

Help for
the journey

Relationships Australia

VICTORIA

PO BOX 8656, Armadale VIC 3143

Telephone: (03) 8573-2222

Fax: (03) 9822-4584

Website: www.relationshipsvictoria.com.au

ABN: 51 263 215 677



Relationships Australia
VICTORIA

Annual Report
2008/09

Travelling in a positive direction

President's foreword



Judi Anderson

After three consecutive years of significant growth and change, the 2008/09 financial year was one of consolidation.

A highlight was the organisation's 60th anniversary, which

we celebrated at a reception in our honour at Government House in October 2008, hosted by Professor David de Kretser, AC, Governor of Victoria, and Mrs de Kretser.

Reaching our diamond jubilee as a strong and leading provider of relationship support services is a testament to our capacity to move with the times, embrace change and remain relevant.

Well placed to respond

The Board reviewed the strategic priorities of Relationship Australia Victoria (RAV) to ensure we are well placed to respond to new challenges and opportunities.

We endorsed a three-year technology infrastructure program to improve our internal systems for the benefit of clients and staff.

A key project came to fruition in December 2008, when we launched our new website, which will become the platform for e-learning and other online services.

The Board also established a Practice Quality Committee to ensure RAV remains at the forefront in practice delivery.

Exceptional contribution

At the end of 2008, we farewelled long-serving colleague, Ken Heyward, who retired from the Board after 20 years' outstanding and loyal service, including 18 years as President from 1990 to 2007.

Under Ken's leadership, RAV grew from a relatively small and cosy organisation, specialising in counselling, to one that is now a leader in the sector.

On behalf of my colleagues, I thank Ken for his exceptional contribution, and wish him a productive and satisfying retirement.

New Board members

The Board welcomed three new members – Lyn Brodie, Peter Boehm and John Lovell – whose strong marketing, business and IT skills have added depth to our deliberations.

Unwavering focus

My thanks to all Board members for their continuing commitment and support. I also commend CEO, Michael Hunt, the senior management team and RAV staff for their unwavering focus on the needs and wellbeing of our clients.

Judi Anderson, President

Moving ahead with confidence

CEO's report



Michael Hunt

RAV ended the year on a very positive note, with the Australian Government confirming continued funding for our family relationship, drought counselling and Early Intervention Services (EIS), and

our Family Relationship Centre (FRC) operations at Berwick, Greensborough and Sunshine.

Our success in achieving full compliance in the quality audit conducted by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) during the year, contributed to this very pleasing outcome.

This vital funding commitment from the Government has reaffirmed the ability of RAV and our partners to deliver a high level of support and assistance to Victorians in need.

Continued growth and increased complexity

The total number of clients grew to just under 19,000 during 2008/09, an increase of 14.6% on the previous financial year.

The increase was largely attributable to the opening of our fourth FRC in Melbourne.

Our clients' needs have become increasingly complex, more often involving mental health and family violence issues requiring a case management type approach.

Our staff members have responded well to these challenges, supported by specialist practice leaders in counselling, family violence, family dispute resolution and FRCs.

Expanded community involvement

As you will read in this report, we expanded our community involvement program to include support for Gippsland residents affected by summer's devastating bushfires.

In the immediate aftermath of the Black Saturday tragedy, our Traralgon Centre staff provided free counselling to new and existing clients.

Since then, the Centre has worked closely with other service providers and community agencies in a range of ways to contribute to the region's recovery.

Major training contract

Training Ground, RAV's professional training arm, was part of the Australian FDR Training Group consortium, which won the National Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner Accreditation and Training contract.

Being awarded the winning tender demonstrated the quality of RAV's professional training services, and reinforced our commitment to being a leader in this field.

A confident future

Along with the senior management team, I greatly appreciated the ongoing support from President Judi Anderson, and other Board members.

I also wish to thank all RAV staff for their valuable contribution throughout the year.

With confirmed funding for our operations, a dedicated team of qualified and committed staff, and excellent partnerships with other agencies, we can look to the future with confidence.

Michael Hunt, Chief Executive Officer

Another year of progress

Demand remained strong throughout 2008/09 for the range of services provided by RAV's eight client centres in Melbourne and regional Victoria.

During the year, RAV assisted more than 15,000 clients at these centres, a slight increase on the previous financial year.

Move to new location

The former Narre Warren Centre was relocated to Cranbourne in December 2008, after moving from temporary premises at Springvale.

The new Cranbourne Centre has continued to provide quality relationship services to residents of the southeast suburbs from its new permanent location in High Street, Cranbourne.

Services extended

RAV improved access to counselling for residents in Melbourne's greater northern suburbs region.

In April 2009, the Greensborough Centre extended counselling to the Whittlesea area through an outreach service operating two days a week.

Pilot program for women at risk

The Sunshine Centre participated in the pilot Family Violence High Risk Strategy, which adopts an integrated, multidisciplinary approach, designed to minimise the risk of future violence, and to maximise the safety of women and children.

The pilot requires an integrated coordination and response conference to address the specific needs of

women and children at serious risk of physical harm. Other agencies involved in the pilot include Victoria Police and Women's Health West.

Help for problem gamblers

Gambler's Help, run from our Ballarat Centre, adopted a new service-delivery model during 2008/09.

This involved developing a portfolio of services that recognise the importance of a 'one-door' approach for those affected by their own or someone else's gambling behaviour.

This approach also supports and recognises the importance of a primary therapeutic relationship by offering case consultation and co-counselling to provide the best possible client care and outcomes.

Partnerships are being formed with agencies including Child and Family Services and Centacare to continue this initiative.

An integral component of the new model is provider education to ensure counsellors and allied health workers are aware of the changes.

In addition to providing counselling services for problem gamblers, the Ballarat Centre participated in awareness-raising initiatives in the Grampians region.

In partnership with the Central Highlands Community Legal Centre, it produced an innovative desk calendar to raise awareness in the legal community about problem gambling.

The project was funded by the Department of Justice.

The Gambler's Help team also took part in Responsible Gambling Awareness Week, a joint, state-wide initiative between state and local governments, the gaming industry and the community sector.

Art leads to shared stories in Shepparton

The Shepparton Centre sponsored the popular 'Women Talking - expression through creativity' program, presented in conjunction with the Shepparton Art Gallery.

The program gave women from different cultures an opportunity to get together while completing art projects at the local TAFE College.

The mainly Sudanese and Congolese women were able to improve their English skills as they shared their stories and experiences with other women from the community. The art they created provides a poignant window into their lives.

Early intervention makes a difference

Early Intervention Services (EIS) were run from a number of centres including Ballarat, Greensborough, Sunshine and Traralgon.

The Traralgon Centre, which is lead agency for Gippsland EIS, developed a 'Making Relationships

Work' program, adapted to different target groups.

Many parents attended the 'Breakthrough' and 'Groundwork' EIS programs offered by the Sunshine Centre. These programs look at ways of resolving conflict, and parenting in the best way possible following separation. 'Groundwork' also prepares individuals for mediation.

Education helps relationships

Relationship education courses remained popular during 2008/09.

The primary venue for courses was the Kew Centre, which ran 11 courses on parenting, couples, life after separation, managing difficult behaviour and managing relationships, attracting a total of 435 participants.

The program was reviewed during the year to ensure the courses offered in 2009/10 are relevant and topical.

Our online relationships course, 'Good Connecting', was revamped and published on the RAV's new website in April, attracting hundreds of registrations by 30 June 2009.

In response to requests from government and community organisations, a number of members of our counselling staff addressed seminars and workshops on topics including keeping relationships healthy in retirement, men's health, improving communications with adolescents, and maintaining a healthy couple relationship after a multiple birth.

Focusing on families

RAV opened a new Family Relationship Centre (FRC) in July 2008, bringing to four the number of FRCs for which RAV is the lead agency.

In August, nearly 60 people attended the official opening of the Melbourne FRC in Collins Street by the Australian Attorney General, the Hon Robert McClelland MP.

Other speakers at the Melbourne FRC opening were Wurundjeri Elder, Aunty Di Kerr, who performed a Welcome to Country, and the Hon Justice Nahum Mushin, Coordinating Judge for Victoria and Tasmania, who spoke on behalf of the legal community.

Funding to continue

The Australian Government announced continued funding for the operation of our Berwick, Greensborough and Sunshine FRCs from 1 July 2009 for two years.

The three centres have assisted about 9,000 families since being established by the Government as part of its family law reform.

An important aspect of the FRCs' work continued to be engagement with the community to raise awareness of – and understanding about – the centres' role in supporting families and children.

Successful CALD forum

The Greensborough FRC, in collaboration with the Broadmeadows FRC, Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre and Whittlesea Community Connections, held a successful forum in December to determine the most effective means of assisting members of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities with family relationship issues.

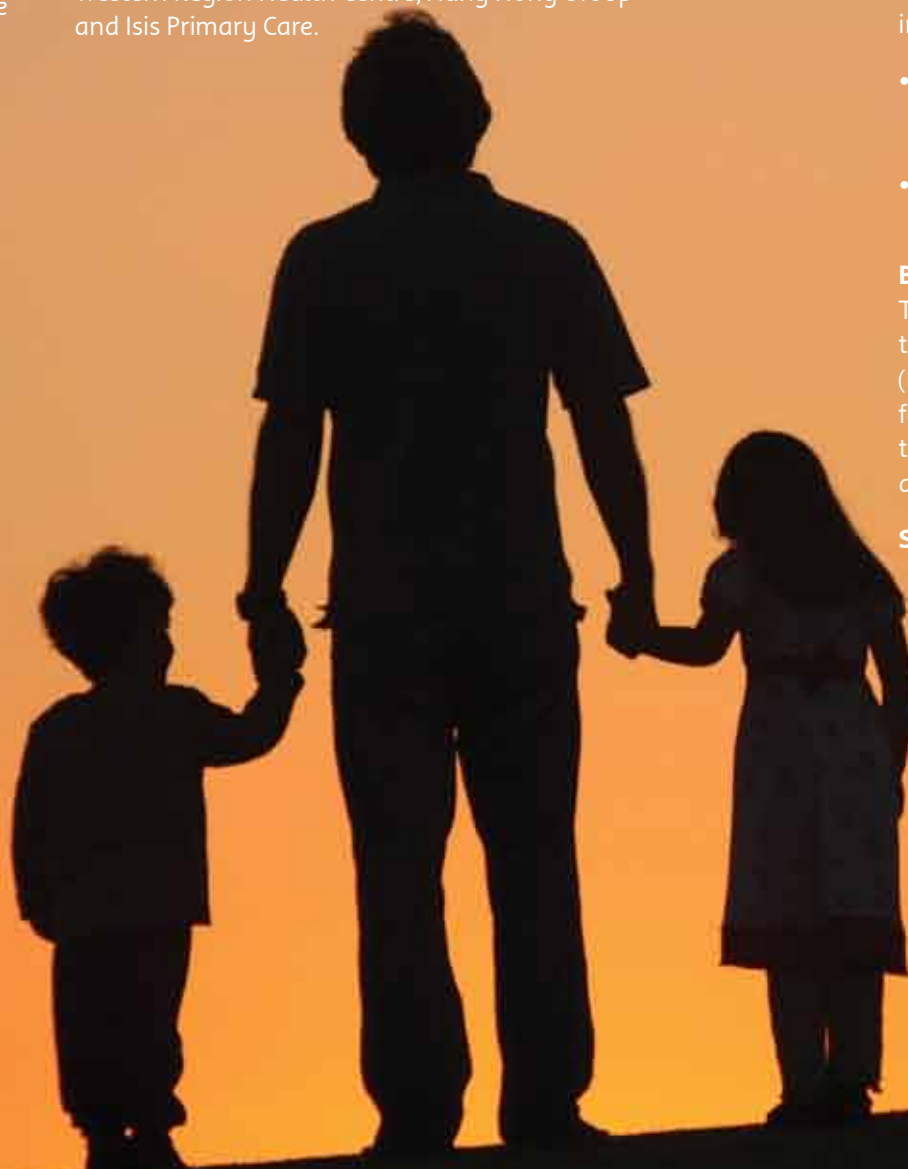
More than 100 participants attended, including representatives of government departments and interstate and local service providers.

Group supports Vietnamese community

The Sunshine FRC took a lead in giving members of the western suburbs Vietnamese community the opportunity to gain new skills and insights to help them make the best of their family life in Australia.

The Vietnamese Advisory Group, a coalition of organisations led by the Centre, ran a successful five-week program of information sharing and activities in October and November 2008.

Other group members are the St Albans East Primary School, the Vietnamese Welfare Resource Centre, the Indo-Chinese Elderly Refugee Association, Centrelink, Western Region Health Centre, Nang Hong Group and Isis Primary Care.



Building bridges with the Indigenous community

RAV took another important step towards building stronger relationships with Victoria's Indigenous community.

We established a working group to oversee and guide the implementation of the Indigenous audit and action plan completed in 2007/08. The plan will be implemented in close consultation with the indigenous community. Other initiatives will include:

- development of RAV promotional materials – for and by indigenous Victorians – including a dedicated website
- employment of an Indigenous Liaison Officer to work with our centres.

Ballarat

The Ballarat Centre continued to work closely with the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative (BADAC) to build staff awareness of cultural issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and to provide a timely and responsive service to the district's Aboriginal community.

Sunshine

The Sunshine FRC initiated an ongoing healing circle for Aboriginal women in partnership with MAYA Living Free Healing Centre, Thornbury. This followed discussions with Aunty Shirley Firebrace about how the two organisations can work together in the best interests of Aboriginal families. The healing circle aims to help women strengthen themselves in ways that will make their families stronger.

Berwick

The Berwick FRC recognised the Traditional Owners of the land in the Berwick area at a plaque unveiling ceremony in November 2008. An Elder from each of the Bunurong and Wurundjeri people unveiled a plaque at the Centre acknowledging the traditional custodians and caretakers of the land.

The Berwick FRC also sponsored a community barbecue at the Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-Op, in conjunction with RAV's Cranbourne Centre, and Windermere Child and Family Services. The event helped to foster relationships between the four organisations and build cultural awareness among all staff.



Supporting the road to recovery

The past financial year saw a significant increase in RAV's support for communities suffering from the continuing drought, and the disastrous bushfires of January and February 2009.

With funding from the Australian Government, the RAV centres in Traralgon and Shepparton provided free counselling, and organised community development activities to support those affected by drought in the Gippsland and Shepparton regions.

Gippsland

Community initiatives in Gippsland included:

- a rejuvenation camp attended by 100 people at Licola for families affected by drought, bushfires, floods and mud slides
- a three-day women's rejuvenation camp at Cape Conran, attended by 45 women who came together for formal workshops and recreational activities
- the Benambra Community Christmas Party attended by more than 120 people – the only community event held in this area
- 'Are we there yet?' – a women's forum in Yarram, which brought together more than 100 women

from across Gippsland for a one-day forum to look at their lives in the context of their relationships, careers and finances

- pamper days at which hundreds of men, women and children were offered activities including massage, relaxation, craft, chocolate making, wood work and yoga.

In addition, the Australian Government provided bushfire funding to RAV to enable the team at the Traralgon Centre to implement programs that will contribute to the Gippsland community's long-term healing and recovery process.

Immediately following the tragedy on Black Saturday, the Centre offered free counselling to residents, and assistance to local schools.

After discussions with people in areas affected by pre-Black Saturday fires, it established outreach counselling services for local communities.

In April, the Centre appointed a Bushfire Recovery Community Liaison Officer to build strong links with the affected residents, local agencies and community recovery committees, and engage with adolescents.

The Centre also took part in community recovery workshops and events, including a community fun day at Callignee in April, which was attended by more than 700 people.

Five comedians from Melbourne donated their time and talents for a comedy night in Morwell organised by the Centre for bushfire affected residents, and the staff and volunteers of local support organisations.

The highly successful community comedy night attracted an audience of more than 500 people from the region.

Shepparton

Similarly, the Shepparton Centre's drought program involved a range of initiatives designed to bring the community together, including:

- 'Women Managing Anger' – a five-week group providing women with the opportunity to learn about:
 - the impact of anger on their wellbeing
 - strategies to manage their own emotions, and
 - new ways to support their families (and especially the males within their families)
- 'Women Dancing at Avenel' at which women of the small country town of Avenel learned how to express their feelings through dance
- a special lunch for local men and farmers from the Euroa district – organised through the Euroa Men's Shed organisation – enabling participants to share stories in a comfortable environment
- 'Time for Me' – a program conducted in partnership with the Euroa Continuing Education Centre to provide an environment in which participants could relax and enjoy activities that would assist their wellbeing
- a family concert in Violet Town, featuring the renowned Choir of Hard Knocks
- two puppetry workshops for Peranbin Primary College students followed by a special presentation to their parents at the Strathbogie Hall.



Helping men find a new path

Our programs for men offered help in a range of areas including relationship support, parenting skills workshops, and behaviour-change programs for those involved in family violence.

New ways for CALD men

In response to identified needs – and to increase its capacity to provide CALD services – the former Narre Warren Centre ran groups for men from the Sudanese and Vietnamese communities.

Developed in partnership with the Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau (SCAAB), and with support from the Springvale Indochinese Mutual Assistance Association, the groups offered these men the opportunity to learn ways to:

- adapt to their changing roles as fathers and partners
- understand and cope with new laws, and
- talk and learn about shared issues of concern.

Learning to reconnect

During 2008/09, the Sunshine Centre ran the 'Reconnecting' program for existing men's groups in the north-west region.

The program helps fathers who are taking responsibility for their violent behaviour, to learn new ways of building trust and playing with their children.

The Centre's family violence program grew to include an entry support, men's behaviour change and ongoing support groups.

In addition, a new women's art therapy group – introduced for the men's partners – has proved very successful.

Men's work conference

The Traralgon Centre supported a major conference in May 2009 entitled 'What Works in Men's Work', which was well attended by providers of men's and family violence services, welfare professionals, and representatives from Victoria Police.

The conference featured Australian cricket selector and former fast bowler, Merv Hughes, as special guest speaker.

Held at Monash University's Churchill campus, the conference provided valuable information and stimulated discussion about services and programs relating to family violence, relationships, health and early intervention.

Supporting men in separation

During the year, RAV collaborated with MensLine Australia and beyondblue (the national depression initiative) on a revised men and separation booklet.

Titled *Navigating the Future*, the booklet is for men going through a separation or divorce, or for someone supporting a man experiencing separation.

It shows men they are not alone, helps guide them through some constructive choices, and raises awareness of some services that may help.

Helping men be better dads

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) completed its evaluation of RAV's Fathers Utilising Networks for Kids (FUN for Kids) program, with funding from the Ian Potter Foundation.

The evaluation found that the program was successful in assisting dads to improve their confidence in their parenting capacity, as well as their parenting skills and knowledge.

It also showed the program had an impact on the quality of co-parental relationships, and the degree to which mothers and fathers supported one another and cooperated in matters of childcare and children's development.

RAV implemented FUN for Kids in 2001 to boost men's confidence in relation to fathering, and to assist men to form positive relationships with their children and partners.

We coordinate the program in conjunction with maternal and child health centres, preschools, kindergartens and primary schools.

During the past financial year, FUN for Kids operated in Melbourne's western suburbs and in Gippsland.

RAV remains committed to the DadsLink program, which aims to strengthen father-child relationships.

DadsLink is run in partnership with YMCA Victoria and the Life Is Foundation. During 2008/09 it organised a range of initiatives, including:

- hands-on fathering activities
- informative newsletters on fatherhood
- community events for the whole family
- the annual Dad's Day Out at the Quarantine Station, Portsea
- a Father's Day Brunch at Riversdale Park, Camberwell, and
- an adventure camp at Anglesea.

Training Ground on the right course

During 2008/09, the RAV's registered training organisation, Training Ground, was part of a successful consortium selected to undertake the National Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner (FDRP) Accreditation and Training contract for the Australian Attorney General's Department.

Under the contract, Training Ground delivers training and assessment in FDR and other family services.

In the second half of the year, Training Ground provided subsidised accreditation to enable FDR practitioners to meet the Australian Government's new accreditation standards by 30 June 2009.

It conducted six week-long workshops in Victoria and the Northern Territory, consisting of two modules: 'Working in the Family Law Environment', and 'Family Violence and Vulnerable Parties'.

These modules cover the three compulsory units required by the Attorney General's Department for re-registration as a FDRP.

By the end of the financial year, Training Ground had issued more than 310 certificates to FDRPs, and conducted more than 50 Recognitions of Prior Learning.

A total of 37 people enrolled in the Specialist Course in Couple Therapy, which has strong links with Victorian universities.

The course is an accredited component of La Trobe University's Masters in Couple and Relationship Counselling and Masters in Counselling and Human Services, and the University of Melbourne's Master of Social Work Clinical Degree.



Research leads the way

RAV is involved in three major research projects funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC).

These projects reaffirm our commitment to securing the most-up-to-date and relevant information, which can be used as a basis for continually improving our clinical practice and service delivery.

Couple counselling

In partnership with La Trobe University, we are in the third year of a project that is investigating the effectiveness and long-term benefits of couple counselling and our Good Connecting relationship course.

In addition to producing better outcomes for our clients, this significant study will also have a national and international impact upon the practice of couple counselling and relationship education.

Assessing the impact

Again in partnership with La Trobe, RAV has obtained a three-year grant to undertake a major longitudinal study into the impact of family violence on the family dispute resolution process and outcomes.

The study aims to:

- map profiles of clients seeking family mediation
- determine whether a history of family violence is identified by mediators, and what influence this might have on processes and decisions

- examine changes to a range of indices across the pre-mediation, post-mediation and six month follow-up period, and the impact of the mediation process and mediation decisions on these indicators.

Same-sex parenting study

During the year, the ARC confirmed funding for a five-year study entitled: 'Work, Love and Play in Diverse Australian Family Life'.

The study will be conducted via collaboration between RANational, the University of Melbourne, La Trobe University and The Bouverie Centre.

Scheduled to start in 2010, the study's primary interest is in same-sex parenting and children's outcomes.

It is expected to provide a broad and in-depth examination of a variety of factors that can have an impact upon child outcomes, including:

- how parents balance their working commitments and domestic arrangements
- the characteristics and quality of the parents' relationship and how they parent together, and
- the family's social, financial and practical resources and social networks.



Balance sheet

As at 30 June 2009



	2009 \$	2008 \$
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	5,491,571	4,529,478
Trade and other receivables	240,939	528,140
Other current assets	25,949	57,585
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	5,758,459	5,115,203
NON CURRENT ASSETS		
Property, plant and equipment	3,490,201	3,435,602
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS	3,490,201	3,435,602
TOTAL ASSETS	9,248,660	8,550,805
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Trade and other payables	1,406,287	1,474,791
Provisions	1,119,046	724,805
Other current liabilities	440,120	468,340
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	2,965,453	2,667,936
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Provisions	438,456	568,226
Other current liabilities	-	37,879
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES	438,456	606,105
TOTAL LIABILITIES	3,403,909	3,274,041
NET ASSETS	5,844,751	5,276,764
EQUITY		
Reserves	1,905,144	1,791,144
Accumulated surplus	3,939,607	3,485,620
TOTAL EQUITY	5,844,751	5,276,764

Key people

As at 30 June 2009



Our Board members

Judi Anderson, *President*
 Ronda Jacobs, *Vice President*
 Peter Boehm
 Lyn Brodie
 Lyn Littlefield
 John Lovell
 Michael Shaw
 Paul Staindl
 Michael Wootten

Our senior management

Michael Hunt
Chief Executive Officer
 Carole Baker
General Manager Business Systems and Technology
 Andrew Bickerdike
General Manager Operations
 Edwin Lang
General Manager Corporate Services
 Ann Wright
General Manager, FRC Operations and Training
 Max Wright
Senior Manager Practice Quality

RAV acknowledges the funding support from the Australian and Victorian Governments.