

CPS means family. From the moment I walked in the doors on my first day everyone was so welcoming, it's a place you just belong ... You can have bad days, you can have good days, and everyone's kind of got your back. It's really a place to belong for the kids, the teachers, the parents. It's a great place to be.

Rebecca, Parent, CPS Early Learning Centre, 2015¹



Continuing Commitment: 2000–2016

The Children's Protection Society welcomed the new millennium with a new CEO and a new president. Former executive director Michael Tizard left after eight years to take up a role with the New South Wales Department of Community Services and president Felicity Broughton departed for a role as magistrate with the Children's Court. Rosi Lever became the new CEO and Marion Stanway the new president.

One of Rosi Lever's first actions as CEO was to produce a strategic plan to guide the work of the Society over the next three years. The turn of the century, coupled with the change in leadership, made it an ideal time for the Society to not only reflect on its foundation and original mission statements, but also to examine its legacy and question its future:

We have had the chance to look at the early days of the organisation we work for, as well as frame a strategic plan that resonated with our values and beliefs and the outcomes we want to achieve in the first five years of this new millennium.²

A new mission statement was developed:

The Children's Protection Society provides leadership in the prevention and reduction of abuse and neglect by:

- Delivering innovative support services to children and their families;
- Raising public awareness of the extent and impact of child abuse and neglect;
- Strengthening families and communities to create safe environments for children.³

In February a five-year review of the Sexual Abuse Counselling and Prevention Program was launched by Christine Campbell, Minister for Community Services. The results of this review provided important data for the development of not only CPS's programs but for sexual abuse counselling more generally. One of the findings noted that, contrary to public opinion, 99 per cent of



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CPS president Marion Stanway (centre) and CEO Rosi Lever (right), who took up their roles in 2000, with CPS patron Elaine Marriner (left).

BOTTOM

In 2000, the Northern Auxiliary celebrated its twentieth anniversary. By that time, its members had raised over one million dollars for CPS.

sexual abuse victims in the CPS program knew the perpetrator. The review, which received widespread media coverage, also brought the issue of sibling incest to the attention of the wider community, though it was still an issue that the community was reluctant to acknowledge. Demand for the Society's counselling services continued to increase, with waiting lists as long as four months for adolescents demonstrating sexually abusive behaviours.⁴

There was also cause for celebration in 2000 with the twentieth anniversary of the Northern Auxiliary. Formed in 1980 by a group of women inspired by welfare officer Peg Sitlington and North West Region president Wilma Paine, by 2000 the auxiliary had raised over one million dollars for the Society.⁵ Paine's long-time and invaluable involvement with the Society was recognised in 2000 with an Order of Australia award 'for service to the welfare of children through the Children's Protection Society, and as a foster parent'.⁶ Thanks to the support of groups like the Northern Auxiliary and the hard work put into organising fundraising events and establishing a strong donor support-base, by 2000, 25 per cent of the Society's income was generated through fundraising.⁷

Child abuse has no 'quick fix'

With the introduction of competitive tendering in the 1990s, the government began looking increasingly for outputs and results. Funding preferences, it seemed, were for short-term projects that showed fast results. For an organisation trying to tackle intergenerational child abuse issues, however, there is never a 'quick fix'.⁸

Towards the end of 1999 the Liberal state government was replaced with a Labor government under Premier Steve Bracks. The Bracks government shifted away from this focus on results and instead emphasised building partnerships and collaborative relationships within the child and family welfare sector, 'primarily focusing on better service outcomes, not simply on containing costs'.⁹ CPS welcomed this new approach, especially since it was 'consistent with the values and goals' of the Society's new strategic plan.¹⁰

Despite this change, however, family support services like CPS were still having to provide as much as 50 per cent of their own funding. While one of the major benefits of non-government and charity-based groups was the flexibility to develop services based on the needs of their clients, one contemporary report found that these organisations were moving into areas where funding and services had been reduced, in order to compensate for those reductions.¹¹ Issues of ongoing concern for CPS in 2001 were the lack of adequate resourcing for family support services and the need for a review of state legislation to ensure that it accurately reflected the needs of children.¹²

In 2002, Dorothy Scott and Shurlee Swain, academics working in the fields of social welfare and history respectively, published a book examining historical perspectives of child protection in Australia. This drew largely on the intact and unique case records of the Society. In the final chapter, the authors concluded:

If the history of child protection has any lessons, it is that there are no simple solutions to this extraordinarily complex human problem. The solutions of the past are no longer seen as viable, yet the societal angst about child abuse continues to express itself in a search for simple solutions.¹³

By 2003 it was clear that the current child protection system was not coping. The state government was receiving over 40,000 notifications each year, with over 60 per cent of these being re-notifications. In an opinion piece for *The Age* in November 2003, Dorothy Scott wrote:

The system has thus become like a giant revolving door, assessing cases but not providing enough help to families to prevent most coming back into the system. The introduction of mandatory reporting has made this worse, with many families caught in the child protection net who do not need to be there.¹⁴

Prevention and education

Increased notifications meant an increased workload for CPS. In 2001 the Society received over 800 referrals across its four referral-based programs.¹⁵ Non-government agencies like CPS were finding themselves not only with increasingly high workloads, but also managing situations involving progressively more complex risks. In order to alleviate the pressure this increased work put on the child protection system, much of it was being transferred onto organisations like CPS, as well as family and support groups.¹⁶ In a speech given at the Royal Children's Hospital in 2002, Dorothy Scott commented:

... while we have achieved a great deal in recognising abuse, many would say that we now provide more case management than case work, and that we have hardly begun to tap the potential for prevention.¹⁷

CEO Rosi Lever was very keen to strengthen and develop the preventative aspect of care within the Society. She increased the Society's relationship with early intervention and prevention settings, including schools and child care centres. By 2002, children participating in the protective behaviours program, a program designed to empower children with an awareness of safe behaviours with the aim of reducing child abuse, had increased by 30 per cent.¹⁸

In October 2005 CPS hosted the 11th National Protective Behaviours Conference, 'Keeping Kids Safe: A Blueprint for the Future'. The conference was very successful with a large attendance to hear national and international keynote speakers, including UK child protection expert Brigid Daniel and Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency CEO Muriel Bamblett.¹⁹



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Authors Shurlee Swain (left) and Dorothy Scott (right) with Minister for Community Services, Bronwyn Pike at the launch of Confronting Cruelty: historical perspectives on child protection in Australia, in 2002.

BOTTOM

Peg Sillington at the launch of Confronting Cruelty next to a photograph of herself as the Society's first welfare officer.

Turning things around

Bob, 34, came to CPS concerned about the impact his anger was having on his parenting and relationship. Separated from his partner due to anger issues and with access to his two sons twice a week, Bob's main priority was to work on understanding his anger and improving his parenting skills.

Once-a-week counselling focused on stressors in Bob's life and how they were influencing his behaviour. Triggers for anger, strategies for dealing with emotion and relaxation were explored and through practice and time, Bob's level of stress and anger significantly decreased.

He attended a weekly CPS parenting course, where with eight other parents he explored a range of parenting approaches. The combination of individual counselling and the parenting course significantly turned things around in Bob's life. By developing a better understanding of how his anger worked, how to control it and how to separate his own issues from his children, Bob has become more confident in being a dad. This confidence means being a more engaged and present father – one who can support, teach and nurture his children and, most importantly, a dad who enjoys spending time with his boys.

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That same year CPS partnered with Anglicare Victoria to expand services to the Whittlesea area, while maintaining its existing relationships with Berry Street and the City of Darebin.²⁰ Acknowledging the need for increased partnerships, Rosi Lever declared:

In a continuously challenging environment we continue to push the envelope – acknowledging however, the increasing pressure and challenges families are facing and the need for government and our major service systems to respond more effectively to provide better outcomes for children who are at risk.²¹

The effectiveness of partnerships between various organisations was not just about maximising funding opportunities. Increased collaboration between child and family services also meant better support for clients. By 2004 the Society found itself working with a number of different agencies across the four local government areas that it serviced. These included Anglicare Kildonan, Plenty Valley Community Health Service, Plenty Valley City Council, City of Banyule, Olympic Village Primary School, Olympic Village Adult Education Centre and Philip's Gate Anglican Community Centre. The Society was also developing a strong presence in local primary schools.²²

In October 2003 this move towards more collaborative partnerships resulted in the formation of a consortium led by CPS and including Kildonan, Anglicare and Darebin City Council. This consortium successfully applied to deliver the non-indigenous component of the Darebin Innovations Project, forming Darebin Integrated Family Services (DIFS). Launched by the Minister for Community Services, Sherryl Garbutt, on 27 April 2004, DIFS reflected 'a significant shift in the provision of services for vulnerable children in Victoria'.²³ It was established to create closer links and a more streamlined service between the key services accessed by high-risk families in the Darebin area. The program became a flagship for partnership and practice innovation and was indicative of the new direction the state government was heading in with child and family welfare services.²⁴

Changing government policy

From the start of the new millennium, it was clear that the child protection system was under strain. The constantly increasing notifications of abuse, coupled with the struggling out-of-home care arrangements, meant that the system designed to help at-risk children and families was actively failing them. In an opinion piece for *The Age* in November 2003, Dorothy Scott cautioned:

The present system faces new challenges, partly as a result of the growth in the number of parents with a drug dependence or serious mental illness, and as a result of the decrease in the number of foster families. The Department of Human Services has introduced several

encouraging initiatives, but we are yet to see whether child protection reform is the major priority it needs to be for the Bracks Government.²⁵

CPS CEO Rosi Lever was also keenly aware of the need for a review of state legislation regarding children and families. 'The landscape in which we live', she reported in 2004:

is significantly different than that which existed in the early 1980s when a groundswell of pressure resulted in changes to legislation relating to children and young persons. Some twenty years on, there has been a dramatic escalation in family violence, increasing rates of poverty and joblessness, as well as spiralling rates of mental ill health and substance abuse.²⁶

These cries did not go unheeded and by 2005 significant changes to the Victorian Government administration, legislation and policy regarding child welfare services were well underway. The *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* and the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* were both passed. Along with these Acts, a Minister for Children was appointed, an Office for Children established, and a Commissioner for Child Safety introduced. These changes were introduced to create better relationships between community service organisations and government, improving accountability as well as quality of services. CPS played an active role in these changes and was pleased to have such a positive result.

Out of the ashes

By the financial year of 2000 to 2001, after five years of deficit, CPS had finally achieved a balanced budget. Through savvy fundraising and programming, the Society had also managed to raise its operational budget from \$0.9 million to \$1.95 million in five years.²⁷ With only 72 per cent of its income generated through government grants, however, the Society still needed to raise at least \$400,000 per annum itself.²⁸ Thanks to the ongoing support of key sponsors and partners, including Toshiba with its annual charity golf tournament and the Pratt and Besen Family foundations, as well as the tireless work of the Northern and Bacchus Marsh auxiliaries, the Society was managing to raise the funds to fill the gaps not covered by government funding.

But the Society's biggest fundraising challenge was yet to come. In January 2002, CPS staff and volunteers awoke to discover the shocking news that an arsonist had set fire to the Society's buildings. The home of the Alys Key Family Care Centre, at 68 Altona Street, was destroyed. It was a devastating blow, not just for the staff and volunteers, but also for the clients, for whom the centre had become a second home.

With characteristic positivity, the Society took the news in its stride and immediately got to work. Jan Roberts was a family support worker at CPS during this time and she recalls:



In January 2002, the Alys Key Family Care Centre was razed by an arson attack.



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The Society rallied after the fire and by July 2002, with the backing of patrons and supporters, plans for a fundraising and rebuilding program were underway.

BOTTOM

CEO Bernadette Burchell, Chief Patron of CPS Lynne Landy, Governor John Landy and CPS president Alice Hill at the opening of the Child & Family Centre in Heidelberg, 2005.

[We] turned what was a shed ... into a sort of conference room and they put people in there, and we worked in an office out in the middle of the car park. It used to be a chook house. Then they got some portables in ... [They were] interesting times!²⁹

By July, under the direction of CEO Rosi Lever, a rebuilding program was launched and an impressive plan for the new building was underway. Wilma Paine became the chair of the fundraising committee charged with raising the necessary funds for the new buildings, which it was estimated would be over \$1 million.³⁰ CPS patron Elaine Marriner was also instrumental in raising funds for the rebuilding. In April 2003 she hosted a gala event at the Plaza Ballroom, which raised \$38,000 in aid of the building project.³¹

By 2004 the Society was well on its way to delivering a new, purpose-built Children's and Family Community Centre. Designed in consultation with the children and families who accessed the Society's services, the new centre aimed to 'replicate the same sense of home and family that existed' before.³² The new centre was built as a series of interconnected houses, with specially designed counselling suites, play therapy centre and training facilities.

Surrounding the centre was a beautifully landscaped play space, which was created by Vasili Kanidiadis, producer of the Channel 31 television program *Vasili's Garden*. Supplies and services were donated by 20 different contractors around Melbourne, all galvanised into helping after 3AW radio presenter Neil Mitchell launched a 'Make a Difference Campaign' in May 2005. The finished space included a delightful garden with fruit trees, as well as a putting green, basketball ring and outdoor seating.³³

While the building was in operation from June 2005, the official opening took place a few months later, on 18 November. With more than 150 guests, including Governor John Landy and Chief Patron of CPS Lynne Landy, and performances by the Wolithica dance company and Fly Right Trio, the new Children's and Family Community Centre rose from the ashes and welcomed clients and staff into their new home.³⁴ The centre, declared president Alice Hill, was the 'new heart of the Society'.³⁵

Rosanna Op Shop

In February 1984, the newly established Northern Auxiliary was given the opportunity to take over the operation of the 'Old Nearly New Shop' in Beetham Parade, Rosanna. Excited by the potential funds this shop could help raise for the Society, the Northern Auxiliary women eagerly agreed.

With a few alterations, the 'Old Nearly New Shop' re-opened as the Children's Protection Society Op Shop. Selling a variety of good quality second-hand items, from homewares to clothing, toys, books and vintage goods, the opportunity shop was a roaring success. Within its first year of operation the shop made \$15,000. The following year this increased by an additional \$1,500.³⁶ Thanks to the dedication of hard-working volunteers and a supportive community, by 2013 the opportunity shop had raised more than \$1 million for CPS.³⁷

In 2015, 90-year-old Roma Hosking was the shop's oldest volunteer. She started volunteering at the shop when it first opened.³⁸ Not all of the volunteers are retired: Ingrid started volunteering when she was just 13 years old in 2013.³⁹ With a strong place in the Rosanna community and an active presence on social media, it is little wonder that the Children's Protection Society Op Shop is still going strong more than three decades after its establishment.



CPS Op Shop volunteers Roma, 90, and Ingrid, 15, in 2015.



LEFT

Members of the Northern Auxiliary outside the CPS Op Shop in Rosanna. The shop has raised over a million dollars for the Society since it opened in 1984.

Reconciliation and relationship building

As CPS began strengthening relationships with other welfare agencies and local government organisations to improve and consolidate access pathways for children and families in need, CEO Rosi Lever identified a lack of connection with the Aboriginal community. Throughout its history there has been a noticeable absence of interactions with aboriginal children in the Society's records and archives. In 2001, Lever initiated a relationship between CPS and Aboriginal child support agencies and in 2002 the first program specifically for the Aboriginal community – Koori Men's Support Group – was launched.⁴⁰

In its first year, the group had 20 participants.⁴¹ Part of the SMART program – Strategies for Men and Relationships Today – the Koori Men's Support Group was coordinated with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL). A full-time project worker was employed and it was hoped this program would be the start of many more opportunities to come, including camps, referral linkages and the establishment of a Koori Men's Support Network.⁴²

By 2006 the SMART program had changed to MARS – Men and Relationships Services – and included counselling services, the I'm a Dad program and Active Dads. With funding from the Jack Brockoff Foundation, CPS was able to introduce an Aboriginal stream of the I'm a Dad program, working in partnership with the Mercy Hospital for Women and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. Steve Gilbert, manager of family and community services at CPS, recognised the gap in existing services and took action to fix it:

Over a three-year period we will build this component of the program as a sustainable, culturally relevant part of the successful I'm a Dad program. Despite the Northern and Mercy Maternity Hospitals being significant birthing services for indigenous babies, Aboriginal fathers are significantly under-represented in the I'm a Dad program.⁴³

Koori Liaison Officer Ron Briggs (centre left) with Reconciliation Action Plan committee members. The Society is committed to building strong, positive relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

CPS staff at a smoking ceremony in 2015.



The I'm an Aboriginal Dad program has been a great success. In 2014 there were 16 Aboriginal families involved, and a new fathers' group was established at the Minajalku Centre in Thornbury.⁴⁴ Commenting on the success of the program, CPS Senior Aboriginal Cultural Advisor Ron Briggs said:

Aboriginal Fathers want to be great fathers and partners, but they face past trauma, have a lack of confidence and don't really see themselves as role models. They feel a lot more comfortable asking questions about being a father or first time dad when they can relate to someone of their own cultural background.⁴⁵

While the relationship between CPS and the Aboriginal community has advanced steadily, building confidence and trust is a slow process. It is important to have an Aboriginal person working in the organisation so that clients know, 'there's someone advocating on their behalf', says Ron Briggs.⁴⁶

In 2014 CPS began working towards a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). CEO Aileen Ashford commented:

CPS acknowledges that the 119 years since our formation have not always been a positive experience for Aboriginal people in Victoria. For CPS reconciliation is about acknowledging this history and moving forward to close the gap of disadvantage that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face, by creating positive and lasting change through genuine relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.⁴⁷

The RAP committee included CPS staff as well as local Aboriginal Elders and community members. It is anticipated that the plan, 12 months in the making, will be launched in early 2016.⁴⁸

There is still a long way to go in building relationships with the Aboriginal community but CPS is making great progress. 'It's great that organisations like CPS are making those first steps towards strengthening those relationships', says Ron Briggs, and 'I think the community is starting to recognise the value of the services, especially around the role of dads'.⁴⁹

The final taboo

Since its establishment in 1993, demand for the Society's sexual counselling programs continually increased. In 2003 the Sexual Abuse Counselling and Prevention Program (SACPP) celebrated its tenth anniversary. As the only voluntary service for adolescents tackling this issue in the northern, eastern and western suburbs of Melbourne, the demand for the adolescents exhibiting sexually abusive behaviour program was fast outstripping supply. By 2003, demand had more than doubled

Coordinated care

Sindiwe is an African refugee mother with four children living in an overcrowded public housing unit, which she shares with five other extended family members. With just two years in Australia and an absent husband, she was diagnosed with advanced breast cancer and has begun chemotherapy. With this variety of issues, Sindiwe required a range of support that included childcare, counselling about her own life-threatening illness, legal advice and financial aid. The role of CPS was to work with Sindiwe to refer her to appropriate services in the community.

Single father Greg was referred for support in parenting his 14-year-old son, Jayden. They both live with Greg's parents since Jayden was attacked by his stepbrother at his mother's home. Greg struggles with addiction issues, so Jayden's grandparents have custody of him, but Greg wants to be a father to Jayden after years of limited contact. Jayden is missing a lot of school and Greg characterises Jayden's behaviour as uncontrollable. Greg requires support not just for his parenting skills, but also to prevent further substance abuse, along with counselling for Jayden about his stepbrother's attack. A safe environment for all requires a package of CPS services.

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The annual Lunchtime Rumours Feast, to raise awareness of CPS sexual abuse counselling, is one of the Society's most successful fundraisers.

that of previous years. That year, the Society undertook a collaborative review with the Department of Human Services that confirmed the value of the program.⁵⁰ Thanks to a generous donation from the Pratt Foundation, the Society was also able to undertake a study into sibling sexual abuse. The 'Sibling Sexual Abuse Prevention Project: A Study of the Nature of Characteristics of Sibling Sexual Abuse' was launched at the start of Child Protection Week in 2003 and attracted public attention. The report found that one in five children referred to the Society for sexual abuse counselling had been abused by a sibling.⁵¹ One third of those who had abused a sibling, had themselves been abused.⁵² While child sexual abuse had been out in the open for some time, sibling abuse was still largely in the shadows.

In an interview with *The Age*, CEO Rosi Lever spoke about the serious and often under-reported issue of sibling sexual abuse:

It's serious and it's silent. Parents will be placed in an almost impossible situation because it's an enormous shock to discover that this is occurring in the family ... and they will be torn about what to do about it because it may mean the perpetrator has to leave the family.⁵³

Prevention was just as important as treatment and research, and the Society worked hard to raise awareness of child sexual abuse. In 2004 the SACPP team participated in national and international education forums, including presentations at the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Treatment of Sex Offenders Conference in Auckland.⁵⁴

CPS also partnered with other organisations and groups working within the child sexual abuse prevention arena, to share knowledge and expertise. This included consultation and training for the magistrates of the Children's Court and staff in the Department of Education and Training, as well as a partnership with Child Wise in developing a training program for identifying and reporting child abuse across the state.⁵⁵

In 2006, Ross Stevenson and the 3AW radio breakfast show drew over 450 attendees to the inaugural Lunchtime Rumours Feast, to raise money for, and awareness of, CPS sexual abuse counselling. The event, repeated annually, has proved to be one of the Society's most successful fundraisers, due in no small part to the ongoing dedication and commitment of volunteers Leonie McNichol and Margaret Robinson and the Society's patron Elaine Marriner. Marriner became a patron in 1996, fundraising for the organisation through functions held at Marriner theatres. Over a twenty-year period she has continued to raise funds via various events and has also been actively involved in directly supporting families through a range of programs. She remains a strong advocate for the work of the Society within her extensive professional networks in the entertainment and business communities.

CPS: a part of our community

As the Society celebrated its 110th anniversary in 2006, it took the opportunity to re-examine and reaffirm its vision, mission and values. Its vision that ‘All children will live and thrive in safe families and communities’, remained unchanged, honouring the original intention of the Society’s founders.⁵⁶ The new mission reiterated the Society’s focus on preventative care:

To break the cycle of abuse and neglect in families and to improve the life chances and choices for children who have experienced abuse and neglect.⁵⁷

Above all, the Society remained child centred.

This revision of its mission helped to refocus the Society as it searched for a new CEO when Rosi Lever stepped down in mid-2005 after six years of leadership. In December 2005, Bernadette Burchell was appointed to the post. Burchell jumped into her new role enthusiastically and in her first report as CEO she stated:

I am privileged and proud to lead a dedicated team of professionals in this effort, buoyed by the regard and support of our donors and supporters, the evidence of our effectiveness, and the efforts of our volunteers, Board members, and Patrons.⁵⁸



CPS staff marching in the Walk Against Family Violence on White Ribbon Day in 2015.



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Staff from the North East Services Connect program, co-led by CPS and Berry Street Victoria. The program represents an integrated approach to service delivery in areas such as mental health, family violence and housing.

BOTTOM

The Mentoring Mums program started in 2008, matching volunteer mentors with new mothers.

As well as re-examining its vision and mission, the Society also reorganised some of its services, combining the three separate programs – Family Support, Men and Relationships, and Protective Behaviours – under one banner: the Family and Community Services Program.⁵⁹ That year, the program provided support to more than 1,200 dependent children.⁶⁰ By 2014 the Family Services workers had provided in total over 23,000 hours of support to families in need.⁶¹

CPS played a significant role in implementing many of the key aspects of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*. The North-East Metro Child and Family Services Alliance was formed, coordinated by CPS and consisting of all Department of Human Services funded family service agencies in the area. These included CPS, Anglicare, Berry Street, City of Darebin, City of Yarra, Kildonan Uniting Care, Ecumenical Migration Centre, North Yarra Community Health and Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. The primary objective of the alliance was to implement the key components of the 2005 Act by overseeing effective planning, development and coordination of integrated family service systems as well as linking in with other services like housing, police, health and education.⁶²

As part of this alliance, CPS was funded by the Victorian state government to operate ChildFIRST (Family Information Referral Support Team). ChildFIRST was designed as a central intake and referral service for all Department of Human Services funded family service agencies in the North-East metropolitan area.⁶³ In the first three months of operation, ChildFIRST recorded 413 family contacts. Of these, 113 were referrals.⁶⁴ By 2015 ChildFIRST received 1,567 inquiries that resulted in over 10,000 hours of work.⁶⁵

In April 2015, North East Services Connect was launched, a program co-led by CPS and Berry Street Victoria. This program, developed with the Department of Health and Human Services, represents a new approach to integrated service delivery in Victoria, combining 15 primary organisations tackling issues including: mental health, homelessness, youth support, family violence, disability, housing and health. Launched as a two-year pilot program, it is anticipated that this service will improve people-centred outcomes for clients. In the first five months of operation, North East Services Connect received 159 referrals. The youngest was 14 years old and the oldest 81 years old.⁶⁶ While still in its pilot stage, it is already proving effective, with one client commenting:

I couldn't speak more highly of Services Connect. The support given to myself by my case manager was outstanding, especially as someone who hadn't had dealings with services before.⁶⁷

Mentoring Mums is another innovative program, introduced in 2008. With support from the Ian Potter Foundation, CPS forged a partnership with Mercy Hospital for Women and created the volunteer-based Mentoring Mums program – aimed at matching experienced mothers with new mothers in need of advice and assistance. The program has grown substantially and is proving to be

an invaluable resource for asylum seekers and refugee mothers, many of whom were born overseas and can feel isolated. CPS helps to carefully match new mothers with volunteer mentors who can assist with important medical appointments and information gathering, as well as providing a friendly face to talk to about what it is like being a new mum. Sharon Scammell, a volunteer with the program, feels that she and the other mentors are able to help the women in the program 'because we're mums ourselves and have experience that we can offer them'.⁶⁸

A world first in early years' education and care

In 2010, after several years of research and fundraising into early childhood intervention, initiated by president Alice Hill, CPS established the Child & Family Centre – 'a world first in the delivery of early childhood education and care aimed at preventing harm to the developing brain caused by early childhood disadvantage'.⁶⁹ The centre was funded through state and federal government support and generous contributions from philanthropic foundations and trusts.

A three-year randomised control trial, the first of its kind in Australia, was developed to examine the impacts of early childhood education and care on young children. Coordinated in partnership with research bodies including the School of Economics at the University of Melbourne, the Murdoch Children's Research Institute and Charles Sturt University, the trial began in 2010 with 45 families receiving a place at the new centre. Another 45 families, involved with the Society but not with the centre, acted as a control group.

Over three years the two groups were monitored to determine the effectiveness of the centre. The aim was to have the children in the centre at the same level as their peers by the time they started school.⁷⁰

The centre began to show immediate positive results and in 2014, CPS became the first Victorian early education and care provider to receive a rating of 'excellent' under the National Quality Framework. The Child & Family Centre was acknowledged by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority for 'its outstanding practices and programs, particularly for children and families living in circumstances of multiple disadvantage'.⁷¹

Aisha Bal is the current early years leader and centre manager at the Child & Family Centre. She describes the particular approach of the centre:

... we are trying to create an environment where the child is supported, is nurtured, is cared for in the best possible way. And then we're also supporting the family to be able to then further look after their children, giving them the skills that they need, giving them the help they need, referring them to support services that they may need so that they can continue on and be a happier, healthier, safer family.⁷²



The Child & Family Centre aims to create an environment where children are supported, nurtured and cared for in the best possible way.

'You have saved our family'

The family of four came to CPS following disclosures from eight-year-old Harley that his 13-year-old brother Max had sexually abused him. The children's parents were extremely concerned about how to support both boys. Separate counsellors were allocated to work with the family. With no extended family to lend a hand, a safety plan was created so that Max could remain at home, while ensuring that Harley would be safe.

Harley's counsellor worked with him for several months to address the impacts of sexual abuse. Using a range of techniques including painting and drawing, Harley began talking about how the abuse made him feel. After a time Harley wanted his mum and dad to join some of his sessions so they could understand him better.

Max engaged in therapeutic treatment for 14 months to understand his behaviours and minimise the risk of reabusing. Through his individual work and group work Max began to identify signs of risk around his behaviours and better understood the ways his sexually abusive behaviours impacts on his brother, with whom he shared an otherwise positive relationship.

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Leigh and his daughter Chelsea have been coming to the centre since 2012. He remembers: ... when Chelsea first came here she was very reserved and reluctant and shy, she hardly spoke a word. Now, in three years, she does not stop talking.⁷³

Rebecca and her son Charlie joined the centre in 2013 and she reflects that it has been a great experience for them both:

Coming here, I connected with other parents and the teachers, and Charlie's connected with the children and the teachers and other parents as well ... Everyone knows Charlie's name. For me that's amazing because I was feeling quite isolated. I look forward as well as Charlie [to] coming here and talking to people ... it's good.⁷⁴

By the end of 2014, the Child & Family Centre had a number of graduates successfully transition into local primary schools and kindergartens. The program has such a positive impact on some families that many have returned to visit long after their time in the program has ended.⁷⁵

A continuing legacy

In 2006 the Society opened a new office in Thomastown. While still maintaining a presence in West Heidelberg, the Society saw an opportunity to meet community demand in the high-growth corridor of Whittlesea with a Thomastown office. The building, however, was old and not well suited to the activities of the organisation, so both staff and clients were excited when, in May 2014, they moved into a new, specially fitted out building on Settlement Road in Thomastown. The building, though not ideally located in an industrial area, provided an interior conducive to all aspects of the Society's work. The Thomastown site is a co-located community services hub with ReGen and Banyule Community Health, providing drug and alcohol services, gambling support and child and family services under the one roof. With counselling suites and art therapy rooms downstairs and office workspace upstairs, the new site has been well received by staff and clients alike.⁷⁶

Aileen Ashford first came into contact with CPS as a young social work graduate in the early 1990s. She was keen to do her placement with the Society after hearing about its ground-breaking sexual abuse programs. After completing her graduate placement under the supervision of Dorothy Scott, Ashford went on to work in a number of other areas of child and family services both in Victoria and Tasmania. When she returned to CPS in 2013, Ashford brought with her a wealth of experience and expertise. Stepping down as Commissioner for Children in Tasmania, she took up the role of CEO of the Children's Protection Society in June 2013. That same year, Jane Munro became the new president, following on from Alice Hill who stepped down after serving ten years on the Board and five as president. Munro welcomed Ashford as new CEO in the annual report:

Aileen comes to CPS with a strong background in the community services sector at both government and non government levels as well as her recent experience and expertise as Tasmania's Commissioner for Children. Her leadership will ensure that we move forward with vitality and focus.⁷⁷

Under Ashford's leadership the Society began to re-examine its strengths and weaknesses and developed a strategic plan to guide it in the years ahead. Looking back on the process, she recalls:

There'd been a lot of missed opportunities about funding new programs over the past couple of years. [The question was] how do we position ourselves, what do we want to do into the future?⁷⁸

By the time Ashford joined CPS, child abuse and family violence had never been more visible in the community. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, launched in 2013, and the Royal Commission into Family Violence, begun in February 2015, continue to reveal a distressing level of abuse and violence perpetrated against children and families, and caused largely by the very systems designed to protect them.

When Lady Brassey and thirteen other eminent Melbourne identities gathered at Government House for the formation and first meeting of the Victorian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty and Neglect of Children in 1896, they foresaw a future free of child maltreatment and abuse. It is doubtful any of them would have anticipated that the Society they established would continue to exist 120 years later, still tackling many of the same issues they had hoped to eradicate.

One hundred and twenty years on from that first meeting, the world is a very different place. As times change, so do the challenges that many families and children face. As the Society has discovered over the years, new challenges continually appear and the best way to confront them is to be flexible enough to move and adapt with them. One thing that has not changed, however, throughout the entire history of the Society, is the passion and commitment of its staff and volunteers.

Jan Roberts has been a family support worker with CPS for 24 years and maintains her commitment and dedication to her work:

My job's changed as I've stayed. You can jump ship and go to Anglicare or Berry Street [but] you're still working with the same people and that's what I love ... I'm passionate about it. Still passionate about it.⁷⁹

When friends ask Wilma Paine why she has continued to volunteer with the same organisation for the last 40 years, she replies: 'I started with them, and I believed in them ... through all the ups and downs – and I believe in them more than anything today'.⁸⁰



The Society's past and ongoing achievements owe much to the dedication of its volunteers.



TOP

The Society expanded into the Whittlesea region with the opening of its new premises in Thomastown in 2014.

BOTTOM

At the opening of the Thomastown site: CEO Aileen Ashford, Minister for Families and Children Jenny Mikakos, President Jane Munro, Bronwyn Halfpenny MP and Anthony Carbines MP.

RIGHT

The CPS Board and Leadership Team in 2016.

The Children’s Protection Society has worked hard fighting for the rights of children and families, influencing child protection policy and finding innovative new ways of dealing with a constantly changing environment. Looking back at the Society’s history, Michael Tizard reflects:

CPS has played an incredibly valuable role over the years in terms of its history, an incredibly valuable role in terms of protecting children and shaping child protection policy in Victoria, and I admire the organisation for all that it’s done, all its innovations in family work and child protection.⁸¹

There is no denying that the work the Society has done and continues to do is hard. It is relentless and at times distressing. Positive outcomes are not always possible and it is a reality of the child protection sector that there will never be enough people, enough money or enough time to fix every problem. After her role as CPS executive director, Penny Armytage went on to a number of senior positions in the state’s justice and human services departments. As Commissioner for Corrections, she encountered adults in the prison system who, as children, the Society had worked with. But she also believes that:

There are a large number of families which no doubt feel very indebted to the work of the CPS. Even though the positive outcomes are not always that achievable for some children and families, they have been there and persisted in their efforts ... I think the fact that CPS has been there, persisted and continued to work with those children and families is probably a testament to their commitment and capability.⁸²



Aileen Ashford agrees that the Society has ‘a strong place in the history [of child protection], we’ve just got to be proud of it’.⁸³ Today, there is still a constant demand for the services of the Children’s Protection Society and other child and family support services. Incidents of child abuse and family violence regularly appear in the media and it may seem like CPS will need to continue for another 120 years. While this may be the case, it is important to remember that the impact an organisation like CPS can have on an individual or a family can be life-changing. The Children’s Protection Society has changed thousands of lives – and not just those of the children and families it has helped, but also the communities it has worked with, its volunteers, its board members and its staff.

The most telling legacy though, is the one that the Society leaves with its clients, as these two attest:

The Children’s Protection Society is a place where I have found wonderful friendships and support ... it is a place where I can speak about things with confidence and a place of safety.⁸⁴

All the disenfranchised souls walk in here and walk out with complete confidence in themselves ... We are validated as human beings and as parents, and we’re heard. Something I think a lot of us had never been before.⁸⁵