

THE
Bridge
Youth
SERVICE

2019-2020

Annual Report

Our mission is to create opportunities that value and empower young people, build family harmony and foster supportive communities, enabling all young people to reach their full potential.

"The Bridge has given me confidence and has been there for my family."



We value and respect everyone we work with



We value and celebrate diversity



We respect that people have rights and responsibilities



We value the responsibility for a persons wellbeing between the individual and the community



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President Report

As I reflect on 2020, my first year as president, I identified the theme of the year to be this: Strength through adversity. The Bridge - our workers, participants, volunteers, and community - have faced unprecedented challenges in the last year and I am proud of the way TBYS has responded.

The resilience of the organisation through COVID-19 is a testament to our hardworking, highly skilled staff. Watching the way our workers adapted to the changing landscape, observing the resounding commitment they had to helping those in need, and the way everyone came together as a team made me immensely proud to be part of TBYS. I am confident that as a result of COVID-19, TBYS as an organisation, and a workforce, will be stronger, better prepared, and ready to support young people in our community than we ever have been.

I want to express heartfelt thanks to our senior management team—Melinda Lawley (CEO), Jenny Cook (Executive Manager Youth and Family Services), Leigh Nash (Corporate Services Manager). Their leadership and guidance are an asset to TBYS and a key part of how we were able to successfully navigate through 2020.

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So often, the world couples youth with inexperience. When I look to the achievements of TBYS it is easy to see that youth is our strength. It is woven into the very core of the organisation through our programs targeted at people aged 12 to 25, but it is also in our workforce. Our workers have proved repeatedly the value add they bring, and a large part of that is their youth.

Looking forward to where TBYS is going, it is pleasing to see our continued presence in the Shepparton, Seymour and surrounding areas, and our growing presence in Wallan. As we begin the work to develop our new strategic plan, we look to reinforce our community connections, our work with other organisations, broaden our reach, and continually improve our services to best serve the young people in our region.

As always, thank you to our funding bodies, primarily State and Federal government departments, and our supporters and advocates within the community.

Georgia Linton

CEO Report

All our work behind the scenes to improve our operations over the last couple of years came to fruition in early 2020 when, for the first time and without warning, support to young people had to be provided remotely, also known as “working from home”. We have for a long time known that young people we support, receive an excellent service. What has not been so obvious is that the “behind the scenes” infrastructure at the Bridge Youth Service is also first rate. The requirements to make a transition to work remotely is immense. We were able to do this because we have responsive, positive staff who had the equipment and technology in place to make the shift.

Prior to the domination of COVID-19 in our lives, many positive moments and achievements occurred. In August 2019 we held a well-attended and positive event during Homelessness Week. A Movie Night at the cinema in Shepparton celebrated what is possible when a young person with an adverse adolescence is given the opportunity to develop their qualities and participate meaningfully in society. The movie ‘Life after Oasis’, a harrowing documentary that follows the lives of homeless youth in Sydney, was the centrepiece of our advocacy work to remind people that homelessness is real and an issue young people in Shepparton experience.

We continued to look for opportunities to share our expertise and advocate for early intervention. We attended the Community of Schools & Services (COSS) forum where we heard of the great success Geelong is having in reducing youth homelessness and school disengagement.

We presented at the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness. We expanded our Step-Up program which supports adolescents who use violence in the home.

2020 saw the introduction of our Internship program with La Trobe University’s fourth year Social Work students. It has already demonstrated the advantages of building our workforce locally. This initiative is part of the continuing work we progress through the Shepparton Community Share initiative.

Thank you to our Board of Management who are supportive and considerate of the issues we grapple with as a growing, specialist organisation. As we seek larger premises and expand our services into more specialised programs, the members of the Board respond to our requests with understanding and positivity. We thank them for the time they volunteer to support us and young people in the community.

To be successful in working remotely, you need to have a solid culture. At the heart of this is trust. If you don’t trust your team, you will not be able to create a positive working environment. This culture of trust and high expectations is one we are proud of. We have a young workforce. They are passionate about supporting young people. They have not let COVID-19 get in the way of this. Thank you to all our staff for the way they have not lost sight of why we are all here at the Bridge.

Melinda Lawley

“ Thank you to all our staff for the way they have not lost sight (during the COVID-19 pandemic) of why we are all here at the Bridge. ”

Resilience and responsiveness during COVID

Over 750 weekly phone calls

We planned, we analysed, we assessed the risk, we adapted, we implemented, and we kept supporting our Youth...

Our ability to adapt and respond was put to the test in March 2020 and we passed with flying colours.

From our IT systems, to our staff response, everyone got on board and we were up and running in no time.

Microsoft Teams immediately became our new friend, as we moved home, and set up daily meetings, online training and team meetings for all of our staff using this platform.

Data security and Confidentiality were at the forefront of our minds as we looked for ways to effectively engage with our young people.

Our partnerships helped us, with Murray PHN providing us with immediate access to the Telehealth Platform, we had our staff trained and meeting with Young people within a week.

Up to 110 Door Step Visits per week for 15 mins each when permitted

Staff Zoom Meetings



We were able to achieve the following:

- Virtual meetings with schools and young people
- Sharing screens and using virtual white boards became the norm.
- Positive engagement from YP who suffer from anxiety and could not face stepping into a classroom. Remote learning has removed a barrier for engagement.
- 15 min doorstep visits were engaged when restrictions permitted.
- Many online purchases with goods being sent directly to YP or click & collect
- Emotional Regulation activities were integral to our support

Up to 20 Telehealth Consultations per week averaging 30 mins

COVID Adaptation Case Study: Parents Group

In a "normal year", each Term our team facilitate 10 face to face groups for Young parents and their children.

Term 1 started as it normally would for our parents' group. As we moved into the Pandemic we supported families with phone calls to check in on their health and wellbeing as well as to provide information on current guidelines and access to services for support.

Our Team developed an online platform to enable groups to continue in Term 2. These occurred through weekly Telehealth sessions.



10 Groups
23 Attendees



Challenges for Parents Group during COVID

Creating a new program with COVID-19 guidelines and developing a way to continue to provide support within a group environment under restrictions.

Continuing to keep parents and children engaged even though the program structure was very different to what they have experienced in the past.

Overcoming barriers where parents haven't had the technology to participate in video calls.

Outcomes

- The team developed a term plan of activities with packs that were delivered with items needed so that activities such as cooking, playdough and craft could continue. Parents and children could be encouraged to interact and participate together.
- Vouchers were provided to parents to provide them with data to enable participation in video call groups.
- Three new first-time parents engaged successfully with the group and participated in the video calls
- Pamper packs were provided to all participating parents to support them in the challenging circumstances. These packs included self-care items for parents (dad's and mum's), book for child/ren, wooden toy for child/ren, all required ingredients for groups and parenting information pack.
- Parents who couldn't attend group video calls fed back that they had completed and enjoyed the activities with their children.

Positive Highlights

- Telehealth calls going for up to 2hrs at a time.
- Individual Telehealth calls and phone calls were beneficial for parents who struggle in the Telehealth group environment.
- Contact was provided through the term 1 and 2 holidays when COVID-19 restrictions were changing quickly. This was to offer support to parents and educate about recommendations and guidelines.
- Parents and children enjoyed baking together via video call and celebrating their achievements.

"They have taken me to appointments... helped me with food, nappies etc and always suggest good parenting skills, they are all round amazing."

Statistics and Achievements

Despite facing a world wide pandemic, we remained strong and created solutions to continue our support for young people. Here is a snapshot of what we achieved over the 12 months.

Homelessness, Tenancy Support

295 young people were assisted with *Housing Support Case Management*

53 participants involved in *Family Reconciliation / Mediation*

79 involved in *STAR Housing*

Disengaging from School & Risky Behaviours

32 young people were involved in the *Mentoring Program & Links to Education*

104 referrals from the Department of Education & Training for the *Navigator Program*

114 involved in *Finding Solutions & Adolescent Support Program*

We asked our young people about their experience...

98%

felt really happy after their visit to The Bridge

87%

felt their worker was extremely supportive

96%

would return and tell their friends about TBYS

Family Relationships & Violence Issues

15 young people and their parents were supported in the *Step Up Program* over the **27** sessions

162 internal consultations by our *Family Violence Specialists*

Young Parents, Sexual Health, Pregnancy & Family Services



210 young parents were supported in *Parenting Programs* over the **36** sessions

22

first time parents received *Pregnancy Support & Antenatal Care*



46 Staff



9 Board Members



22 Volunteers



20 Mentors (10) Mentees (10)

Over **1,340** young people engaged in our programs

Emotional Regulation and Impulse Control ERIC Model

The Bridge
Youth Service
leading the way
with proven,
innovative
practices...

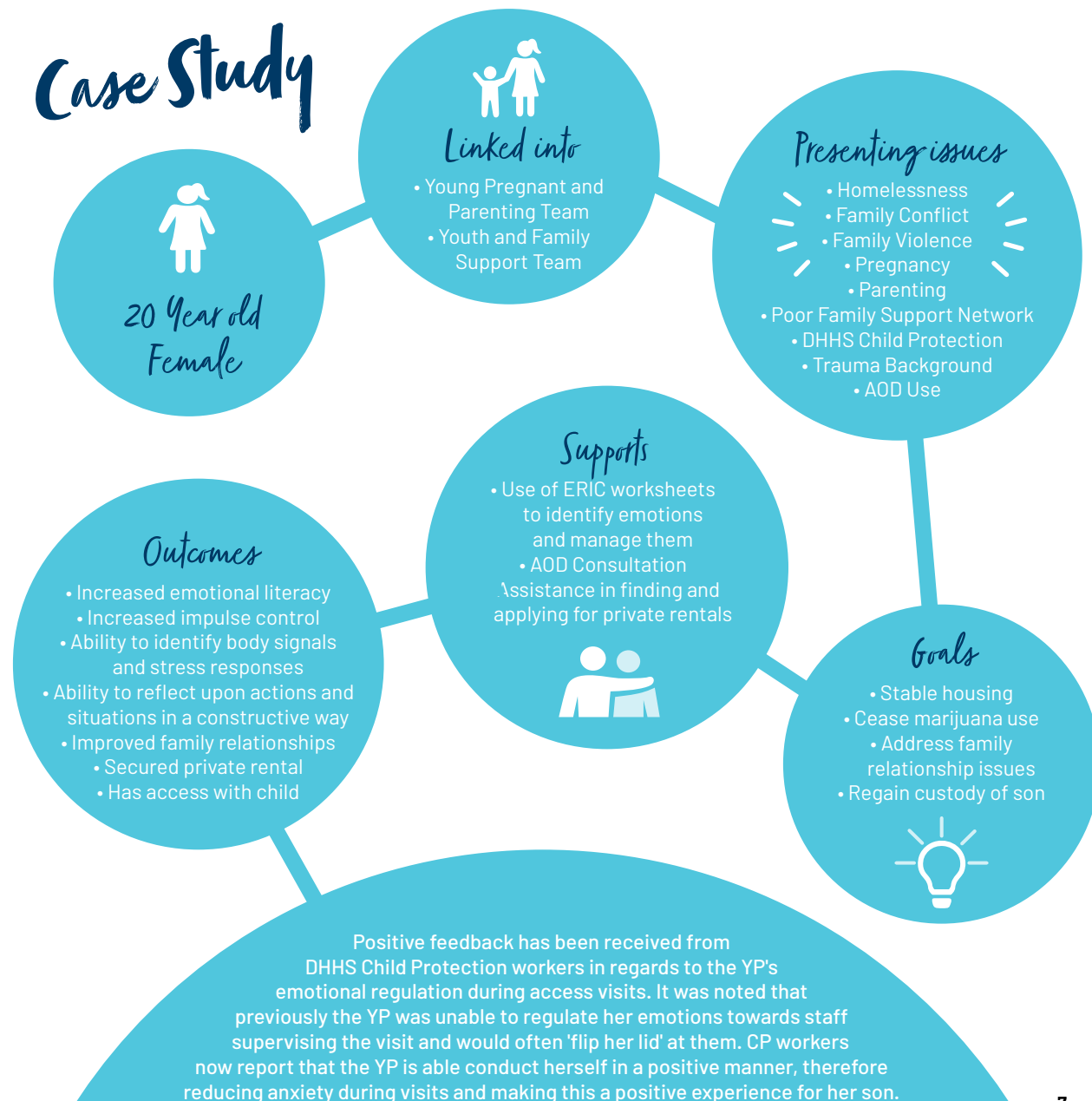


Under the guidance of Dr Kate Hall, Clinical Psychologist, Principal Researcher for ERIC, our team has trained, adapted and implemented the ERIC model into our day to day practice.

ERIC is a psychological skills development program that promotes healthy social and emotional development in adolescents and young adults by building Emotion Regulation and Impulse Control skills. ERIC is made up of modular intervention elements drawn from psychological treatments for mental health and substance use disorders.

To create energy and interest around the implementation of ERIC into practice, the ERIC Community of Practice (CoP) was formed. The ERIC CoP is a collection of professionals from TBYS who have a common interest and passion for learning about and implementing the ERIC model. The group works to facilitate learning and growth not only within the CoP but within the organisation and have the members of the group become leaders within their respective teams.

Case Study



Internship opportunities

Shepparton Community Share (SCS) partnered with Latrobe University to offer paid Internships to local 4th Year Social Work Students. This project was a result of our Human Resource Managers discussing the challenges of recruitment and looking for ways to future proof our workforce.

SCS and La Trobe Shepparton took a collaborative approach to the project to ensure the following goals were met:

- We wanted to work with local students and the 4th year La Trobe cohort
- We wanted to 'package up' internship and field placement within SCS

At the same time as the SCS project was starting to take place, The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare was funded by DHHS to develop a model for workforce development which, coincidentally, dovetailed with local conversations, so we combined the two.

The four HR managers worked together to undertake the recruitment, shortlisted together, interviewed together and selected together, balancing agency

preference and student preferences. The initial plan was to offer one internship per agency we ended up offering five because of the quality of applicants.

In January 2020 we welcomed our intern Lara Blackburn to our Youth & Family Support Team.

Lara has become an integral part of our team and has grown and developed within the role. Lara has worked on intake, and taken on a caseload, supporting Young People with housing and linking appropriate internal supports for any issue that arose.

Lara has had the opportunity to participate in many professional development opportunities and seen firsthand how organisations needed to adapt our services due to COVID-19.

SHEPPARTON COMMUNITY SHARE
Innovating, collaborating and building capacity



THE
Bridge
Youth
SERVICE


familycare


ConnectGV
See the possibility, not the disability


PRIMARY CARE
CONNECT

Internship Q&A with Lara Blackburn

Why did you apply for the Internship?

As someone with no previous social work experience I thought it would be an invaluable way to gain experience with the support of university and the agency. As I had only had one placement, I was really looking for more experience in an agency that was connected to the Shepparton community to build rapport with agency and get a taste of what areas may interest me. Also it gave me an opportunity to move away from other part time work and work towards something I am passionate in.

What's the difference between field placement and the internship?

During my internship I have been treated as an employee and have been able to work independently. During placement I have found that due to certain criteria having to be fulfilled that the work is a lot more supervised than the internship. The internship offers an opportunity to build skills independently and reach out for help when needed, whereas during placement all actions are usually supervised and reflected upon with the field educator.

Biggest benefit of being involved in the Internship?

The biggest benefit I found was how much the internship supplemented my learning. I have been able to apply the theories and practice skills taught to real situations and given me an opportunity to find what skills and theories work best for me and the client base prior to entering the work force full time. It has also allowed me to engage with many different areas of the social work field and find what fields I am passionate about.

Youth Homelessness

Life After the Oasis

We held a film night to raise awareness in Shepparton as part of Homelessness Week in August 2020.

The film, Life After the Oasis, offered a deep insight into the complexities young people who experience homelessness face, particularly entrenched, long-term homelessness. A sequel to the 2008 version The Oasis, the film followed the lives of young people experiencing homelessness in Sydney.

Melinda Lawley, CEO reflected that there were similar traits to Shepparton and unfortunately there had been little change over 10 years. "The stories are the same in Shepparton.... this isn't a Sydney issue but a youth issue"

We were fortunate enough to be able to bring Owen, who featured in the film, to Shepparton to help us highlight his story. Owen took the time to answer questions at the film and also spent time at the Youth Foyer talking to our local youth and inspiring them to use music as a way out of the dark times they experience when homeless. This was how he found a way through his homelessness experiences.

**SHARK ISLAND
PRODUCTIONS**



We continued to advocate for our Youth by bringing the issue of youth homelessness to the forefront of our community.

Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

On Wednesday 11 March 2020 Melinda Lawley and Renae Ford, Program Manager Youth and Family Support presented at the Victorian Government's Inquiry into Homelessness.

The focus was on what it is like for young people and what it is like for the workforce who support these young people. A snapshot of what it is like when policies and programs interact and when there are consequences that were not really foreseen. The presentation focussed on the details of the local homelessness and housing system, the workforce and our solution to youth homelessness.

The COSS Model

As a solution, we recommend the proven model called the COSS model – Community of Schools and Services, better known as the Geelong Project, which is based on an early intervention approach.

Melinda Lawley (CEO)
excerpt from Transcript:

"If we have this fantastic workforce that can work with the young people, work with the families, do family mediation, why can't we do that earlier?"

At the moment if you think of our response to youth homelessness as a continuum, TBYS would be near the end. We are at the crisis end; we are up there with the youth refuge. We are trying to find a solution that is not really forever.

What if we use that workforce at the beginning, before the young person even knows they are homeless? I have worked with young people for a long time; they might not even recognise that they are about to be homeless. Why can't we use the expertise of that workforce earlier? That is what they are doing in Geelong.

They use a survey within a school setting that helps to identify and determine the risk: the risk of youth homelessness, the risk of school disengagement and also—not as well researched, but it is still looking very good—of mental illness. So, between those three risk factors, there is your risk of homelessness.

That is what we would be dealing with when it gets bad enough. Well, we do not want to wait until it is bad enough. We want to work with

Outcomes

Changes in housing situation after our Support 2019-2020:

	before	after
Public/Community Housing	0	10
Private/Shared Housing	18	76
Transitional Housing	39	39
Family Living	8	76
Homeless	254	118

them now, with our really skilled workforce that values young people and can see their promise.

The schools complete the survey once a year with every student. The results are then stratified into three tiers—the most critical, the ones that we should watch and do the most early intervention with, and the other ones that are not so bad and that maybe the school welfare system can support.

The concept is you use our workforce to go in there and start the family mediation then, start focusing on the communication skills, focus on that relationship not breaking down. What the Geelong Project has found in their evaluation is that this model reduced youth homelessness by 40 per cent, and that was in a very short time.

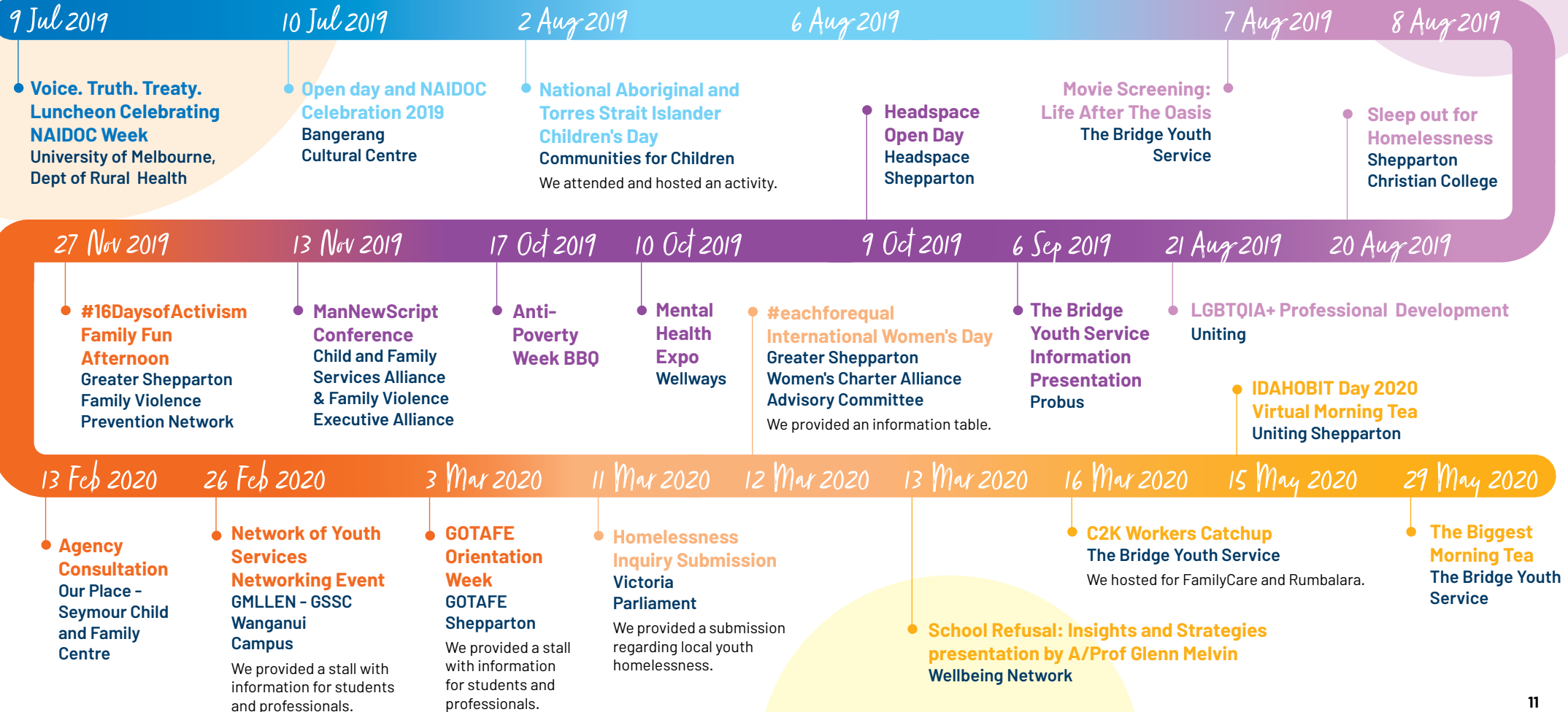
As opportunities present TBYS will continue to advocate for this model in our region.

Community Events we've supported

• **Homelessness Awareness Morning Tea @ Friars Café, Shepparton**
Hume Regional Homelessness Network
We attended and promoted TBYS.

• **Homelessness Awareness BBQ @ Coles, Seymour**
Hume Regional Homelessness Network
We helped cook the BBQ and promote TBYS, highlighting Homelessness.

• **Music Jam Session with Owen Davies**
The Bridge Youth Service and The Youth Foyer



Options for *young people*



(03) 5831 2390

127 Welsford St, Shepparton

54 Tallarook St, Seymour

www.thebridge.org.au

