

Embedding Lived Experience in Evaluation:

Family Preservation & Reunification Participatory Research Project Summary

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About Uniting Vic.Tas

Uniting Vic.Tas is the community services organisation of the Uniting Church, delivering services and programs across Victoria and Tasmania.

We strive to make a difference for individuals, families and communities.



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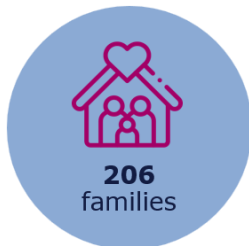
We offer a range of services such as:

- Alcohol & Other Drugs
- Home, Community and Carer
- Early Learning
- Emergency Relief
- Family Services
- Homelessness Support
- Housing
- Mental Health
- Social Enterprises
- Multicultural Services

The aim of the Program.

Empower and strengthen families to:

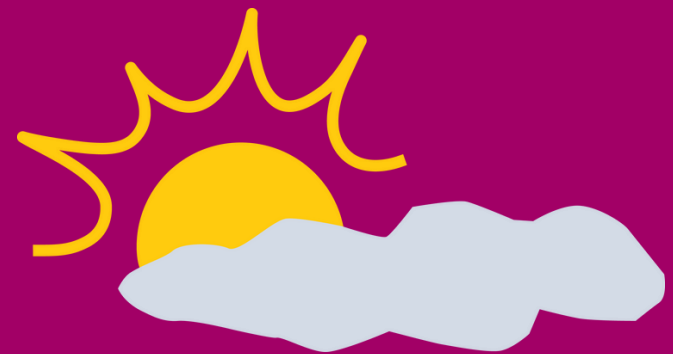
- Prevent the need for children to enter out-of-home care.
- Facilitate the safe return of children who have been placed in out-of-home care.



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“The biggest change in my life was definitely being able to provide a safe and stable environment for my children and myself.”

- Previous Consumer



FPR Participatory Evaluation Project.

Summary and findings

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The FPR Participatory Research Project.

- Outcome tools including:
 - Parent Empowerment and Efficacy Measure (PEEM)
 - North Carolina Family Assessment Scale (NCFAS)
 - **Community Services Outcomes Tree survey (CSOT)**
- From May 2023 – December 2024, the FPR Program collected consumer outcomes data for over 18 months using the **Community Services Outcomes Tree**.

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Project aim:

To review 1000 qualitative data responses from over 146 CSOTs completed by consumers who have closed with the FPR Program.



Why a participatory research approach?

Partnering with consumers in this project significantly:

- Deepened insights
- Enhanced evaluation quality
- Strengthened our capability in participatory methods.



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"I didn't think anyone looked at our feedback."

I thought it would just sit on a shelf somewhere."

– Uniting Consumer Partner

Summary of the findings.

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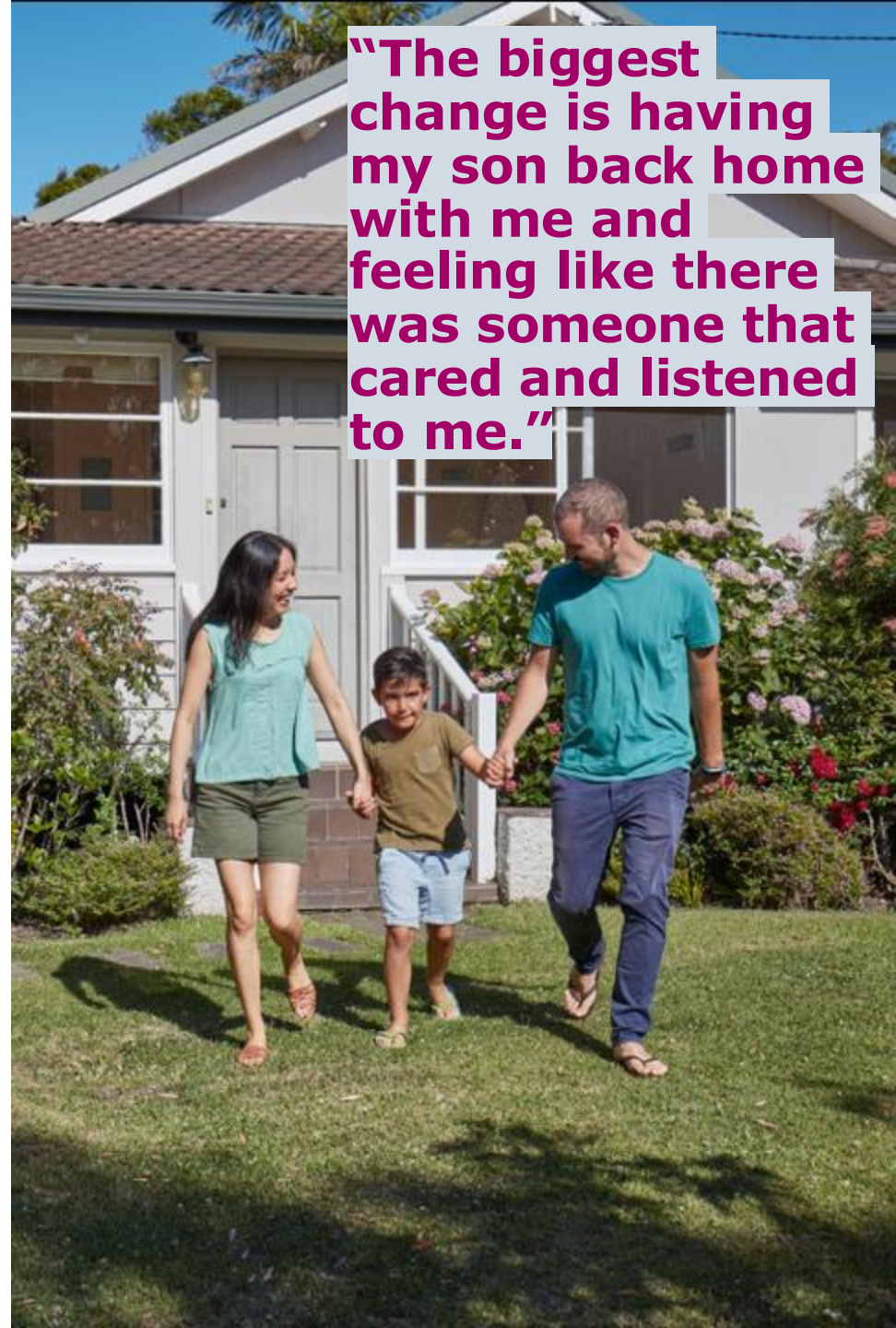
Community Services Outcome Tree data.

Of the 124 responses to the Community Services Outcomes Tree*:

- **97%** said FPR made a positive difference
- **89%** said their parenting skills improved
- **89%** said access to and use of services improved
- **91%** said their confidence as a parent/care giver improved.

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**Consumer outcomes tool developed with Swinburne University completed anonymously by consumers at closure.*



"The biggest change is having my son back home with me and feeling like there was someone that cared and listened to me."

Impacts.

Improved self and parental confidence and self-efficacy

Family preservation and reunification, stability and safety

Stronger bonds and relationships within the family

Improved parenting skills and strategies

System navigation and service access

Routines, home environment and organisation

Improved mental health and emotional regulation



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"Having the confidence in myself to do well as a person and as a parent. Being able to trust myself easier."

"Helped our family communicate with each other"

"Becoming a mom again."

"Being able to make my own decisions and be comfortable in actioning them."

- Previous Consumers

Enablers.

Respectful, empowering,
therapeutic and reliable support

Practical help and wrap-around
support

Developing and learning
parenting skills

Building confidence and self-
belief

Goal setting, motivation and
planning

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"Having somebody to talk to which benefited me. I trusted what you said was for my best interest."

"Always being encouraged and validated on my thoughts. It was very powerful and empowering."

"Helping me with services and support after the closed. Help me with debt out of my hands."

"Engaging in supports that help support my parenting skills, furthering my understanding about youth"

- Previous Consumers

Barriers and improvements

- Mental health and other personal issues
- Lack of flexibility, adaptability and tailoring
- Structural / system based
- Other: family violence, housing, cultural
- No improvements
- Longer time in program



"Mental health"

"Every time a support worker changes, I feel like I have to start all over again because I have to build the rapport again with a new support worker. Having one support through-out would have been great"

"Great for mother with younger children. Did not suit my at-risk teen"

"The biggest barrier for me was not being able to know what services I could access to help me."

"Husband at the time was controlling and got in the way of achieving goals."

"Housing issues"

- Previous Consumers

Snapshot of recommendations



1. Include consumer partners in staff recruitment

2. Introduce an early-engagement Families' Experience Survey

3. Create shared learning spaces for practitioners and consumer partners

4. Assess and build family readiness to engage and change

5. Strengthen family partnership and control over planning and closure

What the participatory approach meant for the project team



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"I honestly believe that lived experience is non-negotiable for good evaluation and improving services."

Data gives us numbers, but lived experience gives us the story behind those numbers ... Without it, we're missing a piece of the puzzle."

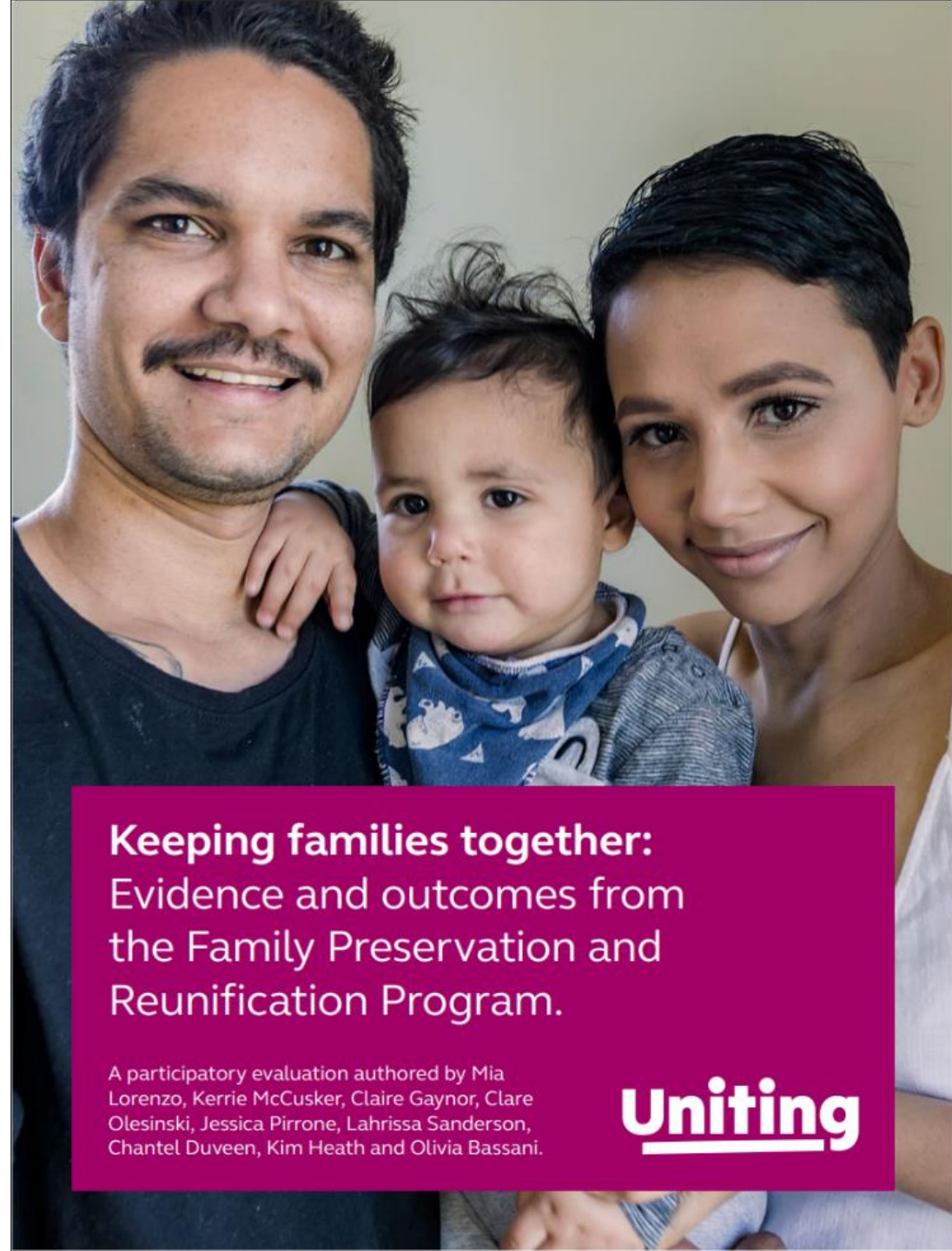
**- Lahrissa Sanderson,
Uniting Consumer
Partner**

Accessing the report

The report is available on the Uniting Vic.Tas website
unitingvictas.org.au:

Keeping families together:
Making a positive difference
for families | Uniting Vic.Tas

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Keeping families together:
Evidence and outcomes from
the Family Preservation and
Reunification Program.

A participatory evaluation authored by Mia Lorenzo, Kerrie McCusker, Claire Gaynor, Clare Olesinski, Jessica Pirrone, Lahrissa Sanderson, Chantel Duveen, Kim Heath and Olivia Bassani.

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Thank you.

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Learn more
unitingvictas.org.au