

Hello, are we going to start?

Yeah.Yep, good to go.

Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you so much for joining us here on such an important day. However, before we begin the official launch, I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we speak, and I'm speaking to you today from the lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung people and we acknowledge and pay respects to the Traditional owners of the land across Victoria and pay respect the elders past and present and of future generations.

Most of you I know, but for those who I don't, I am Miranda Bain, deputy chair for the Funds in Court Human Rights Advisory Commission and with Susan Arthur, who is my co-host today, we are absolutely delighted to welcome you distinguished guests, your honours, everyone involved in the disability sector, family, friends, colleagues, and we pay our respect to all persons who identify with or have a lived experienced with disability.

The Charter of Rights of Parents and Carers with disabilities involved in child protection in Victoria, we called the Charter, is an initiative of the Funds in Court Human Rights Advisory Committee, and Associate Justice Fiona Steffensen will explain a little bit more about that committee and Funds in Court, just in the short moment.

The Charter is result of many people's thoughts and guidance, including the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, who assisted us during the development of the Charter of Rights, including representatives from Danny's Division, Danny is the Dep Sec. I'll introduce him in a moment.

This Charter is for you. It's a powerful human rights document that clearly sets out what each person can expect when they involved in child protection in Victoria. In summary, you have the right to participate, to be heard and to be included. You have the right to be respected, you have the right to information and in accessible formats.

I'm sorry, this is.

Wait, can we just turn the chat off?

Michael.

If we can, that would be very useful.

You have the right to information in accessible formats, and you have the right to have support, but you have also the right to be treated fairly.

So when you are involved in child protection, you have the right to have all these rights respected and employed. The Charter's working group consisted of Matt Hall, the CEO of the Supreme Court, John Velasco, Mark Camilleri, Lauren Adamson, Jacquie O'Brien and of course key DFFH staff proving so absolutely wonderful to work with and have guided us all throughout this process.

I take this opportunity to also specifically thank Powerful Positive Parents, the Council for Intellectual Disability, VALID, the VLA, Star, SARU and everyone who gave time to this first edition of the Charter.

There will be further opportunities to provide input to further additions. The Charter will be readily available from us today and I will send it out to everyone who is in attendance today and we will have it available on other, all of our colleagues' internet sites.

So now, it is now my great pleasure to introduce Mr Danny O'Kelly, the Department of Family Fairness and Housing Dep Sec, Deputy Secretary of Community Operations, Practise Leadership Division, who is representing DFH Community Operations and Practice Leadership division, which includes the Victorian Child Protection Programme. Thank you, Danny. It's a long title.

Thank you Miranda. It is a bit of a mouthful and I'm still getting used to it, I have to admit. Good afternoon, everyone, distinguished guests, your honours, people identifying with a disability, members of the profession, ladies and gentlemen. As Miranda said, I'm Danny O'Kelly and I have what I consider to be a really privileged role as the Deputy Secretary of Operations for the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. And I take a lot of pride in the fact that we have 'fairness' in our in the title of our department. And I think it's really important in the context of what we are launching today. But before I say a few words about that, could I also acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the various lands that we're all dialling in from today?

I'm dialling in from Wurundjeri country and I pay my respects to elders past and present and to elders of all of the communities across, across the areas that we're dialling in from today. The land I'm speaking to you from is Aboriginal land. It always was and it always will be.

I'm delighted to be here today because this is such an important event for parents, for caregivers, children and families that we work with. Our department, as many of you will know, supports a range of ministerial portfolios, including, of course, child protection. But we also look after the prevention of family violence, housing, disability, carers, multicultural affairs, equality, veterans and women and youth, and we have an administrative office, Office of Homes Victoria, and our collective vision, if you think about all of those portfolios, is really about a fairer and safer Victoria that is as much as possible, free from disadvantage and discrimination and is a place where people can build meaningful lives. We're deeply committed to Aboriginal self-determination and we seek to create respectful, respectful and collaborative partnerships and culturally safe practices are at the centre of everything we seek to do.

Our focus is to build inclusive, engaged communities that contribute to a fairer and stronger Victoria. We want all voices to be heard and celebrated and and endeavour to create opportunities that make everyone feel valued. We'll continue our work to reduce inequality and discrimination and to promote accessibility and inclusion. With that in mind, the Department is truly honoured to have supported the development of this Charter of Rights through the wonderful work of the Supreme Court of Victoria's Funds in Court and Human Rights Advisory Committee. The work that we do should always be undertaken in ways that, as much as possible, support all parties or all people that we're working with to participate, in meaningful ways, in processes that affect their lives.

What could be more important than ensuring that parents who have a disability, who are involved, whose children are involved in the child protection system? What could be more important than them having an understanding of what's happening? Of what the process will look like, of how they can be involved, on what they can do if there are elements of the work they're not understanding and what they can do if they're not happy or they haven't understood a process that we've been working our way through? It's really important that we do everything we can to make sure that we support meaningful just engagement in the processes that parents have in the, in the work that we do that affects them. And this resource is such and this, this step is such an important addition to the things that we have available to us to make sure that that happens.

Every day our protection practitioners work with children and families to support children's safety and well being. But as we all know, supporting parents, supporting parents to parent well and to help their children thrive is the most important thing that our practitioners can do. So much of what we are, we're, we're, we're, we endeavour to do is about children being supported by their parents. We know that parents, all parents, face challenges when raising children. And for parents who might have experienced trauma or have, or who might have their own struggles that might be about disability or illness or education or employment, the challenges in interacting with systems like the one that I work in can be multiplied or magnified.

As a system, we really want parents and caregivers to know and understand their rights, to be able to access the support that they need, when and how they need it, and ideally without having to ask.

So we're making sure that people have that available to them.

And the Charter gives us great confidence that parents and carers with a disability who are involved with the child protection system will understand their rights and will know what supports are available to them. The Charter will be on our child protection manual from, I think we're endeavouring to do it as soon as tomorrow, if we haven't already.

Which is pretty quick for us to do these sorts of things and we're really looking forward to promoting the Charter to all of our child protection staff and other staff who might have a role in and around the child protection system. So that it's made available to all parents and caregivers and caregivers when they when and if their child becomes involved in the child protection system here in Vic.

So events like today are a great way for us to share the good work we know. That makes a difference to children and their families and we look forward to working with everyone who's online today to really embedding the Charter in all of the work that we do as we make our way forward. So thank you again for the opportunity to come along today and thank you to everyone who's been involved in developing the Charter, including our staff. And thank you, Miranda for that very kind call out of the role that the DFFH staff have provided, have played, in the development of the Charter and I look forward to working really hard with everyone in ensuring the Charter is part of the work that we do. So thank you Miranda, and thank you everyone.

Thank you, Danny. I'm just so delighted to hear those very affirmative words about how this Charter is going to be embraced and implemented by the Department, it's just fantastic.

So now. I'd like to introduce my co-host, Susan Arthur. Susan is the founder of Powerful Positive parents.

Susan?

And Susan is going to help with the rest of today's event.

Susan.

Hi, my name is Sue, or Susan. I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land. I would also like to acknowledge their elders, past and present. In the self-advocacy world we have a recognition which is, I would like to recognise and thank all self-advocates who have worked very hard over many years for equality and a human rights role. I am a self-advocate with Positive Powerful Parents. We have been wanting a Charter for parents with a disability for a very long time.

We are hoping now that there is a Charter, parents with an intellectual disability, and any other disability, will get their voice heard and actioned on and not ignored.

We are hoping a Charter will give parents with disability, a voice to stand up for their rights, a real chance to keep their children with them. We will be suggesting that parents keep a copy of the charter with them at all times.

PPP or Positive Powerful Parents will have copies printed in both our offices in Melbourne and Morwell for parents to take. We will have it on our website and share it on our social media. We hope people watching this launch today will share far and wide with their networks. PPP also look forward to being involved in the next stages of this working document and the Working Charter.

I would also like to thank Miranda and everyone who was involved in making this so far, thank you.

Thank you, Susan. That was lovely and well, well said. And Ok so without too much ado, I'm going to introduce the senior master of the Supreme Court, Associate Justice, Fiona Steffensen who will talk a little bit about Funds in Court and the Human Rights Advisory committee. Thank you.

Thanks very much, Miranda, and thank you Susan and Danny for your words earlier. I'm so encouraged by listening to Danny speak about the importance of the Charter from the department's perspective and from Sue about the impact this Charter will have on people who identify with disability. I'd like to echo the acknowledgments of the Traditional Owners of the lands that we've heard today already.

No doubt we're sitting on lands across Victoria and perhaps broader, I'm not sure. And I often think about the Traditional Owners of the lands have been meeting on these lands for many thousands of years and that it is a real privilege for us to continue on that tradition and to acknowledge their impact on where we are today.

I feel really excited to be here to celebrate the launch of the Charter of Human Rights for parents and carers with disability involved with child protection and Victoria. Enshrining human rights for people with disability, and making those rights clear, accessible and function based. is a matter very dear to my heart as the senior master of the Supreme Court of Victoria's Funds in Court.

Some people here today might not be familiar with the work of Funds in Court, so if I may seek a little indulgence and tell you just a little bit about us. This might be the best way of me explaining to you why Funds in Court is so pleased that the Charter is being adopted.

Funds in Court is a division of the Supreme Court of Victoria. I am an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court and as part of my role I am what's what is called, for historical reasons, the senior master of Funds and Court. This means that I have the great honour and responsibility of leading Funds in Court.

The main function of Funds in Court is to manage money on behalf of people who do not have capacity to manage their own funds according to law.

Funds in Court has two main cohorts of people for whom we manage money. The first cohort are adults with disabilities, which impact their capacity to manage their own funds. The funds paid into court for these people largely comprise personal injury compensation payments.

The second cohort of people we have are children, most of whom are victims of crime, who've received compensation payment from the victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal.

In each case, we hold their money on trust and ensure that it is invested and spent wisely and in a manner that respects their human rights and dignity. Presently, around 2.1 billion is managed by funds in court on behalf of around 6400 people. Of these approximately 3300 are people have received personal injury compensation payments or some other reward. Most of these people are adults with disability. The remaining 3100 are victims of crime, who were mostly children.

We have a team of around 90 people, each of whom has a passion for ensuring the best outcomes for these extraordinary people.

A large number of our employees are case managers for the people whose money we hold on trust.

Our case managers foster relationships with them, their families and their carers. And in all our dealings, we strive to respect and protect the human rights of those whose funds are entrusted with us. A fundamental plank to our work is giving respect to their wishes and seeking to support them in making their own decisions as far as is practicable.

It was for this reason that the funding court established its human Rights Advisory Committee. The committee was created to promote access to justice for people who identify with disability.

Our day-to-day dealings with people with disability highlighted gaps in their access to justice and we decided to do something about it. The committee is composed of representatives from key Victorian organisations who bring a diverse range of skills and experience, including legal practitioners, disability service providers, members of different government departments and academics. This unique composition is a key plank in the committee's success, as it has enabled the committee to achieve Cross institutional collaborative projects such as this Charter that really do improve access to justice for people with disability.

It has just been announced that the committee is the recipient of the Public Advocate Award, which is presented annually to an organisation which has provided an outstanding contribution to improving the lives and outcomes of people with disability.

I'm so proud of the committee and its extraordinary impact. I would like to thank Miranda Bain who is the deputy chair of the committee and all of the committee members for their hard work and dedication to these important causes.

This charter is one of the key projects of the Human Rights Advisory Committee.

The Charter will see people with disability, informed of their rights in a very tangible way, having regard to the particular functions of child protection.

For example, it will remind all concerned that the parent or carer has a right to be asked what they think. And a right to be listened to in relation to decisions about their child. It also provides information about their rights in connection with court hearings concerning their child. In short, as we've heard, the Charter will provide a go-to resource for child protection workers and parents and carers with disability.

I'm so pleased to say that the Charter has such broad support and I'm really excited to listen to the other speakers that we have today that will be addressing the impact that this Charter will have.

I've no doubt that with the Charter to inform, educate and remind us of the rights of people with disability involved with child protection, better outcomes will be achieved for the precious children, their parents and their carers.

Thank you very much.

Thank you.

Thank you. And a great summary of everything and that was lovely. So I think we now go to Louise Anderson from Court Services Victoria. Louise.

I was off mute. Thank you everyone and thank you, Miranda. Good afternoon. That was a very powerful summary both of the Charter and of the role of the Funds in Court Human Rights Committee, so thank you to the Associate Justice.

First of all, I'll certainly pay my respects to the Traditional Owners on the land of whom I join with you today, the Wurundjeri people. I pay my respects to the elders past, present and emerging, and also to all First Nations people on the call today.

As the Chief Executive Officer of Court Services Victoria, my role is slightly different to those you've heard from today.

My role is to ensure that we support the operations of the Victorian Courts, Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, the Judicial Commission and the Judicial College, so that they can operate independently and continue to provide a strong service to the Victorian community.

In doing that, the Charter itself is very meaningful and profound document and it's been very humbling to listen to only the few comments, but so powerfully said this afternoon. The Charter sets clearly out the expectations that people can hold agencies and other entities to account. It clearly empowers parents and caregivers of, and lets them know and lets you know, of your rights.

And it sets an obligation on those entities, on how they're going to meet those expectations. And while it does not bind decisions of the court, it's a very powerful document for Court Services Victoria to reflect on. And more generally, it reflects the view that we are engendering in the way that we support the operations of courts, that is, that the courts put the user and their experience really matters.

Those who come before the courts through therapeutic justice, needing access to court buildings, access and clarity as to how they navigate court procedure, understanding the interaction of courts and understanding the impact of court decisions, all of those things are important. And from a Court Services Victoria perspective, we are actively engaging in, listening to, understanding and then acting on the needs of court users, so that we can really shape the services we offer to make them relevant, accessible and respectful to all who come before the courts.

So I'm very honoured to be part of, and a very small part and properly so, of this launch and really call out a significant thanks to all who've had such an instrumental role in the development of it and the delivery of it. It's a profound first step and a very important one. Thanks, Miranda.

Thanks, Louise. That was terrific as always. So we're going to march on, we're going to be a little bit overtime, but that's fine. And I'm going to introduce you to the CEO of Tweddle, who has been instrumental in providing a programme called HoPES for men and women who have an intellectual disability, and disability, so that they can raise their babies. Thank you, Jacquie.

Thanks, Miranda. It's a privilege to be here with all of you today at such an important event in launching this Charter. A few things quickly about Tweddle and I too will join with everyone and acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today. I come to you today from Wurundjeri country and very, very aware of the importance of learning from our First Nations people about family and culture, and we take that very seriously here at Tweddle.

So if you don't know Tweddle, it's got 102 year history of being well known as a sleep school.

And it's far more than a sleep school. But a sleep school gives you a nice soft entry for a range of people experiencing vulnerability in the early parenting space. So generally we work with babies and toddlers and their families from zero to two, which we talk about the first thousand days.

One of the things I'm going to talk about today is the work that we've done in partnership with Bowen Child, Youth and Families and a really important programme, our HoPES programme, that is where there is absolutely wrap around services, service providers, but really working with parents with babies and toddlers and they are the parents with an intellectual disability who are involved with child protection.

So I just wanted to make a few major statements about why this work is important and it's important because the first thousand days has a real impact on the future generations. And I always say if you want to change the world, this is where you start. And we have to work in partnership, build relationship with families in order to be able to support them through this period of time. From birth to 18 months, the research tells us that there is so much happening in the brain. There is a million neural connections, so connections happening in the brain per second, that's an enormous period of growth and these early experiences shape the baby's brain development and have lifelong impact on their physical, mental and emotional health.

The World Health Organisation and the Commission for Social Determinants of Health said many challenges in adult society have their roots in the early years of life, including major public health problems such as obesity, heart disease, mental health problems, and experiences in early childhood

also are related to problems and economic participation, literacy, numeracy, criminality; very important period of time where we have to invest in the in supporting families.

So our HoPES programme, it means HoPES means home parenting, education and support programme, really does give hope to families. And I think the partnership with Bowen Child, Youth and Families and the Department really illustrates how that is the case.

So the best way to talk about these programmes is to give you an example, a bit of a story. And if I can ask you as I tell a story, to think about how you'd be feeling if you were in the shoes of this family.

So of course it's a deidentified story, but Michelle is a mother of seven children. She has an intellectual disability, as do four of her other children. She was referred to HoPES through our partnership with Bowen Child Youth and Families and she came into the experience of working with child protection due to rib fractures in the baby.

On reviewing the case, it seemed that it was an accidental injury, but what became evident was the world of this family was very chaotic. The world of this family was really struggling with how to cope with day-to-day living, and mum said she was feeling numb. She was feeling numb in beginning to relate to her new baby.

And I reckon with seven children in the house, I'd be feeling a bit overwhelmed too. Dad said he really didn't couldn't relate to what was going on. And so our role was to come in and work with the family through our HoPES programme. HoPES is an 8 week programme in the home 2 hours a week.

And with a network of care supporting this family, including child protection and including Bowen Child, Youth and Families, we were able to work with the family around modelling, around education, around reinforcing and encouraging and really be strength based and importantly trauma-informed.

What happened at the end of eight weeks was really amazing. Dad, who didn't want to get engaged with the programme from the start, absolutely found ways to engage with his family that he had never done before.

The parents reported, and were measured, with increased confidence. The house was less chaotic. And they were parents, as parents, were more available to interact positively, which is so important for brain development with all of their children. And that was because they were all working together. They were all on the same page. And when we finally exited the, the, the, the from the programme, the dad had tears in his eyes as he said goodbye to his Tweddle worker.

What do I want to say that's really important for you to take away from this programme?

It fills a gap for people with a disability, especially those involved with child protection. It walks with them side by side, building on strengths to help them achieve their best outcomes possible.

It's the programme that's developed from the needs of each family. What one family needs, another family doesn't. This family needed a lot of help with settling the family down towards evening. We were able to do that, so the world was less chaotic.

It works because it's a part of a network of care. And that network of care is able to fill in the gaps of what's needed with that family from across the spectrum of time and as needs change.

We all need to increase the understanding of the science and the impact of the first thousand days, the impacts on health, on physical health, emotional health and the economic impacts across the lifespan.

Programmes such as HoPES are critical to bring about change. It gives us hope that together with families, not just providing information, but walking with families and supporting them in learning skills and reinforcing skills, that we can get really, really positive outcomes.

So finally, we want to say that the early relationships between babies and their parents are incredibly important for building healthy brains, and we need to foster linkages across an integrated care platform to get the best outcomes for families, especially the families involved with child protection and have an intellectual disability. I'm very proud of this programme and the work that it's done for this family achieved a really positive outcome and I think you'd all be able to see that in the story I told today. Thank you.

Thank you, Jacquie.

Yes, we do see that. And you do know how things are changing, they're in a very important time. And the Charter in providing assistance to families, people with a disability so that they can become and remain unified with their babies and their toddlers.

Last but not least, Colleen Pearce, please come forward. I'm sorry we're a little bit late, but last but not least, thank you.

Thank you, Miranda. I too would like to begin by acknowledging where I'm speaking to you today. I'm from the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. I pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging, and to any other Aboriginal people that are online today.

I'd also like to have a shout out to my mate Susan Arthur and to the other disability advocates that are online, you have fought for a very long time for this Charter and with the support of the Human Rights Committee from Funds in Court, we now see the Charter and it's a very important document.

In 2006, I was involved in the development of the Victims of Crime Charter and like this Charter, the victims of Crime Charter sets out that people have the right to be, to understand and be understood, to be provided with information, to be treated with courtesy, dignity and respect, and it sets out obligations and expectations. Now, at the time of the development of that Charter, we were very excited, but privately we wondered whether in fact it was going to be a toothless tiger. Although it was set out in legislation, it didn't create any new rights, it didn't create any new obligations.

Um, but I have to say in reflecting on that Charter, that chart has stood the test of times, and one of the things that I'm very pleased to see is that victims of crime own that Charter. They talk about it, they use it in all kinds of ways, and they hold people to account because of the Charter. I hope that in due course, as this Charter becomes more well known, that it has the gravitas of the Victims of Crime Charter. That it is well known, well understood and that people use it to articulate their rights and their entitlements.

Of course, the respect for that chart of the victims of Crime Charter didn't happen in isolation, and I encouraged the Department of DFFH to ensure that there is training available both for child protection workers, but for parents, caregivers, families and others to ensure that people understand the Charter and that it is widely used and widely understood and I think there is a very important role for supporting advocates and self-advocates to undertake that role, to be able to spread the word to educate others.

I wanted to end with a quote that I use very often. It's a quote from Eleanor Roosevelt, who, in replying to how we measure the progress of human rights, said where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home, so close and so small they cannot be seen on the maps of the world.

Now that's the importance of this Charter to me. It might seem that it's actually a very small thing in the scheme of things, but in fact it's not. It has an incredible importance, because if we don't get it right here, if we don't get the parents and the caregivers and the families to understand and to exercise their human rights and to promote their human dignity, then what is the point? Where do we see human rights in the broader world.

So the Charter is a very powerful and very important document and it needs to be supported and talked about, and there needs to be funding available for training to ensure that the word is out there.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the Human Rights Committee of Funds in Court.

As you heard earlier this year, I gave the Human Rights committee of Funds in Court the Public Advocates award in recognition of the extraordinary work they have done in promoting and empowering people with a disability. So congratulations to everyone who has been involved in the development of the Charter.

I would like to though single out one person in particular, Miranda Bain. There was a whole committee behind Miranda that helped develop this Charter, but really the IT was the brainchild of Miranda. Miranda did very humbly, worked tirelessly negotiating with all of the players across the field to ensure that the Charter got support. And in fact we got here today for the launch of this Charter. Congratulations Miranda, and congratulations to everyone else involved in the development of the Charter.

Well, they're very kind words and very humbling. That's the Human Rights Advisory Committee and the working group, a joy to work with. And I think I just nagged them sometimes, but they're very kind.

So, we can now conclude this launch. I will now announce that we have just begun work on the Indigenous version of the Charter.

So we will have yet another launch of that that will probably be in a couple of months time. This Charter will be reviewed out in the field to see and evaluated strengthen its weaknesses. Please feel free to contact me at any stage about the Charter and how you are experiencing it with from a family perspective and a child protection perspective that's appropriate for the department. Very eager to get feedback. I want to take this time to thank Susan Arthur for being my co-host, I've jumped in a bit there and do apologise and I also wanted just thank Jerry our Auslan interpreter, who has been a joy, as always, to have with us and we look forward to seeing you and everyone again in the near future.

Thank you.

Goodnight, goodbye.