

2021



# Snapshot

Year in review



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## At Safe Places, it's all about the young people.

Since establishing operations in 2006, Safe Places for Children has supported nearly 2000 children and young people in a unique model of therapeutic residential care.

Everything we do - from tailoring care plans to matching the young person with a small, stable team of youth workers to personalising the young person's home - is built around the individual needs of each young person.

Our care model and therapeutic practice aim to build trust with the young person, stabilise their behaviours and give them a sense of hope and direction.

### **Our Vision**

To provide children and young people in care with individualised therapeutic residential services in Australia.

### **Our Mission**

At Safe Places, it's all about the young people.

### **Our Values**

With a focus on being United, Supportive, Responsive, Passionate and Professional, we have created a culture where people can thrive.

## Message from the Chair

**2020 was a year of disruption and displacement for so many people and communities across the globe.**

As we all struggled and did our best to adjust, it gave us an opportunity to reflect on the disruption and displacement that has marked the lives of so many vulnerable young people in care.

From a young age, many of them have already experienced severe trauma, domestic violence, abuse and neglect due to family breakdown because of mental illness, drug, alcohol or gambling issues.

For these young people, the COVID-19 pandemic and its social impact were additional challenges triggering high-risk behaviours and further disengagement from education, family and social networks.



These young people deserve the support of the whole community in acknowledging that they need professional and specialised support to help them develop self-worth and a sense of belonging.

We remain committed to working with all agencies and community partners to improve life outcomes for our young people and break the cycle of disadvantage

**Anthony Thompson**  
Chair of the Board



## Message from the COO

**The past 12 months have proved to us all the need to remain responsive and flexible when faced with unexpected change.**

Our focus has been to work closely with state child protection agencies and all partners in our care model to mitigate the practical impacts and emotional toll of COVID-19 on our young people and their carers.

Alongside the challenges of the pandemic, the past year has been a time of incredible growth at Safe Places with the establishment of two new service areas and expansion of our corporate functions in governance and risk, human resources, learning and development and quality assurance. These efforts position us well to respond to the dramatic increase in demand for our services

My heartfelt thanks go out to our frontline staff who support our young people daily and to our corporate employees who work hard behind the scenes to keep everything running smoothly.

This commitment to quality, safe and therapeutic care for our young people is the hallmark of Safe Places for Children.

**Amanda Dunn**  
Chief Operations Officer



## Our services

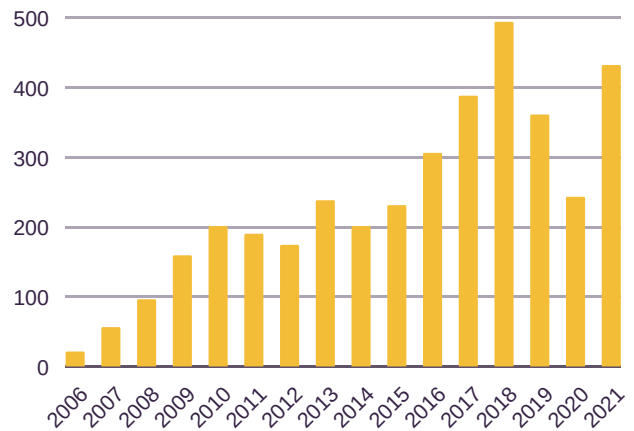
Following referrals from state government child protection agencies, Safe Places offers trauma-informed therapeutic residential care to vulnerable young people, aged 10 to 18 years, who exhibit complex trauma, emotional and behavioural problems. Our goal is to stabilise the young person, teach them better coping strategies and transition them to a less intensive model of care.

We provide short-, intermediate- and long-term placement options, including solo placements, sibling placements (where safe to do so), transition into independent living, transition into semi-independent/supported living, reunification with kinship or significant persons, family-based placements, foster care placements, and less-intensive residential care facilities. We also provide outreach support services to our young people when they transition into home-based care or independent living.

## Certified quality management

Through all stages of a young person's care experience with us, our commitment to quality is exemplified by our ISO 9001 certification. Safe Places is the only solely therapeutic residential care organisation for young people in Australia holding such certification.

## Placements 2006-2021\*



Total to June 2020: 3218

\*Individual placements including short-term and emergency placements



ISO 9001  
QUALITY



## 2021 at a glance



**16** service areas across 5 states



**431** young people supported during past 12 months



**189** homes established or maintained for young people in our care



**251** young people transitioned out of care

## Service delivery areas



## Service partners

Safe Places is adept at working in close collaboration with statutory child protection agencies and multi-disciplinary, wraparound providers, where negotiated contracts, confidential information, shared goals, collaborative planning and respective roles in the young person's case plan are clear.

In each operational area, we build and nurture a local network of allied health professionals, emergency services, drug and alcohol units, education and training facilities, employment services, disability services, secure welfare services, and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations and cultural support teams.

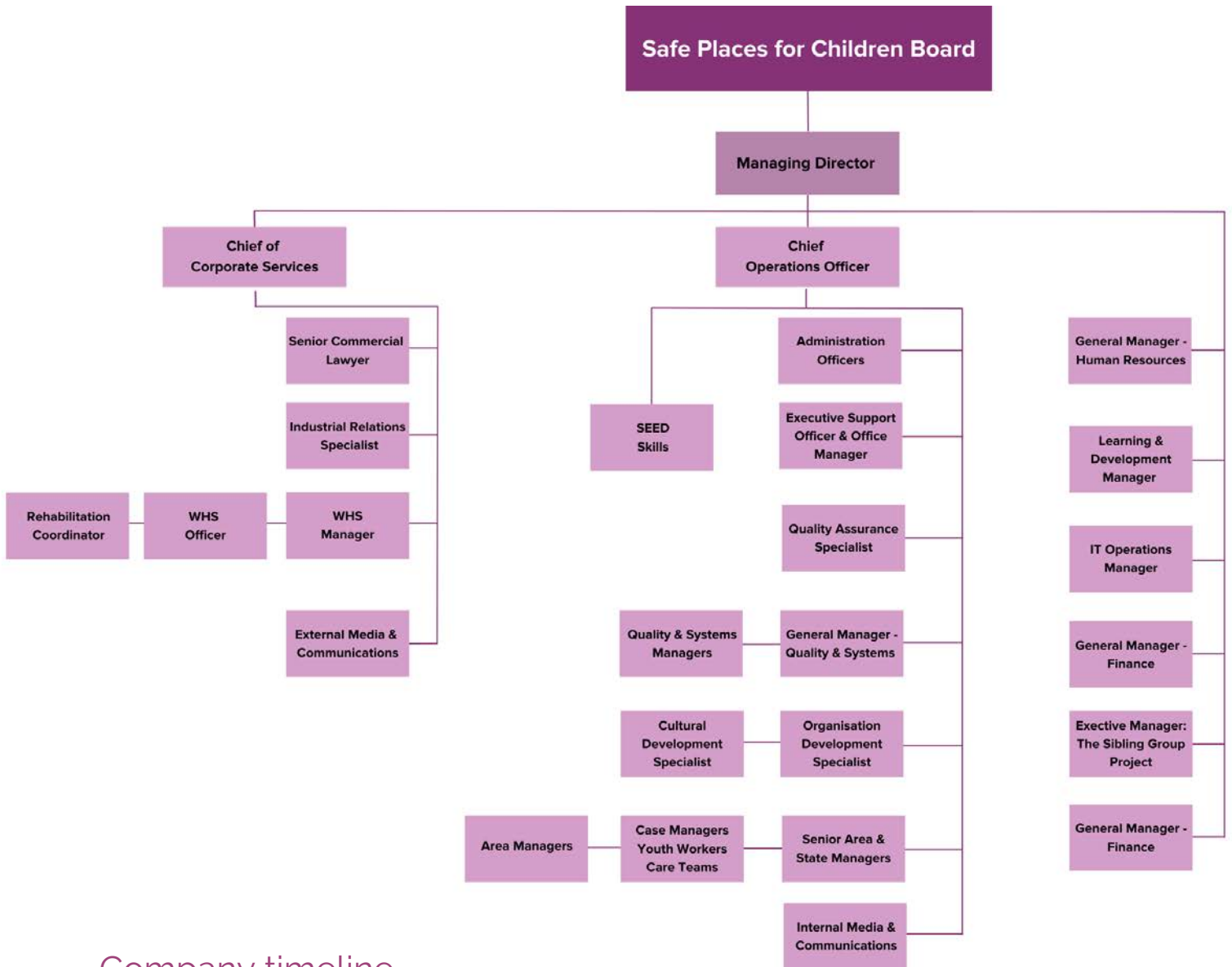
We engage in regular therapeutic clinics and complex case conferences involving departmental stakeholders, therapists, education providers, family and former and future carers.

All of these linkages reflect recommendations from reforms around Australia, as we are committed to establishing a national standard of care that exceeds individual state-based frameworks over the long-term.

# Governance

Safe Places for Children (trading as Safe Places Community Services) is a not-for-profit organisation registered as a Public Benevolent Institution with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission,

We are governed by a Board of Directors, to which the Executive Leadership Team is responsible for operational service delivery, management of our organisational functions and and expression of our core values.



# Company timeline







**2013**  
Achieved State licence  
for all QLD operations

**2016**  
Achieved State licence for Adelaide and Melbourne  
operations. Opened in Sydney. Commenced Safe  
Places for Children Enterprise Agreement  
(NSW, VIC, SA, TAS, ACT, NT) 2016

**2020**  
NSW accreditation for statutory  
out-of-home care



**2014**  
Developed Safe Places Integrative Practice  
Framework. Commenced Safe Places for  
Children Enterprise Agreement 2013

**2018**  
Achieved ISO9001:2015  
certification

# 2021 Year in review

## Service delivery

- Two new service areas established to meet demand in NSW Central Coast and the Gold Coast region.
- Increased capacity and adjusted our care model to accept sibling groups in select service areas, so that critical family connections could be maintained and nurtured as part of the healing process.
- Commenced implementation of the latest iteration of Therapeutic Crisis Intervention Edition 7 throughout our care model, internal processes and training programs.

## People and learning

- As part of our recruitment and retention programs, increased staff annual leave to six weeks and boosted staff anniversary bonuses based on years of service, capped at \$5000 for five years' service.
- Implemented Federal Government's portable long service leave scheme in Queensland.
- Expanded our Human Resources function to support our more than 800-strong workforce and drafted People and Capability Framework to guide employee development.
- Introduced e-learning platform to expand training delivery modes and better utilise training team capacity.
- Revised youth worker induction programs to accommodate legislative and practice reforms.

## Governance and risk

- The Safe Places for Children Board farewelled long-standing Board Member, Petra O'Meara, and welcomed Sienna Perry to the Board.
- Commenced NextGen Project to upgrade enterprise finance and HR systems to accommodate anticipated growth and boost data security and protection.
- Introduced multi-factor authentication for all staff to enhance data security and protection.
- Consolidated key corporate policies into a best practice, integrated Employee Code of Conduct.

## Compliance and quality

- Victoria – Achieved three-year re-certification in Human Services Standards and National Services Disability Standards. Received highest possible rating for Residential Care Audit Program.
- Queensland – Maintained certification in Humans Service Quality Standards
- Achieved three-year re-certification in ISO9001 Quality Management Systems
- Amended internal processes to accommodate changes to Queensland's Blue Card system
- Conducted our annual Young Person's Survey to ensure the young people in our care can continue to influence their care experience
- Introduced a new online document library and transitioned all key company information.

## Key challenges in 2022

In addition to the economic and social challenges that COVID-19 brought to all communities and workplaces, we are also preparing for increased operating costs due to external regulatory requirements, inflationary effects and others factors beyond our control.

Wherever possible, we will continue to introduce internal efficiencies and service improvements to keep our costs low and absorb increases wherever we can, though the following are driving cumulative pressure on our funding arrangements.

- The recently announced Federal Government's 2.5% increase to the minimum wage and 0.5% increase to the Superannuation Guarantee effective from 1 July 2021, are driving wage increases across our more than 800-strong workforce.
- Implementation of portable long service for community service workers in Queensland and Victoria incurs ongoing costs and requires increased financial reserves for future employee entitlements.
- Along with many other organisations providing care to young people, we have declared our intention to participate in the National Redress Scheme. Budgeting must now encompass significant provision for potential claims under the Scheme.
- Due the high-risk behaviours of the young people we care for, considerable financial and organisational resources must be devoted to managing workplace health and safety risks and issues, including making financial provision for current or potential WorkCover claims and increasing Workcover premiums.
- The organisation continues to sustain attacks by isolated individuals regarding allegations of wage theft and underpayment, as part of a broader campaign to destabilise enterprise bargaining in the youth residential care sector. Significant resources have been diverted to defend unsubstantiated claims made to the Fair Work Commission, Fair Work Ombudsman, Police services, Human Rights Commission, governmental inquiries and a range of media outlets.
- Current labour market conditions are making it more difficult to recruit and retain skilled youth work professionals and corporate staff. This is in a sector that already experiences high turnover of frontline staff due to the high-stress setting of complex, therapeutic residential care.
- Direct operating costs continue to rise, including rising rental costs in a competitive housing market, utility costs and costs of repairs.

## Our model of care

The young people we care for have experienced significant trauma and display extremely challenging behaviours. Often the only alternative for them, if not support from Safe Places, is the juvenile justice system or a secure hospital ward.

We understand that most children in care have missed fundamental development experiences or have been subjected to traumatic experiences which often impede normal development. Because of this, everything we do is focussed on helping the young person to heal and move forward with a sense of hope and direction.

Our model of care is customised to each young person's needs and an individualised care map is developed with input from the young person, their care team and departmental stakeholders. We purposely keep our care teams small and stable to minimise disruption for the young person and encourage stronger attachments.

Once stabilised, we aim to transition the young person to a less intensive model of care. We have transitioned, on average, nearly 70% percent of clients aged 12 to 17 to a less cost-intensive model of care within the past 12 months.

### Kayla's story

Kayla has been in care with Safe Places for more than four years, coming to us when she was just 13 from a remote coastal town in northern Western Australia. Now nearly 18, Kayla is almost set to transition back up north to semi-independent living situation surrounded by her family.

Kayla came to us from an extremely unsettled, traumatised background resulting in an array of very challenging behaviours, including physical and verbal aggression with regular assaults on staff, extreme property damage, sexualised behaviours, regularly putting herself at risk, illegal activity and unable to regulate her emotions and behaviours.

During the first two years, Kayla's team used therapeutic crisis intervention strategies daily to support Kayla and help her regulate the intensity and duration of her emotional states. Kayla's severe fetal alcohol syndrome disorders and developmental delays meant she struggled to understand why her emotions would go off track and how to control them. All the basics had to be taught.

A consistent and structured daily schedule and simple, concrete instructions helped to build a safe and stable environment around Kayla.

The matching process was also vital, as many staff struggled to work with Kayla due to her regularly assaulting and targeting them. After reflecting on incidents and through staff feedback, we worked to match staff to Kayla's needs and stabilise the team around her.

As time went on, the team slowly started to build rapport and connection, which allowed Kayla's carers to use the TCI strategies more effectively and include more therapeutic conversations. Kayla's home began to feel safe for her and critical incidents lessened. Remarkably, over the nearly five years Kayla has been with Safe Places, we have never had her placement pause due to her being detained, hospitalised or disengaged.

We have seen Kayla go from strength to strength, engaging in education, reconnecting with family in a positive way and being able to regulate her emotions,

She is a funny, caring and outgoing young person whom all of our team agrees is an absolute pleasure to be around. We look forward to supporting Kayla as she turns 18 and transitions into adulthood.



## Joey's story

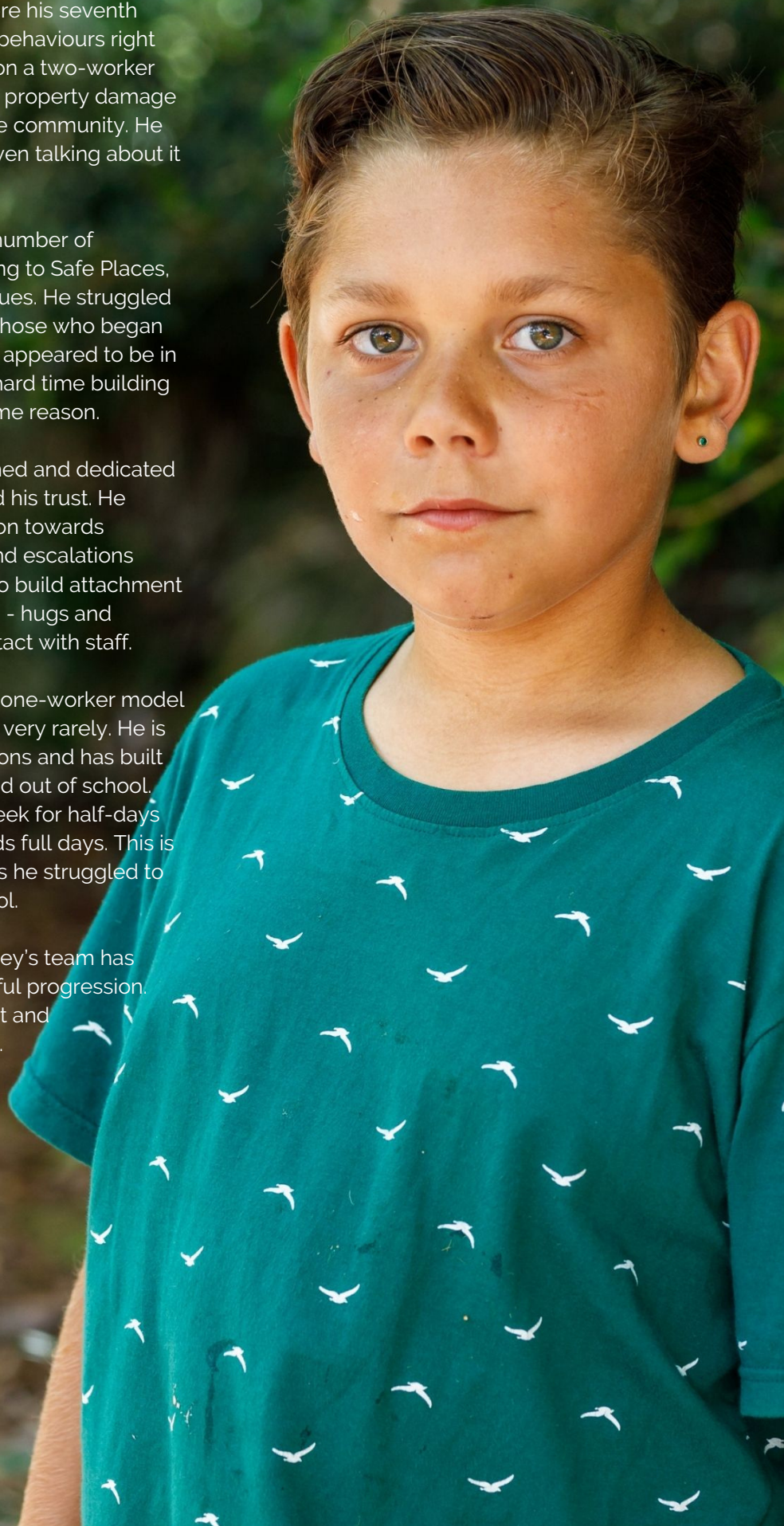
Joey arrived at Safe Places just before his seventh birthday and displayed challenging behaviours right from the start. He was soon placed on a two-worker model due to daily assaults on staff, property damage and assaulting other members of the community. He would not engage in school at all; even talking about it could cause an escalation.

Joey had experienced a significant number of placements for his age before coming to Safe Places, leading to significant attachment issues. He struggled to accept support, often assaulting those who began to build rapport with him. He always appeared to be in a tug of war emotionally and had a hard time building friendships with his peers for the same reason.

By keeping a consistent, well-matched and dedicated team around Joey, we slowly gained his trust. He began to show empathy and affection towards his carers and, over time, assaults and escalations reduced. One of the key strategies to build attachment was through safe and positive touch - hugs and high-fives and positive physical contact with staff.

One year later and Joey is back to a one-worker model with critical incidents occurring only very rarely. He is much better at controlling his emotions and has built a good network of friends both in and out of school. He attends school five days each week for half-days and is making good progress towards full days. This is a significant achievement for Joey as he struggled to even initially stand outside the school.

By building attachment and trust, Joey's team has supported him to make this wonderful progression. Joey now feels safe in his placement and says he is very happy at Safe Places.





“The biggest thing of all is that supporting children and young people is very rewarding. At first, you don't think it is when you're working with a challenging young person who is extremely vulnerable, but when you see the changes, progress and the outcomes - that's rewarding,”

- Safe Places Area Manager

# Our Integrative Practice Framework

Our Integrative Practice Framework (IPF) provides a foundation for all elements of our service provision and details our procedures across intake, care and transition out. It is the product of many years of practical experience and evidence-based research, drawing inspiration from the following contemporary, evidence-based, therapeutic models of care.

- ARC (Attachment, Regulation and Competency) model
- CARE (Containment, Awareness, Resilience and Engagement) Framework
- Sanctuary Model
- Bruce Perry's Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics
- Daniel Hughes' Dyadic Developmental Principles for facilitating attachment (PACE model)
- Ross Green and Stuart Ablon's Collaborative Problem-solving Approach.

We understand that the children we support will often take their experiences of complex trauma into their future relationships with caregivers, which often manifests in hard-wired survival behaviours characterised by aggression, a need to control others, resistance to connection and general non-compliance.

Without a strong, embedded therapeutic framework, there is an inherent risk that residential care staff will personalise a young person's behaviour and over time begin to respond to them in ways that are punitive, rejecting and even threatening.

Our IPF has been specifically designed and embedded into our practice to prevent this cycle of relational trauma and supports our staff (not just those providing care) to depersonalise a young person's pain-based behaviours.

A key element of our IPF is our promotion of non-restrictive practice, meaning staff will not lock young people in or out of their rooms or the house, or take items away as a punishment or control measure. Instead, our teams focus on building positive and respectful relationships with young people and role-modelling to assist them to make positive decisions for themselves. This is an opportunity the young person may not previously have been offered.

In addition, all aspects of a young person's care experience with us are regularly audited through our Quality and Systems function, ensuring that we meet state licensing requirements and our own internal standards.

## Six practice domains



Care worker affect management, attunement, and consistency

Safety, emotional identification and monitoring, emotional modulation, emotional expression

Expectations, zone of proximal development, collaborative problem-solving, natural vs logical consequences

Supporting cultural ties and building family connections

Stable routines, promoting nurturing interactions, personalising the home

Living the Values, a dedicated Quality and Systems team, alignment with organisational strategy.



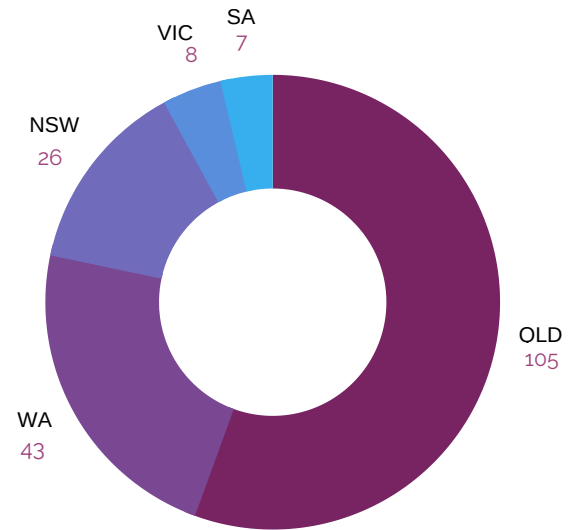
## Our homes

We take great pride in delivering safe, clean and homely living arrangements for our young people. Our homes are rental properties in suburban neighbourhoods, providing a family-oriented, therapeutic environment, where the child can feel safe, comfortable and secure.

Each house is staffed around the clock with at least one youth worker, and a senior youth worker or case manager on-call to provide additional support. Our Quality and Systems teams also conduct monthly property audits to ensure legislative standards are met or exceeded.

Wherever possible, we give young people a sense of control over their surroundings, including the ability to decorate their rooms. Many young people have established vegetable gardens or cared for pets to help develop positive and nurturing interactions. These initiatives help to reduce feelings of displacement.

Number of homes by state



Total properties FY2021: 189



## Our youth workers

Our youth workers are resilient and qualified professionals who come from all walks of life and share a passion for supporting young people with complex needs.

We appoint on merit following rigorous clinical and recruitment governance processes, including safety screening in line with regulatory, legislative and funding requirements to ensure that protections and safeguards are of the highest priority.

Our three-week induction program includes trauma and attachment training, shadow shifts with experienced youth workers or team leaders, and comprehensive in-house accredited training and support to gain mandatory formal qualifications.

### What do you think makes a good youth worker?

*"They understand you and approach kids in a way that doesn't agitate them."*

*"Honesty, kindness, a good listener, caring and loving, and keep an eye out."*

**"They clean the house and play with me"**

*"Really nice, makes me feel safe."*

\*2021 Young Person Survey

## Meet our youth workers

View our youth worker videos at >>

<https://www.safeplaces.com.au/youth-workers>







## Cultural diversity

Despite only making up five percent of youth across Australia aged 10–17 years, Indigenous children and young people are 10.6 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children.\*

Indigenous young people make up more than 40% of the national cohort of young people in out-of-home care\* and comprise just over 50% of the young people in Safe Places' care. In some states, up to 66% of the young people we care for are Indigenous.

In this context, it's vital that these children and young people in our care experience their culture within the context of a relationship and ideally a community. In 2019, we created the role of Cultural Development Specialist to guide our cultural journey and have already delivered the following key initiatives.

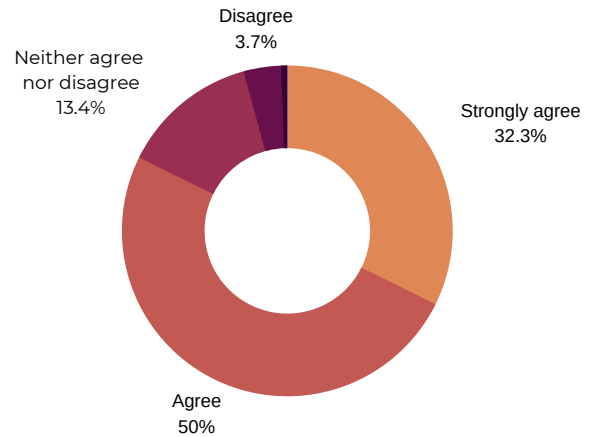
### Key initiatives - Cultural Development Framework

- Our Placement Register includes details of a young person's cultural identity, as chosen by the young person themselves. This gives us real-time data for our cohort of Indigenous young people and allows us to scale up appropriate resources, including youth workers and carers who share an Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or other culturally-diverse background.
- Each young person who identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander has culturally-appropriate initiatives and actions built into their specific care map. This may include researching their cultural history, regular contact with family and visits to country.

\*SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2020. Report on Government Services 2020. ART F. SECTION 16: Productivity Commission, Canberra.

- Our Cultural Diversity Survey gauges employee perception of Safe Places initiatives to boost cultural safety and informs our cultural awareness programs. The inaugural survey in 2019 set the benchmark for key indicators.
- Partnerships with local Aboriginal agencies upskill our staff through Cultural Sensitivity Training to build understanding and competence in the care and support of Indigenous young people.
- Acknowledgement of country has commenced rollout across five states and will be embedded into corporate practice.
- Our online Cultural Connections Hub has extensive resources and links to cultural information and activities for young people, including our cultural placement analytics, a Cultural Meetings Register for logging all engagement activities that support our cultural diversity goals, and a Learning Portal with details of our Cultural Awareness training.

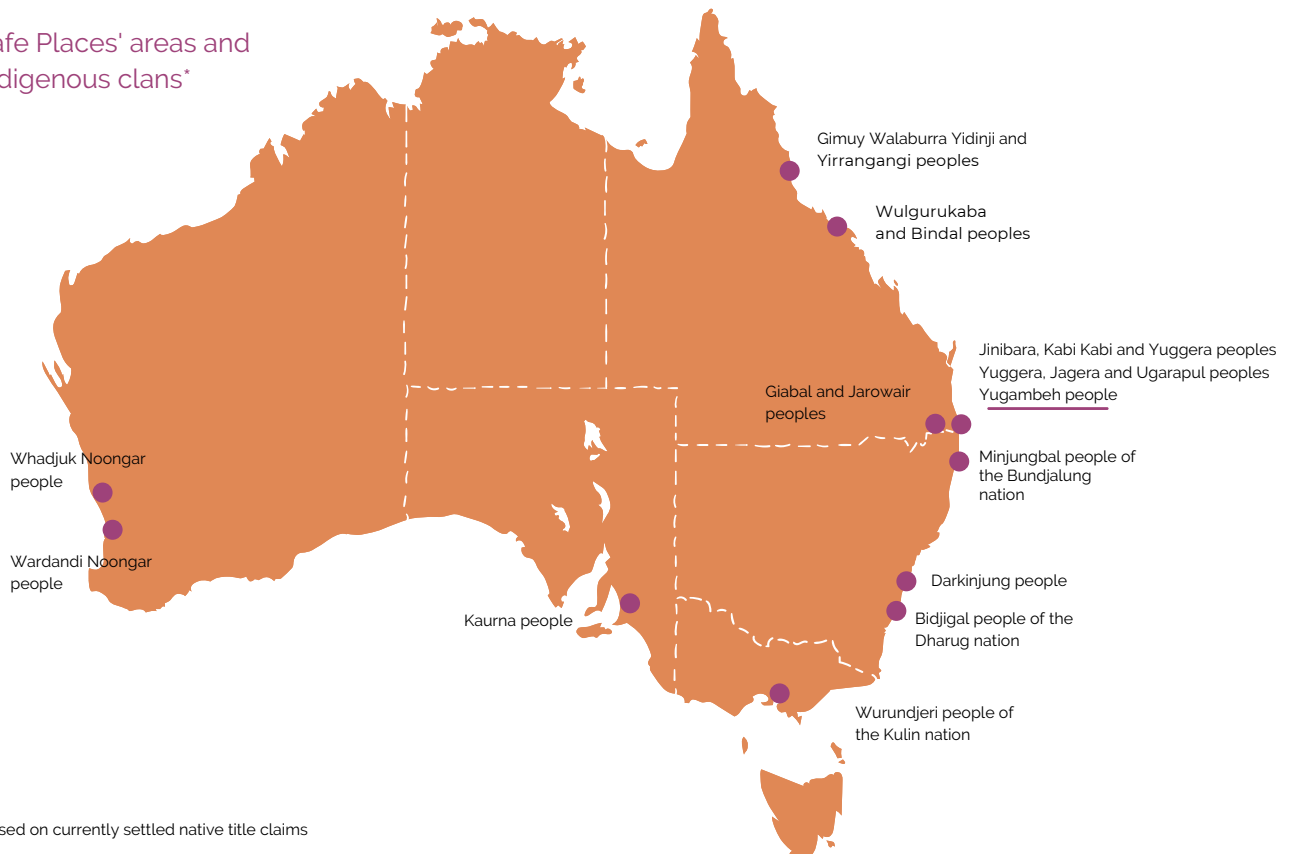
## Cultural Diversity Survey



*Being culturally responsive and safe care is about being part of a family, community and extended network and knowing where you belong.”*

(SNAICC 2011)

### Safe Places' areas and Indigenous clans\*



\*Based on currently settled native title claims







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