

# SHAPING THE FUTURE

## for families

Twenty years of grandparents and kinship carers  
working together as family advocates 2001–2021

grandparents  
VICTORIA



 Kinship  
Carers  
VICTORIA

Much of the work described in this book after 2010 has been achieved with the support of the Victorian State Government and the Department of Families, Fairness & Housing (DFFH).



From 2001 to 2011 Grandparents Victoria was a sole organisation referred to as GPV.

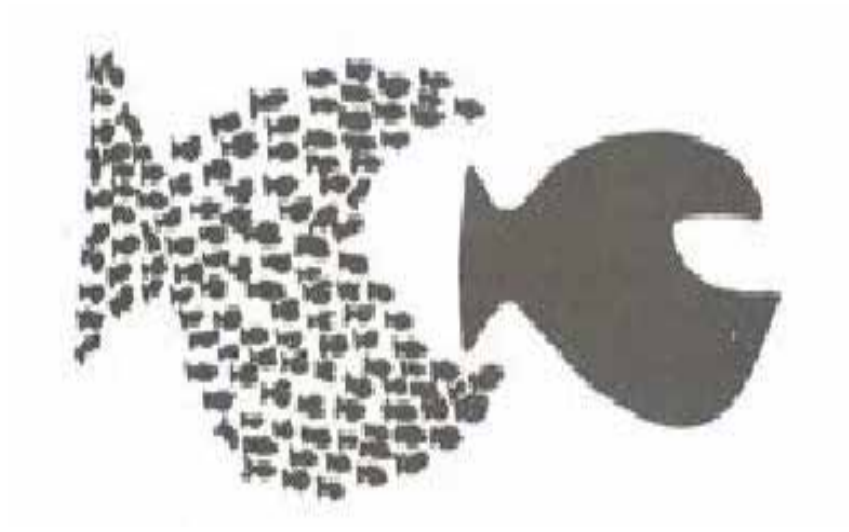


From 2011 GPV undertook the work of Kinship Carers Victoria and became known as GPV/KCV.



**This book is dedicated to grandparents and kinship carers everywhere.  
However, when reflecting on their efforts, it can only be considered a token gesture of  
gratitude.**

**'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world;  
indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.'**<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Margaret Mead (16 December 1901 – 15 November 1978). Mead was an American cultural anthropologist who featured frequently as an author and speaker in the mass media during the 1960s and 1970s.



## Shaping the future for families: 20 years of grandparents and kinship carers working together as family advocates



The importance of parental love and care to the wellbeing and development of a child is recognised and well understood. Less commonly recognised is the significance of other relationships a child may have – with grandparents, wider family members, and trusted adults. Having these bonds exposes children to wisdom across generations, offers them different perspectives on life and gives them a deeper understanding of their place in their family, community and the world. For First Nations children, or for children from refugee or migrant communities, this broader web of relationships is particularly important to connect them to their culture and history.

These relationships are also significant on a practical level. We know grandparents and other family members often play a significant role in helping parents raise and care for their children. Sometimes, these care arrangements become formalised in circumstances where children cannot remain safely with their birth parents. Kinship care is the fastest growing form of out-of-home care in Victoria. This is not without good reason – there is research to suggest that children who remain with family are less likely to experience the trauma of separation and experience greater stability and wellbeing.

Both Grandparents Victoria and Kinship Carers Victoria are marking significant anniversaries, having been in operation for 20 and 10 years respectively. Despite modest beginnings, both have worked to improve the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. In addition to raising awareness in the community of the important role grandparents and kinship carers play, they have connected carers to support networks and training, contributed to research projects, conducted surveys of grandparents and carers and led campaigns to protect the rights of children in a range of areas – particularly in relation to education, access to mental health services and the out-of-home care system. Their resources, networking and advocacy reaches far and wide through Victoria, Australia and beyond, supported by a range of dedicated grandparents, kinship carers, staff and volunteers.

For advocates who continually push for improvement, taking pause to recognise and celebrate achievements is important – particularly when the pace of change is not as quick as one would like. This book is brimming with stories, memories and anecdotes that document a rich history of collective action and shared commitment to improve the lives of children. This significant contribution to systemic change should be commemorated and acknowledged, alongside the work that grandparents and kinship carers do every day to nourish and nurture the children they love and care for.

**Liana Buchanan**  
*Principal Commissioner for children and Young People*



# About GPV/KCV

In April 2001, Grandparents Victoria (GPV) was formed as an organisation based on the belief that grandparents can play a valuable role in supporting and advocating for families and the wider community.

At this early stage, with only four members at the first meeting, it was not certain what the group would do, or how its activities were to be funded, but enthusiasm was high.

For the first two years, GPV focused on consultation with grandparents to learn what challenges they and their families were facing in the 21st century. A series of forums were also held across Victoria to get collect many opinions. Since then regular forums and surveys have been conducted to verify these early views.

In March 2002, the issues faced by grandparents raising their grandchildren were noted, with the GPV Board deciding that the role of grandparents within child protection would be a priority area of work.

Another landmark was reached in 2004 when GPV staff attended their first local grandparents support group. This was the first of many visits to support groups across the state. In 2010 the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) awarded GPV the contract to establish Kinship Carers Victoria (KCV) as the peak group representing the views of kinship carers. Thus, GPV/KCV emerged as a statewide agency for addressing a range of issues from the viewpoint of grandparents.

GPV/KCV addresses a wide range of issues. However, some, aside from support for kinship carers, appear on its work program year in and year out, with family poverty being the most urgent of all the issues addressed over the years.

GPV/KCV is committed to an ethical approach to its work, undertaking to:

- maintain a commitment to its beliefs and aims, prioritising the wellbeing of families
- maintain confidentiality at all times, protecting the privacy of all who associate with GPV/KCV
- uphold individual rights and time advocate for the rights of disadvantaged groups
- foster a culture of fairness
- respect a diversity of views.

GPV/KCV believes that:

- all children must be protected and given every opportunity and support to fulfil their potential
- the needs of families are becoming more complex and the support grandparents can offer to families in general is significant
- grandparents and kinship carers have unique understandings and attitudes that should influence decisions about child wellbeing
- grandparents and kinship carers have a responsibility to engage in public discussions and to act to ensure the wellbeing of children.



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# Introducing GPV/KCV



# Beginning tentatively

This book has been written to celebrate the 20th year of the operation of Grandparents Victoria (GPV) and the 10th year of Kinship Carers Victoria (KCV). In July 2001, GPV was registered as a community organisation after a small band of activists was inspired by the idea of collective action by grandparents. However, nervous thoughts soon dimmed the inspiration a little. A lack of funds and shortage of activists at that time prevented long-term planning. Given this, a decision was taken that GPV would make as big an impact as it could for as long as it could, with activities to be undertaken in one six-month block at a time.

## Anne McLeish says:

*'Even as I was registering Grandparents Victoria Inc. I was not clear about what it would do, how we would do it or how we would fund it. I just felt that galvanising grandparents to take public action to support families was an idea whose time had come. Much of the inspiration for forming a grandparents organisation stemmed from my years as a parent advocate promoting government education, so I had a sense of the possibilities and problems that would confront a small community organisation.'*

In its earliest days the Board of GPV reiterated a set of basic beliefs that underscore its work, namely that:

- people working together, even those without access to much political or industrial power, can stimulate change for the common good;
- collective action is something many of today's grandparents have employed in the past, thus, they have tried and tested skills as activists;
- to improve circumstances for individual grandchildren we need to improve them for all grandchildren. The community cannot prosper as a whole if gains for some grandchildren are made at the expense of others; and

- all children in Australia should be considered as equals. The purpose of GPV is not merely to protect the rights of Australian children. Rather, it is to protect the rights of all children on our land.

Early in its history GPV recognised that it is not possible to achieve lasting improvements in the lives of children by working alone. Most of what was required necessitated changes to government policy and practice, so partnerships with other organisations were deemed to be crucial. The partnerships formed over the years have been crafted in response to the needs of children and families. However, these partnerships would not work on the strength of a shared purpose alone. Like all relationships, working partnerships have to be nurtured, which is just what GPV has strived to do all these years.

Many issues addressed by GPV require quick action, such as sending letters to politicians within hours of identifying a critical issue. It is a credit to the power of the relationships GPV enjoys that this can often be done by GPV and its partner organisations separately but at the same time. Personal trust and shared commitment make this quick action possible.

GPV membership has expanded in unexpected ways. Never would the GPV Board members at the first meeting have envisaged that the organisation would form other organisations – in the case of Grandparents Australia, within a very short time after GPV was formed. Even more unbelievable would have been the thought that GPV might form an international organisation, as it has with the Kinship International Network (KIN).

The first outreach program consisted of a plan to visit as many local government areas in Victoria as time and funding would enable. At the time this was thought to be over-ambitious, but worth attempting. Since then, GPV has travelled across Australia and internationally as well. Each visit to far-flung places has centred on conversations with grandparents, and all have resulted in deeper understanding of issues confronting families.





# Progressing confidently

If the growth in GPV structures and membership was unexpected, so too has been the growth in the scope of issues and activities that GPV has initiated or in which it has participated. Slowly, as confidence grew, more activities have been undertaken and more complex issues tackled. It is not possible in this introduction to detail all the issues addressed by GPV. However, it is possible to mention the main ones: childcare, education, kinship care, poverty, mental health, and child abuse. Some issues have been addressed at multiple geographical levels of operation and across different activities. Children's play is one such example. Acting to improve the quality of children's play has led to discussions and action by local grandparents, as well as an international survey of grandparents matched with international action to promote better play amongst children.

## Helen Brown says:

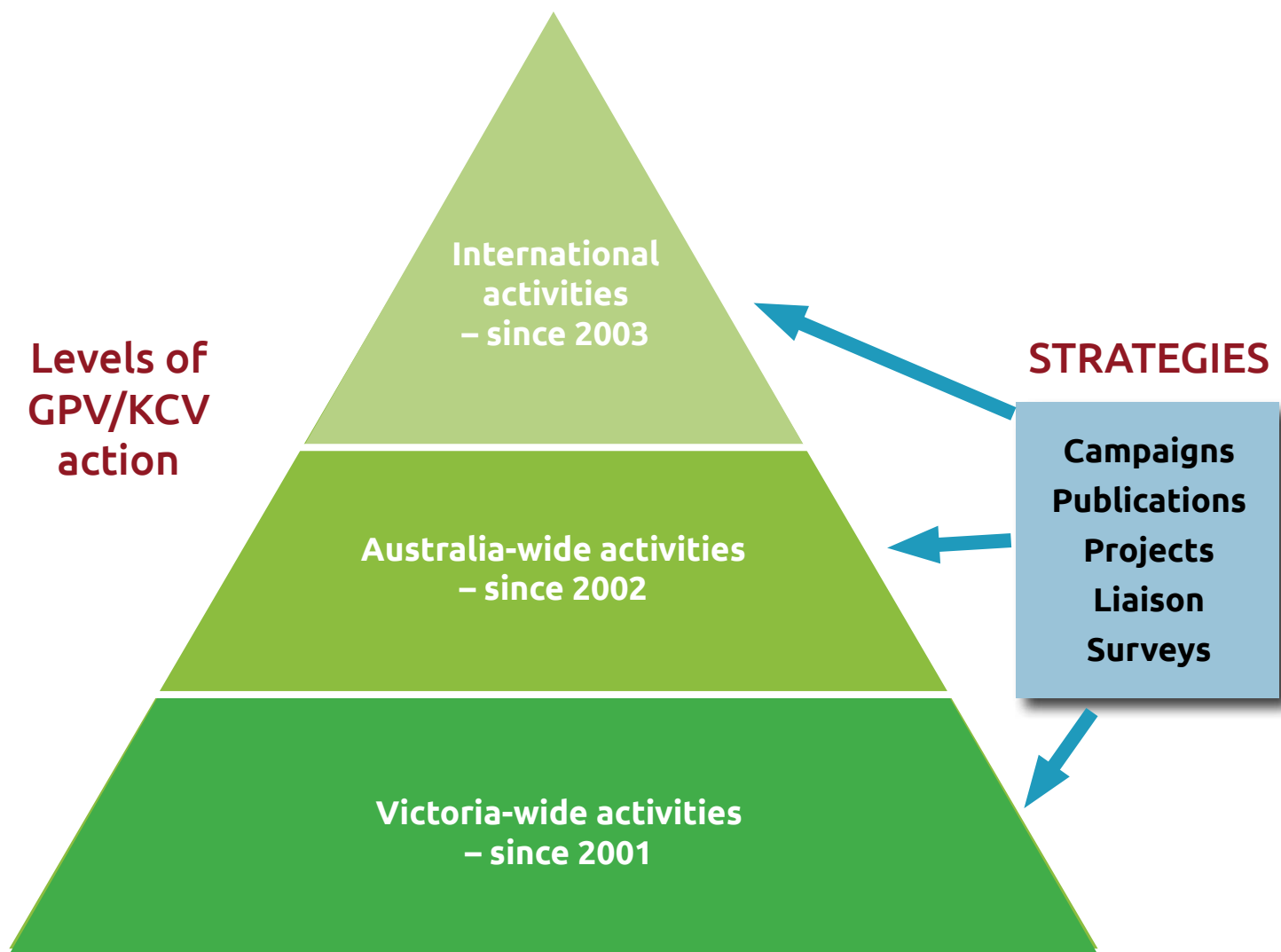
*'It has been a remarkable journey. Wanting to support families has driven us to think and act much more widely than we could have conceived of in 2001. There have been some disappointments along the way, most particularly the lack of value governments place on supporting families, particularly vulnerable families.'*

A number of issues have recurred over the years and have been the subject of regular action, most particularly childcare provision and education. Some issues have been the subject of multiple strategies, with surveys conducted to determine grandparents' views, campaigns conducted to highlight the issues to decision-makers, and research projects conducted to stimulate deeper thinking and action amongst grandparents. Children's play, education, childcare and kinship care have received comprehensive attention.

## Kerry Doquile says:

*'I heard about GPV at the beginning of 2001. I joined because I had just become a grandmother for the first time and when I heard Anne talking about Grandparents Victoria, I thought, "Okay, I'll be in that ..."'*





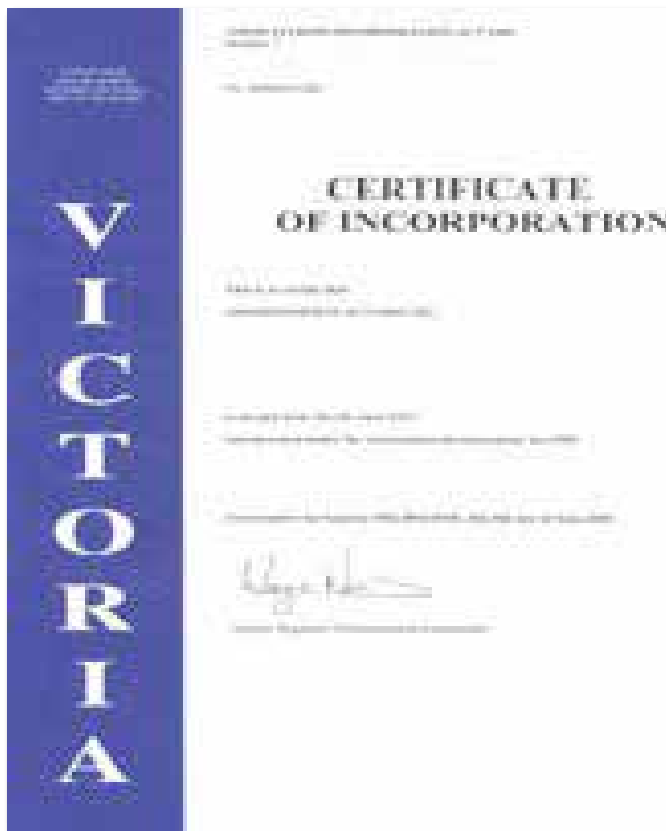
# Laying the foundation



# Launching the movement

The years from 2001 to 2003 were crucial in laying a foundation upon which the work of the organisation could be securely based. The approaches to be taken and the scope of the work needed to be achievable and clear. Although aspirations were high, they needed to be tempered by practicalities.

After the registration of Grandparents Victoria, a combination of launches and exploratory gatherings took place. The official launch by the-then Governor of Victoria, John Landy, was attended by nearly 200 people, with all those present remarking on the endless possibilities of such an organisation. Guests recognised that the twin roles of promoting the role of grandparents while at the same time advocating for the needs of families from a grandparent perspective were laudable. Subsequent launches in Mildura and Ballarat established linkages with rural Victoria and local governments.



# grandparents VICTORIA

After the official launch there was a series exploratory gatherings of grandparents called together to identify issues and to set an ethical framework that grandparents could endorse. These gatherings were held in metropolitan and rural settings, with no differences in attitudes between rural and metropolitan grandparents evident. All wanted a better deal for young families.

Despite being keenly aware of the many local challenges ahead, the GPV Board soon recognised the importance of having a national approach. It was clear that some issues being canvassed were of significance to all children in Australia, necessitating national action. Therefore, in 2002 Grandparents Australia was formed.

For all the same reasons that Grandparents Australia was formed, in 2004 the GPV Board nominated Anne McLeish to be a member of the Board of Families Australia, the peak organisation representing the interests of families across the land. Anne was to remain a member of the Board of Families Australia for 15 years.

The years 2001–2003 were marked by a series of firsts: the first survey, the first press release, the first local GPV group, the first newsletter, the first interstate tour, the first campaign, the first occasional paper and the first seminar. All of these firsts became the foundation actions for many more such activities to follow.



		2001	2002	2003
First newsletter	2001 <i>The Grandparent</i> newsletter			
First Board meeting	2001 Board meeting			
First outreach	2001 First address to a wider community group/East Keilor RSL			
First press release	2001 Grandparents Unite			
Exploratory gathering	2001 Held in Parkville to explore feasibility of grandparents association			
Launch	2001 Official launch of GPV by the Governor of Victoria in Kensington			
Launch	2001 Official launch of GPV in Mildura			
First AGM	2002 AGM Moonee Valley Racecourse			
Media	2002 All about GPV			
First campaign	2002 Better access to a full education for all children and young people			
Media	2002 Childcare			
First project	2002 Echuca young people and older people working together			
Media	2002 Education			
First occasional paper	2002 First occasional paper 'Grandparents and the law'			
Media	2002 Grandparents across Australia Unite			
Media	2002 Grandparents learn about family law			
Exploratory gatherings	2002 Held in Frankston, Echuca, Essendon, Ivanhoe, Bendigo			
Media	2002 Kinship Care			
First local group	2002 Meeting of Moonee Valley GPV group			
First political activity	2002 Meeting with Judy Maddigan MP in Essendon			
Launch	2002 Official launch of GPV with a mayoral reception in Ballarat			
Media	2002 Planning the future for the grandchildren of the electorate of Wills			
First seminar	2002 Seminar – 'The place of grandparents in family law'			
First partnership activity	2002 Victorian education roundtable			
Media	2003 All about GPV			
Media	2003 Denied Access			
First corporate donation	2003 Donation by Australia Post			
Gathering	2003 Echuca grandparents forum			
First GPA meeting	2003 Grandparents Australia meeting			
Media	2003 Grandparents from across Australia gather for the first time			
Media	2003 Grandparents in the Shepparton Area Unite			
First interstate tour	2003 Interstate tour to Queensland support groups			
Media	2003 Kinship Care			
Media	2003 Linking the Generations to Shape the Future (Grandparents Unite)			
First GPA activity	2003 Meeting grandparents rearing grandchildren WA			
Media	2003 Open letter to <i>The Age</i> re kinship care			
Media	2003 Open letter to the public re kinship care			
First survey	2003 Survey – Grandparents speak their minds (Vic)			
Campaign	2003 The disadvantages for grandchildren denied access to grandparents			
Gathering	2003 Travel to Western Australia – Centrelink Grandparents Advisor			



## The Melbourne Launch – giving the movement heart

The Melbourne launch held at the Canterbury Stables in Kensington was attended by over 200 people. Governor John Landy, AO MBE, presided over the official ceremonies before he and his wife Mrs Landy took the time to talk with other guests.

Guests at the launch were drawn from across the state, with metropolitan, greater metropolitan and rural areas all represented. Guests were also drawn from across the private, public and the community sectors.

The conversation at the launch was robust and led to varied follow-up activities. For example, Grandparents Victoria was invited to join the Early Childhood Roundtable sponsored by the Australian Education Union and to attend the conference of the Victorian Federation of State School Parents Clubs. Also, Ford Australia invited Grandparents Victoria to conduct a workshop at its work and community open day. Throughout its 20 years GPV has striven to maintain relationships with the public, private and community sectors established at this launch.

There were notable guests amongst the people at the launch, most particularly two outstanding grandmothers who were supported at the occasion by several generations of their families. Mrs Phyllis Pengelley of Ouyen was joined by some of her 16 children, 54 grandchildren and 25 great-grandchildren. Mrs Anne Hawkey was joined by some of her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren, with five generations in one room.

The launch gave rise to the first press release: 'Grandparents Unite'. This alerted the community to the emergence of a new organisation honouring the role of grandparents. The follow-up radio coverage was extensive, with interviews conducted and repeated several times across different ABC radio networks. However, the coverage by the print media was disappointing, with the *Herald-Sun* failing to print an article or photographs despite sending a photographer/reporter. Funnily, *The Age* sent a reporter to cover the launch on the day after it had taken place.



Governor John Landy, AO MBE

Director of Grandparents Victoria, Anne McLeish said:

*'The wisdom and skills grandparents accumulate throughout their lives are an invaluable community resource. It is time to tap into that wisdom and those skills and use them to shape the futures of our children and grandchildren. Also, the skills grandparents have honed in the past are now relevant to the future. For example, the capability of grandparents to weave better communication across the generations, to plan and prioritise and to work with people from all backgrounds is enormous. These are the skills now recognised as the ones people need to make their way in an increasingly complex world. Grandparents Victoria can play an important role in fostering these skills in our young people and in using them to shape a better future for their children and grandchildren.'*



## The Mildura Launch – connecting the movement with activists



The second launch in Mildura gave rise to media coverage in a Mildura newspaper. The article spoke about the role of GPV in bridging the gap between older people and young people, with an emphasis on promoting the development of broad education and life skills in young people. Pictured in the photograph that accompanies the article are Elwyn Rogers and Dorothy Horbury, along with two of Dorothy's young granddaughters.

In her weekly column the Mayor of Mildura Cr Anne Cox wrote:

*'At 10.30am it was my pleasure to meet with Dorothy and Elwyn, who propose to commence in Mildura a branch of Grandparents Victoria. Grandparents Victoria will be a statewide association of grandparents working together to support each other in their roles as grandparents and to raise community awareness of the importance and needs of grandparents. One example of help that will be available is for grandparents who may be child minding full-time and could be better informed about existing support services available to them.'*

## The Ballarat Launch – connecting the movement to local politics



The third launch in Ballarat was a Mayoral reception hosted by Mayor David Vendy. The many grandparents in attendance certainly enjoyed the mayor's hospitality. This was one of the earliest occasions where the need for GPV to get political was canvassed.



# Gathering ideas

For the first two years, GPV focused on informal gatherings. The stories shared at these gatherings exposed the challenges grandparents and families face in the 21st century. The themes canvassed at these gatherings continue to be featured in GPV/KCV's work 20 years on. The early gatherings also reignited a sense of great possibility. People at these gatherings were sensitive to the challenges ahead but any concerns about practical difficulties were thrown into shadow by the encouragement generated in these early 'chats'. Participants did not contemplate any limits to the possibilities of the organisation and envisaged great potential for grandparents to influence change.



## Gathering at Parkville – a sense of great possibilities



The first gathering of grandparents was held in Parkville at the home of Helen and Mal Brown. Many of the people attending remain actively involved 20 years later. The progress though the lives of the activists who attended this first gathering would make for a fascinating study because so many of them have gone on to be active across a number of community activities or have traversed tragedies in their own lives with grace.

## Gathering at Frankston – first sense of grandparents as mentors

The gathering in Frankston took place at Frankston Primary School. The reception, hosted by the principal and students, was heartwarming, with the highlight of the day being the school choir serenading those gathered. GPV was presented with a selection of paintings by students. These paintings are still in the office 20 years on.

**Anne McLeish, Director GPV/KCV said:**

*'When a grandmother jumped to her feet and called for GPV to run a seminar on birth control I thought it was a joke. I changed my mind when I heard the explanation that came after the giggles had died down. The fact that that the grandmothers wanted to give accurate information to teenagers who confided in them was an early insight into the influence and power grandparents can have and the extent to which young people and older people might trust each other.'*





## Gathering at Echuca – the conversation leads to a project

This gathering marked the start of a longer-running relationship with the Echuca community. Both the Echuca education community and local police were represented at this forum, with the conversation in which they took part leading to the first GPV project being conducted in Echuca.



## Gathering at Moonee Valley – leads to an ongoing group

This gathering led to the formation of an ongoing group of grandparents who met in Queen's Park Moonee Ponds. This group continued for some years and only disbanded when a number of the leading organisers became ill and/or moved away from the area. Years later a similar group was formed at Seaford.



Grandparents  
are great

KEEP KIDS  
OUT OF  
RESIDENTIAL  
CARE

YES TO FAMILY RIGHTS

STOP LIVING OFF  
IMMORAL GAMBLING  
INCOME



MORE SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PARENTS  
- NOW!

YES TO THE PUBLIC SECTOR

More money for public education

# Establishing good governance



# Attracting loyal people

Final decisions that guide the work of the organisation are made by a board of elected members. The first meeting of the Board was held around a table at a restaurant in McCauley Rd Kensington, with five people in attendance: Helen Brown (Chairperson), Kerry Doquile, June Smith, Anne McLeish (Director) and Ron Shaw (Manager). Issues discussed included:

- the responsibilities of Board members and how to attract more members – particularly grandfathers;
- the state of the organisation's finances and the purchase of public liability insurance;
- the priorities for the work program for the 2001–02 financial year; and
- the employment of office staff and the establishment of office accommodation.

The first meeting also included a report tabled on the launch of Grandparents Victoria. Amongst the many positives mentioned was the fact that there were two boxes of wine left. Some of this wine ended up being shared at the AGM in the back garden of Angela Hogan. Unfortunately, Kerrie Doquile, Board member, spilt her share on her dress, a mishap that was photographed for the archives.

Since that first Board meeting through until the end of February in 2021, a further 76 Board meetings have been conducted, with some founding Board members still attending, namely Angela Hogan, Helen Brown and Kerry Doquile.



*Kerry Doquile and her wine-stained dress*

Since the first meeting other members have come and gone, with a further eight contributing long years of service. There have only been three grandfathers on the Board, despite many attempts made to encourage more participation by grandfathers. Since 2010 it has been a requirement that half the Board members must be kinship carers.



**Judith Faulds (pictured above in the purple top), member for 20 years says:**

*'Congrats to GPV and her Board on the 20th birthday! The years have gone by quickly and yet you have achieved so much. Who would have believed it when we first started chatting in Moonee Ponds?'*

Some people opted to become life members of GPV, taking a leap of faith in supporting GPV. Life members' commitment has been particularly important and welcome because without their early injection of funds, basic expenses attached to establishing the organisation would never have been met. The ongoing support of longstanding ordinary members is also highly prized. Founding life members are Helen and Malcolm Brown, Francis and Susan Morgan, Christine and Trevor Wilson, Jack Lloyd, and Anne McLeish. More recent life members are Allan and Noelle Mawdsley.

The support of longstanding ordinary members has also been instrumental in stabilising the organisation. Those who have been ordinary members for 20 years are Bruce Cameron, Ian and Dorothy Horbury, Anne Gordon, Heather and Max Murray, Peter and Anne Renkin, and Stan and Gwen Kurth.



Honour Roll of Board Members			
Name	Status	Years of service	# years of service
Angela Hogan	Grandparent	2001–ongoing	20 years ongoing
Helen Brown	Grandparent	2001–ongoing	20 years ongoing
Kerrie Doquile	Grandparent	2001–ongoing	20 years ongoing
June Smith	Grandparent	2001–2021	20 years
Bev Gardiner	Kinship carer	2011–2019	8 years
Gedda Burke	Kinship carer	2012–ongoing	8 years
Fay Brassington	Grandparent	2010–2018	7 years
Jenny Cheshire	Kinship carer	2016–ongoing	5 years ongoing
Jennifer Sullivan	Kinship carer	2016–ongoing	5 years ongoing
Adine Neill	Kinship carer	2017–ongoing	5 years ongoing
John Gadd	Kinship carer	2005–2011	5 years
Anke Kenter	Kinship carer	2018–ongoing	3 years ongoing
Miralde Crankshaw	Grandparent	2016–2019	3 years
Marylyn Broomhall	Kinship carer	2016–2018	2 years
Kath Rowan	Kinship carer	2011–2013	2 years
Barry Leeds	Kinship carer	2003	1 year
Betty Arrowsmith	Grandparent	2003	1 year
Dassana	Kinship carer	2012	1 year
Helen Corcoran	Grandparent	2010	1 year
Jack Lloyd	Grandparent	2003	1 year
Jack Wilks	Kinship carer	2012	1 year
Loretta Roberts	Kinship carer	2010	1 year
Pat Stewart	Kinship carer	2010	1 year
Phamie McCall	Grandparent	2003	1 year
Sue Bebarfeld	Grandparent	2006	1 year
Sue Morgan	Grandparent	2002	1 year
Carole Cheng	Grandparent	2021	3 months ongoing
Sandy Harbison	Grandparent	2021	3 months ongoing
Kerrie Mannix	Kinship carer	2019	2 years ongoing

There were five people present at the first board meeting held in 2001. Three of them are still active in 2021: Anne McLeish, Helen Brown and Kerry Doquile. The two people no longer active are June Smith and Ron Shaw. June became ill in 2020 and had to resign her place on the Board. Up until that time she was one of the most loyal and active members. The staff relied on June to scan the newspapers and alert them to any issues emerging in the news that GPV might have wanted to tackle. Ron Shaw gave invaluable support in the earliest years by setting up systems for recording data and generally helping with office procedures.

**Peter Renkin, longstanding member of GPV says:**

*'My wife Anne and I joined GPV to be part of a movement that gave voice to grandparents at political and community level. We are pleased that today it is recognised as the key organisation speaking for grandparents. Grandparents hold a crucial position in the structure of Australian families. Too frequently the role played by grandparents in the nurture, care and support of their grandchildren is taken for granted or undervalued.'*



# The founding members' views

The three people at the first meeting who have been at Board meetings across all 20 years were asked to share their thoughts about the journey from meeting #1 to meeting #78.

## Anne McLeish

I first thought of forming a statewide grandparent advocacy group at a dinner I was sharing with Helen Brown. We were celebrating the news that her daughter Catriona and my son Cameron were going to have a baby together, making Helen and I grandparents for the first time. I found myself thinking about what it might mean to be a grandparent in the 21st century.

Given that I came from years of working as a parent activist supporting public education, it was not long before I remembered a conversation that took place in the late 1990s, when I was at a meeting of the Victorian Federation of State School Parents Clubs (VFSSPC). Although this meeting was a celebration of the work of VFSSPC, it was also an opportunity to contemplate the future of the public sector – its importance to families and its vulnerability. Joan Kirner was included in the conversation. At the time all agreed the public sector needed more champions and that as the beneficiaries of the provision of services such as public education the baby boomer grandparents owed it to future generations to preserve and protect public services. This conversation resurfaced in my memory as I was enjoying dinner with Helen and I suggested to her that we might think about it. A few days later when the thought still persisted I called Joan Kirner and spoke to her about the idea. She was at the hairdresser at the time and said she could not talk for long. However, she did say that it was about time somebody did this. Joan became one of our earliest members and was encouraging right up until the time of her death.

I am most proud and more than a little surprised that GPV survives 20 years later because back in 2001 we had no money and had unformed ideas about what grandparents' advocates might all agree to champion. Even then I knew that grandparents were not one homogenous group and that we would need to work hard to bind them tighter with a shared focus on what is good for families – not only their own but all



families. It takes constant work to maintain this family focus amongst members and the wider community. The media interest in the concept was widespread when they realised that we were another organisation set up to advocate for the needs and rights of the grandparents themselves.

The future for GPV is clear in terms of its focus – families first! In terms of the issues canvassed, it is becoming clear to me that we need to do much more to support vulnerable families and to stop the removal of children from their parents. Not enough is done to support young parents before children are removed from them.

In terms of the capacity of GPV to keep up with the work – that is clear to me. I have no plans to retire and believe it is entirely possible for GPV to continue for some years to come. Even if all we did was run a public critique of the many decisions being made that mitigate family wellbeing, we could be serving the community well.



## Helen Brown

As initiating members, Anne and I put it on ourselves to find out what were the most pressing issues surrounding being a grandparent. Being the first Board members also meant we had to set up the organisation's business procedures. Ron Shaw was helpful with that.

My most enjoyable memories have been the early gatherings in various places around Melbourne to hear from other grandparents and the regular outings with other Board members over the years. These outings have allowed us to get to know each other better than we are able to when we just gather at meetings. (Pictured left are Helen Brown (right) and Kath Rowan at one of the earliest fact-finding gatherings.)

I am proud of the reach and level of work that Grandparents Victoria has been able to achieve over the years and that GPV has become an advocate whose opinions are sought out and heard by many people. I believe many of our views are factored into decisions made by people in authority.

I hope that in the future GPV becomes increasingly recognised as a representative body of grandparents promoting the important role of grandparents in society. It would be good to be able to be more inclusive of grandparents of different cultural backgrounds.



## Kerry Doquile



Anne and I worked together and became grandparents around about the same time. Anne came up with this brilliant idea of creating an organisation to represent grandparents and asked if I would help do it. I said, 'Yeah I'll do it.' I didn't have a clue at the time what we would actually do but Anne soon enlightened me.

In the early days it was a lot different to what it is now. It was more casual. We would often have meetings in different places and various people's homes. We all had the desire to create a better future for families in common so we always had lots of things to talk about. (Pictured left is Kerry and her granddaughter at one of the earliest fact-finding gatherings.)

I'm most proud of the fact that we have spoken up in the community and within the official government organisations. We now have a loud

voice and a clear message. I am also proud of the help that Naomi and Anne have provided kinship carers.

I have no idea what the future holds, because we are getting pretty old [laughs]. I must say, though, in that time, since the early days it has now evolved into a much more professional organisation, it's much more formalised now; we have to behave ourselves and all that [laughs].

As for the future of the organisation, I have often thought about that and think we need to discuss the subject of the future and make a five-to-ten-year plan. I'd like to think GPV can continue and still make an impact.

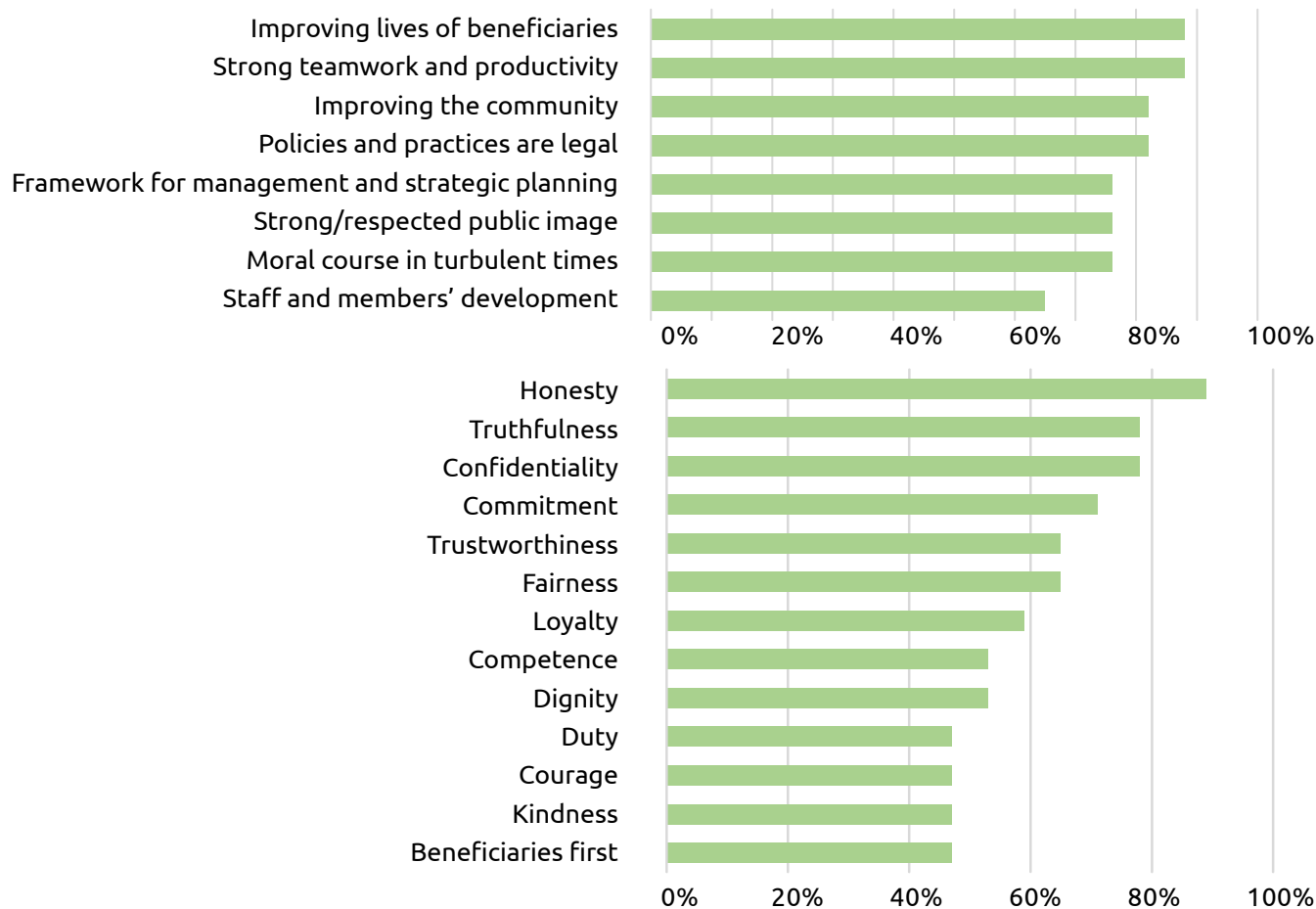


# Grappling with ethics

In its earliest days the Board took the view that GPV was to maintain intellectual integrity, meaning that the views of its members would be valued, sought and safeguarded – and the only ones represented by GPV in the public discourse. In order to maintain an ongoing improvement to an ethical approach, GPV/KCV Board and staff articulated why an ethical approach was necessary and identified the key words that might best describe the ethics of the organisation. Further, the Board took seriously the need to spend public funds with integrity. Some early comments by Board members provided depth to the Board’s thinking.

Various Board members believe the following:

- Honesty means telling it like it is and being very upfront and forthright
- Kindness means being there and offering a helping hand – at a personal and community level
- Loyalty means being loyal to what we stand for and standing together
- Fairness entails empathy, being able to look outside yourself – and being true to your beliefs but being flexible



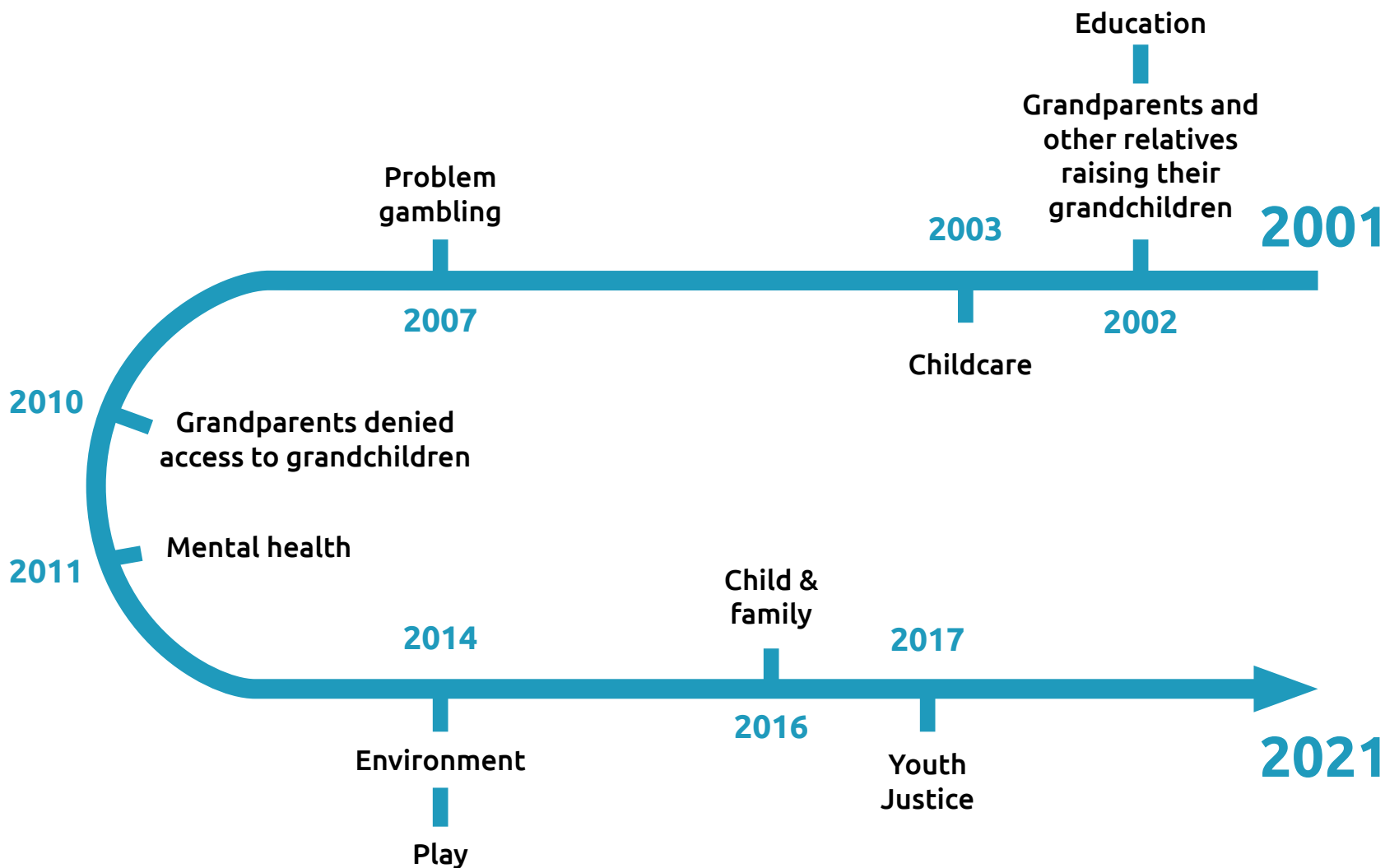


# Grappling with complex issues

From the start the Board decided it was not going to be entangled in a myriad of management decisions. Discussion of issues affecting families was always to take pride of place at all gatherings, most especially Board meetings. Analysis of the decisions taken over 20 years reveals that this has been achieved and that there are some issues that have reoccurred. The minutes of meetings also reveal opportunities lost.

## Recurring issues – then and well into the future

Since 2001 there have been 10 issues which the Board has addressed over successive years and which are likely to be addressed into the future. Irrespective of when they were first addressed, each of these issues has been regularly revisited by the GPV/KCV Board through to the year 2021.



## Lost opportunities – which could be revisited

Some Board-generated ideas were not pursued due to a lack of funding being available, whilst other ideas suggested by outside agencies did not attract Board support. A number of these ideas should be revisited and revised.

### Mallee Research Station Children's Camps

– A proposal to use the decommissioned site of the Mallee Research Station as a camp for children in out-of-home care in the north of Victoria.

### Grandparents as education aides

– A proposal to establish a trial program to train grandparents as education aides and place them in local schools to hear children read, assist with extra-curricular classes such as cookery, or act as mentors to individual children.

### Grandparents' Day

– Twice the Board has decided not to participate in or promote Grandparents' Day. The Board was wary of the commercialisation of such days and preferred to promote the importance of grandparenting as part of Families Week celebrations

### Playgroups for grandparents

– A proposal for the establishment of a network of play groups for grandparents and children.

### Elder abuse

– A request made by another community organisation to devote attention to this issue on the basis of our membership being in the age group caught up by elder abuse. This was not agreed to on the grounds that the priority of working with families and children should stand.



# Implementing the work program

GPV/KCV has been fortunate in the staff it has attracted, especially in the years when there were few funds with which to compensate them. Work was completed ‘on the smell of an oily rag’. Even when finances became healthier, the reliance on volunteers to assist with tasks such as mailouts has been constant across the years. Many of the volunteers have been family connected with Board members who often felt dragooned into assisting.

Some paid staff are employed on a short-term basis in order to deliver single projects, whilst others are employed to achieve the long-term commitments. Taken together, all staff employed by GPV over the years, no matter for how long, have made an invaluable contribution. Whilst many staff have come and gone, others have been around for years – in particular, one person from day one, namely Anne McLeish as Director.

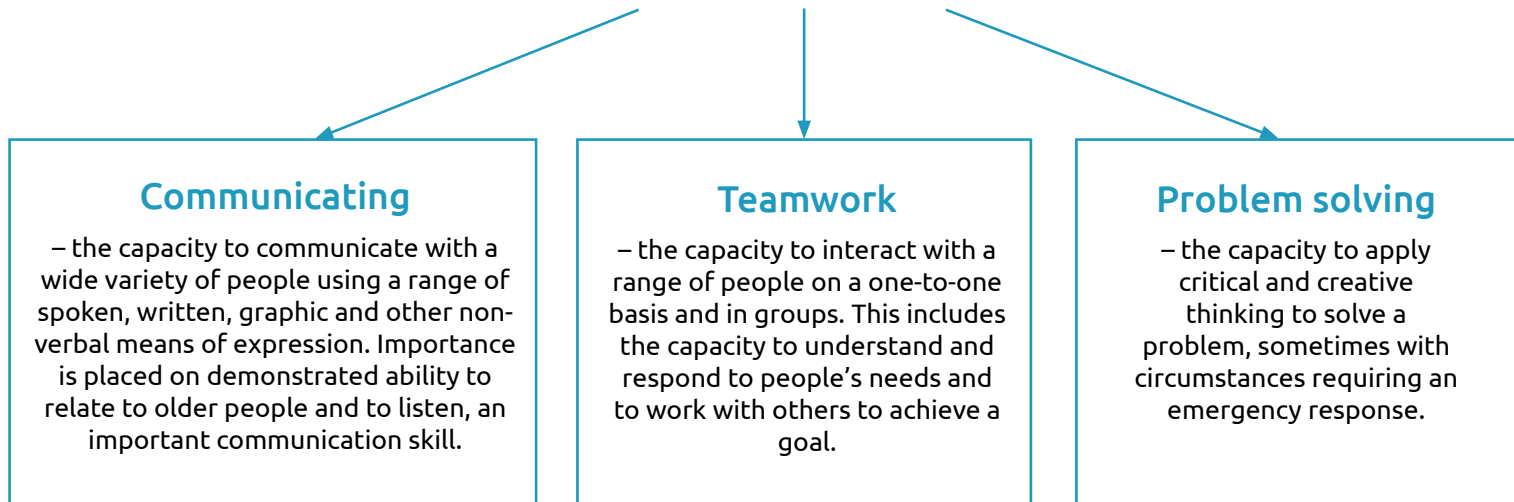
Amongst the earliest volunteers were two who remain active: Catherine McLeish and Zoe McLeish. Zoe commenced her volunteer service as a voluntary member of staff who slept in a laundry basket under the office desk when she was first born but who currently assists with mailouts and project work.

GPV has a practice of employing young people where possible and of selecting people as much for their personal characteristics as for their skills. Most important is the ability of staff to relate to people from all walks of life and to treat all with the utmost respect. It is worth noting that core staff who have been with GPV/KCV for a long time have been drawn from aged care, hairdressing, education research and music, just to name a few interesting backgrounds. Staff are employed not for their technical skills and understanding – which can be learned on the job – but for their capacity and willingness to contribute to teamwork, their respectful and clear communication and problem-solving abilities. Evidence of resilience and a sense of humour are also considered essential characteristics. Over the years the wisdom of taking a creative approach to employing staff has been proven to be the right approach. GPV’s definitions of valued staff characteristics have been affirmed over the years and hark back to the work undertaken in the 1990s to identify the full range of skills necessary for employees to transition into the future world of work.

Staff Honour Board			
Name	Started	Years of service	Role
Anne McLeish	2001	20 years ongoing	Director
Catherine McLeish	2005	10 years ongoing	GPV/KCV Staff
Naomi Whyley	2011	10 years ongoing	GPV/KCV Staff
Megan Crowle	2012	8 years ongoing	GPV/KCV Staff
Sienna McLeish	2012	7 years ongoing	Volunteer
Zoe McLeish	2012	7 years ongoing	Volunteer
Bradley Dawson	2016	6 years ongoing	GPV/KCV Staff
Beryl Gallagher	2018	3 years ongoing	GPV/KCV Staff
Jessica Ziegler	2020	6 months	Occasional Consultant
Ron Shaw	2001	4 years	GPV/KCV Staff
Lisa Mills	2016	4 years	Occasional Consultant
Lynn Robson	2007	3 years	Occasional Consultant
Catriona Brown	2002	2 years	Volunteer
Alaiba Nauman	2020	1 year	GPV/KCV Staff
Amalie Tibbits	2004	1 year	Occasional Consultant
Ebony McLeish	2014	1 year	Occasional Consultant
Ian Stevens	2004	1 year	Occasional Consultant
Juliette Williams	2012	1 year	Occasional Consultant
Keith Redmond	2004	1 year	Occasional Consultant
Ali Grantham	2014	1 year	Volunteer
Angus McLeish	2014	1 year	Volunteer
Brad McLeish	2014	1 year	Volunteer
Cameron McLeish	2002	1 year	Volunteer
Georgia Whyley	2012	1 year	Volunteer
Sharni McLeish	2005	1 year	Volunteer



## GPV Key Employment Criteria



It is the responsibility of the staff to ensure that the business of the organisation progresses within legal contractual frameworks and that decisions made by the Board are acted upon, including the earliest decisions, which were taken quite informally.

### First newsletter – *The Grandparent* newsletter



The first edition of *The Grandparent*, published in December 2001, was a four-page black and white document, celebrating the launch of Grandparents Victoria and the early campaigns already in progress. The newsletters quickly grew in size and scope, at first covering only statewide issues, but soon introducing national and even international issues. The newsletter was, and still is, a way of letting the wider community know what GPV is doing and thinking. Since the early days GPV has employed additional strategies for making its work transparent: these include a website, occasional papers and survey reports.

### First seminar – grandparents and the law

This seminar was held in Essendon, when GPV realised the extent to which many of the issues that GPV had decided to address were affected by national family law, not just state law and regulations.

It was at this forum that GPV made the decision to form Grandparents Australia. When Anne McLeish reported that GPV had insufficient funds to register another organisation, Justice Susan Morgan, who had spoken at the seminar, dipped into her purse and handed over the \$60 required to register Grandparents Australia as a community organisation.

The first GPV occasional paper, written by Justice Morgan and titled 'Grandparents and the Law' resulted from this seminar. This occasion marked the first of many where contemplation of the influence the law on family life was considered and, on some occasions, lamented.





In the paper 'Grandparents and the Law', The Honourable Justice Susan Morgan (pictured here at left wearing black and speaking with a GPV member) said:

*'Family law in Australia is regulated by the Family Law Act which has as its paramount principle that all decisions being made in relation to children be made in the child's best interest. So, from the outset I should make it clear that there is no such thing as parents' rights or grandparents' rights under the Act. It is the rights of children and the responsibilities of adults to care for them that are its central focus.*

*A new section in the Act specifically requires the Court to consider the value to the child of relationships with grandparents and other relatives when deciding what is in the best interests of children. This ensures that the relationships children have with grandparents must be considered when the court is making an order about the child.*

*Another important matter is that Family Court decisions, though based on legislative principles, also include an element of discretion. The inclusion of discretion in family law is designed to cater for the many different issues and relationships that come before the Court. It is also recognised that what might be in the interests of one child, might not, for some reason, be in the interests of another. While strict rules might work for corporations, families are very different. By ensuring that judges can use discretion in conjunction with rules and principles, the family law system is better suited to cater for the often-intricate nature of human relationships.*

*If a parent has decided that a grandparent cannot see his or her grandchild, the grandparent may bring a court action. A grandparent is expressly permitted to apply for a parenting order. Thus, a grandparent can ask the Court to make an order that the child live with them or have contact with them. If it can be shown that it is in the child's best interests to live with or have contact with the grandparent, then an order would be made in his or her favour. Usually, an order that the child live with a grandparent will only be made if a parent is unable to care for the child or because the child has lived with the grandparent for a significant amount of time without a court order and it would be in the child's best interests to remain in the care of his or her grandparents.'*



## First project – young and older people working together

Students from a local high school worked alongside GPV staff and local grandparents to develop a database of grandparents from the broader area, conduct interviews, collate the survey results, write reports and give presentations about their findings.

The grandparents were interviewed about issues affecting their grandchildren. It was hoped that as a result of this work, understanding and mutual respect between young people and older people in the community would increase. Issues raised in this study included the following:

- Drug use and family breakdown – including the first mention of grandparents being denied access to their grandchildren
- School issues – such as class sizes, curriculum and funding
- Childhood issues – such as obesity and effects of over-exposure to electronic devices
- Play matters – such as the creation of safe play areas in communities



## First campaign – access to education for all children and young people

**Grandparents lend a hand**

THE force behind a new education think-tank to help young Victorians has come from the state's senior citizens.

Grandparents Victoria this week announced it was forming an alliance with parents, teachers and administrators to act on schooling issues.

Director Anne McLeish said Grandparents Victoria was concerned about the future of the education system.

"While grandparents recognise there are a lot of good things happening in schools, they are worried about such things as class size, as well as having a general concern about public education," she said.

Many families have both parents in the workforce, leaving grandparents to look after the kids more and more, Ms McLeish said.

*Herald Sun 26/4/02*

By IAN ROYALL,  
education reporter

"They often look after the children before and after school and are involved in the day-to-day school activities.

"Grandparents are also putting their hands in for educational costs, so it is of major concern to us."

In a recent survey, Grandparents Victoria members listed education as the topic that concerned them most, after family breakdown.

The Victorian Education Roundtable will include members from the Australian Education Union, Parents Victoria, Kindergarten Parents Victoria, Victorian Council of Social Security, the Catholic Education Office and the STAR disability rights group.

This campaign involved an ongoing series of calls asking for the costs of education from kindergarten to tertiary education to be reduced. Of particular concern was/is the cost of education to families under financial pressure. Recent withdrawals of the Education Maintenance Allowance in Victoria and the Schoolkids Bonus at a national level have exacerbated this problem. GPV also calls for the provision of a broad general education that addresses life skills as well as work-related skills. Many grandparents believe that currently education is much more like training rather than education.

To start the education campaign, GPV established the Victorian Education Roundtable (VER). This alliance of grandparents, parents, teachers and administrators met regularly to discuss issues related to the provision of education across the state and will undertake joint action in areas of common concern. The VER included the following:

- Grandparents Victoria
- The Australian Education Union
- The Independent Education Union
- Parents Victoria
- Kindergarten Parents Victoria
- The Victorian Council of Social Services
- The Catholic Education Office
- STAR – advocacy for people with physical disabilities

The inaugural meeting of the VER addressed wide-ranging issues, including class sizes, the inclusion of people with disabilities into mainstream schooling, the importance of classroom teachers and the role of public and private education systems.



## First survey – Grandparents Speak 2004



ASC Director

This foundation survey to ascertain the issues of most interest to grandparents was conducted with nearly 300 grandparents from across Australia. It was funded by the Australian Scholarships Group and the report 'Grandparents Speak 2004' was launched by Senator Kay Patterson at the Melbourne City Council in September.

The results of the survey indicated that grandparents often feel that their role is undervalued and that they often suffer financial hardship and inconvenience to fulfil

it. It could well be asked: Do the pleasures outweigh the pressures? Many grandparents raised concerns about the effects on families of drug and alcohol abuse.

The media reporting of the launch and the survey report was extensive, with television and much radio and newspaper coverage in the days that followed. The media was interested in the idea of grandparents becoming organised and making public comment on issues other than those related to aged care or retirement. This launch was when the Grandparents Australia logo, developed by Catriona Brown, made its first public appearance.

In 2004 grandparents saw education as a top priority and a possible solution to many of the problems that children encounter. They saw a need for better funding and a more child-centred curriculum. Grandparents considered two crucial elements in the education of their grandchildren's education were good teachers and a responsive school culture. Kindergarten education was applauded because it is child centred and usually involves a creative curriculum. Grandparents saw tertiary education as needing less oversight, largely because their grandchildren's age meant the latter become more independent and thus responsible for their own lives. Grandparents' satisfaction with current education provision tended to decrease as the level of education increased. Quite a few grandparents (about 40%) were helping pay for the education costs of their grandchildren. A significant number also indicated they were saving towards the future education of their grandchildren.

There was a clear message in the responses from grandparents in the survey: they saw there was a need for values and life skills education to be included in the curriculum, including communication, respect and tolerance, good manners, honesty and trustworthiness, and a sense of community.

It is of special interest that grandparents identified communication as the most crucial life skill. The mode of, and frequency of, communication between grandparents and grandchildren emerged as a major area of concern. Key aspects of communication included talking, listening, empathising and recognising the rights of others.

**June Smith, founding Board member said:**

*'The most stunning finding uncovered in the 2004 survey was the range of relationships grandparents have with their grandchildren. A continuum of relationships emerged, with the grandparents at either extreme of the continuum experiencing grief, but for different reasons. The grandparents raising their grandchildren full time at one end of the continuum and the grandparents who were denied access to the grandchildren at the other end were often distressed.'*

It was found that many grandparents had such varied relationships with their grandchildren that they could be represented on several points on the continuum at the one time: sometimes at one extreme point of the continuum as well as the other extreme. Those grandparents who had only social contact with their grandchildren appeared to be the most financially and mentally stable, whilst those who had parental responsibility and those who were denied contact with their grandchildren were often in need of support.



Senator Kay Patterson



### The roles that bring varying levels of grief with them

- Grandparents who have no contact with any of their grandchildren
- Grandparents who are aware that they have grandchildren but have no details about them, let alone any contact with them
- Grandparents who have no contact with some grandchildren while providing childcare and having social contact with others
- Grandparents who have no contact with some grandchildren and only social contact with the others

Wherever grandparents are denied access to grandchildren, whether as a result of family bitterness or distance, there is some level of grief that grandparents experience. The most potent grief is visited upon grandparents who are denied access to all of their grandchildren as a result of family disputes.

### The roles with the most workload attached to them

- Grandparents who are raising some of their grandchildren 24/7 whilst not seeing others at all, and providing childcare for others and having only social contact with yet more
- Grandparents who are raising all of their grandchildren 24/7
- Grandparents who are raising some grandchildren while providing childcare for some and having social contact with others
- Grandparents who are raising some grandchildren while having no contact with other grandchildren
- Grandparents who are raising some grandchildren while having social contact with others

When children are removed from parents, they are most often placed with grandparents. This form of out-of-home care is called 'kinship care' and is increasing right around the world. The workload attached to this role is substantial and when coupled with the workloads attached to maintaining relationships with other grandchildren it can be said that the grandparents in these circumstances are extraordinarily, emotionally, and physically challenged.

### The roles closest to the traditional role of grandparents

- Grandparents who have only social contact with all their grandchildren
- Grandparents who are providing occasional childcare for, and having social contact with, their grandchildren

These two roles closely describe the view of the traditional role of grandparents. This role is diminishing, with grandparents in the 21st century having more complex relationships with their biological grandchildren, as well as with non-biological grandchildren.







*Pictured on this page are GPV members at various policy-making forums*



**A SCHOOL CURRICULUM  
THAT SUITS EVERY CHILD**

Listen to grandparents –  
it is urgent that you do

**GRANDPARENTS CARRY THE COMMUNITY!!!**

*Protect the environment for the sake of our grandchildren*

**Do more to protect grandparents'  
connection with their grandchildren**

# Broadening the base



# Meeting with politicians

In 2002, GPV attended a meeting with Judy Maddigan (MLA for Essendon from 1996–2010). The next meeting with a politician was held in Bendigo with Ron Best (MLC for the North Western Province from 1988–2002). The picture below shows Ron with Angela Hogan, Anne McLeish and John Mitchell from GPV. These were the first of many meetings held with state and federal politicians from across the political spectrum.

Joan Kirner was one of the earliest members of GPV. When told about the possible formation of an organisation established to capture and share grandparents' views on family matters, she said: 'It's about time someone did this.' Joan spoke at the first AGM, lauding community action as an integral part of democracy, and advised GPV to form partnerships because no one can secure long-lasting change by themselves.



**In February 2003, Mr Bruce Billson, Federal MP for Dunkley, spoke in the Australian Parliament.**

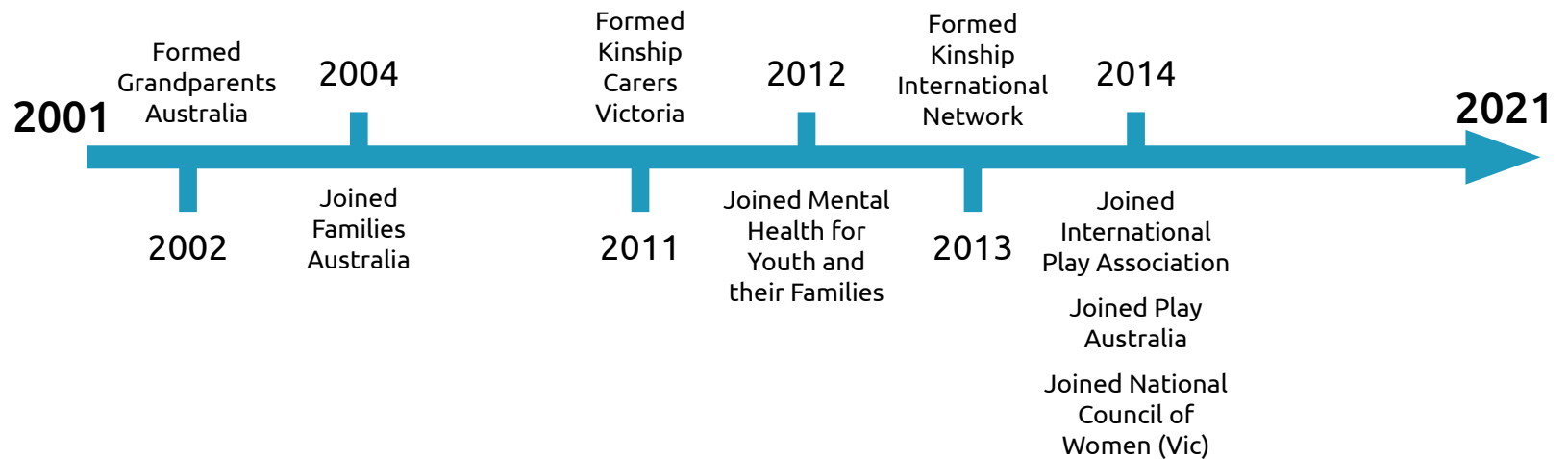
*'Tonight, I would like to talk about my support for grandparents, particularly Grandparents Australia and the Grandparents Victoria division. The organisation arises from a concern that many grandparents are not heard and that their needs are not considered in the policy development process. In quite a significant number of households, the grandparents are almost the Rock of Gibraltar. They are the consistent people, the ones who are always there and can be relied on by the grandkids to give them some stability, certainty and structure while the parents might have other issues to sort through ... The grandparents are the ones you can count on – the ones you can rely on – but I feel, as does Grandparents Victoria, that in many areas the voices, needs and aspirations of grandparents are not properly embraced.*

*I would also like to support Grandparents Victoria in the idea that they should have a voice in areas of social policy and community life. Some grandparents feel that their time has passed and that decision-making has moved to the next generation. I do not believe that that is the case. Everyone has experiences to offer, insights to be shared and, hopefully, a contribution to make to better policies for the country, better communities and better neighbourhoods. So, I encourage all grandparents to get behind organisations like Grandparents Victoria – under the Grandparents Australia umbrella – and make sure their voices are heard. I understand the contribution they have to make, the important role they play in many families throughout the Dunkley electorate and the broader community, and also that grandparents can be pretty young and sprightly characters with many vigorous, important years ahead. We want to make sure that we get that full contribution, not only in the workforce but also in the broader development of our communities.'*



# Finding new allies

GPV has formed, and provides the secretariat for, three organisations: Grandparents Australia, Kinship Carers Victoria and the Kinship International Network. The purposes and workloads of these organisations are interrelated, and each one was formed in response to emerging needs and the growing capacity of GPV. GPV has also aligned itself with some organisations which have priorities closely related to those of GPV.



Since 2014 the Board has decided not to join other organisations. However, strong partnerships with a number of them have been maintained.



## Grandparents Australia



The decision to start a national grandparent organisation was made at a GPV legal seminar in May 2002, when the extent to which federal family law impacted on the work GPV was undertaking was realised. The first interstate group to join Grandparents Australia was Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren (GRG) in Western Australia. A meeting between GPV and Bruce Horigan from GRG took place in January 2003 in the office of GPV. A further face-to-face meeting of Grandparents Australia member organisations was held in Melbourne in October of that year. Since this first meeting, face-to-face meetings with Grandparents Australia members have been few and far between – budget restrictions are prohibitive. Members at the first meeting included the following organisations:

- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Tas
- Grandparents and Grandchildren's Society QLD
- Grandparents Looking after Grandchildren WA
- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren SA

## International Play Association



IPA has members in five continents and 40 countries. Its purpose is to protect, preserve and promote the child's right to play. IPA recognises that the wellbeing of children is a global issue and that the opportunity to play is an important element of wellbeing. GPV/GPA joined IPA prior to attending the IPA conference in Istanbul in 2013.

The GPV Board was impressed with the efforts IPA had put into establishing Article 31 on the Child's Right to Play from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The GPV board was determined to assist with the work of making governments around the world act in regard to Article 31.

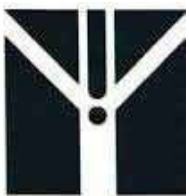
## Families Australia



Families Australia has proved to be a staunch ally of grandparents, particularly those who, as kinship carers, are raising their grandchildren. Anne McLeish was elected to the Board of FA in 2004 and retired from the Board in 2019. With over 750 member organisations across Australia, FA is a national, peak, not-for-profit organisation which strives to improve the wellbeing of all Australian families.

GPV's attention to mental health issues commenced at a national gathering hosted in 2011 by Families Australia in Canberra. Attendees included Helen Brown, Helen Corcoran, Beverly Gardener and Anne McLeish from GPV/GPA.

## Mental Health for Youth and their Families



MHYF works to advocate for sound policies in the mental health sphere, to seek and promote new knowledge, and to reduce stigma. GPV joined MHYF in response to increasing comments from grandparents about the incidence of mental ill-health amongst young people.



## Play Australia



PA is committed to promoting the value of play, to increasing play opportunities for families, and to creating awareness about the importance of safe and developmentally appropriate play. GPV works closely with this organisation as a means of also working with the International Play Association and supporting the Australian representative on the IPA Council.

## Parents Victoria



PV and Grandparents Victoria are longstanding allies. Both organisations share a belief about the right of all children to have equitable access to education.

## National Council of Women Victoria



NCWV is one of the oldest women's organisations in Victoria, and encourages the participation of women in all aspects of life. At the first NCWV congress in 1903 the subjects debated were Equal Pay for Equal Work, The Rights of the Child and Technical Education for Women. These issues are still on the agenda.

## Play Victoria



Play Victoria comprises a diverse group of people and organisations who share a common vision for the health and wellbeing of all young children (from conception to school entry) across Victoria. GPV is supportive of the work of Play Victoria to establish grandparents play groups for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren or providing childcare whilst parents work.

## The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare



The Centre works for the benefit of vulnerable children, young people and families. The Centre provides sector training, facilitates and publishes research, advocates through campaigns and media relations, and sustains ongoing programs focusing on key areas of the state care system. These include the voice of children and young people, and specific programs for foster care, kinship care and residential care.



## Governor General Quentin Bryce as a high-ranking friend of families

*'Our economy has prospered while our most vulnerable children and families, in particular our Indigenous, have failed to thrive,' Ms Bryce told the Families Australia conference at the ANU. 'The pressures – of raising children and grandchildren, caring for kin, coping with inadequate income, limited language skills, mental illness, disability, the unceasing demands of modern life – are for some too great to humanly bear. I have seen the human response of hardship and suffering. I have seen families and communities assembling to support the fragile and destitute amount them. I have seen a collective sense of social responsibility that is palpable. It is that sense – so much a part of our humanity, yet so prone to quelling by the smugness of good times – that I would like to explore with you,' she told the conference audience.*



One of the first public engagements Quentin Bryce, AD, CVO<sup>2</sup>, undertook once she was appointed Governor-General of Australia was to attend a Families Australia Symposium in Canberra in 2008. The Governor-General delivered a speech about family issues, hitting out at the 'smugness of good times' while vulnerable children and families are in despair. Ms Bryce highlighted the collective social responsibility for the wellbeing of families that could no longer bear the pressures of life, drawing on a recent visit to Broken Hill and other towns in the Murray-Darling region.

<sup>2</sup> Companion of the Order of Australia and Commander of the Royal Victorian Order.





# Securing funding – donations and research

In the beginning, GPV was entirely dependent on membership fees and small donations, including donations of stamps, for its survival. Many times, in the organisation's early years, Board minutes noted that, 'Person X will be reimbursed for some expense as and when funds become available.' In the face of these financial restrictions, early corporate donations gave heart and kept aspirations alive.

In 2002 the Reflex paper company donated a quantity of paper to be used in the production of newsletters, but even so, the initial subscription price of \$10 per year turned out to be insufficient to cover the costs of producing and distributing the newsletter.



A \$2000 grant from Australia Post was used to fund the design and production of the GPV

information flyers and posters. Both were distributed by GPV activists across the state and are still in use today. The poster was a successful tool in raising the awareness of GPV among people 'off the beaten track'. While many people telephoned to say they had seen the poster in predictable locations such as their local library, others had noted them in more out of the way places such as the foyer at the church or local bakery/take away shop.



In-kind donations in various forms were also given by The Council for Equal Opportunity and Employment, the Malvern Legacy,

Peninsula Health Frankston, Skills Plus Peninsula, Stesi Wine Bar in Kensington and the Essendon Quilting Society, which donated a quilt for raffle. The raffle was won by June Smith, founding Board member.



The income generated by membership fees and donations alone is still insufficient to keep GPV operating in ways that match its aspirations, thus many of the projects undertaken by GPV are funded by external grants. In the 2003–2004 financial year, for

example, most of GPV's income came in the form of a grant for the 'Grandparents as Alchemists' project. In 2005–2006, a large grant was received for GPV's project on gambling, and in 2009 the bulk of GPV's funding was allocated to the Moonee Valley Carers' Network. It was not until the 2010–2011 financial year that GPV began to receive regular government funding to support the work of KCV, including a large grant in 2012–2013 to cover the costs of producing the *Kinship Carers Handbook for Victoria*.



GPV has made donations to other organisations including to the following:

Plan International in recognition of PI's support of the inaugural meeting of the Kinship International Network (KIN). The meeting was held, free of charge, in PI's offices in London.



The ARK Foundation, whose mission is to improve the quality of life for Africa's most vulnerable children and communities by assisting them to learn strategies and skills necessary for independence. In 2008 the foundation wrote a thank-you note, outlining the achievements the GPV donation assisted, which were:

- 800 scholarships to secondary school students, and
- 1500 sponsorships for grandmothers and programs in 13 districts of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania

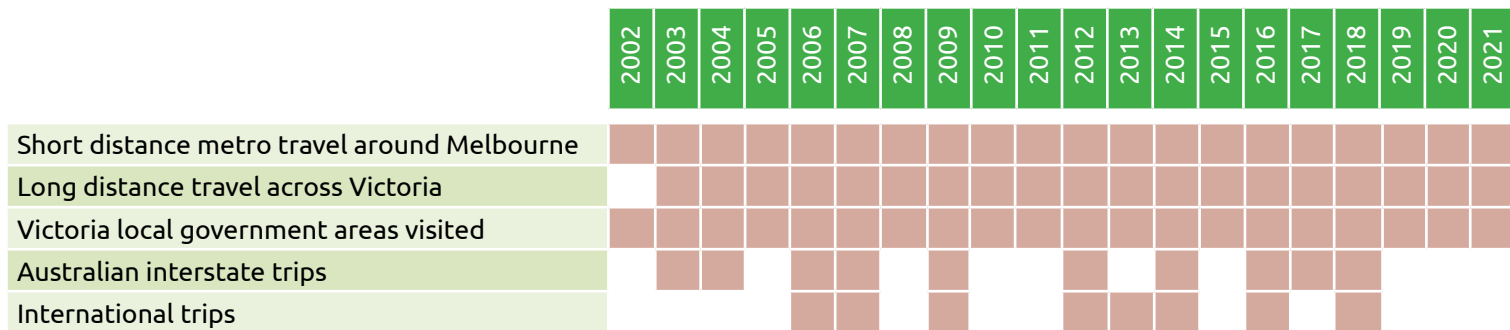


# Broadening the geographical base

From GPV's earliest years its staff have travelled as widely as possible. Meeting people across a wide geographical base has exposed GPV to a range of views and firsthand knowledge of the changes in families and the support they need. In all its travels, GPV has encountered grandparents playing increasingly significant and unconventional roles. Travel has also fostered some longstanding connections with people and organisations in far-flung places which have been galvanised into close working partnerships.

Budget constraints limit the capacity of GPV staff to travel. However, the organisation is fortunate to have Board members whose commitment has led them to fund their own costs associated with international trips.

LGAs visited	51 of the 76 local government areas across Victoria have been visited
Long distance	23 locations more than 120 kilometres from Melbourne are visited regularly
Short distance	31 metropolitan locations on the outskirts of Melbourne are visited regularly and repeatedly.
Countries visited	New Zealand, US, England, Turkey, Italy
Australian states visited	The only state GPV has not visited is the Northern Territory

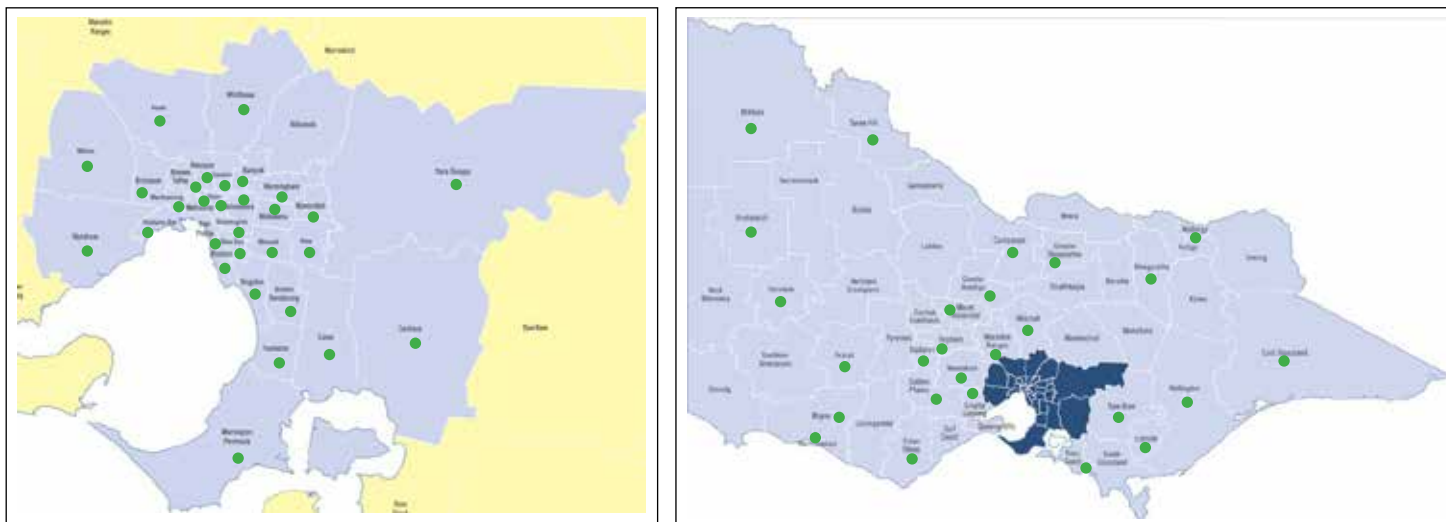


A three-year-old's drawings of grandparents going to meetings by train or plane



## Connecting within Victoria and Australia

GPV staff regularly attend meetings across Victoria. Most of these meetings have involved speaking with and listening to kinship carers. However, some meetings have been more general in purpose, with people increasingly interested in talking about the role of grandparents in the 21st century. GPV also speaks with community groups, such as Rotary and Lions. It is noteworthy that in these wider community groups GPV finds many grandparents playing significant and unconventional roles in their families. In the map below those local government areas marked in green are the ones GPV has visited over the years.



The first three interstate trips made were to connect with grandparents raising their grandchildren. At the time these trips were made, GPV had very little money, but the importance of this issue was already clear and required urgent attention. Since that initial burst of travel there have been subsequent trips also related to kinship care. However, GPV has undertaken trips related to other issues such as overall child wellbeing and play.

As a Board member of Families Australia, Anne McLeish has also travelled to other states on Families Australia business. Notable amongst these trips was the 2008 trip to the Northern Territory, where an Aboriginal homeland just outside of Darwin was visited, leaving an indelible impression and leading to thoughts and actions related to the support of Aboriginal grandparents raising their grandchildren. State visits have included the following:

- 2003 – Queensland – Support groups, Gold Coast
- 2003 – Western Australia – Meeting with WA Centrelink Grandparent Advisor
- 2004 – Western Australia – Grandparents Raising Grandchildren seminar
- 2006 – New South Wales – Early Childhood Conference, Sydney
- 2007 – Australian Capital Territory – Families Australia Child Wellbeing Conference, Canberra
- 2009 – South Australia – Visits to kinship care groups
- 2012 – Tasmania – Visits to grandparent support groups
- 2012 – Queensland – Meetings with Play Groups Australia, Brisbane
- 2014 – Tasmania – Carers Conference
- 2018 – Queensland – Education conference



## Overseas liaisons

All travel undertaken has been deemed by those who undertook it to be worth the personal expense and effort, particularly given the expense that the international excursions require. With one exception, all overseas trips have produced substantive outcomes.

### New Zealand

2006, 2009, 2010 & 2014 The trips to Auckland, New Zealand centred around discussions of kinship care, play and preventing problem gambling. GPV was impressed by New Zealand's systems in these areas, whereby a central contact point exists for carers and people with gambling problems to get consistent advice and support.



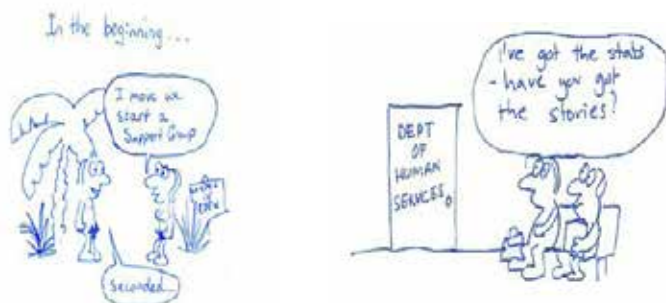
### United States of America

2007, 2012 & 2016



The 2007 trip was to attend a conference in New York run by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). At the end of this conference an attempt to draft a communique was made. However, GPV was not able to agree to the communique because the strong inference contained in it was that only heterosexual families with two parents were appropriate.

The 2012 and 2016 trips involved multiple meetings with organisations supporting kinship carers and kinship carers groups. As a result of this engagement, a series of pamphlets about how to run an effective support group were written (see cartoons below).



Anne McLeish, Director GPV/KCV, laments that:

*'The most enticing idea to come out of all these visits to the US was that of Guardians ad Litem<sup>3</sup>. In Vermont the kinship carers had a positive relationship with the courts. They trusted the judges and the processes the judges employed to liaise with the families and to hear from families directly through their own staff what the families' aspirations were. Children and young people were also asked!'*

<sup>3</sup> A Guardian ad Litem (GAL) is someone who is responsible for the conduct of legal proceedings for a person, where that person is: incapable of representing him or herself, incapable of giving proper instructions to his or her legal representative, and/or under legal incapacity due to age, mental illness or incapacity, disability or other special circumstances in relation to the conduct of the proceedings.



## Turkey

2014



The visit to the conference of International Play Association held in Turkey in 2014 consolidated GPV's understanding of the importance of play in the development of children. For sometime before attending this conference GPV had known that this issue was of increasing interest to grandparents. However, the conference exposed the GPV delegates to more sophisticated understanding about just how play affects children's wellbeing. Since this conference play has become an issue of top priority for GPV.

### Angela Hogan, Board member, remembers:

*'I was deeply affected by the work of international volunteers who flew into wartorn countries to make playgrounds for children traumatised by the effects of war. I was amazed to see how the volunteers scrounged for debris and turned it into an adventure playground that the children eventually learned how to use. Videos showed how reluctant the children were to play at first and how, after encouragement and once their confidence returned, they learned to relax and laugh and gather. Until then I had not thought too clearly about the power of play.'*

## Italy

2018



At a conference of researchers drawn from around the world GPV/KCV presented an outline of the role and potential of community groups as influencers on policy.



## London and the formation of KIN



The trip to London in 2013 was of particular significance. GPV/KCV had called a meeting of 13 delegates from five countries to test the feasibility of forming an international network interested in supporting kinship care. The meeting resulted in the establishment and publication of The Woking Declaration on Kinship Care and the formation of the Kinship International Network (KIN).

The delegates (as shown in the picture below) were:

Australia	Anne McLeish, Naomi Whyley and Juliet Williams – Grandparents Australia/Kinship Carers Victoria; Brian Babington – Families Australia
Ireland	Valerie O’Brien – University of Dublin
Netherlands	Rob Van Pagee – Eigen Kracht Centrale
United Kingdom	Andy Couldrick – Wokingham Council; Cathy Ashley – Kinship Care Alliance; Elaine Farmer – Bristol University, Shelly James – carer
US	Cate Newbanks – National Kinship Alliance for Children; Gale Burford and Joan Vance – University of Vermont



Delegates identified key shared beliefs about kinship care. These were firstly, the belief that it is beneficial to children if they are raised by their extended family where their birth parents are unable to do so, and secondly, that agencies and governments across the world should provide programs and policies which empower and enable kinship carers to fulfil their role.

Delegates also agreed that because kinship care is based on biological family connection it should be differentiated from other types of care where a biological connection does not exist.

Delegates also agreed that international action was necessary to:

- promote kinship care for its positive outcomes and as the only form of out-of-home care that keeps a child within its biological family;
- highlight programs and research that document the outcomes of kinship care; and
- advocate on behalf of kinship carers to ensure that their views are central in any discourse about kinship care.



Delegates recognised the importance of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and identified issues for attention (references below are to the relevant articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

- Article 7**
- The poverty and disadvantage that kinship carers suffer
  - The need for systems supporting kinship care families to be better coordinated, particularly at a local level
  - Birth registration, name, nationality and right to be cared for by parents

- Article 8**
- The poverty and disadvantage that kinship carers often suffer
  - The need for systems supporting kinship care families to be better coordinated, particularly at a local level
  - Preservation of identity

- Article 12**
- The need to empower and enable kinship care families to be heard in public discourses
  - Respect for the views of the child

- Article 20**
- The need for systems supporting kinship care families to be better coordinated, particularly at a local level
  - The need for kinship care advocates to be better able to navigate the systems and find resources
  - The need for programs that assist kinship care families to overcome isolation

- Article 27**
- The poverty and disadvantage that kinship carers often suffer
  - A child's right to an adequate standard of living



FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS NEED PROTECTION

Grandparents united by  
their WorldWide Stories

LET'S ALL SUPPORT THE UNITED NATIONS





# Studying kinship care



# Visiting kinship carers

From the beginning, GPV noted the issues faced by grandparents raising their grandchildren 24/7.

Grandparents and other relatives, such as aunts and uncles, who take on the role of raising children who are biologically related to them, are often in need of advice and support. Over the years they have sought support from a range of sources, including from other kinship carers. Kinship carers have voted with their feet and called for the formation of local self-help groups.

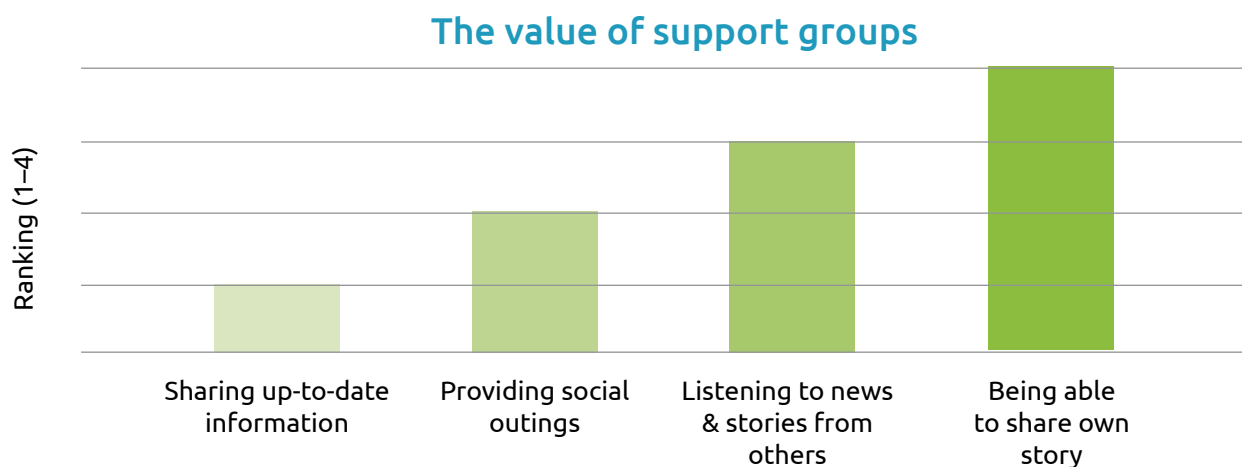
The support groups have proven to be a source of practical and emotional assistance to kinship carers, as is indicated in just a couple of the comments made to KCV in 2014.

**A carer who is still caring and attends three support groups run by three different agencies said:**

*'The support group has been fantastic, wished I went earlier. I realised after attending the KCV/Centrelink Families week luncheon in May and after speaking to other carers at the event that I should go to a support group.'*

*KCV helped me find the ones closest to me. The groups I attend have a slightly different culture but they are all fantastic.'*

In 2014 carers were asked to rank the main aspects of support group work in terms of importance by placing a value between 1 and 4 against each one. The results were remarkable in that they demonstrated that all four aspects of the work of support groups were strongly supported – as outlined below – and confirmed the value of the efforts GPV/KCV expended in strengthening support groups.



GPV first attended a local grandparent support group in 2004 in Shepparton and has visited hundreds more since. GPV has also assisted with the establishment of kinship care support groups across the state.

GPV staff and Board members regularly visit groups across the state and since 2004 have made over 270 visits across Victoria.

There were three remarkable points in this history:

- 2017 – when 25 trips to support groups across Victoria were made,
- 2014 – when 18 trips were squeezed into a few months, and
- 2020 – when just one support group was visited, due to COVID-19 lockdowns.



# Studying kinship carers intensely

## A longitudinal study of carers' sacrifices and wisdom

Between 2011 and 2020, GPV/KCV conducted the KCV Longitudinal Study of Kinship Care Families, 2011 and beyond.

The survey followed 113 kinship care families over the course of the study. Each year, these carers were asked to reflect on their current circumstances and those of the children and young people in their care. The study documents both the positive and negative changes in family circumstances along

the way. The most lasting impression emanating from the survey was of the sacrifices kinship carers make to raise the children in their care within the protection of their biological family and of the wisdom they bring to every decision they make. Even if some decisions require hard choices that the extended family or children do not appreciate, the carers still make them, and are so often proved right to have done so.

**Megan Crowle, KCV staff member who conducted the study, says:**

*'At first it was difficult to hear of the challenges the carers were facing, as so many were in situations I couldn't have imagined. As the study progressed, it was gratifying to learn how these situations were improving, and to hear of the positive outcomes being achieved for the children and young people.'*

*'The benefits of the longitudinal study of kinship carers in Victoria are significant. The data gleaned from the study has informed work to ensure the continuance and improvement of current services to kinship carers.'*

*'Much of the Kinship Carers Handbook was driven by the issues exposed through the study. It has been invaluable in exposing the health concerns and the success stories. And importantly, gave and continues to give those who actually "walk the walk" a voice, and the feedback assured them that they were not alone.'*

**Anka Kenter, GPV/KCV Board member and kinship carer, says:**

*'The benefits of the longitudinal study of kinship carers in Victoria are significant. The data gleaned from the study has been instrumental in determining where to lobby for change and where to lobby to ensure the continuance, and ramping up, of current services to kinship carers.'*

*'Much of the content of the Kinship Carers Handbook was driven by the issues exposed through the study.'*



## Carer attitudes – indicators of success

Carer attitudes to their role proved to be a critical indicator of the health of the placement as a whole as well as the health of the carers themselves. Unfortunately, their attitudes were only recorded from 2014 onwards. Despite this limited collection of data it is clear that, despite many challenges, carers' attitudes improved as the study progressed and the children/young people in the placement moved smoothly towards their adult futures.

### Carer attitudes by % of respondents

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Positive	42	64	43	38	48	44	59
Mixed	53	29	53	53	46	56	41
Negative	5	7	4	9	6	0	0

## Child outcomes – small miracles of successes

The achievement of positive outcomes for children and young people in kinship care is the purpose of the placement. Therefore, the Longitudinal Study included snapshot surveys of the participants on this specific issue.

It must be noted that GPV/KCV had expected that children and young people would leave the study for various reasons but was surprised at the number of new children who entered the study, joining kinship care families that already had numbers of children and young people within them. Children as old as 14 were coming into kinship care families for the first time, sometimes at a stage when the carers were at the point of ending their caring role because the youngest child in their care had made their way in life.

### The numbers of carers and children in the Longitudinal Study

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of carers in the study	113	80	66	58	53	47	45	35	25	22
Number of children in the study	177	134	117	96	89	75	69	54	37	35
Overall number of children, including those who have left the study	177	179	185	187	190	195	196	197	197	197



## Transition out of kinship care – 2014

This snapshot study traced the outcomes for 28 young adults who had turned 18 since the beginning of the Longitudinal Study. It found that over half of these young adults were still living in the kinship family home, a circumstance which led to GPV/KCV supporting Anglicare's 'Home Stretch' campaign in coming years. Only a small minority of young adults (three of 28) were prevented by mental or physical health issues from participating in paid employment or further study, while the others were participating in employment or study appropriate to their life stage.

## Where are all the children now? – 2017

In 2017 the study featured research to determine where all the children to ascertain the outcomes for the children and young people in the study. Their outcomes were overwhelmingly positive, with the majority of children and young people engaged in education or employment suitable to their age group. Only a small minority of young people were reported to have been struggling to engage with the workforce due to ongoing health challenges. Social outcomes were also positive, with a number of young people reportedly raising families of their own with some success.

The majority of young people who had left the study after turning 18 were successfully transitioning, or had successfully transitioned, into adult life, with only a small percentage reportedly being unable to cope with either study or work due to mental or physical difficulties

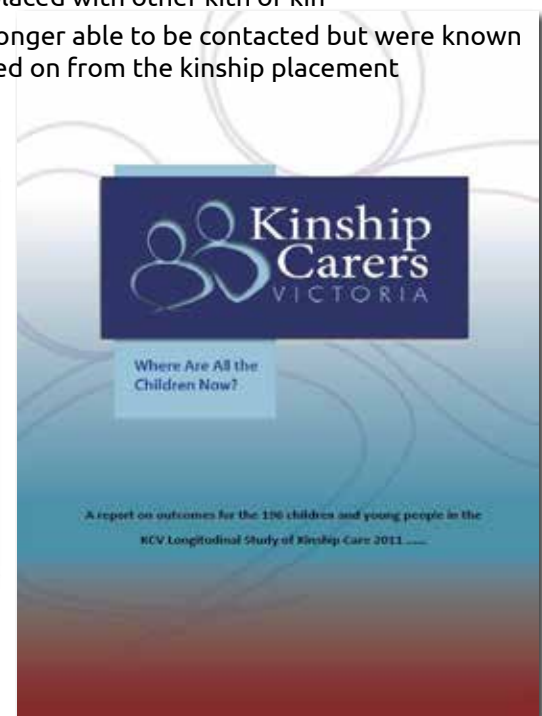
A total of 88.4% (159 of 180 children and young people traced) were fully engaged in either work or study in a variety of fields, including retail, hospitality, agriculture and food production, construction and vehicle construction, trades such as work as an electrician, private security, IT and health.

This report drew on information from previous editions of the Longitudinal Study, as well as on interviews with as many of the carers as could be traced, to draw a picture of the circumstances of all of the 196 children and young people who had been a part of the study. It found that outcomes for children and young people who had experienced kinship care were far better than the average for children and young people in OOHC, and recommended that supports for kinship carers should be improved to ensure that these outcomes continue.

## 2020 – the end of the study

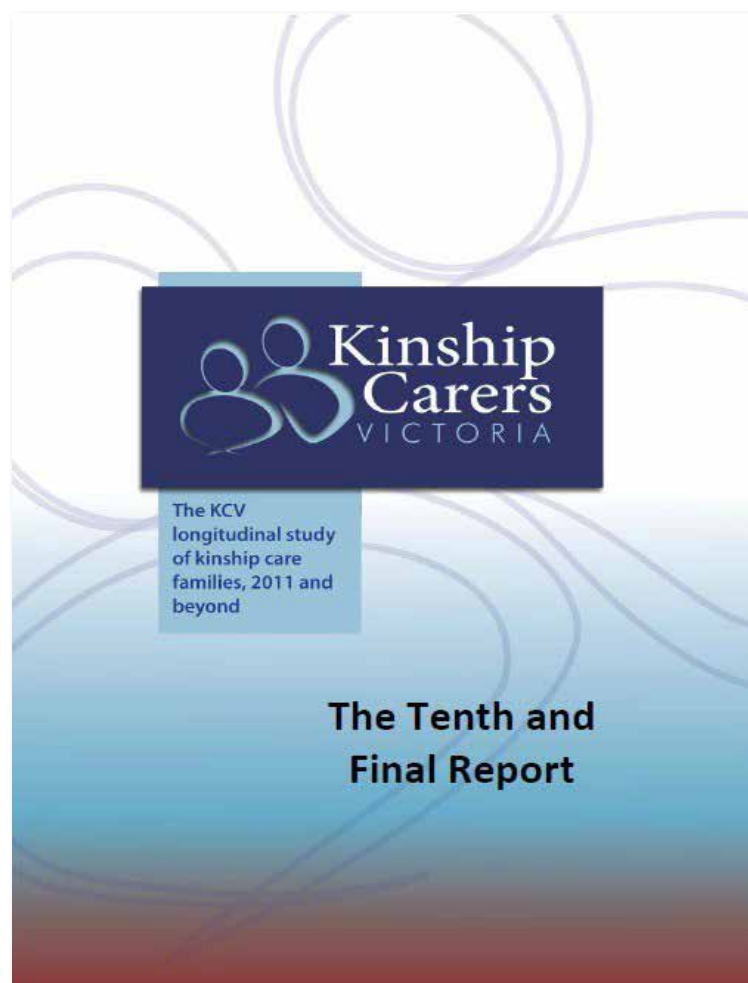
In 2020 the GPV/KCV Board decided to conclude the study. By this time the number of families remaining in the study was 22, who were raising 35 children between them. Of the children and young people who had left the study by 2020:

- 29 had been reconciled with a parent
- 8 had been placed in alternative accommodation
- 6 had been placed with other kith or kin
- 56 were no longer able to be contacted but were known to have moved on from the kinship placement



# Ten updates reported annually

Ten surveys or reports resulted from the Longitudinal Study, with each highlighting special themes that emerged.



## Getting to know the carers and their families – 2011

This survey provided the baseline statistics essential for comparisons in later years. Many details about the families' lives were collected, including the number of children being raised, why the children were being cared for by relatives, and the general health and wellbeing of both carers and the children in their care.

A high proportion of the carers surveyed were over 65, with the youngest aged 40. Although the majority of carers were only raising one child, it was feared that this may be due to siblings being separated (e.g. one child with maternal grandparents and another with paternal grandparents). Mental health issues featured prominently, both in the reasons care arrangements were necessary, and in concerns for the future wellbeing of the children.

## Carers doing it tough – 2012

The second cycle of the Longitudinal Study provided grim reading. Forty percent of carers reported that their circumstances had deteriorated in the preceding 12 months, and a further 25% who had already been struggling reported no improvements. Many of those who reported improvements in their overall circumstances still reported struggling with physical and/or mental ill-health. Across the board, carers were asking for better access to services and financial support.

Contact was lost with 16 carers, and a number of carers indicated that one or more of the children in their care had either transitioned out of kinship care or moved into another arrangement. One positive in the report was the number of carers revealing that the children in their care were beginning to settle down, were doing better at school and in out of school activities, and were receiving necessary counselling and medical treatment.

## Things are looking up – and children are growing up – 2013

Seventy-one percent of respondents indicated that their living situation overall was generally positive, a large increase from the previous years. The number of carers with whom contact had been lost in this third cycle increased to 24. Nine young people had transitioned out of kinship care through turning 18, and it was noted the number of carers reporting that young people in their care were beginning driving lessons, suggesting a large number of young people would again be transitioning out of care before cycle #4 of the study.



## The positive news continues to increase – 2014

By this stage, only 58 of the original 113 families in the study were still caring for one or more children relatives. As expected, 12 young people turned 18 during cycle #4. This led to the conducting of a separate snapshot survey, 'Transition out of Kinship Care'. Several carers were now caring for new babies born since the beginning of the study. Several carers who had previously been listed as 'lost contacts' reconnected with the study in 2014. The number of carers reporting that their circumstances were negative reduced to 7.4%. Concerns were raised about the increasing age and health of carers, as well as their ability to continue to provide housing and financial support for children as carers entered retirement.

## Interacting with the justice system is hard – 2015

For the first time in the study, the sample size decreased to less than half of the original number of families. The number of children within those families continued to grow, with three new children entering the study. The 2015 survey asked a number of in-depth questions about the following:

- **Case management**, asking carers to reflect on how their case had been assessed by DHHS, and whether they still had interactions with a case manager from either DHHS or a CSO
- **Interactions with the justice system**, which raised a number of concerns about the difficulties carers faced when attempting to obtain court orders relating to their care arrangement
- **Interactions with the child(ren)'s parents**, which showed that fewer than half of the children had any interaction with either of their parents.

## Children should be placed with family – 2016

In light of changes to NSW legislation, carers were asked whether they felt that adoption away from the family was something they would have considered. The answer was an overwhelming 'no', with some carers becoming distressed at the mere suggestion. This report also made

recommendations about the need for succession planning and support for older carers, after finding that over 80% of kinship carers were likely to be over 65 when the last child in their care turned 18, with five carers likely to be over the national average life expectancy when the last child in their care turned 18.

## Where are the children now? – 2017

There were no additional questions asked of carers in 2017 beyond those related to child outcomes and carer wellbeing. This survey noted the effect that the deaths of seven carers had on care arrangements, with three of these deaths being reported in the months following the 2016 survey. This report also announced GPV/KCV's intention of conducting a further in-depth census of the outcomes for all children and young people who had been a part of the Longitudinal Study.

## Carer wellbeing is key – 2018

In this survey, for the first time more carers reported overall positive feelings towards their situation than reported either negative or mixed feelings. An emerging issue in 2018 was the level of support available for non-statutory carers in the wake of changes to kinship care funding. Carers were also asked to indicate whether they had accessed training programs such as those offered through Carer KaFE, with almost 50% reporting that they had.

## Contact with parents is rare – 2019

Twenty-five families remained in the study, and for the first time no carers reported overall negative feelings towards their situation. Six young people turned 18 in this year, of whom five were known to be engaging with education and training. Carers were again questioned about contact with the children's families. Only 16% of respondents reported that the children in their care had regular contact with a parent, while a further 16% reported sporadic contact.

## Farewell to the Longitudinal Study – 2020

With only 22 families remaining in the study, it was decided that the 10th report would be the last. This report reflected on the trends observed over the span of the study, and the numerous GPV/KCV projects spawned or informed by the survey results over the years.



EVERY CHILD HAS A RIGHT  
TO KNOW THEIR BIOLOGICAL  
IDENTITY

EVERY CHILD HAS A RIGHT  
TO BE RAISED BY THEIR  
BIOLOGICAL FAMILY

Kinship carers are  
miracle workers

Kinship carers are identified  
by their sacrifices and  
dedication to FAMILY



# Surveying to collate views



Surveys were designed to investigate the views of grandparents and kinship carers on a single topical issue, enabling more detailed investigation of issues, which in turn informed GPV/KCV about how to react in ways that were true to life experiences of the respondents.

The impetus for each survey arose from either a Board discussion, a request for information from the Department of Health and Human Services, or an enquiry from the media.

Some surveys:

- are extensive, resulting in comprehensive reports that are widely distributed; for example, 'Let the children play', 'Where are all the children now?'
- involve few respondents, with a reduced number of questions resulting in an internal briefing paper; for example, 'Passports in OOHC'
- are repeated so that contemporary views are captured; for example, surveys on education, election campaigns.

Most surveys addressed issues related to kinship care: eight related to general grandparenting issues and one survey combined the views of grandparents and young people about aspirations for young people. Surveys pivoted around six themes:

- Education
- Child wellbeing
- Carer wellbeing
- Human rights
- GPV/KCV priority setting
- The role of grandparents

Helen Brown, Chairperson GPV/KCV said:

*'The surveys help us to understand grandparents' and kinship carers' views on issues of universal relevance; that is, those which are relevant to all children and families everywhere. The surveys also help us to better understand issues of more local relevance to smaller groups of children and families. Whatever the basis of the survey, the results are important to the Board of GPV/KCV.'*

The relationships documented in the 'Grandparents Speak 2004' report shocked GPV Board members. Many grandparents reported undertaking grandparenting roles that were too demanding for them to sustain. Further, they reported experiencing financial demands attached to their role as grandparents which were causing them to draw on their superannuation funds. More detailed outcomes from this survey are described earlier in this book (page 29).



## An overview of the surveys

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
1. Grandparent members survey								■											
2. Grandparents and young people on children's rights																	■		
3. Grandparents' federal election campaign															■				
4. Grandparents speak (national)		■																	
5. Grandparents speak about play												■							
6. Grandparents speak about public education		■																	
7. Grandparents speak their minds (Vic)	■																		
8. Grandparents surveyed on their role										■									
9. Grandparents on the roles grandparents play																	■		
10. Kinship carers on education for children in OOHC											■								
11. Kinship carers on the value of support groups													■						
12. Kinship carers on transition out of kinship care												■							
13. Kinship carers on wellbeing during COVID-19																		■	
14. Kinship carers on relationships with extended family											■								
15. Kinship carers on birth certificates for children																			■
16. Kinship carers on carer wellbeing															■				
17. Kinship carers on reunification and contact with parents																		■	
18. Kinship carers on passports in OOHC													■						
19. Kinship carers: Where are all the children now?																■			
20. Kinship carers on support for kinship care families													■						



## Surveying Grandparents

## Surveying Kinship Carers

### **2003 Grandparents speak their minds (Vic)**

This first GPV survey was conducted with the assistance of a group of year 10 students from Echuca Secondary College. It found that the issues of most concern to the respondents were drug use, family breakdown, education, health and wellbeing, and community development.

### **2004 Grandparents speak their minds 2**

This survey was conducted with 286 grandparents from across Australia to ascertain the issues of most interest to them in regard to the wellbeing of their grandchildren. Grandparents raised concerns about the effects of drug and alcohol abuse, as well as family violence. It was noted that in these situations, grandparents provide a sense of security for their grandchildren and that this is not widely valued.

### **2004 Grandparents survey on public education**

This report was published using data taken from the 'Grandparents speak' survey. It found that grandparents viewed education as a key factor in ensuring a positive future for children and that grandparents were alarmed at the rising costs of education. It recommended that, as interested stakeholders in the education debate, grandparents should contribute more to discussion of this issue.

### **2010 Grandparent members survey**

This survey was designed to assess the issues most affecting grandparents in 2010 and to ensure that GPV was continuing to meet the needs of its members. The issues raised by respondents in this survey matched the issues arising from the 2004 survey of grandparents.

### **2012 Grandparents have a Families Week conversation**

Grandmothers were asked what types of support they offered their families. All indicated that they provided moral support to their families, and 80% offered some level of financial support. Assistance with items such as babysitting, transport, and household chores were generally only provided in times of emergency.



## Surveying Grandparents

## Surveying Kinship Carers

### 2013 Kinship care: Education for children

Overall, carers reported that they were happy with the education being provided for children in their care, although a number indicated the need for improved communication with the children's school. It was noted that carers sometimes found it difficult to get the school to understand their circumstances, but that generally the schools were supportive. It was also noted that almost 50% of the children in the survey had some form of learning difficulty, yet only 65% of those had access to special learning programs. A third of carers said they would appreciate a reduction in education costs for the children in their care.

### 2013 Kinship care: Relationships with extended family

This survey revealed that navigating wider family relationships can be 'tricky'. While 75% of carers reported that they had contact with some members of the extended family and at least one of the child(ren)'s parents, nearly 50% had no contact with the paternal side of the family, while 25% had no contact with the maternal side. In several cases the carers did not even know the identity of the child(ren)'s father(s). Some carers indicated they had not been able to have contact with extended family members due to intervention orders. In most cases, the quality of contact was rated between 'passive' and 'positive'. Several carers indicated that contact with their extended family was distressing. Half of the carers surveyed indicated that they received no practical assistance from extended family, although children were involved in special occasions and received gifts.

### 2014 Grandparents speak about play

The play survey was completed by 100 grandparents between the ages of 49 and 90 drawn from rural, regional and urban areas in all Australian states and New Zealand. Respondents lamented the fact that children were relying on electronic toys at the expense of imaginary play or spending time outdoors.

### 2014 Kinship care: Transition of young people out of kinship care

This survey was conducted to determine what was happening with young people who were now legally adults, and therefore no longer in kinship care. It was found that over half were still living in the kinship family home. While several of the young people were unable to work or study due to physical or mental illness, the others were divided evenly between working and/or studying. Two-thirds of the young people were still receiving some form of government support.



## Surveying Grandparents

## Surveying Kinship Carers

### 2014 Kinship care: The value of support groups

Carers were asked to identify how highly they valued support groups. Access to information, social outings, listening to others, and sharing stories with sympathetic listeners were all ranked evenly. Support Group Facilitators shared what they thought would improve the situations of carers. Issues raised included recognition of the unique situation of kinship care, the need for better funding for both groups and individuals, better access to respite care, and access to legal aid.

### 2015 Kinship care: Support for kinship care families

This report highlighted the specific needs of kinship carers. It found that there was much room for improvement in DHHS processes around assessing cases and following through with the necessary support. Many complaints were also reported in regard to interactions with the justice system, even in cases where carers were generally satisfied with their experience.

### 2015 Kinship care: Passports in OOHC

Seven kinship carers shared their struggles in obtaining important legal documents, including birth certificates, passports, and Medicare cards. In a number of cases this was made more difficult by the fact that the birth of a child had not been properly registered in the first place, and that the parent(s) were not willing or able to assist with the necessary paperwork to help obtain the documents.

### 2017 Grandparents election campaign

Grandparents were asked to rate the importance of issues such as environment protection, out-of-home care, welfare payments, child wellbeing, health, refugees and education. The results were used to inform a Log of Claims sent to all politicians before the 2018 state election and the 2019 federal election.

### 2017 Kinship care: Carer wellbeing

This survey found that kinship carers would benefit from programs helping them to focus on their own wellbeing, after conversations with carers by telephone and in person showed carers were experiencing a significant level of stress.

### 2018 Where are all the children now?

This survey traced the outcomes for 196 children and young people who had been a part of the Longitudinal Study. It found that the majority of children and young people were achieving positive outcomes and engaging in work or study appropriate to their age and life stage.



## Surveying Grandparents

## Surveying Kinship Carers

### **2019 Grandparents: The roles grandparents play**

Respondents were asked to reflect on the roles they play. The survey found that the roles varied according to age group, with respondents most likely to take on a greater number of roles during the period when they are transitioning from the workforce into retirement. The roles undertaken included kinship care, childcare during working hours, casual babysitting, financial support, paid employment, and volunteering.

### **2019 Grandparents and young people on children's rights**

This survey was completed by five cohorts: young people aged 18 and over who had not yet had children; parents; grandparents; kinship carers; and staff working in child-related fields. Respondents were shown a list of 15 issues previously raised in a report by the National Children's Commissioner as points of concern when considering Australia's progress in advancing the rights of children and young people, and were asked to rate their importance. The top four issues as rated by all cohorts were issues relating to the health and wellbeing of children.

### **2020 Kinship care: Wellbeing during COVID-19**

This survey invited kinship carers to reflect on the coping mechanisms they were relying on during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The strategies employed were found mostly to be related to keeping the mind and body active, and keeping connected with friends and family as much as possible, given the restrictions in place.

### **2020 Kinship care: Reunification and contact with parents**

The extraordinary challenges surrounding reunification/contact during the COVID-19 period prompted this survey of 10 care families. Reunification and contact processes had not been followed well by DFFH, which led to difficulties and stress for the carers which at times seemed insurmountable. There was evidence of carers being asked to supervise contact visits in situations that were deemed by them to be unsafe. The results were published in the report 'Kinship care and reunification – A pathway to family preservation' and also resulted in the release of a communique and a set of recommendations.

### **2021 Kinship care: Birth certificates for children**

This survey contacted carers who had reported difficulties obtaining birth certificates over three financial years to determine whether they had ultimately been successful. It highlighted the complexities involved in rectifying this issue, especially where unregistered births were the chief cause of the problem.



REGISTER EVERY CHILD'S  
BIRTH WITHIN A DAY OF  
THEIR BIRTH

LET THE CHILDREN PLAY OUTSIDE FOR THEIR SAKE

KEEP PARENTS  
AND CHILDREN  
CONNECTED — FOR  
THE CHILDREN'S SAKE

No family is perfect but they  
are all worth celebrating



# Conducting projects



Over the years GPV/KCV has conducted 'action projects' to address issues of interest to both grandparents and kinship carers. Many of the projects have been significant in the ways in which they have shaped GPV/KCV's thinking and priorities. The first project conducted in 2002, along with the conducting of the grandparents survey in 2002, kick-started thinking about issues beyond the practicalities of establishing the organisation. Below is a list of significant projects listed by title and year of commencement.

- 2002 Echuca Community Development – young people and older people working together
- 2004 Grandparents as Alchemists
- 2005 Grandparents Preventing Problem Gambling
- 2007 Grandparenting across the Generations
- 2008 YMCA Grandparents Project (picture bottom right)
- 2008 Moonee Valley Carers Network
- 2009 Kinship Care State Conferences
- 2014 Play Project (in cooperation with Play Australia)
- 2015 Family Finding
- 2015 Small Gifts for Kinship Care Families and Small Grants for Kinship Care Support Groups
- 2016 Melbourne Zoo School Holiday Program
- 2017 Kinship Peer Support Strategy
- 2017 Kinship Care Learning Circles 1
- 2018 The KCV Information Clearing House
- 2018 Artist in Residence (picture top right)
- 2018 Pakenham Action
- 2018 Kinship Care Learning Circles 2: Where to from Here?
- 2019 Kinship Carers Week 2019
- 2020 Kinship Carers Week 2020

The projects can be categorised into three types: gathering people together, investigating topical issues, and offering practical assistance.



# Gathering people together

Gathering people together has been a part of GPV/KCV's work since its very beginning. Through these gatherings, GPV/KCV has been able to establish networks that support and encourage grandparents and kinship carers to continue to fulfil their roles to the best of their ability. These projects have resulted in public gatherings, such as conferences and training seminars, which were designed to strengthen the capacity of participants through peer support and recognition of their achievements.

## Supporting kinship carers (2008–ongoing)

Connecting kinship carers with each other and local services in their LGA area (Moonee Valley Carers Network)

## Recognising kinship care (ongoing)

Achieving greater recognition of the roles kinship carers play and the support required for them to undertake these roles (Kinship Care State Conferences: 2009, 2010, 2011), (Kinship Carers Week 2019), (Kinship Carers Week 2020)

## Strengthening carer capacity (2017–19)

Strengthening carer capacity through the provision of training seminars and written documentation (Learning Circles, Learning Circles 2: Where to from Here?)



## Investigating issues

Some projects examined topical issues and resulted in the publication of reports as well as further campaign action. Projects investigating particular issues were among the first conducted by GPV. In fact, the earliest project the organisation undertook was a survey investigation of grandparent views on a range of family matters. This unearthed the requirement for more attention to be paid to the needs of grandparent kinship carers, and at the same time brought to light the issue of grandparents being denied access to their grandchildren. The following table outlines the issues being investigated across these projects.

The research challenge	Issue under investigation
Identifying strategies to help prevent the adverse effects of gambling	Grandparents preventing problem gambling 2005
Identifying the differences amongst grandparents and across generations, and preserving memories for future generations (grandparenting across the generations) Empowering grandparents to be more active in their own families and the wider community through training seminars (Grandparents as Alchemists)	Grandparents' roles now and in the past (2004–5, 2007–8)
Ensuring that family members are involved in decision-making (Family Finding)	Connection to biological family (2015)
Identifying barriers to cross-generation relationships, and fostering mutual respect and understanding (Echuca Community Development Project)	Connecting grandparents and young people (2002–3)
Recognising the impact of school class sizes, curriculum and school funding (Echuca Community Development Project)	Education (2002–ongoing)
Recognising factors likely to impact children's wellbeing. Advocating for improved access to safe play spaces for children. (Echuca Community Development Project) Identifying ways in which the importance of children's play can be promoted, both nationally and worldwide (GPV Play Project)	Childhood health and wellbeing (2002–ongoing)
Addressing carer wellbeing by strengthening peer support (Kinship Peer Support Strategy)	The importance of peer support for kinship carers (ongoing)

## Offering practical assistance

GPV/KCV conducted projects which recognised the valuable contribution of kinship carers by offering small gifts to them and their families. It is estimated that these projects have provided gifts to 1200 kinship care families.

Supporting Child Wellbeing (2008)	Connecting kinship carers and children with free access to YMCA gyms
Prioritising Carer Wellbeing (2018)	Addressing carer wellbeing through the provision of creative crafts workshops (Artist in Residence project) and small gifts (Small Gifts to Carers, Grants to Peer Support Groups)
Informing Kinship Carers (2018)	Strengthening carer capacity through the provision of written documentation



# Celebrating families



In 1993 the United Nations declared 15 May to be the International Day of Families. GPV/KCV has engaged in several celebrations of this day over the years. The earliest was a function hosted by Senator John Madigan, (former) Democratic Labor Party Senator for Victoria, at a Saturday morning 'open house' at a café in Ballarat. Families were invited to drop in and have a coffee or breakfast and a bit of fun. The children enjoyed the cup cake decorating competition the most – some adults did as well. The first GPV/KCV-hosted Families Week function was held in May 2006, with a further seven having since been held.

- 2006 Launch of Early Childhood Statement in North Melbourne
- 2008 Luncheon in Moonee Valley
- 2009 Luncheon in Rosebud
- 2011 Luncheon in Kensington
- 2012 Luncheon in Seaford
- 2013 Reception hosted by the Governor of Victoria at Government House, Melbourne
- 2013 Luncheon in Dandenong
- 2014 Luncheon in Oakley
- 2015 Morning tea with the Minister and the National Children's Commissioner at the Melbourne Town Hall
- 2016 Morning tea with Robyn Monroe Miller of the International Play Association



# Conducting projects across a wide geographical base

For the most part, the projects were focused at a local or Victoria-wide level. However, there were others that examined issues outside of Victoria.

Geographical focus	Project	Issues addressed
Greater Melbourne	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Moonee Valley Carers Network</li> <li>2. YMCA Grandparents Project</li> <li>3. Pakenham Action</li> <li>4. Artist in Residence</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connecting kinship carers with each other and with services in their LGA area</li> <li>• Strengthening peer support in the Greater Pakenham area</li> <li>• Connecting kinship carers and children with free access to YMCA gyms</li> <li>• Addressing carer wellbeing through creative crafts</li> </ul>
Victoria-wide	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Echuca Community Development</li> <li>6. Preventing Problem Gambling</li> <li>7. Kinship Care Conference #1</li> <li>8. Kinship Care Conference #2</li> <li>9. Kinship Care Conference #3</li> <li>10. Grants to peer-support groups</li> <li>11. Small Gifts to Carers</li> <li>12. Family Finding</li> <li>13. Learning Circles</li> <li>14. Learning Circles 2: Where to From Here?</li> <li>15. Kinship Peer-Support Strategy</li> <li>16. KCV Information Clearing House</li> <li>17. Kinship Carers Week 2019</li> <li>18. Kinship Carers Week 2020</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connecting the generations and promoting cooperation between grandparents and young people, as well as uncovering issues important to grandparents, such as education and child wellbeing.</li> <li>• Identifying strategies to help prevent the adverse effects of problem gambling</li> <li>• Achieving greater recognition for kinship care and improving support for it</li> <li>• Establishing the role of a National Children's Commissioner to promote children's rights and wellbeing</li> <li>• Addressing carer wellbeing through the provision of wellbeing activities and small gifts</li> <li>• Addressing carer wellbeing by strengthening peer-support networks</li> <li>• Strengthening connection to biological family by ensuring that as many family members as possible are involved in decision-making</li> <li>• Strengthening carer capacity through the provision of training seminars and written documentation</li> </ul>
National	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>19. Grandparenting Across the Generations</li> <li>20. Grandparents as Alchemists</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledging the difference between grandparents' roles now and in past generations, and preserving these memories for future generations</li> <li>• Empowering grandparents to be more active in their own families and the wider community through training seminars</li> </ul>
International	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21. GPV Play Project</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying ways in which the importance of children's play can be promoted, both nationally and worldwide.</li> </ul>



# Conducting projects with other agencies

Fourteen projects were funded by 10 agencies other than GPV/KCV, with some agencies funding more than one project. Six projects were funded by GPV.

Funding agency	Project
Campaspe Cohuna Local Learning Employment Network	1. Echuca Community Development
Moonee Valley City Council	2. Grandparenting across the Generations 3. Moonee Valley Carers Network 4. Statewide Kinship Care Conference #1
Australian Department of Family and Community Services	5. Grandparents as Alchemists
Victorian Government Community Partnership Strategy	6. Grandparents Preventing Problem Gambling
DHHS	7. Kinship Peer-Support Strategy 8. Kinship Carers Week 2019 9. Kinship Carers Week 2020 10. Statewide Kinship Care Conference #2
DHHS Carer KaFE Program	11. Learning Circles 1 12. Learning Circles 2
YMCA	13. YMCA Grandparents Project
The Melbourne Zoo CECFW Melbourne F1 Grand Prix	14. Small Gifts to carers projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Melbourne Zoo Holiday Program and Zoo Passes for Kinship Families</li> <li>• Books for Kinship Care Families</li> <li>• Melbourne Grand Prix Tickets</li> </ul>
GPV/KCV	15. Small Grants to Peer Support Groups 16. Family Finding 17. GPV Play Project 18. Information Clearing House 19. Artist in Residence Workshops 20. Pakenham Peer-Support Project 21. Statewide Kinship Care Conference #3









Lets all celebrate International Day of Families on May 15th

Yay for the UN report!  
Families Policy in  
a Changing World  
– promoting social  
protection and  
intergenerational solidarity

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF  
HUMAN RIGHTS FAMILY IS A  
NATURAL AND FUNDAMENTAL UNIT OF  
SOCIETY

Join With others to take action to improve conditions of families, including kinship care families

# Speaking out



There would be little point to GPV's existence if the organisation did not make known the views of grandparents on contemporary issues confronting families. It is hoped that by both public and private discussion, using well-founded arguments, grandparents will have an increasing influence on the public discourse. GPV has articulated 'grandparent opinion' through the following:

- Reports of surveys of over 2500 grandparents drawn from across Australia and New Zealand
- *The Grandparent* newsletter
- Submissions to state and federal government enquiries plus four testimonies to enquiry panels
- Occasional papers distributed nationally
- Newspaper articles in 33 different newspapers distributed across Australia
- Press releases distributed across Australia
- Over 100 television and radio interviews

The avenues for communicating grandparent opinion listed above are ranked in order of the time and effort required to craft and deliver them. The work put into both the surveys and the grandparent periodicals has been well spent, with the surveys being crucial to gathering grandparent opinion

and *The Grandparent* newsletter being crucial in raising the awareness of grandparents about issues that are confronting families. Across these avenues of communication there have been a number of recurring issues which have been regularly addressed, such as kinship care, childcare and grandparenting in the 21st century.

It is heartening to note that when grandparents speak, people do listen. GPV/KCV has been made aware on more than one occasion that the organisation's publications are used by other organisations as evidence to support their own work programs.



*Listen! a grandparent is talking*

## Campaigning

...to demand change is the most vocal means of speaking out upon which GPV/KCV relies

In every year since 2002 some campaign activity has been underway at GPV/KCV. Despite the anticipation of slow or even no progress and because the nexus between issues raised in the campaigns and the life chances of children is so tight, GPV/KCV feels duty bound to battle on. GPV/KCV's first campaigns addressed three issues: education, childcare and grandparents denied access to grandchildren.

Twenty years later, in 2021, three new campaigns were commenced, calling for early intervention for vulnerable families, reunification of children with parents and tighter controls over the sale of alcohol. In some years a number of campaigns were active at the same time, resulting in heavy workloads for organisation staff and volunteers. This was not an ideal situation for a small organisation, as at times the pressures were barely manageable.

Campaigns were designed to raise public awareness and influence individual action, as well as to influence

government/agency policy and practices. In order to meet these lofty aims, GPV/KCV has employed a range of strategies designed to ensure the message is heard by the people who need to hear it. Most campaigns have been started with a letter to relevant decision-makers, and some have involved following up with other strategies as well. Some campaigns relied on multiple strategies being in play at the same time. Strategies employed are listed below.

- Letters to politicians and other decision-makers
- Meetings with politicians and other decision-makers
- Postcard campaigns
- Individual action by grandparents
- Publication of position papers
- Media events
- Participation in protest marches
- Joint action with other agencies



Some campaigns have advocated for changes to legislation in order to strengthen child and family rights, while some have called for families to be better assisted through the introduction or improvement of support programs. Six campaigns conducted in the lead-up to state and federal elections called for both better program delivery and legislative changes.

A number of campaigns were conducted in partnership with other organisations. Often GPV played an initial role in setting the scope and details of a campaign and worked in close partnership with other organisations. Alternatively, GPV took independent action which echoed the sentiments

of another organisation's campaign. The campaigns conducted with other organisations were most effective and comforting for GPV when issues were controversial.

The campaign program has had wide geographical relevance. Twenty-three campaigns have encompassed matters of national importance, 14 have addressed issues best dealt with at a state level, and four have centred on matters of international significance.

A range of issues affecting families and giving rise to varying emotional responses by members has been addressed in the campaign program. Outlined in the figure below is a snapshot of some of those issues and emotions.

**7** → sought changes that acknowledged the complex shape of families  
campaigns

**6** → were aimed at Victorian and Australian elections and were conducted with little hope of inspired leadership from politicians  
campaigns

**5** → caused frustration at the lack of progress made on fundamental issues such as education and childcare  
campaigns → called for changes to legislation and court procedures

**4** → addressed issues related to the physical and mental health of families  
campaigns

**3** → caused heartache when it was realised that campaigns to protect people's humanity were needed in Australia  
campaigns → called for more responsive support for families living in poverty  
→ called for action to protect the environment, particularly local environments in which children might play

**2** → were controversial, with decisions to act being protracted because a few people informally connected with GPV wondered why the organisation engaged in the issue  
campaigns → resulted in outcomes which cause GPV enduring pride



# Campaigns

Campaigns marked in orange were international campaigns, those marked in green were national and those in blue were state campaigns.

	Campaign number and issue	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Frustrating	Free, Comprehensive Education for All	Blue								Blue				Blue				Blue			
	Free, Comprehensive Childcare for All		Green																		
	Governance of Gambling			Blue																	
	The Schoolkids Bonus													Green							
	The Aust Senate Enquiry into Kinship Care													Green							
Heartfelt	Grandparents Denied Access to Grandchildren		Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
	Children in Refugee Detention Centres													Green							
	Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)																	Blue			
Successful	Centrelink Advisors for Kinship Carers			Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green											
	A Children's Commissioner for Australia			Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green									
Election	Vote for families – Federal Election 2010									Green											
	Vote for families – State Election 2010									Blue											
	Vote for families – Federal Election 2013												Green								
	Vote for families – State Election 2014													Blue							
	Vote for families – State Election 2018																	Blue			
	Vote for families – Federal Election 2019																			Green	



	Campaign number and issue	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	
Legal	Child Protection Legislation									■												
	Victoria's Children's Court											■	■									
	The Children, Youth and Families Act													■	■							
	The Minimum Age for Criminal Responsibility																				■	■
	The Court Network																				■	■
Controversial	Corporal Punishment																		■			
	The East-West Link Tollway												■	■	■							
Environment	Children's Play												■	■								
	A World Environment Organisation															■	■					
	The Use of Round-up in Playgrounds																■					
Social	The Federal Budget														■							
	Increase Jobseeker																				■	■
	Support Casual Workers																				■	
Shape of Family	Reunification/Contact of Children with Parents																					■
	Grandparent Questions in ABS Census			■																		
	Fast-Tracking Adoption															■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Young People in OOHC Care up to Age 21															■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Marriage Equality																	■				
	Legislate for Flexible Working Hours Now!																		■			
	Support Non-Statutory Carers																				■	
Health	Improve the Quality of Aged Care									■	■	■										
	Improve Youth Mental Health Services											■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Early Intervention Programs for Children																					■
	Regulate to Keep Families Safe from Alcohol Harm																					■



## Frustrating campaigns

There are campaigns that address issues of foundational importance to children's outcomes in life and yet have caused the Board lasting frustration because improvements in the areas canvassed are minute and far too slow to happen. Three of these campaigns were commenced in the early days of the organisation and are still being pursued 20 years later. Consider the issue of provision of free comprehensive education for all children in Australia. The campaigns most frustrating to GPV/KCV call for the following:

- Provision of free, comprehensive education for all
- Free, comprehensive childcare for all
- The Victorian Government to govern gambling responsibly
- Retention of the Schoolkids Bonus
- Implementation of the recommendations of the Australian senate enquiry into grandparents raising grandchildren

The education campaign is an ongoing series of calls for the costs of education from kindergarten to tertiary education to be reduced. Of particular concern is the cost to families under financial pressure. Withdrawal of the Education Maintenance Allowance in Victoria (in 2014) and the Schoolkids Bonus at a national level (in 2016) have exacerbated this problem. GPV also calls for the provision of a broad general education that addresses life skills as well as work-related skills. Many grandparents believe that education is too much like training rather than education. Abolition of the Schoolkids Bonus was viewed as a cruel blow and will, GPV believes, truncate children and young people's access to education and the capacity of families to have access to funds that empower them to make decisions best suited to the individual needs and interests of the children in their care.

**Gedda Burke, GPV Board member, says:**

*'Access to a free, comprehensive education for all children is a basic right which is being denied many children. Even in a nation as wealthy as Australia, families are struggling to pay for education. This is morally unacceptable and does not bode well for the long-term health of the nation.'*

The issue of childcare confounds GPV/KCV. Why this cannot be solved is beyond understanding. Providing more affordable, accessible and better-quality childcare is a service to families and to the economy. A greater number of people, particularly women, would be enabled to join the workforce if childcare was more readily accessible. Grandparents often have to take up the slack by providing childcare whilst parents work. Incidents of this are growing rapidly and are not always satisfactory for those involved; often the grandparents are worn out and adversely affected financially.

Lack of proper governance of the gambling industry has also confounded GPV. GPV recognises the right of individuals to gamble but does not accept the right of governments to craft policy that gives gambling agencies concessions that are overly generous, particularly when gambling contributes to costly and socially disturbing outcomes. For governments to profit from a program that causes such family grief is unconscionable.

**Fay Brassington, GPV Board member, says:**

*'It is hard to believe that the Victorian government relies so heavily on the proceeds from gambling. I wonder if the government truly cares about the hardship families suffer when gambling is so readily available and so poorly regulated.'*

GPA/GPV recommended the report of the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee 'Grandparents who take primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren (October 2014)' to all Australian politicians. The 18 recommendations were pitched at a high level of policy and practice and GPA/GPV believed that if implemented, they would make a substantial impact on kinship care in Australia. Further, GPV stipulated that the report and its recommendations had international significance.

The fact that the Australian government took two years to respond to its own report is cause for disgust, even in 2021.





## Heartfelt campaigns

Three campaigns addressed issues that gave rise to high emotion:

- Grandparents who are denied access to their grandchildren
- Children in refugee detention centers who need to be freed
- Genital mutilation of women

Some campaigns caused GPV grief at the realisation that the circumstances addressed in these campaigns existed, particularly in Australia. The pride felt in being a citizen in a well-developed, civilised country was dimmed for many Board members as these issues were canvassed.

The grief suffered by grandparents denied access to their grandchildren is often palpable and the disadvantage visited upon children denied the love of grandparents should be acknowledged. This campaign was not aimed at politicians and other decision-makers so much as it was aimed at the general community in the hope that families will think carefully before they deny the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents. Right up to 2021 this issue remains one of the most common raised in media interviews, particularly on radio talkback programs.

Anne McLeish says:

*'Possibly the saddest story I have heard came from a grandmother who had one child and one grandchild. When her child's marriage broke up, she was denied access to the grandchild, whom she had seen nearly every day since the child was born 10 years earlier. The grandchild was picked up as usual by her mother and told to say goodbye to her grandmother because she was never going to see her again. When the child realised what had been said she had to be dragged away by her mother. In telling me this story in 2004 this grandmother maintained her dignity but that was enough for me to sense the deep grief that clouded every day of her life.'*

The fact that Australia locks children into refugee centres was galling to a large number of grandparents. They felt that they needed to make clear to the Australian Government that this was not to be done in their name. A postcard campaign allowed grandparents to easily make this point (the message to then-Prime Minister Abbott is reprinted below.) This issue firmed up GPV's determination to represent the interests of all children in Australia, not just all Australian children. One of our early cartoons (top right) made this broad commitment clear.



Those who signed the postcard said the following:

***Dear Prime Minister,***  
***I implore you to remove refugee children from all detention arrangements within the responsibility of Australia, be they onshore or off-shore. Further, I implore you to ensure that no more children enter such arrangements in the future. Holding children in captivity is unconscionable and an aberration in the long history of Australia's determination to give people a 'fair go'. I find it unsettling to think of myself as a citizen of a country that would subject children to unnecessarily harsh treatment in the name of all Australian citizens. Sending this postcard is an important step for me; it distances me from agreeing with Australian action with which I disagree.***





Genital mutilation of women was brought to the attention of GPV by a Board member involved in campaigns to abolish it that were being run elsewhere. Deciding to highlight this issue was one of the quickest decisions made by the Board.

**Marilyn Broomhall, GPV Board member, said:**  
*I found it difficult to understand that this practice still happens and was very relieved when GPV decided to highlight the issue and support the unit in the women's hospital correcting the damage done to women who had been mutilated in this way.*

## Successful campaigns – with real benefits to families

GPV hails two of its campaigns as great successes, in that hard-fought battles have led to lasting change in the circumstances of children and families. The campaigns are:

- Appointment of Centrelink Advisors for Grandparents/ Kinship Carers
- Appointment of a Children's Commissioner for Australia



Dealing with Centrelink can be a trying experience for anybody, but for grandparents coming to terms with the shock of suddenly finding themselves parents again, it can be a real nightmare. The position of grandparents raising grandchildren is a unique one, and many Centrelink staff members are not familiar with payments kinship carers may be eligible for.

The appointment of a National Children's Commissioner was crucial in the battle to improve the quality of children's lives and highlight their rights. Therefore, GPA/GPV campaigned for the creation of an office with resources



adequate for it to function as an active national authority able to undertake travel to all points of Australia to meet with people from all walks of life. The Commissioner's office should also be resourced sufficiently for it to commission research and initiate action research projects.

**Anne McLeish recalls her visit to kinship care support groups in Western Australia:**  
*'It was during this visit that I met the Centrelink grandparent adviser who specialised in addressing the claims of kinship carers and advising them about their options for financial support from the Australian Government. Meeting this adviser put the idea in my head that there should be a national network of people doing this work – at least one in each state. The GPV Board agreed and we campaigned for this to happen.'*



## Election Campaigns – Vote for families



From 2010 to 2019 six election campaigns were conducted, with logs of claims issued to candidates from major parties in either the Australian or Victorian elections across campaigns #9, #10, #15, #18, #27, #28 and #32. A suite of issues was highlighted for each candidate's attention.

They included the following:

**Children's Rights** – GPV/KCV called for implementation of a regime of Child Impact Statements (CIS) (see also page 105) to be completed when proposing new legislation and programs. A CIS would consist of an analysis predicting the potential outcomes for a child's wellbeing in the medium, short and long terms. These outcomes could then be judged against the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to determine whether the legislation would promote the wellbeing of children. GPV/KCV also asked governments to reinstate the right of children under 10 years of age to independent representation in court proceedings affecting them.

**Children's Health and Wellbeing** – GPV/KCV believes in a child's right to enjoy good health and high-quality health care, and asked governments to encourage a healthy lifestyle and to:

- conduct research into the effect of diet on trauma behaviours;
- create a government-funded campaign promoting healthy eating; and
- develop policy on children's play.

**Play** – The right of all children to enjoy good quality play is enshrined in Article 31 of the UNCRC. As the subject of a UN General Comment, all signatory countries, including Australia, are required to take action on implementation of this article. GPV/KCV called for political parties to craft policy and programs that fulfill this commitment, such as the creation and preservation of adventure playgrounds and

the foundation of a network of therapeutic play groups for children.

**Kinship Care** – GPV/KCV drew attention to the needs of kinship carers in a number of election campaigns. It was pointed out that providing adequate support for kinship care would actually be more cost effective to governments in the long term, as it provides better outcomes for the children and young people than other forms of OOHc can deliver. Logs of Claims called for greater recognition of kinship care and the benefits of maintaining connections to biological family.

**Education/Childcare** – Education is a key element in ensuring positive outcomes for children as they mature into adult life, and all children have the right to a high-quality education that ensures all students experience success at school. The high costs of childcare have made it necessary for more grandparents to step in. GPV called for programs that cut the cost of childcare and assist grandparents to fulfil this role more easily. Suggestions included:

- provision of more information for grandparents about child rearing, including 'tips for better children's play';
- provision of government-funded school holiday programs that are free for grandparents and grandchildren.

**Public Transport** – GPV/KCV deplored the environmental impact of a reliance on cars and the government's plans to build the East-West Link Tollway. It called on governments to establish an independent committee to develop future plans for transport which would take into account public opinions about environmental damage and the need for public transport.

**Welfare** – It is the responsibility of a civilised society to have an equitable welfare system that operates as a safety net to ensure children and families have access to the basic necessities of life, and that welfare measures should support families without stigmatising them, enabling those families to better their circumstances, rather than be decimated by the welfare system. GPV/KCV called for a stop to the use of the Cashless Welfare Card and to use the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as a framework for all actions taken on behalf of children.



## Campaigns for legal reform

Between 2010 and 2020, four GPV/KCV campaigns which addressed serious matters related to legal reforms. They called for the following:

- Changes to Victorian Child Protection legislation
- Improvements to the Victoria's Children's Court
- Change in the Victorian Children, Youth and Families Act
- Raising the minimum age for criminal responsibility
- Support to fund the Court Network (Victoria)

Although four separate campaigns were conducted, the issues addressed overlapped, particularly in regard to the two campaigns calling for improvements to Child Protection legislation and the Children, Youth and Families Act.

### *Guardians ad Litem*

GPV believes all children and young people have the right to their own legal representation in matters where their needs are in dispute. Further, GPV raised concerns about the damage that was being done to already traumatised children, with them spending excessive time in the courts, either waiting for their case to be heard, or being exposed to adult discussions about their circumstances. Both of these issues could be alleviated by the implementation of the *Guardians ad Litem* system used in many states in the US. Guardians ad Litem are appointed by the courts with the sole purpose of advocating for the best interests of dependent children and representing their interests in the courts. They investigate, attend to the child's emotional and legal needs, monitor the child's family, and seek to shield the child from the often-bruising experience of a lawsuit. A Guardian ad Litem interacts with each case only for the duration of a particular legal action. Specialised and intensive training is mandated for Guardians ad Litem, who are sometimes volunteers.

A proposal that DHHS staff speak on behalf of their clients in court was not supported by GPV, as it is important that the child's interests be represented by an independent person.

### *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*

Concerns were raised about changes to this act which would make it too difficult for children to return to their parents. The concerns included the following:

- The inclusion of adoption away from the family in the hierarchy of permanency objectives

- The short timeframes allowed for reunification, coupled with the lack of availability of services to assist parents in meeting conditions for reunification
- The limiting of the powers of the Children's Court to review placements and order reunification
- The backlog of families with no allocated caseworkers
- The changes unfairly disadvantaged vulnerable families

## Age of Criminal Responsibility



In 2020, in the lead-up to a meeting of Australia's Attorneys General, GPV/KCV hurriedly sent a series of emails calling on Attorneys General to lift the age of criminal responsibility so that children as young as 10 could no longer be charged as adults. GPV/KCV supports the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in its call for countries to address this matter. The UN's General Comment No. 10 on Children's Rights in Juvenile Justice calls for the age of criminal responsibility to be lifted to 14 years of age. GPV notes that China, Russia, Germany, Spain, Sierra Leone, Azerbaijan, Cambodia and Rwanda have taken this step but not Australia.

## Fund the Court Network

Since its establishment in Victoria in the 1980s, many families have benefited from the support offered by the Court Network (CN). The CN should be funded for a minimum of four years at a time, with its funding including both substantial base recurrent funding as well as fixed funding for special projects designed to extend its services.



## Controversial campaigns

Two campaigns caused extended discussion within the Board before a final decision to act was taken. There was a difference of opinion among Board members as to whether these campaigns should be taken up by the organisation:

- In 2013–2016 campaign #14 – Abandon Plans for the East-West Tollway
- In 2018 campaign #31 – Abolish Corporal Punishment

### Abandon Plans for the East-West Tollway



This campaign was controversial, even in the minds of a few GPV Board members. However, on weighing up all arguments for and against, the GPV Board took a decision to campaign against the tollway because the short-term and dubious claims about the benefits of the tollway were far outweighed by the certain

detrimental effects on grandchildren who would be saddled with crippling public debt and a massive loss of parkland.

When testifying to the panel examining community attitudes to the East-West Link proposal, GPV raised for the first time its expectations that the Victorian Government cabinet should consider the impact on families of all major policy changes and programs across all portfolio areas. GPV developed a checklist to assist in the determination of the possible impacts of the East-West Link proposal on families.

GPV believes that proceeding through this exercise will assist the development of a summative view of the outcomes of any activity being considered and will also assist in identifying detailed benefits and disadvantages as well as whether there are areas of impact that must all be considered. These include the following:

- Economic impacts on family wellbeing, including financial burdens placed on families to access their community activities
- Impacts on work/family balance, including the capacity for a family to provide volunteer support for community activities or to access support
- Impacts on children's health and general wellbeing, including the impacts on a child's safety and their capacity to navigate their community safely

- Impacts on the participation of the family in community activities and to generally move around their community
- Specific impacts on families coping with disabilities, carer families, and low-income families

Individual staff members do not always agree with GPV's stance on certain issues, and the East-West Link campaign was one of those. Naomi was supportive of the East-West Link construction – not the specifics of the plan for destroying Royal Park, but of the idea and the need for the east and west to link up.

**Naomi Whyley says:**

*'One afternoon after a meeting with the GPV chairperson in the city, across the road was an East-West Link protest on the steps of Parliament. Over went Anne and Helen to join in with the gathering of protestors. I waited on the opposite corner for Anne and Helen to return; I was not joining in or even going near it, after all, I was for the road to be constructed. Often even now in 2021, when Anne and I have been out in the east to a meeting and we are stuck in lines of traffic, I say to Anne "if only we had another option" and we laugh about it.'*

### Abolish Corporal Punishment campaign



GPV/KCV believes that corporal punishment violates a child's physical, emotional and spiritual integrity and can have a devastating effect on the lives of children, both in the short and long term. It also negatively affects society as a whole. GPV called on governments to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence, as required by Article 19 of the UNCRC.



## Environmental Campaigns

Campaigns to protect the environment are all connected to saving the natural world for future generations to enjoy.

- 2013–2014 campaign #16 – Deliver Programs that Improve Children’s Play
- 2014–2015 campaign #23 – Form a World Environment Organisation
- 2015 campaign #25 – Ban the Use of Roundup in Playgrounds

### Deliver Programs that Improve Children’s Play

Campaign 16 was a positive one, in that GPV was not battling an immediate crisis. It highlighted the value of free, child-centred and outdoor play for children. The central driver of this campaign was the fact that in 2013 the United Nations nominated children’s play as an issue of international significance by making Article 31 (A Child’s Right to Play) of the convention the subject of a UN General Comment, which is a call to action issued to countries by the UN.

GPV identified play ambassadors drawn from 15 local government areas to assist with its play campaign.

### Form a World Environment Organisation

In 2014, it was noted that many natural environment areas were being devastated. GPV believes that although the losses are already catastrophic, the global community

can put a stop to the devastation. Therefore, in a letter campaign, GPA/GPV proposed the establishment of a World Environment Organisation (WEO) to operate parallel to the WHO and the WTO in safeguarding the conditions necessary for humanity’s continuing existence – from the perspective of safeguarding the environment. The WEO would transform and galvanise local, national and international grandparent activity towards action to protect the environment, so that we can leave it as a legacy for our current grandchildren and those to come in future generations.

Grandparents Australia calls on all people to take advantage of every opportunity available to support the creation of a WEO. We make this call on behalf of the world’s grandchildren.

### Ban the Use of Roundup in Playgrounds

Grandparents called for a ban on the sale of Roundup and other products with glyphosate. It came to the attention of GPV that Roundup was being used around children’s playgrounds. This was stunning information, given that in mid-2015 the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the substance to be a serious carcinogenic. GPV urged all grandparents to undertake some Internet research on the matter and contact their local government to make the point that they do not want their grandchildren exposed to a substance increasingly being banned around the world.

## Campaigns supporting social justice for families

The rights of families were the subject of three campaigns:

- 2012 campaign #20 – Decision-makers Must Amend the Federal Budget
- 2019–2020 campaign #33 – Permanently Increase JobSeeker
- 2020 campaign #35 – Support Casual Workers

### Decision-Makers Must Amend the Federal Budget

GPV has always been vocal about the need to ensure that public expenditure is well managed and that welfare

payments are delivered to those who are in genuine need. GPV also believes there are many people who do not receive an adequate share of the wealth of our nation. Given these beliefs, GPV called for the following:

- Ensuring that payments are made to the right people; for example, ensuring that grandparents raising their grandchildren receive child-specific payments rather than the parents
- Ensuring that payments for kinship carers are sufficient to cover the needs of children
- Ensuring that any cuts to payments are done gradually, giving families time to adjust



- Retention of the Schoolkids Bonus
- Ensuring that cutbacks do not disadvantage the most vulnerable members of society, such as young people who are being forced to wait six months for unemployment benefits
- Improvements to childcare subsidies



## Permanently Increase JobSeeker

GPV/KCV believes that everyone has the right to a life free from poverty. We wrote to draw attention to the inadequacy of Newstart/JobSeeker and how this inadequacy affects many informal kinship carers. We urged the government to permanently increase social security payments, without conditions, as a key feature of the recovery phase of this

crisis. GPA/GPV/KCV strongly welcomes recommendations to set a national standard definition of poverty and to ensure that no person receiving social security payments lives in poverty.

## Support Casual Workers

Grandparents across Australia believe the COVID-19 pandemic will unduly increase stress for our young people employed in insecure or casual work and may place them at higher risk of homelessness. The workers most at risk are our grandchildren aged between 19 and 30 years, who are living independently with little disposable income from casual work or a combination of casual work and benefits.

One solution would be to immediately increase the JobSeeker payment to help people on low incomes ride out the downturn in casual work. Another solution would be to provide replacement income for casual workers affected by the downturn.

This matter demands urgent attention to prevent a homelessness epidemic. We urge the Australian Government to assist our young people to be able to get ahead by providing more support for people on very low incomes.

## Campaigns supporting the diversity of families

GPV has always been determined to acknowledge the diversity of families, starting with the collection of stories and data that draw an accurate picture of families. Campaigns relevant to this aim were the following:

- 2004 campaign #7 – Include Grandparent Questions in ABS Census
- 2014–2021 campaign #24 – Stop Fast-tracking Adoption
- 2015–2020 campaign #26 – Support Young People in Out-of-Home Care up to Age 21
- 2017 campaign #28 – Vote for Marriage Equality
- 2019 Campaign #29 – Legislate for Flexible Working Hours Now!
- 2020 campaign #34 – Support Non-Statutory Carers

## Include Grandparent Questions in ABS Census

The role grandparents play is significant to the future health

of both the family and the nation as a whole. If future planning on social issues is to be at all relevant, an accurate picture about the role grandparents play must be painted. We suggest the following questions be added to the census to determine the following:

- The number of grandparents in Australia
- The number of grandparents assisting with occasional childcare
- The number of grandparents raising grandchildren as a result of a court order
- The number of grandparents raising grandchildren through informal family arrangements

## Stop Fast-tracking Adoption

GPV/KCV believes that, where possible, keeping children connected with their extended family is in their best interests. This is true for all children, including those in out-





of-home care. This strongly held belief arises from extensive consultation with GPV/KCV members.

A submission of support was made to the Victorian Law Reform Commission's (VLRC) review of adoption legislation, which was tabled in the Victorian parliament in June 2017. To this day the recommendations made by the Commission have not been acted upon.

Further, GPV/KCV applauded the stance taken in the Regulatory Impact Statement on proposed adoption regulations released by the Victorian Government in October 2018. This report stands in stark contrast to the Federal Government's report into local adoption, which proposed an aggressive agenda of making children in OOHC available for adoption. In particular, GPV/KCV welcomes moves to make finding members of the extended family a priority, as well as legislating for increased steps to identify and involve a child's father in decisions related to adoption.

## Support Young People in Out-of-Home Care up to Age 21



Home Stretch is a national campaign formed to seek change to the leaving care arrangements for young people in state care by extending the leaving care age from 18 until 21 years. Current government policies require the Child Protection system to begin preparing a young person to leave care as early as 15 years. In comparison, children residing at home in the wider community with one or both parents are remaining at home longer, with almost 50% of young people aged 18 to 24 having never left the family home.

**Findings from a 2009 survey conducted by the CREATE foundation in 2010 of children who had left care demonstrated that:**

- 35% of children were homeless within the first year of leaving care
- 46% of boys were involved in the juvenile justice system
- 29% were unemployed

**A study by the Care Leavers Australia Network in 2008 of children who had left care reported that:**

- 41% were pregnant during their adolescence
- 43%– 65% of care leavers had poor mental health outcomes (including depression, anxiety, PTSD, panic attacks and sleep disorders)





## Vote for Marriage Equality



In 2017, GPV/KCV supported those who were campaigning for marriage equality, encouraging people to vote 'yes' in the Australian Government's postal plebiscite. GPV released a statement calling for the government to:

- recognise equality as a fundamental principle of human rights;
- make civil marriage available to all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity; and
- stop wasting public funds on protracted debate and to resolve the matter quickly.

## Legislate for Flexible Working Hours Now!



GPV/KCV believes that balancing work and family life is essential for the wellbeing of our community and yet it is a balancing act that is becoming increasingly difficult. This campaign called for the introduction of practical, flexible work practices which allow people to balance work and family life.

## Support Non-Statutory Kinship Carers

This campaign drew attention to the hardships being endured by grandparents raising grandchildren across Australia. These families are subject to increased pressures on their ability to raise the children in their care at the best of times. In times of extra strain and cost they find it even harder to cope. We believe that many families headed by grandparents and other relatives will break down under the pressures, leaving the nation to pick up the pieces.

The campaign noted that the 2014 report by the Australian Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee 'Grandparents who take primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren' highlighted the areas of concern and interest relevant to a rapidly growing contemporary feature of family life – grandparents and other relatives raising their grandchildren. This report demonstrated the empathy for kinship families held by the Australian Senate.

In 2020, kinship care families were faced with the most challenging set of circumstances imaginable. Challenge was mounted upon challenge as families try to raise children with high needs on a diminishing incomes within a much more isolated existence.

The campaign sought a one-off \$500 payment for the kinship care families currently assisted by Centrelink. This payment could be confined to those carers who already qualify for some level of assistance, so its scope would be predictable and confined. This payment would be easily applied – it would be a matter of asking the Centrelink Grandparent Advisers to use existing databases.



## Campaigns supporting the health of families

The health needs of families seem to be becoming more acute and requiring earlier intervention.

- 2010–2012 campaign #11 – Improve the Quality of Aged Care
- 2013–2021 campaign #12 – Improve Youth Mental Health Services
- 2020 campaign #38 – Implement Early Intervention Programs for Children
- 2020–2021 campaign #39 – Regulate to Keep Families Safe from Alcohol Harm
- 2021 campaign #40 – Better Support Reunification/ Contact of Children with Parents

### Improve the Quality of Aged Care

GPV/KCV is driven by a desire to see improvements in the aged care sector across the nation. This campaign called for more consultation with residents and their families in the governance of aged care facilities and improvements to staff training and support, namely:

- mandatory training for Board members with regard to their legal responsibilities;
- standardised training for aged care workers, including formalised induction processes at each facility and minimum standards of English literacy; and
- minimum ratios of one carer for every six high-needs residents.

### Improve Youth Mental Health Services

The inadequate provision of health care services is becoming increasingly problematic. Demands were and are made in the campaign to promote better provision of mental health services through improved service integration across the mental health field and greater emphasis on early detection and prevention.

### Implement Early Intervention Programs for Children

GPV/KCV supports the 'Every Child' national campaign aimed at promoting the wellbeing of children and young people by calling on governments to establish a National Child Development Fund and to adopt national wellbeing indicators and targets for child health, education, justice and wellbeing. In 2020 GPV also called for the establishment of an effective mechanism within the National Council for Children, Young People and Families to support the active participation of young people in advancing their wellbeing. This campaign also called for recognition of the leadership and strategies advocated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to improve the wellbeing of their children and young people

### Regulate to Keep Families Safe from Alcohol Harm

GPV/KCV believes that the easy availability of alcohol is problematic and that measures should be introduced to control its sale, including moves to:

- introduce a delay of two hours between order and delivery, to stop rapid supply of alcohol to people who may be dealing with alcohol dependence;
- limit alcohol deliveries to between 6pm–10pm, to reduce the risks of alcohol-fuelled family violence and suicide, which peak late at night;
- require online age verification through digital ID checks, to ensure alcohol isn't sold to children;
- require ID checks upon delivery and ban unattended delivery to ensure alcohol isn't supplied to children or people who are intoxicated; and
- prevent alcohol companies from predatory targeting and marketing towards people who are at their most vulnerable to ensure people are not exploited and their health is protected.





## Better Support for Reunification and Contact of Children with Parents

Under COVID-19 restrictions, court-ordered contact between children and their families was suspended in almost all cases without consultation with the Court. The Court has adjourned most cases and is only hearing urgent applications, where contact for children with their family and friends is an urgent matter. Programs, supports and assessments provided by community services have been cancelled or placed on-line. DHHS has advised that they are gradually resuming some contact but that their resources to do this safely within the guidelines are limited. Anecdotally, GPV has heard that there is still very little physical contact between parents and their children in care.

Changes to the *Children and Young Persons Act 2005* (CYPA) that came into effect in 2017 have severely reduced the capacity of the Court to oversee the work of Child Protection, and there is now a time limit of 12 months (or 24 months in exceptional cases) for parents to show that they have addressed the issues of concern and can safely resume their parental role.

By the time the Children's Court resumes a full list of hearings, many children will have passed the time limit for the Court to be able to make a further Family Reunification Order. Their parents may not have been able to successfully complete the program set down for them, the bonds between parent and child will have been weakened or broken, and the connection between siblings, who are frequently not placed together, will have been further eroded. The Court at that stage will only be able to make orders that have the effect of permanently removing a child from a family's care, which can result in lifelong detrimental consequences for all involved.

GPV/KCV calls on DHHS to urgently work co-operatively with the Court, families and professional agencies to find ways of building family capacity so that this pandemic does not cause a surge in families being permanently torn apart.



# Working with the media

Some important issues have been marked by media events to promote better public awareness of the issues. The first newspaper article appeared in a Mildura newspaper, the *Sunraysia Daily*, and highlighted the launch of GPV in Mildura. The article spoke about the role of GPV in bridging the gap between older people and young people, with an emphasis on promoting the development of broad education and life skills in young people.

The year 2004 represented the peak of GPV's media exposure, as widespread interest was shown by both print and broadcast media in the Grandparents Speak Survey and the Grandparents as Alchemists project. No issues since have brought GPV so much intense media attention.

Whilst the earliest media releases were about the formation of GPV, it was not long before key issues began to emerge, and media releases about kinship care, childcare, aged care, and gambling were being distributed to a range of media outlets, including radio, television and newspapers.

**Fay Brassington, founding Board member, remembers:**

*'A not-so-fond memory was of the time The Age came to interview my daughter and I about the differences in childcare and parents then and now. I made a side comment about not having dummies in my day. Lo and behold this comment became the main feature of the article, much to my disappointment. I have not done an interview since.'*

## Issues addressed in the media

GPV is sometimes approached to comment on issues that are important to grandparents. General grandparenting issues have been the most talked about topic in media interviews, with media organisations regularly contacting GPV to seek interviews about the role of grandparents in the 21st century. Some hot topics, such as the Grandparents as Alchemists project, the Grandparents Speak survey and

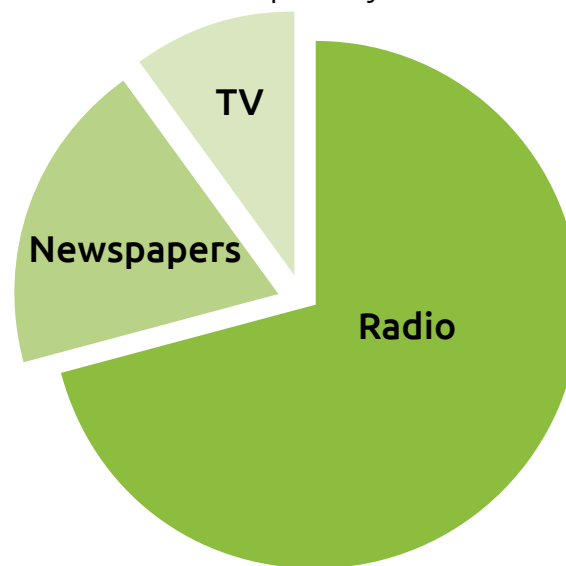
the Grandparents across the Generations project had their allotted 15 minutes of fame, while issues such as problem gambling, grandparents being denied access to their grandchildren, and grandparents providing childcare recur every few years.

## Newspaper articles

GPV has been featured in 97 articles across 37 publications ranging from local newspapers through to statewide and national publications. In the early years, many of the newspaper articles featuring GPV were promoting the fledgling organisation and encouraging new membership, as well as promoting some of the issues raised in surveys such as Grandparents Speak. In more recent years, GPV has been asked to comment on issues such as kinship care and grandparents being denied access to grandchildren.

## Television and radio programs

The GPV diaries do not list all of the television and radio programs that have featured GPV. At a conservative estimate, there have been 20 television interviews on five different networks, and 70 radio interviews on 10 different networks. Many of these interviews have had national exposure. GPV has been asked to provide comment on the many more radio programs over the years; however, as these were often telephone interviews conducted at short notice, they were not recorded for posterity.



## Publications in which GPV/KCV has appeared

### Australia wide

ABC News Online  
*The Australian*  
*Gold Coast Bulletin*  
*Sydney Sunday Mail*  
*Weekender*  
*Hobart Mercury*  
*Townsville Bulletin*  
*The Sunday Telegraph*  
*Riverine Herald*

### Victoria wide

*The Ballarat Courier*  
*The Bendigo Advertiser*  
*Frankston Standard Leader*  
*The Sunday Age*  
*The Age*  
*Moonee Valley Leader*  
*Dandenong Leader*  
*Geelong Advertiser*  
*Herald Sun*  
*Sunday Independent*  
*Shepparton News*  
*Victoria Senior magazine*  
*Victoria Weekly Times*

In one article the Labor Government promised, if they were re-elected, to provide \$900,000 for the establishment of support groups for grandparents who were the primary carers of their grandchildren. This promise came as the result of much lobbying by GPV.



Harder than it looks: Julia Gillard tries her hand at shuffleboard during a visit to Brisbane's BallyCora Retirement Village.

PICTURE: JONATHAN HEWITT

# Support for aged promised

DAN HARRISON  
 BRISBANE

PRIME Minister Julia Gillard has reached out to older voters with a package designed to fight age discrimination, support mature-age workers and provide stronger protection against unfair reverse mortgages.

Ms Gillard announced the measures yesterday after a tour of an aged-care facility in the Bris-

bane of Labor's Yvette D'Ath by a margin of 4.2 per cent.

She promised a re-elected Labor government would appoint an age discrimination commissioner to handle complaints and act as an advocate for older Australians.

The commissioner, who would cost \$3 million over four years, would tackle discrimination in areas including work, education, housing and insurance.

\$30 million in extra funding for training for workers aged over 50. The money is expected to enable 7500 mature-age workers to improve their skills.

She said special protection was needed for older Australians who used equity in their homes to gain access to credit. Labor would change banking regulation and credit laws to require greater disclosure of the features and fees of reverse mortgages and home

equity loans. Labor would also make it illegal for consumers to be left with a debt significantly greater than the value of their

**A re-elected Labor government would appoint an age discrimination commissioner.**

property. It would also provide \$900,000 to set up support groups for grandparents who are the

primary carers of children. The promises come on top of a previous pledge to let pensioners earn up to \$6500 a year from part-time work without benefits being cut.

This comes at a cost of \$94.3 million over four years.

National Seniors Australia chief executive Michael O'Neill welcomed Labor's proposals but said both main parties needed to do more to boost older people's participation in the workforce.



EVERY WHICH WAY WE TURN  
FAMILIES ARE UNDER-SUPPORTED:

- EDUCATION,
- CHILDCARE,
- LEGAL REPRESENTATION

STOP THE RACE TOWARDS ENDEMIC  
POVERTY FOR SOME FAMILIES  
**NOW!**



# Publishing opinion



Since the first publications were distributed by GPV in 2002, they have become increasingly important and sophisticated over the years. GPV/KCV publications are the main vehicle through which the world is informed of both emerging issues of interest to grandparents and kinship carers, and the activities undertaken by GPV/KCV. In addition to this, GPV/KCV has published a number of resources for grandparents and kinship carers to assist them to better fulfil their roles, in the form of information pamphlets and handbooks.

GPV/KCV publications cover a wide variety of topics; however, they can broadly be divided into two major themes: child and family rights, and child and family wellbeing.

## Child and Family Rights

From the very beginning, GPV/KCV's main aim has been to speak out on issues affecting children and families. One of the ways this has been achieved, particularly in recent years, is through documenting situations where it is believed that children and family rights are not being observed. Among the publications which have highlighted rights issues are papers on the following topics:

- Grandparents' rights in legal matters
- The need for a National Children's Commissioner to oversee children's rights in Australia
- The potential implications of changes to the *Children, Youth and Families Act*
- The importance of Article 31 of the UNCRC (A Child's Right to Play)
- Changes to the youth justice system

## Child and Family Wellbeing

Publications released on this subject include papers on the following topics:

- Problem gambling and substance abuse
- The value of support groups, and suggestions for how to run successful support groups
- Balancing work and family
- Kinship carer wellbeing
- The COVID-19 pandemic

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<i>The Grandparent</i> newsletter	108 across 19 years																			
Occasional papers	55 across 19 years																			
The Kinship Care Longitudinal Study																				
<i>The Kinship Carer</i> newsletter																				
<i>Kinship International Network</i> newsletter																				
GPV/ KCV podcasts																				
GPV/KCV project reports (19)	2		1	1		1			1				2			2	7	1		1
GPV/KCV snapshot survey reports (20)		1	1						1		2	1	3	3		2	1	2	1	2
GPV/KCV handbooks/magazines (9)			1			1						1				2	1	2	1	
Submissions/testimonials to enquiries (21)		1			1		1		1	3		1	3		5	3	2			
<i>Kinship Care During COVID-19</i> newsletter																				15





# Issuing newsletters

GPV/KCV has produced newsletters to cater for the various groups who make up the membership of the organisation. Newsletter articles almost always focus on the wellbeing of children. However, each article published looks at the issue from the perspective of grandparents, and some articles urge them to take action within their own families or beyond. For example, sometimes grandparents are asked to send messages to politicians. Increasingly since 2007 the newsletters have included articles from overseas.

Jokes and quotes about grandparents from young children became a popular feature of *The Grandparent* and appear regularly. Since 2013, cartoons by GPV's in-house illustrators have appeared in *The Grandparent* newsletters. Resident illustrators are Georgia Whyley, Sienna McLeish, Zoe McLeish, Angus McLeish and Ali Grantham.

Issues addressed across all newsletters include the following:

- Children's play
- Mental health for families
- Gambling
- East-West Link Tollway in Victoria
- Drug addiction
- Immunisation of children
- Election campaigns
- Childcare
- Family violence
- Grandparents raising grandchildren
- Legal issues
- Children's weight and diet
- Smacking children
- Cigarette smoking
- Homelessness
- Budget



The first edition of *The Grandparent* was a four-page black and white document, celebrating the launch of Grandparents Victoria. The newsletters quickly grew in scope, soon introducing national and international issues. It was a way of letting the wider community know what GPV was doing and thinking. Since the early days GPV has employed additional strategies for making its work transparent. These include a website, occasional papers and survey reports.



Since February 2011 over 200 editions of *The Kinship Carer* newsletter have been distributed across the country. It provides up-to-the-minute information about policy and practice changes that will affect kinship care families and tips on aspects of child rearing, as well as providing information about where to go for specialist support.



This was a special publication devised in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. New editions were published almost daily to provide kinship carers with information related to changing circumstances, tips on wellbeing in lockdown and resources for carers.



This newsletter brings information about key issues in OOHK to an international audience, focusing on stories that highlight positive and negative aspects of policy changes here and overseas.



# Commissioning occasional papers

Occasional papers are written by authors from outside the organisation. The guest authors and topics are listed below.

CHILD WELLBEING		
Secretariate	Families Australia	Childcare
Secretariate	Australian Institute of Family Studies	Corporal punishment
Secretariate	Relationships Australia	Denied access
Shawn Ginwright PhD	San Francisco State University	Healing trauma
Cathy Di Domenico	Kinship Carer	Play
Robyn Munro Miller	International Play Association	Children's rights/play
Julian Burnside AO, QC	Bob Brown Foundation Action for Earth	Refugees, climate change and refugees
Amos Washington	United Nations Youth Representative	Voices of young people
COMMUNITY WELLBEING		
Richard Eckersley	Australian Institute of Family Studies	Community wellness
Secretariate	Families Australia	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reconciliation
Secretariate	Council of Gamblers Help Services	Gambling
Secretariate	Gambler's Help	Gambling
KINSHIP CARE		
Liana Buchanan	Victorian Commissioner for Children & Young people	Kinship care
Minster Luke Donnellan	Victoria Government	Kinship care
Gregory Nicalou	Australian Childhood Trauma Group	Kinship care, childhood trauma
Senator Dean Smith	Australian Senate	Kinship care, Grandparents as kinship carers
Megan Mitchell	Australian Children's Commissioner	Kinship care, Grandparents as kinship carers
Secretariate	Families Australia	Kinship Care, Support for carers
LEGAL MATTERS		
Secretariate	Families Australia	Law, balancing work and families
Colleen Pearce	Public Advocate for Victoria	Law, <i>Children Youth and Families Act 2005</i>
Justice Susan Morgan	Family Court Of Australia	Law, Family law
Radio National transcript	ABC Radio	Law, Family law
Justice Alastair Nicholson	Children's Rights International Network	Law, Family law reform
Secretariate	Families Australia	Law, Paid maternity, paternity leave
Dr Patricia Brown	Director Children's Court Clinic of Victoria	Law, Retirement speech as CEO of Victorian Children's Court
Fleur Ward	Law Institute of Victoria	Law, Young offenders and the law



# Writing discussion papers

Discussion papers are written by GPV/KCV staff to draw attention to emerging issues, and are intended to stimulate further discussion and/or action on issues such as adoption, childcare, child rights and the UNCRC, education, law reforms including youth justice, mental health, substance abuse, and welfare reform.

KINSHIP CARE	TOPIC
Being an effective kinship carer advocate	Kinship care
How to run an effective meeting	kinship care
Kinship care as the subject of public reviews	Kinship care
Longitudinal summary of report	Kinship care
Summary of key points related to Child Protection matters raised in recent Victorian annual reports	Kinship care
Welfare reform in Scotland	Kinship care
Kinship carers are hopeful but will wait and see Victorian Budget	Kinship care
Victorian reform agenda for out-of-home care	Kinship care
COMMUNITY WELLBEING	TOPIC
Grandparents against substance abuse	Addiction
Grandparents shaping the community	Advocating
World Environment Organisation	Environment
Grandparents call for changes to Victorian <i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005</i>	Families
Grandparents exploring the future of children and family policy	Families
Grandparents' views on gambling	Gambling
GPVKCV applauds the Auditor General for his report into Child Protection mental health	Mental health
Loneliness	Wellbeing
CHILD WELLBEING	TOPIC
KIN play	Play
Education Support Centres	Education
Grandparents speak about early childhood	Education
Grandparents call for a National Commissioner for Children	Children's rights
Grandparents and the Convention on the Rights of the Child	Children's rights
Childcare – a national crisis	Childcare
Adoption Australia Report Summary	Adoption
LEGAL MATTERS	TOPIC
Restorative justice	Family law
Grandparents and the law	Family law
Grandparents in the Family Law Act	Family law

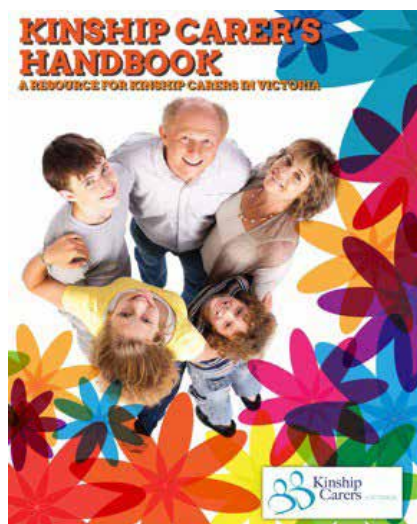


## Producing podcasts

KCV created 15 podcasts between 2018 and 2020 on a variety of topics of interest to kinship carers. Each edition of the podcast covers one or two subjects, and many of the episodes feature one or more guests who are able to offer deeper insights into the topic under discussion. The topics covered in the podcasts are predominantly about carer wellbeing, services for kinship care families, and information about how to influence government policies in the lead-up to elections.

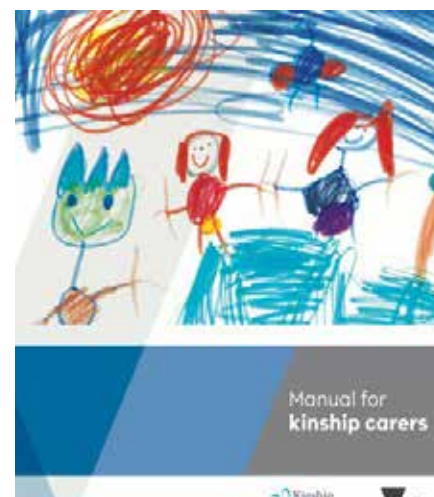


## Developing handbooks and manuals



From time-to-time GPV/KCV publishes or supports the publication of handbooks containing substantial information on a topic. Among these are two of the most substantial documents ever published by GPV/KCV: the *KCV Kinship Carers' Handbook* (2014), and the *KCV Manual for Kinship Carers* (2017). The remainder of the handbooks deal with carer wellbeing, through to manuals for running successful support groups, and the *Kinship Carer Wellbeing Magazines*.

The first *Kinship Carers' Handbook* was launched in March 2014. The launch marked the end of 18 months of solid work by a team of people working with kinship carers to ensure that their interests were accommodated in the contents of the handbook. Chief amongst those who worked on this project were Juliet Williams and Reuben Shannon.



When the participants at the launch saw the handbook, they were very pleased with it and feedback since has confirmed that the contents of the handbook remain relevant to the everyday lives of kinship carers. To date, 16,000 copies of the handbook have been distributed across Victoria.

## Reporting GPV/KCV projects

The Longitudinal Study of Kinship Care – Ten annual update reports of this study were published, exploring changes in the lives of 113 kinship care families. See the section on the Longitudinal Study (page 49) for more information.

Reports of snapshot surveys – Over 20 snapshot survey reports have been published on a range of issues, with some focused on kinship care, and others on issues of more general interest. See the 'Surveys' section of this book (page 55) for a list of the surveys conducted. A report was published for each one.



# Crafting submissions to enquiries

Of all the more major submissions and testimonies to enquiries made and outlined below, 72% dealt with the issue from the viewpoint of families as a whole, particularly vulnerable families, whilst 28% dealt with issues from the perspective of kinship carers and addressed problems arising from the ways in which out-of-home care is supported.

Submissions and testimonies required extensive consultation with members and preparation. The written submissions in particular create a punishing workload. Given the lack of change on some issues, the Board and staff of GPV/KCV often wonder if the submissions are worth the trouble. However, at the time issues present themselves it is decided that GPV/KCV cannot walk away from the responsibility of representing the needs and aspirations of families.

It must be noted that some enquiries have been well run and have resulted in substantive findings that GPV/KCV went on to support, namely the 2011 enquiry into protecting vulnerable children, the senate enquiry into grandparents raising grandchildren, and the Victorian Law Reform Commission review of adoption. Each of these reviews published findings either wholly or partly ignored by government. This, in turn, has resulted in the perpetuation of some serious problems for families.

## Whole-of-family submissions and testimonies

In these submissions and enquiries GPV/KCV called for change in, or creation of, the matters listed below.

### Regulation of gambling 2006

A written submission was forwarded to the enquiry by Gaming Licensing in Victoria, and made the following points:

- The matter of problem gambling cannot be addressed by focusing on licensing issues only
- The effectiveness or otherwise of current measures to minimise the incidence of problem gambling in Victoria is inadequate
- Many tragic family issues relate to the long-term consequences of government inaction to stem problem gambling.

In 2008 a verbal testimony was presented to the Victorian Parliamentary Victorian Gambling Enquiry, making the same points as above, all over again!

### Victorian Cabinet – regional meeting 2007

In 2007 Board members met with Victorian Government Ministers at a regional cabinet meeting held in Monee Ponds. A range of family matters were discussed.

### A National Commissioner for Children 2008

A submission to the Federal Government calling for the

creation of a National Children's Commissioner. This submission outlined views about the role and scope for a proposed children's commissioner

### Review of Victoria's Child Protection legislative arrangements 2010

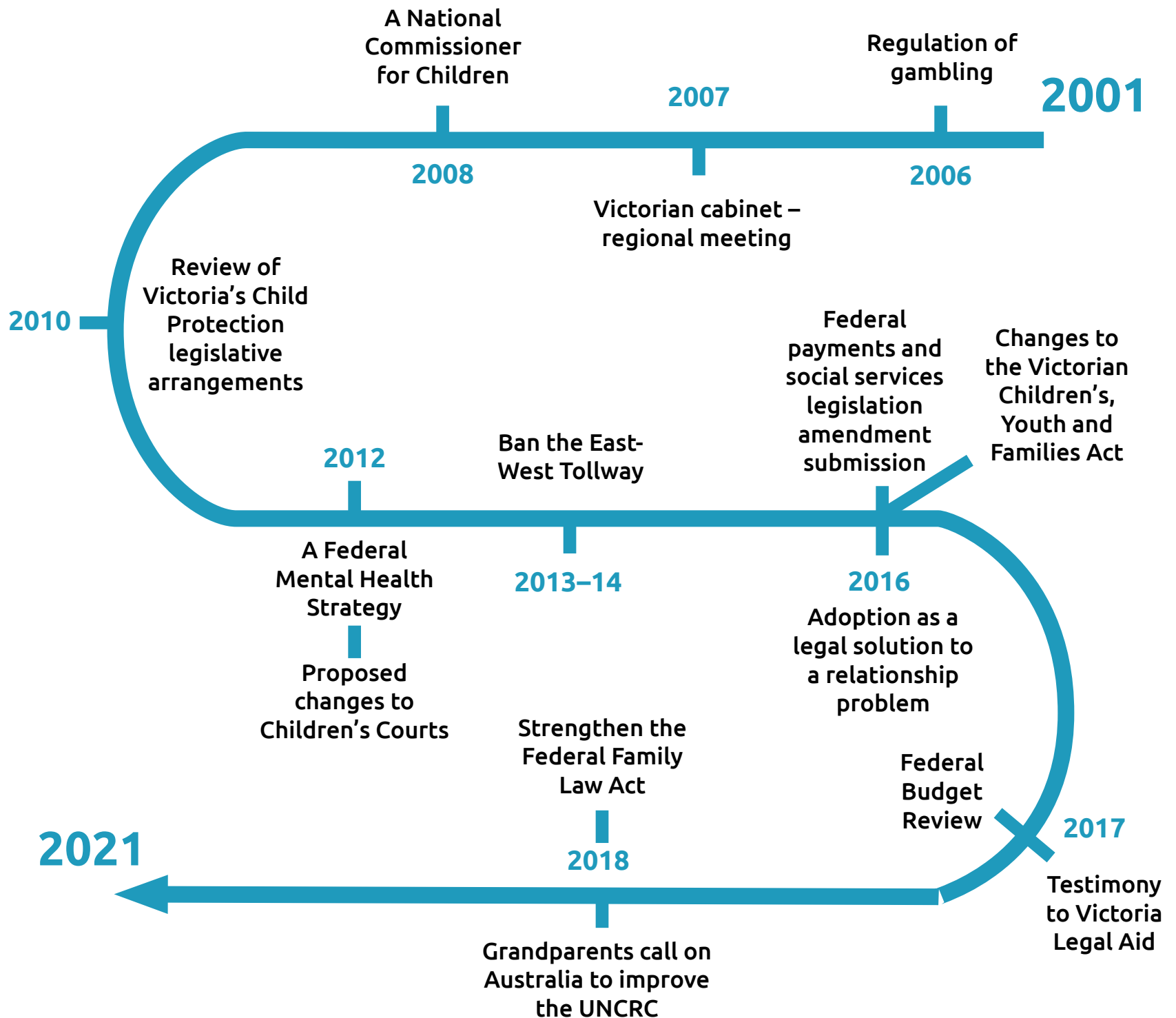
In 2010, in recognition of difficulties faced by grandparents when dealing with court proceedings, GPV/KCV raised two circumstances that most frustrate grandparents:

- The first occurs when grandparents are seeking access to their grandchildren after the grandchildren's parents have separated and grandparents are denied access. This can happen even after the grandparents have enjoyed long-term contact with the grandchildren.
- The second circumstance arises when grandparents seek leave to make comment about the welfare of their grandchildren. These grandparents are not necessarily seeking custody of the children but they are keen to ensure that a wide range of evidence is taken into consideration when deliberating on the outcomes for children. Many times, grandparents have witnessed repeated abuse of children but are not allowed to provide such evidence.

We believe that all these anomalies could be rectified if the range of evidence that can be examined and the range of people who have a right to give it can be broadened to include grandparents. In fact, we would go so far as to say



# Timeline – whole-of-family submissions and testimonies



that in all cases the Court should automatically call the grandparents and seek their views. If grandparents' views were actively sought, the decisions made would be more creative, based on better information and have a better chance of succeeding.

## A Federal Mental Health Strategy 2012

A written submission to the National Mental Health Commissioner putting the case for the forthcoming federal mental health strategy to support and case-manage whole families.

## Proposed changes to Children's Courts 2012

A written submission to the Law Reform Commission criticising the proposal to take the right to legal representation away from some children. The submission also proposed a new model of paralegal assistants to work directly with judges in assessing and reporting children's/ carers' needs.

## Ban the East-West Tollway 2013–14

In 2013 a written submission against the proposal to build tunnels under and car passes over Royal Park. GPV did not take a stand against freeways in general. However, we are not prepared to accept this particular solution, which severely reduced public park space and meant longstanding sporting groups would have no base from which to operate.

In 2014 a verbal presentation to the independent review panel established to evaluate community concerns about the proposed tollway. Representatives attended what proved to be the panel's last meeting on this issue. The change of government at the November 2014 state election meant that the tollway proposal was abandoned.

## Adoption as a legal solution to a relationship problem 2016

A written submission and consultation with the review team of the Victorian Law Reform Commission's review of the Adoption Act 1984. Points made by GPV/KCV included:

- the stipulation that children are born into families, not just to individual parents;
- the right of extended family to be consulted about what is in the best interests of the child before adoption is considered.

The point was also made that DHHS can consider parents unfit to raise children yet still fit to make life-changing decisions – such as adoption – on the behalf of a child.

In 2017 GPV testified to the federal government Review of Forced Adoption, an action which resulted in a report being released by the Senate Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, 'Breaking barriers: a national adoption framework for Australian children'.

## Federal payments and social services legislation amendment submission 2016

Verbal testimony to a senate enquiry arguing for clearer, more accessible information about people's entitlements and for swifter payments to vulnerable families.

## Changes to the Victorian Children's, Youth and Families Act to CCYP 2016

GPV/KCV attended a number of briefings about the changes to this legislative act. Of concern was the emphasis placed on adoption as an option for children in out-of-home care and the determination that kinship care placements should be made permanent placements too early, leaving the carers without vital resources.

The review of the amendments to the Children's Youth and Families Act (CYFA) was something GPV/KCV had campaigned for. In its submission, GPV/KCV made a number of points fundamental to the support of the rights of children and families.

## Federal Budget Review 2017

Written submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, making the point that Australian families are concerned about the string of cuts to welfare recently proposed by the Federal Government. Many families are struggling under the burden of the high costs of living, and the proposed cuts will put additional pressure on already precariously balanced household budgets. Supporting families to ensure that children receive the best start in life should be the government's highest priority. Implementing budget cuts that send our most vulnerable families into deeper poverty and their children into lifelong disadvantage is never going to be supported.



## 2017 Testimony to Victoria Legal Aid review of Child Protection's duty lawyer guidelines

GPV supported moves by VLA to better describe the duty lawyer's goodliness, particularly to the extent to which they focused on making sure everybody was well informed and their rights were observed.

## Strengthen the Federal Family Law Act 2018

A written submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission's review of the Family Law Act making the following points:

- The 2006 reforms giving the courts the ability to consider the relationship between grandchildren and their grandparents have gone some way towards making it easier for grandparents to maintain contact with their grandchildren after a family breakdown, but GPV still

receives many calls for help and advice each year from grandparents who have been denied access to their grandchildren by the child's parents.

- Grandparents continue to need support from the Family Law Court in enforcement of restraining orders and access arrangements. They often find themselves in the invidious position of 'go-between' in family dispute situations, involving them in divided loyalties and the need to make decisions for which they are usually neither trained nor experienced.

## Grandparents call on Australia to improve implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 2018

In 2018 GPV called on Australia to improve its implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – a submission to the National Children's Commission which is preparing a report for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

## Kinship care submissions and testimonies

### Tasmanian parliamentary enquiry into grandparents raising grandchildren 2003

In 2003 GPV/KCV made representation to this enquiry to support Tasmanian kinship carers, who had very little government support available to them.

### Protecting Victoria's vulnerable children review – Victoria 2011

KCV was represented on the reference committee that worked with the three-member panel conducting this Victorian review. The review investigated systematic problems in Victoria's Child Protection systems and recommended changes to improve the care of Victorian children who are at risk of abuse or neglect. Many recommendations were made; however, not many recommendations related directly to kinship care. Since the review the Victorian Government has commenced work to develop a new strategy for children in out-of-home care.

### The prevention of child abuse through Kinship Care 2011

Kinship care is an important strategy in the prevention and remedy of child abuse and neglect. This care is increasingly being relied upon as a strategy in rectifying the most toxic effects of child abuse on children. This submission was written from the perspective of kinship carers, the majority of whom are grandparents.

### Social Services Legislation Amendment 2014

A written submission to the Federal Senate Standing Committee on community affairs commenting on changes to the Social Services Payments as far as kinship carers were concerned, and making the following points:

- The Family Tax Benefit B payment be made available to both single and couple kinship care families until the time that the youngest child in care turns 18 years of age, and that the payment be equivalent to an amount





not less than those currently received, with an automatic annual increase by an amount equivalent to the increase in the cost of living.

- Kinship carers who are eligible for Family Tax Benefit B also be eligible for a newly designed Kinship Care Emergency Payment to cover a range of unforeseeable events that attract expenditure unable to be planned for and unable to be borne by the carers. For example, the funeral costs of children in the care of the kinship carer or the funeral of the spouse of the kinship carer.
- Kinship carers be awarded an automatic one-off newly designed Kinship Care Placement Establishment Grant to the amount of \$500 for each child placed with the kinship carers. These funds are to be used to purchase basics such as beds, prams, linen, clothes, baby equipment etc. associated with raising the children, and are in recognition of the fact that most carers do not have such facilities in their homes at the time the children are delivered to them.
- A further two Centrelink kinship care/foster care/grandparent advisors be appointed to better respond to the increasing number of calls being from carers who are seeking advice about eligibility for payments and other services available through Centrelink.
- Entitlements to childcare benefits include eligibility to claim for half of the costs of two camps, either school camps or other therapeutic camps, for each child in the case of the kinship carer and

## Grandparents raising their grandchildren 2014

A written submission and testimony to the Australian Senate enquiry into the circumstances surrounding grandparents raising grandchildren. The submission included calls for:

- an Australian Carers card
- collection of national data
- a national grandparent/kinship carer payment scheme
- an establishment grant for kinship carers
- reunification of children with parents
- a national network of playgroups for children in kinship care
- early intervention in mental ill-health
- national standards for out-of-home care

## Children Youth Families Bill inquiry submission 2015

GPV/KCV concerns related to the changes to the Bill made in 2014 and which came into effect in March 2016.

Primary amongst GPV/KCV concerns was and is the way the Bill presented the out-of-home care options for children who are taken from their parents. A hierarchy of options was presented. This hierarchy gave first preference to children being adopted outside the family. Then came permanent care, while third preference was given to long-term out-of-home care. It is only at the level of this third option that kinship care is given priority. We believe that there should not be a hierarchy and that the Bill should list all options with a commitment to deciding on the option best suited to the needs of the child. We further believe that the processes used to decide on the option best suited to the needs of the child must involve members of the extended family, particularly grandparents, and that consideration must be seen to be given to placing the child within its family. If it is decided that the child should not be placed with its family there should be detailed documentation outlining the reasons.

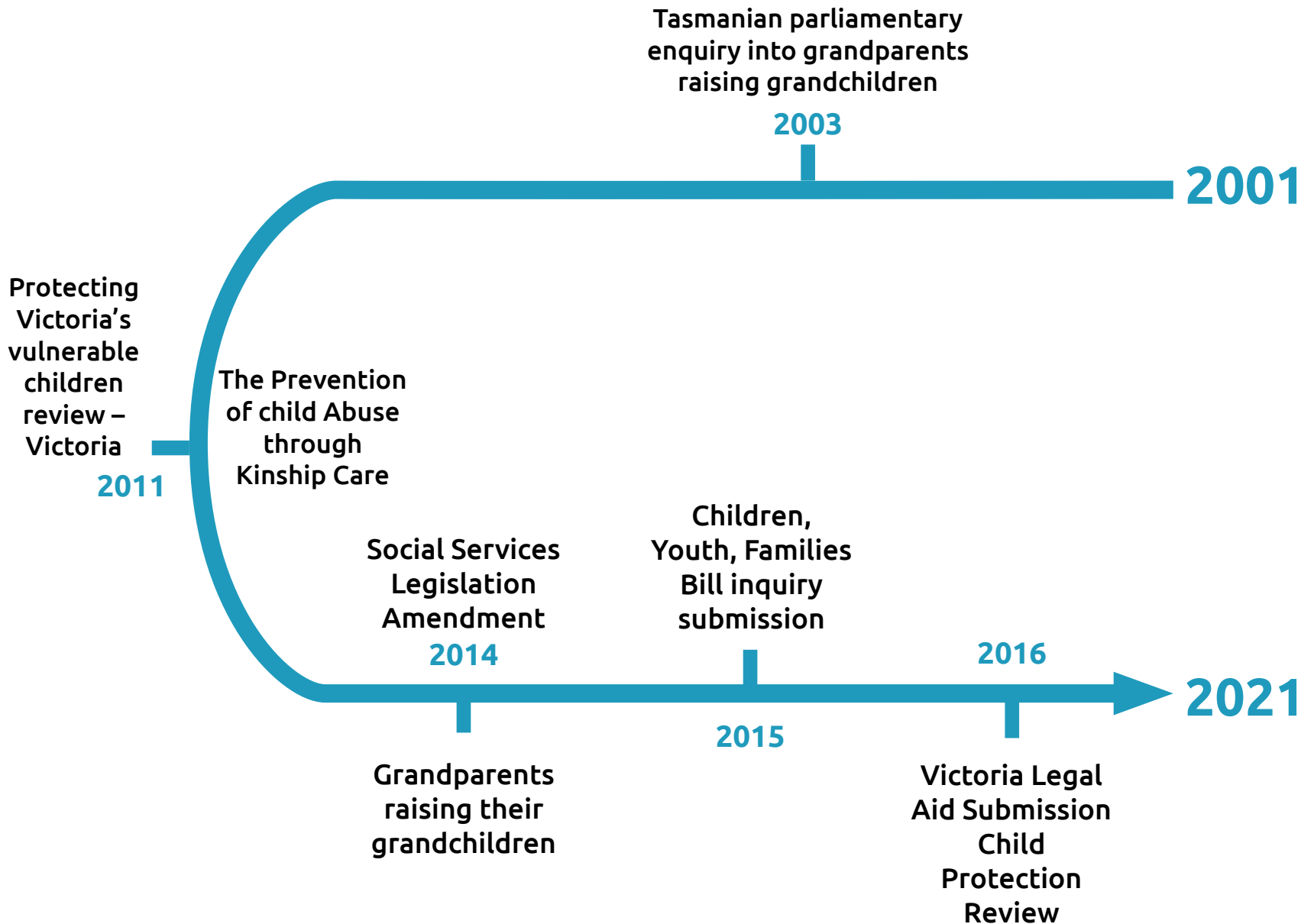
It is already the case that families are talking about legal challenges. We can also see a day when adults who have been placed outside their family as children will want to know why this was done. Surely we have learned through the bitter experiences of so many Aboriginal children and 'Forgotten Australians' put into institutions away from family that this is the worst possible option, and certainly not a preferred one.

## Victoria Legal Aid Submission Child Protection Review 2016

A consultation with the review team, reiterating the gaps in services and the dangers to the wellbeing of children as a result of bad practice, as well as the lack of access to financial assistance, with legal costs incurred by carers. The report was released in October 2017.



## Timeline – Kinship care submissions and testimonies



## Child Impact Statements

From its earliest days GPV/KCV has scrutinised law, policy and practice, asking: what is best for all children and what effect will the decisions we take today have on their futures?

GPV/KCV recognises that guidelines exist for the creation and use of Family Impact Statements (FIS) when putting proposals to local, federal or state government councils or cabinets, but is disappointed in the underutilisation of these statements and their lack of public visibility.

In 2017 GPV commenced calling on all levels of government in Australia to pay specific attention to the potential impact that changes to legislation will have on outcomes for children. Every piece of legislation, as well as all changes to regulations and practices should be accompanied by a 'Child Impact Statement' (CIS), consisting of an analysis predicting the potential outcomes for child wellbeing in both the short and long term.

**Each CIS must measure the extent to which any policy or practice contributes or enhances adherence to the following rights for all children:**

- **not be raised in poverty**
- **to know, and spend quality time with, their extended biological family**
- **to have access to affordable, quality health care, and early intervention in mental health issues**
- **to be safe from emotional and physical harm**
- **to have access to a free, comprehensive, quality education**
- **to participate in leisure activities**
- **to have a clear understanding of their identity**
- **to connect with the languages and religious beliefs of their family of origin**
- **to be paid fairly for fair work, and have the right to safe working environments**
- **to participate in decisions affecting their own lives**
- **to be treated fairly and humanely within the justice system**



## The UNCRC articles critical to GPV/KCV's defence of child rights

In the years from 2004 and 2018, GPV/ KCV identified the articles in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) considered to be most crucial. They were then, and still are, as follows:

<p><b>Article 3</b> Responsibilities of Institutions</p>	<p>In 2015 GPV/KCV formalised its concerns that the <i>Children's Youth and Families Amendment Act 2013</i> (Vic) (CYF) breached this article. According to Justice Alastair Nicholson AO RFD QC, The Act contravenes Article 3 of the UNCRC by interfering with the Court's ability to determine an individual child's best interests on a case-by-case basis.</p>
<p><b>Article 4</b> Undertaking Appropriate Measures</p>	<p>This article requests that signatory states to the UNCRC take all possible steps to ensure that children's rights are respected and upheld – a sentiment echoed by GPV/KCV. However, government commitment to the UNCRC is not what it should be and caused GPV/KCV acute embarrassment.</p>
<p><b>Article 6</b> A Child's Inherent Right to Life</p>	<p>Featured in this article is an exhortation for states to 'ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child'. GPV/KCV feels that this article reinforces the responsibility of governments to ensure that children are provided with the basic necessities of life, including nutrition, housing and clothing, as well as educational programs and health care.</p>
<p><b>Article 7</b> Registration and the Right to a Name, Nationality and Care</p>	<p>In 2012 Articles 7 and 8 were affirmed by GPV/KCV because they both relate to one of the child's most basic human rights – the right to have a strong sense of identity. These articles are of particular concern to GPV/KCV in the context of adoption, and the 'legal' alterations made to a child's identity at the time of adoption.</p>
<p><b>Article 8</b> Identity</p>	<p>Many adoptees of the past have reported that they felt a loss of sense of identity, both through being deprived of their original birth name, and the loss of connection with their extended family and that family's culture. The risk of this sense of loss is particularly acute in cases of international adoptions.</p>
<p><b>Article 9</b> Separation from Parents</p>	<p>This article was endorsed by GPV/KCV in 2016 after a Children's Matters forum at which Justice Nicholson noted that a number of the articles of the UNCRC had been breached by changes to Victorian government legislation that had come into full effect. Justice Nicholson noted that: The CYF Act 2014 (Vic) is in serious breach of the requirements of this Article, as are the two 2013 Acts in question. The operative words in Article 9.1 are that competent authorities must decide that such separation is in the best interests of the child and, most importantly, that decisions must be subject to judicial review.</p> <p>All of the relevant Acts are in breach of Article 9.2, which requires that all interested parties shall be given an opportunity to participate in the proceedings and make their views known.</p>
<p><b>Article 10</b> Family Reunification</p>	<p>Although the specific details of this article refer mainly to the need for governments to regulate their borders in a way that is sympathetic towards families who live in different countries, GPV/ KCV supports the sentiment behind it.</p> <p>Where possible, children should be able to keep in close contact with members of their extended family, except in cases where this contact may place the child in danger of physical or psychological harm.</p>



<p><b>Article 12 Children’s Own Voice</b></p>	<p>This article was first endorsed by GPV/KCV at a meeting in London in 2013 and subsequently reindorsed in 2016 when Justice Nicholson noted that the Justice Act 2013 (Vic) assumes that a child under 10 is incapable of giving instructions of any kind without regard to considering the individual child, and removes their right to be heard. The CYF Act 2013 also has the effect of reducing the child’s opportunity to be heard.</p> <p><b>GPV/KCV believes that all children have the right to have their views represented in decisions which impact on their lives. Further, all children have the right to representation in decision-making processes by an independent advocate such as a lawyer or Guardian ad Litem.</b></p>
<p><b>Article 18 Child-Rearing Responsibilities</b></p>	<p>This article was endorsed by GPV/KCV in 2016, after a Children’s Matters forum at which Justice Nicholson noted that a number of the articles of the UNCRC had been breached by changes to Victorian legislation that had come into full effect. Justice Nicholson noted that Article 18.2 is important for present purposes because of the obligation to support parents. It can hardly be consistent to stipulate, as this legislation does, that after 12 months, or in exceptional circumstances 24 months, the obligation to support parents or guardians ceases.</p> <p><b>GPV/KCV agrees that in cases where a child is unable to live with his or her parents, the Victorian Government and DHHS should be responsible for supporting carers to keep children together within the family home, or that of the extended family. This support may take the form of financial assistance, or services such as counselling.</b></p> <p>In 2017–18, the provision of childcare services for kinship carers was an emerging issue.</p>
<p><b>Article 19 Protection from Violence, Abuse, Maltreatment</b></p>	<p>In 2013 KCV received record numbers of complaints about DHHS related to underfunding special needs of children and inadequate assessments. At the Children’s Matters forum Justice Nicholson stated that:</p> <p>‘This article states a primary responsibility of DHHS, but it is hardly consistent with it to make arbitrary provisions without regard to the needs of the individual child, as this legislation does. The 2014 Act seems more directed at the convenience of the Department than considerations of the child’s individual need or to promote the child’s relationship with parents.’</p>
<p><b>Article 20 Protection by the State</b></p>	<p>This article was first endorsed by GPV/KCV at a meeting in London in 2013. Section 3 provides that ‘due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child’s upbringing and to the child’s ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background’.</p> <p><b>GPV/KCV believes that the best way to ensure this continuity is to place children with members of their extended family if they cannot remain with their parents.</b></p> <p>This article is important in the case of Indigenous children. The year 2018 marked the 10th anniversary of the Federal Government’s apology to the Stolen Generations, and yet statistics show that more children are being removed from Indigenous families today than were removed at the height of the Stolen Generations era.</p>
<p><b>Article 21 Adoption</b></p>	<p>In 2016 GPV/KCV concerns about adoption were heightened.</p> <p>A report into adoption practices in Australia found that adoptees frequently reported a loss of their sense of identity after learning that they had been adopted, and reported having difficulty connecting with others. Further, GPV/KCV continues to hold concerns for the loss of connection to family and culture that arises when children are adopted away from the community and family in which they were born.</p>



<p><b>Article 21</b> <b>Adoption (continued)</b></p>	<p>The UNCRC insists that among other safeguards that should be established before an adoption takes place, it should be ensured that ‘persons concerned have given their informed consent’. The practice of placing children for adoption by strangers is inconsistent with this. This practice is also of concern because whilst parents may be asked for their consent, there are no provisions in the current Victorian adoption legislation for grandparents or other extended family members to consent to an adoption.</p> <p>In the Safe and Wanted report, the Victorian Commissioner for Children and Young People stated that, ‘[I]n light of the widespread community concern, particularly for Victoria’s Aboriginal community, and the evidence that adoptions are not occurring in practice, the Commission recommends that it be removed from the hierarchy of permanency objectives. This request comes in light of fears that a second Stolen Generation might be created through placing adoption at the top of the hierarchy of permanency objectives.’</p>
<p><b>Article 22</b> <b>Refugee Status</b></p>	<p>In 2014 GPV/KCV campaigned for the removal of refugee children from detention centres under Australian control, whether those centres were on Australian soil or offshore.</p>
<p><b>Article 24</b> <b>Health and Treatment of Illness</b></p>	<p><b>GPV/KCV strongly supports the provision of adequate health care for children. Within the framework of this article, GPV particularly supports the demand that ‘states parties ... shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services’.</b></p> <p>GPV/KCV is aware of many cases in Victoria where families struggle to meet the costs of health care for children – especially in cases where the children have greater needs or mental health issues.</p> <p>Section 3 of this article states: ‘States Parties shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.’ GPV/KCV considers female genital mutilation (FGM) as coming under this heading, abhors the practice and supports measures to eradicate this practice. In 2018 GPV/KCV intended to campaign against this practice. Further, GPV/KCV believes that corporal punishment is never appropriate, as it can cause lasting physical and mental damage to children, and normalises violence in the home.</p>
<p><b>Article 26</b> <b>A Child’s Right to Social Security</b></p>	<p>This article is linked closely to the issue of poverty. GPV/KCV supports the right of children and families to have access to welfare benefits where these are necessary to sustain the health and wellbeing of the child.</p>
<p><b>Article 27</b> <b>Standard of Living</b></p>	<p>This article was first endorsed by GPV/KCV at a meeting in London in 2013 and subsequently reendorsed in 2016 when Justice Nicholson noted that Article 27 says that children have the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs and that the government should help families to provide this. This article came to prominence again in 2017 after the release of the Victorian Ombudsman’s report detailing the issues faced by Victorian kinship carers in obtaining reimbursement payments from DHHS.</p> <p><b>GPV/KCV agrees that the Victorian Government and DHHS should be responsible for supporting carers to keep children together within the family home, or that of the extended family. This support may take the form of financial assistance, or services such as counselling.</b></p>



<p><b>Article 28</b> A Child's Right to Education</p>	<p>In 2012 GPV/KCV identified this article as one of the most essential factors in setting up a child for future success in life. Article 28a is of particular note, as it concerns the appropriate type of disciplining of children in schools, which should be administered in a manner consistent with the child's 'human dignity'.</p>
<p><b>Article 30</b> A Child's Right to Enjoy Minority Group Culture</p>	<p>In 2012 GPV/KCV identified this article as particularly important in the context of the Stolen Generations and international adoption.</p> <p><b>GPV/KCV believes that children have the right to maintain connections with the community in which they were born, and that removing them from these communities in the name of child protection should be done only as a last resort.</b></p>
<p><b>Article 31</b> A Child's Right to Play</p>	<p>In 2004 GPV/KCV first identified the right to play as a critical article in the UNCRC. In 2014 a survey of grandparents showed that grandparents are concerned about the quality of play activities enjoyed by today's children. Most apparent was the observation by grandparents that many children do not enjoy enough outdoor adventure play.</p>
<p><b>Article 32</b> Children and Employment</p>	<p>Article 32 insists that states set guidelines around the employment of children in order to protect them from dangerous working environments or exploitation. This article requests that children be protected from undertaking paid work at the cost of their education, but GPV/KCV notes that in developing nations, some children face such extreme poverty that they must choose between undertaking paid work or starvation. To a lesser extent this is true in Australia, where some teens must make the choice to enter paid employment because they cannot afford the high costs of education.</p>
<p><b>Article 34</b> Protection from Sexual Exploitation</p>	<p>In 2016 GPV/KCV identified this issue as one of the most pressing. The uncovering of the extent of sexual abuse of children across Australia was alarming and cause for strong action nationwide.</p>
<p><b>Article 37</b> Children and Liberty</p>	<p>In 2017 Articles 37 and 40 were endorsed by GPV/KCV after concerns were raised by a number of reports into the juvenile justice system. Concerns in relation to this article included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• children in residential care facilities being reported to police and charged for minor infractions;</li> <li>• children being kept in isolation in adult prisons;</li> <li>• children being kept in lockdown for 23 hours a day due to inadequate supervision; and</li> <li>• children having inadequate access to educational and mental health programs.</li> </ul> <p><b>GPV/KCV holds concerns about the implementation of Section 4 of UNCRC Article 40 in Victoria. This section asks that alternatives to institutional care be considered when dealing with children facing criminal charges, and that counselling and educational programs be made available to children in the youth justice system. Article 37 also raises the issue of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment.</b></p>
<p><b>Article 39</b> Recovery and Reintegration</p>	<p>In 2016 this article was noted by GPV/KCV, as the organisation became aware of increasing numbers of cases where children being raised by kinship carers continue to suffer symptoms of trauma for years after being removed from the situation of neglect or abuse in which they were being raised.</p>
<p><b>Article 40</b> Children and Legal Proceedings</p>	<p>See notes for article 37.</p>



Lets support the United Nations Charter on  
the Rights of the Child, especially:

**ARTICLE 9 - SEPARATION  
FROM PARENTS**

**Article 10 - Family reunification**

**Article 3 -  
Responsibilities of  
institutions**

**ARTICLE 12  
CHILDREN'S OWN VOICE**

**Article 27 - standard of living**

**ARTICLE 31 - A CHILD'S RIGHT TO PLAY**



# Chronology of key activities 2001 – 2021



This chronology does not present all activities. Rather, it is an overview of the activities that are remembered by staff for one reason or another. The most significant staff memories are captured in the annotations. This overview does not include GPV/KCV publications. Although the publications program was comprehensive and required much attention, the staff took the view that this was basic management work and only created a lot of work.

	Type of activity	Aim/result
2001	Gatherings	To explore the feasibility of forming a grandparent association
		To launch GPV in Mildura
		To launch GPV by the Governor John Landy
	Governance	Grandparents Victoria registered as a community organisation and had its first GPV Board meeting
	Outreach	First TV interview – Grandparents Unite
	Outreach	Address to a local RSL
Campaign	A call for better access to a full education for all children and young people (Victorian Education Roundtable)	

*This launch was arranged by two local women, Dorothy Horbury and Elwyn Rogers. Both had a long, proud history of community activism in Mildura and beyond. Further, both women had skills as advocates in defending public education. Much of what GPV hoped to achieve resonated with them.*

*June Smith and Anne McLeish left this gathering demoralised. The male audience did not want to hear about what they thought to be 'women's nurturing business'. The attitude reminded Anne McLeish of the old divide between mothers clubs and school councils.*



2002

Type of activity	Aim/result
Gatherings	To gather grandparents at the first meeting of the Moonee Valley grandparents' group
	To explore the role of grandparents at a seminar group – Ivanhoe
	To launch GPV at a Mayoral reception in Ballarat
	To explore the role of grandparents at a seminar – Echuca
	To explore the role of grandparents at a seminar – Essendon
	To explore the place of grandparents in family law
	To explore the role of Grandparents in the 21st century – Frankston
	To explore the role of Grandparents at a seminar – Bendigo
Governance	Registration of Grandparents Australia
	1st AGM at Moonee Valley Racecourse
Outreach	First meeting with a politician: Judy Maddigan, MP, Essendon

*It was on this occasion that the decision to form Grandparents Australia was taken. As there were insufficient funds to cover the registration fees, Justice Susan Morgan donated the \$60 registration fee on the spot.*



		2003	
		Type of activity	Aim/result
	Campaign	A call for recognition of disadvantages to grandchildren denied access to grandparents	
	Governance	1st meeting with GPA member organisation – Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren in WA	
		1st Grandparents Australia meeting – face-to-face meeting in Melbourne	
	Outreach	Court Network Forum	
		Interstate visit to kinship care support groups – Gold Coast	
		Interstate visit to kinship care support groups – WA	
	Project	Echuca community development project	
	Submissions, testimonies	A meeting with LHMU re the commission hearing about child care workers' wage claim	
	Peer support	Attendance at two kinship care peer-support groups in metropolitan and regional areas in Victoria	

*This meeting was held at the Dousta Galla Hotel in Kensington, which was becoming the venue of choice for a number of gatherings because it was so close to public transport and the office, which at this stage was one spare room in the home of Anne McLeish.*



Type of activity	Aim/result
Campaigns	A call for Centrelink to appoint specialist grandparents advisors across Australia
	A call for government to be more responsible in the governance of gambling
	A call for the appointment of a children's commissioner for Australia
	A call for grandparent-related questions in the ABS Census
Gatherings	To explore the role of grandparents in the 21st century – Knox
	To explore the role of grandparents in the 21st century – Shepparton
	To explore the role of grandparents in the 21st century – Geelong
	To launch grandparents report at Melbourne Town Hall
	Interstate visit to kinship care support groups – WA
	To launch the Grandparents as Alchemists program, with Federal Minister for Family & Community Services Kay Patterson
Governance	Anne McLeish elected to Board of Families Australia
Outreach	1st visit to a kinship care support group – Shepparton
	1st meeting of Grandparents Australia with delegates from states other than Victoria
Project	Grandparents as Alchemists training seminar – Frankston
Submissions, testimonies	Victorian cabinet – regional meeting
	Gambling submission lodged
Peer support	Attendance at five kinship care peer-support groups in metropolitan and regional areas in Victoria



	Type of activity	Aim/result
2005	Outreach	1st meeting with DHHS – in Geelong
	Project	Grandparents preventing problem gambling

*This project caused friction between the Victorian Government and GPV. This was over the photograph to be used on the front cover of the booklet arising from the project. GPV chose a photograph that was neutral; that is to say, no one was smiling. The marketing people at the department wanted a photograph that showed a happy family group – something the GPV Board thought entirely inappropriate. The Board offered to give what remained of the project funding back to the government and not to proceed to the next stage of the project. The Board was told we could not do that and a compromise was reached.*

2006	Gatherings	To Launch Early Childhood Statement at a Families Week function in North Melbourne
		To seek members' views on a range of issues
	International Study tour	To New Zealand – to look at gambling prevention strategies and peer support in Auckland, New Zealand
	Outreach	Early Childhood Conference, Sydney
Workshop presented at a national conference on Intergenerational Matters		



	Type of activity	Aim/result
2007	International Study tour	To New York – the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Conference on grandparenting
	Project	Grandparenting across the Generations Project
	Submissions, testimonies	Appeared before the Regional Victorian Cabinet Meeting and Premiers' Reception
	Survey	Moonee Valley Survey
	Peer support	Attendance at seven kinship care peer-support groups in metropolitan and regional areas in Victoria

*The conference was stressful because the attitude of the newly elected delegate was more conservative than anything encountered in Australia. It was also a surprise to realise the power the AARP had. Lobbying the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). At the end of this conference an attempt to draft a communique was made. However, GPV was not able to agree to the communique because the strong inference contained in it was that only two-people heterosexual families were appropriate.*

*The grandmothers who were interviewed on this project all enjoyed talking about their own grandparents. For many this was the first time they had done so for a long time and they felt sad that such conversations about family history are lacking in today's busy family cultures. This experience caused GPV to think about the possibility of grandchildren interviewing their grandparents in an oral history project. Nothing has been done about this, however.*

2008	Gatherings	To celebrate families at a Families Week function – Moonee Valley
		To Launch the <i>Grandparenting Across the Generations</i> book
	Project	Moonee Valley Carers Network Report
	Submissions, testimonies	Testimony to a parliamentary enquiry – Victorian Parliament Gambling Select Committee
	Peer support	Attendance at nine kinship care peer-support groups in metropolitan and regional areas in Victoria



	Type of activity	Aim/result
2009	Gatherings	To examine the role of grandparents in the 21st century – Chadstone
		To celebrate Families Week function #3 – Rosebud
		To establish ongoing discussion group at luncheons – Seaford
		To explore kinship care matters at the Victorian Kinship Carers State Conference #1 – Moonee valley
	International Study tour	To New Zealand – to meet with Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Conference in Auckland
	Outreach	Attendance at International Women’s Breakfast
1st meeting for the National Framework for Protection of Children		
Peer support	Attendance at 10 kinship care peer-support groups in metropolitan and regional areas in Victoria	

*The emergency contact system I saw in New Zealand, especially its availability to people dealing with gambling addiction was most impressive and never been properly addressed in such a systematic way in Australia.*

*Also, I was heartened by the strong organisation of the kinship carer networks, this has been matched in Victoria in many ways made more systematic.*

*Anne McLeish, OAM*

	Type of activity	Aim/result
2010	Campaigns	A call for changes to the Victorian Child Protection legislation
		A call for recognition of the importance of kinship care
		A call for grandparents’ issues to be addressed in the 2010 federal election campaign
		A call for grandparents’ issues to be addressed in the 2010 Victorian state election campaign
		A call for improvements to the quality of aged care
	Gatherings	To explore kinship care matters at Victorian Kinship Carers’ State Conference – Melbourne
		To launch the GPV/YMCA Ascot Vale Project
	Outreach	Meeting with Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
	Survey	GPV membership survey
	Peer support	Attendance at 17 kinship care peer-support groups in metropolitan and regional areas in Victoria





2011	Type of activity	Aim/result
	Gatherings	To celebrate families at Families Week luncheon #4 – Doutta Galla Hotel
		To examine support for grandparents with Victorian Legal Aid seminar
		To explore kinship care matters at State Kinship Care Conference – Melbourne
		To explore kinship carer matters – meeting with the Auditor General’s office
		To support grandparents denied access to grandchildren – luncheon
	Governance	Kinship Carers Victoria organisation formed and first KCV committee meeting
	Outreach	Meeting(s) re Victorian Carers’ Bill
		1st meeting of the Australian Children’s Round Table
	Projects	Meetings regarding Walpeup research station proposal – Mildura
Work session to commence the KCV Longitudinal Study		
Submissions, testimonies	Submission to a major government enquiry – Victorian Vulnerable Children’s Enquiry	
Survey	Longitudinal Study of Kinship Care survey	
Peer support	Attendance at 17 kinship care peer-support groups in metropolitan and regional areas in Victoria	

*One of the most distressing circumstances GPV has to deal with is the breakdown of contact between grandparents and grandchildren. Many family breakups are bitter and result in the children being caught in the middle.*

*Children, parents and grandparents can all suffer in these situations, which are growing in number.*



Type of activity	Aim/result
Campaigns	A call for early intervention in mental health of children and young people
	A call for improvements to Children's Court procedures in Victoria
Gatherings	To examine the role of grandparents in the 21st century – Ringwood
	To celebrate families at a Families Week function – Ballarat
	To celebrate Families Week Luncheon #5 – Seaford
International Study tour	To the US – Visits to kinship care support groups in Vermont and New York
Outreach	Presentation at Play Victoria conference
	Meeting/s of MHYF and GPV
Project	KIN pamphlets: Being an effective kinship care representative and running an effective support group
Surveys	Education
	Longitudinal Study of Kinship Care survey
	The role of grandparents (Families Week)
Peer support	Attendance at 20 kinship care peer-support groups in metropolitan and regional areas in Victoria

2012

*The authorities at Kennedy Airport in the US were determined to deny Anne entry into the US, as she didn't have the address of her accommodation on the entry documents.*

*In the end, it was only because the customs officer could not get hold of his supervisor and that the queue of people was getting angry that he relented and called Joan Vance (Anne's US contact) to verify that Anne was telling the truth.*



2013	Type of activity	Aim/result
	Campaigns	A call for grandparents' issues to be addressed in the 2014 federal election campaign
		A call for improvements to Children's Court procedures in Victoria
		A call to stop the East-West Link Tollway proposal
		A call for better promotion of the value of child-centered outdoor play
	Gatherings	To celebrate families at a Families Week function #6 – Governor's Reception, Government House
		To celebrate families at a Families Week Luncheon #7 at Heritage Hill Museum – Dandenong
	Governance	Registration of Kinship International Network (KIN) website
	International Study tour	To England – to host the Kinship International Network inaugural meeting in London
	Surveys	Children's play
		Kinship care relationships with extended family
		Longitudinal Study of Kinship Care survey
	Peer support	Attendance at 26 kinship care peer-support groups in metropolitan and regional areas in Victoria

*Anne and Naomi were interrogated at Heathrow Airport about where and what they would be doing in the UK, and airport authorities did not appreciate the Australians' pronunciation of the town of Woking.*



2014	Type of activity	Aim/result
	Campaigns	A call for immediate withdrawal of children from Australian Refugee camps
		A call for grandparents' issues to be addressed in the 2014 Victorian state election campaign
		A call for the retention of the Schoolkids Bonus
		A call for amendments to the federal budget
		A call for support for the Senate Report into Grandparents Raising Grandchildren
	Gatherings	To launch the <i>Kinship Carer's Handbook for Victoria</i> at the Melbourne Museum
		To launch the <i>Kinship Carer's Handbook for Victoria</i> in Ballarat
		To celebrate families at a Families Week Luncheon in Oakley
		To celebrate the 10th anniversary of the KCV carers group – Shepparton
	International study tour	To New Zealand – to survey grandparents about play
		To Turkey – to attend the International Play Association Conference in Istanbul

*Coffee pods were quite new at this time and the coffee machine at the venue had everyone tricked. Many of the GPV/KCV guests needed help to make a coffee, so Naomi Whyley stayed close by the machine all day.*



Type of activity	Aim/result
outreach	Melbourne University Conference – Best practice in support for kinship carers in England
	Address at Yooralla Carers Conference – Childhood trauma and self-help for carers
	Attendance with kinship carers at National Foster and Kinship Care Conference, Tasmania
	Families Australia Child Aware Conference
	Play Australia workshop – Theories behind children's play
	Maternal Child Health Nurse state conference (distribution of kinship carers handbook)
	Address to Malvern Ladies Legacy club
Project	GPV Play Project to document grandparents' views about play and stimulate local action
Submissions, testimonies	To Senate Enquiry into Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, meeting with opposition spokesperson on Children & Families Jenny Mikakos
	Testimony to government enquiry – East-West Link hearings DHS Western Region forum – Ballarat
	Testimony to Senate about Grandparents Raising Grandchildren – Melbourne
	Meeting – with Senator Smith, Melbourne
Surveys	Grandparents speak about play
	KCV transition out-of-home care
	Longitudinal Study of Kinship Care survey
	The value of support groups
Peer support	Attendance at 33 kinship care peer-support groups in metropolitan and regional areas in Victoria

*The message about the world of grandparenting was confronting, with many of the guests expressing shock at the challenges some grandparents face.*

*Some guests left relieved that their family was immune from some of the circumstances spoken of.*

*The number of groups attended in this year was too taxing for staff and too costly.*



	Type of activity	Aim/result
2015	Campaign	A call for family finding
	Gatherings	To celebrate National Families Week at Melbourne Town Hall
		To celebrate the launch of the GPV History Book – <i>Grandparents Shaping the Future</i>
	Outreach	GPV addresses Richmond Rotary Club
		Address to Whitehorse City Council grandparents group
	Project	Kinship care small grants (local support groups received funds for small activities)
	Survey	Longitudinal Study of Kinship Care survey
	Peer support	Attendance at 31 kinship care peer-support groups in metropolitan and regional areas in Victoria

2016	Campaign	A call for the formation of a world environment organisation
	Gathering	To celebrate families at a Families Week Luncheon – Kensington
	International Study tour	To the US – to attend a national kinship care conference in Las Vegas
	Outreach	Children’s Matters forum
	Submissions, testimonies	Attendance at Royal Commission into family violence briefing
	Survey	Longitudinal Study of Kinship Care survey
	Peer support	Attendance at 10 kinship care peer-support groups in metropolitan and regional areas in Victoria

*Melbourne zoo experience*

*This conference was memorable and not just because of the venue, location or speakers but because Las Vegas was more than HOT – its daytime temp was 47°C degrees.*



2017	Type of activity	Aim/result
	Campaigns	A call for change through the state election campaign
		A call for support for same-sex marriage
		Support for flexible working hours
		Call to raise awareness opposing fast-tracking of adoption
		A call to oppose female genital mutilation
		A call for the abolition of corporal punishment
		A call for governments to better act on Article 31 – A child's right to play
		A call against proposed changes to the Children, Youth and Families Act
		A call not to employ approaches to adoption taken by NSW
		A call for support for young people leaving OOH to be extended from the age of 18 to 21
	Projects	First Melbourne Zoo holiday program (100 complimentary tickets for kinship carers)
		First seminar of the Kinship Carers Learning Circles program – Ballarat
		Artist-in-residence program of art therapy workshops
		First facilitation of support group – Pakenham
	Submissions, testimonies	Submission to the Child Protection Legal Aid services review
		Submission for review of the Adoption Act
	Surveys	Election issues survey
		Longitudinal Study of Kinship Care survey
		Play as therapy
	Peer support	Attendance at 25 kinship care peer-support groups in metropolitan and regional areas in Victoria

*Some of the board and staff tested this program out before it hit the road. We all thought that we wouldn't be good artists but it turned out to be a fun time.*



Type of activity	Aim/result
Campaign	A call for the Federal Government to increase support for poorer vulnerable families, Treating Families More Fairly Alliance
Gatherings	To examine education issues at a forum in Mildura
	To examine kinship care matters at a forum in Melton
	To train kinship carers at Learning Circles #2 – Where to from here? – Ballarat
Governance	GPV/KCV Ethics review
International Study Tour	To Italy – attendance and presence at a research conference in Prato
Outreach	Address at first meeting of Kin Raising Kids Tasmania, talking about the formation of this group
	Champions of Change, lookout education centre conference
	Understanding Trauma conference
	Hosting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children Day Luncheon
Project	Hosting Mildura Kinship Care Consultative Committee
Submissions, testimonies	Submission to Victorian Legal Aid calls for responses to guidelines for Child Protection duty lawyers
	Submission to Australian standing senate committee on social policy and legal affairs – enquiry into local adoption
Surveys	Children's rights
	Longitudinal Study of Kinship Care survey
	The roles that grandparents play
	Wellbeing of kinship carers
Peer support	Attendance at eight kinship care peer-support groups in metropolitan and regional areas in Victoria

2018

*A guest at this luncheon was hit on the head with a plate during the serving of lunch.*

*But all was well and the event was a great celebration.*





	Type of activity	Aim/result
2019	Gatherings	To celebrate the first Kinship Carers Week celebration (launch by the Minister)
		To explore a range of issues in education provision Kinship Carers Week education forum
		To explore Kinship Care Matters carers forum – Darley
		To explore local kinship care issues in Melton (Minister in attendance)
		To put questions to the Minister, at an afternoon tea with the minister
		To talk with staff of the Commission for Children and Young People – the rights of young people in out-of-home care
	Outreach	Launch of a carer strategy
		Attending Early Intervention forum at the CFCEW
	Survey	Longitudinal Study of Kinship Care survey
	Peer support	Attendance at three kinship care peer-support groups in metropolitan and regional areas in Victoria

*Every carer in attendance was eager to have their photo taken with the Minister, who happily obliged. The carers had a wonderful morning.*

	Type of activity	Aim/result
2020	Campaigns	A call for support for casual workers during the COVID-19 pandemic
		A call for increased funding for informal kinship carers
	Projects	Commencement of a telephone counselling service
		Second Kinship Care Week
	Surveys	Longitudinal Study of Kinship Care survey
		Reunification – a pathway to family preservation survey
	Peer support	Attendance at one kinship care peer-support group in metropolitan and regional areas in Victoria



# Greetings from some supporters

In 2019 GPV/KCV hosted a luncheon to celebrate Kinship Carers Week. At the time a few of our supporters offered greetings for publication.

*'I wish to offer my heartfelt congratulations to all kinship carers for the inspiring work you do for children and young people. As convenor of the National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing, I have worked with many carers and their organisations over the past decade as we strive for greater government and community recognition of, and support for, the needs of families, children and carers through the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020. I applaud the love, commitment and energy you give every day of the year and thank you for inspiring me in my work.'*

**Dr Brian Babington**  
**CEO Families Australia**  
**Convenor, National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing**



*'Without Grandparents Victoria, the voices of grandparents who care for their grandchildren across Victoria would not be heard by the powers that be in this fragmented and dysfunctional child protection system.'*

*'Grandparents are the cornerstone of the entire system and without them many children and their parents would be lost entirely.'*

**Fleur Ward**

**FLEUR WARD &  
PARTNERS PTY LTD**

*'Family, including the extended family, are so important for the healthy development and growth of children. For Aboriginal children extended families play an even more important role in their upbringing, especially from a cultural point of view. At VACCA we encourage all our carers, including kinship carers, to be connected to the Aboriginal culture and family of the children they care for. Most Aboriginal children in care are usually in the care of family and it is heartening to see family members step in to look after their children – their nephews, nieces, grandchildren. I want to thank kinship carers for their hard work and determination. Your caring is invaluable to all of us.'*

**Professor Muriel Bamblett**  
CEO, Victoria Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)

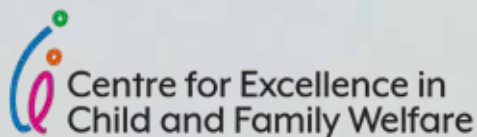


*'Kinship carers and their families come in many different forms, and we are very lucky in Victoria to have so many incredible families stepping in to support the children and young people who need it most.'*

*We are privileged to know and support kinship carers across Victoria, and we know that many of you have committed to caring for the children and young people in your lives without a second thought. My colleagues and I are in awe of the dedication, commitment and care you provide – and we know it isn't always an easy job.'*

*To all the grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, cousins, nieces, nephews and friends who step in to help children and families: we thank you for all the incredibly amazing work you do, and for putting the best interests of the children you support first. The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare is proud to represent and work alongside kinship families to ensure that you receive the best support possible and are recognised for the tremendous work you do. We are proud to celebrate Kinship Care Week alongside you, and wish you all the very best.'*

**Deb Tsorbaris, CEO**  
Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare



*'I want to give my heartfelt acknowledgement, respect and support to kinship carers across Australia.*

*Kinship carers provide a safe and loving environment for children who can't live with their parents. Kinship carers are vital to maintaining connections to family and community. Both informal and formal kinship carers need more support to undertake their important roles.*

*I would like to especially acknowledge First Nations kinship carers who help children maintain connections not only to their family, community, but culture and country. I would like to thank kinship carers for all the amazing love and support you give to the children you love and care for.'*

**Rachel Siewert**

**Australian Greens Senator for Western Australia 2005–2021**



*'As the former CEO of Berry Street for 26 years, I want to thank all the wonderful kinship carers for the critical work you do every day caring for children and young people who cannot be with their birth family.*

*You are the people who daily bear witness to the trauma they have suffered, their hurt and anger ... [you] tirelessly and courageously advocate for them ... have to navigate systems and processes which are incredibly frustrating ... understand that contact with siblings and parents is important to understand identity, even though it can be so upsetting for the child ... do your best to respect and strengthen cultural connections.*

*You do this because of your deep commitment to the kids, and you do it despite not receiving the community acknowledgment and financial support you deserve.'*

**Sandie de Wolf AM**

**Former CEO, Berry Street**

*'What an amazing group of people you are. I am inspired by your endless commitment to your children and families, and I am always astonished by the energy you have to manage your lives on a daily basis. How you do it is simply beyond me.*

*I have the greatest respect for you as decent, caring and hard-working people without exception. I consider you to be the most selfless people I have ever met, and I must say "thank you" from the bottom of my heart!'*

**Barb Champion**  
Executive Director, Play Australia



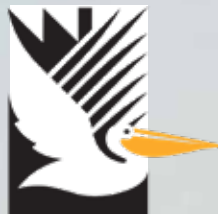
*Proudly promoting the value of play and supporting all Australians to play every day*

*'As we head into Kinship Carers Week, I am pleased to formally acknowledge the role of kinship carers in the Hobsons Bay community. These truly special individuals are quite literally changing lives. In what can sometimes be challenging circumstances, kinship carers place the needs of the children they care for ahead of their own. From providing day-to-day care and a safe and nurturing environment to planning for the child's future needs, kinship carers play a significant role in the wellbeing of the children in their care.*

*It is essential that we provide kinship carers with support. Kinship Care Victoria (KCV) provides assistance to carers of children raised by family members other than their parents. From providing support and resources for carers to advocating on their behalf, KCV makes a real difference. Hobsons Bay City Council appreciates the contribution KCV makes to our local community and recognises the impact the organisation has on the lives of children and their carers.'*

**Cr Jonathon Marsden**  
Mayor, Hobsons Bay City Council

**HOBSONS**  
**BAY CITY**  
COUNCIL



*'The Mornington Peninsula Shire Council recognises the enormous contribution that kinship carers make to the wellbeing of their families as well as to the wellbeing of the wider communities to which they belong.*

*Kinship care is the fastest growing form of out-of-home care for children and young people unable to be raised by their parents, with over 70% of children in out-of-home care in Victoria placed in kinship care.*

*Victoria's children and young people are its future and the most precious resource we have. All children in Victoria should have easy access to the full range of opportunities the state can offer them and programs that empower them to take up those opportunities.*

*The Mornington Peninsula Shire Council supports Kinship Care Week 2019 and takes the opportunity to thank the kinship carers for their contribution to the overall wellbeing of Victoria.'*

**Councillor David Gill**  
**Mayor Mornington Peninsula Shire Council**



**MORNINGTON  
PENINSULA**  
*Shire*

*'Kinship Carers Week is another week that is fast approaching. Held from 8 September to 14 September, the inaugural week recognises the work of kinship carers who raise children in out-of-home care.*

*Their love ensures vulnerable children are taken care of.'*

**Cr Rose Hodge**  
**Mayor, Surfcoast Shire**





