

# Kinship Care Forum

## *Making a Difference*



Thursday 25 June

Friday 26 June 2009

Clocktower Centre, 750 Pascoe Vale Road  
Moonee Ponds Victoria

## Day 1 – 25 June

### 8:45 REGISTRATION/TEA AND COFFEE

- 9:30
- Welcome-Anne McLeish OAM, Director, Grandparents Victoria and Brian Babington, CEO, Families Australia
  - Welcome to Country
  - Deputy Mayor, Moonee Valley Council, Councillor John Sipak
  - Launch of OCSC Parenting Guide, Child Safety Commissioner, Bernie Geary, OAM
  - Launch of DHS Kinship Care Model, Mr Paul McDonald, Executive Director, Children Youth & Families Division, Department of Human Services.

### 10:30 MORNING TEA

- 11:00 Key Note Speaker – Dr Howard Bath, Northern Territory Children's Commissioner  
**'Feeling safe – What recent research tells us about the most important needs of traumatised children'.**

- 11:45 Key Note Speaker – Robyn Miller, Principal Child Protection Practitioner, Department of Human Services  
**'The Heart of the Matter – the need to belong'. Celebrating kinship families and the difference they make for children.**

### 12:45 LUNCH

### 1:45 Workshops

#### Main Auditorium – Pascoe Room

1. **Family contact for children in kinship care** – Professor Cathy Humphreys, Alfred Felton Chair of Child and Family Welfare University of Melbourne
2. **Messages from research; A carer's and young person's perspective on kinship care** – Cas O'Neill, Research Fellow, University of Melbourne and Secretary, Post Placement Support Service, Beth Parker, HelpLine Co-ordinator, FCAV with Jo McMahon, Vic State Coordinator CREATE and Mattie, a young person who has experienced kinship care
3. **Grandparents and the Children's Court** – Brian Wynn - McKenzie, former Children's Court Magistrate, now Consultant

#### Tower Room

4. **'You're not alone'** – Common parenting issues for carers and helpful support – Dr Priscilla Seyfort, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Child Safety Commissioner

#### Studio Room

5. **A closer look at the new DHS Kinship Care Program model** – Ruth Champion, Placement and Support, Children, Youth & Families Division, DHS and Andrea Griffin, A/Manager, Child Protection and Family Services, Hume Region

### 3:00 CLOSE

*Participants at the conference will be invited on the first day to nominate an issue they would like addressed by the Panel. These issues will be collated and a summary of the main themes identified will be given to the Panel for discussion.*

We welcome your input!

Please complete the green form found in your satchel with issues you would like the panel to discuss.

Place in the box located at the registration table.

## Day 2 – 26 June

**9:30** Welcome and overview - Anne McLeish OAM, Director, Grandparents Victoria, and Brian Babington, CEO, Families Australia

**10:00** Cate McKenzie, Group Manager, Children and Family Safety Group, Department of Housing, Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs – **A National Perspective**

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### 10:30 MORNING TEA

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### 11:00 Panel Discussion

Panel members:

- **Brian Wynn-McKenzie** – Former Children’s Court Magistrate, now consultant
- **Raelyn Marshall** – Grandparent Carer
- **Nathan Fenelon** – Aboriginal Family Decision Maker Community Convener, VACCA
- **Robyn Miller** – Principal Child Protection Practitioner, DHS
- **Marija Joyce** – General Manager Southern Services, Oz Child
- **Ray Carroll** – Manager, Out of Home Care Monitoring Unit, Office of the Child Safety Commissioner
- **Argiri Alisandratos** – Assistant Director, Placement & Support, Children Youth & Families, Department of Human Services

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### 12:30 LUNCH

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### 1:30 Workshops with a focus for professionals

#### Main auditorium – Pascoe Room

##### 1. *Support for Kinship Carers;*

Bronwyn Harrison, Wendy Frayne and Merilyn Di Blasio, OzChild

##### 2. *Engaging ‘families’ in the decision making process*

– Andrea Griffin, A/Manager, Child Protection & Family Services, Hume Region and Brian Fitzgerald, Family Group Conferencing Convener, DHS Southern Region

#### Tower Room

3. *Kinship Care and access* – George Habib, Principal Practitioner, Southern Region DHS, Lynne McCrae, Manager, Child & Family Support Services Oz Child, Drew Browning, Senior Kinship support worker, OzChild

#### Balcony Room

##### 4. *Principles of Aboriginal Decision Making;*

Sepi Weerasingh, Manager Family Preservation Services, VACCA, Nathan Fenelon, Aboriginal Family Decision Maker Community Convener, VACCA and Dominique Swift, Family Decision Maker Manager, Child Protection Program N&W Region

##### Workshop with a focus for professionals and carers

#### Main auditorium – Pascoe Room

5. *The role of grandparents in the legal process* – Brian Wynn-McKenzie, Consultant and Robyn Miller, Principal CP Practitioner, DHS.

##### Workshop for carers only

#### Studio Room

6. *Kinship Care–Future Directions* Anne McLeish, Director Grandparents Victoria and Brian Babington, CEO Families Australia.

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**2:30** Close – Argiri Alisandratos, Assistant Director, Placement & Support, Child Youth and Families, Department of Human Services.

**2.40 –**

**3:00** Final comments and acknowledgements - Anne McLeish and Brian Babington.

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# Background information on presenters

**Mr Bernie Geary** has been working over the last 33 years with vulnerable children, young people and their families. He began his career as Victoria's first outreach youth worker in Melbourne's West Heidelberg area, and worked for 17 years at Jesuit Social Services, where he was the CEO from 2001 to 2005. In his early years with Jesuit Social Services, Bernie managed the Brosnan Centre, assisting young people upon their release from prison. He had been an advisor and advocate on issues relating to young people and families throughout his career.

Bernie served on the Victorian Youth Parole Board for 17 years from 1988 – 2005 and was a member of the initial Premier's Drug Advisory Council in 1999 (under the Kennett Government) and the subsequent Premier's Drug Advisory Council in 2001 (under the Bracks Government) both chaired by Professor David Pennington. Bernie was a member of the Victorian Sentencing Advisory Council 2005 – 2008. He is currently a member of the Victorian Children's Council.

Bernie received the Order of Australia in 2002 for services to young people, a Centenary Medal in 2000, and has an honorary Masters Degree in Social Work.

Bernie and his wife Therese have 5 children and 9 grandchildren and he has been the Child Safety Commissioner since the role was established in 2005.

**Paul McDonald** has been with the Department since 2001. He first came in as Director, Drugs Policy and Services Branch for the Department of Human Services. In that time he oversaw the Department's Drug Policy and Program area on all matters concerning licit and illicit drug use and abuse. Since July 2005, he has been the Manager of Community Care in the North West Region overseeing the Child Protection, Family and Children Services, Juvenile Justice and Placement and Support program areas for the Region.

Previous to this, Paul was appointed as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to the Youth Substance Abuse Service in 1997. This followed previous appointments as CEO to the Council of Homeless Persons and Director of Crossroads Salvation Army respectively.

Paul has a Masters Degree in Social Work, a Diploma in Youth Work and has undertaken extensive research and advisory work culminating in numerous publications, and presentations in regard to highly disadvantaged client groups.

**Anne McLeish** is a founder and Director of both Grandparents Victoria and Grandparents Australia. She has a long history in community organisations supporting the public sector, most particularly public education in childcare. She was awarded the OAM in 2009 for her work in establishing state-wide and nationwide grandparents' movements. Anne earns her income as an education consultant specialising in promoting the importance of generic skills. She is currently working with the South Australian government on enterprise education projects.

**Brian Babington** has been the Chief Executive Officer of Families Australia since 2005. He is an inaugural member of the Australian Families and Children Council. In 2007, he was a member of the Australian Government Carer Payment (Child) Review Taskforce which reviewed payments for carers of children with a profound disability or severe medical condition. As a 2008-09 Churchill Fellow, he examined child protection systems in the USA, Canada, the UK and Ireland.

He has been President of Parentline (ACT) – telephone counselling and support service for parents and carers – since 2004. He is an Ambassador for White Ribbon Day, a campaign which raises awareness about violence toward women.

# Background information on key note speakers

**Dr Howard Bath** is the Children's Commissioner for the Northern Territory. In this role he is responsible for ensuring the wellbeing of protected and otherwise vulnerable children. He has a specific responsibility for monitoring NT government decisions arising from the 'Little Children are Sacred' report and the administration of the NT *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007*. Howard trained as a Clinical Psychologist and has a long history working in child welfare settings. He has a particular interest in the contributions of recent neuroscience research to our understanding of the needs of vulnerable children and young people.

**Robyn Miller** is a social worker and family therapist with over 25 years experience in the field. Prior to this she has worked in the Community Sector, Local Government, Child Protection, and for the past 14 years at the Bouverie Family Therapy, La Trobe University Centre as a senior clinician and teacher. She has worked in the public and private sectors as a therapist supervisor, consultant and trainer for a range of organisations and academic institutes. She has been a member of the Victorian Child Death Review Committee for the past 5 years and was the recipient of inaugural Robin Clark memorial PhD scholarship attached to the Take Two Program. For the past three years she has provided practice leadership as the Principal Practitioner in the Children, Youth and Families Division of the Department of Human Services in Victoria, Australia, which has embraced many positive reforms. Her practice and research interest has been in the area of trauma and family work, and she has particular expertise with families where there has been sexual abuse and family violence.

Robyn has published several articles and has authored the Best Interest Series for the Department of Human Services. Robyn has presented widely at conferences both nationally and internationally and she is noted for her innovative practice with children and families where there is a complex and trans-generational trauma.

**Cate McKenzie** is the Group Manager, Children and Family Safety Group in the Federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. In this position Cate is responsible for a range of policies and programs relating to children and parenting with a focus on early intervention and prevention and protecting Australia's children; the development of a National Plan to Reduce Violence against women; and programs focussed on reducing family violence in indigenous communities. A number of these areas involve working closely with state and territory governments.

Cate has worked in the Department (FaHCSIA) for about eight years on a broad range of issues including housing, homelessness, people with disabilities and their families and carers, disability business services, the communities' agenda, indigenous, welfare reform and programs to assist people with multiple, non-vocational barriers to employment. At one stage, Cate's also managed the State and Territory network with over 500 staff in 30 locations across Australia.

Cate has worked in a range of portfolios since joining the Australian Public Service in 1985. These include the departments of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Environment, Primary Industry and Energy, Territories and Finance.

# Background information on panel members

**Brian Wynn-Mackenzie** was a Victorian Magistrate from August 1992 until August 2008.

Brian was a specialist Magistrate at the Children's Court of Victoria from January 1999 until August 2008.

Prior to his appointment as a Magistrate, Brian was a solicitor/Partner at Middletons Lawyers (Melbourne) from 1973 until his appointment as a Magistrate in 1992. Brian was a specialist in Shipping Law and Aviation Law. Brian was a mature age law graduate having had a career in the military prior to his legal studies.

Brian resigned as a Magistrate in 2008 to follow his interest in the less rigid field of Alternative Dispute Resolution by mediation. Brian is a qualified mediator. Brian is a strong supporter of the resolution of disputes by non-court process where possible.

Brian is also committed to ongoing community legal education to assist a better understanding of the Court process.

**Robyn Miller (please see information under key note speakers)**

**Nathan Fenelon** is connected to both Gu Gu Yimithiir and Gu Gu Yalanji people of Far North Queensland and has been employed by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency since 2004.

Prior to joining VACCA, Nathan was part of a Cultural Education Program that was delivered to various schools nationally, whereby permission was granted by relevant Elders to enable the sharing of some aspects of culture to children both indigenous and non-indigenous. The purpose of the Program was to highlight that the Indigenous Culture in Australia is one of the oldest living cultures in the world, and to teach children that we are proud to be a part of that culture and that they should be too.

In 2003-2004 Nathan worked with Troubled Youth at a Community Centre in Redbank Queensland, successfully engaging both indigenous and non-indigenous children and young people with a wide range of difficult behaviours. Together with staff, progress was made to find ways for children to move forward productively and with a little vision, guidance and encouragement they could reach their full potential.

From 2004-06 Nathan worked as a Family Support Case Worker with VACCA. From 2006 to mid 2008 Nathan has been in the role of Community Convenor for the Aboriginal Family Decision Making Program in the North West Region.

Nathan is currently the VACCA Family Services Team Leader and the Aboriginal Family Decision Making Convenor for the Eastern Metropolitan Region.

**Raelyn Marshall** is a grandparent to 7 grandchildren, two of which are living with her at the moment. She also has a great grandchild of 3 ½ months living with her. At one time, Raelyn has had all 7 children in her care.

**Ray Carroll** has extensive experience across Community Service Organisations and the Department of Human Services. This has encompassed direct service delivery and management roles in out of home care, family services and child protection. In recent years, he has held senior roles in Child Protection policy development and the previous office of the Advocate for Children in Care. He has been on the management team of the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner since its establishment nearly four years ago. Ray currently manages the Out of Home Care Monitoring function of the Child Safety Commissioner.

**Argiri Alisandratos** is the Assistant Director, Placement and Support, Child Protection, Placement and Family Services Branch in the Child, Youth and Families Division, Department of Human Services. Argiri has extensive experience across the child and family welfare field as a practitioner, operational service delivery and policy manager within the public sector environment. He has held a number of senior roles within the Department of Human Services and has been a responsible for the management and implementation of major policy and program change initiatives and the implementation of significant systems reform and redevelopment within operational environments.

**Marija Joyce** is a senior manager, clinical supervisor and counsellor with qualifications and experience specialising in working with traumatised children and adolescents. She has over 20 years experience in the community sector in a broad range of community organisations, government and commercial entities. She brings a strong commitment to social justice and advocacy for children in particular and is focusing in her role as General Manager, Southern Services at Oz Child on implementing the principles and spirit of the two new pieces of legislation in Victoria - the Child, Youth and Family Act (2007) and the Disability Act (2007).