



VERITAS
HOUSE

ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23



Brief Note on Our History

Veritas House opened as a family and youth refuge in Bathurst in 1981. We have since grown into one of our region's largest providers of Foster Care and Youth Homelessness Services, supporting young people to be safe, secure and valued.

Traditional Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which Veritas House operates, the Wiradjuri Nation and pay our respect to Elders past, present and future.

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Veritas House is accredited by the Office of the Children's Guardian, the Australian Service Excellence Standards (ASES), and is registered as a charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC).



FROM THE CHAIR & CEO



Geoffrey Hastings



Jody Pearce

In the spirit of reconciliation Veritas House acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We are delighted to present to you Veritas House's Annual Report for the 2022-2023 financial year. Despite the challenges posed by a rapidly evolving landscape, Veritas House has continued to demonstrate its dedication to children, young people and families.

Veritas House continued to grow in 2022-2023 with our workforce increasing to over 120 staff and 105 carers. Even through this growth, Veritas House has maintained the highest standards of care, ensuring that each child, young person and family we work with receives the support they deserve. Our dedicated team have been provided with excellent feedback following audits against the Australian Service Excellence Standards and the Office of the Children's Guardian Child Safe Standards.

In December 2022 the Veritas House Strategic Plan 2022-2025 was launched. This plan was created by the Board and Executive Team at Veritas House following extensive consultation with children and young people, staff, carers, families, funders and peer organisations. This feedback was crucial to ensuring that our Strategic Plan reflects the needs of the community we serve. We thank everyone who participated in the consultation for their time and feedback on the strengths and opportunities for Veritas House.

We currently deliver a range of programs including:

- Youth Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in Bathurst and Orange
- Permanency Support (Foster Care)
- Premier's Youth Initiative (PYI)
- Case Work Support Services (CWSS)
- Homeless Youth Assistance Program (HYAP)
- Targeted Family Services (TFS)
- Interim Care Model (ICM)
- Supported Independent Living Services (SILS)
- Trauma-Informed Individual Placement and Support (TI-IPS)
- Bail & Accommodation Support Service (BASS)
- Clinical and Consultation Services (CCS).

This year we launched Trauma-Informed Individual Placement and Support (TI-IPS) funded by the Australian Government through the Local Jobs Program. This program extends our services to reach over 180 children and young people aged between 16 and 24 years. Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is an evidence-based model of employment support for individuals experiencing mental ill-health and integrates vocational support services with clinical mental health services. It is founded on being strengths-based and person-centred, integrating vocational assistance with mental health support. IPS places the employment preferences and strengths of the individual at the heart of how it identifies, seeks out, obtains, and maintains employment.



Donations towards the Veritas House Transitional Youth Housing Raffle



Veritas House service users enjoying a day at the zoo

Last year we fulfilled a long-term dream by purchasing a transitional youth property in Orange. The property was beautifully renovated and furnished and formally launched in a small 'Housewarming' celebration in January 2023. The celebration was attended by a number of key supporters of the Transitional Youth Housing Appeal along with staff and Board members.

Veritas House has a desire to continuously improve in all aspects of its operations. In 2022 the Carer Advisory Group (CAG) was established. The CAG supports and encourages a healthy, collaborative approach between Veritas House and Carers engaged in Permanency Support. The group is underpinned by mutual respect and empathy for the respective challenges we all face in supporting children and young people in Foster Care. The group is co-chaired by Operations Manager, Toneya Carr-Smith, and Carer, Steve Blackwell. Thank you to Steve Blackwell, Megan Morrow, Billie Henderson, Michelle Thurgood and Maureen Wilkins for your active engagement in the Group and for volunteering your time.



Indigenous Art Workshop for Veritas House service users with Sandon Gibbs O'Neill



Veritas House has remained committed to implementing a crisis prevention and intervention system across the agency. This system is known as Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI), of which a key component is Therapeutic Crisis Intervention training. This training is now made available to all staff at Veritas House and Directors. TCI has two goals of crisis intervention:

1. Support young people by providing immediate emotional and environmental support to reduce stress and risk and increase the young person's sense of safety; and
2. Teach young people by helping them learn and practice ways to regulate their emotions and behaviours.

Thank you to Peter Rohr (Clinical and Consultation Services Manager), Bronte Emanuel (Operations Manager – SILARS), Daniella Kelly (Team Leader – PSP) and Libby Sinclair (Projects Officer) for your commitment to being Accredited Facilitators of this training for your colleagues. Later in 2023, Veritas House will continue on this journey by bringing TCI to families and carers.

In 2023 Veritas House Support Services Limited was created. This exciting new chapter for the Veritas House Group aims to build our footprint providing clinical and consultation services for vulnerable children, young people and families in the Bathurst, Orange and surrounding communities.

We would like to express our gratitude to the dedicated employees of Veritas House, whose hard work and passion have been instrumental in our success. Despite the challenging environment Veritas House operates in, our staff work avidly to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and families.

We would like to acknowledge the continued dedication, support and leadership to Veritas House from Board Directors; Ron England, Tim Dalla, Andrew Paul, Ben Jenkins, Meghan Hibbert, Margaret Jones, Kerry Silverson and Pamela Hunter. There is no doubt that the coherence that we see in the day-to-day work of Veritas is also mirrored in this talented and cohesive team of Directors.

Finally, we also extend thanks to our partners for their trust and unwavering support. Together, we will continue to build a future where all people are safe, secure and valued.

Despite the challenges posed by a rapidly evolving landscape, Veritas House has continued to demonstrate its dedication to children, young people and families.



OUR VISION

Our Vision is to contribute to the creation of a socially just and caring community in which every person is safe, secure and valued.

OUR MISSION

Veritas House provides innovative, accessible, responsive services to the community through the provision of care, support and advocacy.

Our Mission is to:

- End the cycle of homelessness
- Empower people to reach their full potential
- Strengthen interpersonal, family and community relationships, and
- Work in the best interests of children and young people in Out of Home Care.



OUR VALUES

Our core operating values influence the culture and public image of Veritas. They articulate ideals that we aspire to hold ourselves accountable for and offer guidance about how we behave in carrying out our mission.

Relationships

We are all connected and the way we behave towards each other matters. Showing respect, being inclusive and communicating in a kind and honest way gives everyone the opportunity to feel valued. Strong relationships lead to mutual understanding and support.

Collaboration

We work together to solve problems and deliver solutions. We understand that bringing people together fosters empathy, builds trust and sparks creativity. Collaboration helps us achieve our goals and the goals of the children, young people and others we work with.

Compassion

With an open mind, we accept people without prejudice or judgement. Compassion opens our minds to others, regardless of our differences. Compassion allows us to work in a caring, well-informed way that respects the experiences and needs of the people we work with.

Authenticity

We are true to ourselves and stand up for what we believe, regardless of pressure from others. We don't try to be what we're not, and this transparency means others know where they stand with us. Our actions are genuine and without pretence.

HOMELESSNESS AND EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES

Veritas House Homelessness and Early Intervention Program (HEI) consists of the Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS), Targeted Family Services (TFS) and the Homeless Youth Assistance Program (HYAP). All of our programs work towards holistic individually tailored responses to the needs of our service users. Each program is delivered by the Veritas team consisting of passionate practitioners dedicated to reducing homelessness and supporting young people and families.

Veritas House SHS team footprint covers the LGA's of Bathurst, Oberon, Orange, Cabonne and Blayney. SHS across Orange and Bathurst has 9 beds available for crisis accommodation and transitional accommodation options available. The team provides assistance with rehousing and responding to and managing complex needs.

Veritas House TFS service provides support to families within the community via delivery of parenting programs and casework support to target early intervention with areas of vulnerability such as child abuse, neglect, domestic violence and social networking and support.

HYAP services cover a wide area of the Central West NSW. The service is specifically targeted to 12-15-year-old young people (unaccompanied under 16-year-olds) at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

This year Veritas House HEI services celebrated in some exciting ventures. 2023 has seen the unveiling of a 2-bedroom Transitional Youth Housing property in Orange with Veritas partnering with Newcastle permanent charitable foundation who provided a \$60,000 grant used to refurbish the property. This property is used to support young people as they navigate the housing market to secure more permanent accommodation to live independently. Veritas has also been working toward the unveiling of a transitional property in July through a partnership with Bathurst RSL to meet the needs of families involved in our TFS program who are experiencing homelessness and transitioning to more permanent accommodation options.

34.2% of SHS service users engaged with Veritas House identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

51.8% of SHS service users were at risk of experiencing homelessness.

22.1% of SHS service users were experiencing homelessness.

21 young people were experiencing homelessness and 27 were at risk of homelessness and supported through HYAP at Veritas House.

Veritas House TFS service provides support to families within the community via delivery of parenting programs and casework support to target early intervention with areas of vulnerability such as child abuse, neglect, domestic violence and social networking and support.

Cassidy's Journey to Finding Home and Hope

Having endured more trials in her teenage years than many will experience in a lifetime, Cassidy finally found a safe home, with a stable network of friends around her and a bright future ahead. Cassidy shares her story, along with her former Veritas House caseworker, Anna.*

Before arriving at Veritas House's Youth refuge at nearly 18 years of age, Cassidy describes how staff from Veritas persistently reached out to offer her help. "I had been through a rough domestic violence situation. I was doing [drugs] every day, to the point where I was doing crime and getting arrested. I was not the best version of myself. I was on the street and Veritas called me again. They said, 'We can come and get you, just tell us where you are. We want to help you.' At this point, I had nothing. Nobody around me; no family. So I said, 'Okay, I'll come'. They were genuinely concerned about me, and they didn't judge me at all, not for a second."

During her stay at the youth refuge, Cassidy received help to access drug and alcohol support services, mental health services, financial support to pay her debts and manage her money, as well as assistance to develop a resume, get her Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) and Responsible Conduct of Gambling (RCG) certificates and secure employment within the hospitality industry. Veritas House caseworker, Anna, recalls the impressive effort Cassidy put in to making these positive changes in her life. "When she first entered the refuge, she was detoxing off drugs, but she made a quick turnaround. She came a long way within that environment and towards the end of her stay, she was very much like a role model for the other young people there."

Cassidy describes the responsibility she felt as the oldest resident in the refuge, to set a good example, "I sort of turned into a big sister, which was new to me, like, being someone that people would look up to," says Cassidy.

Having achieved stability during her stay at the youth refuge, Cassidy moved to a Veritas House Transitional Youth Flat and began working directly with Anna to live independently. "She's a very motivated young person. She completed the module 'Rent It, Keep It', where we go through things like, what's a lease, what's a bond, paying rent and bills. I showed her things like how to read a pay slip and do a tax return, and assisted her to get a loan, so she could purchase a car."

After a few short months in the transitional flat, Cassidy was ready to move into a private rental with a flat mate and has since taken over the lease to live independently. "It feels like so many people just gave me a chance. My work gave me a chance, Veritas gave me a chance and my roommate gave me a chance. It's led me to the best part of my life," says Cassidy. "Now I work full-time as a bar supervisor. I love it; it's a big passion. I have my own place; it's a really nice little house. I've got my dog and I've got a great group of friends. I'm going to keep saving money until I can afford to go to uni. My goal is to do a public health course; I'm really interested in women's health, so I'd like to be a women's health educator or something like that."

Of the Veritas House workers who supported her, Cassidy says, "They were just coming from such a place of kindness, genuine kindness. It wasn't like, 'This is my job. I have to do this.' They were worried and concerned about me. It is definitely not weak to ask for help, as much as it feels like it at the time. You can do so much more with other people around you and other people helping you."

**Names changed and generic image used to protect privacy.*



After a few short months in the transitional flat, Cassidy was ready to move into a private rental with a flat mate and has since taken over the lease to live independently.

BRIDGING THE GAP: NEW TRANSITIONAL HOUSING SOLUTIONS IN ORANGE AND BATHURST

With access to affordable housing continuing to be a significant barrier we were thrilled to unveil two new Transitional Housing properties in 2023; one located in Orange, and one in Bathurst.

Orange Transitional Youth Housing

In response to a desperate shortage of affordable properties available to support vulnerable young people in our community, Veritas House launched its Transitional Youth Housing Appeal in December 2018. After nearly 4 years of fundraising, we purchased a two-bedroom apartment in Orange in 2022. The property was then renovated, thanks to a \$60,000 grant from Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation, which enabled us to paint, re-carpet, install energy-efficient lighting and heating, and furnish the flat to make it a comfortable home for young people for years to come.

The property will be leased for six to nine months to young people transitioning into independence, with case workers providing support to obtain furniture, secure ongoing income, and learn budget and tenancy management skills. At the end of their lease, Veritas will provide a reference, and advocate for and support the young people in securing long-term accommodation.

"I grew up in a few different places before I moved to Orange when I was 10. I liked growing up in Orange. I was happy and had friends. One of my friends, Nadia, had been kicked out of home and we started sleeping in my car because we didn't have anywhere else to go. Someone told us about Veritas and said we should get in touch to see how they could help us. We met Drew and Emma; they were great. Everyone at Veritas have been friendly and helpful. They helped us find emergency accommodation until the flat we are in now was ready. They also helped us with food and to find jobs so we could earn money to buy our own food and live here. It felt great. It was such a relief. The flat was so nice and it was our own space; it was calm. I am in a routine now. I am working up to 36 hours a week and am really busy.

*It's good; I can afford to do things to my car.
I would like to maybe go to TAFE and learn more about how to fix up my car."*

– Anna, Resident of Orange Transitional Youth Housing Apartment



Orange Transitional Youth House - Bathroom



Orange Transitional Youth House - Bedroom



Bathurst Transitional Youth House - Lounge



Bathurst Transitional Youth House - Dining Room

Bathurst Transitional Housing

Recognising the need for more affordable rental accommodation in Bathurst, the Bathurst RSL Club spent approximately 10 months renovating one of its owned properties before offering it to be used by Veritas House as Transitional Housing for vulnerable young people and families. Renovations to the three-bedroom house included reparative work to the foundations, fencing, painting, new carpet, heating, lighting and electrical upgrades, as well as new furnishings. Veritas House now offer the property to young people and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness, as they access other support services.

"Prior to moving into the Transitional House, I felt shame that I wasn't able to provide housing for my girls. When Covid occurred so did inflation. We were living in a home that wasn't great and the rent was high. I had received 90 days' notice to leave the house and I applied for over 200 houses during the Covid period; it was crazy! After the 90 days, I contacted Link to Home and we stayed in hotels around Bathurst for 49 nights, stayed with friends, camped with some friends at Sofala, slept in the car, slept a few days here and there at my Mum's 1 bedroom place.

When we connected with Veritas House, we eventually were able to move into the Transitional House. Now, the girls are settled, unpacked and placing their toys in their room the way they like it; before the girls weren't able to unpack any of their things, now they can.

The house is in an amazing location, we can walk to shops nearby and the girls school bus is right across the road, which is great. The food hampers and pantry staples from Veritas House have been very helpful, and the caseworkers are so compassionate, they provide lots of supporting information. But the biggest support has been this house."

– Carolyn, Resident of Bathurst Transitional Youth Housing House

"This is an incredibly exciting milestone for Veritas House and could not have been possible without the overwhelming support of businesses, individuals and community groups who have supported our efforts to provide more transitional housing across our region."

– Jody Pearce, Veritas House CEO

SUPPORTED INDEPENDENT LIVING AND RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

Veritas House Supported Independent Living and Residential Services consists of the Supported Independent Living Program (SIL), Interim Care Model (ICM), Premier's Youth Initiative (PYI), Case Work Support Service (CWSS) and the newly introduced Trauma Informed Individual Placement Support (TI-IPS) program.

The Supported Independent Living Program at Veritas House provides the opportunity for young people in statutory out of home care to live independently with the support and guidance of caseworkers. A young person can be in the program for up to 2 years and must enter some time between 16-18 years. In the last financial year, SILs experienced our highest number of young people in the program supporting 17 in their own property. We have not lost a tenancy and have been able to strengthen our relationships with real estates and be proactive in any concerns with properties. SILs have advocated on the behalf of young people to get some fantastic outcomes including full time employment, traineeships, support to get into university and other models of care.

The Interim Care Model known as Wambinya, is a home like environment staffed by a dedicated team of youth workers. Wambinya is for children and siblings in out of home care between the age range of 9-14 years of age to stay, learn and grow until a more permanent placement is found. In the interim care space, a decision was made to close our second interim care house known as Helix House. With the challenges in workforce recruitment, we agreed to focus the energy on Wambinya house which was our first ICM house. We received positive feedback from the OCG monitoring audit in October/November of 2022 along with a few areas of improvement for the ICM. Those improvements were made and recognised in June 2023.

The Premier's Youth Initiative supports the most vulnerable young people likely to experience homelessness from the age of 16 and 9 months and older. The dedicated team focus on supporting practical life skills, housing support and education and employment support through those crucial adult years. Following an increase in young people reaching out to our service post 18 years of age, we were successful in increasing the age range of young people referring through the community referral pathway from 17 to 19 years.

We have also been successful in increasing our community referral program numbers to meet the demand. In the last financial year, PYI's community housing provider My Foundations Youth Housing have provided 19 young people at its peak into subsidised transitional accommodation across Western NSW.

The Casework Support Services (CWSS) team help children and young people, their families and carers to manage day-to-day life by providing supervised contact for meaningful connections, safe transport between destinations, mentoring, and respite options to promote sustainability in care arrangements. Throughout 2022-23 CWSS had a keen focus on staff training and development which has built a competent and confident team that is passionate about quality service provision for Veritas House service users as well as external clients. As a result, there has been a steady increase of external requests for services primarily from Department of Communities and Justice as well as other Non-government organisations in the sector.

In 2023, we introduced a new program focused on achieving the employment goals of young people who have experienced trauma with intense support to ensure the sustainability of employment for both the young person and the employer. The Trauma Informed-Individual Placement Support (TI-IPS) is funded by the Federal Government to offer the employment and training element of PYI to young people in our organisation. This is a really exciting program to increase the employment support to young people aged 16-24 years who have experienced a trauma history.

PYI

In 2022-23, **94** young people were engaged in the PYI program.

34 young people exited the program. All 34 young people had an exit plan and met their goals.

SILs

Supported **19** young people in the model.

Exits: **7** young people were capable of living independently, 1 young person exited to a disability SIL and 1 young person exited to Uni accommodation.

Skye's Story from Homelessness to Hopeful Horizons

First-time mum, Skye, embarked on a transformative journey following the birth of her beautiful baby girl. With dedication and support, she continues to overcome adversity and now sets her sights on a bright future.

Skye was referred to Veritas House's Premier's Youth Initiative (PYI) program in December 2022, soon after turning 18 and leaving Out-of-Home (Foster) Care. Skye was pregnant, living between the homes of her own family and her boyfriend's family. When she initially met members of the PYI team at Veritas House, she expressed her desire to earn her own income, secure a driver's licence, and her own housing. However, at the time, with the challenges Skye faced, she found these goals overwhelming and beyond her reach.

Skye began working with both a Transitional Support Worker and an Education & Employment Mentor. She worked hard to build her capacity around independent living skills and increase her knowledge of how to maintain and manage a tenancy through weekly engagements and over the phone support. Skye was also assisted with budgeting skills and money management.

Shortly after joining the PYI program, Skye gave birth to a healthy baby girl. However, the new mum and bub were forced into homelessness after the relationship between Skye and her partner ended.

After a short stay in emergency crisis accommodation, Skye and her daughter moved into their own rental property with the help of her Veritas House Transitional Support Worker and My Foundations Youth Housing. Since moving in, Skye has been able to create a home for herself and her baby, and continues to work towards achieving her goals.

Our Education and Employment Mentor has been working with Skye on the skills needed for a return to work when the time is right for her and her baby. Skye is keen for a new career path and has a keen interest in the hospitality and travel industries.



ICM

Supported **14** children in the model.

Exits: **3** to foster care placements,
7 to other models of care (4 still in house) .

CWSS

From August 22 to June 23, CWSS supported children and young people at Veritas in **631** completed jobs and 13 external jobs. This is a combination of mentoring, contacts, transport and in-house respite.

*"Veritas House helped me to secure a house,
I wouldn't have got it if they didn't help me.*

Things are going good right now.

If you are ever struggling, seek help;

Veritas can help you."

- Skye, PYI service user

BREAKING BARRIERS: A WORLD FIRST PROGRAM ADDRESSING THE BARRIERS OF EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH TRAUMA

In June 2023, Veritas House was awarded a contract by the Australian Government through the Local Jobs Program to establish and deliver a world-first initiative designed to achieve vocational outcomes for local young people who have experienced trauma.

In partnership with Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, Veritas House established a pilot program which aims to address the range of barriers of employment for young people experiencing mental ill-health, particularly those who have experienced extreme trauma. The Trauma-Informed Individual Placement and Support program, referred to as TI-IPS, sees Veritas House Education and Employment Mentors working with 16 to 24-year-olds who have experienced trauma and are not engaged in, or are at risk of disengaging from, employment, education or training. Initially, the program will be open to young people who are accessing Veritas House services with a plan to expand the program to external agencies in time.

Following the initial intake, mentors work with the young person to identify their short and long-term goals. Once we have an understanding of what they would like to achieve, together we create a career plan. This helps to identify and address any barriers they might face in not only gaining employment but retaining it too. The program offers practical training and assistance from writing resumes and job applications, to preparing for interviews, including sourcing appropriate work wear. Once a young person has secured employment, their mentor supports them to sustain it. They provide support and assistance to help the employer understand how the young person might react in certain situations. Veritas House checks in with the employer on where the young person might require assistance to continue to build certain skills within the workplace, which could be as small as making more eye contact whilst they're at work or practicing how to work the till. Support can be provided for up to 12 months, being as readily available as needed.

“The TI-IPS program will have a massive impact on young people feeling successful, feeling supported in employment, knowing that their employer has a level of understanding about trauma and why it might cause them to behave differently to a person who hasn't experienced trauma. Their employer will be able to meet them where they're at, in order to help them grow and develop. This program will go a long way towards breaking the cycle for these young people in terms of maintaining employment, feeling successful, feeling supported, which then flows on to their day-to-day life to be able to live independently and financially support themselves.”

– Bronte Emanuel, Operations Manager Supported Independent Living & Residential Services (SILARS)



*“TI-IPS is about supporting young people with history of trauma to obtain and sustain employment.
We help our clients find employment that aligns with their career aspirations
and support them in understanding how trauma may affect them in the workplace.
We also work alongside their employers to help make reasonable workplace adjustments
for better outcomes all round.”*

– Tyler Martin, Senior Education and Employment Mentor

As part of the pilot, Orygen will evaluate the program every six months and will conduct research to measure the effectiveness of this individualised model to ensure it continues to meet the vocational needs of some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people in regional NSW.

Veritas House invites the support of businesses across the Central West to be part of the TI-IPS program. Your support could be as simple as offering short-term work experience so that the young people can gain insight into different industries and begin to learn by hand, or by hiring them as full, part-time or casual workers, with the assurance of support from Veritas House Education and Employment Mentors. To learn more about the mutual benefits TI-IPS can offer call our SILARS Operations Manager, Bronte Emanuel, on 6332 3882 or email Bronte.Emanuel@veritashouse.org.au

TI-IPS is supported by funding from the Australian Government through the Local Jobs Program.



PERMANENCY SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Permanency Support Program (PSP) supports children and young people who are in statutory Out-of-Home Care. These children and young people are aged between 0 and 17 years and are supported by the PSP team with day-to-day case management. We have a broad range of Foster Carers who open their homes and offer a nurturing and stable environment filled with love whilst we explore more permanent options. The PSP team also welcomes and provides on-going support to children and young people's birth families.

The PSP program exists to keep children and young people in our communities safe. At times families may face many different hardships and trauma which is where we come in to support them and their children in the hope that they can heal and create change. Our primary focus is on ensuring that children and young people remain at the centre of everything we do and to ensure that their voices are heard. We aim to work towards their case plan goal of either Restoration, Guardianship or Pre-Adoption and support all relevant stakeholders especially their birth families and foster carers during this process.

During 2022-23 we underwent both a monitoring audit with the Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG) as well as our accreditation renewal with the OCG. The OCG is an independent statutory authority for the NSW Government. The OCG's role is to oversee agencies and ensure that they uphold the child safe standards and provide children and young people with appropriate support. These two audits were incredibly positive, and the PSP team members should be proud of their continued dedication and commitment to the work that we do each day. We will receive our formal feedback towards the end of 2023 with the recommendation for our next accreditation period.

The PSP team, with the support of our Foster Carers, established the Carer Advisory Group. The aim is to bring together the voices of Veritas House authorised carers and staff representatives to find solutions to challenging problems. It is proving to be effective, and I have enjoyed the creative solutions we have come up with to address the challenges that have been raised.

99 Children and young people were supported by PSP during the financial year.

Number of service users who exited to another service or have achieved goals:

14 of those were Case Management Transfer exits to other agencies.

2 exited to guardianship.

2 restored to family home [exit service following PR & supervision orders expiring].

1 exited to Supported Independent Living.

2 aged out.

Finding Solutions to Challenging Problems: Introducing Veritas House's Carer Advisory Group

In 2022, Veritas House established the Carer Advisory Group in response to feedback from carers to provide a forum for meaningful dialogue between themselves and the agency in an effort to find solutions to challenging problems.

The Carer Advisory Group (CAG) brings together the voices of Veritas House, authorised Carers and staff representatives to support and encourage collaboration. It provides an avenue for concerns to be raised, and solutions to be identified, and is underpinned by mutual respect and empathy for the respective challenges faced by everyone in supporting children and young people in the Out-of-Home Care sector.

The CAG actively develops better ways to support Carers, advocating for their needs and having input into training, peer support, communication issues and post placement support for carers - particularly where the placement has broken down. The CAG also plays a vital role as an official voice of Veritas House Carers in improving our policies and procedures and contributing to our advocacy efforts for children and young people.

Meeting bi-monthly, the CAG is co-chaired by the Permanency Support Program Operations Manager and a directly appointed carer. The CAG Secretary and the Clinical and Consultation Services Manager make up the Veritas House representatives. The group also has four directly appointed carers and four elected carers.

The Office of the Children's Guardian, who provide accreditation to Veritas House, were impressed with the initiative and the meaningful communication that is taking place between Veritas House and Carers.

If you would like more information regarding the CAG, or you are a Veritas House Carer and would like to nominate yourself for a vacant position on the advisory group, or if you would like to raise a topic for discussion, you can email us at careradvisorygroup@veritashouse.org.au

"While only having been established for a short time, the CAG has contributed quite a lot to ensure that together we are giving the best outcomes to the children in our care.

We have discussed communication and information dissemination to carers, provided input to various policies, discussed issues around respite and the information provided to carers re the children in respite...The CAG is a great initiative having positive impacts on how Veritas House supports us as carers."

- Steve Blackwell, Co-chair



ADVANCING TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE THROUGH THERAPEUTIC CRISIS INTERVENTION

In 2022-23, Veritas House reaffirmed its commitment to implementing the Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) system throughout the organisation. TCI is a comprehensive crisis prevention and intervention framework designed to cultivate a trauma-sensitive environment. Our primary goal is to ensure that young people in our care feel safe and supported as they learn essential emotional regulation and effective coping skills.

This year, the TCI trainers at Veritas House have continued to deliver TCI Training for staff across the agency. To equip our staff with the necessary skills, we conducted seven 26-hour courses throughout the financial year, which saw 65 Veritas House staff members achieve the competency standards, enhancing their ability to provide the best possible care and support. This training has been attended by our CEO, right through to our frontline staff. Ensuring ongoing excellence, 29 of our dedicated staff members attended refresher training sessions during the same period. Moreover, we took proactive steps by integrating elements of TCI refreshers into our Clinical and Consultation Services (CCS) and Interim Care Model (ICM) team meetings at monthly and fortnightly intervals respectively, guaranteeing that the principles and techniques remain fresh and relevant. Feedback from staff has been overwhelmingly positive with the training helping them to better support young people through a crisis situation, and also help the child or young person learn and grow in a positive way from the experience.

“TCI provides staff with an effective framework that clearly outlines how we can best respond to young people in our care during a crisis. Staff feel empowered and confident they are responding in a way that is helpful in both the short and long term, and for the young people, it means that no matter which staff member is on shift, they receive a consistent and predictable response during their most vulnerable moments. They also feel heard when they share their version of events, repair the relationship with staff and connect their triggers to feelings and behaviours. This builds self-awareness and positive strategies to manage similar situations in the future – these are skills that young people will hopefully continue to build and draw on throughout the rest of their life.”

– Mirander Webb, House Manager Interim Care



We understand that TCI is not just for our staff but extends to families and Carers who provide essential support to children and young people. In May 2023, our Carer Development Training Officer attended a comprehensive five-day training course on TCI for Families (TCI-F) in Brisbane, and two of our existing TCI trainers attended the TCI-F update to help bring this format to life at Veritas House. This specialised training focuses on the nuances of providing crisis support within the home setting, rather than alternative care models. We look forward to offering our first TCI-F course to our carer cohort in November 2023. This represents a significant step forward in enhancing our ability to support families and carers within our community.

"I've been engaged with TCI for 5 years; I recognise how important it is in a care setting.

Being skilled in TCI will prevent escalations and placement breakdowns.

It's an essential skill base for anyone working in the Out-of-Home Care sector.

The most difficult thing is escalated behaviours; it's what is likely to break placements.

TCI gives you the skills to navigate these situations and deescalate them.

I think all Carers will really benefit from engaging with this training."

- Carer Training & Development Officer

Lastly, our focus extended beyond staff training to encompass the integration of TCI principles into our policies and procedures. This ensures that TCI remains a core aspect of our organisational culture and continues to guide our approach to crisis prevention and intervention. Our efforts have significantly enhanced our ability to support young people in crisis. We remain dedicated to creating an environment where emotional regulation and coping skills flourish, ensuring the continued well-being and growth of the children and young people we work with.



Veritas House staff after completing TCI training

CLINICAL AND CONSULTATION SERVICES

Veritas House's Clinical Consultation Services (CCS) employs clinicians such as Psychologists, Social Workers and Occupational Therapists to deliver a range of supports across Veritas House programs, and when possible, we extend our service offering to the local community.

Children, young people, families and carers have continued to access CCS for a range of therapeutic supports including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Social Skills training, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and psycho-education. In addition, CCS has been very active in providing facilitation and consultation services to groups and teams of Veritas House. Family Group Conferences which aim to explore options to bring family members and other supports together around meeting the needs of a child or young person. CCS clinicians have also facilitated monthly group supervision with the Permanency Support Team regarding some of their most complex matters. The objective of these Group Supervision sessions is to help draw on the knowledge and skills of the staff involved and find a way forward for children, young people and families in Foster Care. Finally, our service has also been delivering consultation support to our Veritas House Interim Care Team (ICM). The ICM team work within a residential setting to meet the needs of young people who don't otherwise have a Foster Care placement available to them.



CCS has responded to a significant increase in requests for assessments of children and young people over the course of 2022-23. These have included cognitive assessments, mental health assessments and assessments for neurodevelopmental concerns such as ADHD and Autism. We're fortunate to have both the skilled staff to complete these assessments, and the instruments required to provide an accurate, evidence-based assessment service. This has helped children and young people gain access to additional supports through the NDIS, Community Services, and the education system to help them attain the best possible outcomes for their particular circumstances and needs.

Our Carer Training and Development Officer commenced this year. This was a new role created at Veritas House to help coordinate and create additional learning opportunities for our Authorised Carers. This has included the delivery of Shared Lives Training for new carers, Mental Health First Aid, and an information session on the NDIS for carers. Resources have also been pulled together to help Carers undertake self-paced learning for those who have barriers preventing them making it to face-to-face training, and they've also been supported to access My Forever Family Training for those not already set up with the online training platform. Looking ahead we see the roll out of Therapeutic Crisis Intervention Training for Families as an ambitious but incredibly valuable goal for 2024.

Hours:

557 therapy to children and young people.

266 assessments and reports.

1,404 behaviour support planning and implementation.

498 professional supervision.

Empowering Young People through Occupational Therapy

An important part of providing safe and effective care to children and young people is the assessment and ongoing review of Authorised Carers. These generous people open their homes and hearts to children who have been assumed into care. CCS have two Carer Assessors who facilitate new Carer assessments, as well as completing reviews for existing carers. The latter element being a vital link back to Veritas House about the experience of Carers over the preceding year providing invaluable insight into how Veritas House and the Carer can work most effectively together.

CCS staff have historically established and delivered professional supervision sessions for staff across the various programs of Veritas. This is a key component to supporting the teams in the work they do by creating a regular, safe, reflective space for staff to think through the needs of the children, young people and families they work with, as well as their own needs as a professional operating in an emotionally challenging field of work. This is consistent with the goal of being a 'learning organisation' which always seeks to take on new understanding, and continually improve practice at the individual, team and organisation levels.

CCS has also been supporting two internal and one externally employed Provisional Psychologist through their Registration. This contributes to achieving outcomes for children, young people and families, but also helps grow the psychological workforce in our service and in our region. This is something Veritas House identifies as an important contribution to helping meet the needs of our local community.



2022-23 saw the commencement of our Occupational Therapy (OT) services with Kate Priddle joining the Clinical and Consultation Services team. This marked a significant achievement for Veritas House, which had wanted to add OT services to the CCS suite of services for a long time. Kate's appointments were quickly taken up by children and young people from Veritas House and beyond, reflecting the significant shortage in the region of OT services. Kate shares some of her experiences with Veritas House so far.

I joined Veritas House in February of 2023. I was relocating from Sydney, looking for work in Bathurst and the Veritas ad for an Occupational Therapist (OT) jumped out. I saw that it was working with children and young people, particularly kids in Out-of-Home Care, and was driven to apply based on my experience working with older people in mental health, as well as my interest in supporting people who've experienced trauma. I'm currently the only OT at Veritas, however, I work in a team of clinicians who are all very experienced within the industry. There is a diversity to the Clinical and Consultation Services (CCS) team which gives it strength; we're all coming with a slightly different lens on what we do. We're here to support young people through the evidence base of our various disciplines to provide the best interventions for children, young people and families.

The CCS team provides a range of support services so that our service users can grow and develop and achieve the best possible outcomes. For instance, a Veritas Caseworker can reach out to the CCS team for advice on how to best support a Foster Carer in managing challenging behaviour from a child in their care. We also support Veritas staff through Professional Supervision, which is highly valued by all teams, as the work they do can be tough. It's a very rewarding industry, but the work can also be challenging, so it's crucial to have sound support for staff to look after their own wellbeing.

Continued over

Across our services at Veritas, there has been a great need among our service users to access occupational therapy. Put simply, occupational therapy might sway more towards the body and working at a sensory level, which is fantastic when we can see it working side by side with our CCS psychology services. Occupational therapy helps people do the things they need to do in their everyday life. With young people, it's about being able to go to school and learn, being able to form friendships, to manage the demands of the world around them. Practically speaking, a person with a physical disability may need assistance to learn how to do self-care tasks in an alternate way, or someone who doesn't yet have the social skills to relate to other people may struggle to form friendships.

Occupational therapy addresses the barriers someone may be facing and works to overcome them. It's all about learning to understand the world we're in, learning to regulate and find our place in the world. Occupational therapy helps people to explore who they are, and what's important to them. With carers and families, it's about supporting them in their role, developing the skills and accessing the resources they need to parent well.

I've been incredibly grateful to have been able to work with some beautiful children and young people since starting at Veritas. I've been working with a young person recently who has had some challenges over his lifespan, but who's gradually seeing me as somebody who isn't threatening, who can be trusted, and we're starting to share some beautiful moments of reciprocity; it's a real breakthrough! The work is so rewarding when I reflect on it like this.

Veritas House, and most importantly the kids we work with, are now benefiting from having not only psychological services available, but they are also now complimented and diversified through occupational therapy. That slightly different approach and different lens by which to address an issue is giving individuals and the organisation options which can only benefit those we work to support. We're also incredibly pleased that Veritas House is now providing services through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), offering more choice of service to our community.

At Veritas House we're interested in looking holistically at people. Rather than reducing an issue to just a part of the body or a component of the individual that's having a problem, we look at the whole person and their environment. So if you engage with our Clinical and Consultation Services, we'll work not just with a child, but with the whole family and community around them to support everybody to address issues all together.

I love what I do, and I love being able to bring that to Veritas House. I can't wait to see the occupational therapy service grow.



Veritas House continues to travel through an exciting period of growth. During the year we have introduced Senior Case Workers and Casework Specialists as well as a very welcome Occupational Therapist into our Clinical and Consultation Services team. Another exciting addition has been the hiring of additional Education and Employment Mentors. This team are responsible for collaborating with young people to define their educational and employment goals and connecting them to educational services and employment opportunities as needed.

As with many industries, recruitment has been a challenge post-COVID. The numbers below show that we have continued to grow as an organisation and despite challenges consider ourselves very fortunate to continue to welcome excellent candidates to our teams.

Legislation Update

With effect from February 2023 all staff have access to 10 paid days of domestic violence leave.

In late December 2022, the Federal Parliament passed the Fair Work Legislation Amendments (Secure Job Better Pay) Bill. This Act includes focus on:

- Job security and gender equity
- Prohibition of pay secrecy
- Broader protection against sexual harassment
- Addition of a number of protected attributes for intersex status and breastfeeding
- Enhancing flexible working provisions
- Prohibition of maximum term contracts for more than 2 years (unless an exemption occurs)

At Veritas House we have taken strong steps to ensure all of the above changes to the Act have been addressed, including how we advertise vacant positions, in-house training and ensuring privacy through our payroll system for paid domestic violence leave.

Workplace Gender Equality Agency Report

Veritas submitted its first report to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), as this year, we had over 100 employees for the full year for the first time. Completing this report requires a thorough assessment of our policies and procedures against benchmarks set by the WGEA as well as an assessment of remuneration of all staff, by gender. Once our data is submitted, the WGEA collate ours with all other data received contributing to the Agency's world-leading dataset on gender equality in Australian workplaces.

Following completion of our submission, we now know that Veritas House has an overall gender pay gap of 5% favouring female staff. This was expected given the number of female staff, and the number of female staff in leadership roles at Veritas House. Veritas House adopts a merit-based recruitment approach and remuneration is set by Awards for 93% of our staff; meaning that discriminatory factors (including but not limited to gender) do not form any basis for these decisions.



111 total number of employees as at 30th June 2023.

We have a gender pay gap of +5% favouring female staff – national average is 22.8% to men.

15 new positions created.

24 internal moves.

19 promotions.

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS AND SPONSORS

Veritas House gratefully acknowledges the funding and support received from the NSW Department of Communities and Justice. We would also like to thank the following generous individuals and organisations who have supported Veritas House in 2022-23:

Adam Robinson	Christine Hannus	Kristina Renshaw	Ross Hill Wines
Alanna Dixon	Cleary Fairbrother Property	Kylie Burcher	Rotary Club of Bathurst Daybreak
Alexandra Banner	Clint Beale	Kym Flitcroft	Rotary Club of Orange
Alisa Lockhart	Commonwealth Bank	Lauren Kelso	Rotary Club of Orange Daybreak
Alison O'Brien	Bathurst Branch	Lesley Walker	Sandra Nankervis
Alison Shurmer	Courtney and Dawsyn	Lina Lavalu	Sandra Stocks
Amanda Wilding	Courtney Groat	Linda Hurford	Sara King
Angus Edwards	CWA Orange Branch	Lisa and Greg Smith	See Saw Wines
Ann Dib	Daniella Kelly	Loretta Power	Shane Ward
Anna Suzuki	David	Louise Ranshaw	Shannon Blinkhorn
Anne Brown	Debbie G	Louise's Pottery Workshops	Shannon Wood
Annette Uata	Debbie McKean	Lucy Coen	Sharron Carter
ATCO	Diane Burrell	Mandy Wilding	Sheree Richards
Balance Childcare	Don and Donna McLean	Maree Storey	Shirley Featherstone
Barbara McCreery	Drew Johnston	Mark Welch	Sophie Hodge
Bathurst City Centre	Ellie Rennie	Matthew Tabbernor	Sophie Long
Bathurst Goldfields	Emily Harris	Michelle Jewell	Sophie Long Tax & Accounting
Bathurst Lions Club	Emma Curtis	Narelle Stocks	Soufia Alminri
Bathurst Memorial	Fiona Geddes	Nhung Nguyen	Southern Cross Austereo
Entertainment Centre	Forest Reef Area Catering	Nicolina Peck	St George Bank
Bathurst Panthers	Genevieve Inatay	Nikki Nankervis	Stef Loader
Bathurst Regional Council	Gina Jessett	Orange Ex-Services' Club	Steve Limbrick
Bathurst RSL Club	Hanna Colley	Orange High School	StreetSmart Australia
Bathurst West Public School	Hannah Lepaio	Panorama Mini-Mart	S-Yun Lo
Bec Walsh	Haylee Lepaio	& Takeaway	Tammy Taylor
Bianca Higgins	Inland Digital	PayPal Giving Fund	Tara Janelle
Big W Bathurst	Jacob Soetens	Peak Connect	Tess Lamont
Bonnie Conway	Janette Kelly	Peter Sargent	The Upstairs Startup Hub
Bonnie Conway	Janine Lovett	Philip Fletcher	The Western Advocate
Bree Vandorp	Jesse Pavlovich	Pru Flanagan	Theo Harris
Bridgette Evans	Jessica Kosef	Quicksew	Tom Devitt
Bronte Emanuel	Jill Rohr	Raine & Horne Bathurst	Toyota Material Handling Australia
Candice Boggs	Johanne Lonie	Rebecca Kelcey	Vanessa Willis
Capital Chemist Bathurst	Judy Tyson	Regis Resources Limited	VERTO
Catholic Diocese of Bathurst	Kate Miller	Renascent	Western Advocate
Central Commercial Printers	Keira Davies	Robyn Fitz	Wiradyuri Traditional Owners Central West
Charles Sturt University	Kenny Spring Solicitors	Ron England	Aboriginal Corporation
Chelsea Gibbs	Kirilly Whitney	Rosalind	2BS 95.1 FM Radio



Orange Ex Services Club donation towards Christmas hampers



Donation of gifts for young people from VERTO



Donation of food and essentials from West Bathurst Public

DONATE

Veritas House is registered as a charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) and is endorsed as a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR), so all donations over \$2 are tax-deductible. Any donation large or small, one-off or recurring will help Veritas continue to deliver accommodation and support services to vulnerable children, young people and families in Western NSW.

We currently have two major fundraising Appeals:

Transitional Youth Housing Appeal

Veritas supports hundreds of young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in our region each year. With limited finances, no prior rental history and a private rental market with very few vacancies, obtaining approval for a lease for many of the young people who cannot return safely to their homes can be challenging, particularly in the current rental crisis. Our Transitional Youth Housing program, utilising properties owned and managed by Veritas aims to help overcome this. Clients are charged below-market rent for up to six months and case workers support the young person during this time to develop independent living skills including budgeting, tenant rights and responsibilities and planning simple, economical and nutritious meals. At the conclusion of the six months, Veritas provides a reference and advocacy and support for the young person to secure long-term accommodation through social housing or the private rental market.

Education and Employment Fund

Many of the young people Veritas staff work with are overcoming some major obstacles in their lives and at the same time trying to continue their education or enter the workforce. For many, finding funds for necessary educational and employment resources such as work boots for apprentices, or books and laptops for students, can be another barrier to try to overcome. The Veritas Education and Employment Fund invests all donations received, with the income earned annually used to support young people in the local region to pursue their vocational ambitions.

To find out more about our fundraising appeals or to make a donation visit: veritashouse.org.au

BECOME A CARER

Foster care provides a secure, safe and supportive home environment for children and young people who can no longer reside with their families. Children and young people enter into Permanency Support (Foster Care) for a myriad of reasons, but generally they have experienced a degree of trauma, neglect and abuse that required intervention and removal for their own safety and wellbeing.

Carers support children and young people by providing homes with nurturing environments, that allow them to feel comfortable and supported so they can grow and develop in a happy and healthy way.

Our Foster Carers, Kinship Carers and Relative Carers play an essential role in:

- supporting children and young people in immediate need
- restoration as we work with families to return children and young people home safely
- providing vulnerable families with some time out to strengthen their parenting.



If you would like information on becoming a Foster Carer visit: veritashouse.org.au
or contact us on 1300 011 973.



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