



Lead the Way Conference 2026



Program

2–3 September | Melbourne | Rydges

Enduring Wisdom, Emerging Futures:
Strength in What We Know,
Co-Creating What Comes Next



About

Across two days of keynotes, panel discussions, research presentations, and interactive workshops, the conference will explore:

- Cross-sector insights for strengthening safety and wellbeing.
- How evidence-based approaches improve outcomes.
- What real-world examples of practice look like across sectors.



Inspiring Keynotes

Experts on trauma, culture, child safety, wellbeing and leadership.



Cutting Edge Research

Evidence-informed insights for safer environments.



Real-World Case Studies

Examples of practice transforming schools and organisations.



Networking

Connect with leaders across sectors.



The conference is a celebration of collaborating across sectors, providing an opportunity for knowledge sharing and promoting the critical importance for us all to have a deep understanding of trauma and its impact on the families and children we support, and the staff who support them.



Dr Robyn Miller AM

Chief Executive Officer
MacKillop Family Services

Keynote Speakers



**Professor Pasi
Sahlberg**

**Professor in Educational
Leadership**

Faculty of Education

The University of Melbourne



Deb Tsorbaris

**National Children's
Commissioner**



**Professor Geoff
Masters AO**

**International Adviser on
Curriculum and Assessment
Redesign**



Natalie Siegel-Brown

**Child Rights and Law
Reform Adviser
UNICEF**



Rabbi Zalman Kastel AM

**Founder
Together for Humanity**



Dr Robyn Miller AM

**Chief Executive Officer
MacKillop Family Services**

Guest Speakers



Sarah Davies AM
Chief Executive Officer
Alannah & Madeline Foundation



Paul Fitzgerald
Senior Psychologist
Fire Rescue Victoria



Lisa Parsons
School Engagement Partner
Kids Helpline @Schools



Professor Melitta Hogarth
Director of Ngarrngga
University of Melbourne



Jeremy Kalbstein
Director of Education
Click Against Hate



Dr Nikki Jamieson
Defence - Strategic Advisor
Suicide Prevention, Lived
Experience and Moral Injury



Emma Mason
Mother, Independent
Children's Lawyer,
Children's Advocate



Tom Brunzell
Associate Professor
Education and Research
Faculty of Education
University of Melbourne



Dr Madeline Wishart
Founder
Wishart Psychology



Professor Tim Carey
Director of The Centre for
Health Equity in Regional
and Remote Communities
CQ University



Sara Tajima
Research Fellow at Ngarrngga
University of Melbourne



Sam Wright
Vice Principal of Students
Padua College



Mia Bannister
Mother | Founder & Director, Ollie's
Echo: Pathways to Prevention Ltd |
Lived Experience Speaker | Advocate
for Safer Digital Spaces for Children



**Natasha
Tereshchenko**
International Programs
Coordinator
The Knox School



Nick Tebby
National Executive Officer
Relationships Australia



Glen Hayres
Curriculum Writer at Ngarrngga
University of Melbourne



Annette Schneider
Chief Executive Officer
Together for Humanity



Professor Darryl Higgins
Professor and Director of
The Institute of
Child Protection Studies
Australian Catholic University



Dr Phil Lambert PSM
Adjunct Professor
University of Sydney



**Associate Professor
Tim Moore**
Deputy Director of The
Institute of Child
Protection Studies
Australian Catholic
University

Guest Speakers



Dr Zach Greig
Founder

The StandUp Project



Dr Gemma McKibbin
Senior Research Fellow

The University of Melbourne



Cheryl Barrett
Chief Executive Officer

Kanda Care



Jackie Bray
Chief Executive Officer

Department for Child Protection,
South Australia



David Cross

Chief Executive Officer
ZOE Foundation Australia



Andrea Cross
Program Manager

ZOE Foundation Australia



Gerard McGeough
Chief Executive Officer

Victims of Crime NT



Payge Whitehead
Senior Social Worker
Department for Education SA



Caterina Davis
Education Lead
Department for Education SA



Jenny Wood
Founder and Director
JustaSec Education Pty Ltd



Chante Kuhn
Uniting VicTas



Alexandra Harper
Western Sydney University



Dr Annaley Clarke
Infinity Community Solutions



Dr Matthew Spicer
Centre for Positive Behaviour Support



Georgia Pope
St Michael's Lutheran Primary School



Mark Smith
Mark Smith Education Consulting



Grant Dewar
FirstAidPro



Dan Shandler
Co-Founder
ElephantEd



Ben Vasiliou
CEO
The Man Cave



Dr Phil Slade
Founder
Switch4Schools

Guest Speakers



Esmai Manahan
Yorta Yorta
National Director, Nanyubak
Unit: First Nations Practice
and Partnerships
MacKillop Family Services



Eliza Munro
Gamilaroi
Cultural Consultant
MacKillop Seasons



Crystal Envy
Wiradjuri
Cultural Engagement Officer
MacKillop Seasons



Simangaliso Nyoni
National Multicultural
Practice Lead
MacKillop Family
Services



Jo Quinn
Disaster Resilience Officer
MacKillop Seasons



Louise Hall
National and International
Partnerships Lead
MacKillop Seasons



Cameron Burgess
National Program
Director, Sanctuary
The MacKillop
Institute



Justin Roberts
ReLATE National Program
Director
The MacKillop
Institute



Sally Wood
National Practice Specialist
Power to Kids
The MacKillop
Institute



Jocelyn Bignold AM
Chief Executive Officer CEO
McAuley Community Services
for Women



John Cardamone
Disclosure Expert



Vanessa Hamilton
Director
Talking the Talk



Dr Becca Beights
Director of Research
Centre for Positive
Behaviour Support



Dr Geoff Potter
Chief Clinical Officer
Centre for Positive Behaviour
Support



Pola Orlowska
Director
Deloitte Access Economics



Rebecca Cooney
Senior Risk Consultant
ANSVAR Insurance



Dr Alison Asche
Regional Mental Health and Suicide
Prevention Senior Lead
East Melbourne PHN



Mark Bekerman
Regional Suicide Prevention
and Mental Health Planning,
Strategic Design
East Melbourne PHN



Fiona Giles
Education Coordinator
Ronald McDonald House
Victoria & Tasmania



Liz Shaw
Education Services
Manager
Ronald McDonald House
Victoria & Tasmania

Presenting Organisations



Sponsors

Gold Sponsors



Silver Sponsors



Agenda

Conference Seminar Key:

UNDERSTAND
Why This Matters

LEAD
Leadership Practice

ACT
How We Respond

DAY 1 | WEDNESDAY, 2 SEP 2026

8.00 AM – 9.00 AM ARRIVAL AND REGISTRATION LEVEL 1, RYDGES HOTEL

9.00 AM – 10.20 AM OPENING PLENARY CENTRE STAGE

MC Welcome & Housekeeping

Welcome to Country

Opening Remarks – Dr Robyn Miller AM, CEO, MacKillop Family Services

Keynote – Professor Pasi Sahlberg, Professor of Educational Leadership, University of Melbourne – Lead the way toward the future we need

10.30 AM – 11.10 AM MORNING TEA – PRE FUNCTION AREAS LEVEL 1 AND LEVEL 2

11.10 AM – 12:10 PM BREAKOUT SESSION 1

CENTRE STAGE 1 LEVEL 1	CENTRE STAGE 2 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 1 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 2 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 3 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 4 LEVEL 1	TERRACE 1 LEVEL 2
<p>Improving Behaviour Support with Needs-Based, Non-Aversive Reactive Strategies (NARS): Effects, Risk, and Human Rights Protection</p> <p>Presenters: Dr Matt Spicer, Dr Geoff Potter, Dr Becca Beighits</p> <p>Organisation: Centre for Positive Behaviour Support</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 min pres</p>	<p>Two Mothers, One Mission: Lived Experience Driving Safer Futures in a Digital World,</p> <p>Presenters: Mia Bannister, Emma Mason</p> <p>Organisation: Ollie's Echo</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 mins</p>	<p>Experience the Game? Preventing child exploitation through gameplay.</p> <p>Presenters: David Cross, Andrea Cross</p> <p>Organisation: ZOE</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 mins</p>	<p>Trauma-informed Educational Leadership: Leading schools to meet the future</p> <p>Presenters: A/ Prof Tom Brunzell</p> <p>Organisation: University of Melbourne</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 mins pres</p>	<p>Preventing Moral Injury in the Workplace</p> <p>Presenters: Dr Nikki Jamieson</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 min pres</p>	<p>Co-designing systems change with a lived experience lens – a panel discussion</p> <p>Presenters: Jocelyn Bignold AM, Diana Connell, Vanessa Corbridge, Kristy Berryman</p> <p>Organisation: McAuley Community Services for Women</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 mins - panel</p>	<p>Anti Racism in Schools</p> <p>Presenters: Jeremy Kalbstein</p> <p>Organisation: Click Against Hate</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 min pres</p>

12.15 – 13.15 PM BREAKOUT SESSION 2

CENTRE STAGE 1 LEVEL 1	CENTRE STAGE 2 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 1 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 2 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 3 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 4 LEVEL 1	TERRACE 1 LEVEL 2
<p>Demystifying Power Sharing with Young People</p> <p>Presenters: YLAB Young People</p> <p>Organisation: YLAB</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 mins pres</p>	<p>Returning to the Foundations of Wellbeing in Schools</p> <p>Presenters: Lisa Parsons</p> <p>Organisation: Kids Helpline @ School</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 min pres</p>	<p>(Title to be confirmed)</p> <p>Presenters: Sponsor – Pivot PL</p> <p>Organisation: PivotPL</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 mins pres</p>	<p>From Resistance to Belonging: Creating Neuro-affirming, Trauma-informed School Environments that Re-engage Students.</p> <p>Presenters: Georgia Pope</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 mins pres</p>	<p>Putting Child at the Centre of Positive Relationships</p> <p>Presenters: Nick Tebbey</p> <p>Organisation: Relationships Australia</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 min</p>	<p>Child Safeguarding</p> <p>Presenters: Prof Darryl Higgins</p> <p>Organisation: ACU</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 mins</p>	<p>Leading Best Learner Outcomes Through Mentorship</p> <p>Presenters: Mark Smith</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 min workshop</p>

13.15 – 2:00 PM LUNCH & NETWORKING PRE FUNCTION AREAS LEVEL 1 AND LEVEL 2

2:00 PM – 2:40 PM BREAKOUT SESSION 3

CENTRE STAGE 1 LEVEL 1	CENTRE STAGE 2 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 1 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 2 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 3 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 4 LEVEL 1	TERRACE 1 LEVEL 2
<p>Engaging boys to become great men: Exploring how healthy masculinity programs in schools are shaping the world of teenage boys. This session will also provide real world insights from thousands of boys.</p> <p>Presenters: Ben Vasiliou</p> <p>Organisation: The Man Cave</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 mins</p>	<p>Anti Racism in Schools</p> <p>Presenters: Annette Schneider CEO TFH, Phil Lambert</p> <p>Organisation: Together for Humanity</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 min pres</p>	<p>Embedding Lived Experience to Strengthen Wellbeing and Safety for Children and Young People in Family Preservation and Reunification</p> <p>Presenters: Chante Kuhn</p> <p>Organisation: Inviting Vic Tas</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 mins</p>	<p>Understanding impact in alternative education settings</p> <p>Presenters: Pola Orlowska</p> <p>Organisation: Director Deloitte Access Economics Pty Ltd</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 min</p>	<p>Supporting Families and Cultural Practice through Mangka</p> <p>Presenters: Dr Kelly Thompson, Liz Plackett</p> <p>Organisation: Mankah</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 mins</p>	<p>Emotional Regulation in Action – Shaping Character, Culture, and Everyday Practice.</p> <p>Presenters: Caterina Davis, Payge Whitehead</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 min</p>	<p>Engaging the Disengaged – A Whole-School MTSS Approach to Increasing Student Attendance</p> <p>Presenters: MacKillop Education</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 min</p>

2:45 – 3:25 PM BREAKOUT SESSION 4

CENTRE STAGE 1 LEVEL 1	CENTRE STAGE 2 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 1 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 2 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 3 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 4 LEVEL 1	TERRACE 1 LEVEL 2
<p>(Title to be confirmed)</p> <p>Presenters: Prof Helen Skouteris</p> <p>Organisation: Monash University</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 mins?</p>	<p>Cultivating mental health literacy through data informed approaches in a larger 4 campus college</p> <p>Presenters: Sam Wright</p> <p>Organisation: Padua College</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 mins</p>	<p>Settling the Storm: Distress Tolerance Skills for Moments of Emotional</p> <p>Presenters: Dr Madeline Wishart</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 min pres</p>	<p>Seeing the Need: Applying Constructivist Grounded Theory to Finding and Engaging Family for Children on Statutory Child Protection Orders</p> <p>Presenters: Dr Annalee Clarke</p> <p>Organisation: Infinity Community Solutions</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 mins</p>	<p>Addressing the Wellbeing of Students Impacted by a Chronic Health Condition or Serious Illness: Seasons for Growth Pilot in a Unique Educational Setting.</p> <p>Presenters: Fiona Giles</p> <p>Organisation: Ronald McDonald House</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 mins</p>	<p>What 3,000 Educators Wellbeing Data Taught Us About Leading Safe and Well Schools</p> <p>Presenters: Justin Roberts</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 min</p>	<p>Supporting Healthy Conversations About Sexuality Between Schools and Families</p> <p>Presenters: Jenny Wood</p> <p>Organisation: JustASec</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 min pres</p>

3:30 – 4:30 PM KEYNOTE 2 AND 3 – NATALIE SIEGEL-BROWN (30 MINS) AND TBC (30 MINS)

4:30 – 6:30 PM NETWORKING DRINKS AND CANAPES – TERRACE (OPTIONAL)

Agenda

DAY 2 | THURSDAY, 3 SEP 2026

Conference Seminar Key:

UNDERSTAND
Why This Matters

LEAD
Leadership Practice

ACT
How We Respond

8.00 AM - 9.00 AM ARRIVAL AND REGISTRATION LEVEL 1, RYDGES HOTEL

9.00 AM - 10.20 AM OPENING PLENARY CENTRE STAGE

MC Welcome & Housekeeping

Keynote 3 & 4 Rabbi Zalman Kastel AM (30 mins) & TBC (30 mins)

10.30 AM - 11.00 AM MORNING TEA - PRE FUNCTION AREAS LEVEL 1 AND LEVEL 2

11.10 AM - 12:00 PM BREAKOUT SESSION 1

CENTRE STAGE 1 LEVEL 1	CENTRE STAGE 2 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 1 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 2 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 3 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 4 LEVEL 1	TERRACE 1 LEVEL 2
<p>Designing for Belonging: How Organisations Can Support Safety and Wellbeing in Times of Change</p> <p>Presenters: Natasha Tereshchenko</p> <p>Organisation: The Knox School</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 mins pres</p>	<p>Self-Forgiveness Enabling the Carer to care</p> <p>Presenters: Grant Dewar</p> <p>Organisation: FirstAidPro</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 mins</p>	<p>Navigating Digital Dangers: AI deepfakes, Sextortion & Online Threats</p> <p>Presenters: Brandon Fieldman</p> <p>Organisation: ElephantEd</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 min pres</p>	<p>To Lead is to Serve: Impact of Servant Leadership on Emergency Services Wellbeing & Culture</p> <p>Presenters: Paul Fitzgerald</p> <p>Organisation: Fire Rescue Vic</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 min pres Lead</p>	<p>Student Wellbeing in Schools</p> <p>Presenters: Dr Phil Slade</p> <p>Organisation: Switch4Schools</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 min pres</p>	<p>Knowledge in relationship: Weaving First Nations knowledge into every classroom</p> <p>Presenters: Melitta Howarth, Glen Hayres, Sara Tajima,</p> <p>Organisation: University of Melbourne</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 min pres</p>	<p>Panel Discussion: Cultural Practice</p> <p>Presenters: Esmal Manahan and panel</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 min - panel</p>

12.05 - 13.05 PM BREAKOUT SESSION 2

CENTRE STAGE 1 LEVEL 1	CENTRE STAGE 2 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 1 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 2 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 3 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 4 LEVEL 1	TERRACE 1 LEVEL 2
<p>Seasons for Healing</p> <p>Presenters: Eliza Munro, Crystal Evry</p> <p>Organisation: Seasons for Healing</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 mins pres</p>	<p>Trauma Informed Schooling</p> <p>Presenters: River Nile School</p> <p>Organisation: River Nile School</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 mins</p>	<p>Panel: Organisational leadership</p> <p>Presenters: Cameron Burgess and panel</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 min - panel</p>	<p>Panel: Child Safeguarding</p> <p>Presenters: Panel - Prof Darryl Higgins, A/ Prof Tim Moore, Rebecca Cooney ANSVAR</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 mins</p>	<p>Supporting Healthy Conversations about Sexuality</p> <p>Presenters: Vanessa Hamilton</p> <p>Organisation: Talking the Talk</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 min pres</p>	<p>Child safeguarding</p> <p>Presenters: A/Prof Tim Moore</p> <p>Organisation: ACU</p> <p>Format/duration: 60 mins</p>	<p>Session to be confirmed</p>

13.05 - 1:50 PM LUNCH & NETWORKING PRE FUNCTION AREAS LEVEL 1 AND LEVEL 2

1:50 PM - 2:30 PM BREAKOUT SESSION 3

CENTRE STAGE 1 LEVEL 1	CENTRE STAGE 2 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 1 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 2 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 3 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 4 LEVEL 1	TERRACE 1 LEVEL 2
<p>Suicide Prevention</p> <p>Presenters: Alison Asche, Mark Bekerman</p> <p>Organisation: East Melbourne PHN</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 mins</p>	<p>Supporting Intercultural Understanding in Schools</p> <p>Presenters: James Milne, Ella Heather</p> <p>Organisation: Franklin Primary School Tasmania</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 mins</p>	<p>Child Trafficking Only Happens Overseas - Right? The Hidden Reality in Australia</p> <p>Presenters: David Cross</p> <p>Organisation: ZOE</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 mins</p>	<p>Learning Grows Outdoors: How Nature Play Strengthens Wellbeing, Belonging, and Engagement in Primary School</p> <p>Presenters: Alexandra Harper</p> <p>Organisation: Western Sydney Uni</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 mins</p>	<p>Supporting Children and Young People through Grief and Loss</p> <p>Presenters: Louise Hall</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 min</p>	<p>Child safeguarding - framework or pathways to healing</p> <p>Presenters: John Cardamone</p> <p>Organisation: John Cardamone</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 min pres</p>	<p>Session to be confirmed</p>

2:35 - 3:15 PM BREAKOUT SESSION 4

CENTRE STAGE 1 LEVEL 1	CENTRE STAGE 2 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 1 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 2 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 3 LEVEL 1	MEETING ROOM 4 LEVEL 1	TERRACE 1 LEVEL 2
<p>Bridging the Gap : Building Stronger Connections Between Educators , Families , and Multicultural Communities</p> <p>Presenters: Simangalisso Nyoni</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 mins</p>	<p>From Bystanders to Upstanders: Building Safer School Communities Through Student-Led Action</p> <p>Presenters: Dr Zach Graig</p> <p>Organisation: StandUp Project</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 min pres</p>	<p>State of the system - Observations on the alternative education sector</p> <p>Presenters: Pola Orłowska</p> <p>Organisation: Director Deloitte Access Economics Pty Ltd</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 min</p>	<p>Power to Kids Child Safeguarding in Schools and OOH</p> <p>Presenters: Sally Wood</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 min</p>	<p>The Third Wheel: Why Families Matter in Generational Change (What happens when schools try to change lives without changing the ecosystem around them?)</p> <p>Presenters: MacKillop Education</p> <p>Format/duration: 40 min</p>	<p>Session to be confirmed</p>	<p>Session to be confirmed</p>

3:30 - 4:30 PM CLOSING CEREMONY

Keynote 5 & 6 Victorian Commission for Children and Young People (30 mins)

Performance

Closing Remarks Dr Robyn Miller AM, CEO, MacKillop Family Services

Conference speakers



Professor Pasi Sahlberg

Educational Leadership – University of Melbourne

Professor Pasi Sahlberg is a renowned Finnish educator, researcher, and author, recognised for his contributions to global education reform. With a career spanning teaching, teacher education, policymaking, and academia, he has influenced education systems worldwide. He has served in key roles, including Senior Education Specialist at the World Bank (Washington, DC), Lead Education Specialist at the European Training Foundation (Italy), and Director General at Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture (CIMO). Additionally, he was a Visiting Professor of Practice at Harvard University. Pasi is currently Professor of Educational Leadership at the University of Melbourne, where he continues to advocate for evidence-based education policies.



Deb Tsorbaris

National Children's Commissioner

Deb Tsorbaris is a leading advocate for children, young people and families with over 30 years of experience in executive roles in the not for profit and public sectors. As National Children's Commissioner, Ms Tsorbaris promotes and protects children's human rights. Ms Tsorbaris provides policy leadership to governments across Australia and has been instrumental in advancing the rights of vulnerable and marginalised children. In recognition of her outstanding work with children, Ms Tsorbaris was honoured with the prestigious Robin Clark Leadership Award in 2022.



Rabbi Zalman Kastel AM

Founder – Together for Humanity

Rabbi Kastel was raised in the ultra-Orthodox Hasidic tradition in the racially divided Crown Heights area of Brooklyn, New York. Originally viewing the world through the lens of his community's traditions, his perspective transformed in 2001 following meaningful encounters with Christian and Muslim communities. As a Hasidic Rabbi, Rabbi Kastel continues to teach Bible study at Chabad House North Shore in Sydney. He was ordained after extensive study in the UK, Australia, and the US, and holds a Graduate Diploma in Education from the University of New England, Armidale. His journey of interfaith cooperation has been marked by moments of laughter, challenge, and growth, as he works to bring positive experiences of diversity to young Australians. In recognition of his significant contributions to interfaith and intercultural understanding, Rabbi Kastel was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 2020.



Natalie Siegel-Brown

Child Rights and Law Reform Adviser UNICEF

Natalie Siegel Brown is the Inspector-General for Aged Care, overseeing Australia's aged care administration and regulation. She is a former Commissioner for Social Policy at the Productivity Commission and a Director at Oxfam. She has led major oversight bodies in child protection, youth justice, mental health, disability and elder abuse, including serving as Queensland Public Guardian. Natalie advises UNICEF and the Fiji Government on law reform. She has a long record in human rights, Indigenous justice and abuse prevention.

Conference speakers



Sarah Davies AM

Chief Executive Officer – Alannah & Madeline Foundation

Sarah has had a wide-ranging career from executive roles in tertiary education to private sector consulting in Australia and overseas. For the last 20 years she has held leadership and executive positions in the charity and for-purpose sector. In 2021 Sarah joined the Alannah & Madeline Foundation as the CEO. The Foundation works to make sure children can grow up happy, safe and strong – in both their online and offline worlds, free from violence, and with the support and strategies they need to thrive. Sarah also serves on a range of Boards and committees. Her current community Board roles include Chair of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) Advisory Board, and non-executive director of the Sisterhood Foundation, the Board of Old Parliament House, which manages the Museum of Australian Democracy, and Social Ventures Australia.



Paul Fitzgerald

Senior Psychologist- Fire Rescue Victoria

Paul Fitzgerald is a Registered Psychologist with senior and leadership experience across health, safety, and wellbeing departments within the emergency services sector. He is currently employed at Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) and now in his seventh year within the sector, specialising in developing psychologically safe leaders & teams, psychological wellbeing, and mental health support for frontline personnel. As a Board-Approved Supervisor & EMDR practitioner, he brings expertise in trauma recovery and resilience-building. His experience includes multiple disaster deployments and delivering mental health training across emergency services. Paul is the 2025 recipient of the Emergency Services Foundation to study the impact of Servant Leadership on culture and wellbeing of first responders. Drawing on evidence-based practice and operational insight, Paul is passionate about enhancing psychological safety & supporting others to thrive in uncertain & high-pressure environments.



Lisa Parsons

School Engagement Partner – Kids Helpline @ Schools

Lisa Parsons is a youth mental health and wellbeing advocate and experienced educator with a strong background in school engagement and community support. She currently works as a School Engagement Partner with Kids Helpline @ School, supporting schools to strengthen student wellbeing through evidence-informed, preventative approaches. Lisa brings extensive experience as a primary teacher, alongside qualifications in primary education and TESOL, and is deeply committed to creating safe, inclusive, and supportive environments for children and young people through education, advocacy, and community collaboration.



Professor Melitta Hogarth

Director of Ngarrngga – University of Melbourne

Professor Melitta Hogarth is a Kamilaroi woman and the Director of Ngarrngga. She is Professor of Indigenous Education and Principal Research Fellow in the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne. Prior to entering academia, Professor Hogarth taught for almost 20 years in Queensland, particularly in secondary schools. Her PhD on the rights of Indigenous peoples in education won multiple awards, including the Ray Debus Award for Doctoral Research in Education. In 2024 she was named ACEL Vic Hedley Beare Educator of the Year.



Jeremy Kalbstein

Director of Education – Click Against Hate

Jeremy Kalbstein is driven by one question: how do we help young people think critically and act ethically in an increasingly complex world? As a Learning Designer and the Director of Education for Click Against Hate and Holocaust Education Australia, he designs immersive, story-based learning experiences that support educators and challenge students to engage deeply with complex real-world issues.

Conference speakers



Esmai Manahan – *(Yorta Yorta)*

National Director, Nanyubak Unit: First Nations Practice and Partnerships – MacKillop Family Services

National Director of Nanyubak: First Nations Practice and Partnerships at MacKillop Family Services, Esmai Manahan is a proud Yorta Yorta and Gunditjmara woman. She was raised in a politically active family who remain passionate to this day about making positive change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people including advocating strongly for Treaty and Truth-telling. Esmai is mother, grandmother, sister and aunty to many. Esmai is trauma and family therapy trained and responsible in her role as National Director, for the oversight of cultural safety and cultural change, policy development, self-determination and reconciliation at MacKillop, including strongly advocating for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families, particularly the most vulnerable in the areas of prevention, healing and out of home care. Esmai is a Life Member of the Margaret Tucker Aboriginal Girls Refuge, Co-Chair, Indigenous Advisory Board of Breastscreen Victoria, and continues to be actively involved and committed to community activities.



Eliza Munro – *(Gamilaroi)*

Cultural Consultant – MacKillop Seasons

Eliza is a proud mother of five, grandmother of one and spiritual woman from the Gamilaroi Nation. Eliza holds over twenty-years in Indigenous health contributing to the health and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with experience in both government and community led organisations. Eliza is passionate about supporting the returning to Spirit journey (palliative and end-of-life care), First Nations death literacy and grief, loss and healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and families.

Eliza is a Sorry Business Consultant and Managing Director of Ngiyani Wandabaa, a 2024 Churchill Fellow (Exploring Death and Dying in First Nations Communities). End-of-Life Biographer. One of six Founding Directors of, and the concept creator behind the establishment of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Palliative Care Association. Advisory Member for the End-of-Life Law for Clinicians National Project, 2023 Palliative Care Queensland Award Winner for Outstanding Achievement in Palliative Care for First Nations Communities (IPEPA Team) and a Board Director for Homes North Community Housing.



Crystal Evry – *(Wiradjuri)*

Cultural Engagement Officer – MacKillop Seasons

Crystal is a proud Wiradjuri Woman, mother, and experienced First Nations social worker with a background in child safety and wellbeing. Over the past 7 years, she has supported families experiencing complex challenges, working with compassion, cultural awareness, and a trauma-informed approach. Crystal is passionate about walking alongside people through grief, loss, and change, drawing on both her professional experience and personal journey. She is deeply committed to strengthening families, empowering communities, and advocating for culturally safe and respectful support systems that honour the voices and lived experiences of First Nations people.



Jenny Wood

Founder and Director – JustaSec Education Pty Ltd

Jenny Wood is a sexuality educator who has held senior positions in sexuality education and program development and is now the founder and director of JustaSec Education Pty Ltd.. Through JustaSec Jenny leads the development of high-quality educational resources and digital content designed to strengthen parent engagement and whole school approaches to RSE (Relationships and Sexuality Education). Her work is grounded in collaboration, evidence-informed practice and a strong commitment to ethical care and child safety."

Conference speakers



Dr Nikki Jamieson

Strategic Advisor (Suicide Prevention, Lived Experience and Moral Injury) -
Department of Defence & Founder of Moral Injury Australia

Dr Nikki Jamieson is an Author, Suicidologist, Social Worker and Researcher & has undertaken pioneering research on moral injury in Australia following the suicide loss of her son in 2014. Published nationally and internationally on moral injury Nikki also delivers keynotes and workshops and written two books and micro-education app on moral injury for first responders and their families. Nikki has worked in several government departments in suicide prevention including Health and the Departments of Veterans' Affairs and Department of Defence. Nikki continues to advocate for suicide prevention and engaging lived experience.



Dan Shandler

Co-Founder - ElephantEd

Dan Shandler is a Co-Founder and Director of Elephant Ed. Dan is a passionate educator dedicated to shaping safer, more respectful school communities. With over a decade of experience, Dan has presented to tens of thousands of young people, parents and teachers on national and international stages, helping audiences navigate complex conversations around consent, relationships and online safety with clarity and confidence. Elephant Ed partners with more than 500 schools across Australia and now delivers evidence-based, age-appropriate programs to more than 100,000 participants each year. Elephant Ed is endorsed as a Trusted eSafety Provider by the eSafety Commissioner and is included in the Australian Council for Educational Research directory for evidence-based student wellbeing programs.



Emma Mason

Mother | Independent Children's Lawyer | Children's Advocate

Emma Mason has been a lawyer for 25 years, currently working as an Independent Children's Lawyer and advocate, representing the voices and best interests of children navigating complex family law matters. Through her work in the Family Court, Emma has seen firsthand the profound impact that conflict, trauma, and systemic pressures can have on young people and their families. Emma's advocacy extends far beyond the courtroom. She is also a leading voice in national and global conversations around child safety, particularly in the digital environment, work driven by the devastating loss of her daughter, Matilda "Tilly" Rosewarne. At just 15, Tilly died by suicide after experiencing sustained online bullying, including image-based abuse, a tragedy that has shaped Emma's drive to ensure no other family endures the same loss. From the Family Court to the United Nations, Emma has used her voice to influence international policy, challenge systems, and advocate for safer online spaces as well as stronger protections for children. Her work is grounded in the belief that supporting children cannot sit solely within legal systems, it requires all of us to step forward and play a role in shaping safer, more connected communities. As a speaker, Emma brings together professional expertise and lived experience to challenge, inspire, call others to action, reminding us that the responsibility to protect and support young people and our wider communities belongs to every one of us.



Tom Brunzell

Associate Professor - Education and Research Faculty of Education - University of Melbourne

Associate Professor Tom Brunzell (PhD) is an internationally recognised leader in trauma-informed education and wellbeing sciences at the University of Melbourne, Faculty of Education. He examines the impacts of trauma-informed pedagogies through the interdisciplinary integration of the sciences of learning, engagement, and wellbeing, with a particular emphasis on trauma-informed school and education leadership to support both student and staff outcomes. His scholarly works—including books and peer-reviewed publications—are widely accessible through academic databases and global booksellers. His book: Implementing trauma-informed pedagogies for school change: Shifting schools from reactive to proactive, co-authored with Professor Helen Stokes is available through Emerald Publishing Limited, UK along with his new book is co-authored with Professor Helen Stokes and Jack Grieg, Trauma-Informed Educational Leadership (2025).

Conference speakers



Simangaliso Nyoni

National Multicultural Practice Lead – MacKillop Family Services

Simangaliso is a Social Worker and Counsellor with over 16 years of experience, currently serving as a Cultural Practice Lead at the national level. Specialising in multicultural communities, she works to embed culturally responsive best practices across services and policies. Previously, she was Principal Practitioner and Cultural Advisor Coordinator at MacKillop Family Services and a Counsellor at Deakin University. She holds a Bachelor of Social Work and a Master of Counselling from La Trobe University and is currently pursuing a Juris Doctor at Monash University. A passionate advocate for decolonising social work and counselling, Simangaliso co-authored a chapter in *Intersecting Stories: Narrative Therapy Reflections on Gender, Culture and Justice*.



Mark Bekerman

Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network (EMPHN)

Mark Bekerman is the Regional Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Coordinator at Eastern Melbourne PHN. He has been involved in suicide postvention protocol groups since 2011, including the establishment of the first collaborative emergency response to suicide clusters in Melbourne's southeast. He has worked in a range of sectors including Justice, Education, Mental Health, Local Government and Primary Health and holds qualifications in psychology, change management and leadership.



Dr Geoff Potter

Chief Clinical Officer – Centre for Positive Behaviour Support

Geoff is the Co-founder and Chief Clinical Officer with CPBS. He has over 30 years' experience in positive behaviour support. Geoff has extensive clinical and research experience with constructional behaviour analysis and nonaversive strategies. He has a PhD, is a BCBA, and has published work in multi-element behaviour support.



Dr Alison Asche

Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network (EMPHN)

Over the past 30 years, Alison has worked in a range of roles in suicide prevention, postvention and mental health with a particular focus on complex trauma and supporting communities from refugee and people seeking asylum backgrounds. Her PhD involved a systemic analysis of service provision for youth experiencing suicidal distress who have childhood trauma histories. Alison has a lived experience of being bereaved by suicide and is chair of the Victorian Suicide Prevention Australia committee. She is currently the Regional Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Senior Lead at Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network (EMPHN).

Conference speakers



Dr Madeline Wishart

Founder - Wishart Psychology

Madeline is a Clinical Psychologist with a special interest in nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI), with her PhD exploring the psychosocial determinants of the acts and functions of NSSI convened in 2018. She has been invited to present the results of her research at numerous renowned mental health conferences, including the International Mental Health Conference and the Australasian Conference of Child Trauma. Madeline has also published several peer-reviewed papers in international mental health journals. She has been actively engaged for the past 21 years in an educational, therapeutic, practical and theoretical capacity in the area of NSSI, and psychology more broadly. She is passionate about dispelling the many myths that persist about NSSI.



Professor Tim Carey

Director of The Centre for Health Equity in Regional and Remote Communities - CQUniversity

Timothy Carey Ph.D., is Director, Centre for Health Equity in Regional and Remote Communities, CQUniversity. Previously, he was the Chair Country Health Research and Innovation at Curtin University and before that the inaugural Director of the Institute of Global Health Equity Research and Andrew Weiss Chair of Research in Global Health at the University of Global Health Equity in Rwanda, the Professor of Clinical Psychology in Health Equity at Charles Darwin University, and the Director of Flinders University's Centre for Remote Health in Alice Springs. He is a Fulbright Scholar, a clinician, researcher, trainer, and educator. He has worked as a clinician in Scotland as well as metropolitan and rural Australia including working for the Central Australia Health Service in the adult mental health service, the alcohol and other drugs service, and the pain management service. He has also worked for the Aboriginal Medical Service in Alice Springs in the Social and Emotional Wellbeing clinic.



Sara Tajima

Research Fellow at Ngarrngga - The University of Melbourne

Sara Tajima is a Research Fellow at Ngarrngga. She holds a Master of Social Sciences (International Development) from RMIT University, and a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (Honours) from the University of Melbourne. Sara's work in education has been diverse, with experience across early childhood, schools, and tertiary education settings in Australia and internationally. Her research interests lie in social equity, intercultural education, and the early years.



Sam Wright

Vice Principal of Students - Padua College

Sam Wright is an experienced educational leader currently serving as Vice Principal - Students at Padua College, a multi-campus Catholic secondary school on the Mornington Peninsula. With over two decades in education, Sam brings a rich background shaped by leadership roles in regional Catholic schools. A passionate advocate for student wellbeing, Sam has led transformative initiatives at Padua College, including the implementation of a tiered mental health program, trauma informed practices and the training of all staff in Youth Mental Health First Aid. His leadership philosophy centres on intentional design and authentic connection, ensuring that wellbeing remains at the heart of school culture. Sam continues to teach a senior classes and coach school football, believing that strong relationships and shared experiences are key to meaningful education. His contributions have been recognised nationally, presenting at several conferences and forums and most recently he received the Outstanding Leadership Award at the 2025 National Education Summit Teacher Awards, celebrating his visionary approach to wellbeing, innovation, and community impact. He is married to Kylie, a Wellbeing Coordinator in a country secondary school and has 4 adult children all engaged in further study.

Conference speakers



Mia Bannister

Mother | Founder & Director, Ollie's Echo: Pathways to Prevention Ltd | Lived Experience Speaker | Advocate for Safer Digital Spaces for Children

Mia Bannister is the Founder and Director of Ollie's Echo: Pathways to Prevention Ltd, a charity established in memory of her son, Ollie, who tragically lost his life to suicide at just 14 following a battle with anorexia, compounded by online harms, bullying, and broader mental health challenges. Through Ollie's Echo, Mia is committed to changing the narrative around eating disorders in boys and young men, raising awareness, breaking stigma, and advocating for early intervention, prevention, and education, while also addressing the growing impact of social media and digital environments on young people's wellbeing. As a lived experience speaker and national advocate, Mia shares Ollie's story to spark meaningful conversations, influence systemic change, and create safer environments for young people. She is an active voice in national conversations on youth mental health and digital safety, contributing to media, policy discussions, and reform efforts including advocating for stronger protections for children online and greater accountability of social media platforms. Mia has stood alongside government, sector leaders, and advocacy groups to help drive change and ensure lived experience informs national responses. Her work brings together parents, educators, health professionals, and policymakers to better understand the intersection of body image, social media, bullying, and mental health. With nearly two decades of experience in senior business development and partnerships roles across the corporate sector, Mia now channels her skills into purpose-driven work, amplifying voices too often unheard and championing pathways to prevention so that no family has to experience the loss her own has endured.



Natasha Tereshchenko

International Programs Coordinator - The Knox School

Natasha Tereshchenko is International Programs Coordinator at The Knox School, Melbourne, and Founder of Global Adapt. With twelve years across international development and international schools in Europe, Asia, and Australia, and postgraduate qualifications in development, anthropology, and education, she designs systems and programs that support belonging, safety, and wellbeing for internationally mobile and culturally diverse communities. Her work includes children in post-conflict environments, bringing direct experience from Sri Lanka, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan to questions of trauma-informed transition and institutional care.



Nick Tebbey

National Executive Officer - Relationships Australia

Nick is the National Executive Officer of Relationships Australia, a federation of organisations committed to ensuring the well being of individuals, families and the community. With a dedicated focus on human rights, and a commitment to evidence based practice, Relationships Australia promotes healthy relationships for all Australians, in all their diversity. He graduated from the Australian National University with a Bachelor of Asian Studies, Bachelor of Laws with Honours in 2005 and went on to complete a Master of Laws with the ANU in 2012. After over a decade of legal practice in Canberra, I was honoured to have the opportunity to support the settlement journeys of new Australians as CEO of the Settlement Council of Australia. Nick served as a board member of the Conservation Council ACT and am a member of the Law Council of Australia Immigration Law Committee. I was named ACT Young Lawyer of the Year in 2009 and in 2016 was admitted as a fellow of the Migration Institute of Australia. I have lectured in migration law at the ANU and subsequently ACU, since 2006.



Glen Hayres

Curriculum Writer at Ngarrngga - The University of Melbourne

Glen Hayres is a Curriculum Writer at Ngarrngga. With over 20 years of experience spanning early childhood, primary, and tertiary education, Glen has worked as an educator, leader, and consultant in government and independent schools in Australia and internationally. He holds a Master of Instructional Leadership from the University of Melbourne. Glen specialises in the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme, an inquiry-based, transdisciplinary framework designed to build conceptual understanding and develop globally minded learners. He has contributed to global curriculum innovation projects by co-designing future-focused educational materials, leading professional development initiatives, and facilitating school evaluation processes for the International Baccalaureate Organisation.

Conference speakers



Annette Schneider

Chief Executive Officer - Together for Humanity

Annette brings more than two decades of experience in educational leadership, both in Australia and internationally. She began her professional journey in the classroom as a teacher before moving into leadership and values-driven education roles with organisations such as the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, UNICEF, the Council of Europe Youth Directorate, and Amnesty International. After many years working in Europe, Annette returned to Australia where she taught in a range of school settings across Sydney, eventually joining the team at Together For Humanity. She holds a Master's degree in Intercultural Education and a double Bachelor's degree in Education and Arts (International Studies). Having lived and worked in diverse communities across the globe—and drawing on her own multicultural heritage—Annette brings rich lived experience to her commitment to intercultural understanding and inclusive education. At home, she is kept grounded and inspired by her three children, each of whom reminds her daily of the importance of striving for a world where diversity is celebrated and all people are treated with dignity and respect.



Professor Darryl Higgins

Professor and Director of The Institute of Child Protection Studies
- Australian Catholic University

Professor Daryl Higgins' research focuses on public health approaches to protecting children, and child-safe organisational strategies. A registered psychologist, Professor Higgins has been researching child abuse impacts and prevention, family violence and family functioning for nearly 30 years. As the Director of ACU's Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS), and the former Deputy Director (Research) of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Professor Higgins has extensive research experience in the areas of child-safe organisations, child abuse and neglect, child protection, out-of-home care, family law and allegations of child abuse, disability and family care, welfare reform, family and interpersonal violence, jobless families, past adoption and forced family separation practices, and community development approaches to child and family welfare issues.



Associate Professor Tim Moore

Deputy Director of The Institute of Child Protection Studies - Australian Catholic University

Associate Professor Tim Moore serves as Deputy Director at the Institute of Child Protection Studies and is widely regarded as an international expert in child and youth research and advocacy for children's rights. With over 20 years of experience, his work has addressed a broad range of critical issues including homelessness, youth justice, child protection, residential out-of-home care, young carers, and strategies for preventing child sexual abuse. Tim has contributed expert advice to numerous major inquiries and Commissions, most notably the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and has played a pivotal role in shaping initiatives at local, national, and international levels aimed at improving outcomes for children, young people, and their families. At the Institute, Tim leads the development and delivery of research and practice that meaningfully includes the voices and perspectives of children and young people. His work focuses on making services and systems more responsive, inclusive, and aligned with the rights and lived experiences of those they serve.



Dr Zach Greig

Founder - The StandUp Project

Dr Greig is the Founder of The Stand-Up Project - a voice, agency, and leadership-based anti-bullying program. With a PhD in community empowerment, he is a leading expert in bullying prevention and a frequent speaker and media commentator on student wellbeing, school culture, and preventative education. Drawing on a background in academic research, teaching, and large-scale program delivery, Dr Greig has worked with schools across Australia, Asia, New Zealand, and the United States to embed evidence-based approaches that genuinely shift behaviour.

Conference speakers



Jocelyn Bignold AM

Chief Executive Officer - McAuley Community Services for Women

Jocelyn Bignold AM has been the CEO of McAuley Community Services for Women since 2008, leading innovative support programs for women and children experiencing family violence and homelessness. She has over 25 years of experience in community services, policy development, and advocacy, working extensively with government and non-government organisations to improve policy and service systems. A recognised leader in her field, Jocelyn was an expert witness before the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence and was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2020 for her contributions to social welfare and improving the lives of vulnerable women and children.



Cheryl Barrett

Chief Executive Officer - KandaCare

Cheryl is an experienced CEO and strategic leader with over 30 years' experience driving growth, performance, and cultural transformation across large organisations. As CEO of Kanda Group, they lead 1,450+ staff across multiple business units, with strong expertise in operational efficiency, HR strategy, and risk governance. Cheryl holds several board roles across health, welfare, and First Nations organisations, with a focus on building high performing teams, strong governance frameworks, and customer focused service delivery.



Jackie Bray

Chief Executive Officer - Department for Child Protection, South Australia

Jackie Bray is the Chief Executive of the Department for Child Protection. Prior to this, Jackie was the inaugural Head of the Office for the Early Year, which was established as a single point of strategic leadership for universal early years services across government, NGOs, and the broader Early Childhood sector. Jackie has worked in the public and private sector across several senior executive positions both in the United Kingdom and South Australia including UK Health Services, Department for Families and Communities and as the Deputy Chief Executive in the Department for Correctional Services. It was while working in the UK Health Service that Jackie found her passion for major service delivery reform around changes that affect the community services. Jackie is a professional and strategically minded Executive, with an extensive knowledge and experience of creating partnerships, policy development and strategic reform within the South Australian public service. Jackie is passionate about developing a transparent and accountable department, one with strong and effective leaders and a highly capable workforce equipped to meet their challenges and succeed within a positive organisational culture.



David Cross

Chief Executive Officer - ZOE Foundation Australia

David Cross is the CEO of ZOE Foundation Australia, where he leads initiatives to prevent child exploitation and trafficking, increase understanding of child trafficking and modern slavery, and develop ways to support children on their restorative journey. After serving for more than 11 years with ZOE in Thailand, working alongside government agencies and law enforcement, David returned to Australia in 2021. David continues to support the work of ZOE internationally, seeking out ways to strengthen partnerships and share global learnings from ZOE teams in the USA, Thailand, Japan, and Mexico. David also brings personal insight to his work as a parent and foster carer, shaping his compassionate approach to supporting children.

Conference speakers



Andrea Cross

Program Manager – ZOE Foundation Australia

Andrea Cross is the Program Manager at ZOE Foundation Australia, where she oversees restorative care program development, curriculum, and education. She focuses on building trauma-informed practices, developing restorative care programs for children, and leading educational initiatives that increase understanding and help prevent child exploitation. Andrea draws on her experience as a parent, foster carer, and teacher to inform and strengthen ZOE's restorative care programs.



Gerard McGeough

Chief Executive Officer – Victims of Crime NT

Gerard McGeough is CEO of Victims of Crime NT, leading trauma-informed, victim-centred services across the Northern Territory. With over 25 years' experience, including a decade in victim advocacy, he specialises in justice system navigation, policy, and reform. He has strengthened services for remote and First Nations communities, driven organisational transformation, and led innovative programs addressing domestic, family and sexual violence, improving outcomes for victims.



Payge Whitehead

Senior Social Worker, Department for Education SA

Payge is a Senior School Social Worker with 14 years of experience supporting young people across a broad range of community and education services. Currently working within Student Support Services, Payge provides expertise across newly developed technical colleges, strengthening staff capacity and creating improved opportunities for young people through systems-focused wellbeing approaches. Passionate about early intervention and youth empowerment, she has led system-wide wellbeing initiatives, developed student programs and resources, facilitated professional development, and presented at conferences. Payge has extensive experience supporting complex mental health, attendance, and child protection needs, while advocating for inclusive student voice and stronger school-community partnerships.



Caterina Davis

Education Lead – Department for Education SA

Caterina has held senior and executive leadership roles across diverse learning settings over the past 15 years. She served as Deputy Principal at South Australia's largest and highest-performing secondary school and established and led a community learning centre supporting vulnerable young people, earning the South Australian Secondary Educator of the Year Award for Community Innovation and Engagement. Caterina now leads system-wide reform and innovation across South Australia's network of Technical Colleges, driving capability development, culture and wellbeing approaches that improve outcomes for young people. An expert in adolescent development, she brings extensive experience designing and leading professional learning that empowers professionals working with young people and fosters environments where both young people and staff can thrive.

Conference speakers



Chante Kuhn

Uniting VicTas, Implementation and Evaluation Lead

Chante is an evaluator specialising in child, youth and family programs across government and community sectors. She holds undergraduate degrees in psychology and sociology, along with a Graduate Certificate in Evaluation, underpinning her expertise in measurement and data-driven decision-making. At Uniting Vic Tas, she leads evaluation and implementation of programs focussed on family preservation and reunification, child wellbeing, and early intervention in families. In her role, she bridges research and practice, translating evidence into practical, impactful strategies that strengthen programs and improve outcomes for children and families.



Alexandra Harper

Western Sydney University

Alexandra Harper is a PhD candidate at Western Sydney University Australia. She has Master degrees in applied positive psychology and education policy (international), and over 30 years' experience working as a primary school teacher, executive school leader, academic and policymaker. Her areas of expertise, research and interest are connecting children to nature, loose parts play and designing innovative school playgrounds, schools, and practices with affordances for student agency and competence. She is also interested in the power of professional learning networks to connect and uplift teachers' joy, sense of community, and professional practice. Alexandra's contributions to education have been recognised through being awarded a NSW Premier's Teacher Scholarship, Endeavour Executive Leadership Award (from the Australian Government), and being named a top 50 finalist in the inaugural Global Teacher Prize.



Dr Annaley Clarke

Infinity Community Solutions

Dr. Annaley Clarke is a social worker with over 30 years of experience in the child welfare and out-of-home care sectors. She has held various roles across government and non-government services, focusing on practice, evaluation, and management. Currently, Dr. Clarke serves as the Chief Operating Officer at Infinity Community Solutions Ltd. and is passionate about partnering with families and advocating for family-led approaches that emphasize keeping children and young people connected and safe. Her research contributions include national and international publications in areas of statutory kinship care, the Sanctuary Model and residential care.



Dr Matthew Spicer

Centre for Positive Behaviour Support

Matthew is the Director of Clinical Training with CPBS. He has over 25 years' experience working within positive behaviour support using constructional behaviour analysis and multi-element behaviour support. Matthew is a registered psychologist and Board Approved Supervisor. He has published work on MEBS, nonaversive strategies, and trauma informed practice.



Rebecca L. Beights

Director of Research, CPBS

Becca is the Director of Research with CPBS. She has over 15 years' experience working within applied behaviour analysis and positive behaviour support. Becca has taught ABA courses at Australian and American universities. She has a PhD, is a BCBA, and has published work on assistive technology and student support.

Conference speakers



Georgia Pope

St Michael's Lutheran Primary School

Georgia holds a Masters Degree in Special Education and a Graduate Certificate in Special Education (Autism). Since 1988, she has been engaged in the South Australian independent education sector, bringing extensive experience in teaching and supporting students with diverse learning needs.

Georgia currently serves as Diverse Learning Coordinator at St. Michael's Lutheran Primary School in Hahndorf, South Australia, where she oversees the coordination of learning support and wellbeing initiatives.

She demonstrates a strong professional commitment to the development of inclusive and connected communities, with a particular interest in the role of organisational culture in fostering environments in which individuals, educators, and communities are supported to flourish and achieve sustainable success



Mark Smith

Mark Smith Education Consulting

Mark Smith is an innovative educator with more than 35 years' experience in the Victorian education system across all sectors. He holds a Master of Education, Gifted and Talented Education acquired via course work and research at Monash University. He is passionate about best practice teaching and learning approaches and has facilitated outstanding results with students using mentoring as a means of cultivating student engagement, agency, and self-efficacy. He is the author of Mentoring for Talent, an Amba Press publication, and since the end of 2022, he has been working full-time as an Educational Consultant.



Grant Dewar

FirstAidPro

With 30 years of experience delivering Work Health and Safety programmes, Grant has worked across training, education, consultancy, advice, workplace interventions, and policy. He is the author of The Self-Forgiveness Workbook, focusing on the role of self-forgiveness in learning and growing from life setbacks. He holds a PhD and a Master of Education.



Sally Wood

National Practice Specialist, Power to Kids

She leads national practice development focused on preventing and responding to child sexual abuse and strengthening protective, connected relationships for children and young people living in out-of-home care.

Sally brings extensive experience across community, school, and therapeutic settings, with deep expertise in residential care and child protection. After time in private practice, she returned to MacKillop to focus on building safer systems for children and strengthening the confidence, capability, and professional practice of the adults who support them.

Her work is grounded in trauma-informed, attachment-focused, and neurodiversity-affirming frameworks, with a strong emphasis on translating evidence and theory into practical, relational practice. Sally holds a Master of Social Work, a Postgraduate Degree in Applied Psychology, a Diploma of Therapeutic Life Story Work, and a Bachelor of Psychology, along with additional specialist qualifications.

Conference speakers



Pola Orlowska

Director – Deloitte Access Economics

Pola is an Associate Director in the education practice at Deloitte Access Economics. Her work focuses on system-wide improvement in schooling equity and quality. Pola's experience spans strategic advisory, program monitoring and evaluation, workforce modelling, funding model design, and policy research.

In FY 2023 Pola worked as a Senior Manager of School Development and Growth for the Berry Street School. Prior to joining Deloitte in 2019, Pola worked for the Education Outcomes Fund, now hosted by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), on results-based financing models in education.

Pola holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics and Management, and a Master's degree in Comparative and International Education from the University of Oxford.



Rebecca Cooney

Senior Risk Consultant – ANSVAR Insurance

Rebecca provides expertise in risk management, clinical governance and systems safety, supporting clients to enhance organisational outcomes through good governance and systems improvement. Her specialist areas of consulting include culture, leadership and complex systems.

Her background as a nurse, quality manager and safety professional, equips her with insights on relevant and actionable risk strategies that can be applied across all our clients' environments.



Fiona Giles

Education Coordinator – Ronald Mc Donald House Vic & Tasmania

Fiona Giles is an Education Coordinator with the Ronald McDonald Learning Program, Ronald McDonald House Victoria and Tasmania Chapter. As a secondary teacher, Fiona has worked in inclusive education across the government and independent sectors in Australia and the UK. She holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Learning Disabilities and her primary goal is to ensure students studying whilst managing a chronic health condition or serious illness, have access to the necessary supports and accommodations to be successful in their desired educational pathway. Fiona has also contributed to the development of professional learning resources for schools focusing on the needs of students with a life limiting health condition.



Liz Shaw

Education Services Manager at Ronald McDonald House Victoria & Tasmania

Liz is the Education Services Manager at Ronald McDonald House Victoria & Tasmania, bringing over 20 years of experience in education. Liz holds a Bachelor of Education and additional specialist training in Learning Disabilities, Autism, Neurodiversity, and Auslan. Liz is a strong advocate for inclusive education, committed to ensuring young people can engage meaningfully in their learning while building confidence in their abilities. Liz continues to advocate for programs and inclusive practices that empower students to achieve success both academically and personally.

Conference speakers



Justin Roberts

National Program Director, ReLATE – The MacKillop Institute

Justin is a nationally recognised leader in inclusive education, drawing on more than 15 years of experience as a teacher and educational leader in both mainstream and specialist school settings. His early career in mainstream education fuelled a deep commitment to creating learning environments that respond to the diverse needs of all students. He has held senior leadership roles, including Principal and Deputy Executive Principal, and has consistently championed approaches that prioritise student wellbeing and equitable access to education. In 2024, Justin was named one of Australia's Most Influential Educators in recognition of his significant contributions to the field.



Phil Slade

Behavioural Economist, Psychologist and Founder – Switch4Schools

As co-founder of Switch4Schools—a globally recognised wellbeing software company recently named by HundrED and the International Baccalaureate as one of the top 10 most significant wellbeing educational innovations worldwide—Phil is dedicated to unlocking human potential and helping people live fuller, more meaningful lives. He firmly believes that many of the world's greatest challenges—social, environmental, economic, and political—can be addressed by better understanding, managing, and harnessing our emotions.

With a gift for making neuroscience accessible, engaging, and entertaining, Phil is a sought-after keynote speaker, known for his dynamic and down-to-earth approach. He empowers individuals to take control of their choices and shape their own futures.

Beyond speaking, Phil advises and coaches leaders in top organisations, specialising in decision-making, strategy, systems design, incentives, human dynamics, critical thinking, high performance, negotiation, and emotional intelligence.



Cameron Burgess

Program Director, Sanctuary – The MacKillop Institute

Cameron Burgess brings over two decades of leadership experience across the Community Services, International Development, Social Enterprise, and Child Protection sectors. He holds formal qualifications in Social Work (Honours), Business Management, and Leadership. From 2012 to 2017, Cameron founded and led Mission Australia's Strengthening Communities initiative, delivering impactful community development projects in public housing estates and remote Aboriginal communities nationwide. This innovative work was recognised as a finalist in the national Collaboration for Impact awards. Cameron has also worked extensively across Southeast Asia, particularly in Myanmar, Vietnam, and Cambodia, and has served as Chair of the Board for an international non-government organisation.



Louise Hall

National and International Partnerships Lead – MacKillop Seasons

Louise's passion for the value of group work led her to her current role. With a social work and early years background, Louise has worked across statutory and not for profit services with a focus on family support and wellbeing. At work, Louise enjoys building relationships with stakeholders and widening the reach of community support; and at home, she enjoys the changes and joy that come with being a parent of young adults.

Conference speakers



Dr Gemma McKibbin

Senior Research Fellow - University of Melbourne

Dr. Gemma McKibbin is a Research Fellow in the Department of Social Work at the University of Melbourne, working with Prof. Cathy Humphreys in the Violence Against Women and Children Research Team. With a background in gender studies and experience in the women's sector, her PhD research focused on preventing harmful sexual behaviour among children and young people. A scholar with the Safer Families Centre for Research Excellence, Dr. McKibbin is the Chief Investigator on action research projects in partnership with MacKillop Family Services and Jesuit Social Services. She recently led a co-designed sexual abuse prevention program for children in residential and home-based care.



Jo Quinn

Disaster Resilience Officer - Victoria

Jo Quinn is an experienced primary teacher and Wellbeing and Learning Adjustment Leader dedicated to inclusive, supportive environments where every student can thrive. A trained facilitator with the Seasons for Growth organisation, she delivers professional learning for schools and organisations, helping staff strengthen wellbeing practices and positive relationships. Jo works collaboratively with educators and leaders to build practical approaches that enhance learning, connection and a strong sense of belonging for all.



Who we are

Mackillop Family Services is a leading provider of education, child and family support, and out-of-home care services across Australia. Guided by our values of justice, hope, and collaboration, we are committed to supporting vulnerable children, young people, and families by delivering programs that promote healing, resilience, and long-term wellbeing.

At Mackillop Family Services, we are committed to supporting some of Australia's most vulnerable children, young people, and families. Across 53 locations, our 2,300 dedicated staff deliver integrated family services, out-of-home care, disability support, and trauma-informed education to over 16,000 families each year. All our programs aim to create safe, nurturing environments for children, families, and the staff who support them.

Our work is grounded in evidence-based practice, research, and community engagement, ensuring that we provide effective, sustainable solutions to complex social challenges. The Lead the Way Conference is an extension of our mission to empower professionals with the tools and knowledge they need to drive change within their organisations and communities.





Have Questions? Contact Us

For sponsorship enquiries, please contact:

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 [linkedin.com/company/themackillopinstitute](https://www.linkedin.com/company/themackillopinstitute)



MacKillop Family Services acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Elders in each of the communities where we work.



As a Rainbow Tick organisation, MacKillop values an inclusive culture where lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, gender diverse, intersex and asexual people (LGBTIQ+) have the right to be safe.