

CatholicCare

SYDNEY

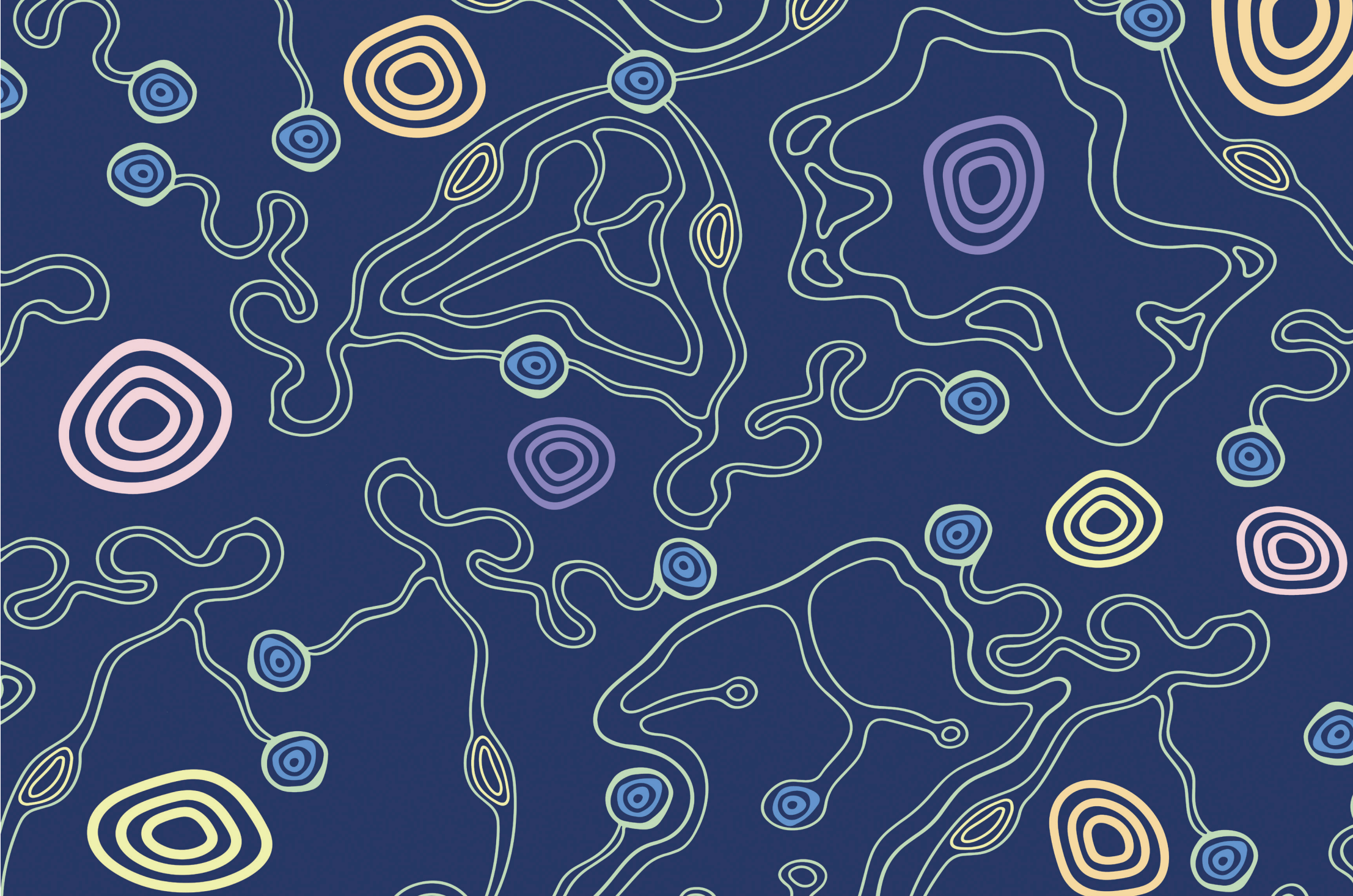


YEARS OF IMPACT IN SCHOOLS

Three decades of School Wellbeing Services
care, connection, growth and partnership
with school communities

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Acknowledgment of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation, CatholicCare Sydney acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

CatholicCare Sydney operates on the lands of the Darug Country and the Eora Nation, and on lands that were also accessed by Tharawal and Gundungurra people.

Message from the Executive Director

Thirty years ago, we began a partnership with Catholic Schools with a simple but powerful belief: that every child is made in the image of God, deserving to be seen, heard, and supported — not just in life, but within the heart of their school community.

As we mark this milestone, I want to thank each of you who have been part of this journey.

To our school partners, thank you for the trust you’ve placed in us — for the doors you’ve opened, and for the shared commitment to nurturing the whole person. Your leadership has made space not only for service, but for relationship — for accompaniment. To our clinicians, thank you for your compassion, strength, and deep sense of vocation. You show up daily for young people and families in moments of uncertainty, pain, and quiet hope. Through your presence, you honour the dignity of each person, and help them rediscover their own strength.

One of our long-standing principals reflected, “This support is part of the fabric of our school. It’s not just something we offer — it’s who we are. Our students, our staff, our families — they know that help is here when it’s needed. And that makes all the difference.”

Over the years, we’ve walked together through challenge and celebration. We’ve witnessed how love, justice and mercy come to life when school communities wrap around those in need and say, “...you are not alone.”

This anniversary is both a celebration and a recommitment — to our shared mission, to each other, and to the deep belief that care and connection transform lives.

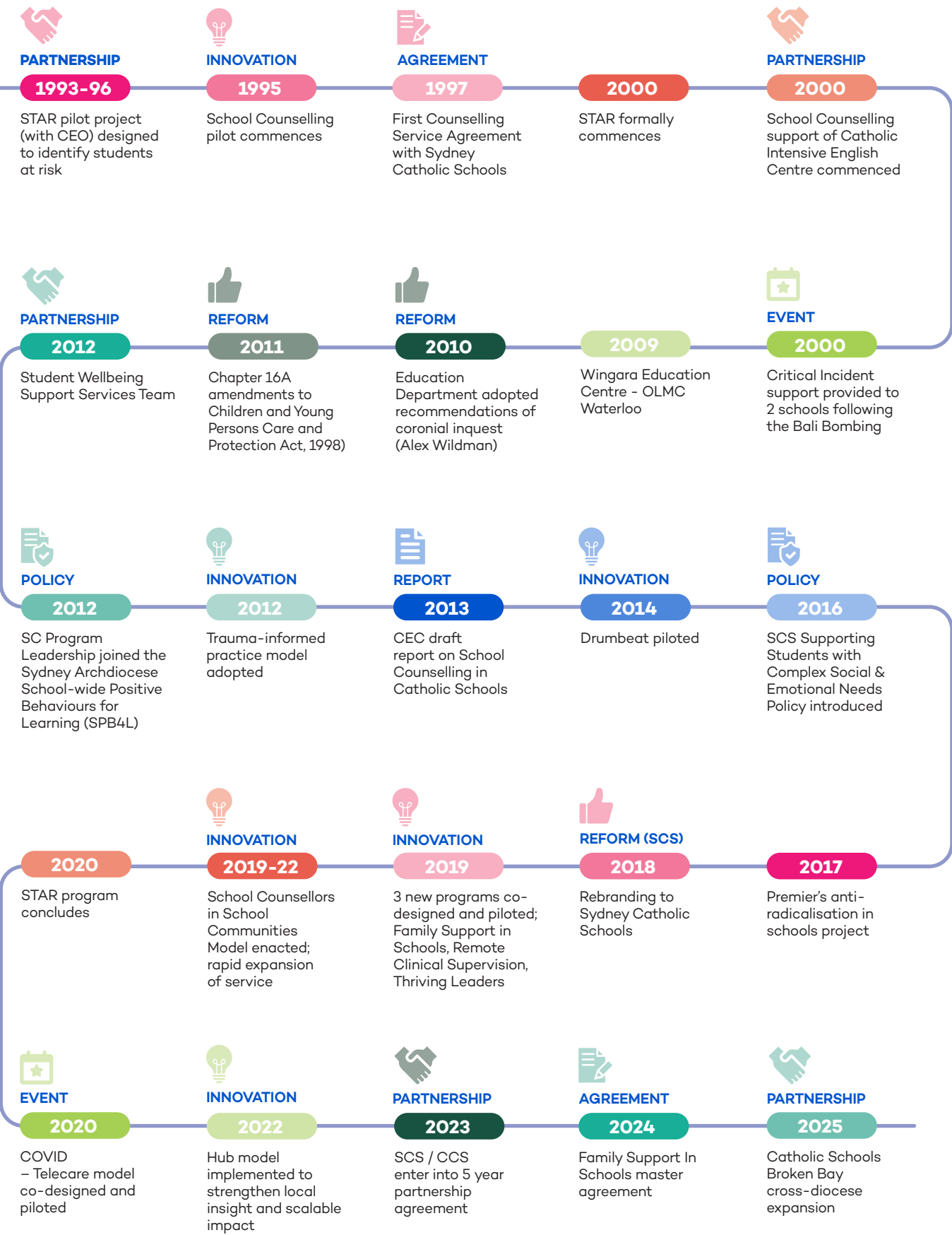
Thank you for being part of this story.

Warm regards,



Sharron Matayalo
Executive Director,
School Wellbeing Services

Timeline of School Wellbeing Services



Founding Story

What began more than 30 years ago as a small pilot project in just a handful of Sydney schools has grown into one of CatholicCare Sydney's most enduring and impactful services — supporting the wellbeing and learning of students across the Archdiocese and beyond.

Our Humble Beginnings

CatholicCare Sydney's journey in school-based counselling began in 1993, when Centacare (as we were then known) partnered with Sydney Archdiocesan schools through the Student At Risk (STAR) Pilot Project. While Centacare had not previously worked in schools, the program's vision to provide accessible support and meet the diverse learning needs of students strongly aligned with our values.

The **STAR Pilot Project**, a four-year study jointly funded by the Department of Education and Training, and the Catholic Education Office (CEO), aimed to establish a baseline understanding of at-risk students in Catholic secondary schools. One of its key outcomes was the STAR Profile Instrument — a tool used to identify and triage students for counselling support. What began with a single Centacare counsellor quickly grew into a small team of six supporting 20 schools.

In 1997, Centacare signed its first formal agreement with CEO to deliver school-based counselling services.

The following year, the CEO launched the STAR Pilot Program across the Eastern, Inner West, and Southern Regions of Sydney, trialling both internal and outsourced models of student support. Centacare counsellors provided STAR

services to secondary schools in the Eastern and Southern regions, growing to support 10 high schools with three dedicated counsellors.

The STAR Pilot Program aimed to support students whose behavioural and life circumstances significantly impacted their learning — and by extension, the classroom environment. An independent review in 1999 by Kathleen Hughes Consulting concluded the program was highly effective and recommended long-term funding. In response Centacare were engaged to extend services to primary schools in 2000.

As schools increasingly recognised the impact of our support, the demand for Centacare's school counselling services continued to grow. By the early 2000s, we were providing counselling to 20 secondary schools and responding to emerging needs in primary settings.

Building Foundations for Support

From these early pilots, three core services were developed — forming the foundation of our school support model for over two decades:

School Counselling

Delivered across the Eastern, Inner West, and Southern Regions, this service supported students facing challenges,

such as stress, underachievement, behavioural issues, or mental health concerns.

Counsellors provided tailored individual support, group programs, and parent and staff workshops — all aimed at reducing barrier to learning and enhancing student outcomes.

Student At Risk (STAR) Program

An intensive intervention program offered in primary and secondary schools in the Eastern and Southern Regions. STAR targeted students at significant risk of learning disruption due to behavioural or social-emotional difficulties. Counsellors provided individual and family support, assessments, and evidence-informed strategies for students, parents, and teachers. Though designed as a short-term intervention, the complex needs of some students often led to longer-term involvement.

Critical Incident Response

This service deploys a coordinated team in response to significant incidents affecting school communities. The team provide crisis counselling, trauma-informed support, and coordinate follow-up care.

Staff Spotlight: Virginia Banks

Virginia Banks was at the heart of CatholicCare Sydney's school counselling evolution. As the first Centacare counsellor in the 1993 STAR Pilot Project, Virginia brought a pioneering spirit and clinical expertise that helped shape the program's success. She contributed to the independent evaluation of the STAR Pilot Program and, in 2000, was appointed Manager of School Counselling — a role she held until her retirement in 2017.

Under Virginia's leadership, the program expanded significantly:



Clinical staff increased and grew to 40



41 schools received counselling services up to five days per week



STAR expanded service delivery across the Eastern and Southern Regions



A comprehensive Critical Incident Response process was developed and presented nationally at the 2013 Critical Incident Management Australasia Conference.

Virginia's vision and dedication laid the foundations for what has become one of CatholicCare Sydney's most enduring and respected services. Her legacy continues to inspire our work in schools today.



Evolving Needs

Evolving to Meet Changing Needs

From a single clinician providing targeted support in 1993, CatholicCare Sydney’s school-based services have grown into a comprehensive wellbeing offering of 5 programs now known as **School Wellbeing Services**. These programs span across more than 200 schools, with a team of 120 clinicians delivering tailored support to students, families, and educators across all of our Catholic education partners.

Over the past 30 years, the service has continually evolved to meet the changing needs of school communities — adapting its model, expanding its reach, and innovating to address the broader context in which children and young people live and learn.

Adapting Through Growth

In the program’s early decades, growth occurred steadily, as more schools recognised the value of counselling support. By the early 2000s, the team had grown to 40 clinicians, supporting 41 schools with school-based counselling, alongside 7.2 FTE clinicians delivering the STAR program — a targeted service for students at serious risk of learning disruption.

Counsellors became embedded in school life, providing individual counselling, group programs, consultations with staff, and support for parents. They played a vital role in identifying student needs, strengthening school capacity, and becoming trusted members of their communities. Program Managers fostered strong professional relationships with Principals, Regional Directors,

and wellbeing staff, which contributed to the growing trust in and demand for the service.

A sense of cohesion across the counselling team was supported by regular training, peer supervision, and team days. Annual reporting to stakeholders through Activity Reports helped identify trends, emerging needs, and guided planning and professional development. During this period, the **Critical Incident Response Framework** was also established and continuously refined.

A System Shift

Between 2018 and 2020, Sydney Catholic Schools implemented the ‘School Counsellors in School Communities’ model, ensuring every school had access to a school-based counsellor at a 1:1000 ratio. With this shift, the STAR program was gradually phased out. The focus of counselling work shifted towards **early intervention and prevention**, with a short-term model of support capped at 10 sessions per student, incorporating goal setting and outcome measurement.

To support this significant growth, ensure continued quality assurance and oversight, new program structures were established, including:

✓

A Hub Model that grouped schools geographically under the leadership of a dedicated manager

✓

Revised reporting frameworks, with schools receiving termly or biannual updates

✓

The introduction of the electronic Client Management Information System (CMIS)

✓

Formalised policy, procedure and guidelines for School Counselling

Navigating Policy, Legislation, and External Events

School Wellbeing Services has remained responsive to a wide range of external influences, including legislative changes and public health emergencies.

- The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 and its 2011 amendments (Chapter 16A) influenced the balance between privacy and information sharing for child safety. Counsellors also increasingly supported school staff in understanding their legal obligations.
- Our programs are closely aligned with student learning and engagement goals, guided by key elements of the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework, the National Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2021), and the NSW Education Act. These foundations ensure our approach remains evidence-informed and outcome-focused.
- Driven by insights from the Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey, legislative changes relating to psychosocial hazards in the workplace, and a renewed emphasis on staff wellbeing from our Catholic Education partners, two complementary programs were launched in 2019 to enhance wellbeing throughout the wider school community:
 - **Thriving Leaders** — supporting principals and school leaders
 - **Remote Clinical Supervision** — supporting counsellors working in isolated school environments
- During COVID-19, the service rapidly transitioned to online delivery, ensuring uninterrupted access to counselling support for students. CatholicCare Sydney’s Practice, Impact, Partnerships and Innovation (PIPI) team supported this transition, enabling timely adaptations and practice excellence.

Responding to Emerging and Time-Limited Needs

Throughout its history, School Wellbeing Services has demonstrated agility in responding to time-limited and emerging needs. Examples include:

- Supporting schools during World Youth Day 2008
- Providing Pastoral Supervision and wellbeing sessions for Year Coordinators
- Hosting student placements from the University of Notre Dame to support the next generation of school counsellors
- Participating in the NSW Premier’s Initiative (2017–18), with two counsellors seconded to address potential radicalisation in schools
- Delivering Critical Incident Response, including during the Bali bombings when two Eastern Suburbs schools that were directly affected. In 2013, the program presented its work at the Critical Incident Management Australasia Conference, highlighting its national leadership in this area

Supporting Quality and Innovation

Program structures have continued to evolve to ensure industry leading service quality and staff wellbeing. The Hub model enhanced localised support and communication, while ongoing clinical supervision, training, and opportunities for reflection ensure the team responds confidently to complex and changing environments.

Governance structures and continuous improvement initiatives underpin service quality. These include:

✓

Updated Policies and Procedures, guidelines, and program models

✓

Leadership structures that offer flexibility and responsiveness

✓

Enhancements to remote service delivery

✓

Partnerships with external bodies

✓

Nationally accredited Family Inclusive Workplace

Whole-team training remains responsive to emerging needs and evidence-based best practice. Examples include:

- Suicide Prevention (Black Dog Institute)
- Neuroaffirming strategies (ASPECT)
- Trauma-informed practice (Australian Childhood Foundation)
- Peaceful Kids, Rhythm to Recovery, and Drumbeat
- Child Protection legislation and practice

In 2022, the division was rebranded as School Wellbeing Services, reflecting its broader service scope and holistic approach. New offerings such as Thriving Leaders, Remote Clinical Supervision, and Family Support in Schools demonstrate a continued commitment to supporting the whole school community — including educators, leaders, and families who shape student’s learning, development and wellbeing environment.



Stories from the Team:

The Heart of the Work

Rhoda Costa, joined 1995

I've had the privilege of being part of CatholicCare's School Counselling team for the better part of 26 years.

In those early days, school counselling was provided to Catholic schools in Sydney by a very small, but devoted team employed by Centacare. There was even a time when the team found itself homeless — possibly for a year or two. During that period, we held meetings wherever we could: the Petersham Scout Hall, the local library, or meeting rooms in schools but the sense of belonging was palpable.

What bound us together was a strong sense of camaraderie and a fierce determination to support students and schools with our fledgling service.

Eventually, we found a new home on Edgware Road in Enmore — an old house owned by the Catholic Church, next door to St Pius Primary School. It was small, but every meeting day our fearless leader,

Virginia Banks (VB for short), greeted us with a warm "Welcome home." The meetings were a welcome relief from the isolation and pressures of being "at the front" in schools.

During the Enmore years, the team grew rapidly. Our members included social workers, counsellors, and psychologists — each bringing unique skills and perspectives. Mutual respect was constant, and every meeting included cherished time for peer support — a chance to reflect, debrief, and recharge before returning to schools.

Over time, the counsellor role broadened from one-on-one sessions to include group work, staff training, parent evenings, and collaboration with school executives. A critical incident protocol was developed, becoming a respected and vital service for schools. As the team expanded, hubs were established to strengthen communication and support.

With changes in society and the increasing pressures on young people — especially around social media — our team continually adapted to stay responsive. In 2020, COVID-19 prompted a rapid transition to online counselling and a rethink of child protection in the digital space.

Despite all these changes, two things have remained constant: the seriousness with which our team approaches this work, and the generous way we support one another. That continues to fill me with great pride.

Looking back, there have been many moments of pride and joy. Stepping into a manager position has been a recent highlight — leading a team of dedicated, compassionate professionals who bring deep care to students and families. What stands out most, however, is the impact we make on students' lives — especially those facing significant wellbeing or mental health challenges. Watching them grow and move forward positively is incredibly fulfilling. I'm also proud of how we respond to critical incidents as a team — knowing our actions make a real difference means a great deal.

When asked what's kept me here for over two decades, the answer is simple: I love people, and I believe in the work we do. The difference we make — sometimes in small ways, other times life-changing — keeps me here. I've always been part of a dynamic, talented team who bring

knowledge, experience, and compassion to their roles. Working alongside such passionate people and seeing the impact of our work continues to motivate me.

Through this work, I've learned that I'm resilient and adaptable — that even small actions can make a big difference. I value collaboration, compassion, and flexibility, and I'm deeply committed to supporting those in need. Above all, being part of this team has shown me how powerful it is when people come together with a shared purpose.



Giving Back Where It All Began

Tegan Batty, joined 2016

Growing up, I wanted to be a teacher. I always saw teaching as a way to support young people to achieve their goals. It was only when I learnt about mental health in high school that I decided I wanted to help people in a different way — and I decided I would become a counsellor instead.

Looking back, it seems inevitable that I would one day end up working as a School Counsellor in a Catholic school. After all, I went to a Catholic school myself, as did my siblings and most of my cousins. But the true sign should have been that my mother worked as a teacher in Catholic schools during my childhood — in fact, we were both at the same school while I was finishing high school. Having my mother present at school meant I was the model student, as she would hear about any indiscretions by lunchtime. However, it wasn't all bad — always having a lift to and from school was a great benefit.

Attending a Catholic school had a strong impact on the person I am today. It was not only during school that I decided the career path I wanted to take, but the positive experience I had there led to working for another Catholic organisation — CatholicCare Sydney — where I continue to support Catholic schools.

When I reflect on my time at CatholicCare, I am most proud of the moments when I have been able to support School Counsellors through complex student cases. Witnessing how counsellors are able to walk alongside and empower students and schools through difficult situations makes me proud to see the far-reaching impact of school counselling.

What has kept me at CatholicCare is the opportunity to work with like-minded people who care deeply about the wellbeing of others. While we all have different roles, the students we support are always at the centre of what we do. Together, we are all striving to improve outcomes for the students and families we work with — and that shared purpose continues to inspire me every day.



Building Something That Lasted

Virginia Banks, employee from 1995 to 2017

I began working in the School Counselling Program in February 1995 as part of a team of three counsellors.

The School Counselling Program was a partnership between the Catholic Education Office and Centacare Sydney. The role was to provide counselling in secondary schools on a needs basis. A school principal or regional director would call the office and a counsellor would attend. Depending on proximity, a counsellor could visit up to four schools in one day.

Coming into the role, there were no job descriptions or KPIs — it was really about establishing how the program could work. There was a lot of autonomy and freedom to respond to whatever the day might bring. Moving from one school to another sometimes felt like starting a new job every few days. The expectations and facilities were very different — one school might provide an office, another

a photocopy room or a corner of the staffroom — but the staff were always welcoming.

At the beginning of 1996, secondary schools were allocated a counsellor for between half a day to a full day per week depending on need, with costs met by the Catholic Education Office. There was no contract, service agreement, or protocols for reporting. Formalities were limited to the occasional meeting, and increases in service were often agreed over a cup of tea and a handshake.

By 1997, the Catholic Education Office decided it would no longer fund school counselling apart from critical incidents. Schools were expected to use their teaching allocation, so some went without counsellors while others opted for half days. Over the next few years, the program expanded, and the role of the counsellor evolved. Schools embraced the service and included counsellors in all aspects of school

Moving from one school to another sometimes felt like starting a new job every few days. The expectations and facilities were very different.



life — camps, staff meetings, parenting courses, and groupwork programs.

Responding to critical incidents confirmed for me the importance of having counsellors embedded in school communities. A tragedy could disrupt what was usually a calm, positive place of learning. By working empathetically with students, staff, and families, the community gradually found balance again.

Many changes occurred during my time — staffing, structure, locations, financial accountabilities, and even the names of the organisations — but the needs of young people became more complex, and keeping the student at the centre of our work has always mattered most. I have always felt that regardless of what is happening in either organisation, our focus must remain on the child or young person.

It has been a true partnership — built on mutual concern for students' wellbeing — that has made the program so successful.





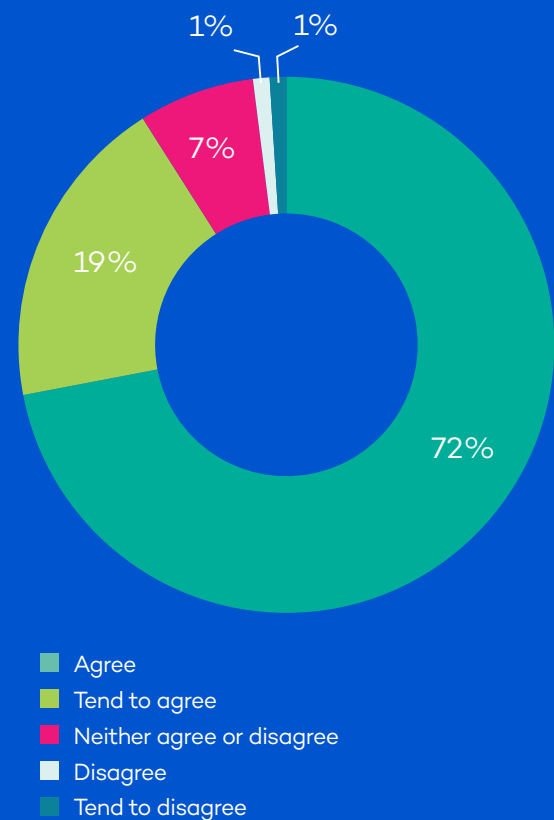
Partnerships Overview

For three decades, our commitment to delivering high-quality wellbeing services in schools has been made possible through the strong and enduring partnerships we have built with school communities. From the very beginning, our work has been shaped by the insight, dedication, and collaboration of principals, teachers, and school leaders who share our vision for supporting the whole student — academically, socially, and emotionally.

These partnerships have been critical to our success, enabling us to adapt and evolve in response to changing student needs, emerging wellbeing challenges, and the shifting education landscape. Together, we have developed innovative approaches, integrated support models, and a culture of care that extends beyond the classroom.

As we celebrate this 30-year milestone, we acknowledge and thank our school partners for their trust, shared commitment, and unwavering belief that wellbeing is central to every student's potential and lifelong success.

When asked whether they feel informed and well connected to the School Counselling program, our school partners responded as follows:



Partners in Student Wellbeing

Clare from Sydney Catholic Schools kindly shared the following reflection on our partnership and the important role we play together in supporting student wellbeing.

Clare McMahon
Manager, Student Wellbeing at School Catholic Schools

The CatholicCare School Counselling staff in Sydney Catholic Schools (SCS) are an integral part of our school communities.

Their presence reflects SCS's commitment to student wellbeing and sends a strong message to families and staff that every child's growth and flourishing matters. Our School Counsellors provide a safe and confidential space for young people to share their experiences, navigate challenges, and develop strategies for coping. In doing so, they not only respond to immediate concerns but also foster the resilience and skills that enable students to thrive both within school and in their broader lives.

Although the School Counselling Program has evolved over time, with new faces and new offerings, our shared vision in partnership with CatholicCare remains the same: to work together in supporting the most vulnerable in our school communities. I look forward to continuing this professional relationship and further strengthening our collaboration as we adapt to meet the needs of our students and families.



We also invited Stephen to share his reflections on a partnership that has spanned decades, shaped by shared purpose and a commitment to student wellbeing.

Stephen Said Consultant and Former Manager, Student Wellbeing at School Catholic Schools



I've had the pleasure of working closely with CatholicCare Sydney Senior Management for the last twenty-four years. In 2001 I replaced Fr Gary Perrit as the Coordinator of Pastoral Services in the Inner Western Region of Sydney Catholic Schools. I came from a role where I piloted a counselling role in the Parramatta Diocese, covering four large secondary schools on a weekly basis, and primary schools in the region in the event of a critical incident.

I had both a teaching and clinical background. I had held leadership roles at Nagle Girls Catholic High School, and I was a qualified Clinical Family Therapist, having trained with Relationships Australia under the tutorship of Anne Hollands, who is currently the Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People.

CatholicCare Sydney was providing school counsellors for primary and secondary schools in the Eastern and Southern Regions, and secondary schools in the Inner West.

I immediately forged a very close working relationship with Lyne Cunneen, who was

later Manager of the CatholicCare School Counselling program. School counselling, as a service, was in its infancy. Illustrating this is the fact that the full-time Primary School counsellors and I coordinated covering twelve schools each!

Lyne and I both had teaching and clinical qualifications and experience, giving us invaluable insights into the challenges faced by teachers in supporting students and their families.

I held a Master of Education (School Counselling) and worked one night a week at the Institute of Counselling in Sydney, training counsellors in their Graduate Diploma of Counselling course and began training clergy in the Pastoral Institute's Master of Arts in Pastoral Care and Counselling course. Around this time I also served as the President of the NSW Family Therapy Association.

In 2013, I took on the newly formed role of Senior Coordinator of Student Wellbeing for

Sydney Catholic Schools. I worked closely with my Director, Dr Michael Bezzina, in the Leichhardt office where the contract with CatholicCare Sydney had historically been managed by Director, Seamus O'Grady.

"I've felt privileged to have worked with CatholicCare management and their team of counsellors over the past 24 years. During that time, they have been generous with their time and expertise as they developed solid policies, procedures, routine outcome measures and so on. Our schools have also engaged a suite of evidence-based related services from CatholicCare that have served students and their families very well."

In 2016, we engaged Paul Bullen to complete an extensive review with the aim of developing an evidence-based, best practice model for the System. A new

contract was developed with CatholicCare, and a much closer working relationship forged between SCS and CatholicCare.

Following the review and subsequent new contracts, CatholicCare senior management maintained strong and consistent connections. Lyne, Sofia and then Carole worked very closely with myself and Joanna Stella in regular meetings that provided the opportunity for joint planning, review and addressing emerging issues.

I've been fortunate to work with a number of CatholicCare leaders over the years — including Luke Stevens, Sharron Matayalo and Michael Everett — whose expertise and commitment ensured students and families received the best possible support.

In the development of the latest contract, Sydney Catholic Schools searched for a market competitive service provider. We were very happy when CatholicCare proved to be the best contender. Having one provider for a large system is something envied by other systems and organisations. Our joint commitment to Catholic teachings and tradition proved to be an added bonus.



Innovation for Community Need

In 2019, a new cross-diocesan partnership was formed to support those who care for our regional school communities. The idea began when the Head of Student Wellbeing at the Diocese of Lismore (DOL) reached out to CatholicCare Sydney, concerned about a team of isolated practitioners struggling without consistent clinical supervision, professional development, or connection.

What started as a single request for support quickly revealed a wider challenge: remote school leaders were facing immense pressure, navigating complex community and psychosocial needs with little support. Many were experiencing stress, fatigue, and even burnout.

Together with our DOL partners, we created a multi-tiered partnership that meets counsellors and leaders working in education settings where they are — offering **meaningful supervision, tailored guidance, and a sense of professional connection**, even across vast distances. It's not just about improving practice; it's about caring for the carers, helping them feel seen, supported, and equipped to lead effectively.

This partnership fosters resilience, builds professional confidence, and strengthens networks that extend across schools and communities. By prioritising wellbeing and connection, it ensures that those who nurture our students are themselves nurtured. What began as a concern and commitment for a small team has grown

into a collaborative initiative that uplifts an entire regional education community — showing the power of support, partnership, and shared care.

Above all, this work honours the extraordinary resilience of the Lismore (and surrounding) community, who have faced repeated natural disasters yet continue to rebuild, care for one another, and invest in their schools. Their determination, strength, and hope inspire the partnership and remind us that even in the face of adversity, communities can recover, thrive, and flourish.

Our journey with Lismore was a critical moment for CatholicCare Sydney — solidifying our capability in delivering high quality and evidence based support for those working with children and families.



Case Studies

Each of our programs supports children, young people, families and school professionals in unique ways. The following case studies show the real difference this support can make.



School Counselling

A high school student was experiencing low attendance and displaying symptoms consistent with school refusal — finding school emotionally overwhelming and difficult to attend. She was disengaged in the classroom, struggled with peer and teacher relationships, and found the learning environment challenging.

Through regular counselling sessions with the School Counsellor, the student was given space to explore what made school difficult. Together, they unpacked issues around friendships, classroom participation, and teacher dynamics. Each barrier was approached with problem-solving strategies, and the student was supported to develop small, achievable solutions to trial.

As the student began to experience success with these strategies, her mindset shifted. She started to see that problems could be solved. With growing confidence, she began putting her hand up in class, asking for help, and even volunteering to assist teachers with tasks.



His attendance improved significantly and has remained consistent throughout the term.

The student's parent shared their appreciation for the change they had observed at home and the feedback they had received from his teacher:

"He's been in a far better mood this term. There has been little resistance to go to school. [Teacher] mentioned his change in behaviour at the beginning of the term, and another teacher mentioned it when I bumped into her last week. Thank you for all you do."

A teacher also noted the transformation, "He is like a totally different kid. He is actually smiling and happy now."



Remote Clinical Supervision:

Working in a small regional school community, a counsellor often felt the weight of isolation and the challenge of managing complex student situations without immediate peer support.

They were connected with a skilled supervisor who offered a safe, reflective space to talk through their experiences and explore strategies for difficult cases. Over time, the counsellor described feeling more confident, supported, and grounded in their role. Regular sessions helped them recognise their strengths, manage emotional demands, and sustain their passion for supporting students' wellbeing.

With renewed clarity and resilience, they were able to provide more consistent, compassionate care to their school community — and rediscover the sense of connection that first drew them to counselling.



Thriving Leaders:

A primary school principal had been feeling overwhelmed by the increasing pressures of leadership and the emotional weight of supporting staff and students through challenging times.

Sessions with an experienced Thriving Leaders clinician provided space for reflection, self-care, and practical strategies to manage stress and sustain wellbeing. Over several months, the principal reported feeling more centred, confident, and able to navigate difficult conversations with compassion and clarity.

By prioritising their own wellbeing, they noticed a ripple effect across the school — a calmer, more connected leadership approach that strengthened relationships and positively influenced the broader school community.

"I've learned how to pause, reset, and lead from a place of calm — which has made me a better support for my team and our students."



Family Support in Schools:

Following the sudden death of their mother, a single father was left to raise his three teenage sons — aged 12, 15, and 17 — while navigating immense grief and practical challenges. The family's stability was under threat, with mounting financial pressures and the risk of eviction casting uncertainty over their future. When the Family Support in Schools case worker first met them, it was clear they needed urgent practical and emotional support to rebuild their lives.

The case worker discovered the family was facing eviction due to an unauthorised shed the father had built. Through strong advocacy, a compelling letter to the housing tribunal resulted in the eviction notice being cancelled, allowing the family to remain in their home. The case worker also completed a housing pathways application, securing approval for Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) housing.

Financially strained, the father struggled to cover essential bills and school fees. The case worker successfully appealed a Centrelink decision, resulting in a \$10,000 back-payment and ongoing support of \$1,200 per fortnight. Additional assistance included school uniforms, clothing vouchers, and community activity referrals — alongside emotional and grief counselling for the children.

Through dedicated advocacy and wraparound support, the Family Support in Schools program helped this family regain stability, dignity, and hope for the future — creating the foundation for the children to re-engage in learning and thrive at school.



The Future

As we look to the next chapter, we do so with hearts grounded in hope and eyes open to the reality that the road ahead — like the one behind — will not always be straight or smooth. The world our children and young people are growing into is one of rapid change, growing complexity, and continued challenge. Mental health and wellbeing needs will evolve. Families and schools will face new pressures. And the systems surrounding them may shift in ways we can't yet predict. But what remains steady — what anchors us — is the strength of the partnerships we've built, and the depth of the mission we share.

If the past 30 years have shown us anything, it's that when trust is nurtured, when collaboration is authentic, and when care is placed at the centre, there is very little that cannot be faced together. We know that uncertainty will remain. But we also know this: compassion is enduring. Courage is contagious. And where there is community — real community — support will always find its way.

Our traditions and training remind us that we are called to honour the dignity of every person, to walk with the vulnerable, and to strive always for the common good. These are not abstract ideals — they are the quiet foundations beneath everything we do. They guide how we show up, how we serve, and how we adapt to the needs of those around us.

In the years to come, our work will not look exactly the same. Nor should it. It will need to respond to new environments, diverse communities, and emerging voices. But what will not change is the heart of this mission: to be present, to offer care, and to journey alongside schools and students with integrity and deep attentiveness. We will continue to grow — not just in numbers or reach, but in wisdom and agility. We will invest in our people, listen closely to our communities, and

seek out innovation that enhances, rather than replaces, authentic human connection.

In the decades ahead, we will remain committed to ensuring that every child, every teacher, every family member who reaches out to us finds a response that is not generic, but personal. Not transactional, but relational.

Our shared Catholic formation reminds us that this work is not about service alone — it is about encounter. And in each encounter, there is the opportunity to affirm, to uplift, and to heal.

Together — with our school communities, our dedicated clinicians, our mission partners, and our supporters — we step forward with confidence.

Not because the path is certain, but because we know we will not walk it alone. Whatever the future brings, we will meet it together. With trust. With care. And with a deep, unwavering belief in the sacredness of every story entrusted to us.

Acknowledgements

Across these pages, we've celebrated three decades of School Wellbeing Services' evolution, impact, and the values that have guided us from the beginning.

This legacy would not be possible without the passion and dedication of our people.

To the staff, past and present, who have walked alongside children, families, and school communities with care and conviction — thank you. To our partners, funders, collaborators, and supporters — thank you for your ongoing commitment to our shared purpose: helping children thrive.

This milestone belongs to all of you.

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