

Capital Region Community Services

Annual Report 19/20



Zoe Marie, 'Kutukulung', 2020.

Capital Region Community Services acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the ACT region - the Ngunnawal People. We pay respect to the Elders of the Ngunnawal Nation, past, present and emerging, and acknowledge their continuing culture and contribution to the life of this city and this region. CRCS acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, waters, and the community.

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Capital Region Community Services

Our Vision

Inclusive, connected communities within the Capital Region.

Our Purpose

Empowering people to live their best life through building and connecting communities; delivering relevant, person-centred services; and providing choice and opportunity.

Our Values

Respect: we are considerate and thoughtful towards ourselves and others

Optimism: we are positive, resilient and flexible

Inclusion: we welcome diversity and celebrate difference

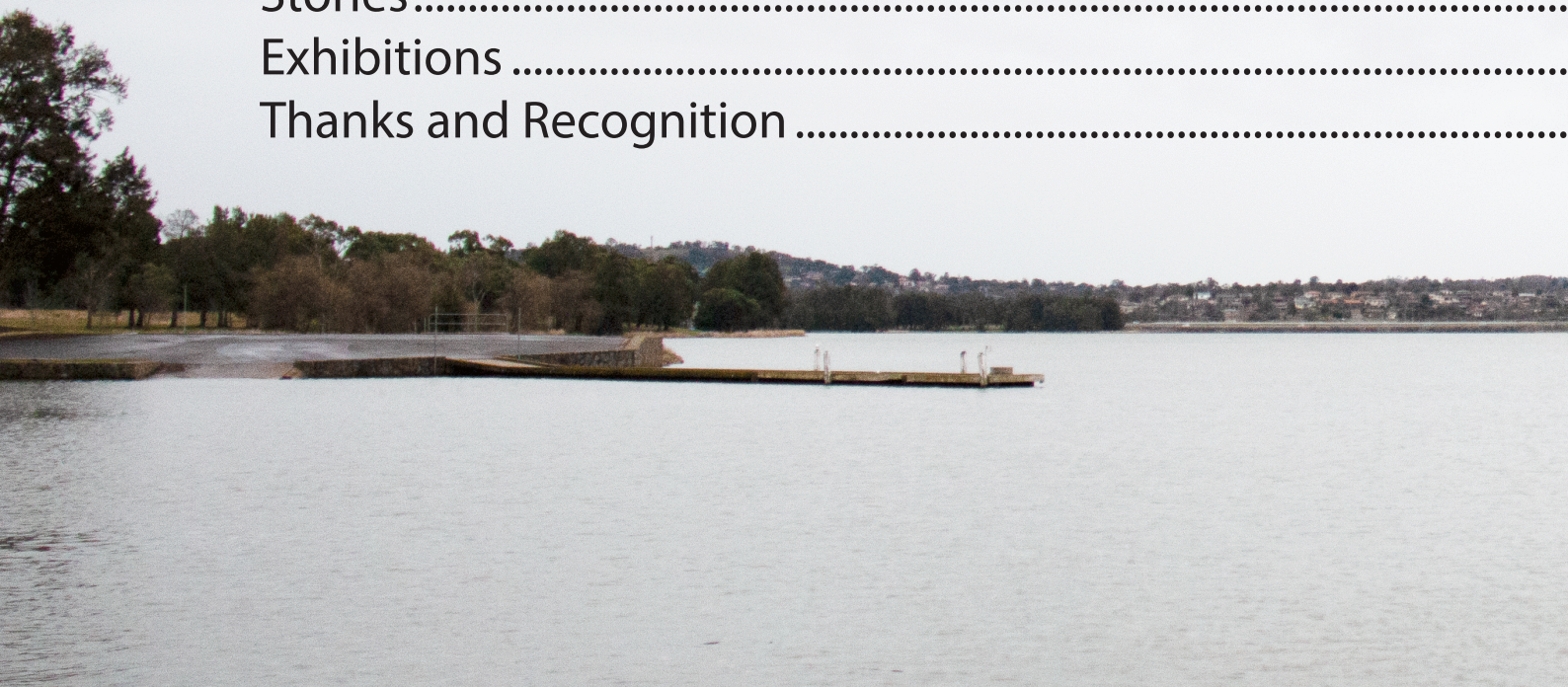
Ethics: we are ethical and transparent in our operations

Accountability: we are responsible and accountable for our actions

Innovation: we celebrate and incorporate creativity in all of our services

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Lake Ginninderra.

Message from our Chair



I think it is reasonable to say that this year has been incredibly bittersweet for CRCS.

The events of 2020 have had a significant impact on the lives of many in our community. The year has highlighted that even with the very best intentions and planning, circumstances don't always follow a predictable path. However, the Board and Executive Team at CRCS remain committed to accomplishing the ambitious goals outlined in our ten-year Strategic Plan – humbly launched this year and met with very positive feedback. The Plan is published on our website, and readers are invited to take a closer look. It outlines our intent to build a stronger community and achieve greater social impact in a manner that truly challenges the organisation; supporting the region in new and innovative ways.

The ACT is now expected to welcome an additional 170,000 people over the next 20 years. Our need to grow the organisation and ensure that community support mechanisms exist for a burgeoning population has never been greater. This is why a ten-year plan, with clear goals and solid performance indicators is crucial. I am confident that these goals are achievable given the plan has the solid commitment and support of our employees, funding bodies and community at large.

This year, CRCS also undertook an extensive rebranding exercise to reflect who we are as an organisation, and to accompany our change in legal status. This is a significant transformation of our organisation and we look forward — with the help of our incredible employees, volunteers and board — to continue to grow and have a positive impact in the lives of our community members.

As a Company Limited by Guarantee we will continue to develop a skill-based board and support the embedded planning, accountability and evaluation systems of the organisation. This will ensure we can report on the measures we've committed to.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to CRCS over the last year, and particularly our funding bodies for your continued support. A special thanks to our CEO Mandy Green for her positive leadership, and indeed to all the Executive Team who fearlessly tackled the many challenges throughout the year. A sincere thanks to Jenelle Tinham, Karyn Ferraris and Allison Sullings. You displayed resilience and creativity - keeping many of our programs afloat and our staff at work when the odds were clearly stacked against us. It was also wonderful to see CRCS staunchly supporting the bushfire relief effort, and reduce social isolation as a result of lockdown – the two biggest challenges of the year.

Finally, a special thank you to Board members who completed their terms this year: Michael Lee, Wanda Oram-Miles, Shirley Smith and Adam McEvoy. It was a tremendous asset having you on the Board, and the organisation truly benefited from your contributions. It has also been wonderful to welcome Loi Lam, Peter Humphries and Vanessa Gale – all of whom have offered many fresh perspectives and ideas that will help shape the organisation in the year to come.

Chris Ermacora

Message from our CEO



It is with great pleasure that I present our 2019/2020 Annual Report.

This reporting year has seen significant change for our organisation. Most notable is the implementation of our ten year Strategic Plan which included a transition from an Incorporated Association to a Company Limited by Guarantee and of course, our change of name from Belconnen Community Service to Capital Region Community Services.

Whilst this reporting period has been challenging, CRCS has also had many reasons for celebration. CRCS was awarded the Excellence in Inclusive Services and Disability Support at the 2019 ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards and we celebrated our exceptional employees with the 2019 All Star Awards at our end of year celebration in December 2019.

The 2019 All Star Award recipients were:
Optimism: Fariha Shahzad
Respect: Yasi Rathakumar
Integrity: Stephanie Amos
Inclusion: Helen Langham and Mahri Henderson
Stewardship: Lauren Kapper
Leadership: Daniel Gaffney
Inspirational Volunteers: 10/10 Volunteers

"Executive Award" Winners (awarded from the Executive Team for going above and beyond):
- Fariha Shahzad
- Matthew Bell
- Tracy Dodt
- Fiona Jarvis



Photo: Mandy Green presenting the All Star Awards to Fariha, Matthew, and Tracy respectively.

The challenges for our organisation and our communities in this reporting period included the devastating bushfires followed by COVID-19. Like many organisations within the Capital Region, CRCS rallied the ACT community and together we donated food, clothing, and other essentials to people affected by the bushfires. I would like to thank those who donated and volunteered their time to this initiative.

COVID-19 was unexpected and impacted our organisation, employees, participants, community and stakeholders. I'm proud of the way CRCS employees adapted and responded to the impacts of the pandemic. Their flexibility and innovation assisted our participants and community through the initial and continuing stages of this situation and, through their efforts, new and exciting ways of providing services were developed to continue meeting the needs of our community.

I would like to acknowledge the significant impact that our eligibility for JobKeeper has had for CRCS. It is thanks to this support that our organisation was able to retain and redeploy most of our workforce. In addition, it ensured our financial stability throughout this reporting period and enabled us to end the financial year in a healthy financial position which we look forward to reinvesting into our communities in the coming years.

Reflecting on this year, I think we have achieved so much and faced unprecedented challenges like no year before. It has been a privilege and a challenge to have led CRCS though this reporting year.

The successes of CRCS are as a result of a supportive Board, a very dedicated and capable Executive Team, and innovative and resilient employees and volunteers. In addition, the support of our key stakeholders and the community has been instrumental in enabling us to continue critical work in our communities and for that we thank you.

Please read through our Annual Report to find out about the many amazing initiatives, people, programs and participants. I would love to talk about them all in my report but I think the stories will do them more justice!

Mandy Green



Photo: A few of the CRCS 10/10 volunteers receiving the award for Inspirational Volunteers at the All Star Awards.

Treasurer's report



It is my absolute pleasure as Treasurer of Capital Region Community Services (CRCS), to present the 2019-2020 annual accounts to our members.

2019-2020 has been an extraordinary year for CRCS. Just this year alone we have seen the amazing work of CRCS through bushfires, dust, hail storms and COVID-19 placing both opportunities and challenges on the organisation as never before experienced. The work of our CEO and CFO and the Executive Team is to be acknowledged for their direction, their ongoing support to the organisation, their employees, participants and all their families.

The organisation recorded a surplus for 2019-2020 of $1,072,177 compared to the deficit of $128,307 recorded in 2019-2020. Income for the year increased by approximately 17% while expenditure increased by 6.74%.

The reported surplus would not have been possible without CRCS being eligible for the Commonwealth Government JobKeeper initiative. The financial support from JobKeeper provided CRCS with increased financial stability during the peak of the COVID-19 event and enabled the majority of our programs and services to continue to operate while providing a degree of security for our people.

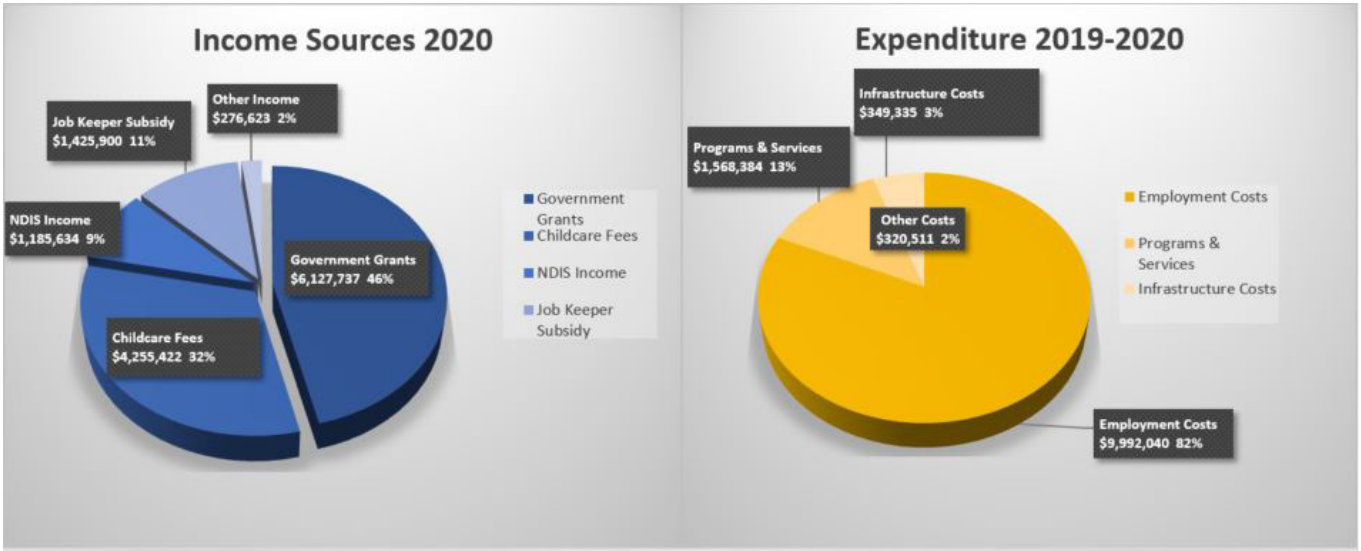
This year we saw Belconnen Community Service transition to Capital Region Community Services as a Company Limited by Guarantee which ensures we are able to expand our services into communities in the broader Capital Region. On another positive note, this year has seen the investment through the purchase of a Head Office for CRCS in Bruce. This investment provides more flexibility for our programs and services and addressed a pressing need for additional space for growing areas of the organisation.

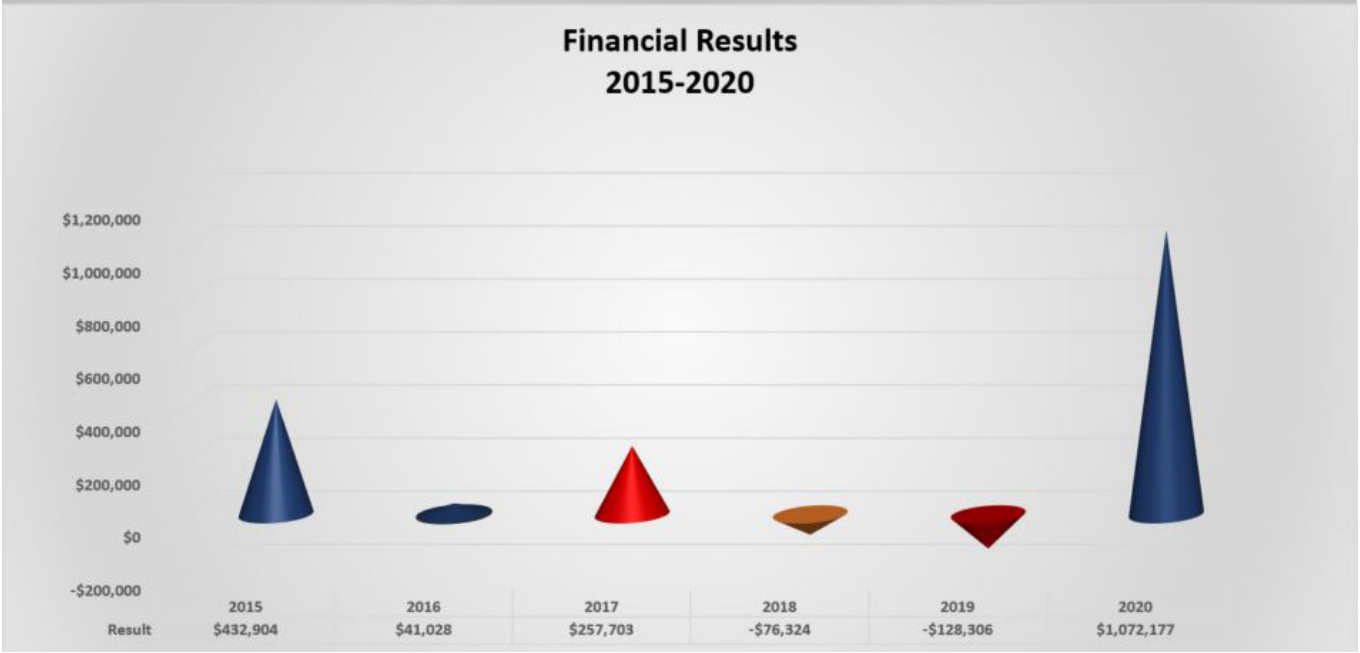
The key financial management challenge in the coming year for the Board and Management will be to build on the efforts of recent years and continue to grow and develop our services through identifying and capitalising on opportunities as they arise, properly supporting the needs of our people and investing in our infrastructure to ensure it can meet the needs of our communities.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the CEO, Mandy Green, the executive leadership team, Board Chair Chris Ermacora and my colleagues on the CRCS Board.

Carolyn McPherson

Financials at a glance
2019- 2020





Inclusive Connected Communities

Since 1975, Capital Region Community Services (CRCS) has provided a wide range of high quality, integrated and inclusive programs and services to individuals, families, children and young people in the Belconnen and wider Capital Region.

CRCS works with community members, local organisations and businesses to develop responsive programs, services and activities that support self-determination and reduce social isolation, placing community at the heart of everything we do.





Then and now... Belconnen Community Centre, over 40 years apart.

Statistical Snapshot

In the year 2019-2020, Capital Region Community Services provided:

1,383 Hours
of Personal Care

4,683 Hours
of Domestic Assistance

3,000 Hours
of CHSP Social Group Programs

437 Hours
of Flexible Respite

4,242 Hours
of Social Support

3,007 Hours
of Home Maintenance

1,211 Hours
of Community Care Case Management

We have also...

Supported
2,358 individuals
through our Individual and Family Support Service

Recorded
850 hours
of work with participants through the Supportive Tenancy Service

Transport



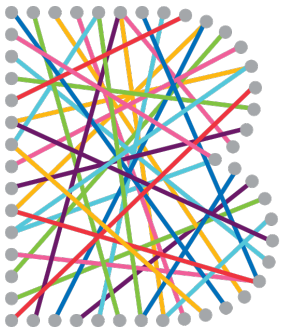
Media and communications

9,522 total E-News opens

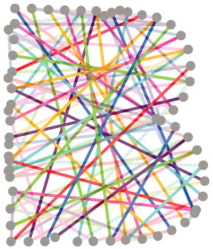
659,820 total Facebook engagements

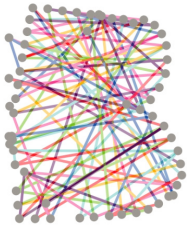
92,125 total active website users

Continue reading our Annual Report for more highlights ...

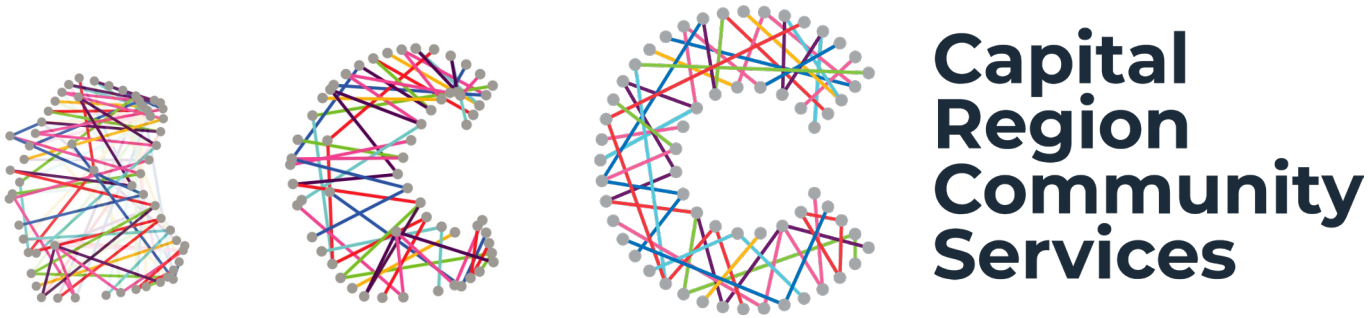


Belconnen
Community
Service





Welcome to th



e CRCS family

Belconnen Community Service rebrands to Capital Region Community Services.



Belconnen Community Service becomes Capital Region Community Services

For over 40 years, Belconnen Community Service (BCS) has committed itself to providing vital services to the Belconnen and wider ACT region. It's something we have taken great pride in, and when the time came to draft a new strategic plan that will drive the organisation's goals for the next decade, we considered how we could improve ourselves and our services - how we could contribute to a more inclusive, connected community.

More than anything, we wanted to keep doing what we do best, staying true to our Belconnen roots and supporting as many people as we can.

In developing the 2020-2030 Strategic Plan, BCS paid close attention to what the community was suggesting. During the consultation period, BCS's Board and Executive Team received several requests to make our services available to communities in regional NSW. This was not possible at the time because BCS was an Incorporated Organisation.

But the community spoke, so we listened.

Photo: CEO Mandy Green and Board Chair Chris Ermacora.

In March 2020, BCS changed its legal structure to a Company Limited by Guarantee so that we could reach across borders and offer the regional NSW community the same opportunities as the ACT community.

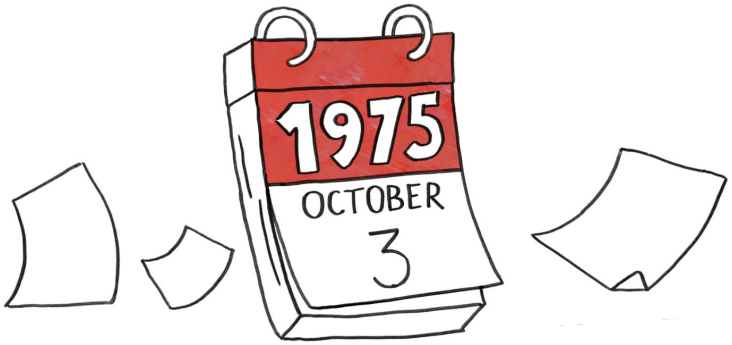
And to reflect this reach, Belconnen Community Service legally changed its name to Capital Region Community Services on 31 March, 2020, publicly announcing the change in May, 2020.



We have a very simple yet clear set of goals for the next ten years; we envision a society empowered by inclusive and connected communities and we hope that by regularly seeking feedback from our communities and improving our services, we would be in a position to facilitate those connections across the Capital Region.
-Mandy Green.

For over 40 years BCS has reached out to connect and enrich lives within the local community. Throughout this time, this community has noticeably expanded and evolved. Through the outcomes of our strategic planning process we can now positively respond to these changes.
- Chris Ermacora.





BCS initially had plans to host an official rebrand event but due to restrictions on gatherings as a result of COVID-19, those plans were curtailed. Nevertheless, BCS chose to move ahead with plans to announce the rebrand online with an official launch video. The video can be found on CRCS's website and social media pages.

"Belconnen is and will always be our home. We stand on the shoulders of passionate Belconnen residents who showed incredible enthusiasm and dedication to turn this Organisation into a hub of community spirit in Belconnen. To stray from that vision would be unthinkable to us.

To our new friends across the Capital Region, we are very excited to be able to open our doors to you and welcome new members to our CRCS family."
-Mandy Green.









Taking the old signage down and replacing it with ...


CENTRE
Ginninderra
Early Childhood
Centre
Capital
Region
Commu
Services
Inclusive Connected
02 6264 0200
CRCS.COM.AU



CRCS 2020-2030 Strategic intent

Goal 1

Engage and connect with communities across the Capital Region

Goal 2

Provide high-quality services, placing people and the community at the heart of everything we do

Goal 3

Be inclusive, responsible and exceptional as an organisation and an employer

Goal 4

Strengthen our innovative and collaborative capacity to achieve greater social impact

Strategic Working Groups

Part of being an inclusive connected organisation that truly reflects the community and its values is ensuring that every effort has been taken to inculcate those values internally. The establishment of strategic working groups at CRCS was for this very purpose.

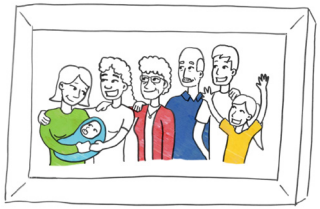
CRCS's Strategic Working Groups are run by CRCS employees who commit their time voluntarily for the purpose of furthering particular goals and ensuring CRCS is in the best position to advocate for inclusion and sustainable practices.

The Rainbow Working Group works towards ensuring CRCS is a safe and welcoming place for LGBTIQA+Rainbow community members and employees. It provides insight into CRCS policies and procedures and offers recommendations based on best practice, while facilitating discussion and conversations about topics related to the LGBTIQA+Rainbow community. Because of the Rainbow Working Group, CRCS was proud to enter into a partnership with FUSE Magazine, and celebrate important dates such as Wear It Purple Day.

The Cultural and Diversity Inclusion (CDI) Group ensures that CRCS maintains its commitment to a diverse and inclusive work culture and delivers culturally appropriate programs and services to the community. The CDI Group celebrates the diverse members that make up the CRCS family, establishes valuable connections with other community and not-for-profit organisations that work with people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, and recommends programs and services aimed at people from migrant and CALD backgrounds.

The Sustainability Working Group works towards making CRCS an environment-friendly organisation and ensuring sustainable practices are implemented and instilled within the organisation. Apart from working towards an ACTSmart Accreditation for CRCS, the Sustainability Working Group also reviews CRCS's practices and recommends green-friendly alternatives that are kinder to the environment. CRCS's Early Education and Care centres are proudly ACTSmart accredited.

The Reconciliation Action Plan Group works towards implementing a meaningful Reconciliation Action Plan for CRCS.









Capital Region Community Services

Capital Region Community Services' four strategic working groups are dedicated to ensuring CRCS is in the best possible position to advocate for inclusion and sustainable practices. All of our Early Education and Care centres are ACTSmart accredited. CRCS is also a proud advocate of equality, diversity and cultural expression - a rainbow version of the CRCS logo was also created in solidarity and celebration of our LGBTIQA+Rainbow community!

CRCS winners at Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards

Capital Region Community Services - then Belconnen Community Service (BCS) - was honoured to receive the award for Excellence in Inclusive Services and Disability Support at the 2019 ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards, held at Parliament House in December, 2019.

The category of Inclusive Services and Disability Support was an extremely competitive one, with several worthy nominees sharing the space with CRCS. It was therefore a tremendous honour in itself when a parent of an NDIS group participant nominated CRCS in recognition of our services and innovation in the NDIS service sector.

"This is quite a shock," Adam McEvoy, then the Community Programs Manager, said as he received the award on behalf of the team, "especially with such a large number of nominees who do such awesome work around Canberra."

"I wish I had not only our staff but the 200 participants that come to our programs weekly. They are the people we listen to each week to get our drive."

In addition to winning this category, CRCS's Tracy Dodt also received a nomination for the Excellence in Support Work award. Never found without a smile on her face, Tracy embodied CRCS's core values and was adored by her participants – one of whom enthusiastically seized the opportunity to nominate her for this extremely deserving award.

> *"BCS regularly seeks feedback from participants and families and welcomes suggestions to ensure a dynamic environment. BCS's range of activities exceeds national standards for disability service providers... -Judging panel.*



Adam McEvoy and the NDIS groups team accepting the award from Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA.

10/10 project attracts record number of volunteers



Volunteers hard at work at one of the sites.

September kicked off a very busy period for CRCS with our annual Trivia Night fundraiser held at the Raiders Club in Holt. Fantastic costumes were again part of the celebrations with a special shout-out to our very own Ghostbusters who made a surprise appearance on the night!

The 10/10 project achieved some stunning results again this year, with everyone's efforts making a big difference in the lives of the people whose yards we were privileged to work in.

> *The 10/10 project continues to grow from year to year and for the first time ever, we had just over 100 volunteers contributing their time to the project.*
> *-Graham McKerchar, Project Lead.*

With such an incredible team of volunteers, 14 gardens were completed for this year's 10/10 project.

We also welcomed new partners this year with a team of volunteers from Westpac joining us on the day.

A big thank you to the team at Alliance Leasing for lending us their mighty Triton. This vehicle came in handy on the day as we moved equipment from site to site.

We know the impact that 10/10 has on the people whose yards are included in the project. But sometimes we miss the impact on our volunteers. Nicholas from one of our partner organisations shared his experience with us:

"I greatly appreciated and was honoured to take part in this year's 10/10 project. Credit to the team for the great efforts in bringing the 2019 10/10 project to flourishing.

The atmosphere in the morning was filled with enthusiasm and positive energy and this was reflective of how the day turned out. The sense of community and individual selflessness was very apparent.

Listening to the stories of both households and the team working was emotionally fulfilling. It was a great reminder of what we lose sight of; this is the very essence of what contributes to strong communities.

I left on Friday feeling accomplished, emotionally satisfied and greatly appreciative of my own life. I believe that projects such as this can really be enriching not only to the household, but also to the volunteers."

Community spirit floods CRCS bushfire appeal

The 2019/2020 NSW bushfires left our neighbours across the border in dire straits. Canberrans watched helplessly as fires burned through people's properties and livelihoods, leaving many people stranded and in need.

Canberrans wanted to come together to support those affected, and CRCS was proud to faciliate these connections across the border.

A bushfire appeal was initiated in January 2020 in support of our friends in NSW, with CRCS nominating itself as a collection point for donations in Belconnen.

The response to the appeal was remarkable; CRCS's Youth Centre lobby was filled with donations that were received in just a matter of days.

CRCS then called on volunteers to assist with packing and transporting donations to G-Spot Canberra in Gungahlin – a collection point that transported donations directly to fire-affected communities in NSW.

That call was received by close to a hundred community members who flooded the Youth Centre, offering support to pack and transport donations. Even local sports stars from Canberra United Football Club came around to support the cause.

Due to the overwhelming support, CRCS halved their expected time for packing and transporting donations on the day.



Top: The Belconnen Youth Centre filled with donations from the Canberra community.







Top left: Players from Canberra United lending a helping hand.
Bottom: Filling a semi-trailer truck with donations for Yass Bushfire Relief Centre.
Right: Shopping carts full of fresh food donations courtesy of OzHarvest.

CRCS also packed a semi-trailer truck with donations to be sent to Yass Bushfire Relief Centre, which reached desperate families in Batlow and the surrounding areas where donations had been difficult to reach.

Animals were not forgotten, with CRCS collecting and transporting a substantial amount of donations for animals to Petbarn in Wagga Wagga, which then took them to SMART animal sanctuary in Batlow.

All this, in just a few days, thanks to the overwhelming generosity of the Canberra community!

INVOLVE program aimed at reducing social isolation among senior Canberrans



In January 2020, CRCS launched INVOLVE –a program aimed at improving the mental and physical wellbeing of Canberra's senior community.

With recent reports showing an increase in the population of Australians over 65, concerns about older people's susceptibility to loneliness and social isolation continue to grow. The INVOLVE program addresses these issues with a range of programs that encourage mental stimulation and physical activity.

Programs include *I Can Do IT Myself* – a short course in smartphone technology and social media usage; *Virtually Here, There, and Everywhere* – a virtual reality experience; and *Walkie Talkies* – a program designed to encourage social walking. An intergenerational storytelling program called *Timeless Stories* also aims to bridge the gap between older and younger generations through sharing stories.

Coastal retreats were also planned as part of the INVOLVE program, particularly to bushfire-affected regions in order to drive local tourism to those areas. However, travel restrictions as a result of COVID-19 halted these plans. CRCS plans to resume these retreats as soon as it is deemed safe and viable again.

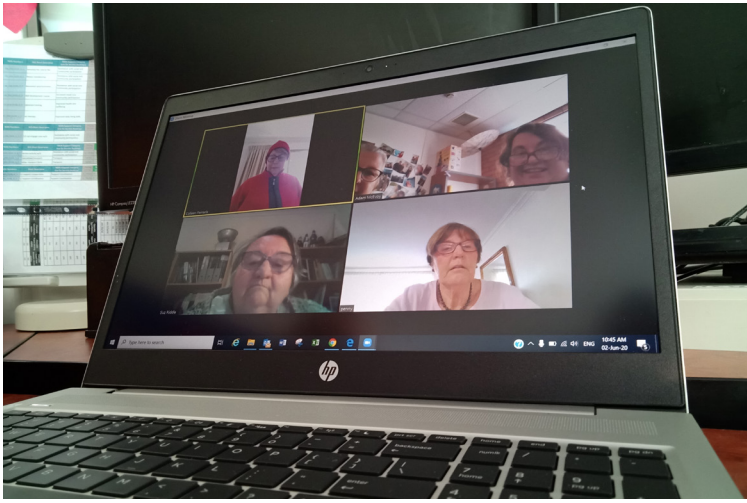








Left: INVOLVE participants at the launch event.
Top left: Our facilitators testing the virtual reality equipment.
Below: The launch of INVOLVE, with Gordon Ramsay MLA as guest speaker.
Top Right: INVOLVE participants out on Walkie Talkies.
Second: A Timeless Stories session taking place.
Third: Participants familiarising themselves with Zoom during COVID-19 restrictions.



Easy P - pilot program for disadvantaged young learner drivers launched by Youth Engagement

In January 2020 and following changes to the ACT's Learner and Provisional driving laws, CRCS launched 'Easy P', a pilot program in Canberra to help disadvantaged learner drivers achieve their Provisional driving licence.

With new laws that came into effect on 1 January 2020 requiring ACT learner drivers to achieve a minimum of 100 supervised driving hours in order to gain their Provisional driving licence, the Easy P program supports disadvantaged learner drivers by linking them up with a course of professional lessons from an approved provider, as well as up to 10 hours per week of driving mentoring with CRCS volunteer drivers.

The Easy P program is supported by the ACT Government's Road Safety Fund and administered by the CRCS Youth Engagement team.



Daniel Gaffney (Right) says Easy P is a very timely program.



Many of our Road Ready participants lack resources and connections to assist with gaining driving experience as it is. This program will assist with removing barriers for young people to participate in what is often seen as an essential element of gaining independence as an adult, as well as gaining valuable connections through relationships with driving mentors.
- Daniel Gaffney, Program Manager.



Meet the new Youth Engagement Team (L-R): Josh (Youth Engagement Coordinator), Louisa, Amy, Nikki, and Ronny.

Paper faces on parade at 2019 Winter Ball



The 2019 Winter Ball held in August was another resounding success, with over 50 participants, employees, family and friends gathering at The Abbey at Gold Creek to celebrate a Masquerade theme!

An awards night component of the event saw our amazing NDIS participants receiving recognition based on CRCS's core values of Integrity, Respect, Optimism, Inclusion, and Stewardship. The night was filled with music, dancing, and companionship.

Thank you to CIT Floristry for the floral arrangements, CMS Make Up Academy for the fantastic makeup they did for our participants and employees, the Pink Party Bus for transporting us from Belconnen Community Centre to The Abbey for free, and all the other donors and friends who supported this participant-led event.












Optimism
AWARD
Daniel Brown

‘Heel and Toe!’: Bush Dance puts a spring in everyone’s step



Another participant-led event took place in February 2020 when CRCS hosted its first ever Bush Dance at the Hall Pavilion; an event that our NDIS participants overwhelmingly requested and CRCS was more than happy to accommodate.

Fifty-two participants and employees attended the event donned in their best cowboy and sheriff costumes, and enjoyed several games and fun activities like the horse shoe toss, Boots and Hats and sack races. Golden Roast Catering served a delicious spit roast meal while Paverty Bush Band did an excellent job as the official bush caller for the evening, keeping everyone on their feet with some great tunes!

There was also raffle prizes and plenty of fun, entertainment and laughs at this very special event.

> *“That was the best night ever...”*
>
> one of our participants said.

















Football stars join CRCS participants to Try a Sport



CRCS's NDIS participants were treated to a wonderful surprise when football stars from Canberra United - Canberra's premier W-League football club - paid a visit to one of their Try a Sport sessions.

The footballers ran our participants through some of their training sessions and capped the day with a friendly game of football.

Photo (left): One of our participants being interviewed by Tim Gavel.









Family Foundations – 'Thinking outside the box' in the way we support vulnerable children in their early childhood

CRCS has made a bold move in collaborating its team of highly experienced early childhood educators and its Family Foundations Program, made up of a team of practitioners who provide intensive family therapies to children and their parents and carers.

In its work, CRCS has seen the value of having services that support families who are experiencing challenges under the same roof as the early education staff who spend their days building relationships with those same children and their parents.

But Family Foundations is taking this one step further by also 'wrapping around' its families.

By closely aligning our therapeutic staff, educators and allied health professionals who are frequently working with families, Family Foundations is creating a therapeutic working model that allows for professional expertise to be shared across a diverse workforce that is resulting in more positive outcomes for children and their families.

One of our key organisational values is 'inclusion'- and in developing this new model of service delivery, inclusivity has been at the forefront of our minds. We know vulnerable families don't always feel comfortable accessing services, so we are ramping up our focus on relationship-based practice. Families can consult with one of the Family Foundations therapeutic professionals after having met them – either at their children's early education and care centre, or chatting to them in the hall after coming to one of CRCS's parenting support groups.

CRCS has experience in providing support to vulnerable children and their families as well as the expertise to elbow this much needed and innovative model of working with families into the Service System. We are looking forward to supporting more families in the Canberra region through Family Foundations.







Community Resilience Through COVID

Adapting to change.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a myriad challenges to the community, and CRCS was no different. Quite suddenly, CRCS had to adapt as programs were forced to shut down and participants were asked to stay at home. Shutting down the Belconnen Community Centre was particularly significant, and employees had to adjust to working from home while continuing to connect with each other and their participants and families.

However, they say adversity breeds innovation, and the CRCS family proved that at every turn.

Below are a few examples of how CRCS rose to the challenge and continued to engage and connect with our community.

Work Health and Safety (WHS) - protecting the community, protecting ourselves

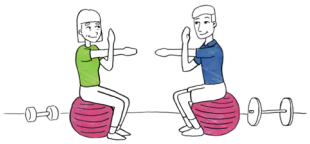
The year 2020 has been a very challenging one, working to provide a CovidSafe workplace for employees, participants and community members. CRCS's COVID-19 Risk Committee met regularly throughout this time to monitor our situation and implement processes or supports as information became available from government medical advisors. We thank everyone who adapted to the many changes required and continued to consider ways we could provide CovidSafe quality service to participants.

A review of CRCS's WHS policy and procedures took place during the year with policies sent out for consultation and feedback. Ratified policies and procedures were discussed with staff including how they will work operationally in service provision and accountability.

The WHS consultative committee has also begun the process of developing their 2021 strategic plan and look forward to working with everyone on building a solid WHS framework for next year.

Employee wellbeing was also a significant consideration during these difficult times and CRCS was particularly mindful about the impact COVID-19 would have on its workforce. Providing quality Employee Assistance Programs was one of the ways CRCS supported its employees.

In extremely challenging times it has been wonderful to see the focus on work health and safety remain a high priority for everyone at CRCS. We look forward to building an even more resilient and safer workplace culture in 2021!



Staying Connected during COVID-19



In June 2020, CRCS received a Rapid Response Grant from the ACT Government to help combat social isolation and bridge the digital divide in the community as a result of COVID-19. The grant was aimed at two target groups; the first were those who were vulnerable and could not afford a device and the second target group were who that were becoming more socially isolated as businesses were shut down and services went online.

To ascertain who were the most vulnerable in the community and to reach as far and wide as possible, CRCS consulted with our partner organisations; Northside Community Service, Woden Community Service, Communities@Work and Community Services#1. These services had similar experiences with their participants and were seeking solutions, therefore by pooling our resources together we were able to connect with a wide range of vulnerable Canberrans.

By doing this we were able to provide 4G Samsung Tablets to many vulnerable people from refugee and CALD backgrounds, families with children at school whose education was falling behind during home schooling due to a lack of technological devices, and our own NDIS participants. We were also able to provide some one-on-one training to those who were struggling to understand our online world, such as the over 65-year-old cohort and some of our NDIS participants.

In addition to the one-on-one training, a manual was produced with basic steps on how to use the Samsung tablet and links to resources like the Be Connected website which provides basic instructions on how to use the internet, as well as the ACT Libraries' digital helpline.

At the conclusion of the project, we hope to have given out more than 60 Samsung tablets and hundreds of hours of one-on-one training, to keep our community both socially and digitally connected to this rapidly changing online world.

Know Your Neighbour campaign

Another way that CRCS continued to build connections within the community was through the *Know Your Neighbour* Facebook campaign. Each month was based on a theme: the first month saw us talking to small businesses who had been effected by closures during the pandemic. This was a very successful campaign with many people leaving positive comments on our Facebook Page.

The second phase was a Faces of Belconnen series, where we profiled everyday Belconnen residents, asking them what they loved about calling Belconnen home.

The last segment of the Know Your neighbour Campaign was a profile of community services in Canberra, doing their bit to make these challenging times bearable. Charities and not-for-profits have found it difficult to fundraise and generate an income during these difficult times. By promoting their services we not only highlighted the wonderful work they do, but also showed our support in recognising the struggles they had been facing.



“It has been amazing to see how the Capital Region has been able to adapt and grow, and stay Well Connected in 2020.
- Tracy Tervoort,
Community Development Coordinator.



Tracy interviewed by ABC News Canberra, talking about the digital literacy program.

Be Active! - A CRCS employee fitness initiative



For a number of years CRCS has run a health and wellbeing program called "A Little Bit Fit". This award-winning program was designed to encourage employees to keep active during their work day. An extension of A Little Bit Fit has seen team members regularly participating in the Cancer Council's annual Relay For Life. Due to COVID-19 the 2020 Relay for Life switched to a virtual relay, "Relay Your Way". The CRCS team had such a fantastic time Relaying Our Way, keeping each other motivated and sharing photos and messages of support as we relayed across the 24-hour relay period.

The sense of connection and camaraderie experienced during Relay For Life in 2020 lead to a workplace conversation about how we could build on that sense of connection across the workplace. The idea of BCS Be Active was born from this conversation.

BCS Be Active is a Facebook Group accessible to all employees of CRCS and is based on a game of tag. From time to time (usually on a weekend) we will call for a game of tag. Someone starts the game by completing an hour of exercise and then tags the next person in to the game. Once tagged, they need to stop what they are doing and start exercising.

Exercise activities could be a walk, bike ride, run, yoga or gym session. No one knows when they will be tagged or who will tag them, they just need to be ready to Be Active!

But BCS (now CRCS) Be Active is more than just about exercise. It also plays a part in getting to know and connecting with your colleagues as they participate. Once you are tagged, the requirement is to upload a photo of your chosen exercise activity. Themes are also a feature of each game. One week, employees shared photos from their favourite holiday destinations so the group were able to take a virtual world trip. Another week we shared photos of our pets, whom we all know play a big role in our mental health and wellbeing. Employees have also taken family and friends along on their exercise sessions once they had been tagged in to the game.

CRCS Be Active brought a sense of fun while promoting a sense of connection particularly when COVID-19 and social distancing requirements were at their peak. Be Active also supports our mental health and physical wellbeing by encouraging our employees to take care of themselves and to keep active during these challenging times.

Old Ways/New Ways - Facilitating connections during 2020

By Claire Manning, former Coordinator, INVOLVE.



The INVOLVE project is an initiative started in January 2020 to develop programs for people over 65 in our community. The focus was to find ways to reduce social isolation by inviting people to come out of their homes, sign up for our programs, meet new people and try something new. Then in March, due to COVID-19, we told them to go home, shut the door and stay safe.

While the world was working out what to do next, the INVOLVE team made regular calls where we checked in with participants, had a chat, shared updates and usually got to have a laugh too. Keeping spirits up worked both ways. As things started to settle here in Canberra, we came up with a couple of ideas to connect remotely with our INVOLVE community.

Our community embraced 'Cuppa and a (video) Chat' and 'Postcard Play' better than we could have expected.

Cuppa and a (video) Chat was a weekly catch up that went for eight weeks. We would link up on Zoom and spoke to everyone about how they were feeling, and then we'd share books we read, movies we'd watched and laughed through Tricky Trivia Quiz; thankfully, we didn't care what score we got (usually low), it was all about having a bit of fun. For me, sitting and talking to these wise women and some weeks our wonderful male colleague, Les, was such a privilege.

> *I felt like I was Kerry O'Brien on the 7:30 Report and my participants were my expert panel who shared their experiences in thoughtful ways and supported each other along the way.*



Previous page: The culmination of Postcard play.
Top left: Claire slipping the Thank You cards into the Ginninderra Early Childhood Centre mailbox.

I wanted to give this group of COVID-19 champions a gift and a task through an old-fashioned way of staying connected.

I approached the director of Ginninderra Early Childhood Centre, Jane, and shared my ideas about Postcard Play, which involved working with the preschool children and getting them to create postcards for me to send to our INVOLVE community. Each child got a Postcard Play Kit which contained two blank cards to draw on (one to take home and one to give back to me) and an introduction letter to their postcard penpal which included what they liked to do in a sentence or two. With help from educators at Ginninderra Early Childhood Centre, we managed to get this enthusiastic group to create beautiful cards for me to send to some lucky people.

Everyone enjoys getting mail and Ginninderra Early Childhood Centre has their own mailbox in the art room. I wasn't sure how successful we would be at getting replies to postcards, but to my surprise most people accepted the invitation and I spent one of my Fridays visiting my generous INVOLVE community members, picking up their artworks and having a cuppa and in-person chat with a few lucky ones!

Next step was using the mailbox in the art room again and what a wonderful special time that was for me. The children were excited to see all the envelopes in the mailbox. Watching Trang, the lovely educator, read the postcards and the smiles on the faces was so special and some of their responses even made me tear up a little.

The fun didn't end there, however. The day of the postcard delivery was the same day as a Cuppa and a (video) Chat was booked. I was so excited about making this extra level of connection between our over-65-year-old participants and the preschool under-four-year-olds. On a big television screen, the children met their penpals over Zoom, said thank you and asked questions. They were a little shy at first but both groups warmed up and we all agreed it was a great way to finish these remote programs.

A big thank you to everyone who took part.

CRCS and the Canberra Relief Network (CRN)





When the Canberra Relief Network was established in March 2020 and CRCS became a community partner, no one anticipated the impact COVID-19 would have on the community. We would isolate, home school, hoard toilet paper and feel real fear for our futures.

The Canberra Relief Network (CRN) is a group of community service organisations working together to provide food security to ACT residents in need as a result of COVID-19. Some CRN participants had been community food pantry users pre-COVID so their access was now seriously impacted with many community pantries unable to access food stocks due to supply shortages and an almost complete end to food and financial donations. Many community pantries also relied on volunteers who were now asked to stay home for their own safety. Since March 2020 CRN had supported many ACT residents including those who had never accessed a community pantry - many had always worked and supported themselves and their families but suddenly found themselves without jobs and needing help.

As a community partner, CRCS initially joined CRN as a distribution point or visit location where participants could collect their hampers. As needs increased, CRCS took up a larger role in establishing the CRN Connect Centre, managing calls from people in need. The Connect Centre arranged food and hygiene hampers and connected participants to other support available in the community.

“We provided an ear and kind non-judgemental words to distressed people,” Masia Ermacora, coordinator of the CRN Connect Centre said. “The Connect Centre asks callers three main questions; are you an ACT resident, do you need support and where can you collect your food hamper from? We also ask how people are doing and what else we can do to help.”

"CRCS has a lot to be proud of – our commitment to the residents of the ACT through CRN meant we could continue to help the community, but CRCS also kept their employees working and connected to each other and the community.

> *I am proud of the CRCS executive team who made this all happen and kept our people working especially when none of us knew if we still had jobs. I am proud of my CRCS colleagues who took on this new task with commitment, kindness and care. I am proud of the great impression the CRCS team has made on the Community Services Directorate, the CRN partners and the ACT community.*
> *-Masia Ermacora, CRN Connect Centre Coordinator.*



Since its establishment, the Canberra Relief Network has ...

Answered 4,458 in-bound calls

Distributed 8,085 food hampers

Supported 2,626 households

Distributed 1,874 hygiene hampers and 504 packets of nappies

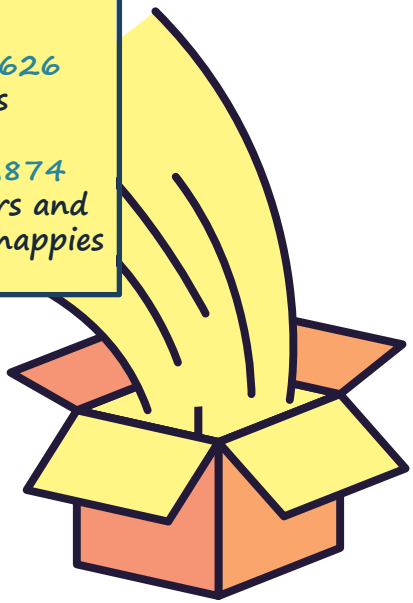


Photo (Previous page, left): Masia and Danielle Bate, Agency Liaison for CRN.
Right: CRN's warehouse is stocked with items to support Canberrans.

#Online - Belconnen Youth Centre (BYC) adapts during COVID-19



Sheer pride: The Multicultural Youth Hub obliterating BYC in a friendly table tennis match. Following page, top left: Josh and Ronny preparing the stage for a live stream. Bottom: BYC prepared their own face masks during one of the workshops.

With the Belconnen youth team unable to ensure the safety of participants and our employees, CRCS made the decision to postpone all youth engagement programs in March 2020. Recognising the potential impacts of COVID-19, the team put an enormous effort into researching ways in which we could safely engage with young people and encourage positive social connections remotely, with the hope to be able to continue to meet the needs of the young people that access supports through the Belconnen Youth Centre.

It was paramount for the youth centre services to adapt and change in order to continue providing positive connections for the young people in our community during this challenging time. Our Short Term Case Work and Employment Hub continued to operate remotely over phone, email, text and social media to ensure the safety of the youth team and role model best practice in dealing with COVID-19 among young people. While we aimed to continue to provide outcome-driven supports, we also recognised that there was going to be a compelling need for positive social connections and that the youth team's role was to be adaptive in the way they identify and meet presenting needs as best they can.

Having to postpone all school-based outreach programs, the youth centre focused on transitioning all of its centre-based programs online. Out of the five centre-based programs the Centre offers, BYC managed to adapt and transition four to an online format using Discord. The Online Youth Centre allowed individual chat spaces as well as private group chats with youth workers and other participants.

Recognising the need to support social connections for young people to share their talents and passions with their friends, family and the Youth Centre community, the youth team started a weekly live stream on Facebook. As part of the live stream the youth team would film and interview a young person from the community to share their talents and passions. This program has had so much success that it will continue to be part of BYC's ongoing social media presence.

The Centre hosted a number of young people with talents that included cooking, sewing, music and Dungeons & Dragons. This provided a much needed platform to celebrate all the wonderful talents that the young people in our community have.







The youth team is proud to look back on the innovation and optimism that we believe provided a successful platform for our community to connect during unpredictable times. We have used this as an opportunity to grow and reflect as a team on the ways we empower and connect with young people in and around the Belconnen area.
- Josh White, Youth Engagement Coordinator.



Supportive Tenancy Service aiding vulnerable Canberrans



In March 2020, the impacts of COVID-19 started to be felt among the Canberra community. In some cases, this was the first time individuals and families were in need of additional support through programs such as CRCS' Supportive Tenancy Service (STS).

An example of this was a young family of Vietnamese migrants who saw their family business cease operation due to COVID-19, and as a result, the family were unable to afford rent and were about to be evicted.

CRCS's STS case manager advocated for the family, overcame language barriers, and assisted the family to access legal advice on their tenancy situation. At some points, our STS case manager was providing daily support to the family as they explored options for suitable housing.

This story has a happy ending – the family was assisted to find suitable affordable housing despite many challenges, and within a short timeframe.

This is just one example of the many supports provided to individuals and families from all backgrounds through Housing, Health, and Community Services Directorate-funded programs, including family support, parenting advice, and youth support and activities.

STS operates as a partnership between Woden Community Service, YWCA Canberra and CRCS.

Children first - CRCS children's programs continue working through pandemic



In the initial phase of the COVID-19 lockdown, families lost jobs, had significant reduction of employment hours, training courses were placed on hold and income to support children and families was greatly diminished. At this time, CRCS became inundated with calls for assistance by means of free or flexible child care options.

As a strong advocate for our community, CRCS offered suspended child care placements, Additional Child Care Subsidy to families in need and continued our Children's Services Programs-Funded Placements during the pandemic. CRCS was adaptable and tried wherever possible to cater to the needs of our community ensuring consistency of routine and a safe learning environment to some of the most vulnerable members of our community, the children.

"Our educators have shown resilience, collaboration and genuine care and commitment to each other and to the organisation," Allison Sullings, Executive Manager of Children's Services said.

"Directors met daily to re-work budgets and support each other. Our educators reduced hours and income and some (those who were young and living at home) even offered to be stood down to ensure educators within their team could continue to work and provide for their families."

> *When many of us were able to be flexible and work from home and assist our children in 'home learning', for educators their days did not change. Not because they couldn't but because they chose not to. Educators continued to go to work each and every day to teach and care for our children and to provide consistency for families.*
> *- Allison Sullings.*



CRCS Children's Services

Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care.



HIGHLIGHTS

In the 2019-2020 financial year, 1,143 children have received high-quality education and care at CRCS

CRCS runs four Early Education and Care centres and three School Age Care centres in Canberra. Combined, over one thousand children have been nurtured and cared for by our qualified educators, and we look forward to nurturing more young minds in the future!

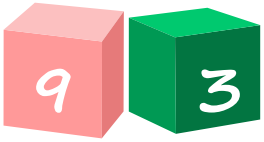
In total, 583 children accessed our Early Education and Care services:



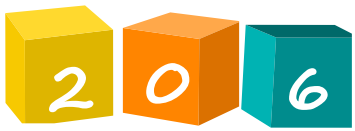
Belconnen Early Childhood Centre



Bruce Early Childhood Centre



Bruce Ridge Early Childhood Centre



Ginninderra Early Childhood Centre

And 560 children accessed our School Age Care services:

Florey Primary School

252 Children



St Matthews Primary School

170 Children



Charnwood-Dunlop School

138 Children



Bruce Ridge Early Childhood Centre the latest addition to the CRCS family





Every interaction, practice and pedagogy that CRCS Early Childhood Educators utilise is centred around relationships; we are acutely aware that through relationships and partnerships, children and families build a strong sense of belonging, are open to exploration and learning, and get their needs met when they are in a supportive, nurturing environment.

When CRCS heard that Bruce Ridge Early Childhood Centre (BRECC) would be closing, we knew that their community would be faced with a tough transition on top of the already anxiety-ridden pandemic of COVID-19. We knew that forming genuine partnerships with children and families was vital for this community to be able to support families and children through this transition.

Usually when a centre changes organisations, it is a lengthy process and can take up to nine weeks. However, due to the nature of the situation, the transition to CRCS was undertaken in four business days.

This was a challenge for executive managers, directors, educators and admin staff, ensuring that we had all the correct licenses, approvals, compliance and plans in place. Behind the scenes, there was a lot of work being done to ensure that everything was legal, compliant and safe to open.

We organised for educators from our other centres to visit BRECC during the transition week. CRCS educators spent the mornings learning about children's routines, preferences, learning journey and their families' expectations. During this time we were able to demonstrate our genuine desire to work in partnerships with families to ensure their child's and their own needs will be met through the education and care we would be providing.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic unfolding in April, we were able to support the introduction of a fourth early childhood centre to CRCS – a time that was proving to be a challenge in many ways to our community. The Government subsidy package meant that families were supported to keep children home with no financial implication, ensuring that families were able to make considered choices about their child's attendance. This resulted in low attendance, which led to an oversupply of employed educators across CRCS. With the introduction of BRECC we were able to provide all our educators full-time work through the pandemic, something that not many organisations were able to provide.

Along with the new relationships developed with the families, we have been able to further create partnerships within our local community such as the Calvary Bruce Public and Private Hospitals and the Calvary Haydon Retirement Community.



Bruce Ridge Early Childhood Centre is licensed to accommodate 72 children. A sun-drenched, warm and inviting Centre, staffed by highly qualified Early Childhood Educators.

CRCS joins Three-Year-Old Program

In June 2020, CRCS Early Education and Care Centres became a part of the 'three-year-old program', an initiative providing three-year-olds access to early education. This initiative forms part of the ACT Early Childhood Strategy which focuses on:

- Partnerships and collaboration across the sector
- Transitions from early childhood education to school
- Quality of the early childhood education and care workforce
- Access and equity for all children to early education and care.

Connect and Grow - playgroups for young families



Photo: A CRCS Early Childhood Educator interacting with children and families who attended Connect and Grow.

CRCS was extremely fortunate to receive funding from the Australian Early Development Census to deliver playgroups to our community.

Connect and Grow, run at Westfield Belconnen, was to be a series of free community playgroups in collaboration with the Australian Early Development Census and Westfield Belconnen, and supported by the ACT Government.

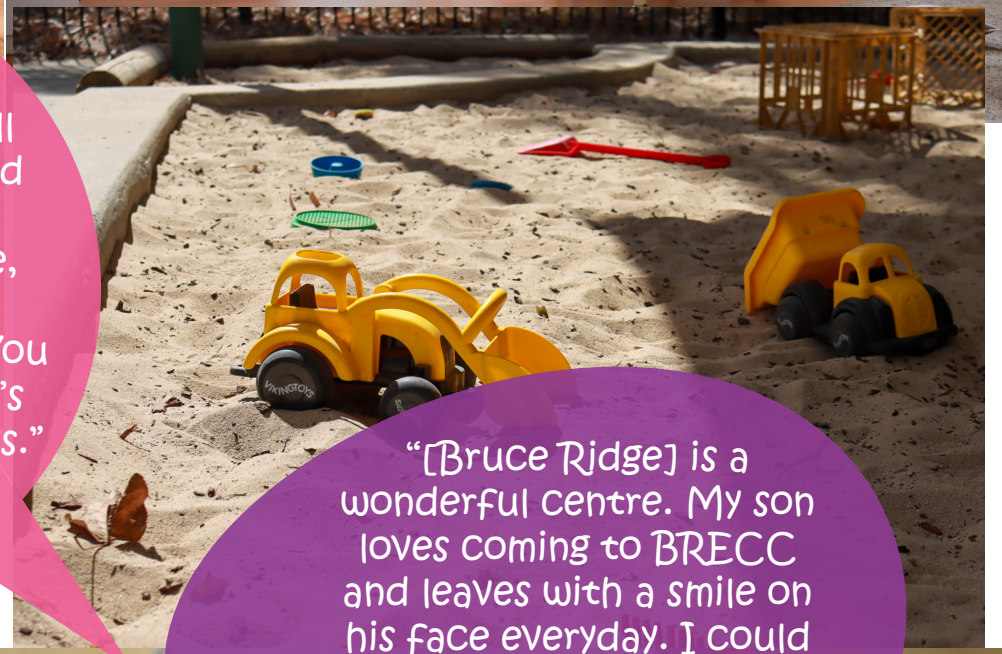
The playgroups were an initiative for families of children aged 0-5 years to engage with other families while their child participated in an inclusive play environment led by early childhood teachers and educators.

Families also had the opportunity to connect with and learn about support services and events in the surrounding region.

Community. Quality. Connections.







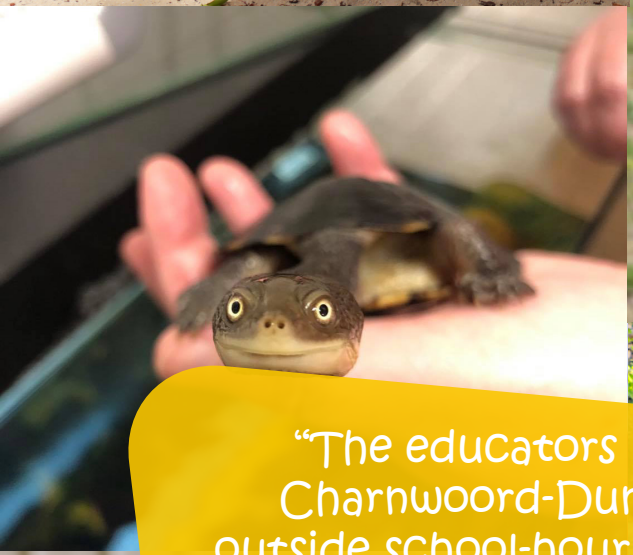
"Thank you so much to all the Bruce Early Childhood Centre educators for instilling the spirit of love, kindness, patience and courage in our daughter. You have influenced our child's life in so many positive ways."



"[Bruce Ridge] is a wonderful centre. My son loves coming to BRECC and leaves with a smile on his face everyday. I could not think of a better place for my child to spend his days learning and growing."

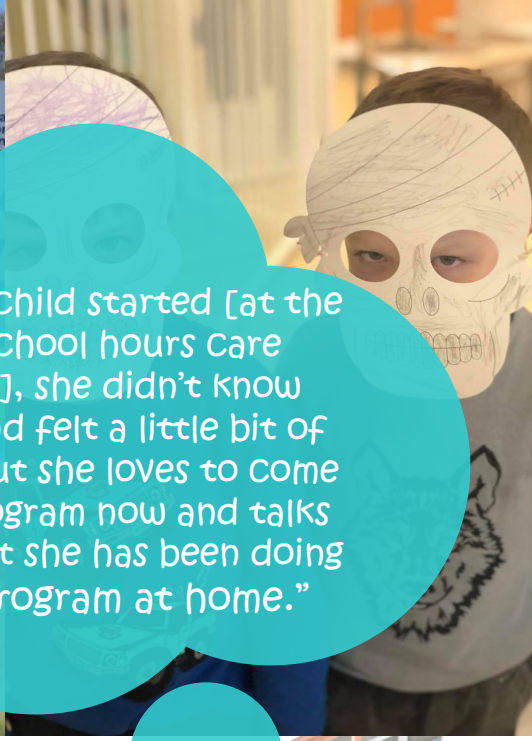












"When my child started [at the after-school hours care program], she didn't know anyone and felt a little bit of anxiety. But she loves to come to the program now and talks about what she has been doing at the program at home."

"The educators [at Charnwoord-Dunlop outside school-hours care] have a great rapport with children. We always receive an update on what our child has been playing with at the program."





Our Stories

Insights from our participants, families, and employees.



Independence and peace of mind - a Home Care Package recipient's experience with CRCS

Dorothy* admits the hardest part about registering for an aged care package was admitting she needed the help.



"I've looked after this house and been independent for so long, it was hard letting go," she says of her leafy suburban house that she and husband James* turned into a home, many years ago.

Dorothy and James have enjoyed retirement for several years until last year when James needed additional support. They were already on the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) but a trusted financial advisor suggested that they get a care assessment, particularly considering the prolonged waiting period.

"The CHSP was very good but we were beginning to need more support," Dorothy said.

Dorothy wasn't sure she needed the help, until one fortuitous meeting at CRCS's Kippax office.

"I was in Kippax and heard that CRCS had recently moved to the Ochre Health Hub there and I thought I'd go say hello," Dorothy said.

Both Dorothy and CRCS got a lot more out of that chat than they anticipated. After a cup of tea and a warm heart-to-heart, Dorothy went away with the assurance that switching to a Home Care Package (HCP) was the right move for her and James.

Having had a long history with CRCS, Dorothy was more than comfortable trusting them with James's Home Care Package.

"I don't like to flip through the yellow pages and call people up. I prefer to ask someone we trust," she said.
After an assessment by the 'cheery lot' at CRCS, James qualified for a Level 2 support, which meant that a carer visited the pair four times a week to help James with his daily tasks – which often consisted of a trip to the nearest library.

And getting on a HCP didn't mean that James had to give up his usual lifestyle. In addition to visiting the library, James also enjoys the mountainside views that Canberra is blessed with – he just needs to ask his carer.

"Brad* [their carer] is lovely because I have someone else to share the load with," Dorothy said.

An avid painter and photographer, the HCP has given Dorothy the peace of mind to enjoy her art group gatherings without having to worry about James's wellbeing. And no one is happier about that than James, whose only concern was that his wife was overloaded and will work herself to a point of illness. By that standard, both parties have peace of mind by getting on a HCP from a trusted provider.

"The degree of flexibility with CRCS is great," Dorothy said. "Debbie [CRCS's Aged Care Coordinator] is so great to work with. You say what you need, and Debbie will get it done.

"In fact, just the other day I was on the phone with her about James's care, and she asked whether I needed her to come around to talk about it in detail." It's this level of personal commitment that puts Dorothy and James at ease.

"The main thing with CRCS is that they put people before the service. They try very hard to make the system fit in with the client.

"I've heard from people, some of the other carers who used to work in other services and then transitioned to CRCS because of the people at CRCS, their humanity," Dorothy said.





**Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the clients and employees.*

“I am prouder than ever to be part of the CRCS family”

Amy Hass is a cherished member of the CRCS family. Predominantly coordinating CRCS’s social groups for over -65-year-olds, Amy (like many others) had to wear several different hats this year as a result of the changes to the workplace brought about by COVID-19. Amy gratefully volunteered to share her thoughts about what she had experienced and learnt this year.



This year has been a year full of change, surprises, loss, opportunity, expansion and courage.

This year has been so tough and many would wish it away in a heartbeat - but what about the silver lining? It’s in times of uncertainty that we have the opportunity to either run or rise. It’s in times of distress that we learn the value of security, trust and courage. It’s in times of fear and loss that we become empathetic to other people’s experiences in ways we may have not understood before.

Perhaps being ‘comfortable’ isn’t the pinnacle of our existence but being understanding, standing strong in the face of adversity and paving new paths out of the wilderness (isolation, distress, abuse) for others is a more meaningful and fulfilling way to experience our lives.

This year I have had the opportunity to work with our NDIS clients, had a few different roles with the Canberra Relief Network, and been so happy to bring back our Community Senior’s groups after a long six-months. I am now currently the acting coordinator for INVOLVE.

I have worked with numerous organisations, team members, managers and CEOs. I've had programs cease and programs start, lost funding for some and gained for others. I've laughed, cried, felt deep sorrow and immense joy. I've seen the worst and the best in people. I've been so proud and so disappointed. I've felt like giving up and then had opportunities to go even further than ever before, having my resolve restored and my passion for what I do and the people I do it for taken to a whole new level.

I believe that the more we invest in our people, both staff and our community members, the more we listen, the more we respect and provide them with opportunities to belong, then we will not only survive the challenges of change; pandemics, business choices, staff changes, funding availability, Government changes, etc, but we will thrive.

> *"People are the heart of our business and our community. It's the people that matter; the communities they represent, the families, the stories of their cultures and experiences that strengthen the next generation, the next leaders of our families, communities and nations."*



I am proud to say that I am part of a team that understands the value of community. I work with a demographic that usually experiences isolation and loss on an ongoing basis, in levels that are sometimes incomprehensible. Our focus for the Capital Region Community Services Aged Care Services is to offer highly professional holistic services that provide thoughtful support to our over 65-year-olds in ways that ensure dignity, respect and choice. In a time of great vulnerability for them, we hope to be able to support them in ways that enable them to spend their time on the people and activities that they find most meaningful.

This year has taught and refined me and I wouldn't wish it away.

We have found new, innovative ways, and that's good business.

"Belonging" - A conversation between a Darug woman and an Ambai man

Inside the Belconnen Community Gallery, Australian clapping sticks combined with the rhythm of a drum from West Papua. The music reflected a connection between Emma, a Darug woman from the Boorooberongal clan in Australia, and Ronny from the Ambai tribe in West Papua. Despite never having met before, in conversation they reveal their connection to the earth, culture and each other.

On the significance of acknowledging Country

Ronny: Where I come from, earth represents mother and that mother is not just a noun but it is a pronoun. It is living, it is breathing and when one thinks of mother it is with love and care. Is that how you feel as well?

Emma: Absolutely**.** We come from the earth, we wouldn't be here without it, it feeds us, it nourishes us, we return to earth, we wear it when we use our *ochre*, when we perform and for ceremony.

Ronny: As Indigenous people, anywhere around the world our dignity and land is so significant. Everything that breathes and passes through has a meaning and connection to the earth.

On Songlines

Ronny: Songlines is how we use the extension of our ancenstral voice through sound and connect with each other. Songkeepers like myself, protect that tradition. We use special drums carved and used by only people from a particular lineage and family names. Through ceremonies, our clans come together and create that sound from beating the drums and that sound travels as well. For example, the rythym of the drum from the North Coast of West Papua is different to that of the South Coast. The sound of the drum in West Papua we call *Tifa*, in Papua New Guinea we call *Kundu*, and Torres Strait it's called *Warup*. Using this sound is how we connect. it's part of our history and cultural identity, and strengthens kinship.

On Kingship

Emma: You mention kinship and the family and having everything passed down. I think in this country it's been a little bit difficult. Using my family as an example, there is the Stolen Generation, there's shame, there's families separated and then, trying to piece together who you are with all of that is quite difficult.

Photo: Ceremonial wooden hand drums, called Tifa in West Papua and Kundu in Papua New Guinea. The hollow body is entirely carved from one piece of hardwood log, a lizard skin on the top with a wood glue holding it together.



Emma: I lived with my grandmother and it was such a shameful thing to acknowledge who you were. For me it has been a really important thing, in respect of her, to embrace that cultural connection and re-learn what has been lost.

> *It's also important for my children to identify that, that is where they have come from and that was what was lost, so that it isn't lost. It's Australian history, it's a part of Australian bembul (earth), it can't be lost.*

To see this continuity through your culture is absolutely beautiful and I think it's such an important thing because it is a huge part of who you are. If anybody looks at their family lineage and looks at what aspects of that make them who they are, it's having those traditions and family gatherings. Could you imagine not having that?

Ronny: No. In fact I came to realise that a lot of the messages that are written in our languages speak about our survival and the continuity of our culture and from the diverse, over 250 tribal languages, it is something that I feel is really important to learn. I have a family now with two young daughters. I teach them this whenever there is an opportunity for us to sing or showcase our cultural songs. All of those performances are for them to learn the beat of the drum and also to sing in the language and to explain the message of the song.

Emma: If we were to look at a map of Australia and all the islands, in all of these areas, they all grow in a specific way and there are things that are just specific to that region. The songs would all have that uniqueness of the area coming through. You could almost paint it. If you thought about what one sounded like in colour, then you might end up with this huge spectrum of colours indicative of what area the song came from.

Ronny: Thank you, Emma. Lessons from this conversation come from really understanding and appreciating our connection with the mother earth as a living and breathing space that we all share together, whether it is from the East to the West or the North to the South.

Emma: : Even though we are from different areas, different *bembul* (earth) and different *nura* (country), there are similarities for First Nations people and in the way we tell our stories and create our songs.

> ***Ronny****: It is important for us as individuals, at the workplace or the space here within Canberra to ask the question, what is my connection to Canberra? What is my understanding of the space I am living in from Indigenous lands?*

Emma: : And the best way to understand, identify and respect that would be to have that conversation and have the local Indigenous people involved, not just one day a year, but throughout the entire year.



Ronny and Emma: A fortuitous friendship.



An artwork collage by the children from our School Age Care centres for Reconciliation Week.

Exhibitions





Belconnen Community Gallery has proudly hosted and promoted exhibitions celebrating local and upcoming artists for many years. It is one of the many ways we support our local community.

In addition to providing a space for external artists, the Belconnen Community Gallery also hosts in-house exhibitions. For Children's Week, children from our Early Education and Care centres and School Age Care centres become the artists, with their work proudly displayed on our walls. For iDay, our NDIS participants brought the Gallery to life with their artwork. Children's Services contributed again for Reconciliation Week, giving us the opportunity to see the world through young eyes.

Photo: Art is for the young and the old: Our employee Gab's little one is proving to be a budding photographer, fascinated by the lens while his mother admires one of the exhibits.









Artwork from the 'Pinned and Stitched' exhibition by the ANU Emerging Artist Support Scheme prize winners, and the 'Four Seasons in One' exhibition.

Following page: Artwork from the Youth Exhibition, iDay exhibition, Reconciliation Week and Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Working Group exhibition held in 2020.













Thanks and Recognition

We couldn't have done it without you!



Capital Region Community Services

Capital Region Community Services is grateful for the significant contributions provided by our funding partners and the generous support of community organisations, businesses, families, employees, and individuals. On behalf of the community we work with, we thank you all for your support during this year.

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ACT Health Directorate
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Jugger Canberra
Kaleen Primary School
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Melba Copland Secondary School
Menslink

MindBlank
Multicultural Youth Services
National Museum of Australia
Northside Community Services
Office for Child Youth and Family Support
Onelink
OzHarvest
Paddywack
Pink Party Bus
Raiders Club Kippax
Raw Potential Canberra
Road Safety Fund
Salvation Army Employment Plus
Sancho's Dirty Laundry
Sexual Health and Planning ACT
Share The Dignity
SHFPACT
Skills Canberra
Snow Foundation
Southern Cross Early Childhood School
St Matthews Primary School
St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School
Tara Cheyne MLA
The Abbey Function Centre
Tuggeranong Arts Centre
Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre
Uniting Care Kippax
University of Canberra
University of Canberra High School Kaleen
University of Canberra Senior Secondary College Lake Ginninderra
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Weetangera Primary School
West Belconnen Child and Family Centre
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