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| **Winners** |

## Chief Practitioner’s Award

**Sinead Grene**
**North Division**

Sinead is an outstanding Senior Practitioner in the North East Melbourne Area, supporting and challenging care teams to continually work above and beyond to achieve the seemingly impossible. She works tirelessly and purposefully, and her respectful persistence makes the difference to every family and young person she works with. She leads by example and is an exceptional team member, role model and mentor. These qualities are demonstrated daily and are well recognised throughout the sector and among external stakeholders. She regularly receives accolades from these partners, citing her collaboration, kindness, ability to listen and to work together with a focus on the needs of young people and their families. One of many outstanding examples of Sinead’s practice is her work with a young person estranged from her family in New Zealand. A violent relationship compounded the young person’s vulnerabilities and complex trauma. Sinead’s persistence to build a genuine relationship with the young person empowered her to refuse violence as the norm in her relationships, to be the key member of her own care team and to take control of her future. Sinead, together with the care team, successfully assisted this young person to transition to independence. She is now thriving – safe, stable and planning for her future.

## Excellence in Case Practice Support

**Jayden Wharton**
**South Division**

Jayden consistently goes over and above to ensure the children, young people and families she works with receive quality care and support. She also plays an integral role in the overall functioning of the case management team in which she works. She proactively keeps track of all unallocated cases, ensuring these children receive safe care, follow up and attention. She creates age-appropriate calendars for younger children, so they can visualise when they will next see their parents and to give them an understanding of how their reunification plan will work. She readily engages with older young people in a relatable and warm manner, providing genuine reassurance, compassion and passion in all of her interactions with children and young people. She always keeps her promises and is intuitive beyond her years. She juggles the team’s sometimes overwhelming contact commitments, ensuring that every planned contact goes ahead wherever possible. She plays an absolutely essential role in team functioning and in upholding children's best interests. Jayden's proactive attitude and assistance with oversight of unallocated cases extends far beyond her role. Her positive outlook and willingness to have a go at any task thrown at her is an absolute asset to the team and an amazing credit to her.

## Rising Star Award (CPP3)

**Sam Arnold
West Division**

Sam commenced in child protection during COVID-19 restrictions, and she started practising with few opportunities to physically meet others in her team or area. Despite these hurdles, she demonstrates exceptional initiative, and is an avid learner and forward thinker who always looks for learning and development opportunities. She is well known for offering her support and knowledge to more experienced child protection practitioners. Not one to shy away from a challenge or opportunity, Sam actively volunteers to support her colleagues with additional case tasks and complex outreaches, including urgent work and interstate travel at short notice. She demonstrates very good practice skills, excellence and clarity in her writing, and has completed a number of permanent care assessments in her first year of practice, seeing them through to permanent care orders. Many carers have acknowledged the impact that Sam has made in their lives, and the way in which she has supported them, which helped them confidently take on the permanent care of children and young people. Sam is exceptionally well organised, efficient, inquisitive, resourceful and determined – all of which are important qualities in ensuring that children are safe and that carers are enabled and empowered with the supports they need.

### Highly Commended

**Tim Jones**
**North Division**

Tim is a new practitioner who brings to his role a strong work ethic and a passionate desire to help others. He has a light-hearted sense of humour that helps him build rapport with families, who speak highly of his work. His engagement with one young person in particular has been outstanding. He developed a multi-faceted care team and remained consistent and dedicated in his support. The young person is now on a pathway out of long-term care and towards reunification with family. This is an incredible outcome that ensures the young person’s safety and gives them a positive experience in care.

## Rising Star Award (CPP4)

**Joanna Hanson**
**North Division**

Jo has been a Child Protection Practitioner for three years, with a background in early intervention and in a kinship support role. Jo is dedicated, compassionate and highly motivated to provide better outcomes for children in care. She is particularly driven to ensure children with disabilities and complex issues receive the intervention and support they need to reach their maximum potential. Jo’s assessment of the needs of a child with disability saw her focus on what was required for this child including changes to the environment in a residential care home. Jo worked with the agency and the children who became engaged in choosing new furniture and decorations. Jo understands how important the environment children live in facilitates safety and security. A further example of how Jo considers the needs of children with disabilities relates to how she focused on two preschool-age children in kinship care, who risked falling behind without appropriate support. Jo was instrumental in engaging an NDIS coordinator who could make sure the children got what they needed. Jo is dedicated to learning and development, and uses her own time to keep up to date with the latest on children’s services and interventions. She priorities the needs of the children and demonstrates this in her collaboration with support services and timely referrals. Through her dedication and advocacy, she is the voice for children and has made a difference in many children's lives.

### Highly Commended

**Situ Shrestha**
**West Division**

Situ is a considered and thoughtful practitioner. In her work with a particularly challenging case over the past 18 months, she remained client focused and steadfast in assessing, managing and responding to risk, despite the challenges. When court decision-making did not align with the view held by child protection, she responded by continuing to work closely with the young person and her family – all the while keeping the system surrounding the family in place through regular communication and collaboration with services. She is willing to learn, and actively seeks feedback on her work, and she never loses sight of what is needed to keep her client safe.

## Emerging Leader Award (CPP5)

**Melinda Wilson**
**North Division**

Melinda is an Aboriginal Family Decision Making Convenor at North Division. She maintains a strong focus on the child and on Aboriginal self-determination. She reviews each Aboriginal child’s status to decide whether they can be managed by an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation. Marram-Ngala Ganbu Children's Court has acknowledged the quality of the many Cultural Support Plans she has assisted with. Melinda is proud to be a child protection practitioner, and she brings her skills and experience to everything she does. Over the past year, Melinda has championed culture by sharing her own story. In her role, she helps practitioners with family meetings, connection to Aboriginal culture and provides assistance to complete Cultural Support Plans. She has also supported the team’s work by acting as Team Manager, appearing in court, volunteering to undertake first home visits, assisting in mentoring and even accepting a challenge during COVID-19 restrictions to sing a song every Friday night (for a year!) on Facebook Live, which brought smiles to everyone’s faces. Melinda gives a lot of herself to everything she does. She is always positive and brings her own style of wisdom to each situation, providing honest commentary and feedback to practitioners.

### Highly Commended

**Emily Ellis**
**West Division**

Emily is a compassionate team manager who leads by example. She develops clear systems and processes that support her team to meet compliance standards and provide a high-quality service to their vulnerable clients. She never loses sight of the impact of her team’s actions on children and families, and she makes time to prioritise the little things that make a child’s life special. Her calm and purposeful leadership provides a constant guide to her team about how to conduct themselves in high-pressure situations. Emily is approachable, flexible and responsive. She prioritises supervision and holds space for her team to laugh, cry, celebrate the wins and unpack the challenges.

## Emerging Leader Award (CPP6)

**Nerrida Vose**
**South Division**

Nerrida Vose is a Deputy Operations Area Manager working in the Bayside Peninsula Area. She oversees the work of two practice leaders, the specialist family violence senior practitioner, two Navigators, the Sexual Assault Investigation Team operating out of the Seaford Multidisciplinary Centre, the community-based team delivering services from The Orange Door, two response teams and a team providing services to high-risk adolescents. She has an unwavering commitment to ensuring that staff, in partnership with the sector, provide the very best possible services to children and their families. She leads by example, providing strong and caring leadership, and focuses on the development of her Team Managers (and broader staffing group). She communicates clearly with staff while being supportive and caring in her approach. She has the ability, on any given day, to move between detailed practice or service delivery issues and big systems challenges without ever forgetting whom she needs to engage with. She is always looking for opportunities to grow and develop the staff around her, and she is constantly thinking about how to improve work with children and families in a way that engages and inspires those around her. Her leadership supports staff to do their very best work in an often volatile, challenging environment.

## Outstanding Team Award

**Cultural Engagement Program**
**Statewide** **Services Group**

The Cultural Engagement Program is a small, dynamic team that works with asylum-seeking, refugee, newly arrived and culturally diverse families involved with the child protection system. The team does home visits, critical assessments, consultations and brokers services. In particular, they liaise with federal departments regarding child protection clients from culturally diverse backgrounds who are at risk of visa cancellation, detention, deportation and other complex migration matters. In this work they exemplify the attributes of the best child protection practitioners. They show courage, determination, innovation, strategic thinking and a willingness to advocate for children in out-of-home care as if they were their own.

The team were able to gain a successful intervention for a young man with disability, who was originally not eligible for the necessary support he needed. This left him in a position of extreme risk when leaving care. Due to the hard work and persistence of the team, they were able to gain him access to all the services and protection he needed. The success of this case will pave the way for other children in similar positions. Despite the barriers they face, the team demonstrates they will do whatever it takes to ensure the best outcomes for the children and young people the department cares for.