



Supporting people since 1978

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MISSION STATEMENT

‘To assist individuals, partners and families, in all their diversity, to achieve and maintain quality and meaningful lives through quality and meaningful relationships’.



ABOUT US

Family Relationships Institute Inc. trading as RelateWell, was founded in 1978. It is a not-for-profit community organisation providing a range of essential prevention and early intervention support services at significant transition points in the lifecycle. Our family and relationship services target the significant family transition points of relationship formation, extension and separation; aiming to support family relationships, prevent breakdown and guarantee the wellbeing of people through broad-based counselling and psychoeducation. Our specialist mental health services match structured evidence-based interventions to individual's needs and complexities in the clinical delivery of targeted psychological support services to adults, adolescents and children. RelateWell is a leader in primary prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery, working with key stakeholders in supporting people's well-being during significant life events. RelateWell is committed to providing accessible, safe and inclusive services to all members of the community. Our family & relationship services (FaRS) are funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS); and have been Commonwealth funded since our inception in 1978. RelateWell is a Commonwealth service provider of mental health contracted services.

Our History

The Family Relationships Institute Inc. was founded in 1978 by the late Don Burnard, a Senior Psychologist who specialised in relationship development courses and Dr Ron Fitzgerald who was a Commissioner for the Education Section of the Henderson Poverty Report.

Our counselling and relationship, marriage and parenting psychoeducational services are primarily at the prevention and early intervention end of service provision and target the significant family transition points of relationship formation, moving in together, getting married, having a baby and maturing in the couple relationship. Essentially, our services prepare people with the skills to deal with life challenges and changes before they become big problems and issues. Healthy relationships are a crucial component of health and well-being. RelateWell aims to provide counselling and relationship and parenting education services at a price which keeps them within financial reach of the majority of people in the community. Priding itself in being a boutique-like provider of services, where people are welcomed, supported and treated like individuals. Where the most vulnerable people in society are treated with respect, leaving our services with improved family and community functioning; and a satisfaction with the service they have received. Strengthening access and services to vulnerable and disadvantaged families is a strategic key in service delivery.

The Family Relationships Institute Inc. is incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act. ABN: 26 497 501 316



Board of Management

The Family Relationships Institute Inc. is governed by a Board of Management, who is committed to achieving our vision of building a sustainable business governed by sound governance.

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

PRESIDENT

Stavros Sakellaris

VICE PRESIDENT

Luciana Martini

PUBLIC OFFICER

Donna Cossio (non-voting member)

BOARD MEMBERS

Russell Williams

Vanessa Field

Tina Douvos-Stathopoulos

Roslyn Monagle

Joan Pianta

HONORARY MEMBERS

Don Burnard (1935 - 2022)

Dr Ron Fitzgerald

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Angela Damianopoulos

Board of Management Charter

The role of the Board is to provide leadership for and supervision over the organisations affairs:

- Developing and approving the vision, purpose and values of the Institute.
- Monitoring management's performance, providing feedback and assistance in the implementation of strategy. Ensuring appropriate resources are offered.
- Approving key organisational policies and approving and monitoring the progress of major capital expenditure, capital management and acquisitions.
- Reviewing and ratifying systems of risk management and internal compliance and control, codes of conduct and legal compliance.
- Approval of annual budget.
- Monitoring the financial performance of the Institute and ensuring there are adequate funds and resources for the organisation.
- Overall organisational governance, including conducting regular reviews of the balance of responsibilities within the organisation to ensure division of functions remains appropriate to the needs of the Institute.
- Liaising with the Institute's external auditors.
- Ensuring that all votes cast by members of the Board as a nominated proxy are cast in accordance with the instructions given on the proxy form.
- Ensuring the Board is functioning well and planning for the succession and orientation of Board members.
- The Board should seek advance commitment from perspective Board members to any particular policies concerning the expectations of the Board regarding matters such as investment of time, attendance requirements, conflict of interest policy and practice, acceptance of responsibility and collective decision-making.
- Policies in dealing with Board consecutive terms.

Message from the President



Our sector is going through lots of change, with people now willingly reaching out for support, especially men. And our key partners, making referrals, knowing that their individuals and families will be supported.

This increase in stakeholders referring to our services has grown significantly over the years, particularly in my time as President of RelateWell.

We have become a trusted partner, a trusted source of referral; and I have seen first-hand the incredible work that we do in wrapping services around people.

We have always welcomed a community framework that is underpinned by inclusivity and accessibility, breaking down barriers to intervention, and prioritising the wellbeing of all people accessing our services.

Our commitment to children and families underpins our work, particularly at key transition points in the life cycle.

RelateWell continues to help hundreds of people deal with relationship and mental health problems and crises in today's stressful environment, providing much needed support through our services and programs, with each point of intervention tailored to meet particular relationship, family and community issues.

Only the commitment of our workforce makes this task feasible.

And as we enter a funding phase of reforms which are unclear and not in the best interests of the sector or our clients, I applaud our teams' unwavering dedication; our client-focused, evidence-based methods make us a dependable resource for Australians experiencing difficulties at key times in their life.

Not remaining stagnant and adapting to change is why we are still here; and will tackle the Government's reforms to remain here.

On a final note, I would like to express my thanks to the Executive Director, whose expertise and dedication to the organisation is reflected in our successes.

I look forward to working with the Board and Executive Team to support organisational growth in remaining "relevant", in a social services sector going through tremendous change and uncertainty.

Stavros Sakellaris, President

Executive Directors Report at the Annual General Meeting of the Family Relationships Institute Inc. trading as RelateWell Thursday 13 November 2025



I would like to commence my report by speaking about an obvious concern to the organisation and the sector, the upcoming ending of our 5 year funding for the DSS sub-activity, Family and Relationship Services (FaRS).

Positively, the ongoing extensions of our Commonwealth funding since 1988, leading to the current five year funding agreement ending 30 June 2026, has provided extended surety, enabling the organisation to grow in reputation, significant partnerships and reach, and concentrate its efforts in supporting people at the prevention and early intervention end of service delivery; and supporting those at the tertiary end, with wrap around specialist services around their presentations and needs.

Negatively, we have received communication from the Commonwealth Labour Government 'that they have listened to the sector's voices', and all five sub-activities funded under the Children and Families Program will need to apply for funding. Grants will be awarded through an open and competitive process.

Since my entry into the sector in 1996, the Family and Relationship Services sub-activity, with its various names and acronyms over the years has been "sacrosanct" due to the decades of accumulated evidence-base from established service providers who have been able to provide exceptional services due to the Government's ongoing commitment to funding.

Discussion Paper: A new approach to programs for families and children

The concern with the revised discussion around an "open and competitive process" for funding is that the "best service provider do not always win", as bigger organisations have the luxury of employing sections specifically for gaining grants, who know the jargon, rather than community and client-centred expertise like RelateWell. RelateWell could bear the costs of contracting a submission writer to potentially secure funding, but the uncertainty is a concern, and we cannot afford to do so without a realistic possibility of receiving the grant.

The “open and competitive process” definitely favours the bigger organisations; it is not an “equal playing field”.

In my 28 years of working in the sector under various governments, the Commonwealth Labour Government have been at the forefront of consultations to reform our sector; whilst the Coalition Government have continued to fund the well-cemented sub-activity of family and relationship services.

I submit: the discussion around an open tender process is not listening to the sector’s needs. It is throwing the whole not for profit sector into chaos, particularly for an organisation like RelateWell that is specifically a family and relationship service provider supported by an array of specialist services to fully wrap services around its constant stream of consumers.

Without surety of funding, RelateWell will not exist.

Reform has been on the Labour Government’s agenda for a while, under various discussions, and it is unfortunate that the announcement by the Government to open funding to tender fosters “fear”, “uncertainty”, “hysteria” and “anxiety” about “sustainability” and job losses, with the collateral damage being children and families accessing our services.

On a positive note, recent evaluations carried out by the Department about the programs highlights effective client outcomes and value for investment for Government. The findings aligning with the cost-benefit analysis commissioned by our peak body Family and Relationship Services Australia (FRSA in 2023); conducted by the Centre for International Economics (‘the report’). The report submitting strong outcomes for the communities we support – children, young people and parents – with overwhelmingly positive improvements in their family functioning, mental health, wellbeing, and development according to age.

With that said, RelateWell will continue to do phenomenal work in the family and relationships services space to warrant a roll-over of funding based on our well-established evidence-base and reach. Our phenomenal capture always applauded by the department.

But with that said, we will actively partake in the consultation process, submitting to discussion the organisation’s importance in the sector.

Our Reach

Service Data: July 2024 to June 2025

In the 2024-2025 financial years, under the Family and Relationship Services (FaRS) sub-activity, the organisation supported 474 unique clients and delivered 1635 client sessions. In our private counselling stream wherein RelateWell is a Commonwealth service provider of contracted mental health services; as well as delivering Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services, a total of 281 unique clients were supported with the delivery of 1722 client sessions.

**Without surety of funding,
RelateWell will not exist.**

A total of 755 unique clients were supported in 2024-2025 FY; with the delivery of 3357 client sessions. This translates to a 3% increase in unique clients seen for the 2024-2025 FY, and an 11.3% increase in the number of sessions delivered for the 2024/2025 FY.

A phenomenal outcome given workforce challenges. Yes, telehealth is a valuable tool to overcome workforce shortages, but the emergence of virtual companies providing solely psychologically based virtual services should not be leveraged at the expense of onsite services. Here we have the reason for workforce shortages – the lure of working entirely virtually, as opposed to onsite.

The work of RelateWell is significant; a well-established observance and commitment to working with key stakeholders such as GP’s, maternal child health nurses and other allied health providers, early in the intervention cycle, to achieve the best outcomes for people at significant family transition points in the lifecycle, via evidence-informed services.

Being innovative is not solely based on app innovation, with AI counselling now available. Innovation is using your well-cemented reputation and specialisation in working with clients and arriving at new and innovative solutions regarding evidence-base content to best support presentations.

Family Relationship Services Australia (FRSA) Member Mapping

A recent report by FRSA illustrated the significant work of member organisations, where RelateWell holds its head high. The report spoke about member’s daily work of working with people who use violence in their family relationships, ranging from specialist family violence services, housing support, case management, generalist counselling support.

What the FRSA report made clear is that our sector holds a principal status in the domain of interventions for people who use violence in intimate/family relationships. Importantly, the report not only displayed the existing capabilities of the FRSA member base, but also the value-add provided to individuals and families across the lifecycle by members.

Accomplishments

I recently met with a CEO of a large not for profit organisation who posed the question: *how did you get your private counselling stream via Medicare subsidised services to work*, as they were unable to get it working. I replied: “hard work” and an ongoing commitment in nurturing

'.....This translates to a 3% increase in unique clients seen for the 2024-2025 FY, and an 11.3% increase in the number of sessions delivered for the 2024/2025 financial year.'

our significant partnerships with the gatekeepers, being maternal child health nurses and GP's.

Our Partnerships

Our ethos is entrenched in a cohesive and a coordinated approach across diverse community disciplines that strengthen partnerships between those working in the prevention and early intervention of relationship dissolution, mental health, family violence and child protection. A consolidation of shared efforts and resources to make a difference in people's lives.

On that note, I am proud of our team for their interest and passion in working for a not-for-profit in supporting clients with integrity.

And always, I want to thank our Board of Management, for their skill-set, professionalism, wisdom and strength in supporting me and Donna with their expertise through our challenges.

As RelateWell faces one of its biggest challenges by way of going to tender, our key partnerships and expertise will lay the groundwork for prosperity.

I thank our collaborative partners for their continued support, as collaboration strengthens our ability to increase accessibility to services fundamentally improving client outcomes.

And to Donna Cossio, the Office Manager, whose calming voice tames my impatience in a sector that awards "the loudest voices" in contrast to the "best specialised voices". Thank you for keeping me patient.

In our 47 years of existence, we look forward to demonstrating our significance, and remaining relevant in a highly competitive marketplace being social services

Yours sincerely,



Angela Damianopoulos

Executive Director

ORGANISATIONAL SNAPSHOT OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIP SERVICES (FaRS)

Counselling:

- Adult & relationship counselling & support
- Parenting & family counselling & support
- Relationship & marriage counselling & support
- Perinatal-specific mental health counselling & support
- Family counselling

Relationship & Marriage Education and Skills Training:

- Premarital Program (Let's Make It Work)
- Committed couples program (Let's Keep It Alive) & ENRICH Inventory style relationship program
- Starting Strong in Your Child's Education (City of Greater Dandenong)
- New Parent Groups (Merri-bek Maternal & Child Health Service)
- Circle of Security Parenting Education (COSP) (Merri-bek & Springvale Service for Children)

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Commonwealth Contracted Mental Health Services:

- CAREinMIND Targeted Psychological Support (TPS) & Suicide Prevention Services (SPS)

Mental Health Services:

- Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific items
- National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIS), Therapeutic Supports
- Self referrals

ASSESSMENTS

- Cognitive assessments

Adult Counselling & Support Parenting & Family Counselling & Support

The significant family transition point of “becoming parents” is a vulnerable period where couples are at-risk of marital/relationship discord and dissolution resultant from postpartum relationship stresses and pressures experienced through the early parenting period. As a result, targeting families in the postpartum period strengthens family relationships, prevents relationship/marital distress and breakdown; and ensures the wellbeing and safety of children.

Early intervention is vital in supporting families in the early parenting period. It is at this stage in a child's life, you can reduce a family's vulnerability to breakdown which significantly impacts on a child's life as it is in these early years that you are able to work on a child's significant developmental years from birth to school entry. The saying “Happy Families Flourish” cannot be underestimated, particularly as safe and secure early attachments early in life and subsequently through the early years of a child's life exists as a predictor of positive societal relationships and reduced antisocial behaviour and criminality for children. Our counselling services directly target families postpartum.

Our Partnerships:

Merri-bek Maternal and Child Health Service (Universal and Enhanced)

Our relationship with Merri-bek Maternal and Child Health Unit is invaluable.

Under our partnership, we break down barriers to accessibility of services by delivering accessible counselling and psychoeducation parenting services to individuals and families at the significant family transition point of becoming parents and raising children.

Our partnership is underpinned by improving the accessibility and equity of services so that people are able to access adequate targeted psychological interventions and support regardless of their financial situation. This entails developing responsive ways so that people do engage in support services.

Our provision of services encompasses the delivery of outreach counselling services within maternal & child health centres; and the delivery of NPGs to maternal and child health centres located throughout Merri-bek.

Springvale Service for Children (SSC), City of Greater Dandenong

SSC is a multifaceted children's hub providing significant early childhood services to families living in Springvale and neighbouring suburbs. Our partnership with SSC is significant because a well-coordinated system of linkage and referral ensures that vulnerable families are supported and appropriate referrals are made within an accessible and timely manner.

From within SSC, RelateWell provides outreach counselling and educational services in the areas of family and relationship counselling and parenting psycho-education. Collaboratively, our services provide a universal platform for engaging families early in the intervention cycle, particularly in supporting people's mental health.

*RelateWell's family & relationship
services prepare people with the
skills to deal with life challenges and
changes before they become
immense problems and issues.
Seeking to achieve a cultural
mindset that the transition to family;
and a healthy relationship can
be supported to reduce
unrealistic expectations
and relationship stresses
postpartum.*

Relationship and Marriage Education and Skills Training

Providing relationship education at the significant transition points of forming relationships, marrying, living together and maturing in the couple relationship underpins our relationship and marriage education programs. Relationship education and skills training activities provide enrichment and enhancement principles that supports partners to increase their chances of having quality, meaningful, respectful and stable relationships.

Relationship education and skills training is divided into three categories based on the principles of the prevention discipline: universal prevention programs (Let's Make It Work), selected prevention programs; and indicated programs (Let's Keep It Alive).

At the prevention and early intervention point of service delivery, our education and skills training (Let's Make It Work) provides relationship and marital health and well-being interventions. At the latter point of service delivery (Let's Keep It Alive), where relationship distress and breakdown is evident, there is a combination of education and therapeutic approaches with counselling.

Evidence-based:

Our Relationship Programs have been developed by our experienced team through application, research, knowledge and an awareness of couple relationships.

The organisation has developed a successful model of curriculum-based adult education and skills training for positive respectful relationships since 1978. This model has provided couples with the knowledge, skills training and awareness that relationship/marriage is a lifelong commitment comprising of many transitions. It is because of our expertise in the relationship space; and comprehensive understanding of evidence based relationship theory, we can support couples at the significant transition points of marrying, living together and maturing in the couple relationship.

Education: New Parent Groups 'Self-Care: Emotional Health & Wellbeing'

While parents are supported in the preparation for birth through antenatal classes, and new parents are supported through the maternal and child health sector, our work in this space works with parents once home, directly addressing expectations, mental wellbeing and relationship changes in the post-partum period with a focus on parenting infants.

The literature and our services specifically identify a range of psychological factors which contribute to declining relationship satisfaction postpartum which impacts people's ability to parent.

In partnership with Merri-bek maternal and child health service, our New Parent Groups support parents in the postpartum period; supporting their mental and emotional well-being post-birth which promotes healthy infant attachment and development.

In achieving desired outcomes, the NPG is empirically supported by an evidence-based foundation; and is delivered by appropriately qualified counsellors in an interactive, non-threatening group setting.

All our services are underpinned by an empirically supported, evidenced-based foundation, delivered by appropriately trained counsellors and psychologists.

Education: Circle of Security Parenting (COSP) Education

In working with parents via our counselling and education services, we have seen an increase in presentations around the challenges encountered by mothers whom parent with mental illness and/or are at-risk of mental illness; and who experience relationship and parenting distress as a direct result of attachment to the infant. Acknowledgement of these presentations and the protective value of secure parent-child relationships has led the organisation to implement the COSP education intervention within its family and relationship services stream.

The COSP education program offers adaptable measures and interventions to families who would benefit from targeted support. Through use of the circle, adults can develop the process to look beyond a child's behaviour and reflecting on the underlying emotional needs (Dolby, 2007).

The COSP education program is based on decades of evidence-based research developed to help parents engage in, and reflect on, the back-and-forth dialogue that is the foundation of secure attachment.

Referrals are from Merri-bek maternal and child health services; and families attending Springvale Service for Children (Greater Dandenong). And are delivered onsite or via Ms Teams.

Cognitive Assessments to families living in Merri-bek

In keeping psychological services within peoples reach, our registered psychologists and provisional psychologists provide professional psychological assessments for children living in Merri-bek. Using current psychometric assessments with the aim of gaining an awareness and understanding into an individuals inclusive cognitive or else mental health functioning.

We are proud that in 2023 at Belle Vue Park Primary School in Glenroy, we delivered free cognitive assessments to its children. By supporting the children, we are able to help identify a child's mental capacity and behavioural styles, informing families, teachers and other allied health professionals on how the child best fits into the academic system and in everyday life. The outcomes also support the latter to understand the child's cognitive and learning difficulties, their academic strengths and weaknesses, and their school readiness.

Tests include:

- WISC-V and WAIS-V (children and adult IQ tests, specific learning disorder, intellectual disability, ADHD)
- Diagnostic assessments (a range of mental health assessments leading to formal diagnosis)

Mental Health Services



Our specialist mental health services match structured evidence-based interventions to consumer needs and complexities in the clinical delivery of targeted psychological support services to adults, youth and children. Operating within clinical governance and a quality assurance framework with clinicians providing front-line consumer care. The professional qualifications of the organisations clinical staff are approved by governing bodies and underpinned by good business practice.

RelateWell is a Commonwealth service provider of contracted mental health services.

Commonwealth Contracted Mental Health Services

RelateWell is contracted by North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network (NWMPHIN) to deliver CAREin-MIND Targeted Psychological Support (TPS) and Suicide Prevention Services (SPS) to North Western Melbourne.

Other Mental Health Services:

Medicare-subsidised mental health specific items

As part of an allied health team, our psychologists assist GPs in undertaking early intervention, assessment and management of patients who present with a range of clinically diagnosable disorders that significantly interfere with their cognitive, emotional or social abilities.

Self-Managed NDIS: Therapeutic support

The organisation provides therapeutic support to people whose plans are managed by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIS).

Therapeutic supports assist individuals to gain skills and improve independence related to identified needs in areas such as language and communication, personal care, mobility and movement, interpersonal interactions, community living to support positive changes in the person's functioning, development and well-being.

In caring for individuals well-being via therapeutic supports, counselling provides participants and carers with assistance to understand and manage situations, behaviours and relationships associated with their need for care and mental health.

Self-referrals

There are no barriers to accessing RelateWell mental health services.

Memorandum of Understanding to provide mental health services

1. Merri-bek Universal & Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Service
2. Merri-bek Youth Services
3. Child Protection Health Program Victoria

Evidence Base

A number of evidence-based therapeutic approaches are used: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Person-Centred Therapy, Compassion Focused Therapy, Psychodynamic Therapy, Emotion-focused therapy, Humanistic-existential Therapy, Existential Therapy, Person-Centred Therapy (also known as client-centred counselling), Art Therapy, Humanistic-Existential Therapy Family/Systemic Therapy, Group Therapy, Mindfulness based approaches and solution focused therapy, Play Therapy.

Our clinicians use a variety of evidence-based approaches dependent on presentation.

The selection of evidence-based treatment strategies necessitates knowledge of interventions and the research supporting their effectiveness. Along with competencies which address different psycho-sociocultural contexts in any given client situation.

Implementing clinical expertise and knowledge, and introducing new therapies and interventions, is a significant way to care for the well-being of clients and to minimise cognitive and behavioural (functional) decline in people. Ensuring that in the medium to long term, clients leave our service with improved mental health and family functioning including child wellbeing; children with improved development (achieving milestones) and well-being; and clients are included in and socially connected to their community.

*RelateWell mental health
services operate within a clinical
governance framework that
safeguards that people receiving
mental health treatment obtain
safe high-quality care within a
safety and high quality culture.*

Service Data from July 2024 to June 2025

755 unique clients supported

3357 client sessions conducted

98% of clients report improved knowledge and skills

99% of clients satisfied with the service they received

97% of clients report improved access and engagement with services

98% of clients report improved family, community and economic engagement

Breakdown of client and session data for 2024/2025:

Family & Relationship Services (FaRS) Stream

474 unique clients
1635 client sessions

Private Counselling Stream

281 unique clients
1722 client sessions

‘Our objective to increase our overall reach in supporting all members of the community has seen a proactive approach to streamlining our operations to better invest in our core capabilities and boost profitability in our private streams which supports expansion. This process is ongoing and involves an evaluation of all aspects of the business to determine whether the cost allotted to each service stream is appropriate and is generating appropriate returns for the organisation.’ At RelateWell, collaboration is embraced as a coming together of professionals from a range of backgrounds, working together to achieve the best outcomes for people accessing our services.’ (Angela Damianopoulos, Executive Director)

Funding Partners



Proudly supported by
City of Greater Dandenong

National Regulator



Peak Body



OUR PARTNERS

RelateWell would like to take this opportunity to thank the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) for their ongoing support and funding; and all those organisations that have worked in partnership with us to reach our mission over 2024/2025:

Belle Vue Park Primary School
Cairnmillar Institute
Child Protection Health Program Victoria
City of Merri-bek Maternal & Child Health Service
City of Greater Dandenong
Family Relationship Services Australia (FRSA)
Monash University
North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network (NWMPHN)
Springvale Service for Children
Creative Family Law Solutions
Better Place Australia

OUR TEAM

The key to the organisations success will always be attributed to its fabulous team -
THANK YOU.