

council of
single mothers
and their
children



years
stronger
together

Annual Report 2020-2021



Strategic Directions 2021-2024

We build on the work of the single mothers who founded the organisation in 1969 to secure a better life for women parenting alone and their children.

Vision:

A society that ensures social and economic inclusion for all single mothers and their children, across their lives.

Mission:

We achieve change by championing the agency, rights and needs of single mothers and their children and by providing specialist support services.

Values:

Our values inform our work and all we do:

Justice driven: We advance social justice for single mother families.

Enabling: We foster mutual support, strengths-based capacity building and self expression.

Diverse & inclusive: We represent the diversity of single mothers, through life experiences, resilience and resourcefulness, grounded in feminism.

Trustworthy: We are respectful, transparent and accountable in all that we do and say.

Priority areas

Income security: Single mothers and their children have the best chance to flourish when they have a secure income. Instead, 37 per cent of single mother families in Australia currently live in poverty.

Diverse education and employment opportunities that fit with family responsibilities: Single mothers can benefit significantly from flexible employment opportunities that accommodate their care responsibilities, along with access to further education, training, and affordable childcare.

Safe and affordable housing: Single mother families are among the most vulnerable in the volatile housing market yet secure and suitable housing is a prerequisite for both adults and children to thrive.

Legal protection in family law: Australia boasts a just legal system, yet evidence increasingly shows mothers and their children are too often mistreated or ignored if they voice safety concerns.

Safety, wellbeing and resilience of single mothers: We foster the wellbeing of single mothers, work to ensure their safety, and reinforce their resilience and capabilities whatever their situation.

Children's safety, wellbeing and opportunities to thrive: CSMC works to ensure the children of single mothers have every opportunity to reach their potential.



Cover Image: *Home Works (2020)* by Claudia Pharès. Claudia is a French-Canadian of Vietnamese-Egyptian descent based in Melbourne/Naarm. She is an artist, a mother of two and a nurse. She submitted this work to our Minerva Project.

Other images have been sourced through Graphic Stock or Unsplash under licence.

Single mothers' names have been changed in all stories to respect their privacy.

Chair Report



Welcome to the 2021 Annual Report for the Council of Single Mothers and their Children, after another year of ongoing restrictions and lockdowns due to COVID 19. Single mothers have been doing it tough for almost two years, facing the ongoing social and economic impacts of the pandemic while supporting, schooling and reassuring their children.

The fabulous frontline staff of the CSMC continued their work from home to provide telephone and online support to single mothers facing major challenges such as securing employment, finding safe housing, dealing with ongoing family violence and negotiating government agencies. As single mothers themselves, they were often caring for and home schooling their own children while providing a compassionate and responsive service to single mothers in need. I would like to acknowledge the dedication and professionalism of the staff who ensured that our important work of supporting and empowering single mothers continued through another challenging year.

Making connections and being heard has been vitally important to maintaining mental wellbeing during the upheaval of COVID 19, and we provided opportunities for single mothers via social media and our Minerva Project. The Minerva Project was an initiative to capture the stories of single mothers during the pandemic and provided single mothers with the opportunity to share their stories through artistic expression. The collection continues to grow with stories both deeply personal and universal.

Our advocacy work continued in 2021, with submissions to Parliament on income security, welfare conditionality and family violence. I commend the staff and CEO for winning opportunities to appear before the Parliamentary Committees to tell single mother stories and for supporting single mothers to write their own advocacy letters to governments.

Our Board had become accustomed during lockdowns in the previous year to operating via Zoom meetings. Strategic planning, however, presented another challenge and I am delighted to report that our process for both Board and staff input worked admirably, allowing us to efficiently develop our 2021-2024 Strategic Plan.

As always, we are very thankful for the many people who help us provide support to single mothers and their children and give them a voice through our advocacy work: the CSMC staff, CSMC Board, partner organisations and financial contributors who share our mission of working to better the lives of single mothers and their children. We are a member organisation run by and for single mothers to create a world in which single mother families are fully valued and respected. We are dedicated fierce and caring, and we are stronger together.

Barbara Schade

Board members 2020-21

Barbara Schade, Chair (2017 -	Robyn Curnow (2017 -	Amy Sasse (2020 -
Deirdre Bignell, Vice Chair (2017 -	Hannah George (2019 -	Sarah Liversidge (2020 -
Jackie King, Treasurer (2020-21)	Kristy Lee Tyrrell (2019 -	Treasurer since June 2021 -
		Genine Hook (2020



CEO year in review

The 2020-2021 year both tested and demonstrated the remarkable resilience of single mothers and their children. Families in Victoria have spent over a third of the year under stay-at-home restrictions with little respite. Their homes are often a tight fit with children home schooling, no access to childcare and some mothers working remotely. Single mothers were the family type hit hardest by job losses in 2020 and are likely to continue to face many barriers to financial recovery.

Despite all this, single mothers continued to engage with us and with each other, giving voice directly and via social media to their challenges, solutions and policy suggestions. CSMC's member base has grown, reaching over 4300 single mother members.

Throughout 2020-2021, we advocated with the State Government for the specific needs of single mothers, advising the Minister for Women on the acute need for equitable access to childcare and onsite schooling, and on the impacts of isolation. Federally we wrote letters and submissions, and joined others in lobbying on a range of issues of significance to single mother families. I was proud to address two federal parliamentary committees on behalf of single mothers and their children.

The role of our contact workers has been even more important this year with the growing number of complex calls reflecting the additional challenges that single mother families have had to grapple. As well as delivering specialist and practical support through our Support Line, we created innovative ways for single mothers to capture and share their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. CSMC's member base has grown, reaching over 4300 single mother members.

As single mothers themselves, staff members grappled with similar challenges of working while home schooling or living in isolation separated from family and friends. I commend the dedication and flexibility of our staff and thank them for their work and commitment to the families we represent.

My thanks also to the CSMC Chair and Vice Chair for their support and guidance, and to the Board members of 2020 and 2021. They too have juggled home schooling and remote work along with their voluntary commitment to CSMC.

I want to convey my profound gratitude to our donors big and small. We cannot do our work without your support – and in these uncertain economic times it is more special than ever to receive your gifts. This year we were delighted with your generous response to our Mother's Day matched donation campaign, and to our Christmas and pre-tax-time appeals. A special thanks to our major donors and the philanthropic trusts and foundations whose pandemic response provided additional grants, much of which we distributed to single mother families as emergency relief.

We have launched our three-year strategic plan for the next three years with the key goal of reaching 10,000 single mother families a year by 2024, including extending our services to ever more diverse of single mother families.

I look forward to working with you to achieve social and economic inclusion for all single mothers and their children, across their lives.

Jenny Davidson

Challenges

During this financial year Victorians experienced more pandemic related lockdowns than any other state in Australia. These have been arduous and demanding for single mothers and their families, despite having far too much previous experience of social isolation, which put us in good stead. We witnessed both the best of government policy - in decisions to greatly increase most social security payments with the coronavirus supplement, ensure workers remained connected with their workplaces through JobKeeper, and support low-income families and businesses with grants - and the worst, as these lifelines were inequitably offered and prematurely withdrawn.

In communities already dealing with unemployment, homelessness and poverty, the pandemic has highlighted economic pressures and exacerbated family violence, physical and mental illness, and the toll of disability and caring for others. Many of these issues are disproportionately carried by single mother families. Nevertheless, single mothers have adapted to Victoria's challenging lockdowns by working, studying, caring and home schooling children, caring for pre-schoolers and extended family and community members.

Single mother realities in COVID

Even getting tested for the virus has been an ordeal for some single mothers. We've had callers, who, with no car and young children in tow, have had to negotiate public transport, walk, or take an uber or taxi to their nearest testing site.

Some mothers have been denied home testing and instructed to drive- with their children- to their nearest testing site while suffering COVID-19 symptoms and feeling unwell.



"Not every service understands the extra difficulties faced when you are a single mum. I have three children, one with autism and extreme behaviours.

No one understands the exhaustion being responsible for cooking, cleaning, covering costs along with managing a child with extra needs while being a single mum. How that affects ability to earn an income, function socially or the toll on my own mental health.

CSMC, I knew would understand - making it feel like a safe space to ask questions and not feel judged."

Single mother responding to our Support Line survey, June 2021.

Professional information, support and referrals

The CSMC Support Line saw a four per cent increase in contacts compared to last year, and an eight per cent increase in complex and highly complex calls compared to pre-COVID.

We had a significant rise in requests for support via email and social media messages as mothers lacked time in the day or privacy to talk, with school and pre-schoolers at home.

"Living in the country we have limited services and you helped me financially. I couldn't be more grateful."

"Assisted me to connect with a lawyer who is really helpful."

"I appreciate the phone conversation I had with a contact worker and the email they sent me afterwards with resources. The conversation was thorough and gave me important practical tips I would not have thought of myself. Thank you for helping me."

Our Back to School program is enabled almost entirely due to philanthropic grants and community donations. This year we spent a total of \$11,460 supporting secondary students and their families to cover the costs of items such as school fees, uniforms and books.

While many Australians assume our school systems are affordable, for those on low incomes, cost is increasingly a barrier to education.

Financial barriers include a range of issues:

- School fee invoices mixing voluntary and obligatory items
- Schools not responding to requests for assistance
- Loss of work and increased costs during the pandemic
- Digital device requirements
- Other competing demands on a small family budget.

We regard the back to school program as an investment in the future of children who are growing up in poverty and social disadvantage.



A special gift

In between lockdowns, four families were able to stay at Agnes's Cottage, a holiday unit in Mornington made available to CSMC for four years by our generous supporter [Clare Duggan](#). Clare supports CSMC in many ways including by sharing a family holiday home, named for her mother, Agnes. David, Clare's husband, supports this gift with maintenance work.

Responses from single mothers highlight the positive impact of a holiday on the well-being and mental health of families.

"We got to relax together and have a holiday in a beautiful place that we couldn't have afforded to otherwise, it was so nice!! Grandparents came as well so I was able to relax a bit".

CSMC service summary

2443 instances of direct assistance

840 phone calls



1150 emails / website enquiries

442 contacts via Facebook Messenger



98 secondary students supported with school costs
302 families assisted with emergency relief



Opportunities in a year of challenges

Digital communications

With Victorians under pandemic stay-at-home orders for much of the year, our digital communications became more important than ever:

- ◆ 41 e-bulletins featured up-to-the-minute information about government pandemic payments and changes, single mother work-from-home supports, along with other news.
- ◆ 74,000 website visitors sought out housing and finance information, co-parenting in the pandemic and health resources, and much other specialist information.
- ◆ In March 2021 we created a 'Stronger Together' Facebook group, a member-only place where single mothers share advice, information and have fun. The group quickly established itself as a supportive forum with responsive and vibrant conversations.
- ◆ We launched Minerva as an online creative project to capture stories of single mothers in the pandemic. Contributions included art installations, stories, poems, and photographs and include the work on the cover of this report.
- ◆ Members enjoyed a reprieve from COVID-19 with our first 'watch party'. Supporters gathered in real time to view the film *Brazen Hussies*. 290 tickets generated proceeds to support unfunded CSMC work.

2020-21	% increase
Twitter followers	10%
Facebook - CSMC page likes	6%
Share house registry members	15%
Instagram followers	29%

Career Development for single mothers

Career Development Coaching is a new initiative for CSMC and commenced in May 2021. This professional peer program will use tailored resources to help single mothers develop their capacities for lifelong career self-management, and the ability to successfully transition to the paid workforce or further education and training. It includes personalised coaching with access to tools, job ready programs and support resources, delivered face-to-face or via video conferencing to single mothers across Victoria.

We look forward to reporting on delivery of this program next year.

COVID career dilemmas

When Melbourne slipped into second wave lockdowns in July 2020, Rhonda was studying full time and working part-time with two children aged seven and nine years. She is an essential worker but relinquished paid work to home school her children. Rhonda found it hard to juggle the expectation of the school that she would teach the children and keep them progressing with few resources and in the face of their disinterest. She also found it almost impossible to maintain her study which she sees as key to better employment options post pandemic.



Many single mothers have struggled with similar dilemmas this year: how to manage households and their children's education while trying to juggle work and study as well. We have found that most single mothers who call cannot cope with the multiple load of work and home schooling – especially when there are no other family members to help out or offer respite. We had many contacts from single mothers who had to leave their employment or abandon their studies to stay home with their children and supervise schooling.

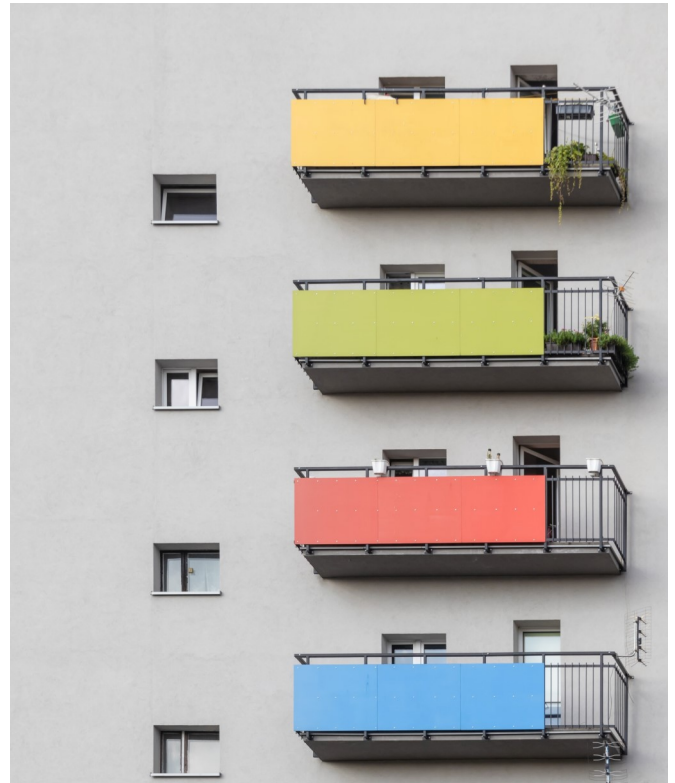
Moving forward, supports for single mothers and their children to deal with the social and emotional impacts of the stay-at-home restrictions and to assist them to move forward will be key. CSMC has consistently provided information to government and others and will actively work toward recovery strategies.

Housing and homelessness

Despite the rent reduction scheme and moratorium on evictions, we continued to hear from single mothers who were not eligible for the scheme or who had nowhere to go after leaving an unsafe situation.

Access to affordable, suitable, and secure rentals remained elusive for many. Families are staying longer in temporary, crisis accommodation, often with inadequate cooking facilities and little room to move, particularly during a lockdown.

With housing and homelessness our top presenting issue this year, we used our referral pathways, service collaborations and emergency relief to support single mother families in this situation into more stable housing.



Tenacity and resilience

From refuge to study

When she escaped family violence Carol was placed in a refuge. She and her teenage son were then moved from motel to motel for months, living with no cooking facilities and dependent on take away meals. Her son disengaged from school and became depressed. Carol rang us when she had just been provided with transitional housing. She was keen to move forward, had found help for her son and enrolled herself in a Community Services course. We were able to help her and her son with groceries, school supplies and links to education supports.

No easy road

Lia was homeless with three children after escaping family violence. She contacted us after she had been accepted for support by a homeless service that required her to apply for five houses per week as a condition of their support. Dependent on JobSeeker and unable to search for work until she and the children were settled, there were few available places she can afford and none of her applications had been successful. CSMC supported her urgent application for secure housing and while not a permanent solution, saw the family into transitional housing.

Having missed schooling due to being homeless, her three children were enrolled in a new high school and required to bring their own digital device. Struggling financially, Lia asked the school for support but was told they had nothing to offer. CSMC worked with Lia to access government and philanthropic support to ensure satisfactory devices for her children.

This year saw a 15% increase in our share house register membership with mothers seeking their own practical solutions to unaffordable housing

*"Hi everyone,
Anyone in my area wants to team up?
I have 10 yr old girl & 8 mths boy. We are
very clean and respectful and looking near
school and CBD as I'm not driving. My
lease end this December and rent will go
up so high so not really can afford it.
Contact me."*

Post on CSMC share house platform.

Member engagement

Single mothers have contacted us throughout the pandemic with ideas to improve their situation, requests for advocacy on their behalf, and offers of support in our work.

Members joined us in writing letters to Members of Parliament, sharing with them the impact of long lock downs on their children and themselves. They contributed to policy and submissions on issues affecting their finances and housing.

Five submissions to government lead to two invitations to public hearings of the investigating committees.

It is great to see this activism growing and we hope to build it in the coming year.



Who will care for my child?

This project grew from several single mothers wrestling with stay-at-home restrictions and addresses issues that were playing on the minds of mothers from metropolitan Melbourne to remote regions of Victoria and beyond: 'If I get sick, who will look after my child?' 'If I have to go to hospital, what will happen to them?'

With customary supports withdrawn, the realities of solo parenting in a pandemic were stark. We gathered some funds and with the voluntary commitment of members, began work. Not yet finished, this project has its genesis in the stay-at-home restrictions of this year and last and we recognise the members involved.

Fighting financial abuse

Another work in progress is a collaboration between a small group of single mothers, Council of Single Mothers and their Children, researchers at Swinburne University and the National Council of Single Mothers. The group of members have been exploring technological remedies to the ongoing issues of late or underpaid child support and other forms of financial abuse. Their efforts this year have moved our university partners to the point of seeking funds. If successful, their efforts will have national ramifications.

Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc. 2020-21 Financial Report

Balance sheet for the year ended 30 June 2021

	Note	2021 \$	2020 \$
Asset			
Current Assets			
Cash & cash equivalents	2	347,929	193,113
Term deposits	2	125,000	125,000
Non-current assets			
Office furniture & equipment	3	1,605	2,225
Total Assets		474,534	320,338
Current Liabilities			
Trade & other payables	4	22,517	9,193
Grants in advance	5	161,398	115,992
Provision for staff leave	6	71,401	62,583
Provision for CSMC national survey	7	25,000	-
Total Current Liabilities		280,316	187,768
Net Assets		194,218	132,570
Equity			
Retained surplus		124,218	132,570
Reserves	7	70,000	-
Total Equity		194,218	132,570

Income statement for the year ended 30 June 2021

	Note	2021 \$	2020 \$
Income			
DHHS core funding		246,031	238,904
Donations & bequests		52,254	43,547
Grants		219,103	191,255
Interest received		1,390	2,456
Sundry income		73	55
Total Income		518,851	476,217
Expense			
Audit & finance fees		2,665	2,155
Board & volunteer expenses		363	827
Depreciation & losses on disposal		620	912
Fundraising ER distribution & expenses		5,023	973
Occupancy costs/office overheads		31,792	35,146
Planning & publicity		33,493	7,959
Project grant expenditure		219,103	191,255
Staffing costs		256,973	224,889
Stronger Together newsletter		3,444	1,633
Total Expense		553,476	465,749
Surplus/(Deficit) For Year		(34,625)	10,468
Plus Other COVID-19 Income			
Cash Flow Boost		7,497	22,491
JobKeeper payments		84,000	66,000
Rent relief		4,776	2,288
Total Other COVID-19 Income		96,273	90,779
Net Surplus/(Deficit)		61,648	101,247

The accompanying notes form part of these financial reports

Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc. 2020-21 Financial Report cont'd

Statement of changes in equity for the year ended 30 June 2021

	Retained surplus \$	Total \$
Balance at 1 July 2019	31,323	31,323
Surplus/(deficit) for the year	101,247	101,247
Balance at 30 June 2020	132,570	132,570
Balance at 1 July 2020	132,570	132,570
Surplus/(deficit) for the year	61,648	61,648
Balance at 30 June 2021	194,218	194,218

Statement of cash flows for the year ended 30 June 2021

	Note	2021 \$	2020 \$
Cash from operating activities			
Receipts from customers		615,384	562,890
Payments to suppliers and employees		(460,308)	(508,924)
Interest paid		1,390	2,456
Net cash provided by/(used in) operating activities	8(b)	156,466	56,422
Cash flows from investing activities			
Payment for plant & equipment		-	-
Payments for investments		-	-
Cash flows from investing activities		-	-
Net increase/(decrease) in cash held		156,466	56,422
Cash at beginning of financial year		191,463	135,041
Cash at end of financial year	8(a)	347,929	191,463

Notes to the financial statements for the year ended 30 June 2021

Statement of significant accounting policies

This financial report is a special purpose financial report prepared in order to satisfy the financial reporting requirements of the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 (Victoria)* and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*. The board has determined that the association is not a reporting entity.

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with following Australian Accounting Standards:

AASB 101	Presentation of Financial Statements
AASB 107	Statement of Cash Flows
AASB 108	Accounting Policies, Changes in Accounting Estimates and Errors
AASB 1031	Materiality
AASB 1048	Interpretation of Standards
AASB 1054	Australian Additional Disclosures

The financial statements have been prepared on an accrual basis and are based on historical cost and do not take into account changing money values except where specifically stated.

The full statement of accounting policies and the Auditors Report from Alkemade & Associates, are available on request.

Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc. 2020-21 Financial Report cont'd

Notes to the financial statements for the year ended 30 June 2021 (cont.)

	2021	2020
	\$	\$
2. Cash and cash equivalents		
Cash on hand	275	323
Cash at bank	347,654	192,790
Term Deposits	125,000	125,000
	<u>472,929</u>	<u>318,113</u>
3. Office furniture & equipment		
Office furniture & equipment at cost	17,559	17,559
Less accumulated depreciation	(15,954)	(15,334)
	<u>1,605</u>	<u>2,225</u>
4. Trade & other payables		
Trade payables	3,973	6,211
GST payable	5,298	-
Payroll liabilities payable - superannuation, PAYG, union fees	13,246	2,982
	<u>22,517</u>	<u>9,193</u>
5. Grants in advance		
Australian Communities Foundation – COVID-19 Emergency Relief	2,884	-
Barr Family Foundation	10,000	-
Bennelong Foundation	16,308	-
CISVic Emergency Relief (DSS)	958	3,596
DHHS Pathways to Family Violence Work	-	12,093
Felton Alfred Estate – A/C Charitable Bequest	13,603	-
Gandel Philanthropy	25,000	-
Hazel Peat Perpetual Charitable Trust	8,000	-
La Trobe University	2,000	-
Victorian Office for Women	3,270	3,270
Phyllis Connor Memorial Trust	39,310	57,096
Ross Trust Emergency Relief	15,000	34,543
Ross Trust Capacity Building	22,500	-
Victorian State Government – Business Support Fund	-	5,394
Victorian Women's Trust	2,565	-
	<u>161,398</u>	<u>115,992</u>
6. Employee provisions		
Annual Leave	40,697	39,574
Long Service Leave	20,704	16,009
Personal Sick Leave	10,000	7,000
	<u>71,401</u>	<u>62,583</u>
7. Other Provisions & Reserves		
The Board elected in 2021 to raise a Provision for the CSMC National Survey of \$25,000 from the current year surplus, as well as raising a Reserve in Equity from prior years' Retained Surplus to the value of \$70,000 to provide for anticipated increased staffing costs in the 2022-2023 financial year.		
8. Cash flow information		
Reconciliation of cash		
Cash on hand	<u>347,929</u>	<u>191,463</u>
Reconciliation of cash flow from operations with net profit		
Profit/(loss) from ordinary activities	61,648	101,247
Depreciation	620	912
Changes in assets & liabilities		
Increase/(decrease) in trade creditors	1650	(1,650)
Increase/(decrease) in trade creditors	(2,238)	3,078
Increase/(decrease) in other creditor & accrued liabilities	60,968	(63,060)
Increase/(decrease) in provisions	33,818	15,895
Cash flows from operations	<u>156,466</u>	<u>56,422</u>

Thank you

Council of Single Mothers and their Children receives invaluable support from the Victorian Government and charitable trusts and foundations who together enable us to deliver our Support Line, provide emergency relief, undertake policy work, expand our organisational capacity and grow our reach to single mothers and their children in diverse situations, locations and cultures. We thank them all.



Financial support

[Australian Communities Foundation](#)

[National Crisis Response Extension Fund – COVID-19 Emergency Relief](#)

[Barr Family Foundation](#)

[Bennelong Foundation](#)

[Department of Social Services & CISVic](#)

[COVID-19 Emergency Relief](#)

[Department of Health and Human Services Victoria](#)

[Core funding and Pathways to Family Violence work.](#)

[Felton Bequest](#)

[Gandel Philanthropy](#)

[Hazel Peat Trust](#)

[Ross Trust Emergency Relief](#)

[Ross Trust COVID](#)

[Victorian Women's Trust](#)

We also thank our **donors and major donors**

Partners and Collaborators

ACOSS

La Trobe University research and project team

Lant3k IT Solutions

McKinsey Executive Leadership Program

Professor Kay Cook, Department of Social Sciences,
Swinburne University

Robina Bradley

Terese Edwards, CEO, National Council of Single
Mothers and their Children

Thatch @ Pretentia

The Hon. Gabrielle Williams, Minister for Women and
her team

Treating Families Fairly Alliance

VCOSS

Women Victoria

Member volunteers and supporters

Amelia

Belinda

Board members (see page 3)

Chilemwa

Ginny

Margo

Naomi

Sarah

Suzanne

Colleen Martin (Salesforce support)

Zali Harris (administration)

Students on placement

We commend our students who completed placements entirely remotely. Two completed 500 hours and a third a shorter placement, followed by ongoing volunteering. One co-authored paper on single mother share housing that was accepted for publication.



**Council of Single Mothers
and their Children Inc.**

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