The work was considerable even before the events of 2020. The challenge has become even greater now and into the foreseeable future.

Thank you to former Board Chair Bronwyn Pike, Interim Board Chair, Rev Allan Thompson and former CEO Paul Linossier for building a strong foundation that will serve us well into the future.

I would like to thank the board directors of Uniting Vic.Tas, particularly acknowledging retiring board directors, John Preston and Peter Prasser for their years of commitment to Uniting.

It is through working together, alongside our consumers, we can enrich the whole community.

Jude Munro AO  
**Board Chair**



# CEO's Report

Our commitment to supporting people and communities across Victoria and Tasmania is as strong as ever.

And that support is more important now than it has ever been.

2020 has been one of the most challenging years our country has faced. It started with the devastating bushfires. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Growing numbers of people are facing crisis, many for the first time in their lives.

The breadth of our expertise has helped us support those who are going through tough times due to these recent disasters, and those who were already struggling with limited resources to cope.

Our teams across Victoria and Tasmania have quickly adapted to find innovative and safe ways to help people through these trying times.

Our community meals programs in Prahran, Ballarat and Hobart were forced to shut their dining rooms at the start of the pandemic. But they have continued to provide hot, nutritious takeaway meals for their communities.

Our aged care and early learning teams have found creative ways to ensure the children, families and older people who couldn't physically get together during COVID-19 restrictions maintained a strong connection and sense of belonging.

In the face of adversity, we have had many reasons to celebrate during the year.

We started construction on a new crisis accommodation facility in Melbourne's east, designed to support older women at risk of homelessness. Our partnership with Mountview Uniting Church, Community Housing Ltd, Oak Building Group and the Department of Health and Human Services will see a new 8-unit facility open so women can take control of their lives and transition into safe and long-term housing.

Our team in Wimmera celebrated the opening of a Wellbeing Centre in Horsham for children, young people and families to take part in group programs that improve their mental wellbeing and connections in the community.

And we officially took part in the Midsumma Pride March for the first time– a proud day for our organisation as more than 80 of our employees, volunteers, consumers and supporters joined thousands of others in a celebration of love and diversity.

You can read about these achievements and many more in this report.

The next few years will be challenging as we recover from the economic, social and psychological impacts caused by the life-changing events of 2020.

There is going to be even greater need for the services we deliver, and we will continue to be there for those who need us, every step of the way.



Bronwyn Pike  
**Chief Executive Officer**





# Director of Mission's Report

This year our foundations have been tested like never before.

Have we been building upon foundations of sand that might be washed away with the first rain, or rock that stand the test of time?

When bushfires, floods and a pandemic came, Uniting's foundations, purpose and values remained solid and inspired our responses.

As part of the Uniting Church, our foundation statement "Christ invites us to serve humanity by creating an inclusive, connected and just world" evokes a vision for a world of justice and reconciliation for all.

The stories in this report give voice to our commitment to serve humanity.

This year Uniting adopted 8 missional principles:

*Inspiring people so that everyone is valued, particularly those most excluded*

1. The dignity of the human person
2. The needs of the whole person
3. Social and economic inclusion

*Enliven communities so that all people contribute and have life giving relationships*

4. Community wellbeing
5. Unity

*Confront injustice to ensure all people are included as they are and have 'life to the full'*

6. The promotion of human rights
7. Reconciliation
8. Solidarity

These principles are evident in our work each day.

By partnering with congregations, we multiply our efforts and reach more people together. Hundreds of Uniting Church congregations provide generous support, which includes pastoral care, volunteers, donations and locations to deliver our services.

In regions, our collaboration with presbyteries enables us to implement locally-focused services together, in response to local needs. We are working in partnership with the presbyteries of Gippsland and the North East as we support communities rebuilding after the bushfires.

Local Engagement Groups (LEGs) across Victoria and Tasmania continue to strengthen and grow relationships in local communities. Our Mission and Ethos team support a strong collaboration with the community, congregations and presbyteries. For example, the Barwon LEG ran a Pancake Day stall in the Geelong CBD with great community engagement and public exposure for our work.

Uniting is built upon the early efforts of faithful people to alleviate poverty 2 centuries ago. The church and charitable entities that flowed from the women and men's efforts to find ways to make a difference have brought us to where we are today.

Australian society has changed and our understanding of how to strengthen people's lives and enliven communities continues to develop, but the foundations of our work remain - a vision of a better world for all.

Rev John Clarke  
**Director of Mission**



# Our purpose, values and foundation

## Our purpose

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We work to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice.

## Our values

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### Imaginative

We challenge convention, explore new possibilities and dare to dream for a better future.

### Respectful

We act with honesty and integrity, and open our hearts to all people without exception.

### Compassionate

We are nurturing, generous and thoughtful in our words and deeds.

### Bold

We face injustice head on and stand up for what is right and true with confidence and strength.

## Our foundation

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Christ invites us to serve humanity by creating an inclusive, connected and just world.



# What we do at Uniting

Every day, we strive to make a difference for young and older people, individuals, families and communities. We work alongside people of all ages and at all stages of life to empower them to live capably and confidently.

We walk alongside people:

- Experiencing homelessness, who are looking for understanding and practical support.
- Experiencing mental health issues, who want to connect with people and feel part of the community.
- Recovering from the effects of drug and alcohol use, on their way to wellness and recovery.
- Living with disability, who want to engage with their community and make their own choices in employment and the supports they receive.
- Needing support to keep their family safe, together and thriving.
- Growing older who want to stay active, maintain their independence and enjoy life.
- Caring for someone and needing expert advice and additional support so they are better able to care for themselves and their loved ones.
- Looking for meaningful employment, by providing access to training and support and connecting them with opportunities.
- Newly arrived in our community and needing safety and a welcoming community.
- Ready to take the next step in their child's early education in a safe and nurturing environment.
- In childhood and adolescence to help them thrive in learning and life.



**Aged and Carer Services**



**Alcohol and Other Drugs**



**Business and Social Enterprises**



**Child, Youth and Families**



**Disability**



**Early Learning**



**Mental Health**



**Housing and Homelessness**



**Community Wellbeing and Capacity Building**



# A yearly snapshot of our support

In the past year we have done big things

**4,900**   
people in **recovery** from  
alcohol and other drugs


**70**   
housing solutions  
for **asylum seekers**

**8,550**   
older people  
**living independently**

**35,000**   
food parcels and  
vouchers for those in crisis

**65,000**   
**Lifeline crisis calls** in  
Melbourne and Ballarat

**61,500**   
community meals  
to those in need

**13**   
Federal and State  
**inquiry submissions**

**1,550**   
carers supported  
to take a break

**1,400**   
people found jobs through  
**disability employment**

**5,200**   
children received **early**  
childhood education



# Strategic Plan 2018-2025

We launched our strategic plan in 2018. It's a reflection of the collective voice of the Uniting family, shaped through engagement with our people, consumers, volunteers and stakeholders.

The plan sets out how we will bring our purpose to life – to be one organisation working to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice.

As we continue to build momentum and drive our vision forward, the focus of our ambition is guided by two main objectives: to change lives and communities and to change how we work.

As you read this report, you will see tabs with one of 5 acronyms, identifying activities that are contributing to the outcomes we want to achieve through our work.

Our ambitions	Our goals	Building our capacity	Outcomes for the future		
Rights and participation	Safe, comprehensive and effective consumer-directed services that are valued by consumers	 Changing lives and communities	<b>OM</b> Life outcomes maximised		
Prioritising disadvantage			<b>CE</b> Inclusive, just, thriving and connected communities enabled		
Best start in life			<b>IC</b> Injustice confronted and public policy influenced		
Safe families					
Reducing harm from alcohol and other drugs	Place-based, integrated solutions that build on family and community strengths to tackle inequality	 Changing how we work	<b>PS</b> Impactful and mutually beneficial partnerships supported		
Changing disability and mental health provision			<b>SO</b> Sustainable organisation known for its strong identity, culture, capability and systems		
Working in partnership	Organisational culture and practices that ensure we are just, effective, efficient and accountable				
Reconciliation and redress					
Evidence and advocacy					



*(Left to right) Sonia, Reg and Emily access our emergency relief services in Hobart. Sonia says the family are grateful for the practical and emotional support they receive.*





# Our work with young people

We support children, young people and the adults who look after them.

## Caring for children

Early childhood education and care services allow children and their families to create, learn and grow in nurturing environments.

Our services for young people going through personal or family challenges provide safe spaces for personal growth. We support this through counselling, mentoring, life skills development and goal setting for the future.

Out-of-home care is also available for children and young people who need a protective environment outside their family. This includes foster and kinship care, adoption and permanent care, and residential care.

## Helping more youth access Alcohol and Other Drug services

Uniting has joined forces with East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative (GEGAC) to provide a new youth Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) residential rehabilitation service in Gippsland.

The purpose-built facility, due to open in Traralgon in 2021, is part of the Victorian Government's expansion of residential rehabilitation beds for young people and adults across the state. It will be the first youth AOD residential service based in the Gippsland region and will address a long-standing service gap.

Uniting and GEGAC look forward to working in partnership to support young people aged 16 -21 years on their road to wellness and recovery.

## Strengthening our Child Safety framework

Over the past year, we focused on the 10 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations and how to enhance our Child Safety approach. A new Child Safety Policy and Code of Conduct was endorsed to highlight our commitment to safe practice. New measures were put in place to:

- improve recruitment
- support people and volunteers
- assess our risk profile
- inform children and young people about their rights and how they can raise concerns.

Uniting leaders used professional development to improve their Child Safety knowledge and skills. Over 100 Child Safe Champions were trained to identify risks and indicators of abuse. A Child Safety Advisory Committee was set up to govern the Child Safety strategy and initiatives.

**SO** This work reflects our commitment to being a **sustainable organisation** known for its strong identity, culture, capability and systems.





# Bulb project helps young minds grow

“It was something positive for them to focus on during a time of uncertainty.” – Mandy, Early Learning Co-ordinator

During the COVID-19 pandemic, our Early Learning services across Victoria and Tasmania worked hard to keep a strong connection with and sense of belonging for children and families.

We partnered with Bunnings in the Beautiful Bulb in A Perfect Pot project. Each child was provided a bulb to plant and encouraged to decorate a pot to plant it in.

As little green thumbs tended to their bulbs, educators encouraged children to share

photos of their pots and provide progress reports on their bulb's growth in online learning sessions.

When everyone was able to reunite, children shared their creations and celebrated the growth of their bulbs with their peers and educators.

**CE** This story reflects our commitment to inclusive, just, thriving and connected communities enabled.

*Harvey and his family took part in the Beautiful Bulb in A Perfect Pot project.*



# A driving force for local youth

“It’s an important milestone for them and it’s a privilege to help them achieve it.” – Bruce



Getting a driver’s licence is an exciting and important milestone in a young person’s life. The L2P program helps young people in out-of-home care achieve this goal by connecting them with a driving mentor – like Bruce.

With years of on-road experience behind him, Bruce is passionate about sharing his knowledge and helping young drivers hone their skills.

“I enjoy talking to the young people and being able to provide them with some stability. Sometimes I can work with them for up to 18 months in order for them to get their licence,” says Bruce.

Through his guidance and support, Bruce has been a positive influence in the lives of many young drivers, seeing multiple students complete their 120 hours experience and pass their practical driving test.

“It’s great to see their skills and confidence develop over time. And when they get their licence, they’re over the moon.”

Many young people who access the program have experienced past trauma that impacts their decision making and alters their experience on the road. But through the program, these young people can increase their driving confidence, pass their test and gain independence.

**OM** This story reflects our commitment to achieving life **outcomes maximised**.

*Please note, the photo accompanying this story is for illustrative purposes only. It is not a photo of the person featured in this story.*





# Housing support for young people in crisis

“When you’re young and going through a rough patch, places like Karrung can be life-saving.” – Bronte

For over 10 years, Karrung has offered housing and support to young people in the Grampians region. Through the short stay program, they are provided with accommodation while they focus on education, employment and training. They can stay in the program for up to 2 years while they develop the independent living skills needed to prevent future homelessness.

In March 2017, Bronte entered the program after escaping an abusive relationship. Her 2-year-old son Noah was being cared for by her mother while she got back on her feet.

“I was an empty shell when I arrived at Karrung. I didn’t know what I was doing with my life, because I didn’t have my son with me,” she said.

Bronte lived at Karrung for just over a year. During that time, she secured employment to become financially independent and worked with the Department of Health and Human Services to regain full care of Noah.

“The team were amazing. They gave me more than just somewhere to live. They gave me support during a really tough time in my life.”

The program laid the foundation for a brighter future. With the help of the team, she was able to secure a rental property, regain full living independence, and provide a happy and safe home for her and Noah.

In early 2020, Bronte returned to the facility to thank the team who helped her through some of her darkest days. “They helped me turn my life around and I wouldn’t be where I am today without their support,” she said.

Bronte is now happily engaged and a mother of 2, with daughter Matilda born in 2019.

**OM** This story reflects our commitment to achieving life **outcomes maximised**.

*Bronte is one of hundreds of youth who have been supported by Karrung over the past decade.*

# Our work with older people

With our help, older people stay active, remain connected to friends and family, maintain their independence, and enjoy life.

## Ageing well

We offer respite care and day group activities, and support people to live in their own homes for longer. We assist carers who need expert advice and additional support so they can care better for themselves and their loved ones.

## Aged care review

The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission is the peak regulatory body for Aged Care. The Commission undertook a review of our delivery of Home Care services in November 2019 and found that there were issues with the way we were delivering care to some consumers. Following the visit, the Commission made 5 findings of non-compliance with the Aged Care Standards. We undertook an extensive review of the way we provide these services and identified a number of improvements. We implemented those improvements over a 3-month period and a return visit by the Commission in February found that all non-compliances had been fully addressed. We continue to monitor the quality of these services to ensure our consumers receive high standards of care.

## Carer Gateway launched

Carer Gateway is a new Australian Government initiative that supports carers across Australia. Launched in April 2020, it provides practical information, advice and support for carers when they need it.

In Victoria, we are working with 6 health and social support providers, including Merri Health (lead agency), Alfred Health, Barwon Health, Bendigo Health, FamilyCare and Ballarat Health to deliver the Carer Gateway.

**PS** This story reflects our commitment to impactful and mutually beneficial partnerships supported.







# Knitters unite to help injured wildlife

“It was wonderful to be able to assist in some small way.” – Denise

The members of East Burwood Positive Living group had a busy start to 2020. With millions of hectares burnt and thousands of creatures injured or orphaned by the bushfire crisis, the crafty crew rallied to knit over 150 pouches for affected wildlife.

“We were all touched by the devastation of the bushfires and it was wonderful to be able to assist in some small way,” says East Burwood Positive Living Group Co-ordinator, Denise Femino.

At a time when many felt powerless to make a difference, the activity presented an opportunity for people to use their skills to make a genuine impact in the fight to help ailing wildlife.

Positive Living Group participant and knitting whizz, Meryl, led the project. “I love knitting, so I jumped at the chance to lead this project,” says Meryl.

“I started knitting when the bushfires hit and just kept knitting until we were placed into (COVID-19) lockdown.”

Meryl has been attending the Positive Living Group for 9 years and says this has been her favourite activity to date because it provides an opportunity for her to help others.

The creativity of the group has not quelled since COVID-19 restrictions were put in place, with weekly activity packs provided by the Positive Living Group team to keep the momentum going.

“Each week we’ve been given a package with different activity sheets by Uniting. The employees and volunteers have been keeping in touch with us several times a week. We played bingo and true or false over the phone. It’s been lots of fun.”

Positive Living Groups are available for older people who have mild disabilities, cognitive impairment or are socially isolated.

**OM** This story reflects our commitment to achieving life **outcomes maximised**.

*Meryl put her knitting skills to good use to help wildlife injured in last summer's bushfires.*





# Chat-a-Ring program keeps people connected

“It’s nice to have a familiar voice to talk to each week.” – Terry

The Chat-a-Ring program connects socially isolated people with a Uniting volunteer for a friendly phone call each week. In these unprecedented times, Chat-a-Ring has never been more vital. With gatherings restricted in response to COVID-19, maintaining social connection has been a significant challenge for many, and particularly for older people.

“These calls are very welcome and appreciated by our consumers, who are often looking forward to a good chat each week,” says Chat-a-Ring Team Leader, Nikki Manolaros.

The program currently has over 100 participants and 12 volunteers who spend anywhere between 10 minutes to an hour chatting on the phone.

The calls give people the chance to discuss their interests, hobbies and goals in life. The conversations can also reveal further opportunities for social connection, where volunteers can link older people to other community activities and events to foster new friendships.

Terry – who has been accessing Chat-a-Ring for 5 years – is a strong advocate for the program. He lives alone and looks forward to the weekly conversations with volunteer, Judith, who calls him every Tuesday.

“It’s a wonderful program. It’s nice to have a familiar voice to talk to each week. You get to know about their life, and they get to know about yours,” says Terry.

“It allows people who don’t have a lot of visitors or can’t get out often to maintain their communication skills.”

During COVID-19, our team of Aged and Carer social support services created weekly personalised activity packs, tailored to each person’s interests. Handing out the packs provided an opportunity to check in and make sure all was well and that the participant was staying connected during this challenging time.

**OM** This story reflects our commitment to achieving life **outcomes maximised**.

*Terry looks forward to his weekly phone call from a Chat-a-Ring volunteer.*



# Aged Care volunteers recognised

“If you can offer someone your time, it’s a very worthwhile experience.” – Jan



Volunteers from our St Mark’s Planned Activity Group and Respite Cottage were acknowledged at the annual Sir John Monash Awards Ceremony in September 2019.

The awards are run by Monash Council to recognise the work of volunteers in the local community. Amongst award winners were:

- Christiane Mamotte, who received a High Commendation in the Inspirational Women’s Leadership Award
- Sardara Brar, who received recognition in the Positive Ageing Leadership Award
- Janice Heeley, who received a High Commendation in the Positive Ageing Leadership Award.

For over 60 years Janice, or Jan as she is better known, has been a familiar face at St Mark’s Uniting Church in Chadstone.

Since joining the congregation in 1960, she has dedicated countless hours of her time through a variety of volunteering roles.

From teaching the secondary section of the Church Sunday School, to setting up a youth group in conjunction with the Melbourne Fijian Uniting Church, Jan has enjoyed working with local youth in her community.

The gifted organist leads the Church choir, sits on the Church Council and has been a member of the Ladies Evening Fellowship. She also works in the op shop, runs cake stalls and helps on the catering committee.

Since the start of St Mark’s adult day program in 1991, Jan has been playing the piano for aged care participants during the worship.

She volunteers in various ways, helping with tasks such as gardening, driving, cooking, day program activity support, worship and music. According to Jan, “If you can offer someone your time, it’s a very worthwhile experience. I enjoy the music the most. It’s lovely to be able to play for other people and see the joy on their faces.”

*Jan has always enjoyed giving back to her local community.*



# Our work with individuals

We work in partnership with people of all backgrounds and abilities to build skills, boost confidence and help people live and feel well.

## Helping with life's challenges

We're here for people experiencing mental health issues with care-plans and support groups.

We're here for job seekers, ready with training, employment opportunities and building community links to find meaningful work.

We work alongside people experiencing the effects of alcohol and other drugs to support their path to wellness and recovery.

We provide nutritious meals, material aid, affordable housing and training to build financial independence.

We help people with ties to out-of-home care services provided by the former Presbyterian, Methodist or Uniting Churches in Victoria to better understand their past.

## Supporting job seekers through the Launch into Work Program

In July 2019, we celebrated the graduation of 15 job seekers who completed the 6-week Launch into Work program, offered through our Employment Services. The program was delivered with financial support from the Australian Government.

Launch into Work takes a values-based and human-centric approach to recruitment. Individuals are selected to participate in projects that align with what matters to them, not just what they can do. The program has transitioned the job seekers into Disability Support Worker roles in our services across Melbourne.

## Celebrating our proud history

For 50 years our Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) team has been a leading service provider in Victoria. In May 1970, the late Rev. Alfred E. Foote founded one of the state's first dedicated AOD clinics in Moreland Hall, Coburg. It was run as a hospital clinic under the management of Matron Sinclair and her 5 nursing sisters. Now, we have over 200 employees offering focused wellness and recovery services and innovative day programs. While COVID-19 restrictions meant we weren't able to celebrate this milestone in person, the team created a presentation that looked back proudly on the past 50 years.

In September 2019, our Voices Vic team celebrated 10 years of service supporting the wellbeing of people who hear voices. Voice hearers are among the most disadvantaged groups in Australian society. They suffer low levels of education, high unemployment, stigma and discrimination. The Voices Vic team provides group and one-on-one support to aid recovery, reduce distress associated with their lived experience, and improve social outcomes.







# A place to call home

“People need to know there are places like Uniting that can help. You don’t have to do it on your own.” – Cliff

Cliff is one of the growing number of people reaching out to our housing and homelessness services. Cliff lived in a caravan near Ballarat. He was experiencing homelessness following the breakdown of his marriage and his savings were heavily depleted.

“It was a scary time. Living in a caravan isn’t ideal, but at least it’s somewhere to sleep at night,” says Cliff.

With just \$90 in his bank account and the burden of a weekly caravan park rent he could no longer afford, Cliff was struggling. He tried to sign up for Centrelink payments, but the online process was unfamiliar and daunting, and he was not sure what to do.

Cliff reached out to us in early 2020. “I feel really lucky that I found Uniting and they’ve been able to help. I don’t know what I would have done without them,” he said. He had wanted to seek help earlier, but his experience with mental health had stopped him from doing so. “I knew I needed help, but I was in a rut. I’m glad I did though.”

Cliff now receives Centrelink payments and has secured long-term, affordable housing.

**OM** This story reflects our commitment to achieving life **outcomes maximised**.

*Cliff is one of the growing number of people experiencing housing challenges.*



# Jack lands his dream job

“I really appreciate the opportunity. I feel like I’m contributing and that’s a good feeling.” – Jack

In November, jobseekers from Uniting’s Employment Services took part in AccessAbility Day.

AccessAbility Day is an Australian Government initiative, bringing together jobseekers living with a disability and employers to explore new opportunities in the workplace.

One of our partners – Australia Post – took on 15 Uniting placements, including Jack. He spent the day with an Australia Post team member to learn about what the role would involve.

A natural team-player, Jack made a great impression and successfully secured a position in one of their distribution centres.

Jack, 1 of 4 Uniting participants who found a position at Australia Post, is thriving in his new

role. He works 3 days a week and has gained experience in various areas of the business.

“It’s a great place to work, everyone is very supportive,” says Jack.

“I’ve been helping with delivering parcels recently and I really enjoy getting out and about.

“I really appreciate the opportunity. I feel like I’m contributing and that’s a good feeling.”

The Uniting Employment Service team continue to support Jack and Australia Post through our Post-Placement Support to help maintain his employment.

**PS** This story reflects our commitment to impactful and mutually beneficial partnerships supported.

*Jack is thriving in his new role at Australia Post.*



# Stephen explores his past

“My past was a blur and I needed clarity.” – Stephen



The experience of being in out-of-home care as a child or young person can have a lasting impact on a person's life. Many seek to understand more about what happened in their past and how their placement has shaped their present.

The Uniting Heritage Service exists to support individuals and the families of individuals who spent time in out-of-home care services run by the former Methodist, Presbyterian or Uniting Churches in Victoria. It helps people access information – such as childhood records, photos and other documents – so they can better understand their own personal history.

In 2019, Stephen reached out to the Heritage Service to access his records. He had spent his childhood in foster homes, children's homes and with stepfamilies. Later in life, he settled down, married, had children and led a successful corporate career.

One day, everything changed. Stephen lost his job and his home. His wife left with his children and he hit “rock bottom.” At the age of 50, he was left to wonder where it all went wrong.

“I could only put it down to my childhood. A part of history I had managed to bury for many years. My past was a blur and I needed clarity.”

Stephen met Heritage Service manager Catriona, who began the search for foster care and adoption records. She was successful, and in November 2019, Stephen and a close friend went back to see Catriona.

“We waded through the documents and for the next 3 hours the emotional roller coaster ride ensued. Anger, pain, hurt, helplessness, hopelessness,” says Stephen.

The records only covered 2 years of his childhood from the age of 4 to 6, but it was a start. Catriona's search continued and just a few months later, she was able to locate the rest of his records with OzChild.

By this stage, COVID-19 restricted his ability to meet with Catriona in person, so his records were posted to him to read and digest.

“I was one of the lucky kids in the process. I could see the social workers involved actually cared, the department did try to do the right thing and make the best choices for me.”

Uncovering his past has not been easy, but Stephen acknowledges that the discomfort has been helpful in validating his feelings and taking the guesswork out of his past.

“I finally feel like I do exist now. There are records, evidence that my memories aren't imaginative but that it did happen. Thank you Uniting for supporting me on this journey of discovery and healing.”

**IC** This story reflects our commitment to **injustice confronted** and public policy influenced.

*Stephen is one of many people who reached out to our Heritage Service this year to access his records.*



# Our work with families

Sometimes, families need help and guidance to navigate through complex issues that impact the stability and safety of their home. We walk alongside families to provide case management, advice and counselling so these issues can be overcome, and they can look towards a happier and healthier future.

## Supporting families to thrive

We support parents to develop the skills and confidence they need to enhance their resilience and fuel their child's potential. Those experiencing family violence can find safety and stability, and the support they need to move forward. Parents receive support to build on family strengths and enhance parenting abilities, to strengthen parent-child relationships and maximise a child's development opportunities.

## Wimmera Wellbeing Centre offers vital support

Our Wimmera Wellbeing Centre opened its doors in February, offering a broad range of programs to help local families thrive. During COVID-19 restrictions, the space was used for face-to-face sessions with high risk families and for staff to film video resources for families to access online. The Community Therapeutic Family Violence Program is one of the programs offered. Through the program, families can access the support they need to work towards a safer and healthier future. Adults and children impacted by family violence receive therapeutic intervention and referrals into programs offered by Uniting, Grampians Community Health and other local agencies.

## Pathways to Resilience

Pathways to Resilience is an exciting new partnership between Uniting Vic.Tas, EACH and the Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF), offering therapeutic family violence services

across Southern Melbourne. The program focuses on addressing the impacts of family violence to ensure the adults, young people and children exposed to this violence are safe, heal from their experiences and develop resilience into the future. This culturally appropriate program is sensitive to the effects of trauma and is heavily focused on safety and recovery.

## Starting Out Program

Our Starting Out program provides support for young parents 25 years and under, who have a child aged 0-2 years. The group helps young parents develop a sense of community and support through meeting other young parents. During COVID-19 restrictions this year, program staff continued offering support to the families via Zoom sessions to discuss the ups and downs of parenting and to continue parent education sessions.

## Fresh start for Newpin program

The Tasmanian Newpin program embarked on a new partnership with Launceston North Uniting Church this year to secure a new location and the long-term future of the program. The program is funded by the Department of Communities through their Early Years Parenting Support funding and helps around 150 mothers and their children to build safety, love and stronger parent-child attachment into their relationships.

**OM** This story reflects our commitment to achieving life **outcomes maximised**



# The gift of giving

“I’m so proud of him. He understands the importance of helping people going through a tough time.” – Jhez

When Jhez was 7 months pregnant and expecting a baby boy, she reached out to the Uniting team at Werribee. Her relationship had just broken down and her financial situation was in disarray after “some bad financial decisions”. She was in a situation she had never imagined herself to be in, and she needed support.

The team helped her with food and accommodation so she could get back on her feet. It started a connection that would span a decade.

Jhez now volunteers in our emergency relief service there, committed to giving back to her community. She is determined to instill that sense of giving in her young son, Troy.

In February 2020, Troy turned 10 and decided to write to his friends to ask them to donate to Uniting instead of buying him birthday presents. He held his birthday party at Uniting, delivering bags full of food and toiletries donated by his young friends.

“I’m so proud of him. He understands that I went through a tough time while I was pregnant with him and the importance of helping people going through a tough time now,” says Jhez.

“At the time, I made a promise to myself that I will never come back here again. Who would have thought 10 years later I would [be here again], but this time to give back to the community?”

## Troy’s letter

Hi, my name is Troy. I would like to make this birthday meaningful. My mum told me her story that she once needed help and Uniting Werribee helped her when she was seven months’ pregnant with me. So, to all my family and friends, please don’t buy me gifts, instead you can make my wish come true by donating food, toys, books and bathroom needs.

*Jhez and Troy have a long history with Uniting.*





# Life-changing support for families

“I now know I always have someone to call on when I need to talk.” – Skye

Skye's children Ayla (2) and Ryda (8) are the centre of her life. Determined to be the best parent she can be, Skye turned to Uniting when she realised that her troubled childhood was starting to take a toll on her young family, who were living in George Town, Tasmania.

She signed up for two parenting courses, Pregnant and Young Parent Support Program and Parents Under Pressure. Parents Under Pressure is a 1-on-1 program that introduced her to Uniting support worker, Lisa.

“Lisa has been a lifesaver.... She has helped me to improve my parenting skills and has given me the support I needed to get through some tough times. I now know I always have someone to call on when I need to talk.”

Both programs offer practical advice for parents so they can develop their parenting skills and knowledge to strengthen their family unit.

Parents at all stages, like Skye, sometimes don't know which way to turn. We're there, by their side, so they don't feel weighed down by the past or overwhelmed by an unknown future.

Skye kindly shared her story for our 2019 Christmas Share Appeal.

**OM** This story reflects our commitment to achieving life **outcomes maximised**.

*(Left to right) Ryda, Skye and Ayla access our family support services in Tasmania.*

# Bringing families together

“It helps to know that someone reliable is visiting each week.”

– Home-Start participant

Our Home-Start volunteers provide invaluable mentoring and emotional support to other parents experiencing isolation or crisis. Many are parents themselves. This allows them to draw from personal experience, lead by example and act as positive role models.

“The respectful and friendly approach each volunteer brings, and their willingness to share their own parenting experiences, allows them to quickly build trusting relationships with families,” says program coordinator, Teresa Garland.

All volunteers go through an intensive training block over several weeks before they start work. Their professional backgrounds are diverse. What they have in common is imagination and an ability to communicate. They operate without judgement to ease the burden of socially isolated families.

Feedback from families has been overwhelmingly positive, with volunteers building strong relationships with the families.

“It helps to know that someone reliable is visiting each week. I was able to talk to her very easily about any subject,” one Home-Start participant says.

“Every volunteer in the team has displayed an ability to relate to children of all ages, be creative in the use of their time, and offer friendship, mentoring and practical support where necessary,” says Teresa.

Our Home-Start volunteers visit each family weekly. Some of the volunteers are so passionate about the program and the positive impact they’ve been able to make, that they now mentor several families at a time.

**OM** This story reflects our commitment to achieving life **outcomes maximised**.



# Our work with communities

We act to have impact in local communities across Victoria and Tasmania. We touch the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), newly arrived, LGBTIQ+ communities and more.

## Building stronger communities

We work alongside communities to overcome social isolation and marginalisation and improve engagement, opportunities and outlook on life.

## LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Action Plan

At Uniting, we have a vision to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice. Our commitment to this vision includes standing with those in the LGBTIQ+ community who experience ongoing discrimination and marginalisation.

Development of the first Uniting LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Action Plan began in early 2020. Through this work, Uniting will be recognised as a safe and welcoming environment for all. Our vision sees community, consumers and the workforce knowing that they are free from discrimination based on sexuality, sex or gender. We are building on the work of our founding agencies in creating culturally safe and inclusive services. The plan also sets out the compelling evidence base for inclusive practice.

Our consumers, carers, volunteers and employees provided their view of how we are performing at the moment. Across Victoria and Tasmania, they entered into conversation and reflection during the consultation period. They shared their vision for a faith-based organisation committed to providing non-discriminatory services. They undertook to listen and learn deeply about the LGBTIQ+ experience. Their vision is an organisation that not only offers welcoming services, but also stands up boldly for the rights of LGBTIQ+ consumers, carers, employees and volunteers.

## Wimmera Wellbeing Centre fosters community spirit

Our team in Wimmera celebrated the opening of a Wellbeing Centre in Horsham in February 2020. As well as the important work being done to support families experiencing family violence, the Centre provides a range of group programs to support mental wellbeing and connection within the local community.

Multi-purpose areas include group rooms with casual seating options, formal training areas, a commercial kitchen and laundry facilities. Cosy counselling and therapeutic spaces sit alongside creative studios for mess and fun.

**CE** This story reflects our commitment to inclusive, just, thriving and connected communities enabled.







# Marching with pride

“The Uniting motto of ‘Fear less, love more’ was chanted from our contingent as well as the crowd, it sent shivers down my spine. I couldn’t stop smiling.” – Rowena

For the first time in our short history as a state-wide organisation, Uniting Vic.Tas was an official participant in the 2020 Midsumma Pride March in Melbourne in February.

More than 80 Uniting employees, volunteers, consumers and supporters joined thousands of others in a celebration of love and diversity. People made the trip from as far away as Horsham and Shepparton to join the festivities. Together, we marched under the motto "Fear less, love more". Pride March spectators picked up the chant as we took to the streets of St Kilda. Our "Freedom from discrimination is not freedom to discriminate" banners referenced our concerns about the Religious Discrimination Bill, and were also well received.

“The spectacular act of unity on display was testament to the strength of Victoria’s LGBTIQ+ community,” says CEO, Bronwyn Pike.

She explained that being at Midsumma was a show of solidarity with Uniting colleagues

and consumers. A demonstration that Uniting services and environments are safe spaces to all in the rainbow community.

Rowena Stewart, Uniting Vic.Tas Early Learning Co-ordinator in Horsham, says participating in the march filled her with love and hope for the future.

“As a Uniting employee and member of the LGBTIQ+ community, I was made to feel welcome,” she says, referencing walking alongside a number of fellow Uniting employees from across the state.

“I felt so at ease, being able to walk down Fitzroy Street and to see the many thousand members from the community come to support the day.”

**CE** This story reflects our commitment to inclusive, just, thriving, and connected communities enabled.

*Our staff, volunteers and supporters proudly took part in the 2020 Midsumma Pride March.*



# Breaking language barriers

“They won’t have to search for or navigate a website in English, which is just not practically possible for most.”  
– Sara



During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that we all understand government advice and know what to do to stay safe. Ensuring that culturally and linguistically diverse communities are informed is an important part of that.

That’s why our Settlement Support Team in Shepparton worked with the Greater Shepparton Foundation to record videos covering crucial COVID-19 topics. Videos covered issues such as physical distancing, mental health and good hygiene. Through the videos, non-English speaking communities – particularly refugees and asylum seekers – had clear and timely information, regardless of their literacy level.

“Almost 80 per cent of our clients cannot read or write in their own language, so it’s difficult for them to understand coronavirus alerts unless they are audio or visual,” explains Program Manager, Sara Noori.

The videos, in Arabic, Persian/Dari, Dinka, Hazaragi, Swahili, Punjabi and Filipino, can be shared within communities. They therefore receive information without needing to search English-language websites, “which is just not practically possible for most”, added Sara.

**PS** This story reflects our commitment to impactful and mutually beneficial partnerships supported.

*Uniting staff member, Sarmed featured in the COVID-19 videos.*





# Uniting culture and community

“The team regularly organise events for traditional Chinese cultural festivals and Australian celebrations.” – Joseph

The Chinese Families Playgroup volunteers help Asian migrant families settle in their local community. They come together 3 times a week, all year round, and their work involves session planning, art and craft, singing and storytelling. They also set up indoor and outdoor activities, help parents and grandparents to supervise their children, and pack up at the end of each session.

The team are all Chinese-speaking and include a mix of university students, parents and professionals. While all are busy, they enthusiastically make time for the program to support their community. The program is so popular, they now have a waitlist.

“The team regularly organise events for traditional Chinese cultural festivals and Australian celebrations,” says Chinese Family Services Coordinator, Joseph Jin.

“They have engaged professionals to link Chinese families with mainstream services to help them find their feet in their community.”

**CE** This story reflects our commitment to inclusive, just, thriving and connected communities enabled.

*Chinese Families Playgroup volunteer, Jessie enjoys sharing stories with the children.*



# Working to make housing a priority

Uniting Vic.Tas and Uniting Housing Victoria have joined forces to grow community housing. This is consistent with our strategic objective to make housing a priority for the Uniting Church and deliver better outcomes for people in crisis.

In 2019, the *Making Housing a Priority Business Plan for Growth* was agreed by the two organisations and the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. Our growth strategy aims to double our tenancies within the next 5 years. This would see us become one of the largest faith-based community housing agencies in the country.

Together we will bring something new to the community housing sector – offering a range of support services to people where they live.

A 3-year roadmap has been developed for the first stage of the growth strategy, with 5 key principles guiding our housing development:

## **1. Local**

We partner with local communities and Uniting Church congregations to explore community need, develop housing options and implement local housing investments.

## **2. Integrated**

We put our consumers and their needs at the centre of the way we provide housing. We have a demonstrable record of collaboration with other agencies to deliver positive consumer outcomes.

## **3. Sustainable**

We develop affordable housing projects that are socially, financially and environmentally sustainable. We work with consumers and experts to conceive well-designed projects that benefit residents, are financially viable and make a positive contribution to the urban environment.

## **4. Focused**

We focus on locations that align with our service delivery and strategic direction. We operate in areas of need, where there is a shortage of alternative supply. Our projects are economically feasible and offer competitive advantage. Our development efforts in the initial phase of our plan will target Tasmania, Western Melbourne and regional areas of Victoria.

## **5. Enduring**

We consider housing investments on a stand-alone basis, where projects can deliver their target rate of return without drawing on other projects or reserves.

Work is now well underway as we progress towards providing more safe and secure housing for people in need.



# Safe haven for older women

“This is the story of nearly 20 years of hoping, dreaming and planning.” - Rev Byrne



In November 2019, construction began on Mountview House in Melbourne's East. The crisis accommodation facility has been set up especially for older women escaping family violence and facing homelessness. It has become a reality through our partnership with Mountview Uniting Church, Community Housing Ltd, Oak Building Group and the Department of Health and Human Services.

“The numbers of women over 55 years of age requiring homelessness support are underestimated and under-reported,” Uniting Vic. Tas CEO, Bronwyn Pike says.

The new facility marks the first step towards addressing these needs and supporting women to find safe and secure accommodation to regain control in their lives.

The congregation of the Mountview Uniting Church are the driving force behind the project. Their generous donation of the land for the 8 units fulfils a long-held vision to give back to their community.

“This is the story of nearly 20 years of hoping, dreaming and planning,” says Rev Brendan Byrne, former Mountview Uniting Church Minister.

He praised the congregation for using “their material resources not for their own benefit or gain, but in service to God’s universal love for human-kind.”

## Part of the CHAnge

At-risk young people are getting their lives back on track thanks to the CHAnge program in Ballarat. CHAnge stands for *Central Highlands Area nurture, grow, engage*.

CHAnge provides stable housing for 16 to 23-year-olds at risk of homelessness. Support from dedicated youth workers is helping them live independently, return to education or find stable jobs.

“We’re backing Ballarat youths and helping them turn their lives around by making sure they have the safety and security of a roof over their head,” commented Minister for Housing, Richard Wynne while visiting the project in December 2019.

**PS** This story reflects our commitment to impactful and mutually beneficial partnerships supported.

(Left to right) Rev Brendan Byrne – former Mountview Uniting Church Minister, Bronwyn Pike – Uniting CEO, Steve Bevington – Managing Director, CHL, Dustin Halse MP – Member for Ringwood.

# Advocating for change

The bushfire crisis and COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the lives of many Victorians and Tasmanians this past year. Both events highlighted areas for improvement in government policy. While our people worked alongside those worst affected, our advocacy team pressed for increased funding and rule changes so that we could deliver fairer outcomes for affected groups.

## Fights for a fairer welfare system

In September 2019, we made a submission to the Senate Inquiry into 'Adequacy of Newstart and related payments and alternative mechanisms to determine the level of income support payments in Australia'.

We made this submission because every area of our organisation is affected by inadequate income support payments. This ranges from our services in financial counselling, emergency relief, energy concessions, mental health, disability, employment and homelessness through to support for people leaving out-of-home care.

Our submission was informed by the lived experience of our consumers, who generously shared their time and stories with us during focus groups. They highlighted how low payment rates impacted their daily lives, wellbeing and sense of dignity.

In November, we were invited to give evidence at the Inquiry based on our submission. CEO Bronwyn Pike and Team Leader of Financial Counselling in Goulburn North East, Kaily Goodsell, both presented to Senators at the public hearing. Bronwyn told Senators about the wide-reaching impacts of the current welfare policies on people's mental health and wellbeing, social inclusion and economic participation. Kaily drew on her experience to highlight the resilience and resourcefulness that rural and regional communities show in the face of such challenges.

Other items discussed included homelessness, the rising demand for emergency relief and financial

counselling, and the disproportionate levels of unemployment and disadvantage in rural and regional areas.

We reiterated that raising the rate of Newstart, Youth Allowance and related payments is the single most effective step to reducing poverty in Australia. We also called for the rate of Newstart (now called JobSeeker) to be raised by \$75 a week, as the first necessary action. Since the hearing, the temporary Coronavirus Supplement has been introduced which has increased people's payments by \$550 a fortnight. This increase has had an immediate impact on the lives of people that rely upon it. We continue to argue against any return to the previous level.

Uniting Vic.Tas was referred to frequently throughout the committee's report. In line with our submission, they recommended that "once the Coronavirus Supplement is phased out, the Australian Government [needs to] increase the JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance and Parenting Payment rates to ensure that all eligible recipients do not live in poverty."

The Raise the Rate campaign – which is run through the social services sector – has applied consistent pressure to the government to make a change. Their ongoing work has created a huge shift in public opinion around income support rates. This change means that there is now far-reaching support to maintain higher rates permanently.

 This work reflects our commitment to **injustice confronted** and public policy influenced.





# Keeping early learning centres open

COVID-19 has been challenging for many businesses and organisations, including the community services sector.

The announcement of free childcare by the Australian Government at the start of April was a huge help to families struggling with the impacts of the pandemic, but unfortunately, this came with a 50% cut to our early learning funding.

The change to childcare funding was intended to be supplemented by the introduction of the JobKeeper scheme, a temporary subsidy for businesses significantly affected by COVID-19. But Uniting's government funding across the organisation meant that we were not eligible for JobKeeper. As a result, at least 20 of our early learning services were put at risk of closure.

We joined forces with Uniting NSW.ACT and UnitingCare Australia to lobby for amendments to the JobKeeper scheme. We were asking for recognition that organisations like ours weren't able to move revenue from one part of the organisation to another, as so much is tied to government programs.

"Using our early learning centres as a case study, we achieved excellent media coverage

of this issue, including a front-page story in The Age and interviews with ABC radio," says COVID-19 External Relations Advisor, Jesse Dean.

Efforts included the confronting task of contacting Members of Parliament (MPs) in areas where our centres were at risk of closing. We encouraged those MPs to share our point of view with decision-makers.

"We had ongoing conversations with the departments who fund the impacted areas and engaged with the Australian Tax Office, who administers the JobKeeper scheme, to make our case," says Jesse.

This collective effort resulted in changes that allowed organisations to exclude their government income from calculations of revenue loss. Most Uniting employees became eligible for the JobKeeper payment, a welcome boost for the organisation during this unprecedented time, when demand for many of our services was growing.

*George is one of the thousands of children who attend our Early Learning services across Victoria and Tasmania.*

# Advocacy and public policy

We contributed to a number of Royal Commissions, Inquiries and consultations across the year.



## 13 submissions to government inquiries:

Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (July 2019)

Inquiry into Sustainable Employment for Disadvantaged Jobseekers (July 2019)

Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) consultation on the Proposal to Intervene to Stop Consumer Harm in Short Term Credit (July 2019)

Inquiry into Centrelink's Compliance Program (September 2019)

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Supported Independent Living (September 2019)

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Planning (September 2019)

Inquiry into the Adequacy of Newstart (September 2019)

Victorian Inquiry into Early Childhood Engagement of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities (October 2019)

Future Directions in Health for Children and Young People in Out of Home Care (October 2019)

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria (October 2019)

Review of the Retirement Villages Act 1986 (December 2019)

Response to the Productivity Commission's interim mental health report (December 2019)

Victorian inquiry into historical forced adoption (March 2020)

## Communities for Children funding

Communities for Children (CfC) is a place-based development initiative that works to help disadvantaged children around Australia. As a facilitating partner of the program, we work with other organisations to deliver a range of services and activities to address local needs, such as home visits, learning programs, support for parents, and help with child nutrition.

This year, Uniting successfully advocated for program funding to be extended. We continue to seek a government commitment to maintain current funding rates in ongoing contracts.

**IC** This work reflects our commitment to **injustice confronted** and public policy influenced.

*Please note, the photo accompanying this story is for illustrative purposes only. It is not a photo of a Uniting consumer.*







# Uniting to prevent discrimination

The draft Religious Discrimination Bill currently in front of the Federal Parliament promotes the right to state unfiltered religious beliefs freely and without consequence. While the freedom to express and practice religious faith is very important, many feel that the Bill is unbalanced and threatens vulnerable groups, like the LGBTIQ+ community and people living with disability.

We partnered with other faith-based community services organisations\*, to take a stand against the draft Religious Discrimination Bill. Together, we expressed concerns that the legislation

would allow people and organisations to use faith as a means to cause harm.

As organisations united by our theological foundations and commitment to serving vulnerable individuals and communities, we are committed to balancing the rights of religious organisations with the rights of our diverse community.

\*Anglicare Victoria, Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand, Jewish Care Victoria, Jesuit Social Services, Mercy Connect, McAuley Community Services for Women and Sacred Heart Mission.

Our staff, volunteers and supporters voiced their concern about the Religious Discrimination Bill at the 2020 Midsumma Pride March.

Freedom from discrimination is not freedom to discriminate  
#ReligiousDiscriminationBill



# Reconciliation journey

Our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) reflects our commitment to listen to and learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to develop positive, socially just and culturally safe relationships.

Many local teams across Victoria and Tasmania are identifying areas where they can improve reconciliation action in the services they provide. These local action plans create opportunities for employees and volunteers to raise cultural awareness and learn more about how to develop mutually respectful relationships with local Aboriginal communities.

Ian Bloomfield, Senior Aboriginal Cultural Advisor, has been brought in to promote cultural safety in our residential and clinical Alcohol and Other Drug services. He is also tasked with strengthening our links to local Aboriginal services. The RAP artwork created by Cassie Leatham from the Taungurung people from the Kulin Nation piece – ‘Over Waters’ – has been printed around the stairwell at the main building of our AOD services. It represents the path we should all take: the path of reconciliation to make our future a better one. It is fitting that it sits alongside the stairs used by employees who work in the building each day. The ‘Over Waters’ artwork was also installed in our Dana Street office in Ballarat. This complements the reconciliation garden outside the office, which was created in 2019.



Our RAP commits us to respecting the cultural rights, values and expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities in all the work we do every day. And we recognise the continuing sovereignty of First Nations peoples over their lands and their inalienable right to self-determination. Our Cultural Safety Audit and Planning Resource, developed by the RAP Working Group, was tested in a pilot across 18 programs and services in Ballarat, Barwon and West Melbourne. The resource is providing practical guidance to our front-line and administrative services.

In the Wimmera, our team started discussions about an amended version of the Australian Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship’s Social Enterprise in Schools Program. The potential partners for this work are Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-operative, Barenji Gadgin Land Council and local secondary colleges.

In Southern Tasmania we are working with the Uniting Church and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress to establish an Aboriginal Community and Education Centre and a social housing development.

In Gippsland, our Gumnuts Early Learning Centre in Sale unveiled a mural by Nanette Channing Solomon, a Monaro Ngarigo woman. The mural symbolises the contribution the centre and its employees make in the local community.

Work is now underway on our Innovate RAP, which builds on the learnings and achievements gained from our Reflect RAP.





# Sea of hands

To mark 2020 National Reconciliation Week and our ongoing commitment to reconciliation, our team in Wimmera created a **Sea of Hands**.

Employees, volunteers and community members were asked to answer the following questions:

- What does the National Reconciliation Week theme 'In this together' mean to you?
- What is your vision for a reconciled Australia?
- How can Uniting build on our commitment to reconciliation?

The answers were then written on hand-shaped cardboard cut-outs to create the **Sea of Hands** display. The motif moved between our Uniting office in Horsham, the Wimmera Wellbeing Centre and the Wimmera Health Care Group Hospital and Arapiles buildings.

"For me, putting these answers into words was quite challenging because it is so important," says Uniting's Executive Officer in the Wimmera, Josh Koenig.

"It gave me the chance to reflect on the theme 'In this together' and that we are all on the journey towards a better Australia."

Josh reflected that although it can be confronting, it is important that we all understand, recognise and respect the stories of our First Nations People and traditional landowners. Only when we do this together can we really move forward as one.

We worked with Reconciliation Victoria CEO, Diana David, who created a video to reach out to our people and volunteers. She spoke about the important contribution of community service organisations to Australia's reconciliation journey. She also reflected on what Reconciliation Week means to her.

Her video was warmly received by our employees and volunteers with many providing their own reflections about the significance of Reconciliation Week.

**SO** This work reflects our commitment to being a **sustainable organisation** known for its strong identity, culture, capability and systems.

*Uniting Executive Officer in the Wimmera, Josh Koenig showcases some of the Sea of Hands submissions.*

# Partnering with consumers

The Uniting consumer partnership journey continues to blossom. We have added new partnership groups and recruited more consumers to work alongside our people.

## Working together

We ensure a consistent and safe approach to our consumer partnership activities. By bringing together the expertise of our employees and the lived experience of our consumers, we can innovate and make a real impact on people's lives.

## Emergency Relief Consumer Partnership Project

This year, we were guided by the input of consumers to improve Emergency Relief services at Uniting. Consumers were involved in a co-design process to review the current state of services and provide suggestions, based on their lived experience.

The process included reviewing the service model and mapping the consumer, employee and volunteer journeys. This led to recommendations for redesign and a communications toolkit.

By working together, we were able to achieve a deeper understanding of those who come to us for Emergency Relief. We made a promise from Uniting to everyone who accesses our services: 'You will always be welcomed, respected and heard when you access services.' This promise guides and forms the basis of our service model improvements and will be brought to life by everyone at Uniting working in this area.

## Public Policy Consultations

Uniting consumers provided valuable insight into the issues affecting their lives for multiple government submissions. These included:

- the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System
- the Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria
- the Senate Inquiry into Adequacy of Newstart and related payments and alternative mechanisms to determine the level of income support payments in Australia
- the Victorian Inquiry into Early Childhood Engagement of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities.

We are grateful to everyone who shared their time and reflections for these submissions, particularly those who shared their personal stories for case studies. Your participation helps shape decisions. By sharing your story, you ensure that consumer voices are heard and the real-life impacts of public policy decisions are not forgotten.








# Consumers speak out

The link between mental health and alcohol and other drugs.

Uniting made a submission to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System in July 2019. The submission reflects the experiences consumers shared with us in consultations at the 101 Engagement Hub, Voices Vic and The Haven. We put forward the case for more consumer involvement in program design, more peer workers, and greater integration of mental health services into other areas of community services that regularly work with people impacted by mental illness.

In particular, our submission noted the missing link between mental health and Alcohol and

Other Drug (AOD) services at both a policy and service-delivery level. This issue raised interest with the Commission, and we have since had the opportunity to provide additional information. We have presented a care model designed by our AOD team and insights from 4 consumer experiencing co-occurring mental health and AOD issues.

 This work reflects our commitment to **injustice confronted** and public policy influenced.

*Please note, the photo accompanying this story is for illustrative purposes only. It is not a photo of a Uniting consumer.*

# Our people

Our greatest strength is our people. Every day our employees and volunteers support people to build a better future for themselves, their families and their communities.

In 2020, the bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic greatly increased service demand. But at the same time, these events made it harder for us to reach people in need, particularly during government-enforced restrictions. Despite these challenges, our employees and volunteers persevered. In true Uniting spirit, they innovated, coming up with new ways to help people through trying times with the compassion and respect they are known for.

We belong to a unique team of hard working and dedicated professionals who operate with a strong sense of justice, and a commitment to those we walk alongside.



## Employee breakdown:

Aged and Carer Services: 158  
Alcohol and Other Drugs: 185  
Business and Social Enterprise: 52  
Child, Youth and Families: 891  
Community Wellbeing and Capacity Building: 198  
Disability: 538  
Early Learning: 1138  
Homelessness and Housing: 235  
Mental Health: 172  
Support Services: 219  
Total: 3786

## Volunteer breakdown:

Aged and Carer Services: 486  
Alcohol and Other Drugs: 1  
Business and Social Enterprises: 502  
Child, Youth and Families: 411  
Community Wellbeing and Capacity Building: 707  
Disability: 30  
Early Learning: 9  
Housing and Homelessness: 1  
Mental Health: 295  
Support services: 21  
Total: 2463

## Inaugural Employee Engagement Survey

In July 2019, Uniting received the results of our inaugural Employee Engagement Survey, conducted by Best Practice Australia. Over 2,160 employees participated, resulting in a 60% response rate that provided valuable feedback on job satisfaction and workplace practices and culture. The results were assessed against industry benchmarks and were found to be in line with fellow community service organisations.

The survey findings helped us understand what is working well and where there are areas for improvement and further action. Based on this, 4 key areas of action were identified. These are:

- **Pride in Uniting:** Uniting in name, thinking and service delivery
- **Valuing our people:** People are our greatest strength and we strive to make a difference
- **Managing change:** Change is a constant and positively embraced at Uniting
- **Communicating effectively:** Our people feel included and involved in Uniting's work.

## Disability and Multi-Employer Agreements

Uniting employees voted to approve the new Victorian Disability Services (NGO) Enterprise Agreement. This is a multi-employer agreement that covers Uniting and 26 other employers within the Victorian Disability Sector. It was negotiated through the Fair Work Commission's New Approaches Program, focused on interest-based bargaining. The negotiation included the state government, National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), employers and multiple unions. The agreement caters for the new environment under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and aims to provide fair terms and conditions for workers in the sector.

Uniting employees are currently covered by 26 different Modern Award and Enterprise Agreements across our organisation, a reflection of the breadth of roles and services we deliver.

**SO** This work reflects our commitment to being a **sustainable organisation** known for its strong identity, culture, capability and systems.





# Keeping consumers at the heart of what we do

“Since changing the admission model, we haven’t had one consumer leave treatment early, which is unheard of in our services.” – Adrian

The COVID-19 restrictions have seen our Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) residential service teams quickly adapt and find new ways to provide treatment and support to consumers.

While many services have moved online, this was not an option for our adult and youth withdrawal units.

“It was a balancing act, because we wanted to continue providing these essential face-to-face services. But due to strict hygiene and distancing restrictions, we needed to ensure they were still delivered in a safe and respectful way,” says Senior Manager of Clinical Residential Services, Adrian Webber.

Our people did a fantastic job adapting to the new circumstances they found themselves in. The team changed the admission process from 3 days per week to 1 day per week, to ensure all consumers

started and finished treatment at the same time. The change allowed for more rigorous cleaning measures to be carried out before admitting a new group; but also resulted in an unexpected positive.

“We have found that through block admissions, our consumers come in together and get to know each other early on,” reports Adrian. It allowed the group to “bond with each other, support each other and most importantly, encourage each other to stay in treatment.”

“Since the admission model changed, not one consumer left treatment early, something unheard of in our services,” says Adrian. The team is now exploring the idea of continuing with the new admission model beyond the COVID-19 restrictions.

*Uniting AOD staff (left to right) Nico, Jason, Olivia, Nellie and Anna.*







# Recycling passion pays off

“I made a career out of recycling goods and I’m glad I’ve been able to continue that in my volunteering role.” – Noel

Before Noel started volunteering with the Op Shop team in Bendigo, removing rubbish and unsellable goods dumped outside the shops was costing Uniting over \$7000 a year. Today the bill for items that can be recycled is \$0.

Noel’s passion for the environment has come from over 2 decades of working in the recycling industry. He takes unsellable items from the shop to repurpose, restore or on-sell as scrap metal, to ensure they don’t end up in landfill.

“In the short time he has been volunteering with the Op Shop team in Bendigo, Noel has educated teams of volunteers on recycling practices, significantly reducing the amount of money spent on rubbish removal,” says Op Shop Coordinator, Mary-Anne Toner.

Not only has Noel saved Uniting thousands of dollars, he’s turned what used to be rubbish into profit, meaning more funds can be provided to people who are experiencing crisis in the Bendigo region.

“I enjoy (recycling) and it’s good to know the broader community benefits from the savings,” says Noel. And at almost 80 years old, he shows no signs of slowing down, visiting the Op Shops at least 4 times a week and cleaning up anything he believes can be recycled.

## Going green

Our environmental impact as an organisation is important. We understand the disproportionate effects climate change and extreme weather have on vulnerable communities, so we need to do our part to drive real change.

In December 2019, we approved our first Environmental Sustainability Strategy (the Green Strategy). This sets out how we will try to improve our environmental performance across 4 priority areas:

- Reducing our carbon footprint
- Decreasing waste to landfill
- Increasing employee engagement
- Growing our partnerships for greater impact.

The strategy is driving the activities of key teams within the organisation. We swapped over our electricity supply to 100% renewable, have started exploring solar opportunities at our sites and have established a network of green champions across the organisation.

**SO** This work reflects our commitment to being a **sustainable organisation** known for its strong identity, culture, capability and systems.

*Noel’s recycling knowledge has been invaluable to Uniting.*



# Meet our Leadership Team

## Our current Executive Leadership Team

Bronwyn Pike

**Chief Executive Officer**

John Clarke

**Director of Mission**

Silvia Alberti

**Executive General Manager, Operations**

Catherine Easton

**Executive General Manager,  
Performance and Integration**

Kristie Looney

**General Manager,  
Housing and Property**

Amy Padgham

**General Manager,  
Quality and Compliance**

Antonia Mochan

**General Manager,  
Community and External Relations**

## Our current Operational Leadership Team

Laurence Alvis

**General Manager,  
Alcohol and Other Drugs,  
Mental Health**

Janine MacDonald

**General Manager,  
Consumer Directed Services**

Annette Kelly-Egerton

**General Manager, North and West Victoria,  
Tasmania and Early Learning**

Wenda Donaldson

**General Manager,  
South and East Victoria**

## The following were part of the Executive Leadership during 2019/20

Paul Linossier

**Chief Executive Officer (until December 2019)**

Aimee Suchard-Lowe

**Executive General Manager, Strategy and  
Engagement (until February 2020)**

Tracey Gibson

**General Manager, Disability and Mental Health  
(until January 2020)**

Angela Forbes

**General Manager, Eastern Victoria  
(until July 2019)**



# Meet our Board



Jude Munro  
**Chair**



Grant Mitchell



Robyn Batten



John Preston



Mark Heintz



Heather Watson



Linda McCrorey



Peter Prasser

## The following members served during 2019/20



Bronwyn Pike  
**Chair until September 2019**



Luke Bo'sher



Paul Linossier  
**Executive Director**



Rev Allan Thompson  
**Interim Chair**

# Our supporters

It is only through the ongoing generosity and commitment of our supporters that we can help so many people manage life's complexities and overcome hardship. We thank all those who have selflessly donated their time and resources to our activities and events this year.

## Uniting Winter Share Appeal

In the face of the devastating bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic, this year's appeal carried incredible significance and meaning. Many Victorians and Tasmanians have found themselves unemployed or without a home for the first time and in need of our support. Our Winter Share Appeal raised more than \$765,000, which will support those who find themselves in vulnerable situations.

## Pancake Day 2020

Pancake Day is a long-running tradition that helps raise funds for Uniting services. On the Christian Calendar, pancakes are symbolically eaten on Shrove Tuesday – or Pancake Day – to use up the last goodies in the cupboard, like sugar and milk, before fasting for Lent begins.

This year's campaign was supported by 130 participating congregations, schools and community groups who helped raise over \$58,000.

## Firefighter Stair Climb

On 7 September 2019, over 600 firefighters stepped up to fight depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicide. Decked out in 25kgs of full turnout gear, they climbed the 28 floors of Crown Metropol Hotel. Over \$525,000 was raised, with \$175,000 donated to Lifeline Melbourne, which we operate. The money will be used to employ more trainers and supervisors for our volunteer workforce who answer calls from around Australia.

## Christmas appeals

The 2019 Christmas appeals were filled with joy, warmth and great generosity from our supporters. Over 70 tonnes of food and other essential items were pledged through our Food For Families campaign. We received a record number of registrations, with nearly 900 individuals, families, schools, workplaces, congregations and community organisations signing up. Our Christmas Share Appeal raised over \$380,000 to support families working towards a brighter future. And as part of the UnitingCare Australia network, we once again partnered with Target to encourage people to donate to families in crisis during the festive season. We were overwhelmed by the response and the spirit of giving, especially by younger members of our community.







# Feeding families

**“It’s an opportunity to give back at a time of giving.” – Eileen**

Donations for the Food For Families campaign help people who are experiencing food insecurity put healthy meals on their table – a cause that is especially important at Christmas time. The success of Food For Families would not be possible without the passion and dedication of our volunteers.

Enter Eileen, a social worker and mum of 3 who has been volunteering with Uniting for the last 7 years. Eileen was the face of our 2019 drive and is an enthusiastic supporter of the initiative. “Food For Families is an easy way people can help others in need,” Eileen says. “I say to people, just do your normal shopping and get a few extra items to donate.”

Eileen collected more than 20 boxes in 2019, a tally that has grown year-on-year thanks to donations from family, friends, local schools,

sporting organisations and work colleagues. She volunteers to drop off boxes and collects them once they are filled, to make participating as easy as possible for people. “Everyone wants to do something to give back at Christmas, but it’s such a busy time,” Eileen says.

But being busy doesn’t hold back Eileen. She does all of this while taking care of 3 children, holding down 2 part-time jobs, and caring for her mother. Thankfully, she does enlist the help of her children, who sort, pack and deliver food to Uniting’s Ringwood Emergency Relief Centre.

“I want to teach my children that Christmas can be very materialistic, but it should be about giving back to your community.”

*Eileen and her children support Food For Families each year.*

# Rebuilding after the bushfires

In January, we called on our community to rally together and help us support the recovery of those impacted by the devastating bushfires across Victoria and Tasmania. The response was truly overwhelming, with over \$430,000 raised.



## These donations helped us deliver:

- Trauma kits for impacted children
- \$57,000 worth of immediate essential items to evacuated communities, including clothes, toiletries, medication, air mattresses and more
- \$200,000 worth of furniture for people who lost their homes and needed to move to temporary accommodation
- Funding for additional pastoral care and support through the Uniting Church.

Plan International, a charity experienced in providing international disaster relief, are working with us pro bono to develop a long-term plan to support children, young people and families in bushfire-affected areas. The plan will be delivered using the remaining funds from the appeal and through work with government and other funders.

The generosity of our supporters will ensure bushfire victims receive the ongoing recovery and relief support they need to rebuild their lives.

## Providing practical support during a crisis

At the height of the bushfire crisis in Gippsland, a couple aged in their 90s were evacuated by air from Mallacoota. They were provided with motel accommodation in Sale but had no spare clothing and had left their medication behind.

Seeking assistance on behalf of the couple, the motel employees called our Gippsland team.

The Integrated Intake and Assessment team shot into action. They headed to the local pharmacy to arrange medication, and while the prescriptions were being filled, drove the couple to the Op Shop where they were given two outfits. The couple were also set up with a personal care package with toiletries and food supplies to see them through the next few days.

But the couple didn't just receive material help in their time of need. Volunteers and Op Shop employees all spent quality time with them too, listening to their story with care and compassion over cups of tea.

*(Left to right) Jeremy and Paul delivered goods to bushfire-affected communities in Gippsland.*





# Leaving a lasting legacy

“I’m aware that ongoing support from the community is needed. I want to be a part of the services continuing for a long time to come.” – John

Prahran resident, John Potter, had decided to leave Uniting a gift in his Will after seeing the positive impact our work made in his late friend Robert’s life.

Uniting was a special place for Robert. He found friends as a regular visitor to Hartley’s Community Dining Room, where he enjoyed socialising and sharing food with others. Uniting also supported him with his mental health and helped secure him permanent housing, where he lived happily until he passed away.

“The continual assistance and regular meetings with his caseworker helped Robert live a fulfilled life,” John remembers.

Over the years, John has found many ways to support Uniting, which enables more people like Robert to access the services they need to live well and thrive.

A lifelong art enthusiast, John has purchased several works from exhibitions held at Hartley’s over the years. He keeps up to date with what’s happening across Uniting, attends events and has donated many items to the Prahran Goodwill Shop.

John has now given the gift of a lifetime. “I have chosen to leave a gift in my Will because I’ve seen first-hand the support Uniting gave to my dear friend, Robert.”

*John has left a gift in his Will to honour his late friend, Robert.*

# Thank you to our supporters

**Thank you** to the thousands of volunteers, businesses, community groups, schools and church congregations who donate funds, in-kind goods and their time to support the work we do. We appreciate the generosity of the following donors, trusts and governments, who strive to make a difference in people's lives.

## Community, businesses, trusts and foundations

A&H Johns Bequest  
Aged Care Innovation Grants  
Allport Bequest  
ACF - Betty Sims Fund  
Bagot Gjergja Foundation  
Ballarat Foundation  
Bell Charitable Trust  
Beverley Jackson Foundation  
Collier Charitable Fund  
CommBank Foundation,  
Commonwealth Bank of Australia  
Dennis Family Corporation  
Edwards Foundation  
Feed Melbourne Appeal  
Feed More  
Fred J Cato Charitable Fund  
Freemasons Foundation  
Geelong Connected Communities  
Give Where You Live Foundation  
Good2Give  
Grange Investments  
Ian & Judy McNally  
JB Were Charitable Endowment Fund  
Jean Drury Fund  
Joe White Bequest  
Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation  
McLeod Family Foundation  
Miller Foundation Ltd  
Mona Georgina Harris Perpetual  
Charitable Trust  
Nevett Ford Lawyers  
Palais Theatre Community Grants  
Peter Schreurs & Sons Vegetable Farm  
Pethard Tarax Charitable Trust  
Simpson Family Foundation  
St Andrews Foundation  
StreetSmart Australia  
The Archie & Hilda Graham Foundation

The Douglas & Phillip Young  
Charitable Trust  
The Flora & Frank Leith  
Charitable Trust  
The Harry Dicker Fund  
The Hinds-Marting  
Charitable Endowment  
The Honda Foundation  
The Isabel & John Gilbertson  
Charitable Trust  
The John & Betty Laidlaw Legacy  
The Joy Smith Foundation  
The Muffin Foundation  
The Peter Isaacson Foundation  
The Ruth Fagg Foundation  
The Walter & Eliza Hall Trust  
The William Angliss (Vic)  
Charitable Fund  
UCAF Stamp Fund  
Uniting Church in Australia Synod  
of Victoria and Tasmania  
Wellcom Group Ltd  
Whitehorse Community Chest

## Bequests

Alison Margaret Clark Estate  
Arthur & Doris Clayton Fund  
Daisy Gardner Trust Fund  
Estate of Allan Norman McNicol  
Estate of Arthur H Brown  
Estate of Bertha Lucy Elizabeth  
Rimington  
Estate of GE Bradshaw  
Estate of George Findon Miller  
Estate of George Osborne Dorward  
Estate of Graeme John Pratt  
Estate of Harry Halliwell  
Estate of John Smith Murdoch  
Charitable Trust  
Estate of Lesley Patricia Farrant  
Estate of L I Roach  
Estate of Margaret

Hanniford Cracknell  
Estate of Mars Prudens McMillan  
Estate of Patience Mary Harris  
Estate of Russell William Hunter  
Estate of Suzanne De Villers Bosisto  
Frank Hincks Bateman Estate  
Grant Bequest  
Henry Charles Enticknap Estate  
Henry Shaw Education Fund  
Jean I Roberts Trust  
Joyce Morgan Estate  
N J Horton & Grace Horton  
Charitable Fund  
Ralph and Betty Sims Fund  
STAF - Alfred John Hutton  
The Ian Berry Foundation

## Government

### Commonwealth Government

Department of Education, Skills  
and Employment  
Department of Home Affairs  
Department of Social Services

### Victorian Government

Department of Education and Training  
Department of Health and Human  
Services  
Department of Jobs, Precincts and  
Regions  
Department of Justice and Community  
Safety  
Department of Premier and Cabinet  
Department of Transport

### Tasmanian Government

Communities Tasmania  
Department of Premier and Cabinet

### New South Wales Government

Department of Customer Service

We thank all **Local Governments**  
who partner with us and enable us to  
deliver meaningful services in local  
communities.



# Get involved

Even the smallest **acts of kindness** can brighten someone's day.

## Make a donation

Your generosity has the power to save lives, and every little bit helps.

Donations – big or small – help us to provide essential services to the most vulnerable and at-risk people in our community.

A gift today or a bequest for the future can help us make an immediate difference in someone's life.

## Volunteer with us

There is no shortage of ways to get involved. Help us sort donated goods at our emergency relief centres or Op Shops. Bring a smile to an older person's face with a visit to their home. Put your green thumb to use in one of our blossoming community gardens or use your creative passion to mentor artists with a disability.

If you have a skill to share and a vision to create a safer, fairer, and better future for all, volunteer with us.

## Become a foster carer

For children and young people unable to live with their birth families, a safe and supportive home environment can be life changing.

We offer foster care and permanent care opportunities. You can be single or married, with or without children, of any sexual orientation and any religion or none.

If you have a spare room and a big heart, we'd love to hear from you.

**E** [hello@unitingvictas.org.au](mailto:hello@unitingvictas.org.au)  
**unitingvictas.org.au**



# Financial report

The financial information presented in this report has been extracted from the audited financial report of Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited for the year ended 30 June 2020. A copy of the full financial report and the auditor's report is available on request.

## Employees

Uniting employed 3,786 as at 30 June 2020 (2019: 3,701).

## Volunteers and donations in kind

Uniting had 2,463 volunteers who made an invaluable contribution to our work. During the financial year under review, it is estimated that the volunteers provided approximately 1,366,878 hours of service which would equate to approximately \$57.03 million. Uniting also received donations in kind valued at \$3.0 million which have not been recognised in the financial statements.

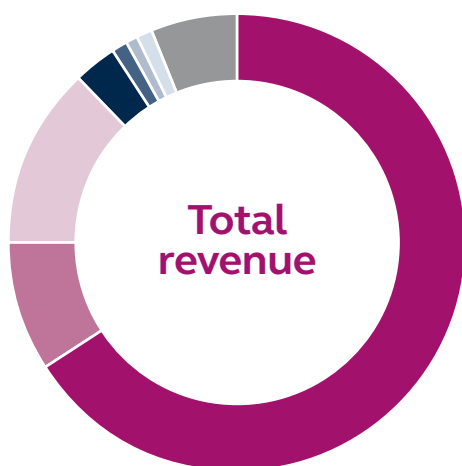
## Results for the year

Uniting reported an operating gain for the year of \$2.0 million, (2019: loss of \$9.4 million). The total revenue for the year was \$293.9 million (2019: \$294.4 million).

## Review of financial condition

The total equity of Uniting at 30 June 2020 was \$266.6 million (2019: \$286.2 million).

The net cash inflow from operating activities during the financial year was \$13.9 million (2019: \$1.3 million).



State Government contributions	66%
Federal Government contributions	9%
Service fees	13%
Philanthropic, bequests and donations	3%
Sale of goods	1%
Rental income	1%
Investment income	1%
Other	6%



Aged and Carer Services	9%
Alcohol and Other Drugs	7%
Business and Social Enterprise	3%
Child, Youth and Families	32%
Disability and Mental Health	18%
Early Learning	14%
Homelessness and Housing	10%
Community Wellbeing and Capacity Building	7%



In August 2019, a new business spend management system, Coupa, was introduced to streamline our supplier purchase process, pay invoices and reduce financial risks across the organisation. This new digitised solution has improved time management and boosted our order tracking efficiency.

**Key highlights:**

- Manual processes replaced by a simplified online system
- Creating electronic purchase orders via web and mobile devices
- Greater visibility of supplier invoices through to payment.

**Successful tenders, direct offers and funding**

Uniting successfully secured over \$55 million in tenders, direct offers and funding variations in the 2019/20 financial year.

Some of these include:

- \$7.7m from 22 new submissions and direct offers (out of 43 submitted for \$32m)
- \$41.5m from 18 submissions in FY18-19 (awarded in the FY19-20 year)
- \$5.6m from 42 funding variations and extensions.

Our Child, Youth and Families and Community Wellbeing and Capacity Building services were awarded the highest number of tenders with 30 and 15 respectively.

Carer services were awarded the highest value tender for delivery of services as part of the Carer Gateway initiative.

# Director's declaration

In accordance with a resolution of the Directors of Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited, we state that in the opinion of the Directors:

(a) the financial statements and the notes of Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited for the financial year ended 30 June 2020 are in accordance with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission Act 2012, including:

(1) Giving a true and fair view of the company and its consolidated entities' financial position as at 30 June 2020 and of their performance for the year ended on that date; and

(2) Complying with Australian Accounting Standards and Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission Regulation 2013; and

(b) there are reasonable grounds to believe that Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited and its consolidated entities will be able to pay their debts as and when they become due and payable.

On behalf of the Board



**Jude Munro**

Chair of the Board of Directors

7 October 2020



# Director's report

## Corporate Structure

Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited is a company limited by guarantee under the Corporations Act 2001 (Cth) and is domiciled in Australia.

## Nature of operations and principal activities

The principal activities during the year were to advance social welfare by providing support to people in need.

## Employees

Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited employed 3,786 employees as at 30 June 2020 (2019: 3,701 employees).

## Volunteers and donations in kind

The Agency has 2,463 (2019: 2,400) active volunteers who make an invaluable contribution to the work of Uniting. During the financial year under review, the volunteers provided approximately 1,366,878 hours of service which would equate to approximately \$57.026 million. Uniting also received donations in kind valued at approximately \$3.0m which have not been recognised in the financial statements.

## Review of results of operations

### Entity overview

Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited is the principal community services organisation of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania.

### Social welfare activities provided

Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited delivers 683 (2019: 759) programs and services that enrich communities in Victoria and Tasmania.

We support people to thrive through programs and services that build independence, confidence and capability. We do this in the following areas:

- Child, Youth and Families
- Housing and Homelessness
- Mental Health
- Early Learning
- Business and Social Enterprises
- Community Wellbeing and Capacity Building
- Alcohol and Other Drugs
- Disability
- Aged and Carer

### Operating results for the period

Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited reported a profit for the year of \$2.0 million (2019: loss \$9.4 million). The total revenue of Uniting for the year was \$293.9 million (2019: \$284.3 million)

### Impact of COVID-19 during the period

The impact of COVID-19 on Uniting's ability to deliver services was assessed by Management on a continuous basis and primarily affected the following areas.

- Opportunity Shops
- Disability Services
- Training and Consultancy Services
- Child Care Centres

During the year ending 30 June 2020, Uniting received the JobKeeper subsidy support provided as part of the government initiative to assist organisations through the lock-down period across Victoria and Tasmania.

### Dividends

Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited is a not-for-profit charitable company operating under a constitution which prohibits the payment of dividends or distribution of profits.

## Review of Financial Condition

### Capital Structure

The total equity of Uniting at 30 June 2020 was \$266.6 million (2019: \$286.2 million), a decrease of \$19.7 million compared to the prior year.

### Cash from operations

Uniting's net cash outflow/inflow from operating activities during the financial year was an Inflow of \$13.9 million (2019: Inflow \$15.4 million).

### Liquidity and funding

Uniting has sufficient liquid resources to fund its operating activities with \$72.4 million of cash and cash equivalents (2019: \$74.7 million).

### Non-Audit Services Provided By Ernst & Young

During the financial year Ernst & Young provided additional accounting advisory services to Uniting management. The Directors are satisfied that the provision of non-audit services is compatible with the general standard of independence for auditors imposed by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission Act 2012. The nature and scope of the non-audit service provided means that auditor independence was not compromised.

### Events After Reporting Date

There were no significant events reported by Uniting after balance date.

### Environmental Regulations

There have been no significant known breaches by Uniting of the environmental regulations to which it is subject.

### Likely Developments and Expected Results

Uniting's future operating results are expected to be consistent with its past performance.

### Indemnification and Insurance of Directors and Officers

During the financial year Uniting provided insurance cover to directors and officers. This insurance policy provided indemnity to directors and officers against liability at law for damages or claims made against them by reason of wrongful acts committed by them in their capacity as directors or officers of the entity. The policy also provides provisions to reimburse the entity for payments of legal costs and damages incurred by directors or officers of the entity where permitted by law. The amount of annual premium paid for the insurance cover was \$78,500.

### Directors' and Other Officers' Remuneration

The Uniting constitution provides for Directors to be paid reasonable remuneration for undertaking the ordinary duties of a Director.

The Board examines and assesses the remuneration of the Executive Team by referring to the relevant employment market.

## Directors' Meetings and Board Committees held 1 July 2019 - 30 June 2020

Meetings	Board of Directors		Audit & Risk	Governance & Key Relationships	Finance Investment & Property	Quality & Clinical Governance	Consumer Directed Services Reform
<b>Meetings held:</b>	10		5	5	10	5	3
<b>Meetings attended:</b>	Attended	Eligible to attend					
Bronwyn Pike - Chair (a)	2	3	0	2	2	0	0
Jude Munro (b)	4	4	0	1	2	0	0
Robyn Batten	10	10	3	3	0	0	3
Heather Watson	10	10	2	5	0	0	0
Mark Heintz	9	10	4	0	10	0	0
Linda McCrorey	9	10	0	0	0	5	2
Allan Thompson (c)	8	8	0	4	0	5	0
Peter Prasser	10	10	5	0	9	0	0
John Preston	9	10	0	0	10	0	0
Grant Mitchell	10	10	3	0	0	2	0
Luke Bo'sher (d)	6	7	0	0	0	0	2
Paul Linossier (e)	4	4	0	3	4	3	1

(a) Resigned September 2020

(b) Appointed February 2020

(c) Resigned April 2020

(d) Resigned March 2020

(e) Executive Director, resigned December 2019

## Corporate Governance Statement

### Background

In mid-2016 Synod Standing Committee approved the joining together of 21 existing UnitingCare agencies in Victoria and Tasmania, Wesley Mission Victoria, Synod-led Early Childhood Services (ECS) and the Share Team to create Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited.

On 3 October 2016 the constitution of the former Wesley Mission Victoria was amended to establish Uniting and the new Uniting Board was formally appointed. At the same time the Boards of the 21 UnitingCare agencies concluded their appointment and the directors of Uniting were appointed as the directors of each of the 21 unincorporated UnitingCare boards.

During the 2016/17 year, when the Board of Directors met, it did so as the Board of Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Ltd and as the Board of each of the 21 unincorporated entities. The first set of consolidated annual financial statements were prepared for the 2016/17 financial year.

On 1 July 2017, following both external and internal legal advice, the operations and assets and liabilities of the 21 UnitingCare agencies were transferred to Uniting, enabling the new organisation to have a formal and legal basis in which to act in accordance with legislative requirements, related Church entities and legal frameworks, ASIC and ACNC requirements. This approach also followed for a bona fide structure for government and non-government funding arrangements to be transferred to the Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Ltd entity.



## **Board Composition**

Members of the Uniting Board are appointed by the Synod Standing Committee in accordance with the requirements of the Victorian and Tasmanian Synod, Uniting Constitution and By-Laws. The Board is currently made up of 10 members including the Chair, Deputy Chair and Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

The following Directors were appointed during the reporting period in accordance with the Constitution:

- Jude Munro, appointed in February 2020 for a term concluding no later than the 2022 Annual General Meeting.

The following changes in Directors occurred during the reporting period in accordance with the Constitution.

- Paul Linossier resigned as Executive Director on 2 December 2020.
- Luke Bo'sher resigned as a Director on 5 March 2020.
- Allan Thompson resigned as a Director on 13 April 2020.

The above changes were approved by the Uniting Church of Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Standing Committee in accordance with Section 7 of the Uniting Constitution.

The Board received the CEO's resignation in July 2019 and immediately commenced a review and search process. On 17 September it was announced that Ms Bronwyn Pike had been appointed to the role of Uniting CEO effective 28 October 2019. Upon accepting the appointment Ms Pike resigned as Director and Board Chair with immediate effect. A period of handover between the departing and incoming CEO occurred thereafter. Board Director Allan Thompson was appointed as the interim Board Chair. Jude Munro commenced as Chair in March 2020.

There were no other changes to Directors during the reporting period.

## **Board Procedures and Policies**

The Board's Governance Charter was developed in accordance with the ACNC Governance Standards. The Charter outlines the roles, responsibilities and terms of reference of the Board and each of its Committees. It also includes Uniting's Code of Conduct, which all new Board members are required to sign. The Charter requires that the performance of the Board and CEO be reviewed on an annual basis.

Uniting maintains a register of Directors' interests and any potential conflicts of interest are recorded annually and reviewed monthly as part of normal Board meeting procedures.

The Board receives regular reports and presentations from senior executives on strategic, financial and operational performance, enterprise risk management, key policy decisions, social justice, research activities and Church policy and relations.

## **Board Sub-Committees**

The Board has established committees to assist the Board in fulfilling its responsibilities. Each committee has its own terms of reference or Charter which set out the authority delegated to it by the Board and details the manner in which the committee is to operate. Each of the Board committees reviews and monitors relevant performance data against established key performance indicators.

During 2019/20 the committees were:

- Audit and Risk Committee
- Finance, Investment and Property Committee
- Governance and Key Relationships Committee
- Quality and Clinical Governance Committee
- Consumer Directed Services Reform Committee

### **Audit and Risk Committee**

The purpose of the Audit and Risk Committee is to assist the Board in fulfilling its statutory, fiduciary and regulatory responsibilities relating to enterprise risk management and compliance, as well as fostering ethical practice and risk-informed decision making. The Committee oversees the development and maintenance of risk management systems, internal control systems, compliance with applicable laws and the appointment of the external auditor. The Committee also reviews the Annual Financial Statements jointly with the Finance, Investment and Property Committee.

### **Finance, Investment and Property Committee**

The purpose of the Finance, Investment and Property Committee is to assist the Board in ensuring that adequate policies and procedures, systems and processes are in place and that they adequately support the organisation to i) meet its financial and accounting obligations, ii) manage and monitor the financial performance of its investments and iii) meet its obligations in relation to the development, ownership, maintenance and use of property. This Committee also reviews annually the Uniting Budget Policy.

### **Governance and Key Relationships Committee**

The Governance and Key Relationships Committee assists the Board to discharge its governance responsibilities under the constitution for Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited including reviewing periodically the Governance Charter and related policies to be adopted by the Board, and oversees the Board's reporting and accountability framework. This includes facilitating the Board's consideration of the CEO annual performance plan and review of performance against that plan and monitoring the processes for setting Board and Executive remuneration. This Committee also ensures that policies, plans and processes are effective in maintaining constructive and mutually beneficial relationships across the Church at congregational, Presbytery, Synod and Assembly levels; as well as appropriate opportunities for community input to programs and mutually beneficial partnerships with a broad range of groups, networks and organisations.

### **Quality and Clinical Governance Committee**

The purpose of the Quality and Clinical Governance Committee is to ensure that appropriate and effective clinical governance systems are in place across the organisation specifically in relation to clinical safety, clinical risk, quality and scope of practice. The Committee promotes forward planning that minimises risk and identifies opportunities and alternate ways to achieve better results for our community.

### **Consumer Directed Services Reform Committee**

The purpose of the Consumer Directed Services Reform Committee is to assist the Board in achieving its strategic priorities for Uniting's consumer directed services with a particular focus on NDIS and Aged Care services. The Committee assists in fostering a culture of consumer directed care and an approach which results in Uniting becoming a significant service provider of consumer directed programs and services.

Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited engaged independent firm, Ernst and Young, as external auditor for the reporting period to June 2020.

The Board of Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited is proud to present the organisation's fourth set of Annual Financial Statements.

Signed in accordance with a resolution of the Directors.



**Jude Munro**

Chair of the Board of Directors



**Building a better  
working world**

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## **Auditor's Independence Declaration to the Directors of Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited**

In relation to our audit of the financial report of Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited for the financial year ended 30 June 2020, and in accordance with the requirements of Subdivision 60-C of the *Australian Charities and Not-for profits Commission Act 2012*, to the best of my knowledge and belief, there have been no contraventions of the auditor independence requirements of any applicable code of professional conduct.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads 'Ernst &amp; Young' in a cursive, flowing script.

Ernst & Young

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads 'Paul Gower' in a cursive, flowing script.

Paul Gower  
Partner  
7 October 2020



## Independent Auditor's Report to the Members of Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited

### Report on the Financial Report

#### Opinion

We have audited the financial report of Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited (the Company), which comprises the statement of financial position as at 30 June 2020, the statement of comprehensive income, statement of changes in equity and statement of cash flows for the year then ended, notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies, and the directors' declaration.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial report of the Company is in accordance with the *Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission Act 2012*, including:

- a) giving a true and fair view of the Company's financial position as at 30 June 2020 and of its financial performance for the year ended on that date; and
- b) complying with Australian Accounting Standards and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission Regulation 2013*.

#### Basis for Opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report* section of our report. We are independent of the Company in accordance with the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's APES 110 *Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (including Independence Standards)* (the Code) that are relevant to our audit of the financial report in Australia. We have also fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the Code.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

#### Information Other than the Financial Report and Auditor's Report Thereon

The directors are responsible for the other information. The other information is the directors' report accompanying the financial report.

Our opinion on the financial report does not cover the other information and accordingly we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial report, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial report or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated.

If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact. We have nothing to report in this regard.

## Responsibilities of the Directors for the Financial Report

The directors of the Company are responsible for the preparation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission Act 2012* and for such internal control as the directors determine is necessary to enable the preparation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view and is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial report, the directors are responsible for assessing the Company's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters relating to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the directors either intend to liquidate the Company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

## Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial report as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with the Australian Auditing Standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of this financial report.

As part of an audit in accordance with the Australian Auditing Standards, we exercise professional judgement and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial report, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the Company's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the directors.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the directors' use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the Company's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial report or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the Company to cease to continue as a going concern.



- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial report, including the disclosures, and whether the financial report represents the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

We communicate with the directors regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink that reads 'Ernst &amp; Young'.

Ernst & Young

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink that reads 'Paul Gower'.

Paul Gower  
Partner  
Melbourne  
7 October 2020



# Statement of income

	2020 \$,000	2019 \$,000
Government contributions	218,776	232,869
Fees for service	37,367	38,452
Donations, bequests and other philanthropic income	8,029	9,327
Sale of goods	2,960	3,864
Other income	26,745	9,871
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>293,877</b>	<b>294,383</b>

Employee expenses	220,662	213,881
Client expenses	20,498	39,229
Occupancy expenses	15,799	18,398
Administration expenses	15,876	19,355
Depreciation and amortisation	10,066	6,059
Finance costs	950	80
Other expenses	8,050	6,782
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>291,901</b>	<b>303,784</b>

<b>Net surplus / (deficit) for the year from continuing operations</b>	<b>1,976</b>	<b>(9,401)</b>
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## Other comprehensive income

Net (loss)/gain on equity instruments designated at fair value through other comprehensive income	(2,525)	2,147
Revaluation decrease of Property, Plant and Equipment	–	(747)
Net Movement in Beneficial Right of Use of Property to Uniting	(3,716)	4,253

<b>Total comprehensive (loss) /income for the year</b>	<b>(4,265)</b>	<b>(3,748)</b>
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This Statement should be read in conjunction with the accompanying notes.

# Financial statement

	2020 \$,000	2019 \$,000
<b>Current assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	72,438	74,663
Receivables	12,955	11,096
Other current assets	5,031	3,288
Assets held for sale	13,382	8,335
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>103,806</b>	<b>97,382</b>
<b>Non-current assets</b>		
Property, plant and equipment	213,480	218,016
Right of Use assets	35,908	–
Intangible assets	–	10,968
Financial assets	39,171	37,647
Other non-current assets	76	25
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<b>288,635</b>	<b>266,656</b>
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>392,441</b>	<b>364,038</b>
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Payables	60,646	42,485
Provisions	25,658	17,978
Lease liabilities	3,479	–
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<b>89,783</b>	<b>60,463</b>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>		
Payables	4,054	4,102
Provisions	10,329	13,236
Lease liabilities	21,721	–
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	<b>36,104</b>	<b>17,338</b>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>125,887</b>	<b>77,801</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>266,554</b>	<b>286,237</b>
<b>Equity</b>		
Contributed equity	12,623	12,623
Reserves	265,918	288,592
Accumulated surplus / (deficit)	(11,987)	(14,978)
<b>Total equity</b>	<b>266,554</b>	<b>286,237</b>

# The future is bright.



When we respect our history, unite toward achieving a common purpose and share common values, a collective spirit is born.

This gives us the foundation to dare to reach further than ever before and be informed by the voice of our consumers and communities to drive real, positive social change.

## **Learn more**

[unitingvictas.org.au](http://unitingvictas.org.au)

**Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited**  
ABN 81 098 317 125

*Cover photo: Bronte was supported with housing while she got back on her feet and is now thriving.*