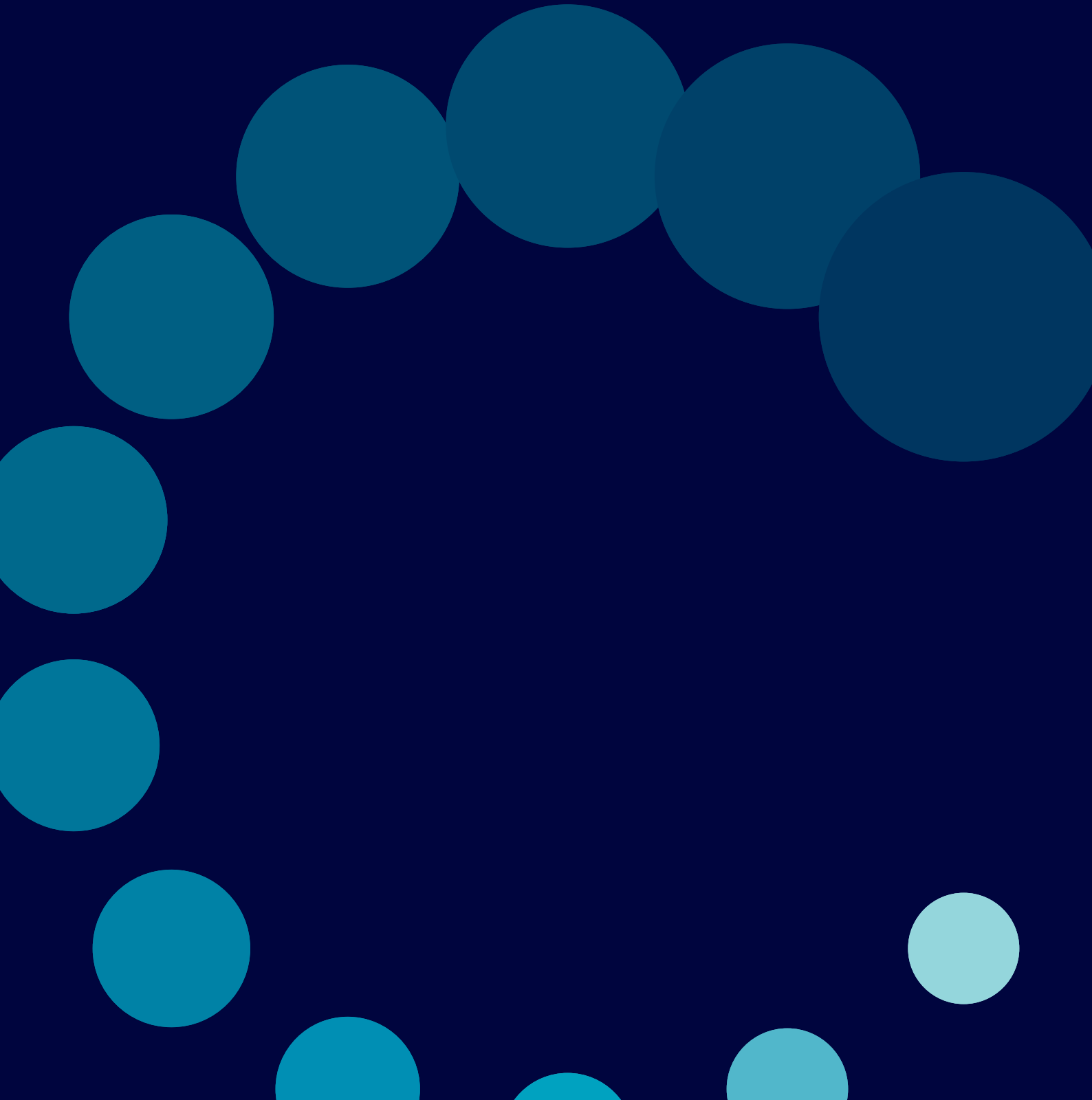


Annual Report

— 2014-2015





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Reports





Judge Peter Couzens **reporting on the period** **1 July 2014 – 8 June 2015**

2014-2015 saw the continuation of recent trends in respect of both the Criminal and Family Divisions of the Children’s Court. The year also saw the introduction of a number of initiatives which are impacting positively on the work of the court and will continue to do so.

Criminal Division

In keeping with recent trends, the number of offenders found guilty during the reporting year declined. Although there was a slight increase in the number of young people ordered to be detained, the number remained low.

Offenders found guilty

| 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 | 2012/13 | 2013/14 | 2014/15 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 6,174 | 5,427 | 4,533 | 4,155 | 3,778 | 3,523 |

Offenders ordered to be detained

| 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 | 2012/13 | 2013/14 | 2014/15 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 246 | 247 | 219 | 169 | 141 | 155 |

In marked contrast, the number of alleged young offenders being admitted to remand increased alarmingly following the commencement of amendments to the Bail Act in December 2013. This can best be illustrated by a comparison between the last quarter of 2013 (112) and the last quarter of 2014 (176). This represents an increase of 57%. It is hoped that solutions can be found to address this undesirable development.

The reporting year saw a number of initiatives, statutory and non-statutory, which have impacted positively on the court’s Criminal Division.

Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried

By reason of amendments to the Crimes (Mental Impairment & Unfitness to be Tried) Act 1997 issues of mental impairment and unfitness to be tried are now capable of being determined in the Children’s Court.

Reports

Group Conferencing

Amendments to the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 have broadened the range of matters which can be adjourned for a group conference. Previously a matter could only be adjourned to enable participation in a group conference if the court was contemplating a probation order or a youth supervision order. Now, by reason of the amendments, a matter can also be adjourned for a group conference where the court is considering imposing a youth attendance order or a period of detention.

Youth Diversion Pilot Program

In October 2014 the Attorney-General approved \$700,000 from the Court Fee Pool to fund a 12 month Youth Diversion Pilot Program. A tender process was conducted to identify a suitable service provider to be responsible for the development and implementation of the pilot. The successful tenderer was Jesuit Social Services. The pilot program will operate in the metropolitan area at Dandenong, Broadmeadows, Sunshine and Werribee and in regional Victoria at Ballarat, Ararat and Stawell.

In the Melbourne metropolitan courts Jesuit Social Services will work in conjunction with the Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS) whilst in the Grampians Region they will work in conjunction with Centacare.

The pilot program commenced at metropolitan locations on 1 June 2015 and will commence in the Grampians Region in July 2015.

At the completion of the 12 month pilot an evaluation will be undertaken to determine whether the pilot program, or an alternative, should be extended and/or expanded.

Education Justice Initiative

On 1 September 2014 the Education Justice Initiative (EJI) was launched at Melbourne Children's Court in the presence of a large audience which included Mr Richard Bolt, Secretary of the Department of Education & Early Childhood Development, Mr Brendan Murray, Executive Principal, Parkville College and Mr Ian Lanyon, Director of the Parkville Youth Justice Precinct.

The EJI is a partnership between Parkville College and Melbourne Children's Court. It is directed towards those young people who appear in the Criminal Division of the court who at the time are either totally or partly disengaged from education. The aim of the EJI is to assist those young people who wish to do so to re-engage with education. This is done with the assistance of representatives of the Department of Education who are present at the court on a daily basis.

The early results of the EJI are extremely positive with a significant number of young people returning to education through their contact with EJI personnel. I hope to see not only that the EJI continues at Melbourne Children's Court but that it is expanded to all venues throughout the state.

Children's Koori Court

During the reporting year the Children's Koori Court commenced to operate at both the Heidelberg and Dandenong venues of the court. The court was launched at Heidelberg on 27 August 2014 and at Dandenong on 12 September 2014. The aim of expanding the court to these two metropolitan venues was to give young Koori offenders the opportunity to have their matters dealt with in their local courts rather than having them adjourned to Melbourne Children's Court.

The Children's Koori Court now sits at Bairnsdale, Morwell, Warrnambool (Hamilton and Portland), Shepparton, Swan Hill, Melbourne, Heidelberg and Dandenong.

I wish to thank Manager of the Koori Court Unit, Travis Lovett, members of the Koori Justice Unit, the local RAJACs, the Elders and Respected Persons and Mr Wayne Muir, CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service for his support of the expansion of the court to Heidelberg and Dandenong.



Family Division

Increase in applications

The reporting year has seen a further increase in the number of child protection applications issued in the court. Last year I reported on the statewide increase in the number of primary applications issued in 2013/14 compared to the 2012/13 year (4,390 compared to 3,804).

In 2014/15 there were 4,933 primary applications issued, an increase of 12% on the previous year.

| 2012/13 | 2013/14 | 2014/15 |
|---------|---------|---------|
| 3,804 | 4,390 | 4,933 |

Conciliation conferences

2014/15 represents the first full year where conciliation conferences have operated throughout the state. The results have been excellent with high resolution rates being achieved both at Melbourne and in regional Victoria.

Family Drug Treatment Court

The Family Drug Treatment Court (FDTC) celebrated its first anniversary in May 2015. The outcomes for the first year of the operation of the program have been extremely promising with a number of reunifications between parents and children being achieved.

Following the retirement of Magistrate Greg Levine OAM in April 2015, Magistrate Kay Macpherson was appointed head of the FDTC. As previously reported, the FDTC will move to the new Family Division complex at Broadmeadows when it opens in late 2015.

New Family Division complex at Broadmeadows

Due to unforeseen difficulties encountered by the builders during construction of the new Broadmeadows Family Division complex completion of the project has been delayed. The complex is now expected to open in late 2015.

I am pleased to report that Magistrate Kay Macpherson has been appointed Regional Co-ordinating Magistrate of the new Family Division court at Broadmeadows.

Listings

Despite the increased number of child protection applications there has been a significant reduction in delays between setting a contested matter down for a hearing and the hearing date itself. At the end of the reporting period the delay was 11 weeks. This was in marked contrast to the commencement of my term as President in May 2013 when the delay was 28 weeks.

Credit for this significant improvement is due to State Co-ordinator, Clare Francis and the magistrates at the Melbourne Children's Court who have engaged in the directions hearing process.

D List

The "D List" is a specialist list at Melbourne Children's Court in which a small number of magistrates provide intensive management of cases in which there are allegations that a child has or is likely to suffer harm as a result of sexual abuse (section 162(1)(d) Children, Youth and Families Act 2005). The D List is headed by Magistrate Francis Zemljak.

Overseas Delegations and Visits



During 2014/15 the Children's Court welcomed a number of visitors from overseas who were interested to learn about the work of the court. They included Judge Aya Kobayashi of the Tokyo District Court, judges of the Singapore Family Court and a delegation of academics, lawyers and child protection workers from the People's Republic of China.

Amongst local visitors to the court during the reporting year were Ms Deb Tsorbaris, CEO of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare and staff of the centre. They engaged in discussions with myself and magistrates at the Melbourne Children's Court, visited the Conciliation Conference Centre and observed court proceedings in both the Family and Criminal Divisions.

Reports

Community Education

The court continues its program of community education activities by providing information to the public through its website and publications, external presentations and the on-going program of community visits to the court.

Groups that have visited the court during 2014/15 include foster carers, trainee bail justices, students of the Victorian Bar readers course, and students of law, social work, youth work, community services work, and maternal and child health. The magistrates at Melbourne continue to give their time before court commences to address these groups and answer questions about the jurisdiction and operation of the Children's Court. In addition, the practice of the court in providing addresses through its President and magistrates to a wide range of forums has continued this reporting year.

Professional Development

In addition to participating in Magistrates' Court professional development days and Judicial College seminars of interest, magistrates assigned to the Melbourne Children's Court took part in three conference days conducted at the court's premises in Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne. A number of distinguished guests attended the conferences and spoke to the magistrates on a variety of subjects of relevance to the court. They included:

- Ms Samantha Beekin (in relation to the delivery of mental health services at Parkville);
- Detective Inspector Steve Wilson and Detective Constable Holly Dalrymple (in relation to the investigation of sexual abuse of children in residential care in the Dandenong region).

In October 2014 a seminar was conducted at the Melbourne Children's Court and video-linked to courts around the state with regard to amendments to the Crimes (Mental Impairment & Unfitness to be Tried) Act. Magistrates were addressed by Julie Carpenter and Louise Dickenson from the Office of Public Prosecutions, Dr Danny Sullivan and Judge Mark Taft.

Participation on Boards, Councils and Committees

During the reporting year I participated in a number of boards, councils, committees, reference groups and advisory bodies. They included:

- Courts Council
- Courts Council portfolio committees including Human Resources Committee (Chair) and Finance, Assets & Accommodation Committee
- Aboriginal Justice Forum
- Children's Koori Court Reference Group
- Youth Justice Group Conferencing Statewide Advisory Committee
- Sexual Assault Advisory Committee
- Magistrates' Court Management Committee
- Ministerial Advisory Group
- Broadmeadows Children's Court Steering Committee
- Education Justice Initiative Monitoring Committee
- Youth Diversion Pilot Program Steering Committee (Chair)

Conclusion

I wish to acknowledge and thank the staff and members of the following organisations who have contributed so conscientiously and effectively to the work of the court at Melbourne and throughout the state during the reporting period:

- Children’s Court Clinic
- Victoria Legal Aid
- Solicitors and barristers who practice in the court
- Department of Health & Human Services
 - Child Protection Litigation Office
 - Youth Justice Court Advice Unit
 - Secure Welfare
- Victoria Police
 - Prosecutions Division
 - Melbourne Children’s Court custodial facility
 - Protective Services
- Parkville College
- Education Justice Initiative
- Salvation Army
- Court Network
- Wilson Security

At the end of 2014 Magistrate Annabel Hawkins left the Melbourne Children’s Court after four years to return to the Magistrates’ Court in the Hume Region. I thank her for her dedication to the work of the Children’s Court.

Having attained the compulsory retirement age for judicial officers in Victoria on 7 April 2015, Magistrate Greg Levine OAM retired after 28 years’ service as a magistrate, 20 of which were spent in the Children’s Court. The esteem in which he is held was evidenced by the large audience that attended his farewell in Court 8 at Melbourne Children’s Court. The expression “standing room only” was never more applicable as Magistrate Levine was farewelled in the presence of his wife Barbara, his son Jeremy, his sisters, and members of his extended family and friends.

Tributes delivered from the bar table by Sgt Mark Higginbotham, Ms Anna Guglielmucci and Mr Andrew McGregor acknowledged Magistrate Levine’s outstanding contribution to the court over two decades, praising him for his calm, measured and compassionate approach on the bench. His crucial role in the development and introduction of the Family Drug Treatment Court was, of course, singled out for special praise.

Magistrate Levine’s service to the court and to the community generally was recognized by his award of OAM in the 2015 Queen’s Birthday Honours.

Having myself attained the statutory retirement age on 8 June 2015 I retired as President of the Children’s Court and as a judge of the County Court. It has been an honour and privilege to serve as President of the Children’s Court of Victoria.

Although my term was relatively short, two years and five weeks to be exact, I am proud of the developments that took place during that time. They include:

- expansion of conciliation conferencing throughout the State;
- expansion of the Children’s Koori Court to Swan Hill, Shepparton, Heidelberg and Dandenong;
- establishment of the Family Drug Treatment Court;
- commencement of the Education Justice Initiative;
- establishment of the Youth Diversion Pilot Program; and
- commencement of construction of the new Family Division complex at Broadmeadows.

Throughout my term of office I received great support and assistance from Children’s Court Chief Executive Officer, Simon McDonald and his management team. I thank them all.

I acknowledge and thank the magistrates and court staff who preside and work in the Children’s Court jurisdiction throughout the State for their hard work and commitment to the work of the court.

Special thanks are extended to my Personal Assistant, Dianne Swanwick for her loyalty, hard work and good humour as well as to Janet Matthew, the court’s Media & Communications Manager who works so tirelessly for the court.

Finally, I congratulate my successor, Judge Amanda Chambers on her appointment and extend to her my very best wishes for a long, satisfying and successful term as President of the Children’s Court of Victoria.

Reports

Judge Amanda Chambers **reporting on the period** **9 – 30 June 2015**



On 12 May 2015 I was honoured and delighted to be appointed President of the Children's Court of Victoria. The Children's Court plays a critical role in the lives of many Victorian children and families and could not do so without the dedication and support of so many other organisations and individuals.

I wish to acknowledge and pay tribute to the outstanding leadership of my predecessors, Judge (now Justice) Jennifer Coate, Judge Paul Grant and my immediate predecessor, Judge Peter Couzens.

Judge Couzens' term as President was characterised by his tireless advocacy for programs to improve the justice response for young people, including:

- funding of a 12 month Youth Diversion Pilot Program in conjunction with Jesuit Social Services;
- launch of the Education Justice Initiative (EJI) at the Melbourne Children's Court in partnership with Parkville College; and
- expansion of the Children's Koori Court to the Heidelberg and Dandenong venues of the court, coupled with the presence of EJI representatives at those hearings.

Also during his Presidency, Judge Couzens launched the Family Drug Treatment Court, an initiative driven by Magistrate Greg Levine OAM following the completion of his Churchill Fellowship which studied similar programs operating in the USA and the UK. The FDTC will be based at the Broadmeadows Children's Court from late 2015.

Since my appointment, I have been overwhelmed by the support and assistance of my judicial colleagues, the administrative staff and the broader support of Court Services Victoria. I thank them for their support and commitment to the important work of the Children's Court of Victoria.

Report of the Chief Executive Officer *Simon McDonald*

2014-2015 has been another busy year for the Children’s Court, with legislative reform, the launch of new programs, ongoing increases in workload and a change in judicial leadership all being defining features of the year.

New President

The Children’s Court has always been very fortunate to have had exceptional judicial leadership. Sadly, this year we farewell Judge Peter Couzens who retired from the bench in June 2015 having served as President of the Children’s Court since May 2013. Judge Couzens’ legacy encompasses significant reforms in this jurisdiction including the expansion of conciliation conferencing and the Children’s Koori Court, establishment of the Family Drug Treatment Court as an Australian first and the very promising Education Justice Initiative, and more recently the Youth Diversion Pilot Program. We wish Judge Couzens well in his new role as Head of the Adult Parole Board and welcome the appointment of Judge Amanda Chambers as the new President of the Children’s Court. We look forward to working closely with Judge Chambers to ensure this jurisdiction remains a high functioning, progressive and innovative specialist jurisdiction.

Establishment of Court Services Victoria

This year marked the first anniversary of the establishment of Court Services Victoria (CSV) as a statutory public sector body. CSV comprises the state’s courts and tribunals as well as a number of business units and statutory entities. This new model of judicial led governance strengthens the independence of courts, which remain as separate, distinct entities, while providing a framework and support for jurisdictions to work in a collegiate and mutually supportive way to create a better integrated and more accessible court system. We look forward to exploring future opportunities created by the CSV model to strengthen and solidify whole of court innovation and cooperation.



Criminal Division

During 2014/15 the Children’s Koori Court expanded to Heidelberg and Dandenong and now sits at eight venues across the state. Building on the success of the Children’s Koori Court model in the court’s Criminal Division a Koori Family Division will be established at the new Broadmeadows Children’s Court to enhance culturally appropriate practices for child protection proceedings involving Koori children and families.

In June 2015, the court in conjunction with Jesuit Social Services, commenced a Youth Diversion Pilot Program at seven sites across the state. Early indications about take up of the program are very encouraging. In its first month operating across four metropolitan venues, 22 young people were referred into the program.

On 1 September 2014 the Education Justice Initiative (EJI) was launched at Melbourne Children’s Court. The EJI is the result of a very effective partnership between the court and the Department of Education. The program operates at Melbourne, Dandenong and Heidelberg targeting young people charged with criminal offences who are either totally or partly disengaged from education and aims to reconnect them with appropriate educational pathways.

Further information on these programs is available elsewhere in this report.

Family Division

During 2014/15 there was a 12% increase in the number of primary applications issued compared with the previous year with the largest increases being experienced in the Hume, Melbourne and Barwon South West regions adding significantly to the demand for resources at these locations. The court has been and will continue to be active in looking at all opportunities for case management reform to minimize the impact of ongoing increases in caseload on hearing delay.

Reports

In October 2015, the new Family Division complex at Broadmeadows will open. The new court will feature some new and innovative court processes which are discussed more fully elsewhere in this report. The new complex has been designed to include child and family friendly spaces including an area developed in partnership with the Alannah and Madeline Foundation.

During 2014/15 the Family Drug Treatment Court (FDTC) pilot program completed its first full year of operations. The FDTC, the first of its type in Australia, provides an intensive, therapeutic judicially monitored program aimed at reuniting families fractured by parental substance abuse. Later in 2015 the FDTC will relocate from Melbourne to the new Broadmeadows Children's Court complex. A more detailed report on the FDTC is available elsewhere in this report.

Conciliation conferencing

The court is proud of its dispute resolution initiatives, a key component of which is the conciliation conferencing program. Our conciliation conference conveners have extensive experience dealing with the most vulnerable families and in its first full year of operating throughout the state, the program has continued to assist parties to achieve high rates of negotiated outcomes both at the Conference Centre at Melbourne and across regional Victoria. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the outstanding efforts of Sue Higgs, Manager of the Conference Unit who has managed the conferencing program since its inception and under whose guidance the program has continued to evolve and expand. The success of conciliation conferencing is in no small part due to Sue's passion, hard work and commitment.

Royal Commission into Family Violence

In June 2015, the Children's Court, in collaboration with the Magistrates' Court of Victoria, provided a submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Our joint submission highlighted the impact family violence continues to have in both jurisdictions and specifically for this court the prevalence of family violence in child protection cases and the increase in the number of young people coming before the court as perpetrators of family violence. We look forward to the Royal Commission's report and recommendations due early in February 2016.

Looking Forward

In recent years the Children's Court has pursued opportunities for reform and innovation through technology to improve the services we deliver for families and children. Ongoing review of governance, operational, financial

and service delivery arrangements across the state and rigorous evaluation of new programs will again be a feature of the coming year. We place great value on collaboration and consultation with stakeholders as key to delivering responsive court programs and services. We will continue to seek opportunities to work closely with other jurisdictions, agencies and service providers to develop coordinated and systemic solutions to the common challenges we face in trying to continually improve the way we do things.

The coming year is already set to be a busy and exciting one for this jurisdiction. The new Broadmeadows Children's Court will open in October to provide an innovation hub to develop, trial and evaluate new approaches, in particular family friendly approaches, to improve the court process and experience for young people and their families in the Family Division. We look forward to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence early in 2016 and we are already working hard to ensure that the court is well placed to respond effectively to the significant changes to the Children, Youth and Families Act in relation to permanent care arrangements which become operational in March 2016. We will also undertake a comprehensive service review of regional Children's Courts to ensure that regional courts, faced with growing demand, in particular in the Family Division, are properly supported to ensure that they can continue to deliver high quality services and meet the needs of regional children and families.

Acknowledgements

My personal thanks go to Alan Clayton, CSV's inaugural Chief Executive Officer, for his strong support of the Children's Court and for his insightful leadership of CSV in its first year of operation. Thanks also to the staff and directors of Jurisdiction Services who continue to provide corporate expertise and assistance to the court and to the CEOs of each court and VCAT.

I also wish to acknowledge and thank the court's management team for the support that they have given me and, in particular Leah Hickey, General Manager, Operations & Strategy for her skill, expertise and dedication throughout the year.

Thanks go also to Dr Patricia Brown, Director of the Children's Court Clinic and her staff of highly skilled clinicians for their tireless work to provide expert, independent advice to assist magistrates in their decision making.

Finally, the Children's Court can be a demanding and difficult environment to work in and so as always, I take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all Children's Court staff and magistrates across the state for their outstanding dedication and commitment to the work of this jurisdiction.

Year at a Glance



Year at a Glance

In the 2014-2015 year the Children's Court of Victoria finalised a total of 35,887 cases.

When analysing the statistical information provided on these pages it should be noted that while country venues of the court hear cases in both divisions, in the metropolitan area all Family Division child protection cases are heard in the Melbourne region. Suburban venues of the court (other than Moorabbin which forms part of the Melbourne region) hear criminal matters and applications for intervention orders only.

More information about the operation of the Criminal Division is available on page 20 of this report and the Family Division on page 23.



Criminal Division

Criminal matters finalised, 2014/15

| | |
|-------------------|-------|
| Melbourne | 2,533 |
| Grampians | 637 |
| Loddon Mallee | 705 |
| Broadmeadows | 584 |
| Dandenong | 1,096 |
| Frankston | 1,003 |
| Barwon South West | 832 |
| Heidelberg | 650 |
| Gippsland | 942 |
| Ringwood | 966 |
| Hume | 941 |
| Sunshine | 800 |
| NJC - Collingwood | 39 |

Total 11,728

CAYPINS matters finalised, 2014/15

| | |
|-------------------|-------|
| Melbourne | 1,643 |
| Grampians | 282 |
| Loddon Mallee | 162 |
| Broadmeadows | 1,001 |
| Dandenong | 1,058 |
| Frankston | 1,287 |
| Barwon South West | 260 |
| Heidelberg | 456 |
| Gippsland | 236 |
| Ringwood | 1,316 |
| Hume | 250 |
| Sunshine | 1,244 |
| NJC - Collingwood | 52 |

Total 9,247

Family Division

Child protection applications finalised, by region, 2014/15

| | |
|-------------------|-------|
| Melbourne | 6,989 |
| Grampians | 813 |
| Loddon Mallee | 1,049 |
| Barwon South West | 1,165 |
| Gippsland | 1,077 |
| Hume | 1,165 |

Total 12,258

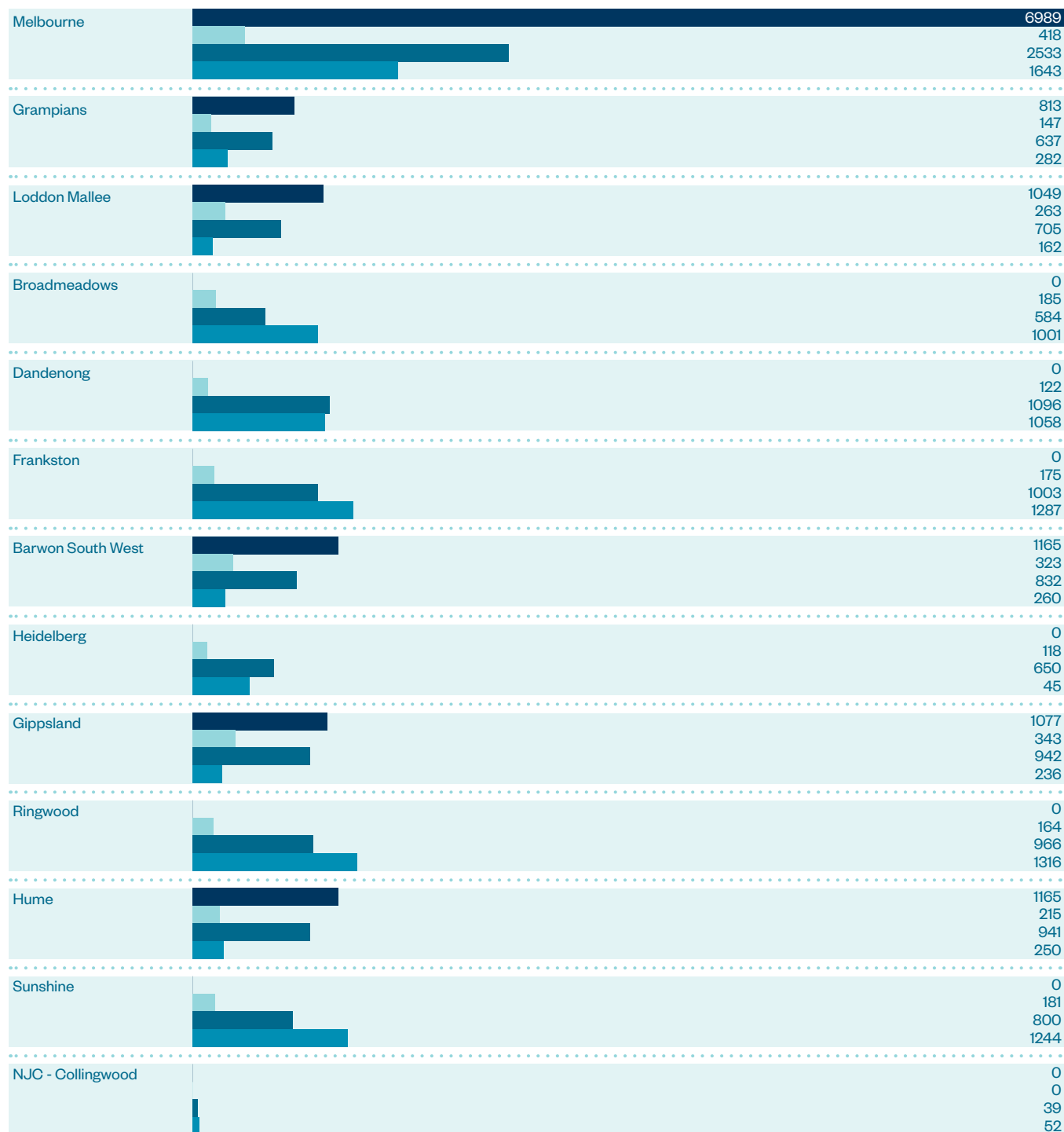
Intervention order applications finalised, by region, 2014/15

| | |
|-------------------|-----|
| Melbourne | 418 |
| Grampians | 147 |
| Loddon Mallee | 263 |
| Broadmeadows | 185 |
| Dandenong | 122 |
| Frankston | 175 |
| Barwon South West | 323 |
| Heidelberg | 118 |
| Gippsland | 343 |
| Ringwood | 164 |
| Hume | 215 |
| Sunshine | 181 |

Total 2,654

Regional Breakdown

Regional breakdown of Children's Court cases finalised, 2014/15



- CP
- IVOs
- Criminal
- CAYPINS

Highlights & Challenges



KEY ISSUES

John and Amy's

- health, safety and wellbeing
- contact with Ben
- schooling

Preventing exposure to family violence

Support services

STRENGTHS

New Family Division Complex at Broadmeadows

A new Children's Court Family Division facility is being constructed on the site of the existing Broadmeadows Court. The new court will be integrated with the Magistrates' Court to provide an expanded and improved court precinct for the local community. The new Broadmeadows Children's Court will manage and determine child protection matters from northern metropolitan Melbourne. Opening of the new court will relieve workload pressures and congestion being experienced at the court in Melbourne.

The establishment of a new court at Broadmeadows provides an opportunity for the court to model a range of child-focused and child-friendly approaches for use in the Family Division. The court will also be the site of the Family Drug Treatment Court pilot.

The Children's Court is looking at a range of innovations including developing a listings model that includes pilot case docketing and Koori hearing day initiatives, a more coordinated response to family violence, increased use of technology to enhance service delivery, and collaboration with other organisations to provide a child and family friendly environment.

Family Drug Treatment Court

The Family Drug Treatment Court (FDTC), launched in May 2014, recently celebrated its first anniversary. The FDTC was established as a three year pilot program within the Family Division of the Children's Court. The program is based on similar models operating in the USA and UK.

The FDTC engages parents whose substance misuse/dependence has played a significant part in the removal of their children from their care. Utilising intensive case coordination and therapeutic intervention to address issues of substance misuse/dependence, mental health, housing, and deficits in parenting and financial management, among others, the FDTC aims to achieve permanent, sustainable family reunification of parents and their children.

The FDTC comprises a dedicated multi-disciplinary, cross-sectoral team of professionals across a variety of government agencies and non-government organisations, led by a dedicated Children's Court magistrate. By combining such a diverse range of individuals, the underpinning philosophy of collaborative practice is maintained and positive outcomes are more likely to be achieved.

Once a referral to the program has been made, the parent must undergo an eligibility screening conducted by the court. This is followed by a clinical assessment to determine their suitability and identify issues of substance misuse, mental and physical health, and a variety of other factors that may have led to the separation from their child/children. This assessment forms the basis for the parent's individual treatment plan whilst on the program.

Once an individual treatment plan has been formulated and treatment begins, the parent will be required to fully participate in the activities they have agreed to as part of their rehabilitation. This may include regular court appearances to facilitate monitoring of progress by the FDTC magistrate, participating in regular tests for the use of non-prescribed substances, and attending a range of treatment and case management services, as well as parenting support programs. Upon advice from the team, the magistrate may impose a range of rewards or consequences according to positive or negative behaviours of the parent.

Once a parent has achieved significant progress in their recovery, the FDTC team will work with them to prepare for incremental reunification with their children. Parents fully graduate from the program once unconditional reunification of the family has been achieved. This process is expected to take approximately 12 months.

Those parents who are unable to achieve unconditional family reunification at the end of their involvement in the program may have their children placed permanently in out-of-home care and any further court involvement with the family's case will be heard in the mainstream Family Division of the Children's Court.

Up until the end of 2014/15 one parent had graduated from the program (reunified with their child), another four families were reunified whilst on the program. This equates to eight children being reunified with their parent/s.

Highlights & Challenges

Children's Koori Court

During 2014/15 the Melbourne Children's Koori Court expanded to sit on circuit to Heidelberg and Dandenong. The court will continue to explore options for the further expansion of the Koori Court jurisdiction to establish Koori Court sites during 2015/16.

The Koori Court offers an alternative approach to sentencing by enhancing the ability of the court to address the underlying issues that lead to a person's offending behaviour. Koori Courts aim to:

- reduce Aboriginal over-representation in the prison system;
- reduce the failure to appear (at court) rate;
- decrease the rates at which court orders are breached;
- reduce the rate of repeat offending;
- deter crime in the community generally;
- increase community safety;
- increase Aboriginal ownership of the administration of the law;
- increase positive participation by Koori accused and community;
- increase accountability of the Koori community for Koori accused; and
- promote and increase community awareness about community codes of conduct/standards of behaviour.



Elders and Respected Persons make a significant contribution to the Koori Court process. Importantly the Koori Court Officer, Koori accused and their families can all contribute during the hearing to ensure court orders are appropriate to the cultural needs of Koori offenders and assist them to address issues relating to their offending behaviour.

Youth Diversion Pilot Program

The court recognises the benefits of diversion and has long advocated for a coordinated diversion program for young people appearing in this jurisdiction. In some cases, it is appropriate to divert young people away from the criminal justice system (and avoid a criminal record) and intervene early with supports to prevent further offending and progression through the system. By offering young people an opportunity to address the underlying causes contributing to their criminal behaviour, we provide the best chance for rehabilitation.

The Children's Court commenced a 12 month pilot in June 2015, partnering with Jesuit Social Services, the Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS) and Centacare to offer a diversion program at Dandenong, Broadmeadows, Sunshine, Werribee, Ballarat, Ararat and Stawell.

The program targets young people who acknowledge their offending, and who have little or no criminal history. The court is able to refer eligible young people to the community-based organisation for assessment about suitability and the components of the plan. Diversion plans are broad-ranging and fit the circumstances of the accused and the offending (e.g. letter of apology to the victim, drug and alcohol counselling, employment services etc). Upon successful completion, the matters before the court are discharged, which importantly results in no finding of guilt against the young person.

In its first month operating across four metropolitan venues, 22 young people were referred into the program. Although it is too early to observe any trend, the main factors present across this group were disengagement from education or employment, substance use and a history of child protection involvement. Diversion plans were tailored to meet the needs of each participant and the initial reports from providers are that participants have engaged fully and are well-placed to complete the program.

There will be an independent evaluation conducted in 2015/16.

Education Justice Initiative

The Education Justice Initiative (EJI) pilot, funded by the Department of Education and Training, was launched in September 2014. Managed by Parkville College, the initiative aims to address educational disadvantage among young people involved in the youth justice system.

Principally, the EJI connects young people appearing in the Melbourne Children's Court, and Heidelberg and Dandenong Children's Koori Courts, to an appropriate, supported education pathway by liaising and advocating with schools and training providers. Magistrates have welcomed the addition of education consultants to the services available at court, as they are now able to receive timely information and advice about education options for a young person appearing before them.

The interim evaluation report is very positive, highlighting the benefit for young people having professional support to negotiate re-entry into school. During the first six months of the pilot, the EJI staff had contact with approximately 450 young people, engaging intensively with 45 to help them reconnect with education.



Churchill Fellowship



In 2014 Magistrate Jennifer Bowles was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to review options for residential therapeutic treatment for young people suffering from substance abuse/mental illness. Her research was conducted in Sweden, England, Scotland and New Zealand.

Many of these young people do not voluntarily access treatment. The focus of the research was on whether mandated therapeutic treatment could work. Ms Bowles visited secure homes, adolescent hospitals, therapeutic residential facilities and outreach services. She spoke to young people undergoing treatment together with numerous experts and practitioners. She also visited courts and met with members of the judiciary in each country and reviewed the different legislative regimes.

Ms Bowles concluded that mandated residential treatment can be as effective as voluntary treatment provided it is delivered in a homely and non-punitive environment by high quality staff. It also requires schooling on site, external scrutiny, step-down facilities and effective transition to the community. Her recommendations include introducing a youth therapeutic order as an option available to the Children's Court of Victoria and the establishment of secure therapeutic residential facilities for young people. She has also recommended the introduction of a youth drug court and a cross-over list for young people subject to both criminal and child protection proceedings.

Highlights & Challenges

Multi-disciplinary Training

The Children's Court, Victoria Legal Aid and the Department of Health & Human Services are funded to jointly deliver cross-disciplinary professional development for professionals working in the court's Family Division. This initiative offers an opportunity for various parts of the child protection legal system to come together to learn, share ideas and prepare for change or reform.

In September 2014 the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) successfully delivered an Aboriginal cultural competency conference to child protection professionals. Entitled Ballert Boopoop Narkwarren (Strong Families) and delivered over two days, the conference provided an opportunity for practitioners to discuss the critical issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in the child protection system.

A Multi-Disciplinary Training (MDT) webpage was developed in early 2015 and can be accessed via the Children's Court website, providing access to a new online calendar of MDT events.

Looking ahead to 2015/16, a program of events is being developed which will offer professional development opportunities to practitioners from across the Children's Court jurisdiction. Family violence and the pending permanent care reforms will be a focus. The next scheduled training event is a presentation by Magistrate Jennifer Bowles on the findings of her recent Churchill Fellowship research.

Retirement of Judge Couzens

On 8 June 2015, after 25 years in courts, Judge Peter Couzens retired from the bench.

Judge Couzens was appointed as a judge of the County Court and President of the Children's Court of Victoria on 1 May 2013. Prior to his appointment as President, Judge Couzens served as a magistrate in Victoria for approximately 23 years. During that time, he sat in courts throughout metropolitan and regional Victoria.

Judge Couzens' career was celebrated at a farewell function at Melbourne Children's Court on his last day at the court. We wish him well for the future.

Appointment of New President

On 12 May 2015, the Attorney-General announced the appointment of Magistrate Amanda Chambers as a County Court judge and President of the Children's Court. Judge Chambers' term as President commenced on 9 June 2015. Prior to her appointment as President, Judge Chambers served as a magistrate in Victoria for the previous eight years.

Retirement of Magistrate Gregory Levine

On 7 April 2015, after 28 years on the bench, Magistrate Gregory Levine retired. A bench farewell was held to celebrate Mr Levine's service as a magistrate, particularly his 20 years in the Children's Court.

Tributes were delivered from the bar table by Sgt Mark Higginbotham (Victoria Police, Prosecutions Unit), Ms Anna Guglielmucci (Child Protection Litigation Office) and Mr Andrew McGregor (legal practitioner). Mr Levine was acknowledged for his calm, measured and compassionate approach on the bench. His crucial role in the development and introduction of the Family Drug Treatment Court was singled out for special praise.

Magistrate Levine's service to the Children's Court and to the community generally was recognized by his award of OAM in the 2015 Queen's Birthday Honours.



Jurisdiction & Divisions

COURT LISTS



Jurisdiction & Divisions

The Children's Court of Victoria has jurisdiction under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 to hear cases involving children and young people up to the age of 18 years, and in some cases up to 19 years.

The Family Division of the court has the power to hear a range of applications and to make a variety of orders upon finding that a child is in need of protection, or that there are irreconcilable differences between a child and his or her parents.

In the Family Division, the court also has jurisdiction to hear applications relating to intervention orders pursuant to the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 and the Personal Safety Intervention Orders Act 2010 where the "affected family member" (family violence matters) or "affected person" (personal safety matters), or the respondent is a child. The Children's Court may also hear and determine an intervention order application when both parties are adults if there is a related child protection proceeding.

The Criminal Division of the court has jurisdiction to hear and determine summarily all offences (other than murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, child homicide, defensive homicide, culpable driving causing death and arson causing death) where the alleged offender was under the age of 18 but of or above the age of 10 years at the time the offence was committed and under the age of 19 when proceedings were commenced in the court.

The Children's Koori Court (Criminal Division) has jurisdiction to hear matters relating to criminal offending by Koori children and young persons, other than sexual offences.

Criminal Division

Activity within the Criminal Division

Whilst the general demand in the Criminal Division is decreasing throughout the state in initiations and contested hearings in particular, the number of remands continues to rise placing pressure on custodial facilities. Cell capacity for Children's Court remands remains an issue statewide. Melbourne Children's Court continues to support the state for remands that are not able to be listed at proper venues.

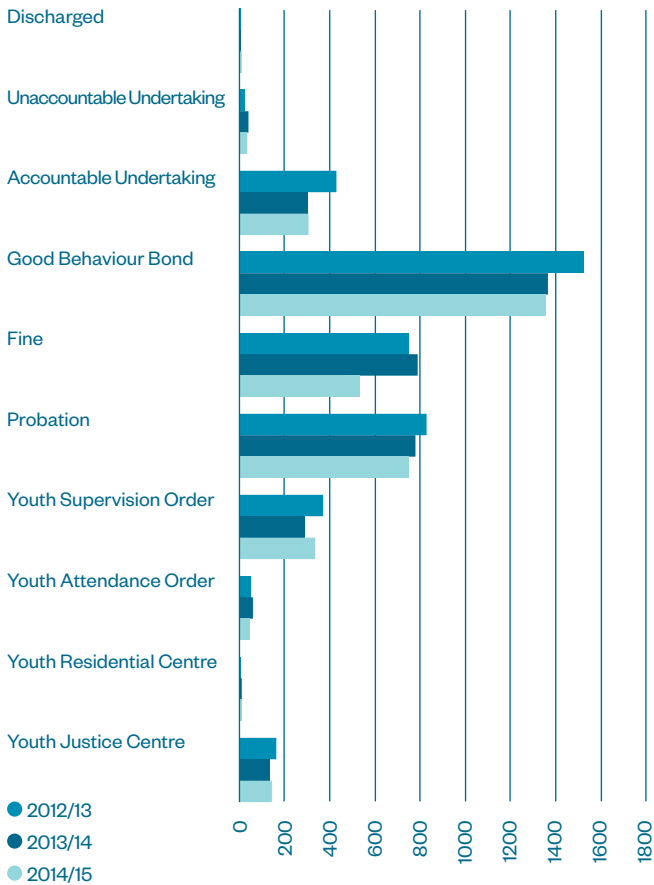
Matters initiated and finalised, 2014/15



Regional caseload distribution for finalised matters, 2013/14 - 2014/15



Offenders found guilty, by outcome, 2012/13 - 2014/15

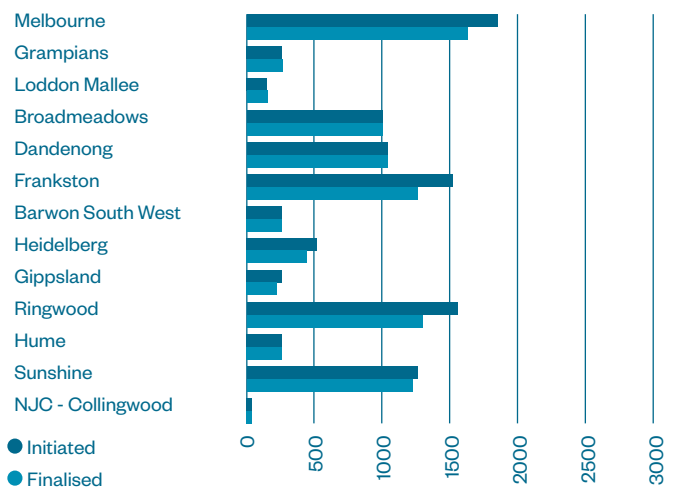


CAYPINS

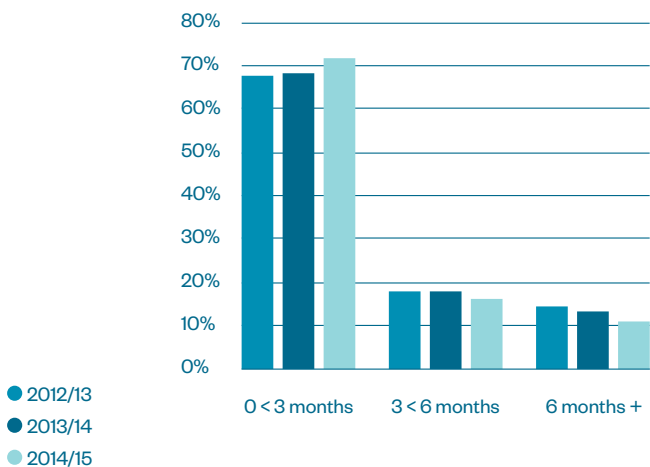
CAYPINS is an alternative system to the traditional open court summons process for dealing with children and young people who fail, in the first instance, to pay on-the-spot and other penalties issued to them by prosecuting bodies such as Victoria Police and the Department of Transport.

Lodgment of CAYPINS matters was commenced by these agencies in November 2007 with the first hearings being conducted by registrars at Melbourne Children's Court in December 2007.

CAYPINS matters finalised, 2014/15



Distribution of criminal matter processing times, by elapsed time between date of first hearing and finalisation, 2012/13 - 2014/15



Jurisdiction & Divisions

Children's Koori Court

During 2014/15 the Melbourne Children's Koori Court expanded to sit on circuit to Heidelberg and Dandenong. The Children's Koori Court also sits at Shepparton, Swan Hill, Mildura, Warrnambool (including Portland and Hamilton), Morwell and Bairnsdale.

Young people appearing/Matters finalised

| Location | Number of young people | Matters finalised |
|----------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Bairnsdale | 8 | 15 |
| Dandenong | 15 | 34 |
| Heidelberg | 4 | 1 |
| Latrobe Valley | 11 | 16 |
| Melbourne | 32 | 61 |
| Mildura | 62 | 67 |
| Shepparton | 23 | 35 |
| Swan Hill | 1 | 0 |
| Warrnambool | 3 | 3 |

Youth Diversion Pilot Program

The Children's Court commenced a 12 month pilot in May 2015 to offer a diversion program at Dandenong, Broadmeadows, Sunshine, Werribee, Ballarat, Ararat and Stawell.

Diversion plans are broad-ranging, and fit the circumstances of the accused and the offending (e.g. letter of apology to the victim, drug and alcohol counselling, employment services etc). Upon successful completion, the matters are discharged, which importantly results in no finding of guilt against the young person.

In its first month operating across four metropolitan venues, 22 young people were referred into the program.

Sex Offences List (Melbourne)

The Melbourne Children's Court runs a sexual offences list in the Criminal Division designed to better manage these cases. This list is available to magistrates in metropolitan courts who may adjourn sex offence matters into this list for specialised case management.

Education Justice Initiative

The Education Justice Initiative (EJI) pilot, funded by the Department of Education and Training, was launched in September 2014. Managed by Parkville College, the initiative aims to address educational disadvantage among young people involved in the youth justice system.

Principally, the EJI connects young people appearing in the Melbourne Children's Court, and Heidelberg and Dandenong Children's Koori Courts, to an appropriate, supported education pathway by liaising and advocating with schools and training providers. During the first six months of the pilot, the EJI staff had contact with approximately 450 young people, engaging intensively with 45 to help them reconnect with education.

Video conferencing

The Children's Court is currently participating in a video conferencing pilot alongside the Magistrates' Court of Victoria. New video conferencing technology has been installed into Children's Courts at Melbourne, Broadmeadows, Frankston, Werribee, Geelong and Ringwood.

The President of the Children's Court issued a guideline that commenced on 20 April 2015 suggesting that all criminal mentions, committal mentions and special mentions convert to video-link hearings. The additional technology allows the court greater capacity to assist in video-linking to Melbourne Youth Justice Centre when there are cell capacity or transportation issues. These measures improve access to justice and allows the court to better plan for future demand.

Family Division

Activity within the Family Division

The Children's Court has experienced significant increases in demand in recent years. During 2014/15 the Family Division workload continued to grow with a statewide increase of 12.05% in the number of primary applications issued compared to the previous year (4,927 compared to 4,397). The most significant increases occurred in the Hume (28%), Melbourne (14%) and Barwon South West (12%) regions. These increases have added considerable pressure on resources at the central courts in the two country regions, being Shepparton and Geelong, along with the Melbourne Children's Court.

In order to keep delays to a minimum, the court continues to be proactive in responding to consistent annual increases in Family Division demand throughout the state.

About 40% of all protection applications are heard outside of Melbourne. To assist with the increase in demand, the Children's Court commenced a six month pilot in the Hume region allowing for greater coordination of the court list, additional assistance to the judiciary and maximised use of court time. A review at the end of this pilot will determine if the pilot is expanded to other regions across the state.

In February 2015 the court created specialised directions hearing lists to provide a further opportunity for parties to agree on an outcome without the need for a contested hearing. These directions hearings have around a 40% resolution rate and have contributed to the court's delays decreasing from 17 weeks to 10 weeks over a four month period in 2015. The court has centralised these directions hearings from Melbourne and supports the regions by conducting the hearings via video link.

The Hume region currently has the highest demand for contested hearings in the state. The court is responding to this by regularly allocating specialist magistrates to conduct concentrated case management of contested cases within this region.

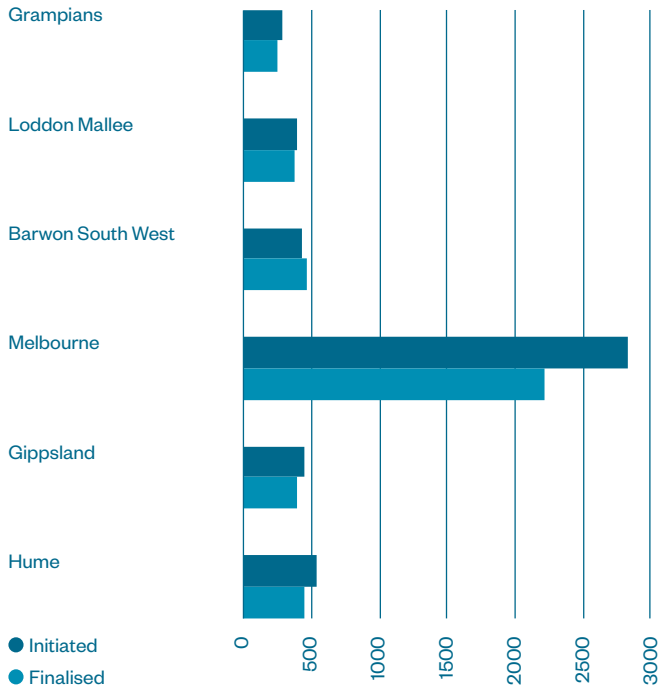
These intensive case management initiatives are intended to place the court in the best position possible to be able to cope with anticipated ongoing growth in child protection applications throughout the state.

Orders made, 2012/13 - 2014/15

| Order | 2012/13 | 2013/14 | 2014/15 |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Adjournment | 8,762 | 9,854 | 10385 |
| Appointment - Independent Child Lawyer | n/a | 59 | 147 |
| Child attend Court | n/a | 21 | 10 |
| Custody to Secretary Order | 1,412 | 1,389 | 1658 |
| Custody to Third Party Order | 8 | 7 | 13 |
| Dismissed | 39 | 39 | 44 |
| Extension of Custody to Secretary Order | 1,430 | 1,498 | 1543 |
| Extension of Guardianship to Secretary Order | 362 | 346 | 380 |
| Extension of Interim Accommodation Order | 11,149 | 12,529 | 15540 |
| Extension of Supervised Custody Order | 126 | 194 | 231 |
| Extension of Supervision Order | 457 | 393 | 380 |
| Extension of Therapeutic Treatment Order | 9 | 8 | 6 |
| Extension of Therapeutic Treatment (Placement) Order | 2 | | 1 |
| Free Text Order | 11,997 | 14,728 | 18620 |
| Guardianship to Secretary Order | 239 | 261 | 313 |
| Interim Accommodation Order | 6,632 | 7,663 | 8559 |
| Interim Protection Order | 920 | 1,131 | 1218 |
| Leave for TAO without Notice Order | | 9 | |
| Long-Term Guardianship to Secretary Order | 53 | 46 | 40 |
| Order for Costs | n/a | 36 | 124 |
| Permanent Care Order | 292 | 318 | 305 |
| Refusal to Make Protection Order | 82 | 122 | 121 |
| Search Warrant | 4,001 | 4,069 | 4961 |
| Struck Out | 1,046 | 1,158 | 902 |
| Supervised Custody Order | 453 | 579 | 737 |
| Supervision Order | 2,296 | 2,153 | 2516 |
| Temporary Assessment Order | 10 | 17 | 4 |
| Therapeutic Treatment (Placement) Order | 2 | 2 | |
| Therapeutic Treatment Order | 32 | 26 | 28 |
| Undertaking - Common Law | 41 | 23 | 25 |
| Undertaking s.272 PA / IRD Dismissed | 10 | 24 | 26 |
| Undertaking s.272 PA / IRD Refusal to make Protection Order | 6 | 12 | 8 |
| Undertaking s.272 PA / IRD Struck Out | 195 | 147 | 243 |
| Undertaking s.278 Protection Order | 219 | 201 | 196 |
| Total | 52,282 | 59,062 | 69,284 |

Jurisdiction & Divisions

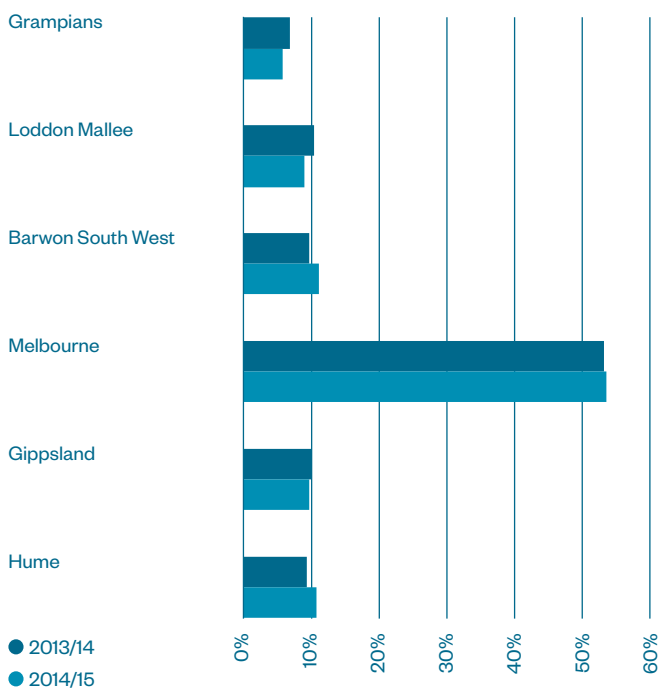
Primary applications initiated and finalised, 2014/15



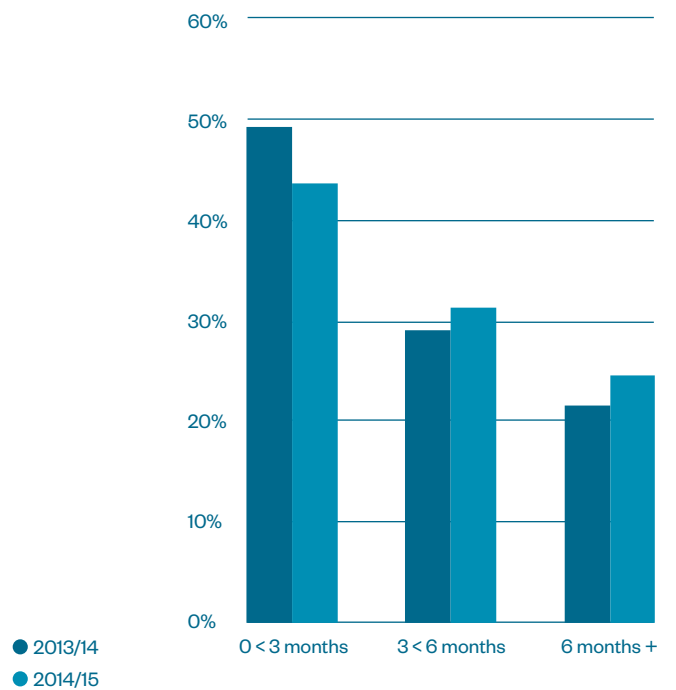
Percentage of protection applications initiated by emergency care, 2013/14 - 2014/15



Regional caseload distribution for finalised primary applications, 2013/14 - 2014/15



Distribution of primary application processing times, by elapsed time between date of first hearing and finalisation, 2013/14 - 2014/15



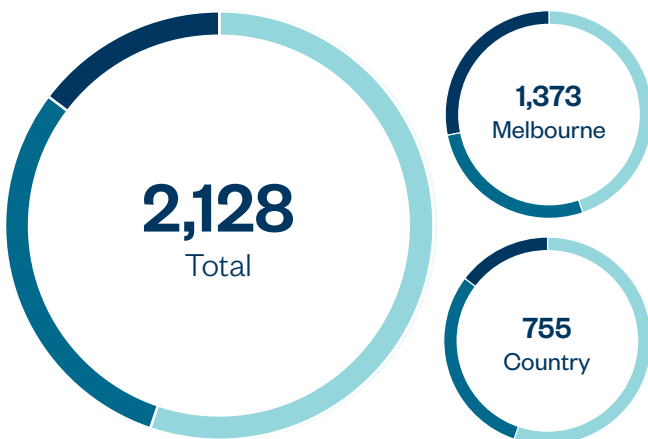
Conciliation conferences

Conciliation conferences in the Family Division of the Children's Court are intended to facilitate the early resolution of applications through a non-adversarial process. The conciliation conference process provides for:

- better preparation by participants;
- more time for discussion in an appropriate environment;
- Department of Health & Human Services decision makers being present at the conference;
- appropriate behaviour by all participants; and
- an appropriate process for those children who wish to participate.

The court's commitment to this model of dispute resolution continues to benefit families in preventing many cases proceeding to a contested hearing. Statewide rollout of conciliation conferences was completed in early 2014. In 2014/15, over 1,600 matters listed for a conference were resolved or partially resolved without a directions hearing.

2014/15 Conferences Listed



- Conferences resulting in settlements
- Conferences resulting in partial settlements
- Conferences resulting in directions hearings

Family Drug Treatment Court

The Family Drug Treatment Court (FDTC) engages parents whose substance misuse/dependence has played a significant part in the removal of their children from their care. Utilising intensive case coordination and therapeutic intervention to address issues of substance misuse/dependence, mental health, housing, and deficits in parenting and financial management, among others, the FDTC aims to achieve permanent, sustainable family reunification of parents and their children.

The table below provides information on families on the FDTC program as at 30 June 2015.

| | |
|--|----|
| Parents referred to program | 50 |
| Current parent participants | 24 |
| Participants awaiting assessment | 6 |
| Participants exited program/returned to mainstream Family Division | 6 |
| Parents referred to program/declined to participate | 13 |
| Participants graduated from program | 1 |
| Children of participants | 47 |
| Families reunified whilst on the program | 5 |
| Children reunified with parent/s | 8 |

Jurisdiction & Divisions

D List

The D List was established as a pilot in January 2013 to provide intensive management of cases in which there are allegations that a child has or is likely to suffer harm as a result of sexual abuse (section 162(1)(d) Children, Youth and Families Act 2005).

During 2014/15 the D List successfully moved from a pilot to a formal and recognised list within the Family Division of the Children's Court. Magistrates Zemljak, Cain and Hubble were appointed to the list in 2014.

In addition to applications brought under ground 162(1)(d), applications involving Therapeutic Treatment Orders as well as post-proof extensions and variations which include sexual abuse allegations have also been brought into the D List.

As with the pilot, the court has recognised that there are real benefits for all parties and family members in maintaining a docket system so that, where possible, the same magistrate deals with the matter as it progresses through the various stages of the court process.

In actively case managing D List matters the court continues to recognise the need to prioritise matters involving sexual abuse allegations. Frequently these allegations involve serious allegations of abuse which require significant and sophisticated intervention and management by the Department of Health & Human Services from the outset. The children and families involved in such cases benefit from a timely and thorough investigation of not only the allegations but the appropriate responses, should such allegations be found proven.

Intervention Orders - Family Violence and Personal Safety

In 2014/15, the number of intervention order applications finalised was similar to the previous year. Most applications were determined within three months, and in just over half, an intervention order was made. The bulk of intervention order applications relate to allegations of family violence and about 30% involve parties that are not related.

In June 2015, the Children's Court, in collaboration with the Magistrates' Court, provided a joint submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The submission highlighted the impact family violence continues to have in both jurisdictions. Specifically, for the Children's Court, that is the prevalence of family violence in child protection cases and the increase in the number of young people, mostly male, coming before the court as perpetrators of family violence.

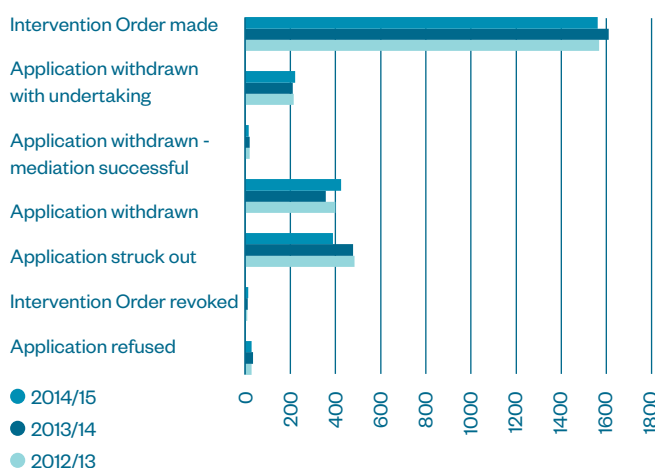
The submission proposed 36 recommendations for the Royal Commission's consideration. Broadly the recommendations aim to:

- address case and workload pressures;
- ensure court buildings are safe, comfortable and accessible for parties in family violence cases;
- implement processes and systems to enable appropriate sharing of information relating to family violence;
- develop skilled specialist magistrates, court registrars and court support staff;
- define a legislative framework that facilitates best practice responses to family violence; and
- develop court based programs and services, informed by research and evaluation.

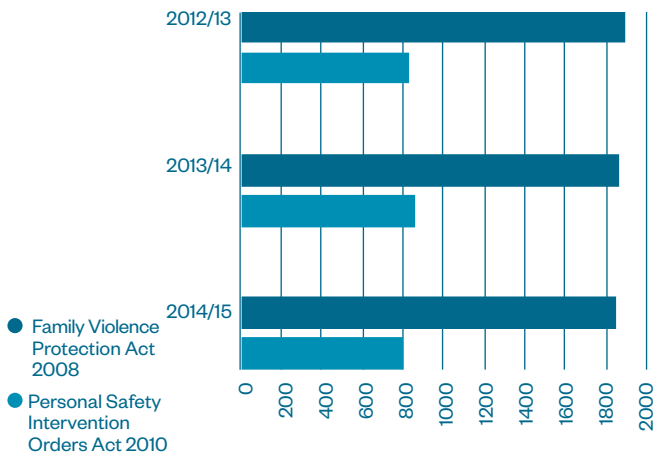
Currently the Children's Court is not funded to provide any specialist court responses or services in relation to family violence, including support services for young people who are committing criminal offences which arise in the context of family violence. One of the specific recommendations made to the Royal Commission is that an enhanced Family Violence Court Division model be available and resourced across all Children's Court venues to provide equitable access to a best practice specialist family violence response in this jurisdiction. Of equal importance is the need for specific programs, including youth specific behaviour change programs, to be available to address the problem of children and young people using family violence in the home.

The court looks forward to the Commission's final report and recommendations to the government due in February 2016. The joint submission is available on the Children's Court website.

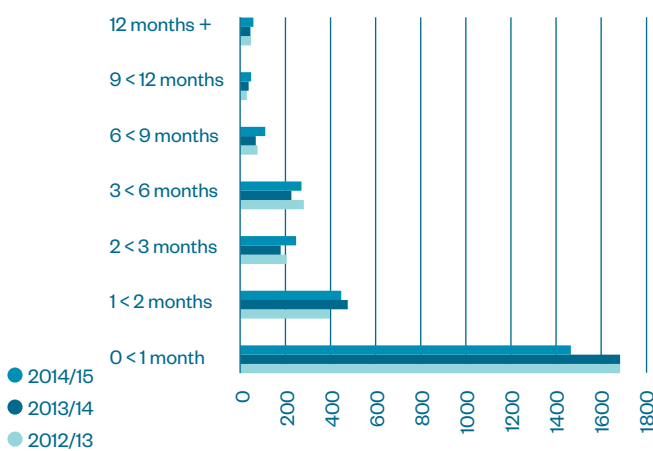
Applications for an intervention order finalised, by outcome, 2012/13 – 2014/15



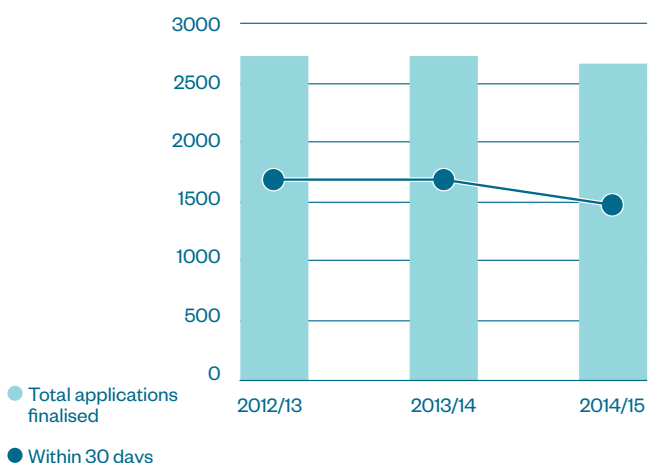
Applications for an intervention order finalised by Act under which application made, 2012/13 – 2014/15



Applications for an intervention order finalised, by elapsed time between date of issue and finalisation, 2012/13 – 2014/15



Applications for an intervention order finalised, and proportion finalised within 30 days of issue, 2012/13 – 2014/15



Children’s Court Clinic



The Children’s Court Clinic, under the directorship of Dr Patricia Brown, is an independent body which conducts assessments and provides reports on children and their families at the request of Children’s Court magistrates throughout Victoria. The clinic also has a small treatment function in selected cases still before the court and is a teaching facility.

The clinicians employed are highly skilled psychologists and psychiatrists who have specialist knowledge in the areas of child protection and youth offending. Clinicians may be asked to provide advice about a child’s situation in his or her family, the course of the child’s development over the years, any special needs within the family, and if it is required, where treatment might be obtained. The clinic also makes recommendations to the court about what should happen in the child’s best interests.

There were 987 referrals of children, young persons and their families during 2014/15, which represents an overall increase of 30% in protection matters and 26% in criminal matters on referrals in the previous year. The greater proportion of the assessments were carried out by sessional clinical psychologists with psychiatrists, neuropsychologists and forensic psychologists also contributing to the service.

Of the 987 referrals for assessment during 2014/15, 293 were criminal cases, 671 were child protection cases and 23 were family violence/personal safety matters. Of the total, 681 referrals emanated from the metropolitan area and 306 were from country regions of the state.

In addition to assessments, the Children’s Court Clinic also has a short-term treatment function in respect of cases where treatment at the clinic is made a condition of an interim order by a magistrate. During 2014/15 the clinic provided 91 such sessions.

The Court & the Community

Work Experience Program

For many years a work experience program has been operating at Melbourne Children's Court. The court is a popular placement for secondary and tertiary level students and hosts one, sometimes two students, during most available weeks throughout the year. During the 2014/15 year the court hosted 44 students. Of those, 38 were secondary students completing a week of work experience and six were tertiary level students undertaking a one or two week placement.

During the placement students are encouraged to view a variety of cases in both the family and criminal jurisdictions. Students are shown court proceedings from the perspective of a bench clerk, which includes viewing the court's computerised case management systems in operation. Students are also shown a number of general office duties performed by deputy registrars and are encouraged to perform administrative tasks appropriate to their age and experience.

Community Education Program

The President, magistrates and staff of the Melbourne Children's Court regularly participate in the provision of court tours and information sessions.

During 2014/15 the court facilitated approximately 75 presentations and visits to Melbourne Children's Court. Visiting groups have included foster carers, trainee bail justices, students of the Victorian Bar readers course, and students of law, social work, youth work, community services work, and maternal and child health. The magistrates at Melbourne continue to give their time before court commences to address these groups and answer questions about the jurisdiction and operation of the Children's Court. In addition, the practice of the court in providing addresses through its President and magistrates to a wide range of forums has continued this reporting year.

Overseas Visitors to the Court

The court also regularly receives official visitors from overseas, some of whom are members of the judiciary as well as members of the judiciary and administration from other courts within Australia. During 2014/15 visitors to the court included those from Japan, Singapore and China.

Judiciary



The Children's Court at Melbourne is the only venue of the court which sits daily in both divisions. The Children's Court at Melbourne currently has 12 magistrates sitting full-time together with the President who is a judge of the County Court.

Magistrates in other metropolitan courts also sit as Children's Court magistrates in those regions on nominated days and as required hearing Criminal Division and intervention order matters only. The exception is Moorabbin Children's Court where child protection cases emanating from the Department of Health & Human Services Southern Metropolitan Region are heard on a daily basis.

Magistrates in country areas sit as Children's Court magistrates in both divisions on nominated days and as required.

President

Judge Peter Couzens (*retired 8 June 2015*)

Judge Amanda Chambers (*from 9 June 2015*)

Magistrates

Ms Jennifer Bowles (*from 1 January 2015*)

Mr Darrin Cain

Mr Peter Dotchin

Ms Lesley Fleming

Ms Jane Gibson

Mr Martin Grinberg (*from 16 February 2015*)

Ms Annabel Hawkins (*until 31 December 2014*)

Ms Gail Hubble

Mr Gregory Levine (*retired 2 April 2015*)

Ms Kay Macpherson

Ms Kim Parkinson

Ms Roslyn Porter

Ms Sharon Smith

Mr Mark Stratmann (*from 4 May 2015*)

Mr Francis Zemljak

Court Locations & Sitting Days

With the exception of Melbourne, the Children's Court of Victoria sits at locations at which the Magistrates' Court is held pursuant to section 5(1) of the Magistrates' Court Act 1989. In accordance with section 505(3) of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 the Children's Court "must not be held at any time in the same building as that in which the Magistrates' Court is at the time sitting unless the Governor in Council, by Order published in the Government Gazette, otherwise directs with respect to any particular building."

Consequently, the Children's Court of Victoria sits at nominated times, and as required, at court venues throughout the state as published by Court Services Victoria in the *Law Calendar*.

1. **Melbourne region:**
Melbourne (*headquarters court*), Moorabbin, Neighbourhood Justice Centre (Collingwood)
2. **Grampians region:**
Ballarat (*headquarters court*), Ararat, Bacchus Marsh, Edenhope, Hopetoun, Horsham, Nhill, St. Arnaud, Stawell.

3. **Loddon Mallee region:**
Bendigo (*headquarters court*), Castlemaine, Echuca, Kerang, Kyneton, Maryborough, Mildura, Ouyen, Robinvale, Swan Hill.
4. **Broadmeadows.**
5. **Dandenong.**
6. **Frankston.**
7. **Barwon South West region:**
Geelong (*headquarters court*), Colac, Hamilton, Portland, Warrnambool.
8. **Heidelberg.**
9. **Gippsland region:**
Latrobe Valley (Morwell) (*headquarters court*), Bairnsdale, Korumburra, Omeo, Orbost, Sale, Wonthaggi.
10. **Ringwood.**
11. **Hume region:**
Shepparton (*headquarters court*), Benalla, Cobram, Corryong, Mansfield, Myrtleford, Seymour, Wangaratta, Wodonga.
12. **Sunshine region:**
Sunshine (*headquarters court*), Werribee.



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