

Goulburn Child and Family Services Alliance

the effects on clients of changes to service provision due to COVID-19



RUMBALARA
ABORIGINAL CO-OPERATIVE LTD.



THE
Bridge
Youth
SERVICE



the project

Significant changes have taken place within local communities due to the 2020 COVID-19 outbreaks across Victoria. This has caused a succession of substantial changes amongst all industries, including The Goulburn Child and Family Service delivery platform whose programs prior to COVID, relied predominately on direct face to face work. This project has been proposed in the wake of these changes with consideration being given to the potential implementation of further changes in the future.

This project was driven by FamilyCare but was undertaken in conjunction with the Goulburn Child and Family Services Alliance incorporating The Bridge Youth Service and Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative.

Clare Brown, a 4th year Social work student, was the project coordinator. Clare undertook all interviews and the collation of the report. Clare was supported by Angela Marshall.



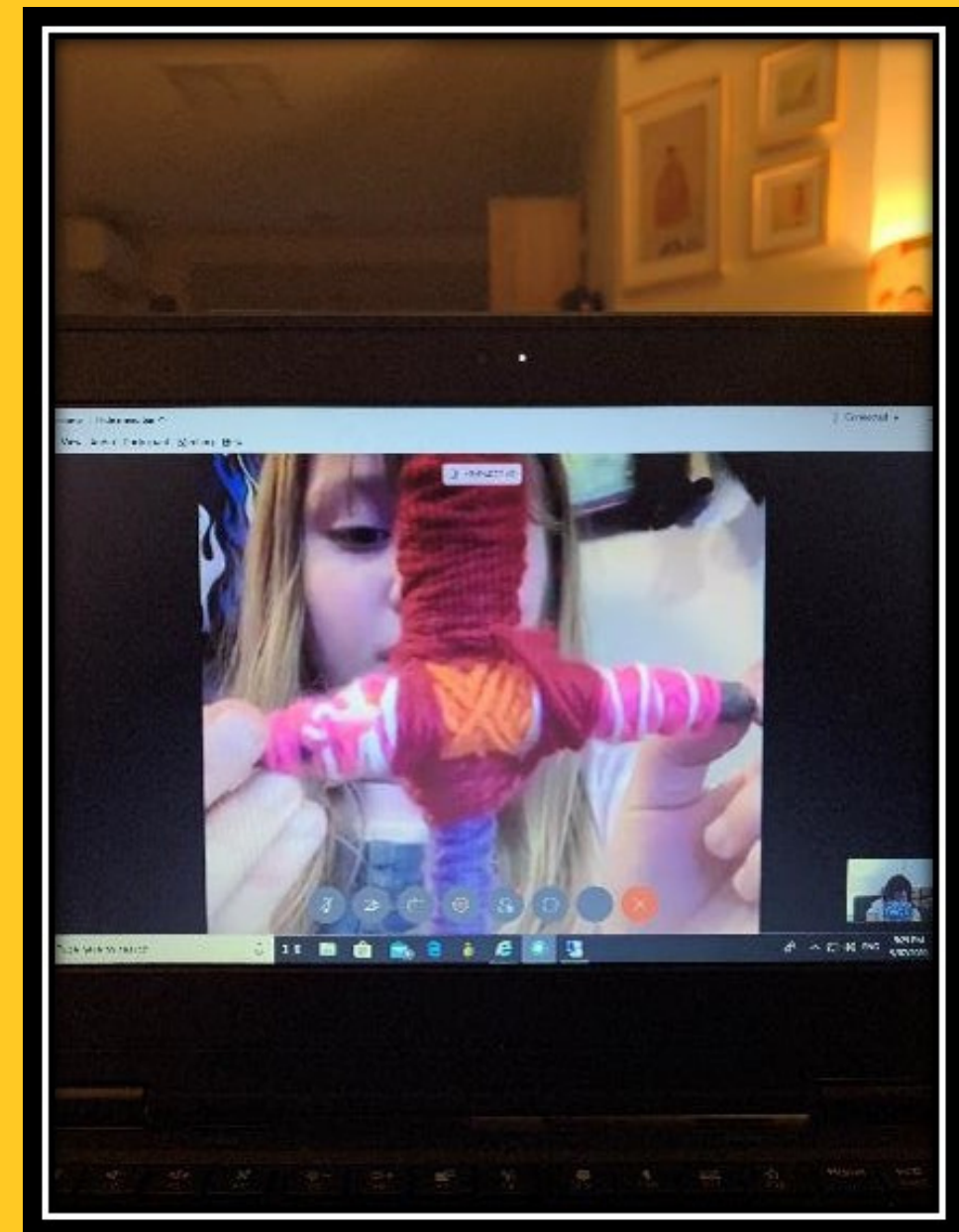
The Goulburn Child and Family Service Alliance has had to significantly alter the ways in which services are provided to clients during the varying stages of lockdown. Such changes included:

- All offices shut their doors to the general public
- Limited home visits
- Client contact via video link, phone and email
- Mandatory wearing of masks and eye coverings
- Staff working a combination of from home and onsite office hours
- In person therapeutic groups cancelled or conducted via video link



focus

This project aims to establish what is working well for clients and what may in fact be beneficial to embed into service delivery after COVID-19 restrictions have been eased. Furthermore, identifying areas which clients feel their needs are not being met, identifying gaps and establishing adverse trends amongst clients is equally as important.



why

The traditional mode of the Child and Family Service Alliance's service delivery was made impossible due to COVID-19 restrictions. The mandatory changes that have been imposed may have had both positive and negative impacts on clients. Collating and evaluating the effects on clientele of these changes may offer insight into how we can better meet program goals and outcomes going forward.

how

Family Services staff across the Alliance were asked to select 3 clients from our Child and Family Services Program and gain their verbal consent to be a part of the survey prior to being contacted by the project coordinator.

The data was collected by conducting a short phone survey (4 questions), directly relating to their experience since the commencement of COVID-19 restrictions.

Phone interviews were conducted between 10 July and 27 October 2020

who

A total of 41 participants across all partners were interviewed.

3 ♂

38 ♀

Participants lived in the following shires

Greater
Shepparton

14

Mitchell

10

Murindindi

2

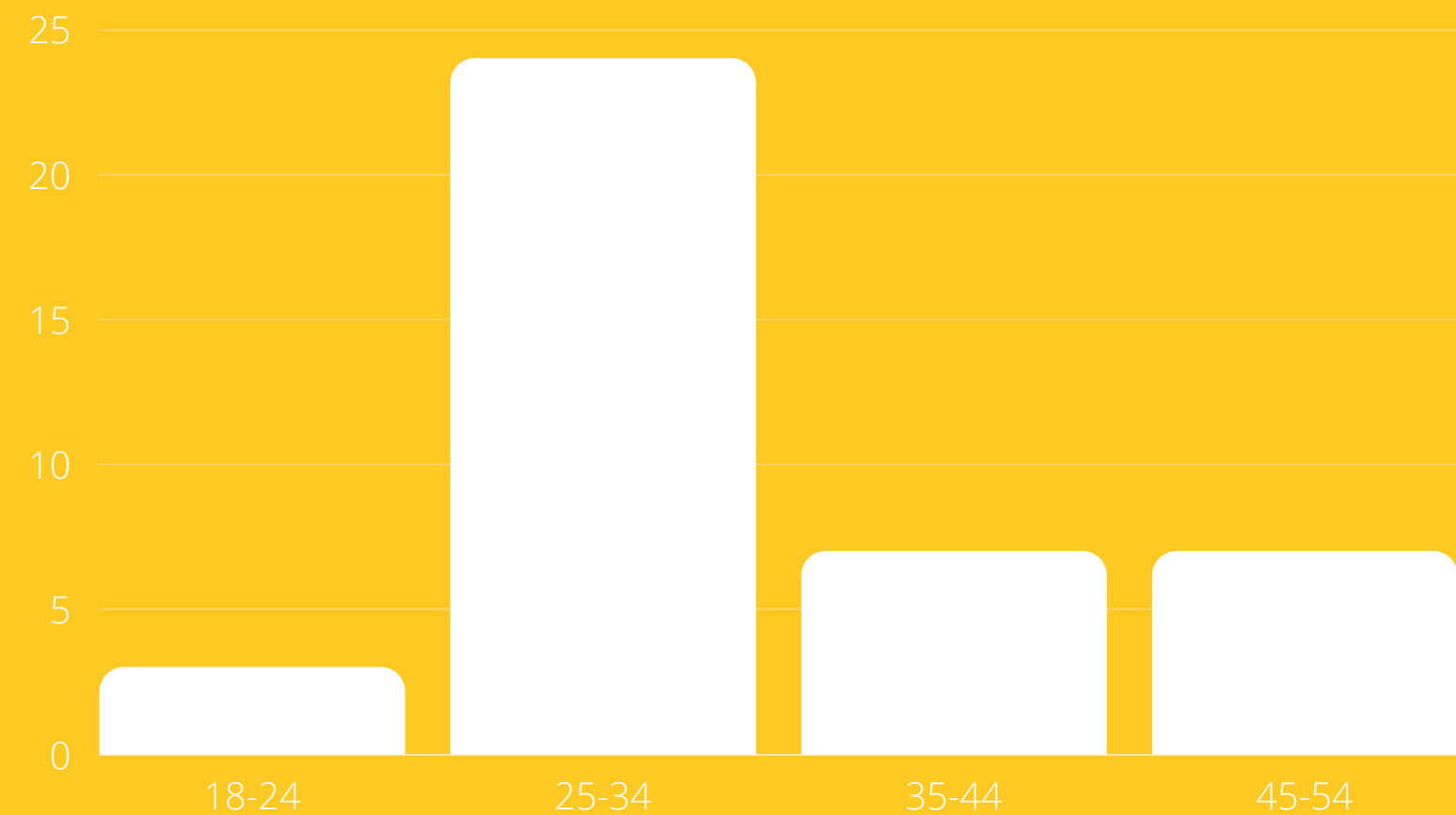
Strathbogie

4

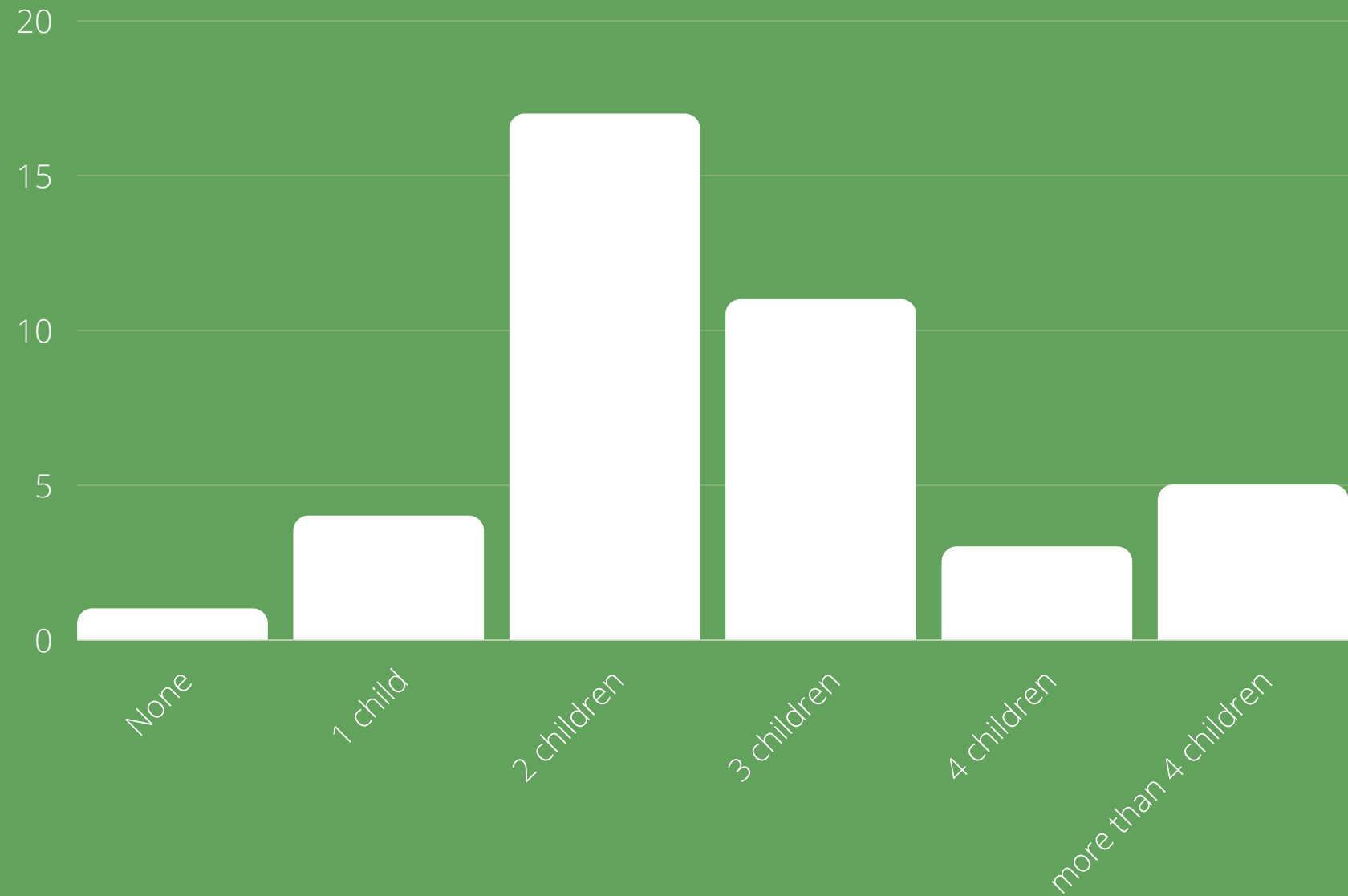
Moira

11

Age range



How many children are you parent or guardian for and live in your household?



3 Participants identified as Aboriginal



How have the changes to services during COVID-19 impacted on you and your family? (No home visits, video link contact etc.)

Some clients expressed that over the phone/ video link support wasn't as effective for them or their children in comparison to in-person services. This was for a variety of reasons; lack of connection with worker, inability to express feelings and problems, difficult to build rapport, technology issues, children struggling to connect with worker on a screen.

It was also mentioned that clients had found the changes in the services they had been linked to (but not directly offered by the agency for their children) difficult to manage without. Clients were not able to access services such as; Sand Play, OT's, speech therapy, support groups etc.

While most missed face to face contact and commented they were negatively impacted or said that it didn't bother them, 20 % of the cohort found it convenient and helpful.

How have the changes to services during COVID-19 impacted on you and your family? (No home visits, video link contact etc.)

“

- *No home visits which is quite annoying. We can't do face-to-face and my son can't build a rapport with his worker. It's hard to explain to a child with intellectual disabilities why they have to do a video call. Also, he's not going to tell the worker what's going on because his grandma (who he lives with) is right there, and the conversation can't be private*
- *It's been tough for me having no face-to-face sit down's with my worker. We still talk but everything has been over the phone. It's just not as good as in person services*
- *For me, it's been more helpful doing appointments over the phone. My worker has been more available and it's been easier to get appointments with her. So I think it's actually had a positive impact for me.*
- *You can't see your worker if you want to talk about personal problems, you have to do it over the phone. Doing everything over the phone doesn't help your depression and anxiety. I have found it hard, especially when I have children with medical issues and I'm trying to get services and help for them during COVID-19. I think it is good that we still have the services though, even if it's not in person.*
- *It hasn't been too great of an issue for me as I'm quite a home body. We have had over the phone appointments only, which I actually find it a lot easier than a video call. I have a lot on my plate with the kids, so it's flexible - I can hop off the phone if I need for a minute and the kids don't interrupt as much.*
- *The changes in services has been an issue. The normal services we needed just weren't available. No speech therapy or OT, they couldn't even do it by Zoom or phone. It's been really challenging when we have a high needs child.*
- *For us it hasn't changed. We only became involved after COVID-19 started. I have found the over the phone service good though, it works well for me as a mum who has school drop offs, appointments and a baby.*

”

Did you receive information and/or support from FamilyCare/The Bridge/Rumbalara during COVID19 when you needed it?

All participants answered YES to this question

“

- *Yes. Our worker kept all our appointments how they used to be pre-COVID and we just did them by phone. But getting the children to speak with our worker was difficult.*
- *Yes. My worker was really good and still dropped stuff at my house just put it in the letter box*
- *Yes. They were really good. There was always mobile contact during the day*
- *Yes. Our worker was fantastic, she is just a brilliant worker for us*
- *Yes. The workers have been really good. They sent the kids out colouring in pages, a book about what COVID-19 is and heaps of information*
- *Yes. The kids packs that explained what COVID-19 was to my children were really helpful*

”

Was there anything FamilyCare/The Bridge/Rumbalara did that that you found really helpful and you would like us to continue with once COVID-19 restrictions have eased?

Clients commented they found the following helpful - regular check ins and texts between appointments, financial support, home schooling support, household items, groceries and activity packs for children. Most indicated they would like these to continue.

Some enjoyed the online contact - finding it easy and convenient, while others still preferred face to face.



Was there anything FamilyCare/The Bridge/Rumbalara did that that you found really helpful and you would like us to continue with once COVID-19 restrictions have eased?

- “
- *Since COVID started my case worker drops activity packs around for the kids in the mail box. Thats been good and would be nice to get in the future as well.*
 - *Sending out the activity packs for kids. They have been great and I hope we get them post COVID*
 - *Yes. My worker has supported me mentally and financially during COVID-19. She checks in on me regularly by phone and text and I would really like this to be ongoing after COVID restrictions have eased.*
 - *The regularity and consistency of communication. Because committing to a Zoom is easier for me and for the workers find they are more regular than pre-COVID. I hope this continues.*
 - *Sometimes it was helpful having zoom appointments, but sometimes they were an issue as well*
 - *Nothing in particular. I prefer face to face.*
 - *Nothing specific. (Agency) have been really supportive during COVID-19 and I just want to continue with them after this is over.*

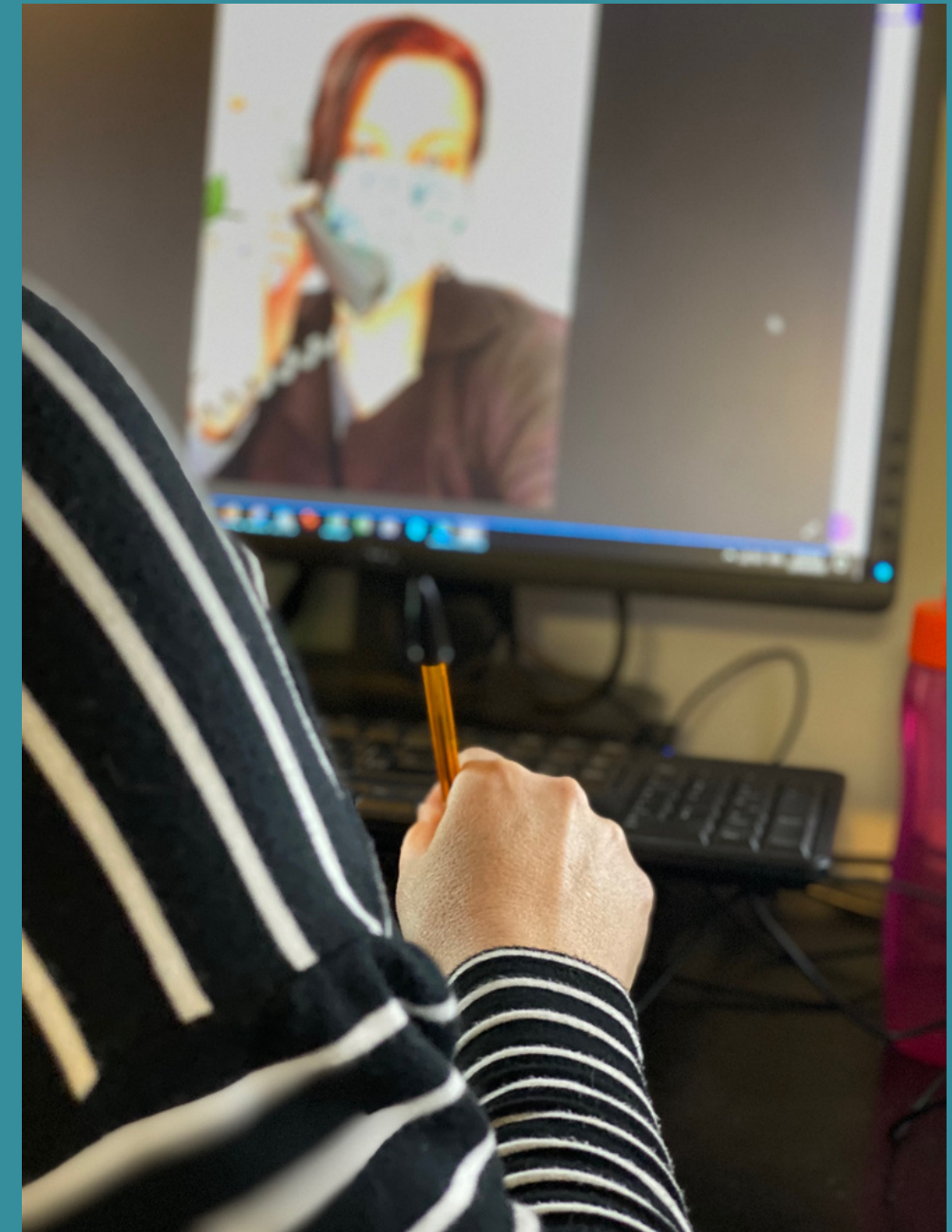
”

What do you miss most about the in-person services that FamilyCare/The Bridge/Rumbalara provides? What do you feel like you're missing out on by not receiving services in this way?

The trend in responses suggested that clients missed the in-person rapport and connection they and their children had with their worker.

Client's didn't feel like the services that were provided by video link and phone were as effective. This was due to the comfort of in-person meetings, difficulty interpreting information (body language), workers not being able to see the reality of what was going on in a clients home and clients generally just missing face to face contact with their worker.

There were also a significant number of responses to this question stating that they did not feel like they were missing out either due to finding the remote services more convenient or just as effective.



What do you miss most about the in-person services that FamilyCare/The Bridge/Rumbalara provides? What do you feel like you're missing out on by not receiving services in this way?

“

When the worker was here the children had great interactions with her. The kids just struggled and it was harder to engage them and interact with her. The kids struggled to understand why the worker wasn't able to come to the house. The previous support didn't feel like it was there, even though it was.

- *Building a rapport with my worker. I'm also sick of not being able to communicate properly, things are missed and sometimes misunderstood in communications over the phone.*
- *Yes and no. I find it easier and helpful having face-to-face meetings. I have a new worker who I haven't met and its hard to open up and talk about things when I don't really know them.*
- *Probably the general day to day input of a worker coming into the home and seeing what family life is really like for us in person.*
- *Actually seeing the worker face to face. I find it a lot easier to talk about things face to face than over the phone. The children prefer seeing the worker face to face too*
- *The in-person visits help with picking up on things that i might miss. You only have one set of eyes being a single parent and my worker would often see little things in my children that I hadn't noticed.*

”

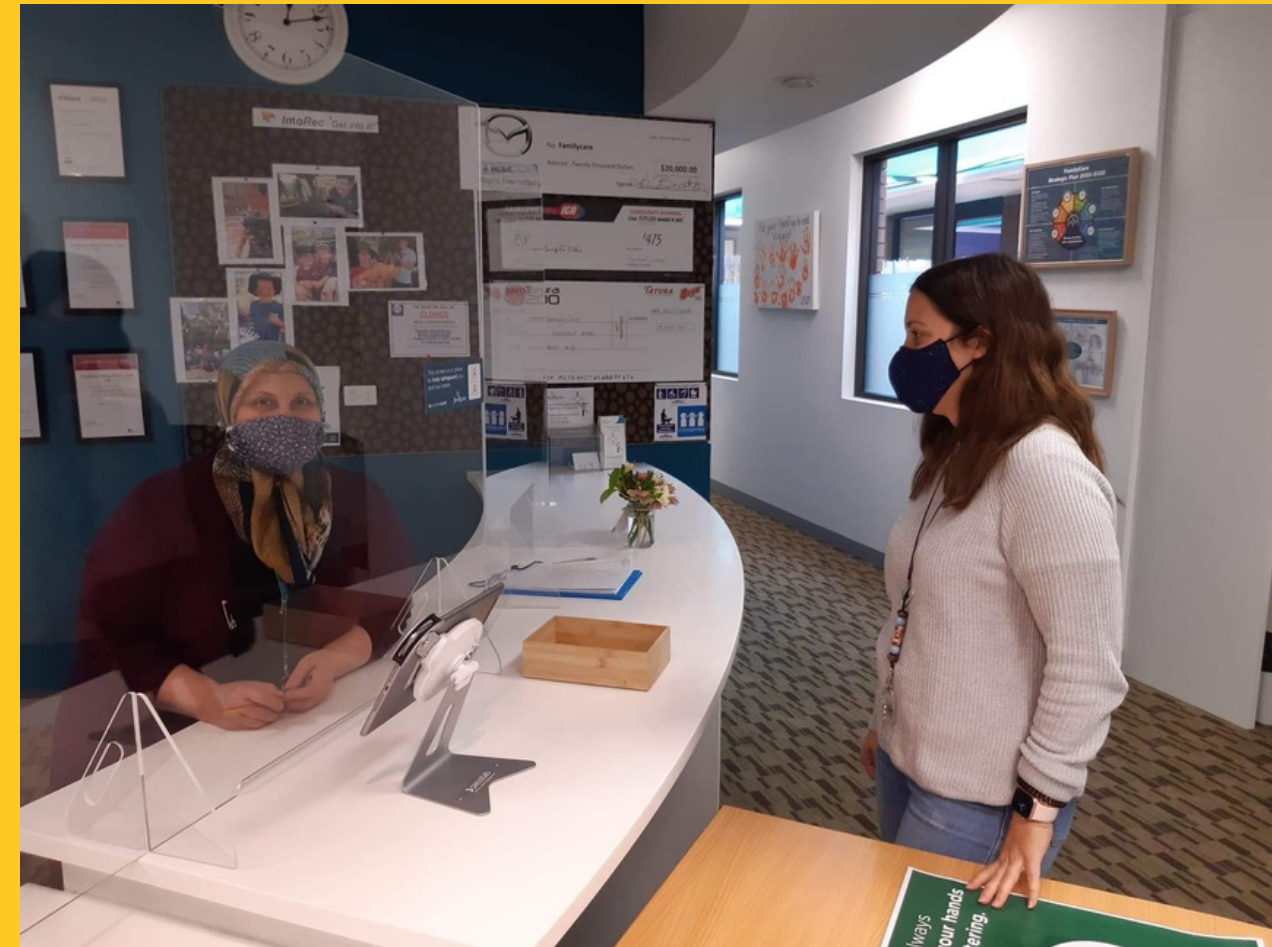
COVID-19 has clearly impacted the day to day lives of children and their families and the way we are able to provide services. The key changes to service delivery are

- **Staff were able to maintain engagement, clients appreciate the regular contact and check ins.**
- **Staff very creative about the ways to engage all family members.**
- **The support provided to clients was timely, consistent and dynamic.**
- **Observations are limited which can impact on the ability to assess the full situation.**

We have adapted our approach to working with children and young people, during this time of heightened risk in families but it is evident that vulnerable children and families are less visible and have less access to supports. Going forward it would be ideal to be able to offer services differently, maintaining direct interactions but utilising other methods online to enhance our engagement and work with families.

A balance needs to be reached which will keep us safe from COVID-19 whilst being able to address the risk of violence, abuse and neglect in the home.

summary



thanks

**Clare Brown
Angela Marshall
Naomi Mazzone
Katie Huddleston
Angela Armstrong
and the 41 clients who were interviewed.**