

# Annual Report 2023–24



**Children's  
Court**  
of Victoria

## Letter to the Governor

Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC,  
Governor of Victoria

Government House  
Melbourne Vic 3004

Dear Governor,

In accordance with section 514 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* I have much pleasure in submitting the Children's Court of Victoria Annual Report for 2023 – 2024.

The report covers the Court's operations during the reporting period.

Yours sincerely

**Judge Jack Vandersteen**  
President, Children's Court of Victoria

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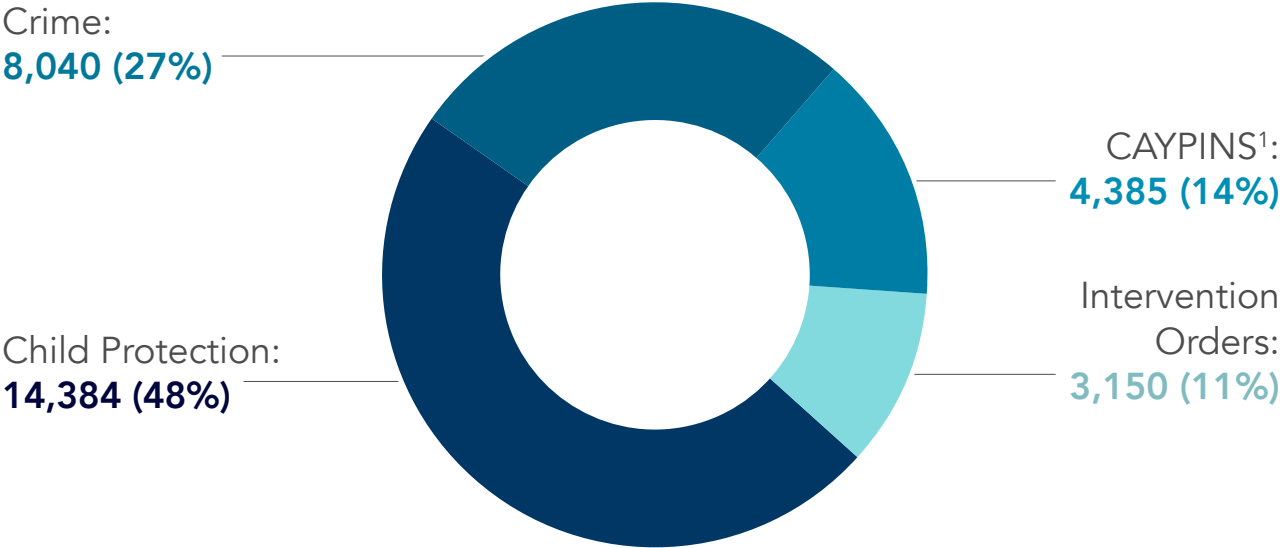
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# Report of the President & CEO

# Report of the President & CEO

## THE YEAR AT A GLANCE

In the 2023–24 year the Children’s Court of Victoria finalised a total of **29,959** cases.



## DANDENONG CHILDREN’S COURT

In June 2024 we celebrated the first anniversary of the official opening of the Dandenong Children’s Court. The new, dedicated, purpose-built facility ensures that children, young people and their families in the south-east region are no longer required to navigate the adult court system.

The Court has heard child protection and intervention order cases, bail and remand hearings and Children’s Koori Court cases. Over the reporting period, the Court finalised 1,148 cases in the Criminal Division and 1,667 cases (including 193 intervention orders) in the Family Division, the second highest number of Family Division cases finalised in the state.

Thank you to Regional Coordinating Magistrate Hubble and Magistrate Billings, and all of our Dandenong staff for your hard work and dedication over the past year.

## CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

In October 2023 we implemented our new Case Management System (CMS), introducing a new secure, self-service, online portal, and changing the way professional court users engage with the court in child protection cases.

The CMS Portal enables:

- applications, reports, and documents to be filed electronically
- access to case information, including hearing details
- the drafting and submission of proposed minutes of court orders electronically
- tentative scheduling of next hearing dates
- access to authorised court orders.

We thank the court and project staff and court users who contributed to the success of the development and implementation of the CMS.

1. CAYPINS stands for ‘Children and Young Persons Infringement Notice System’. A CAYPINS infringement is dealt with by a registrar who can make various orders, including an order for payment of all or part of a fine or penalty issued by an agency including Victoria Police and the Department of Transport.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We extend our thanks to Magistrate Jennifer Bowles, Magistrate Randall Kune, Magistrate Kristen Rose and Judicial Registrar Julia Lever-Davidson who we farewelled in the reporting period. We held a bench farewell for Magistrate Bowles in April to recognise her long service to the Children’s Court of Victoria. We welcomed Magistrate Majella Foster-Jones and Magistrate Siobhan Whittle in May of this year.

Our thanks to all court users and support services including Aboriginal community and legal services, legal organisations and practitioners, and community and government organisations. To the judicial officers and staff of the Children’s Court of Victoria and of the Magistrates’ Court of Victoria, thank you for your dedication and commitment to the work of the court.

### **Judge Jack Vandersteen**

President of the Children’s Court of Victoria

### **Simon McDonald**

Chief Executive Officer, Children’s Court of Victoria

# Child Protection

## Child Protection cases

	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Primary applications registered	4,015	3,991	4,227
Secondary applications registered	12,659	12,482	11,844

### CHILD PROTECTION CASES – STATEWIDE TOTAL

Total number of primary and secondary applications initiated, finalised, and pending by region.

Court Region	2022-23			2023-24		
	Initiated	Finalised	Pending	Initiated	Finalised	Pending
Barwon South-West	1,304	1,106	265	1,237	956	320
Gippsland	1,589	1,400	279	1,600	1,185	451
Grampians	1,073	998	210	908	779	224
Hume	1,350	984	410	1,472	1,082	530
Loddon Mallee	1,687	1,543	418	1,468	1,261	427
Broadmeadows	1,697	1,646	503	1,705	1,388	726
Dandenong	499	366	407	1,984	1,476	643
Melbourne	4,811	6,635	1,879	4,318	5,086	1,826
Moorabbin	2,463	1,926	386	1,379	1,171	504
Statewide	16,473	16,604	4,757	16,071	14,384	5,651



## Marram-Ngala Ganbu (MNG) – Koori Family Hearing Day

Marram-Ngala Ganbu (meaning “we are one” in Woiwurrung language) is a Koori Family Hearing day that provides a more effective, culturally appropriate, and just response for Koori families through a court process that enables greater participation by family members and culturally aware decision-making.

The program demonstrates a deep commitment to Aboriginal self-determination through changes to the traditional court set-up and functioning, as well as other innovative approaches to enable the Court to be more welcoming and culturally safe for Koori families. MNG sits one day per week at Broadmeadows Children’s Court and one day per fortnight at Shepparton Children’s Court.

During the reporting period MNG teams have continued their strong engagement with local services, encouraging a presence at Court on MNG hearing days, and working closely together to ensure that Aboriginal families are well supported through the court process. In September 2023, the MNG team were invited to present at the 10<sup>th</sup> SNAICC National Conference in Darwin. The conference provided a valuable opportunity to showcase the benefits of the MNG program.

### NUMBER OF MARRAM-NGALA GANBU SITTINGS 2023–24 SHEPPARTON

Month	Total sittings	Number of families
Jul 23	1	9
Aug 23	3	31
Sep 23	2	21
Oct 23	2	9
Nov 23	3	32
Dec 23	1	12
Jan 24	2	8
Feb 24	2	10
Mar 24	2	10
Apr 24	2	10
May 24	2	10
Jun 24	2	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>173</b>

### NUMBER OF MARRAM-NGALA GANBU SITTINGS 2023–24 BROADMEADOWS

Month	Total sittings	Number of families
Jul 23	4	32
Aug 23	5	56
Sep 23	3	34
Oct 23	5	56
Nov 23	3	28
Dec 23	3	31
Jan 24	4	30
Feb 24	4	38
Mar 24	4	34
Apr 24	5	50
May 24	4	41
Jun 24	4	29
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>431</b>

## Family Drug Treatment Court

Operating at Broadmeadows and Shepparton Children’s Court, the Family Drug Treatment Court (FDTC) provides a 12-month collaborative program for parents to address their drug and alcohol use and achieve a safe and sustainable reunification with their children.

### NUMBER OF PARENTS REFERRED AND INDUCTED INTO THE FDTC DURING 2023–24

<b>49</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>50</b>
Broadmeadows Referrals	Shepparton Referrals	Broadmeadows Inductions	Shepparton Inductions	Total Referrals	Total Inductions

## Conciliation Conferences

Conciliation Conferences are facilitated by Court appointed convenors.

### STATE-WIDE CONCILIATION CONFERENCES 2020–21 TO 2023–24

	Conferences conducted	Conferences achieving full settlement	Settlement rate
2021–22	3,170	1,332	42%
2022–23	2,798	1,175	42%
2023-24	2,325	977	42%

## Children’s Court Clinic

The Children’s Court Clinic is a statewide service which conducts psychological or psychiatric assessments of children and/or family members and provides assessment reports to the Children’s Court of Victoria.

During the reporting period:

- 27 reports were submitted to the Criminal Division
- 155 reports were submitted to the Family Division.

## Court Support Coordinators

Court Support Coordinators (CSCs) provide referrals to external services, targeted practical support, and information to court users.

CSCs provide:

- self-represented litigant support
- referrals to community support services, including drug and alcohol, disability housing, youth support, family violence
- information about court processes and procedures
- assistance to join online hearings, and support during hearings
- family violence support.

# Intervention Orders

## Family Violence

### FINALISED APPLICATIONS FOR FAMILY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION ORDERS

<i>Family Violence Protection Act 2008</i>	2022-23	2023-24
Intervention order made	1,028	720
Application refused	18	21
Application struck out	207	157
Application revoked	3	8
Application withdrawn	706	934
Application withdrawn with undertaking	163	40
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,125</b>	<b>1,889</b>

## Personal Safety Intervention Orders

<i>Personal Safety Intervention Orders Act 2010</i>	2022-23	2023-24
Intervention order made	574	495
Application refused	18	13
Application struck out	149	164
Application withdrawn	295	546
Application withdrawn with undertaking	199	52
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,235</b>	<b>1,270</b>

# Crime

# Criminal Cases

	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24
Initiations	9,678	10,217	10,014	10,477	9,277	9,339	10,154	7,715	6,683	7,458	7,266
Finalisations	10,839	11,728	11,555	12,201	9,530	9,230	8,142	7,708	8,444	8,197	8,040
Pending	2,311	2,389	2,452	2,573	1,914	2,400	4,512	4,410	3,085	2,798	2,448

# Weekend Online Remand Court

The Children’s Court’s Weekend Online Remand Court (WORC) hears bail and remand matters from across the State from 3pm until 9pm on all non-sitting days other than Christmas Day. Young people appearing before the WORC have access to specialist Children’s Court Magistrates and Koori Court officers as well as specialist children’s lawyers and Youth Justice.

Total Sittings



116

Total Matters Listed



163

Average Per Day



1.4

# Youth Diversion Program

The Children’s Court Youth Diversion (CCYD) program provides an opportunity for eligible children to:

- address harm caused by their offending by taking responsibility and completing a diversion activity
- address the underlying cause of their offending
- receive assistance to engage with support services
- have the charges dismissed, with a non-disclosable criminal record, on successful completion of the diversion activity.
- avoid the stigma associated with a criminal record and its impact on future life opportunities.

Data relating to youth diversion is published by Youth Justice and will be annexed to this report when available.

## Children’s Koori Court

The Children’s Koori Court is a sentencing court for young Aboriginal people who plead guilty to a criminal offence (other than a sexual offence). The Children’s Koori Court sits at 12 locations across the State.

The Elders and Respected Persons (ERPs) play a significant role in the Children’s Koori Court hearings. They provide cultural advice to Koori Court magistrates while helping participants acknowledge the underlying issues contributing to their offending and its impact on the community. This extends to engaging and communicating with young people to ensure they do not have to tell their story multiple times, leading to better justice outcomes for the Koori community.

Koori Court Officers play a critical role in the operation of the Children’s Koori Court by:

- working with the Koori community to help with understanding the court process
- providing non-legal support and advice
- supporting judicial officers with access to information to support culturally appropriate outcomes.

### CHILDREN’S KOORI COURT STATE-WIDE DATA FOR 2023–24

Location	No of young people	Matters finalised
Bairnsdale	1	0
Dandenong	7	52
Geelong	8	7
Hamilton	1	2
Heidelberg	2	9
Latrobe Valley	5	13
Melbourne	20	96
Mildura	3	4
Portland	2	4
Shepparton	3	0
Swan Hill	3	7
Warrnambool	4	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>196</b>

# About the Court



## Our Judiciary

There are four stand-alone specialist Children’s Courts located at Melbourne, Broadmeadows, Dandenong and Moorabbin.

### **PRESIDENT**

Judge Jack Vandersteen

### **MAGISTRATES**

Ms Jacqueline Billings

Ms Jennifer Bowles

Mr Darrin Cain

Ms Erica Contini

Mr Peter Dotchin

Ms Lesley Fleming

Ms Majella Foster-Jones  
(from 7/5/24)

Ms Jane Gibson

Ms Annabel Hawkins

Ms Robyn Hamilton

Ms Gail Hubble

Mr Randall Kune (until 5/1/24)

Ms Elizabeth Langdon

Ms Kay Macpherson

Mr Shiva Pillai

Ms Kim Parkinson

Ms Lucia Raponi

Ms Kristen Rose (until 8/9/23)

Ms Sharon Smith

Ms Melissa Stead

Ms Siobhan Whittle (from 7/5/24)

Mr Francis Zemljak

### **RESERVE MAGISTRATES**

Ms Margaret Harding

Ms Michelle Ehrlich

Ms Cathy Lamble

Mr Charlie Rozencwajg

### **JUDICIAL REGISTRARS**

Ms Judith Benson

Ms Majella Foster-Jones  
(until 6/5/24)

Ms Julia Lever-Davidson  
(until 24/5/24)

# Court locations

The Children’s Court of Victoria sits at:

- the Melbourne, Broadmeadows, Dandenong and Moorabbin Children’s Courts; and
- locations at which the Magistrates’ Court is held.

## MELBOURNE REGION:

### Family Division:

Melbourne Children’s Court (headquarters court), Moorabbin, Broadmeadows, Dandenong.

### Criminal Division:

Melbourne Children’s Court (headquarters court), Moorabbin, Broadmeadows, Dandenong, Frankston, Heidelberg, Neighbourhood Justice Centre, Ringwood, Sunshine, Werribee.

## GRAMPIANS REGION:

Ballarat (headquarters court), Ararat, Bacchus Marsh, Edenhope, Hopetoun, Horsham, Nhill, St Arnaud, Stawell.

## LODDON MALLEE REGION:

Bendigo (headquarters court), Castlemaine, Echuca, Kerang, Kyneton, Maryborough, Mildura, Ouyen, Robinvale, Swan Hill.

## BARWON SOUTH WEST REGION:

Geelong (headquarters court), Colac, Hamilton, Portland, Warrnambool.

## GIPPSLAND REGION:

Latrobe Valley (Morwell) (headquarters court), Bairnsdale, Korumburra, Moe, Omeo, Orbost, Sale, Wonthaggi.

## HUME REGION:

Shepparton (headquarters court), Benalla, Cobram, Corryong, Mansfield, Myrtleford, Seymour, Wangaratta and Wodonga.



