



Going to New Places

Annual Report 2019

Vision

An Australia where all people experience positive relationships, truly value each other, and live safer, more confident lives.

Mission

We help people to become more resilient, to empower them and to enjoy healthier relationships, by building their skills and knowledge, giving guidance and tools, and supporting them through challenging times.





Brendan Rowswell Chair of the Board

[Reaffirming our commitment to help Australians get to a better place in their lives](#)

When we introduced ourselves as Better Place Australia in 2018, we were not just unveiling a new name and brand, we were also making a promise to our current and future clients to continue offering services that will help them surmount relationship, financial or psychological hardship to get to a better place. I am proud to say we have spent the past year doing exactly that.

The Board is extremely pleased with the great progress we have made towards achieving the objectives set out in our Strategic Plan, particularly those relating to having a greater impact as a thought leader. We have also prioritised our organisation's financial sustainability so that we can begin investing in new initiatives that will make a difference.

Over the last year, we have diversified by growing the breadth of our services into new mental health and elder abuse prevention programs, and expanding our regional footprint.

We have also grown our funding base and developed new technologies to better meet service demands and our clients' accessibility needs. All of these initiatives have helped us build a stronger, more trusted brand within the sector and among the many communities we serve.

I am extremely proud of our staff, led so well by our CEO Serge Sardo, and the exceptional effort they make each day to help our clients have a second chance at a better life. It speaks volumes for our progress that we are able to attract and retain such talented employees who chose Better Place Australia because of our reputation as a progressive industry leader.

While we are proud of what we have achieved, we remain committed to preparing for the future.

Financial pressures and the prevalence of mental health issues will continue – both will demand a wider and deeper response. The aging demographic will put more elders at risk and the family law system will still be under review.

Having said that, I have confidence in our team to continue living up to our mission of supporting people through challenging times and helping them to improve their lives.

On a more personal note, this year marks a new milestone for me at Better Place Australia. After serving as a director for the past four years, I stepped into the role of Chair in November 2018. It is an exciting time to lead our exceptional team and organisation. I would like to express my warm appreciation to my predecessor Gerlinde Scholz for her generous contribution to the organisation over six years.

I would also like to thank my Board colleagues and Better Place Australia's leadership team and workforce for their unwavering commitment to delivering the best possible service to those in need.

Looking ahead, I am confident that Better Place Australia will continue thriving and moving closer towards our vision of an Australia where everyone enjoys healthy relationships, values each other and lives safer lives.

Brendan Rowswell
Chair of the Board of Directors



Serge Sardo Chief Executive Officer

[Going to new places](#)

Better Place Australia has stretched itself far and wide this year. In terms of our financial performance, we have seen a satisfying increase in revenue to reach a threshold of \$11m. We have also made good progress against our strategic pillars for growth, brand and enterprising.

For starters, we received outstanding results in our staff engagement survey where the participation rate was 89% - well above the industry benchmark of 79%. In addition, 83% of our staff reported being engaged which is 7% higher than the relevant industry benchmark.

In October 2018, we moved offices from Moorabbin to Cheltenham where we established strong brand signage on the Nepean Highway and received positive feedback on our new branding proposition. Our clients are finding the name easily recalled and evocative.

With an eye to enabling our future vision, we have generated a substantial surplus. This is key for us to be able to reinvest into the organisation, particularly into establishing a parenting recovery centre at our Narre Warren site. This is an exciting and unique development. We can now also take our next step into the digital realm by investing in new technology to provide better service and access for our clients. Lastly, our team can now totally overhaul our outdated phone technology and move up onto the 'cloud' and develop a sector-leading phone and online experience for our clients.

In advocating on behalf of our clients and their families we made strong recommendations to a number of Government committees and commissions. One such call was for mental health services to be aligned much more closely with family law and financial hardship processes.

Our response to the Australian Law Reform Commission Family Law Review paper included recommending that greater measures are required to ensure that vulnerable clients are not manipulated by former partners through the family law process and that they do not get lost. We also

voiced a desire to see mental health services, financial counselling and family support services being made available at every step of the family court experience.

Better Place Australia introduced three new services this year – the Financial Counselling and Capability (FCC), National Debt Helpline (NDH), RESI-Care psychological services and the Brockhoff Foundation funded program for elder abuse victims. All new and using either innovation in practice or technology to empower clients to become more resilient. Our new cloud based Financial Counselling and Capability (FCC) services is allocated 20% of the calls that come through. RESI-Care provides mental health services to support residents in aged care facilities in the Mornington Peninsula.

This year will also see a new face at the forefront of Better Place Australia. I would like to extend a warm welcome to our new Board Chair Brendan Rowswell who brings with him strong advocacy skills to assist us in representing our clients' interests at the federal and state government levels.

Brendan's appointment means bidding farewell to Gerlinde Scholz, who retired as Chair after four years of holding the mantle. I would like to express our heartfelt thanks to Gerlinde for her governance advice, strategic direction and overseeing our recent transformation.

As we gear up for a new year, I would like to thank the directors, executive team, front line practitioners and administration staff for their wonderful work, professionalism and determination to making us truly, a better place for our clients. I would like to extend my thanks to our funding partners whose support is pivotal to our work in the community.

Serge Sardo
Chief Executive Officer

Board



Brendan Rowswell
Chair

Brendan is a Director at a leading public affairs firm in Melbourne whose clients are major Australian companies within the infrastructure, transport, higher education, information and technology, and health and energy sectors. He is an experienced government relations and communications specialist and regularly represents not-for-profit clients in their dealings with federal and state governments.

Brendan is a member of the Advisory Council of Artolution, an international public arts charity, based in New York. He was previously Public Affairs Manager at a Victorian industry association, and adviser to a federal Member of Parliament for two terms in Government.

Board Chair since November 2018.

Brendan is a member of the Finance Risk & Audit Committee and the Nominations & Remuneration Committee.



David Speyer
Director and
Treasurer

David is General Manager Commercial and National Services at Vision Australia. A Chartered Accountant by training, David has spent the last 28 years in senior executive and leadership roles in finance, mergers and acquisitions, business reorganisations in multi nationals and for purpose organisations.

David is Chair of the Finance, Risk & Audit Committee.



Rachel Holthouse
Director

Rachel is currently the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Global Development & Vice President of the Global Development Portfolio at RMIT University. She was previously Chief Executive Officer of RMIT Training located in Melbourne, Australia, a successful provider of education solutions to clients worldwide.

Rachel has held senior governance roles in the education sector across several countries. She has extensive international experience working with global partners and operating in highly regulated and multijurisdictional environments.

Rachel is a member of the Nominations & Remuneration Committee.



Erika Owens
Director

Erika Owens is the Director, Victim Support within the Victim Services, Support & Reform (VSSR) unit at the Department of Justice and Community Safety. She was previously the CEO of Crime Stoppers Victoria. She has also held executive positions as Senior Manager, Southern & Eastern Melbourne and later as General Manager, State Services at Relationship Australia (Vic) for 3 years. Prior to this, Erika worked in the Department of Justice for several years overseeing delivery of government reform and operations.

Erika has a Bachelor of Arts (Sociology and Australian Cultural Studies) from Victoria University, a Graduate Diploma in Arts (Criminology) from the University of Melbourne and an Executive Master of Public Administration from the University of Melbourne.

Erika is a member of the Finance, Risk and Audit Committee.

Delia McIver
Director

Delia McIver has significant experience at a senior executive level across the post-secondary education sector in the areas of People and Culture/Human Resources, safety, risk and corporate services. Working across Australia and internationally in her career. Delia currently holds the position of Executive Director People, Culture and Safety at Chisholm Institute. She has held similar positions as Executive Director People & Capability at Box Hill Institute and Director Human Resources at Victoria University.

Delia has a keen interest in the not-for-profit sector, has been a member of the Fitzroy Learning Network Board and on the Oakleigh Centre Board.

Delia is a graduate of the University of Melbourne, Monash University and La Trobe University and is a member of the Australian Human Resources Institute.

Delia is Chair of the Nominations & Remuneration Committee.

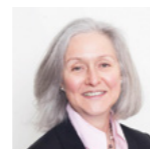


Anne Goldsbrough
Director

Anne Goldsbrough has been a Victorian Magistrate since 1996. She has a long-standing interest in the Court's Family Violence and Family Law jurisdictions and has presided over a portfolio of significant projects, such as the development and introduction of the specialist Family Violence Court Division of the Magistrates Court in 2005. She currently leads a Magistrates' Court with specialist family violence and mental health programs.

Anne contributes regularly to ongoing legal and judicial professional development both inside and outside the court, and to a range of community information and education programs, within Australia and internationally.

Anne completed her law degree at Melbourne University and previously studied in the areas of behavioural science, psychology and teacher training at La Trobe University.



Gerlinda Scholz
Retired
Board Chair

Gerlinda is a not-for-profit sector specialist with extensive executive, board and advisory experience.

She is currently Executive Officer of Australian Community Philanthropy, the peak body for Australia's community foundations, and recently served as interim CEO of a family violence agency. In her earlier career she held senior executive positions at a medical research institute and the University of Melbourne and has advised a broad range of non-profit clients as a consultant. Gerlinda also serves on the boards of environmental sustainability organisation Renew, and the RANZCOG Women's Health Foundation.

Gerlinda joined the Board at Better Place Australia in 2012.

Retiring Board Chair November 2018.

Executive Team



Serge Sardo
Chief Executive
Officer

Serge Sardo is the CEO of Better Place Australia. He has accumulated over 10 years' experience as a CEO and non-executive director for not-for-profit or government organisations. In his previous role as CEO of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, Serge was instrumental in establishing the Foundation as a world leader in the delivery of counselling, support and prevention programs to over 100 different locations.

Serge has an MBA qualification and strong commercial experience. With expertise in preventative programs, social policy and advocacy, he has delivered and managed a wide variety of community-based therapeutic and prevention services.

Serge is a member of the Board for Family and Relationships Services Australia and Scope Disability.



Graeme Westaway
Executive
Manager
Brand, Digital & Corporate
Communications

Graeme Westaway is an experienced senior executive with over 25 years' experience in brand, organisational development, communications strategy and customer service development. With a science, marketing and mediation educational background, Graeme brings to Better Place Australia an expertise in communication and stakeholder management, branding, services development utilising multiple platforms, growth generation, and organisational planning. He has held a number of executive and senior leadership roles and has a background in developing and implementing strategies to drive revenue, digital engagement and service innovation across the not-for-profit, mutual and corporate sectors.



Jenni Dickson
Executive
Manager
Community Support
Services

Jenni Dickson has over 20 years' experience in the health sector. She has a strong background in services development and quality improvement, and has vast experience in improving client experience. Jenni has a Bachelor of Nursing and a Graduate Diploma in Community Health, and has significant experience in the Aged and Community Care sector. Her extensive experience in community and health services has led to the highly developed standard of reporting at Better Place Australia. Jenni was instrumental in the initiative to achieve QIC Accreditation for Better Place Australia, and works to constantly improve service standards.



Craig Dennis
Executive
Manager
Business Systems

Craig Dennis has over 20 years' of experience in IT systems, information management and information technology strategy. He has held a number of senior and executive roles, and has extensive experience in technology change consulting, and advisory and business leadership roles. Craig's expertise in business automation systems for small to medium businesses has enabled Better Place Australia to develop new key IT strategies and systems. Craig has a long history in volunteer work, including helping senior roles in the Country Fire Authority and consulting for a number of not-for-profits.



David Turen
Executive
Manager
Human Resources

David Turen has extensive experience as an HR Executive across a variety of sectors including not-for-profit, health care, local government and commercial aviation. He has a Bachelor's Degree in Economics and a Master's Degree in Human Resources and Industrial Relations. He is also a professional member of the Australian Human Resources Institute. David's portfolio includes responsibility for HR Strategy, Enterprise Agreement administration, HR consultancy and people policy.



Chris Ritchie
Executive
Manager
Corporate Services

Chris has a Bachelor of Business with a major in Accounting and postgraduate qualifications in business management. He is a Fellow of CPA Australia and of the Governance Institute of Australia.

Chris has extensive knowledge of finance, administration, contract administration, facilities management, corporate governance and risk management, with over 25 years in senior roles with ASX listed companies as a CFO, Director and Company Secretary.

Staff

Our People

As a values-driven organisation, Better Place Australia recognises that having committed, qualified and engaged staff is essential to making an impact in our clients' lives.

We are committed to fostering an open and thriving organisational culture to bring about positive change.



Employee Engagement

In April 2019, Better Place Australia staff participated in an Employee Engagement Survey covering topics ranging from workplace satisfaction to organisational values. We achieved an impressive participation rate of 89% - a notable improvement from our previous survey participation rate of 74% and well above the industry benchmark participation figure of 79%.

83% of our staff reported being engaged which is 7% higher than the relevant industry benchmark. Intention to stay was a key driver of our high engagement figure with an overall score of 73%, which is 11% above the industry average/benchmark.

Better Place Australia's highest areas of achievement relative to the Community and Advocacy Services benchmark were:

- Organisational direction (12% better than benchmark)
- Recruitment and selection (Identified unique strength, 18% better than industry benchmark)
- Reward and recognition (Identified unique strength, 13% better than industry benchmark)

Responding to Family Violence

Better Place Australia's frontline staff and practitioners underwent the Department of Health & Human Services Elder Abuse Prevention training as part of our goal of continuous professional development. Elder abuse is a common yet hidden, undefined and underreported problem in our society. This online training is aimed at building awareness and capacity among the Victorian workforce to identify and respond to elder abuse in line with the Victorian Government's practice guide. Better Place Australia staff are now trained to:

- recognise and define types of elder abuse
- identify risk factors for elder abuse
- understand the empowerment model
- recognise that elder abuse situations are often complex
- understand their duty of care as workers
- help build the capacity of Better Place Australia to effectively respond to elder abuse

Diversity and Inclusion

We celebrate the diversity of our staff and are working towards creating an inclusive space for our LGBTIQ+ clients and staff. Professional development, capacity building and working with key organisations are pivotal in enabling us to deliver services that really help the community. One such initiative towards creating an LGBTIQ+friendly space is requiring all our staff to undergo a series of Living Rainbow training sessions run by Rainbow Health (previously known as GLHV).

Better Place Australia is also working with other organisations, staff with lived experiences, and allies, to develop training specifically targeted to Rainbow families in the counselling, mental health and mediation space.



Awareness Days

Better Place Australia staff organised and participated in multiple Awareness Days this year to help nurture better understanding and closer ties among us and with our community.

- Sister's Day Out: A community event organised by Djirra, an Aboriginal Family Violence organisation, where Aboriginal women are able to engage with lawyers, counsellors and social workers in a safe and inclusive space.
- Seniors Empowering Seniors Program Support Group: A successful inaugural event with older participants talking about the challenges they face in their situations, offering each other support and engaging in music therapy.
- Cultural Diversity Week: Better Place Australia offices organised international luncheons where staff introduced each other to food from their own culture and celebrated workforce diversity.
- Midsumma Festival: Better Place Australia participated for the first time in this high-caliber, engaging arts, culture and social event celebrating diversity and LGBTIQ+ pride with a stall on the showground.
- Happy Feet Well-being Group: A initiative kickstarted by our Cheltenham office that encourages self-care into the workplace through various well-being activities.
- #IDAHOBIT: Our Cheltenham office held an afternoon tea, and spoke about discrimination and mental health in the LGBTIQ+ community on the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia.

Staff have also gone ahead to represent and participate in various conferences and events in and out of Victoria, such as the 2019 National Elder Abuse Conference and the 2019 Child Aware Conference in Brisbane to events closer to home.

Going to New Places



Better Place Australia continues to chart new milestones with the dedication of the staff who work daily to empower clients to enjoy healthier relationships, by building their skills and knowledge, giving guidance and tools, and supporting them through challenging times.

Advocacy

Most common debt was credit card debt at **26%**

62% of those who accessed FCC services were women

25% of clients reported a disability, with psychiatric the most common

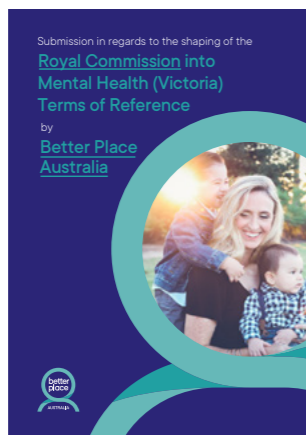
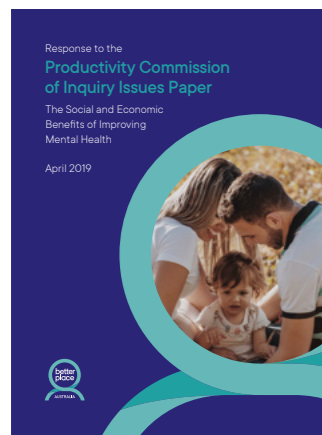


Mental Health

In July 2019, Better Place Australia published a submission to the Royal Commission into Mental Health (Victoria) with our recommendations for providing a better response to six mental health themes. In April 2019, we published our response to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry Issues paper into the Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health.

In summary, our recommendations on improving mental health services in Australia include:

- Looking beyond just healthcare as the gateway to mental health support
- Aligning mental health services with family law and financial hardship processes
- Better service integration among Medicare, PHN and NDIS
- Fully funded psychological support in primary schools
- A life-stage approach to mental health support for the aged
- Funding mental health programs in outer suburban, rural and regional areas, and incentives for mental health professionals living and working there
- Training the call centre workforce in resilience building and self-care, and providing them pathways to external mental health services.



Financial Hardship Report

Better Place Australia completed a research paper in June 2019 that explored the cost of living in Victoria. The paper examined debt and poverty among over 1900 clients who accessed our Financial Counselling and Capability (FCC) services between July 2017 and June 2018. A qualitative survey was also conducted with our FCC counsellors between March and April 2019 to gain a frontline perspective of FCC services.

Key findings

- 62% of those who accessed FCC services were women
- Most common debt was credit card debt (26%), followed by loans (24%) and living expenses (23%)
- 25% of clients reported a disability with the most common being psychiatric
- Top three contributors to financial problems are mental illness (71%), unemployment (57%) and low income (57%)
- Top three support services FCC counsellors referred clients to were legal advice (71%), mental health (45%) and housing services (43%)
- Top three reasons clients delay asking for help were mental health (71%), lack of knowledge (71%) and shame (57%).

Considerations

- Embed financial counselling services within a multi-disciplinary team
- Provide financial counselling services alongside family violence services
- Stronger incentives and benefits for the underemployed (current benefits thresholds do not cover even basic living expenses)
- Greater financial counselling capacity within local culturally diverse community services organisations
- Protect those with mental health issues from payday lenders through tighter regulation and reforms.

Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) Family Law Review

In November 2018, Better Place Australia drafted our response to the ALRC Family Law Review discussion paper. Our response presented a collection of case studies on the experiences of those who used the family law system. The chosen case studies offered valuable insight into the challenges within the system and pinpointed issues that the reform should solve or examples of situations that remain unresolved. Our recommendations included:

- A consumer-focused foundation to lead any public health approaches
- Legislation and court orders translated into layman terms to improve understanding
- Policy and guidelines on case follow up responsibilities between microsystems in the family law process
- FCC services offered at all stages of the user experience
- Greater visibility across Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) and the family court system to prevent process manipulation and respond to mediation requests
- Wide consultation when drafting child participation in the family law process
- A more holistic approach to FDR that supports the victim and children of family violence without resorting to total family exclusion.



Romance and Attitudes Survey

In October 2018, Better Place Australia conducted a survey titled "A snapshot: Victorians' attitude towards romance in a time of marrying at first sight" to better understand the romantic beliefs of Australians.

A total of 845 respondents aged 18 and above from across Victoria participated in the survey. Of that number, 65.8% were in a relationship at the time of the survey and the remaining 34.2% were not. A further 18.3% had never been in a relationship.

The survey posed questions around three common themes of romantic ideation:

1. There can only be one true love for me;
2. All you need is love; and
3. Love at first sight.

What we know

- Marriage rates have declined from 9.3 marriages per every 1000 Australians in 1970 to an estimated 4.9 marriages per every 1000 Australian residents in 2016
- Divorce rates were at a high in the 1970s but began falling after the principle of no-fault divorce was introduced in 1975
- Divorce rates were at the lowest in 2016 with just one third of marriages ending in divorce
- Most divorces happen between the age of 25 to 29 or in the late 40s
- After the age of 55 couples are more likely to stay together for the rest of their lives.

What we found out

- Men hold more traditional views on romance with 64.6% saying that "love conquers all"
- Life stages influence romantic beliefs with romantic ideation at its highest in the late 20s and 30s, and lowest during the 40s
- Over 35% believed in "one true love" while 43% said that finding "true love" means being in love forever
- 60.9% of respondents believed that love surmounts all differences – this rate rose to 66.3% in the 30–39 age group
- 45.4% believed in love at first sight, 27.2% didn't and 27.4% were neutral

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Romance and Attitudes Survey



Achievements

Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA)

Better Place Australia successfully negotiated a new EBA which was approved by the Fair Work Commission. The EBA took effect in December 2018 and builds on the key features of our employer value proposition and demonstrates our commitment to being an employer of choice. The key features and benefits include:

- Generous above award salary rates
- Additional paid annual leave (between Christmas and New Year)
- Annual leave loading of 17.5%
- An 11% superannuation contribution
- 12 weeks paid parental leave
- Up to 20 days family violence leave
- Paid study leave and extensive professional development opportunities.

In our recent engagement survey initiative, our people rated our employer benefits at 89% – which was 20% above the benchmark figure in the community services sector.

New Brand

We changed our name to Better Place Australia in October 2018 to better align our brand with the organisation we are today. We have transformed over the past 34 years – growing our services, expanding into new mental health and elder abuse prevention programs, and increasing our geographic footprint. Yet our vision hasn't changed. Better Place Australia's purpose remains to build an Australia where all people experience positive relationships, truly value each other, and live safer, more confident lives.

New Head Office

Better Place Australia relocated from Moorabbin to a brand new, bigger and better head office in Cheltenham in October 2018. The relocation was an excellent opportunity to reduce our paper trail in a bid to create an eco-friendly work environment in line with our move to further digitise our systems. Our new Cheltenham office is purpose-fitted with custom-made furniture and the fit-out is washed in warm, earthy tones to complement our new teal and navy brand palette. The new office will boost our capacity to see our increasing number of clients.

The Emerging Growth Corridors

As Melbourne grows we are observing a shift in demand for our services by type and by site. Our Cheltenham, Chadstone and Frankston sites are experiencing an increase in demand for services for older people such as our Elder Abuse and Counselling services. As young families settle in the outer suburbs, the demand for our Family Support and Family Dispute Resolution services is growing. Our Narre Warren and Wyndham Vale offices are now our busiest locations for families. Our Traralgon office traditionally serviced as far as Bairnsdale, but we're now seeing an increase in demand from Inner Gippsland as new housing is established from Pakenham and Officer East towards Morwell.

- increase in demand for services for older people
- increase in demand for services for families
- increase in demand for services as new housing is established

Sandra, 40
Lawyer

Tonya, 36
Business
Owner

Belle, 6
Sandra's
daughter

All three live
together



The LGBTIQ+ community was once notably absent from mental health strategies, policies and frameworks. As a result, they were also excluded from such services, programs and project responses. Marriage equality has changed all that. Today an increasing number of those from the LGBTIQ+ community are seeking out various services including personal and family relationships, and individual challenges.

Many mainstream organisations are also doing their part to support the LGBTIQ+ community by holding training sessions on creating a safe and inclusive workplace for their LGBTIQ+ staff and clients. Better Place Australia has invested in training sessions by Rainbow Health Victoria (previously called GLHV) to create an inclusive space that can be sustained and

maintained. It is important to us that our staff are given an understanding and insight into the experiences, needs and challenges facing the LGBTIQ+ community. We see this as our responsibility as an organisation and a way to communicate our expectations of our staff.

We also recognise that the issues and needs of the LGBTIQ+ community are very different to those of our other clients. Our counselling and mediation approaches therefore strike a balance between inclusivity and specificity. Tailoring our services approach this way provides reassurance to this hypervigilant community.

We are deeply passionate about supporting the LGBTIQ+ community. Our focus will always be on service delivery and as such, we are building a skilled cohort of workers and increasing our resources to better support this community in much-needed issues like coming out, estrangement, anxiety, depression, bullying and isolation. We are also partnering with other organisations to develop counselling, mental health and mediation training specifically for LGBTIQ+ families.

Case Study

LGBTQI+ (Parenting & Property FDR)

Scenario

Sandra and Tonya have been together for seven and a half years. Sandra has a biological daughter, Belle, whom she conceived through IVF prior to the relationship. The three of them live in a house that Sandra bought with her inheritance money.

Sandra works full time as a lawyer while Tonya put her catering business on hold to be Belle's primary carer. When Belle recently started school, Tonya returned to work and is juggling her business with school drop-offs and pickups. However, Sandra became unhappy with their relationship and initiated Family Dispute Resolution (FDR).

In the sessions, Sandra expressed anger at Tonya for "claiming" Belle and the house, and for not contributing financially to their lifestyle. She disclosed that she was still paying off Tonya's original loan to buy a van and equipment for her catering business. In her mind, the relationship was over.

A distressed Tonya, on the other hand, didn't want the relationship to end and cried at the thought of losing Belle. Yet she was also deeply hurt at Sandra's sudden coldness and focus on money.

Process

FDR: The first session involved a polarised discussion. Sandra focused on her resentment at being the sole provider for her family while Tonya talked about her sadness and feelings for Sandra and Belle.

Sandra repeatedly referred to Belle as "my daughter" which prompted Better Place Australia's FDR practitioner to reframe the scenario as one where both women care for and love Belle. The practitioner also drew their attention back to Belle and asked if they thought she was aware of the situation. Both women strongly felt she was, and Sandra said that Belle had voiced a desire to also talk to the practitioner.

CIM: A child-informed mediation (CIM) was arranged between Belle and Better Place Australia's Supporting Children After Separation Program (SCASP) worker. Belle turned out to be a very confident and bright 6-year-old who asked the SCASP worker to "tell both my mummies they are being very silly."

She drew numerous pictures of herself with Sandra and Tonya surrounded by hearts and thick red lines encircling them. Belle said she was proud to be the only girl in her class with two mothers and that her best friend Danielle also thought she was very lucky.

The session between Sandra and Tonya shifted to being purely about Belle. Both felt proud of her positive nature and moved by her drawings. As they acknowledged what each had done to care for her, the conversation revolved around separating with Belle's best interest in mind if that was the ultimate decision.

The FDR practitioner referred Tonya to Queerspace Drummond St for counselling while Sandra considered whether she wanted to do the same. Tonya was also referred to financial counselling as she wanted to explore how she could manage her debt on her own.

Outcome

Both parties moved from polarised and fixed positions to empowered ones. Belle's happiness became the biggest consideration as well as looking after themselves.

Tonya felt more empowered about managing her own finances and not depending on Sandra to support the family. There was also now an 'if' around the separation, which both were willing to explore.

Malik, 49
North African
descent

Lee, 43
East Asian
descent

Aly, 8
Meela, 13
Their children

Married for
11 years

Family violence is traumatic, disempowering and can be difficult to disclose. Many clients who reach out to Better Place Australia are likely to have lived with family violence for months or years before finally deciding they need help. Many contact Better Place Australia for assistance in other areas of difficulty, like financial hardship or mental health issues, and eventually disclose family violence as the cause or consequence of their situation.

Better Place Australia practitioners are trained to effectively address the cycle of violence by offering these clients appropriate support services and referrals. Our suite of family services encompasses Family Dispute Resolution (FDR), Supporting Children After Separation Program (SCASP), Child Counselling and Respecting Elders.

One of the professional development training courses we've made mandatory is the Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF), which equips our practitioners to handle difficult clients. Many practitioners are experienced working with culturally diverse communities and work in multicultural regions across Victoria.

Children exposed to family violence suffer significantly and experience higher levels of emotional and behavioural challenges. Better Place Australia is a child-focused organisation that places the needs and safety of every child first. Practitioners recently completed "The Empty Jar" approach to help children heal from family violence, based on a children's book by the same name developed by InTouch: the Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence for children from multicultural backgrounds. The book is one of the many therapeutic resources practitioners use that children experiencing family violence can relate to.

Case Study

Family Services

Scenario

Malik has a history of generational family violence perpetrated by his mother. His family were also survivors of war back in his country of birth, resulting in him bearing physical scars. Malik was jailed in the early years of his marriage following a violent physical altercation. His siblings also have significant mental health issues and are receiving long-term support in mental health facilities and external support.

In 2015, Malik's mother found out she had terminal cancer and decided to return to her country of birth. Malik intended to travel with her but was denied access due to incorrect paperwork. His mother died some months later.

According to Lee, her husband became verbally and emotionally abusive towards her shortly after his mother's passing. His drinking habits increased and this affected his employment. Lee and the children were walking on eggshells around Malik.

Lee says the children wanted her to divorce their father but she was adamant about maintaining the family unit and contacted Better Place Australia for support. The family was supported through Family and Relationship Services (FARS) and Supporting Children After Separation Program (SCASP).

Process

FARS: Lee engaged in individual counselling to support her acknowledgement of her unstable relationship. During this time she successfully submitted an application for an Intervention Order (IVO) against Malik on grounds of intimidation, physical and emotional violence. Malik also engaged in individual counselling where he disclosed deep resentment towards Lee and his feelings of helplessness. Both later attended couples counselling sessions.

SCASP: Meela, the oldest child, bore the brunt of his father Malik's verbal and emotional abuse. He engaged in a few sessions of individual counselling and also received strong support from his school friends. The two children engaged in counselling sessions to talk about the changes the IVO had made to the family. They were introduced to emotion regulation strategies and discussed the impact of their father no longer living at home. While they reported mixed feelings of confusion and sadness, they also admitted to feeling relaxed for the first time in a long time.

Outcome

- The children are continuing counselling sessions on a regular basis
- Lee is supported through individual counselling sessions and by EDVOS
- Lee would like the children to see their father under supervised access
- Malik and Lee plan to complete the mediation process at a later date

Practitioners within Better Place Australia and referring services engaged the family to consider all options and risk, and walked alongside their journey until they were ready to make difficult decisions. At every step of the way, if there was a change in their situation, practitioners would reassess risk and safety of the family and take the appropriate steps.

Peter, 28
Self Employed

Single and
lives in a
share house

History of
undiagnosed
depression

Case Study

Financial & Mental Health Services

Scenario

Peter contacted Better Place Australia six months after a car accident led to his loss of income. Another vehicle had collided into him, badly damaging his Ute. Neither driver had car insurance. To make matters worse, the other driver was unemployed and couldn't afford any compensation.

Peter is a self-employed tradesman and mobility is crucial in his line of work. Not having his own transport severely restricted his ability to earn an income. He didn't have work cover insurance so he was forced to rely on his savings and credit cards to stay afloat. By the time he turned to Centrelink to apply for NewStart Allowance, he was already struggling to afford food and rent.

Peter suffers from undiagnosed depression and the mounting financial stress further impacted his mental health. Realising he needed help, he called the National Debt Helpline (NDH) and was directed to one of Better Place Australia's Financial Counsellors.

Service

Better Place Australia began offering free Financial Counselling and Capability (FCC) services through the NDH in 2019. We were allocated 20% of incoming calls to the NDH. Most clients who call the NDH are already deeply entrenched in their financial hardship and unaware of their rights or the services available to them. Many are also facing worsening or emerging mental health issues as a result of financial stress.

When assisting these clients, Better Place Australia's Financial Counsellors conduct an assessment of their financial situation. They also take into account other factors impacting the client, including family violence, homelessness, mental illness and physical health issues.

Outcome

Better Health Australia's Financial Counsellor made a full assessment of Peter's situation before providing him options for building his financial resilience and managing his mental health.

Credit card debt Maintaining a good credit rating was important to Peter so the Financial Counsellor advised him to explain to creditors that he had fallen into financial hardship and to work out a three-month payment suspension that would allow him time to get back on his feet. In the long-term, Peter could then propose a hardship variation to allow for affordable payments. New laws have made banks more willing to provide reasonable payment plans for people.

Cost of living The Financial Counsellor suggested Peter access emergency relief services to obtain food and transport vouchers and provided him with contact details of his local community information support service. Peter had been unaware that these services existed and was relieved that he had help that would ease his financial stress.

Compensation for damages to his vehicle

The Financial Counsellor identified that Peter may benefit from legal advice and provided him with contact details of free legal services.

Mental illness The Financial Counsellor identified that Peter was struggling with poor mental health and suggested he may benefit from counselling support. Although Peter wasn't ready to take this step, he was open to the suggestion and accepted the details of his local primary health service to access free psychological intervention.



New Services

Residential Care Psychological Services in Mornington

- Funded by South Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network (SEMPHN) to deliver the Residential Aged Care Facility (RACF) Psychological Services program in the Mornington Peninsula
- Providing psychological therapies to residents with depression and anxiety
- Services comprise 1:1 counselling, group therapy and training for RACF staff
- 12 aged care facilities on-boarded and 114 individual referrals received
- 8 new Resident Support Groups and over 77 music therapy sessions have been undertaken

“Support services for older Australians suffering from Dementia and Alzheimer’s are widely available but there have traditionally been no services to support residents in RACF with low to mild mental health illnesses. Residents who needed these services have also struggled to access them financially or logistically. So it’s wonderful that we’re finally able to offer this much-needed program to support both RACF residents and staff.”

**Jenni Dickson, Executive Manager
Community Support Services**

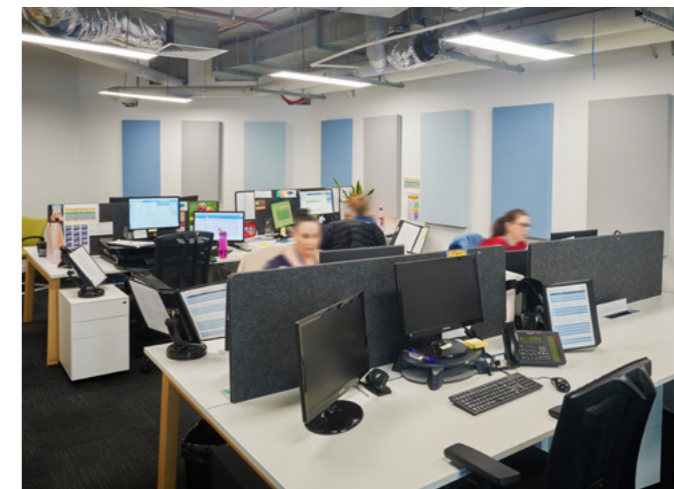


Brockhoff Foundation Pilot Program

- Established a 12-month pilot support group in May 2019 for women in Melbourne who have experienced elder abuse
- Participants say they want a supportive group environment with others who have a similar experience
- Program helps participants learn resilience and coping skills after emerging from social isolation and financial exploitation
- Music has been a key enabler of support for this group

“We provide a safe space for women to discuss their situation. They can open up as much or as little as they want. We also provide taxi vouchers, host a morning tea and music therapy. All this helps encourage attendance and generate conversations that form part of reminiscing therapy.”

**Graeme Westaway, Executive Manager
Brand, Digital & Corporate Communications**



FCC Helpline

Better Place Australia won a tender to provide financial counselling services through the National Debt Helpline (NDH) to commence in 2019. An internal project team was set up to develop the service, plan capacity building and deliver the service. A case management system was already in place that was able to capture the necessary client and case information for a new NDH service stream, allowing Better Place Australia to rapidly adapt to the additional NDH calls. With the help of a consultant, Better Place Australia was able to source an appropriate contact centre solution that would allow us to configure the service to our needs and direct the calls to any of our Financial Counsellors rostered onto the service.

The selected contact centre solution was programmed to support different service hours, workflows and counsellor availability. Supervisors were given access to real-time monitoring of calls and status information in order to coach and optimise the service. The contact centre solution and our case management system allowed reporting to be integrated into our Business Intelligence reporting system for an executive reporting dashboard.

Better Place Australia is allocated 20% of all incoming Victorian calls to the NDH. Since we launched these services in April 2019, we have met the service obligations through either answering calls or returning voicemail messages from Victorians experiencing significant financial distress.

“A specialised cloud-based helpline enables Better Place Australia to efficiently manage calls to the National Debt Helpline. It also means our geographically distributed workforce can provide the service from any of our offices across the state and our team leaders are able to get real-time data on service performance. Better Place Australia is proud to be able to provide immediate help to Victorians experiencing financial hardship.”

**Adam Gilbert,
Digital Product Manager**

Financials

Statement of Profit and Loss	2019 (\$)	2018 (\$)	
Revenue	11,167,805	10,128,345	\$1.03m increase from 2018
Expenses			
Reversal of impairment of non-current asset	73,249	-	
Impairment of non-current asset	(42,402)	-	
Employee benefits	(7,271,874)	(6,717,097)	
Depreciation & amortisation	(270,603)	(221,896)	
Marketing	(168,473)	(182,578)	
Occupancy & utilities	(842,962)	(674,645)	
IT software & support	(431,655)	(492,645)	
Professional fees	(354,403)	(271,268)	
Communication costs	(147,142)	(170,382)	
Other expenses	(500,048)	(341,816)	
Surplus for the Year	1,211,492	1,056,018	\$155,474 increase from 2018

Statement of Financial Position	2019 (\$)	2018 (\$)
Assets		
Current assets	5,408,875	4,145,779
Non-current assets	2,808,925	2,290,513
Total assets	8,217,800	6,436,292
Liabilities		
Current liabilities	1,408,611	1,250,146
Non-current liabilities	538,720	127,169
Total liabilities	1,947,331	1,377,315
Net Assets	6,270,469	5,058,977

Our Funders

We would like to acknowledge the generous and valuable support of our funders and partners.

Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS)

Better Place Australia is funded by DSS to deliver family support and financial counselling services.

Australian Government Attorney-General's Department (AG)

Better Place Australia is funded to deliver family law services.

Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)

Better Place Australia delivers elder abuse services as part of the Integrated model of care for responding to suspected elder abuse.

South Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network (SEMPHN)

Better Place Australia delivers a range of psychological services through SEMPHN.

Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation (LMCF)

The Respecting Elders Support and Conflict Resolution program has been supported by a philanthropic grant from the LMCF.

Brockhoff Foundation

Better Place Australia delivers a pilot program of therapeutic support to older women who have experienced elder abuse.

Glossary

Meanings of terms and acronyms used in this report and commonly used in the legal, family and relationships sector.

ALRC	Australian Law Reform Commission
ACA	Australian Counselling Association
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (communities)
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/ Transsexual, Intersex and Queer/ Questioning
Elder abuse	Elder abuse refers to an intentional act, or failure to act, by a caregiver or another person in a relationship involving an expectation of trust that causes or creates a risk of harm to an older adult. This can include psychological, sexual, emotional, physical and/or financial abuse.
Rainbow families	Referring to parents, carers and prospective parents who identify as lesbian, gay, bi, transgender, gender diverse or intersex, including their children
GLHV	Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria (now known as Rainbow Health Victoria)
IVO	Intervention Protection Order
IDAHOBIT	International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia
FDR	Family Dispute Resolution
PHN	Primary Health Network
SCASP	Supporting Children After Separation Program
FARS	Family and Relationship Services
CIM	Child Informed Mediation
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NDH	National Debt Helpline
RACF	Residential Aged Care Facility

About Better Place Australia

At Better Place Australia, we have been helping people to become more resilient, to empower them and to enjoy healthier relationships for over 30 years.

We have evolved into one of the most successful providers of counselling and community support services in Victoria, seeing over 8,000 new clients a year across 24 locations.

Better Place Australia Suite of Services

Counselling and Psychological Services

- Child and Youth Counselling
- Relationship Counselling
- Family Counselling
- Bulk-billing for Individuals

Family Mental Health Support (Family Counselling)

Family Dispute Resolution

Mediation

Respecting Elders Support and Conflict Resolution

Financial First Aid

- Financial Capability
- Financial Counselling

Skills Building

- Training
- STAR School Learning Programs
- Parent & Group Programs



Locations

- Better Place Australia Offices
- Co-Locations
- Outreach Locations
- * Branded Family Relationship Centre (FRC)

- | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| <p>1 Cheltenham (Head Office)
Level 1, 16 Park Road
Cheltenham Vic 3192</p> <p>2 Chadstone*
Unit 1 & 2
41 Stamford Road
Oakleigh Vic 3166</p> <p>3 Broadmeadows
Unit B1, 1-13 The Gateway
Broadmeadows Vic 3047</p> <p>4 Narre Warren
86-88 Victor Crescent
Narre Warren Vic 3805</p> <p>5 Ringwood
367 Maroondah Highway
Ringwood Vic 3134</p> <p>6 Heidelberg West
Shop 48 Bell Street Mall
Heidelberg West Vic 3081</p> <p>7 Greensborough
Diamond Valley Community Support Centre
Shop 378a, Level 3
Greensborough Plaza
Greensborough Vic 3088</p> | <p>8 Traralgon*
41 Grey Street
Traralgon Vic 3844</p> <p>9 Westall
Westall Library & Community Hub
35 Fairbank Road
Clayton South Vic 3169</p> <p>10 Cardinia
Black Fish Medical Centre
215/235 Rossiter Road
Koo Wee Rup Vic 3981</p> <p>11 Bunyip
High Street Medical Centre
17 High Street
Bunyip Vic 3815</p> <p>12 Pakenham (Hollins Centre)
Hollins Children Centre
10 Atlantic Drive
Pakenham Vic 3810</p> <p>13 Pakenham (Lakeside Centre)
Lakeside Centre
2 Olympic Way
Pakenham VIC 3810</p> | <p>14 Pakenham (Springs Centre)
Pakenham Springs Centre
5 Livingstone Boulevard
Pakenham Vic 3810</p> <p>15 Bairnsdale
Quantum Support Services
306 Main Street
Bairnsdale Vic 3875</p> <p>16 Fitzroy
Fitzroy Legal Service
Level 4, 126 Moor Street
Fitzroy Vic 3065</p> <p>17 Geelong
7-9 Ryan Place
Geelong Vic 3220</p> <p>18 Leongatha
5A Church Street
Leongatha Vic 3953</p> <p>19 Warragul
West Gippsland Healthcare Group
31-35 Gladstone Street
Warragul Vic 3820</p> | <p>20 Frankston
Level 2, 60-64 Wells Street
Frankston Vic 3199</p> <p>21 Frankston PCLC
Frankston Peninsula Community Legal Centre
441 Nepean Highway
Frankston Vic 3199</p> <p>22 Wyndham Vale
IPC Health, 510 Ballan Road
Wyndham Vale Vic 3024</p> <p>23 Caroline Springs
22-50 Becca Way
Caroline Springs Vic 3023</p> <p>24 Melton
195 Barries Road
Melton West Vic 3337</p> |
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Social Services

Visit www.dss.gov.au for more information.