



2024-2025 Annual Report

A timeline celebrating 30 years of impact

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YOUNG PARENTS GROUP IN SEYMOUR

CHAMPIONING CHANGE

Campaigns and events advocating, raising awareness, and building connections across our community.

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THE
Bridge
Youth
SERVICE

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Nathan Quinlan
President



This year has been one of transformation and reflection for The Bridge Youth Service.

It has also been my first full year as President, and I want to begin by acknowledging the dedication of my fellow Board members and the extraordinary work of our staff in navigating challenges and opportunities.

A highlight was the opening of The Nest in early 2025 – a unique partnership project with the Women's Property Initiative and the Property Industry Foundation that has already begun providing secure, supportive homes for young mothers and their children. Seeing this vision become reality was a proud moment for our organisation and a tangible example of how we can create lasting change when we work collaboratively.

The Board also endorsed a new Strategic Plan 2024–2027, which sets a clear direction for the years ahead – formalising our trauma-informed practice, amplifying youth voice, strengthening evidence of outcomes, and promoting The Bridge as a leader in youth and family services.

Through the strategic planning process, it became evident that we were selling ourselves short by omitting families from our name. We recognised that we have always supported the parents, siblings, and carers around the young people we work with. After discussions with staff and young people, it was decided to include the word Family in our name. This change will coincide with our move to the new office in St Georges Road.

I also want to note the Board's continued oversight of accreditation, governance, and policy. Passing our QIC accreditation with confidence was a testament to the professionalism of both the Board and staff.

This year we farewell three valued Board members – Anne Ryan, Georgia Linton, and Shannon Balfour – and thank them sincerely for their contributions. Moving away from our catchment, Georgia reluctantly resigned after holding the President position for six years. At the same time, we warmly welcome Julie Marshall, Merrin Tonks, and Claire Thompson (Dann) as our new Treasurer. Their skills and perspectives will strengthen our governance into the future.

Looking ahead, our focus is firmly on the completion of our St Georges Road headquarters and on embedding the Strategic Plan.

We remain committed to creating safe, inclusive, and empowering spaces for young people and families across our region.

On behalf of the Board, I thank our CEO, Melinda Lawley, and the Executive Team for their leadership – and all staff for their commitment, creativity, and care.

Highlights

- ✓ **Opened The Nest, providing safe homes for young mothers and children.**
- ✓ **Launched Strategic Plan 2024–2027: trauma-informed practice, youth voice, outcomes, leadership.**
- ✓ **Adolescent boys project gained national attention and funding.**
- ✓ **Transition to The Bridge Youth + Family Services and move to St Georges Road underway.**
- ✓ **Passed accreditation reviews with confidence.**
- ✓ **Welcomed new Board members; farewelled long-serving contributors.**
- ✓ **Looking ahead: new headquarters and embedding the Strategic Plan.**

CEO'S REPORT

Melinda Lawley
CEO



We began this year with great enthusiasm to develop a new Strategic Plan and move into our new premises.

The Shepparton team of the Bridge had outgrown the Welsford St office in 2019, since then we have been working from two sites. The purchase of 25-27 St Georges Road in 2023, and its transformation from an old tile warehouse – and more recently the Salvos Op Shop – into a comfortable, purpose-built office space, is nearing completion.

The new site provides ample space for Shepparton staff, along with improved accessibility for young people and families.

This year we have felt the positive impact of appointing a Communications Lead, which has increased the reach and visibility of our messages. This stronger focus on storytelling has reinforced, internally and externally, the number of young people benefiting from our programs – we are making a real difference in their lives, and we're proud to share that.

We appreciate the ongoing interest in our work of community members and stakeholders. We thank them for contributing to the development of our 2024–2027 Strategic Plan. If you haven't already, please take a moment to read it.

This year, we were invited to apply for two pilot programs – one with the Federal Department of Social Services and another with the Victorian Department of Education.

Successful applications have enabled us to develop and deliver the Changing the Story program, targeting adolescent boys impacted by family violence. Working alongside our partners at the Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF), we have strengthened our focus on therapeutic interventions while maintaining our strong psychosocial engagement model.

We've enjoyed building relationships with the local ACF

team and are encouraged by our shared values and therapeutic approach to supporting young people and families.

Our Find My Future program continues to provide case management support for young people under 16 who have left school – a vulnerable cohort at risk of further disconnection if left unsupported. The program works with each young person to design a personalised plan that helps them find a pathway to "what's next".

Both new programs complement our existing services and align closely with our new Strategic Plan. We continue to seek opportunities to support young people and their families earlier and more effectively.

I would like to thank our Executive staff, Jenny Cook and Leigh Nash, for their strategic input and operational insight, ensuring our teams have everything they need to support young people. To the other members of our Leadership Team – your input and oversight of program delivery provide invaluable information to guide decision-making.

Thank you to all staff who show up every day with professionalism, empathy, and positivity to support young people in difficult circumstances. The work can be demanding, but the camaraderie among staff and the guidance of skilled leaders ensure everyone feels prepared, supported, and effective.

Thank you also to our new President, Nathan Quinlan, for taking on this leadership role following the resignation of Georgia Linton, President for six years. Reluctant to leave before the opening of The Nest, Georgia was able to see the modules arrive in Mooroopna and visualise young mums settling into their new homes.

Finally, thank you to all Board members who volunteer their time to explore ways to bridge service gaps and develop programs that help young people look toward the future with optimism.



OUR IDENTITY IN ACTION

Strategic Plan implementation and our evolving identity

CEO Melinda Lawley said:
"This plan isn't something that sits on a shelf – it's guiding our everyday work. It reflects our determination to break down barriers, listen deeply to young people, and deliver services that make a tangible difference in their lives."

This year marked the first stage of implementing our Strategic Plan 2024–2027, which sets out three clear pillars:

- ▶ Enhancing service delivery through evidence-based practice models and research.
- ▶ Strengthening youth voice and feedback to guide continuous improvement.
- ▶ Promoting TBYS as a leader in youth and family services across our region.

Already, we've:

- ✔ Begun formalising our trauma-responsive model of practice.
- ✔ Developed a youth housing solution model through The Nest: Solid Foundations.
- ✔ Expanded consultation mechanisms with young people, including through the Youth Ambassador Program and partnerships, such as the one with Mitchell Shire Youth Council.
- ✔ Increased our visibility as innovators, with staff presenting at networks and forums and sharing learnings with peers.

A name that reflects who we are

As part of this forward-looking vision, The Bridge Youth Service will soon become The Bridge Youth + Family Services.

This change is not about adopting a new identity – it is about recognising the work we already do.

Our services have long extended beyond young people aged 12–25 to include young parents, children under 12 through the I'm Here program, and families engaged through Pregnancy and Parenting and Family Foundations.

Consultation with young people showed strong support for the updated name, with 87% comfortable and many noting that it "sounds more inclusive".

The new visual identity will retain our well-recognised bridge logo, with a subtle + symbol to highlight the expanded scope. Importantly, "Youth" remains the hero word, ensuring our commitment to young people stays front and centre.

Executive Manager of Youth and Family Services Jenny Cook reflects:

"The word 'family' acknowledges the breadth of our work. It doesn't change our youth-centred approach – it strengthens it, because families

Looking ahead:

The new name and refreshed logo will officially launch in October 2025, alongside the move to our new premises at 25–27 St Georges Road, Shepparton.

A staged communications plan will ensure clients, staff, partners, and the broader community understand the change and feel reassured: we are still The Bridge – trusted, inclusive, and youth-focused.

As we look to the future, we remain guided by our values: Diversity, Collaboration, Curiosity, Connection, and Flexibility.

With a clear strategic roadmap and a name that truly represents our scope, The Bridge Youth + Family Services is ready to keep building stronger futures – for young people, their families, and our communities.



The
Bridge
Youth
Family Services

THE NEST

Solid Foundations

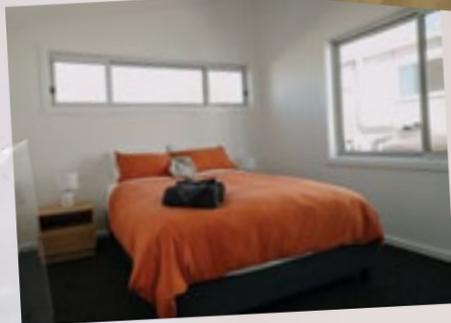
"I no longer feel like I'm in a black hole I can't get out of. My life now has stability, hope, and a future."

Case Study:

A fresh start at The Nest

One young mother and her child were living in an overcrowded, unsafe home where substance use and offending behaviours were common. Her child was falling behind educationally, and she struggled to establish boundaries or routines.

With patient outreach from TBYS, she began to engage with support services. Since moving into The Nest, her child has started school and is thriving, while she has gained confidence as a parent, implemented healthy routines, and set boundaries with family.



In February 2025 we celebrated the official opening of The Nest: Solid Foundations – a unique and much-needed response to youth homelessness in the Goulburn Valley.



WPI CEO Roberta Buchanon, The Bridge CEO Melinda Lawley and PIF CEO Kate Mills.

CEO Melinda Lawley reflected at the launch:

"This project is about more than just housing – it's about stability, opportunity, and breaking the cycle of disadvantage. If a young mother has a safe and supportive environment, she has a far greater chance of completing her education, gaining employment, and creating a secure future for her child."

The Nest represents what's possible when community, philanthropy, and service organisations come together with a shared vision: to create lasting change for young families.

The Nest provides three independent units for young mothers and their children, developed in partnership with Women's Property Initiatives (WPI) and the Property Industry Foundation.

More than just housing, The Nest offers wraparound support through The Bridge Youth Service, including parenting and life skills, budgeting, education and employment support, and emotional wellbeing programs.

By mid-year, all three units were home to young mothers who previously faced unsafe or unstable housing.

Early feedback has been overwhelmingly positive: 100 per cent of tenants reported satisfaction with their home and location, highlighting the safety, stability, and community connection The Nest provides.



The Shepparton Soroptimists.

Staff from The Bridge and GV Health.



OUR Reconciliation JOURNEY

At The Bridge Youth Service, reconciliation is an ongoing journey of listening, learning, and taking meaningful action.

Having proudly completed our Reflect RAP in 2024, we are now progressing towards the development of our Innovate RAP, which will further embed cultural learning and respectful practice across our organisation.

This past year, we supported local NAIDOC Week events, walking alongside our community to honour the culture, history, and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our most memorable step forward came in May 2025, when we hosted a powerful Internal Learning event on Yorta Yorta Country.

More than 45 staff and board members participated in a day of deep reflection and connection, guided by Yorta Yorta cultural facilitator **Nartasha Bamblett** and First Nations specialist consultant **Bobbie Pepper**.



The program included truth-telling, cultural storytelling, and a weaving workshop that provided a tactile, grounded way to reflect on identity, Country, and reconciliation.

Staff described the experience as “moving,” “powerful,” and “a chance to slow down and truly listen.”

The day reinforced the importance of creating safe spaces for cultural dialogue and highlighted the role of First Nations voices in guiding our journey.

With the dedication of our RAP Champion, Reconciliation Working Group, and leadership team, we remain committed to building cultural safety into every part of our work, ensuring reconciliation is lived through both our values and our actions.



DIVERSITY + INCLUSION

At The Bridge Youth Service, we are committed to creating safe, welcoming, and affirming spaces for every young person and



In 2024–25, this commitment was visible across our events, partnerships, and behind-the-scenes work toward Rainbow Tick accreditation.

Rainbow Tick Accreditation

This year, TBYS completed the Rainbow Tick self-assessment, mapping our strengths and identifying opportunities to strengthen inclusivity across all levels of the organisation.

From staff training to intake practices and cultural safety in documentation, our teams are embedding inclusive practice into daily operations.

Staff surveys and youth voice collection are informing our work, ensuring we are listening to LGBTIQ+ young people and shaping services around their needs.

We are now preparing for formal accreditation in early 2026.

IDAHOBIT @ Twilight 2025

In May, TBYS proudly co-hosted IDAHOBIT @ Twilight at GV Libraries, bringing together more than 150 community members for a bold celebration of pride, visibility, and resilience. Our Communications team led media, accessibility, and promotional efforts, creating an Access Key to support inclusivity for all attendees.

On the night, our stall was staffed by Specialist Youth Workers Brianna and Shannae, with Youth Ambassador Molly McLeod showcasing her small business. From youth-led stalls to dazzling performances, the event embodied the power of community and highlighted the importance of safe, inclusive spaces.

Wear It Purple Day 2024

In August last year, we joined forces with local partners including GOTAFE, GV Pride, and headspace to celebrate Wear It Purple Day – a day dedicated to supporting rainbow young people.

With vibrant colour, creativity, and courage, the event reinforced our reputation as a leader in youth inclusion. Staff engaged directly with young people, promoted TBYS services, and proudly stood alongside partner organisations in celebrating diversity.

Our commitment

Whether through community celebrations like IDAHOBIT and Wear It Purple Day, or through the systemic change of Rainbow Tick accreditation, TBYS continues to champion equity and belonging.

As one of our youth workers reflected: “Safe spaces save lives – and every step we take toward inclusivity helps a young person feel seen, valued, and supported.”

CAMPAIGNS

+ EVENTS

The Bridge Youth Service proudly championed a wide range of campaigns and community events this year, highlighting our commitment to advocacy, awareness, and connection.

Homelessness advocacy

+ awareness

- ▶ Houses at Parliament (July 2024): Staff and program leaders joined the Victorian Homelessness Network in Melbourne for a powerful display of 6000 origami houses, symbolising the urgent need for 60,000 new social homes in Victoria.
- ▶ End Homelessness for Good Forum (August 2024): Program Manager Renae Brophy featured as a panellist at this regional sector forum, addressing stigma and solutions in partnership with The Salvation Army and GOTAFE.
- ▶ Step Up for Homelessness (August 2024): Our team kicked off the "Pay It Forward" coffee campaign at Lemon Tree Café, supporting those in need across the Ovens Murray and Goulburn regions.
- ▶ Lake Victoria Walk (August 2024): Staff joined sector partners in a community walk to shine a spotlight on homelessness.
- ▶ Youth Homelessness Matters Day (April 2025): TBYS amplified the voices of young people, supporting petitions and campaigns led by Yfoundations and the Property Industry Foundation.
- ▶ Youth Homelessness Matters Breakfast Forum (March 2025): CEO Melinda Lawley represented TBYS at this Melbourne event, showcasing The Nest as an innovative housing solution for young mums.



Community partnerships

+ family support

- ▶ South Shepparton Community Church (October 2024): Supported the installation of a new shade sail, enhancing safe play spaces for young parents and families.
- ▶ Our Place Storytime (March 2025): Family Foundations Coordinator Stephen shared stories with children, strengthening links with Mooroopna's early learning hub.
- ▶ Refugee Week (June 2025): Hosted a creative beading activity, as part of Uniting Vic Tas's celebrations of resilience and cultural diversity.



Social change

+ advocacy

- ▶ 16 Days of Activism (November–December 2024): Staff participated in forums and awareness events highlighting the need to prevent gender-based violence.
- ▶ Do It For Dolly Day (May 2025): Teams in Wallan and Shepparton "went blue" to take a stand against bullying and spread kindness.

Youth engagement

+ celebration

- ▶ Youth Fest GLOW Roller Disco (September 2024): Partnered with GV Pride, Uniting VT, Berry Street, GLOW and Impala to deliver a fun, inclusive event for young people and families.
- ▶ Neurodiversity Celebration Week (March 2025): Celebrated the strengths and contributions of neurodivergent young people, calling for inclusivity and acceptance.
- ▶ Bring Your Dog to Work Day (June 2025): A light-hearted wellbeing initiative that brought joy and connection to both Shepparton and Wallan offices.



Community spirit

+ fundraising

- ▶ Australia's Biggest Morning Tea (May 2025): Wallan staff raised funds for Cancer Council Australia with strong local support.

YOUTH ACTIVATING CALD VOICES:

Hayley's fellowship journey



In 2025, specialist youth worker Hayley Rowan was recognised as one of the Goulburn Valley's first-ever Community Fellows through the University of Melbourne's Social Equity Institute. The prestigious fellowship supports local practitioners to step outside the daily demands of frontline work, build research capacity, and design projects that strengthen communities.

Hayley's project, Activating CALD Youth Voices, is focused on improving how services engage with young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

"Last year, only 24 of the 600 young people we worked with identified as CALD. That tells us there are barriers to engagement, and that many young people simply don't access services at all." Hayley identified.

The project involves co-designed focus groups with CALD young people aged 18–25, gathering their perspectives on what works, what doesn't, and how services can change. These insights will inform a new community engagement model, to be shared through Shepparton Community Share and local networks, ensuring lasting impact beyond the life of the fellowship.

Hayley has already immersed herself in training and community learning, including trauma-informed practice for CALD communities, the 2025 Cultural Bus Tour, and regional research forums.

"The bus tour was amazing," she said. "It gave me a deeper understanding of the rich cultural and religious diversity in Shepparton – and highlighted just how much young people learn and connect through their own communities, like mosques, churches and cultural associations."

Balancing the fellowship with her housing support role has been challenging but rewarding. With strong backing from TBYS management, her caseload was adjusted to make space for this important work. "I feel really supported," Hayley said. "This is all in the best interest of young people and the organisation."

Her passion and proactive approach have already been noticed across the region. As CEO Melinda Lawley notes; "Hayley's fellowship represents exactly what we value at The Bridge – curiosity, courage, and connection. By listening to young people and amplifying voices that are too often unheard, this work has the potential to reshape how services engage with CALD youth across the Goulburn Valley."

FAMILY FOUNDATIONS:



Building stronger parenting teams

Welcoming a new baby reshapes family life, and for Rachel Fulton and Will Buckley, adjusting to life with two young children was made easier through participation in Family Foundations.



Backed by research from Pennsylvania State University and adapted for Australian families by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Family Foundations is designed to strengthen relationships during the critical early years of children's lives.

Delivered by The Bridge Youth Service and funded by Communities for Children, the program offers 10 sessions that equip parents and caregivers with practical skills to manage stress, communicate positively, and support each other through the ups and downs of raising young children.

Family Foundations extends TBYS's support beyond its youth demographic, embracing parents and caregivers of all ages, and reinforcing the organisation's holistic approach to building stronger, healthier families.

Rachel explains: "Two kids is hard and we've had to have some discussions. We've been able to use some of what we've learned to have our hard discussions."

Will adds, "The program teaches you to listen to your partner and then you talk – instead of trying to talk over each other."

Both parents also noted the benefits for their children, including more thoughtful approaches to discipline and reassurance about their toddler's development.

Accessibility is a key feature – sessions are free, flexible, and can be delivered at home or online.

Rachel praised the facilitators: "They come to our house, and they work around our schedules... they're just not judgmental. You can say anything, even if the baby is crying during an exercise."

Program Lead Stephen Hunter highlights the broader purpose: "Our mission is to help parents and caregivers strengthen their relationships as a parenting team, laying a solid foundation for raising children in a nurturing and happy environment. Research consistently shows that cooperative parenting leads to better outcomes for babies."

PREGNANCY + PARENTING PROGRAMS

Report from Linda King, Program Manager



153

Families, were supported through our Pregnancy + Parenting Programs throughout 2024-25

93 of these families were new referrals



Families across Shepparton, Wallan, and Seymour engaged in our Pregnancy and Parenting Programs, building trust and connection through practical support and care.

Our Young Parents Groups continued to provide peer connection and community, with 41 parents participating in Shepparton alone. Meanwhile, 21 young women were supported through ACEP, and 20 families were referred to Family Foundations, with 12 teams fully engaged.

Working closely with DFFH Family Services, our team provided targeted support through the Family Preservation and Reunification (FPR) response – ensuring that families experiencing significant vulnerability, including family violence (FV), were met with timely, trauma-informed interventions.

This included coordinated case management, safety planning, and parenting capacity building to strengthen family functioning and prevent out-of-home care.

The team embraced new therapeutic tools to enhance understanding and outcomes.

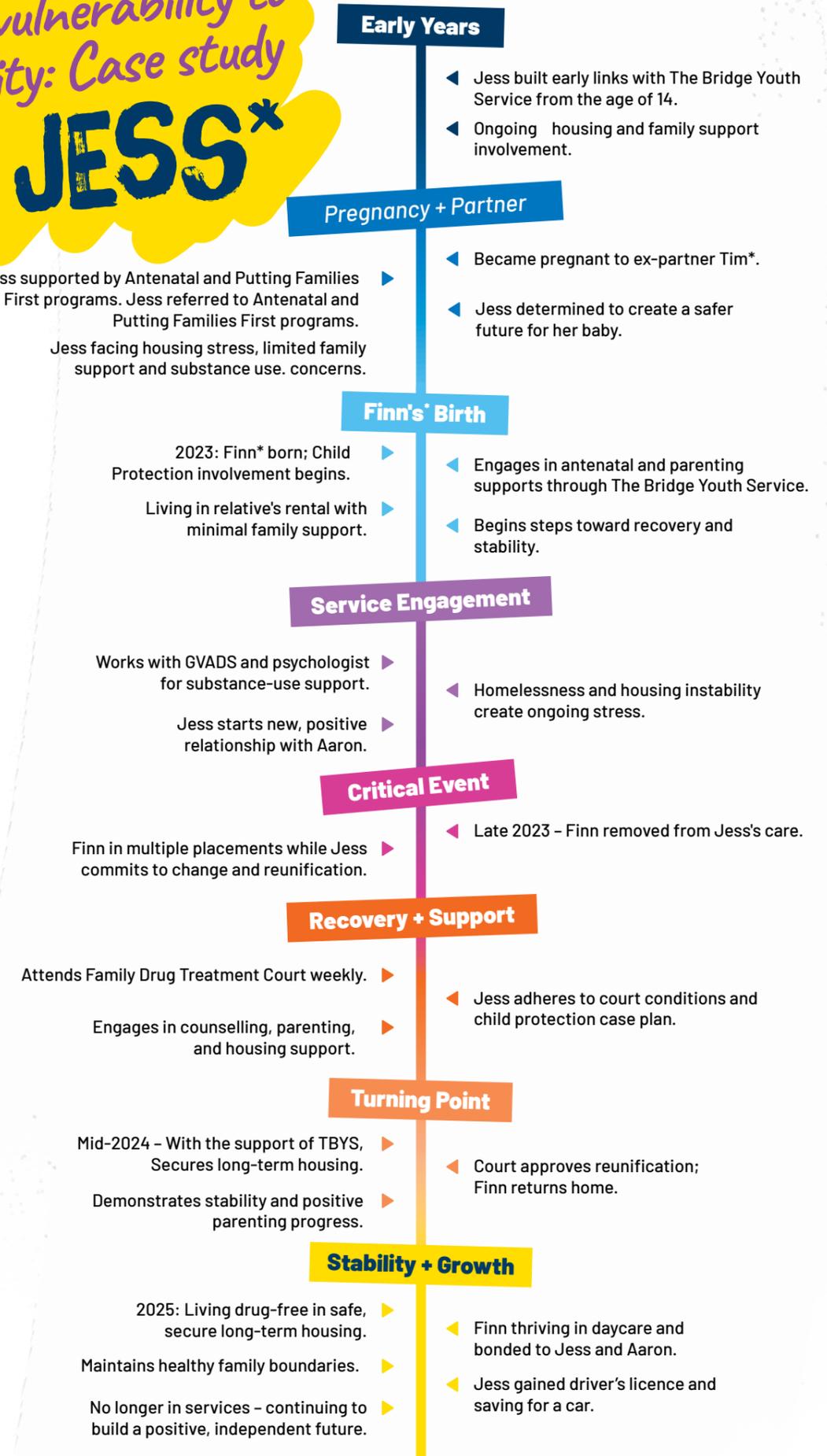
“Parents stay in touch years later, sending photos when their children start school or have birthdays. That shows the lasting relationships and trust we build,” - Linda, Program Manager

“This year, we introduced Therapeutic Assessment Reports and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire,” Linda said. “These complement our existing frameworks and allow us to build a more comprehensive picture of each family’s needs.”

Families consistently highlight the flexibility, non-judgment, and genuine care they receive.

From vulnerability to stability: Case study JESS*

Jess supported by Antenatal and Putting Families First programs. Jess referred to Antenatal and Putting Families First programs.
Jess facing housing stress, limited family support and substance use concerns.



*Names have been changed to protect privacy.

CHANGING THE STORY:



Breaking cycles, building futures

In January 2025, The Bridge Youth Service launched Changing the Story, a two-year pilot program supporting adolescent boys affected by family violence and at risk of using violence.



Funded through the Federal Government's Supporting Adolescent Boys trial, TBYS is one of only 12 organisations nationwide chosen to deliver this early intervention initiative.

By its official launch in April, the program was already changing lives. By June 30, 17 young people were engaged, and within months, demand quickly rose to 26 participants – reaching full capacity.

Each young person's journey is different, but the program provides tailored therapeutic and psychosocial interventions, including support with emotional regulation, respectful relationships, identity, family connection, education, and pathways into community.

CEO Melinda Lawley describes the program as "an unparalleled opportunity to intervene early and support young people in their recovery from violence. By addressing trauma before it manifests in harmful behaviours, we can help these boys build healthier relationships in adulthood."

The program is delivered in partnership with the Australian Childhood Foundation, bringing expertise in trauma-informed practice and strengthening TBYS's capacity to respond to complex needs.

Program delivery is guided by a holistic, youth-centred approach that ensures no young person is exited due to escalating behaviours – instead, they are met with consistent, safe support.

The urgency of this work is clear.

A TBYS snapshot survey revealed that 70% of young people accessing our services in a two-week period were impacted by family violence – across housing, school engagement, young parenting, and mental health supports.

Changing the Story addresses this need head-on, providing hope that cycles of violence can be disrupted.

As the program grows, its outcomes will not only impact individual lives but also contribute to national learnings about how best to intervene early with adolescent boys.

It is a powerful example of TBYS's leadership in delivering innovative, place-based solutions to some of the toughest challenges facing young people today.

"By addressing trauma before it manifests in harmful behaviours, we can help these boys build healthier relationships in adulthood."

- Melinda Lawley, CEO

From
YOUTH
AMBASSADOR
to
VOLUNTEER
of the
YEAR



When Lauren first walked through the doors of The Bridge Youth Service as a teenager in 2009, she was seeking support during a difficult time in her life.

Over the years, The Bridge became a constant source of connection – through antenatal care, housing support, and later as a young parent.

In 2019, Lauren became our very first Youth Ambassador, a role designed to elevate youth voice and lived experience in shaping services.

Her courage and openness set the tone for the program, which has since supported other young leaders.

Lauren has continued that legacy of leadership ever since.

As a volunteer, she has been at the heart of our Young Parents Group, where she leads activities, prepares food, provides transport, and shares her lived experience to encourage and guide other young parents.

"I just really love being part of the Young Parents Group," Lauren said. "It feels good to give back, because I know what it's like to be in that spot and need help."

Her passion for giving back extends into advocacy, including representing young families at a Victorian Parliament Youth Forum, where she helped bring key decision-makers to hear directly from young parents.

Her volunteering extends beyond The Bridge – from quietly helping at her children's school and sporting club, to lending a hand in the Mooroopna community during the floods, and even sewing items for GV Pregnancy Support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This year, Lauren's commitment was recognised when she was awarded Adult Volunteer of the Year at the Greater Shepparton Volunteer Recognition Awards.

It was a fitting honour for someone who has given so much of herself to her community.

2025 was also a year of personal joy for Lauren, as she welcomed her new baby, Lazarus – a little brother for Luna and Layne.

Looking back on her journey, Lauren reflects: "The Bridge has been there for me since I was a teenager. Now I feel like I can be there for other young people. It's like coming full circle."

Lauren's story is one of resilience, generosity, and growth. From her beginnings as a young mum needing support, to her role as our first Youth Ambassador, to being celebrated as Volunteer of the Year, she has shown the power of lived experience in shaping and strengthening community.

"For me it's about showing other young parents they're not alone. If I can share my story or even just make lunch and drive them in, it can make their day a bit easier,"
- Lauren explains.



2025 YOUTH AMBASSADOR

Molly McLeod

In 2025, The Bridge Youth Service proudly welcomed 16-year-old Molly McLeod as our Youth Ambassador. A passionate advocate for mental health and a small business owner, Molly brings lived experience, courage, and an inspiring voice to the role.

Molly first connected with TBYS through the Navigator Program after struggling with school attendance and mental health. She recalls her Specialist Youth Worker, Sarah, as a turning point: "Sarah made me feel like I wasn't crazy and what I was feeling was valid. Even though she was there to help me get back to school, she helped me see that school isn't everything."

That support became crucial when Molly received a diagnosis of BPD. "I was really scared and really confused because I didn't know what it was. Sarah really helped me understand it and talked me through it," she said.

With Sarah's encouragement — and the support of her mum, Lyndall — Molly made the difficult decision to leave school.

She then channelled her energy into new passions, launching her baking business, Daisy Chain Baking Co, while continuing to journal and paint.

She is also known for her love of ABBA and old films, and is proud to say she still listens to her mum's vinyl records.

For Molly, becoming Youth Ambassador is about giving back: "I feel very honoured to be able to be the Youth Ambassador and to help other people. No one should go through it alone — you guys really helped me, so I'd really love to be able to help you help other people."

Her role involves sharing insights, attending events, and ensuring that the voices of young people are heard in the design and delivery of services. As Sarah reflects:

"You have a whole organisation behind you now... You're able to feed that back to other young people and use your experience to help. It's validating that your story is amazing and worth sharing."



Molly sums up her journey best:

"I had this tiny shred of hope, and I hated that hope so much because I just wanted to die. But I thought, I can't let this happen to anyone else. I need to get through this, so one day I can help others. I don't want people to feel alone."

Led by Renae Brophy, the Youth and Family Support Team has embraced a year of transformation, creativity, and deep listening.

The launch of The Nest: Solid Foundations was a standout achievement, providing housing stability for three young women and their children.

For the families involved, it was life-changing: "It means everything. Stability. It's nice to have somewhere to come back to every day and not have to stress about where I'm going to go and what I'm going to do."

Renae reflects on the team's practice shift: "We introduced reflective practice this year, giving staff space to step back, think critically, and learn from their work. It's supported us to respond to the complex presentations of young people in our community."

The program's outcomes extend far beyond numbers — they're measured in stability, trust, and moments of joy.

As Renae said, "Our focus is always on what the young person actually wants, not just what other services or adults think they need. That makes a big difference in helping them feel heard and in control."

Looking ahead:

Renae is energised by the move into TBYS's new premises and the opportunities it brings: "We're excited about innovative, creative, holistic practice to support young people — always pushing the limits and fiercely advocating for their needs."

YOUTH + FAMILY SUPPORT

Report from Program Manager, Renae Brophy



A DAY in the LIFE



Specialist Youth Worker

Snapshot:

Name: Marie Camilleri
Program: Youth and Family Support
Date: Monday, August 11
Hours: 9:00 am – 5:00 pm
Locations: Wallan office; Beveridge
Total travel: Total travel: 24 km

Activities:

- ▶ Intake and assessments
- ▶ Outreach
- ▶ Advocacy referrals
- ▶ Administration
- ▶ Program planning
- ▶ Phone support



The day:

Marie's day began at the Wallan office with emails and prep for appointments. Her first outreach was a home visit in Beveridge, completing a STAR Assessment and exploring rental arrears solutions. Together, they discussed budgeting and direct debit options – a step toward financial independence.

Back at the office, Marie worked on case notes, referrals, and intake administration and reached out to young people recently allocated to her for support. The afternoon included a phone appointment with another young person. Despite Marie's efforts to provide information, advocate with their school, and offer youth group referral, the young person declined all supports. Marie finalised case notes, closed the referral respectfully, and ensured the referring organisation was updated. She also prepared an updated list of local supports for future use.

Most Meaningful Moment

The Beveridge home visit was a highlight. The young person's willingness to engage in conversations around budgeting and rental arrears, and their openness to exploring direct debit, demonstrated growth and motivation toward independence.

Challenges

Not every interaction results in engagement. For Marie, a key challenge was supporting a young person who declined all offered services. She ensured the closure process was handled with respect, leaving the door open for re-engagement when the time is right.

Reflections

Marie finished the day with mixed emotions: satisfaction at witnessing progress with one young person, tempered by the reminder that some young people may not yet be ready to accept support. As she notes, a recurring theme is the difficulty of engaging young people who don't yet see the value in available services.



HOUSING SUPPORT CASE STUDIES:

Finding peace and stability

A home of her own

For Ellie*, 21, and her two-year-old son Leo*, finally having a place to call home has been life-changing.

"Having my own space means everything. I've never had a stable house before, and all kids who don't have stability dream of having a house – that's all they want," Ellie said.

Her persistence paid off. "I emailed the housing register twice a week so they knew I was pushing to help myself. It put me on their radar."

Now, life feels calmer. "I feel a lot less anxious. It's relaxing and not stressful anymore," she explained.

Ellie is looking forward to creating special memories. "Having birthdays and Christmas in our own home – being able to have our own Christmas tree – that's what I'm excited about."

For Tahlia*, 23, having her own home means freedom from stress and uncertainty.

"Having my own space means stability and security. It's peaceful now – I'm not stressed, and nothing's fuzzy anymore," she said.

After years of trying to manage alone, Tahlia learned the power of asking for help. "My workers supported me with all the applications I couldn't manage. I realised it isn't so bad to ask for help."

She admits there were times she wanted to give up. "You get knocked back so many times and you think, what's the point? My advice is: don't give up."

Now, with secure housing, Tahlia is looking forward to routine, a job, a car, and saving for her own home.



Building a safer future

For Sophie*, finding safe housing meant escaping a cycle of family and relationship violence.

After leaving an unsafe relationship, she and her young daughter Juliet* were forced to move between relatives and temporary places, never knowing where they'd end up.

With the support of her youth worker, Sophie was able to secure transitional housing, later moving into a permanent public housing property. "I'll never forget when my worker organised a bed for me after mine was damaged. It meant the world – having someone who really understood and supported me," she said.

Today, Sophie is working close to full-time, financially stable, and able to plan for her future. Most importantly, she and Juliet are thriving in a safe and supportive home.

From crisis to confidence

When Chloe* left her partner, she suddenly found herself and her young son living in a caravan park, paying more than \$600 a week for a roof over their heads.

Overwhelmed, she was referred to The Bridge Youth Service, where her specialist youth worker helped her navigate the rental system and secure stable housing. "There's a lot more stability for me and my child now," Chloe said. "I can work properly, and my son is settled."

Alongside housing, she also received food, clothing, and vital support to connect with other services.

Now in secure accommodation and steady work, Chloe is optimistic about the future and grateful for the support of her specialist youth worker.

"She didn't just help with housing – she supported me with everything I needed at the time. She's one in a million."

NAVIGATOR PROGRAM



Report from Deb Pepper,
Program Manager - Wallan/Navigator

Deb reflects:

“Parents who once felt hopeless now describe Navigator as restoring that hope.”

Under the guidance of Program Manager Deb Pepper, the Department of Education's Navigator Program has continued to empower young people to reconnect with education and unlock their potential.

This year, the program supported 158 young people, reflecting the growing demand for tailored, compassionate intervention.

Deb describes 2024-25 as “a year of empowering young people to reconnect with education and reach their full potential”.

The program celebrates many success stories – from improved attendance and engagement to families regaining hope.

One powerful moment came when a young person, for the first time, felt safe enough to share their experiences in front of their mum, showing the deep trust built through the program.

The team strengthened its practice by refining templates, embedding professional development, and encouraging peer-to-peer coaching.



Deb explains:

“Peer-to-peer coaching and shadowing has allowed practitioners to learn from each other's experiences and approaches, fostering a sense of community and collaboration.”

This culture of support has improved outcomes for young people while also building practitioner confidence.

Families and young people consistently describe Navigator as “a bridge” between school and home – someone to listen, advocate, and walk alongside them.



EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAM

44

Young People were supported across our clinics

11

Engaged in Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) interventions

33

Received mental health support

The Early Intervention Program (EIP) continues to play a vital role at The Bridge Youth Service, offering targeted therapeutic support for young people experiencing mental health and alcohol and other drug (AOD) challenges.



Supporting young people in Mitchell and Murrindindi is never one-size-fits-all.

This year, the Early Intervention Program (EIP) continued meeting young people where they are – literally and figuratively – offering support in places they feel most comfortable, whether at home, school, or in the community.

Working across two large rural shires, EIP staff have gone the extra mile, travelling long distances to reach young people in smaller, often overlooked towns. Their dedication ensures consistent, quality support close to home.

Sessions blend creativity and therapy to make learning practical and engaging. Art-based tools such as Wreck-It Journals and vision boards help young people explore emotions, reflect on goals, and visualise change, while whiteboard calendars build structure, motivation, and a sense of achievement.

For Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) support, EIP provides education, harm-reduction strategies, and decision-making tools to help young people make safer choices. Integrated with broader mental health support, this holistic approach recognises the strong connection between emotional wellbeing and substance use.

EIP also strengthens communication, self-awareness, and coping skills, linking young people with community opportunities – including The Bridge's U-Krew program – to enhance connection and belonging. Partnerships with Murray PHN, Mental Health in Mind, and Warren Psychology ensure timely, effective support across the region.



Case Study:

Strength through support

"Useful, flexible and non-judgemental."

At 17, Grace* was facing challenges far beyond her years – daily substance use, family conflict, unsafe relationships and brushes with the law.

Referred to The Bridge's Early Intervention Program, she began working with a dedicated caseworker who helped her build a wider circle of support: a GP, detox and mental health services, youth advocacy groups, and employment and driving programs.

From the outset, Grace set herself clear goals – to stop using methamphetamine, reduce cannabis, return to school, find a job, and get her licence.

With flexible, non-judgemental

support, she began to turn her life around.

The results speak for themselves. Grace completed detox, reduced cannabis use, re-enrolled in education, secured part-time work, addressed legal issues, and improved relationships with her family.

She also gained the confidence to move into independent living.

Reflecting on her experience, Grace said the program was "useful, flexible and non-judgemental" and described the workers as "the best I've engaged with."

Today, Grace is focused on recovery, education and employment – and has a clear plan for her future.

*Names have been changed to protect privacy.

U-KREW2

Building skills, confidence and community in Wallan

In Term 2, 2025 we proudly launched U-Krew2, an engaging after-school program for young people aged 12-17 in the Mitchell Shire.

Delivered in Wallan, U-Krew2 is designed to equip young people with practical life skills, boost emotional wellbeing, and foster meaningful community connections.

Each week, participants took part in group sessions, mentoring and workshops focused on leadership, teamwork, emotional regulation, and career readiness.

Guided by local mentors and community leaders, young people rolled up their sleeves with hands-on activities including cooking, art, sports, and community projects – each one sparking confidence, resilience, and a sense of belonging.

The program also embedded evidence-based approaches such as the ERIC model (Emotional Regulation and Impulse Control) and PACE principles (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, and empathy).

These frameworks supported participants in developing essential interpersonal and vocational skills, while creating a safe space for self-expression and growth.

With Wallan's youth population projected to triple by 2039, U-Krew2 responds directly to the urgent need for inclusive and preventative programs that address mental health, social isolation, and disengagement from education.

22

Participants

Referrals

16 through word of mouth across four suburbs

6 from external services

20 female

6 male

Engagement

13-16 regular weekly attendees



A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP in youth services

Our History: 1996-2025

The Bridge was officially established in 1995 at 11 Edwards St, Shepparton. Following the closure of the Youth Health Service in 1991, the Shepparton Central Rotary Club made a significant commitment to raise funds toward a new youth service – The Bridge – designed as a central access point for advice, programs and information to support the health and wellbeing of young people.

At that time, the youth-specific Goulburn Accommodation Program Inc (GAP) was also based at the same site. Originally established in 1986 as a "Youth House" by a group of volunteers, GAP had grown by 1995 into a formal housing service with 10 staff and management of several youth-specific rental properties.

Though operating as separate organisations, both shared a clear focus on supporting young people. Recognising the value of collaboration and the need for strong service infrastructure, the two agencies merged in 1999 – forming the foundation of the organisation we know today.

Key community leaders were instrumental in shaping and sustaining the organisation in its early years, ensuring its success in attracting and maintaining funding. Among them were John Corboy OAM (SPC, GV Foundation), Jim Andreadis (MOVE Shepparton, Foodshare, philanthropist and property developer), and other local leaders including Lisa Bourke (Melbourne University), Leigh Rhode (Gibson), and representatives from Goulburn Valley Health, who helped establish the inaugural Board of Management.

Throughout its history, The Bridge's Board has continually explored and evaluated ways to strengthen youth support. Minutes from 25 years ago record discussions about possible amalgamations with Berry Street and Uniting Kildonan Youth Services – decisions that ultimately reaffirmed The Bridge's commitment to remain independent. We are deeply grateful that they did.

In the years that followed, the organisation transitioned from uncertain, short-term funding to more stable recurrent funding from the Department of Human Services (now the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing). This stability allowed The Bridge to grow and broaden its scope.

By 2004, the Board identified an emerging gap in services for young expectant mothers and parents – a focus that has since become one of our defining strengths.

We extend our sincere thanks to the dedicated individuals who have volunteered their time and expertise to guide the organisation during the past three decades.

Leadership over the years:

Pre-1996

Goulburn Accommodation Program (GAP) – Marina Klooster

Sexton, Peter Bourke, Leigh Gibson, Andrew Fox, Nicole Cavallaro, Michelle McCracken, Audrey Ash, Alan Lindsay, Charlotte Brewer, Andrew Fox, Katrina Hinchcliffe (T)

1996-2005

President: Ken Gaal
Board Members: John Corboy, Jim Andreadis, Rob Poole, Rob Crow (T), Leigh Gibson, Tammy Lovett, Allan Lindsay, Martin Hull, Helen Phillips, Lisa Bourke
Managing Director: Rick Harrison (1998-2004)

CEOs: Graeme Parish (2004-2013), Sharon Hensgen-Smith (2013-2015)

2005-2015

President: Helen Phillips
Board Members: Nancy Collins, Alan Lindsay, Michelle Vowles (T), Ann

2015-2024

Presidents: Charlotte Brewer, Georgia Linton
Board Members: Helen Phillips, Helen West, Mark Rumble, Felicity Dalle Nogare, Anne Ryan, Josh and Mel Doxey
CEO: Melinda Lawley

30 YEARS of IMPACT

1995-1996

Amalgamation of the Goulburn Accommodation Program and The Bridge Youth Service.

Early focus on housing support, youth outreach, and family services.



1997-1998

Expansion of services into Seymour and regional towns. Strong emphasis on homelessness support, adolescent programs, and family mediation.



2000-2001

Programs broadened into education, parenting, and health supports. Steady growth in staff and community partnerships.



2004-2005

Revamp Used Stuff Op Shop launched as TBYS's major fundraising arm, led by Sandy and Bob Coles. Provided vital funding for programs and facilities, while also creating youth volunteer opportunities.



2007-2008

Antenatal Care & Education Program recognised by the Victorian Department of Human Services as a model of best practice.

Minister for Youth Affairs, James Merlino, visited TBYS and announced funding for the Young Parents Mentoring Program.

"To Be a Young Mum" resource booklets launched, with over 5,000 copies distributed.

Jam-It Program grew, supporting young musicians in competitions and live performances.

2009-2010

Applied and achieved accreditation of services through QICSA (Quality Improvement and Community Services Accreditation).

Significant growth in youth services across housing, family, and parenting.

Stronger focus on strengths-based practice embedded across programs.



Moira Shire

Shepparton
Greater Shepparton

Strathbogie Shire

Seymour

Mitchell Shire

Murrindindi Shire

2011-2013

Introduction of new therapeutic interventions for young parents and family support.

Continued expansion of services across the Goulburn Valley, Mitchell, Murrindindi, Strathbogie and Moira Shires.

2014-2015

Service numbers reached 1,000+ young people supported annually.

Strong partnerships developed across health, education, and community agencies.

2016-2017

Navigator Program launched to re-engage young people in education.

Research confirmed 50% of young people supported had experienced family violence - led to TBYS's first Family Violence Specialist role.

Step Up Program began, addressing adolescents using violence in the home.



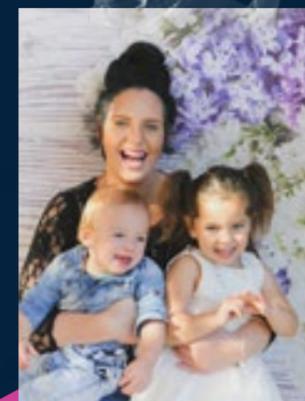
2018-2019

Over 1200 young people engaged in services with more than 260 supported with housing across the Goulburn region.

Revamp Op Shop closed after 16 years, having raised over \$930,000 to support TBYS.

Growth of antenatal and parenting programs, with 54 young parents supported.

The Youth Ambassador program began.



CELEBRATING 30 YEARS PROVIDING OPTIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

30 YEARS

2020-2021

Services adapted rapidly to COVID-19 pandemic disruptions, ensuring continued support through remote engagement.



2021-2022

Stronger focus on mental health and family services post-pandemic. Introduction of psychologist on staff to increase access to mental health services for young people. Strategic partnerships expanded in schools and local communities.



2022-2023

Wallan service delivery growth

Wallan expanded youth outreach

Strategic Plan 2021-2024 implementation

2023-2025



First dedicated housing for young mothers, The Nest: Solid Foundations, launched.

Focus on youth voice and co-design across programs.

From TINY BEGINNINGS to TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE



30 years of parenting support at The Bridge

In 1995, when The Bridge Youth Service was still finding its feet, the idea of running specialist programs for young mums was little more than a compassionate instinct.

Staff saw young women arriving in crisis – pregnant, parenting, and often without a safe place to turn. So, they did what The Bridge does best – they listened, responded, and built something from the ground up.

In 2007, with teenage pregnancy rates among the highest in the state, the Board made a deliberate decision to strengthen this response, investing in dedicated Pregnancy and Parenting Programs to provide targeted support for young parents across the region.

Thirty years later, that early instinct has grown into one of regional Victoria's most respected and impactful programs, helping hundreds of young people each year to become the parents they aspire to be.

From quiet support to recognised innovation

The earliest support offered to young parents was informal but deeply personal – youth workers helping young women navigate housing, health care and schooling, all while learning to care for a newborn. By the early 2000s, The Bridge had formalised its Young Pregnant and Parenting Program, establishing a small but committed team that walked alongside young mums through the messy, magical, sometimes overwhelming early years of parenthood.

Those early efforts soon blossomed into structured, collaborative programs. The Antenatal Care and Education Program, delivered in close partnership with Goulburn Valley Health's Midwifery Unit, became a standout. It brought together midwives, social workers and maternal health nurses to ensure that pregnant young women weren't just medically supported – they were emotionally prepared, connected, and empowered.

In 2007, this program was recognised as a Department of Human Services best-practice model and featured in a statewide health equity compendium. It was a major milestone – not just for The Bridge, but for the young parents whose voices had shaped it.

Evolving programs for evolving needs

Over time, the needs of young families grew more complex – and so did the responses.

The Cradle to Kinder program was a game-changer. A four-year wraparound initiative for vulnerable young parents, it connected housing, health, education and parenting support from pregnancy right through to school readiness. In later years, it expanded to include a culturally safe Aboriginal stream, ensuring tailored support for young First Nations families.

The Supporting Young Parents Program, the Future Parenting Program, and the Young Parents Mentoring Program all offered different entry points for young mums and dads – whether they were looking for peer support, parenting education, or simply someone who understood.

One particularly successful initiative was the creation of regional programs, especially in Seymour and Wallan, where parenting groups offered a lifeline to isolated young families. A lack of transport, service mistrust, and previous trauma often kept young parents out of the system – but The Bridge found ways to bring the system to them.



Jenny Cook



Linda King

The people behind the programs

Ask anyone at The Bridge who's been at the heart of this journey, and two names rise to the top: Jenny Cook and Linda King.

Jenny Cook, now Executive Manager of Youth and Family Services, has been a steady, compassionate presence through decades of change. Her leadership has seen the service through the birth of new programs, staff transitions, and hundreds of powerful parenting stories. Whether co-facilitating an antenatal class, mentoring a new worker, or simply greeting a parent by name, Jenny's impact has been both strategic and deeply human.

Linda King, Manager of Youth and Family Services, has likewise played a pivotal role in shaping the service's trauma-informed, family-focused direction. Her ability to combine big-picture thinking with grounded relationships has ensured that programs not only grow – they work.

Together, they've helped raise a generation of staff who share the same values: trust, respect, and the belief that young parents deserve the same opportunities as anyone else.



"I didn't know how to do this alone. At The Bridge, I never had to."

What young parents say

The most powerful endorsement of this work comes not from awards or outcomes data – but from the parents themselves.

"It felt like someone finally believed in me," one young mum shared.

Parents have described the programs as "life-changing," "non-judgemental," and "like a second family." They've gone on to finish school, find work, reconnect with culture, or simply enjoy parenting without fear.



A place to call home: The Nest

In 2021, the vision of long-term, holistic support took a literal form: The Nest – a dedicated housing project for young mothers in partnership with Women's Property Initiatives and the Property Industry Foundation.

By 2024, three purpose-built homes were under construction in Mooroopna, ready to provide not just safe accommodation, but on-site wraparound support from The Bridge's parenting team. The Nest embodies what the service has always believed: when young parents are safe, supported and housed, everything else becomes possible.

A legacy to celebrate

In 2023-24 alone, The Bridge supported over 180 young parents. But the legacy spans far beyond numbers. It's in the toddlers learning to walk on playgroup mats. In the mums who graduate school with a baby on their hip. In the dads who return to Centrelink with confidence, knowing their rights. And in the staff who keep showing up, again and again, to offer connection, education and care.

After three decades, The Bridge's parenting programs remain what they've always been at heart – a place where young people are seen not as problems to be fixed, but as parents with potential.

Celebrating 20 YEARS OF DEDICATION

Jenny's journey at The Bridge

For the past 20 years, Jenny Cook has been a quiet yet powerful force within the community, working with unwavering passion and dedication at The Bridge Youth Service.



Her journey has spanned many areas of nursing, from orthopaedics to paediatrics, emergency care, and community health.

But it was her work with young people that truly captured her heart.

"I started nursing when I was 18. After I completed my grad year, I specialised in orthopaedics and then gynaecology. I had my four children (in quick succession!) and went to Rumbalara, I worked in the health clinic and undertook further study to become an immunisation practitioner, asthma educator and sexual health nurse," Jenny said, reflecting on the varied paths her career has taken.

For 10 years, Jenny worked as a community health nurse for Rumbalara, where she honed her skills in a variety of settings. But her passion for working with young people led her to The Bridge.

The opportunity to be involved in program development and to reach young people in a deeper, more personal way was something she found exciting.

"I wanted to work with young people specifically and to be part of the program development," Jenny

said. "It was a very medical model at Rumba and that was flexible because it was community health, but to really take that to the next step, I wanted to be out in the community. You know, being in their homes, developing the parenting program."

After a decade at Rumbalara, moving to The Bridge felt like a natural progression.

"It made sense to come to The Bridge to work with a more specific age group, but still diverse," Jenny said.

Her role has evolved from working in community health to having the opportunity to influence program design, something that excites her greatly.

"I love program design. Working with teams to create a program and sustain it too, like with ongoing funding," she said. "The Bridge has, and continues to give me, the opportunity to learn so much more about other areas and to be involved in program development and design."

Jenny has always had a love for child development and antenatal care, but her passion for learning means she embraces all aspects of her work.

"I'm passionate about everything," Jenny said. "So that was probably my core set of study and skills."

Her passion has played a pivotal role in helping to shape the growth of The Bridge over the years. When Jenny started, the team was small, with just six staff members. Now, 20 years later, the team has grown to 53, and the programs have expanded far beyond what Jenny could have imagined when she first arrived.

"We've had a massive expansion of program areas beyond what I ever dreamed when I started," she said. "We just had the parenting group and then that was all the parenting team was, me and a social worker one day a week doing parenting group... I've been able to have all these ideas and thoughts, and I've had the opportunity to progress them."

Jenny's journey has not been without its challenges, but she finds strength in the collaborative spirit of The Bridge and the relationships she's built over time. Her

I've had a vision, but I've been supported to build on it. And I still am, and that is why I stay here – it's just so dynamic."

work has helped elevate youth work as a specialist field, gaining much-needed respect locally and statewide.

"Yeah, I couldn't begin to name them all there's been quite a few," Jenny said when asked about mentors. "There has been a lot of collaboration over that time and that was one of my goals. To really build up our profile and our collaboration and our respect of our expertise. That's what's driven me – I wanted them to see the expertise of youth work and see that we're a specialised area. I think we are really there now."

Jenny's leadership and impact on The Bridge and the community are most evident in moments of unity and achievement. One of her proudest and saddest moments came when the staff banded together to support each other after the loss of a team member.

"There was one time when one of our staff members passed away and we all pulled together and supported each other," she said. "We were just, you know, that was a really proud moment to think, you know, we're such a united team."

Another moment that stands out for Jenny is the creation of The Nest.

"Building The Nest. Like, that's real... that was a dream. I'm so proud and excited about that."

Her work with youth, and her personal commitment to supporting marginalised communities, have been key drivers throughout her career.

In addition to her work at The Bridge, Jenny is also the chair of ConnectGV, an organisation focused on disability services. She has been involved with them for 10 years and is deeply passionate about supporting the disability community.

Jenny's passion for diversity is deeply personal as well. She has four children with husband Darren and their family reflects the diverse communities she is so passionate about supporting.

"I'm just a very passionate person, I think that stems from our family and because we're so diverse," she said. "My son, who has Down syndrome, has taught me so much about inclusion and resilience,

his journey has inspired my dedication to disability advocacy. Another of my son's partner is Indigenous, and I'm just so proud of that. And my daughter is gay – I'm passionate about all the diversity that my family brings."

As Jenny reflects on her 20 years at The Bridge, she looks forward to the future with the same excitement and dedication that has defined her career.

"I think the profile (of youth work) has finally been acknowledged as a specialist area," she said. "That's what I'm really happy about. And the qualifications and the opportunities and the respect locally and statewide."

Outside of work, Jenny enjoys simple pleasures like chocolate ice cream, coffee (until lunchtime, of course), and spending time in her garden during her favourite season, Autumn. She also has a love for travel, with Morocco topping her dream holiday destination list – "it felt like I was in a fairy tale. Riding camels and camping in the Sahara, snake charmers in the square" – and enjoys a good James Bond movie or binge-watching English crime shows.

Looking ahead, Jenny is eager to continue making an impact, hoping to add a fourth TBYS office to her list of locations next year.

It's clear that Jenny's passion for her work, her community, and her family continues to drive her forward – and there's no telling where her journey will take her next.

Jenny, thank you for your dedication, passion, and the positive influence you've had on so many lives. Here's to many more years of inspiring work at The Bridge.

Human impact

+ legacy

- ✓ **Team Leadership:** Brought staff together through challenges, including supporting each other after the loss of a colleague.
- ✓ **The Nest:** Turned a dream into reality, creating a safe and supportive space for young people.
- ✓ **Inclusion Champion:** Advocates for diversity inspired by her own family's journey (disability, Indigenous identity, LGBTQ+ pride).
- ✓ **Mentorship & Collaboration:** Built strong partnerships and elevated the profile of youth work locally and statewide.
- ✓ **Resilience & Dedication:** Balances professional impact with personal challenges, always guided by passion and compassion.

30 YEARS OF HOUSING SUPPORT at The Bridge



Looking ahead:

As The Bridge celebrates 30 years, housing continues to define our mission.

From crisis beds to tenancy support, from youth-led peer housing models to wraparound services like The Nest, we know that safe, stable housing is the bedrock of resilience.

Over three decades, thousands of young people have walked through our doors with nowhere else to go – and found not only shelter, but also the chance to rebuild their futures.



With the implementation of the Opening Doors framework in 2010, The Bridge became a recognised Entry Point for young people at risk of homelessness across the Hume region. This formalised our role as the “front door” into housing and homelessness support, ensuring young people were triaged quickly and connected to the right services.

Program managers consistently reflected on housing as the “anchor point” of our support.

As one manager noted:

“Housing is the foundation – once a young person has a safe place to sleep, everything else becomes possible: school, work, healing and connection.”

Services ranged from crisis accommodation to tenancy sustainment and life skills education.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the fragility of housing for many young people. The Bridge adapted services to remote engagement, but also advocated strongly for housing and homelessness supports as essential services.

The Goulburn Accommodation Program Inc amalgamated with youth service The Bridge to become The Bridge Youth Service. TBYS was born out of a community commitment to provide safe housing and crisis support for vulnerable young people in the Goulburn Valley.

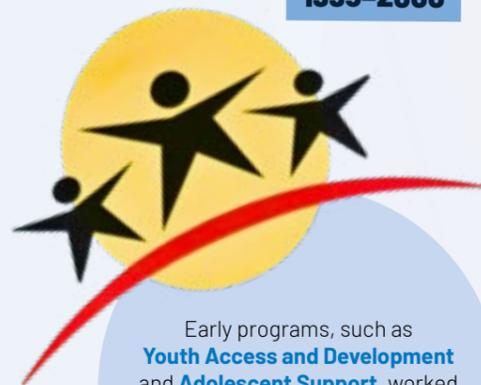
By 2005, The Bridge was directly supporting more than 700 young people annually, with homelessness services making up the largest proportion of contacts.

The 2000s saw a consolidation of housing services across Shepparton and Seymour.



Laying the Foundations

1995–2000



Early programs, such as **Youth Access and Development** and **Adolescent Support**, worked to address homelessness and housing insecurity, offering meals, emergency accommodation, and case management.

Within the first two years, hundreds of young people had accessed support, many reporting that for the first time they felt safe and heard.

Expanding models

2000–2010

The **Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)** was a mainstay, providing both individual case management and family reconciliation supports.



Innovative models emerged, including **Adolescent Community Placement (ACP)** – a foster-style model of care that offered stability outside traditional housing options – and **lead tenant ventures in Seymour**, where young people could develop independent living skills with the support of mentors.

In 2008, a partnership with Rural Housing Network Limited produced a tenancy rights and responsibilities manual, empowering young people to succeed in their housing arrangements.

Strengthening practice

2010–2020



By 2017, the **STAR Housing program** was established, supporting **93 young people in one year** alone.

A growing proportion of referrals were **self-referrals (around 30%)**, demonstrating that young people saw The Bridge as a trusted place to turn when housing was unstable.

Responding to new pressures

2020–2025



The **Step Up program** (2016–) and later **Changing the Story** (2025–) have complemented housing work by addressing family violence and adolescent behaviours that often underpin housing instability.

In 2023–24, **more than 260 young people were supported with housing** and tenancy, ranging from crisis accommodation to transitional and long-term support.

Today, youth housing remains at the core of The Bridge.

Specialist youth worker Hayley Rowan, reflecting on her Community Fellowship project with the University of Melbourne, spoke to the ongoing challenge:

“For many culturally diverse young people, housing isn’t just about a roof – it’s about feeling welcome, safe, and seen. Our role is to create spaces where they can belong, while advocating for systems that work for them.”

2024-2025 STATISTICS

School + Education Support



DET Navigator Program
157 new referrals

Early Intervention

Early Intervention Program (EIP)

Seymour Clinic (Feb-Jun 2025):

9 initial assessments
26 follow-ups

Wallan Clinic (year total):

6 initial assessments
60 follow-ups
11 young people supported in AOD

33 supported in Mental Health



'I'm Here' Program

66 students
5 schools
98 sessions delivered

Housing + Family Support



Adolescent Support & Finding Solutions

145 young people supported

8 Targeted Care Packages delivered

\$21,220.28 in HEF funds spent



Pregnancy, Parenting + Family Services

Young Parents Program

Wallan / Seymour:

16 new families referred
11 individual families attended

Shepparton

34 new families referred
34 individual families attended
41 individual parents attended

21

young pregnant women supported by ACEP

Family Foundations

20 referrals (Parenting Teams)

12 parenting teams engaged and commenced program



404

young people supported with Transitional Youth Support/Supporting Young Parents in Housing

19

young people supported to reconcile family relationships

Families Supported (DFFH funded programs)

153 families supported
93 new referrals

57

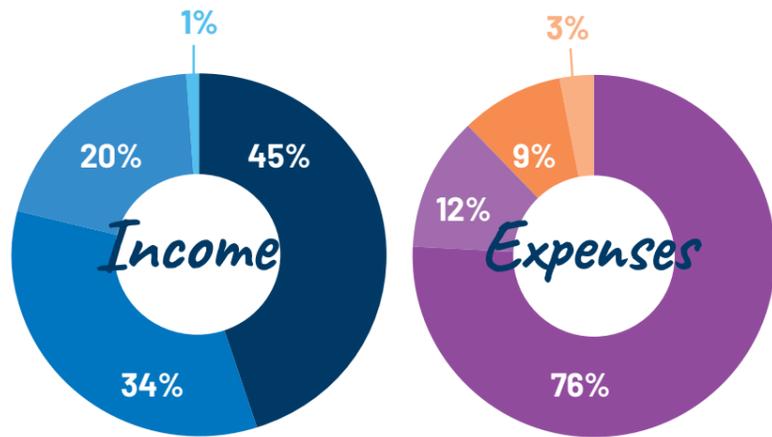
young people utilised STAR Housing Assistance

Thank you to our funders!



INCOME + EXPENDITURE

\$2,677,871	DFFH Funding
\$2,043,323	Other Government Funding
\$1,226,041	Other Non-Government Funding
\$8,968	Other Income
\$5,956,203	Total
\$4,594,419	Employee Benefit Expenses
\$695,570	Operating Costs
\$548,622	Holistic Support for Young People
\$156,183	Depreciation & Amortisation
\$5,994,795	Total Expenses
\$38,592	Total Surplus (deficit)

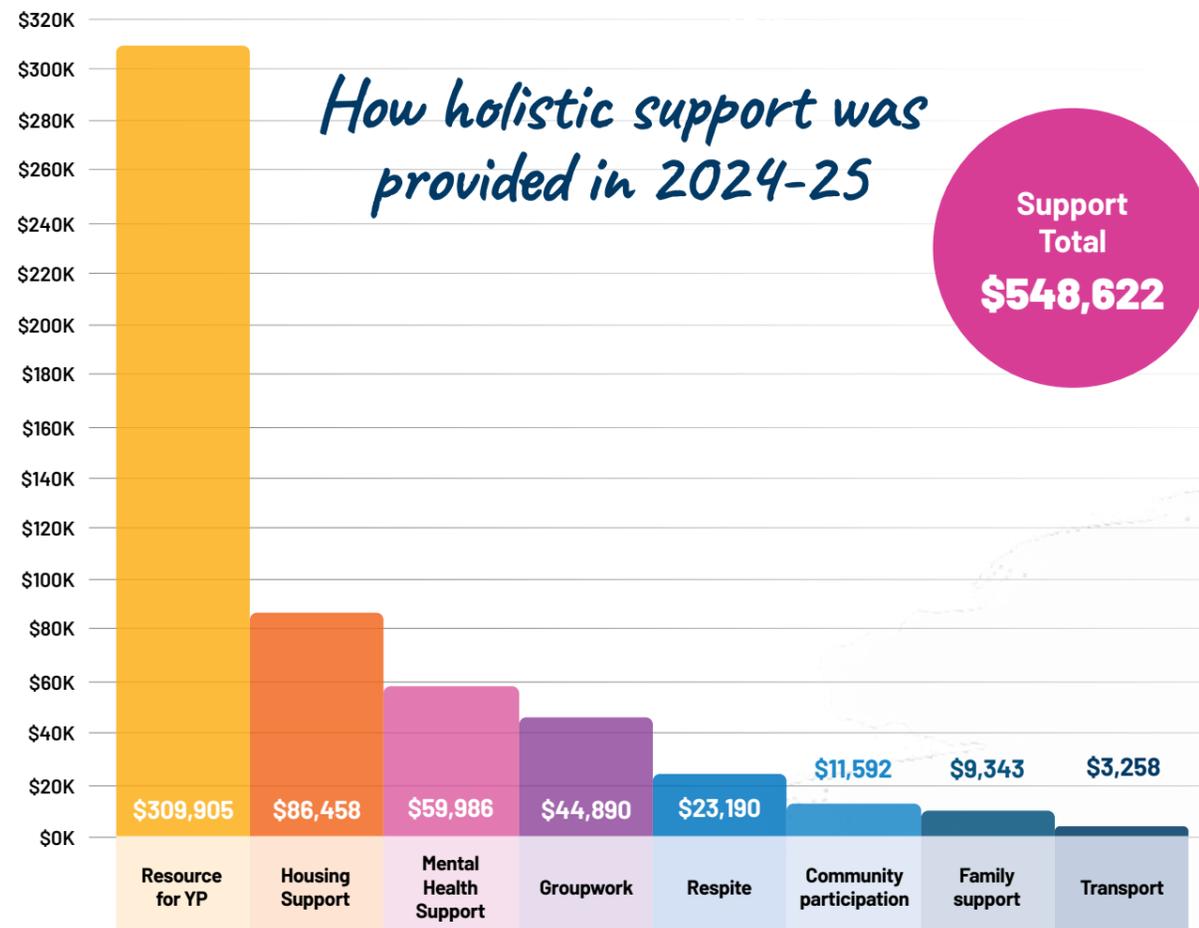


TBYS STAFF ROLL CALL

Alexandra Wynan
 Alison Cardwell
 Amanda Lagudi
 Amber Kelsey
 Angela Barry
 Ayden Graham
 Brian Howley
 Brianna Gadsden
 Brianna Murphy
 Caitlin Kirby
 Caroline Tracy
 Celisha Earl
 Claire Block
 Clara Pizzorno
 Cora Bourke
 Deborah Pepper
 Diane Aldous

Dianne Giddens
 Ebonie Johns
 Hannah Jensen
 Hayley Rowan
 Helen Jeram
 Hope Hamilton
 Jenny Cook
 Julie Batey
 Karli Wood
 Kristy Mathewson
 Kylee Alford
 Leigh Nash
 Linda King
 Marie Camilleri
 Melanie Wilson
 Melinda Lawley
 Melony Brown

Moana Perkins
 Nicole Thornton
 Rebecca Slade
 Renae Brophy
 Ros Cullen
 Samantha Mazzon
 Sarah Dunkley
 Shania Toy
 Shannen Jenkins
 Shona Suthendran
 Stacey Dalziel
 Steph Guerra
 Stephen Hunter
 Sue De Boer
 Vicky Vourgalis



CURRENT BOARD MEMBERS

President: Nathan Quinlan
Board Members: Brett O'Keeffe, Ian Michaelson, Alan Mitchell, Gemma

Parkinson, Merrin Tonks, Julie Marshall, Claire Thompson (Dann)(T)
CEO: Melinda Lawley



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119 Wellington St, Wallan



ACCREDITED

