

# Annual report

2017-2018



**Uniting**

Uniting is the community services organisation  
of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania.





**“ I’m turning up  
to a place where  
I know I belong,  
where people say  
hello to me, and  
I feel welcome.”**

— Paul, accessing 101 St Kilda Hub

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# Chair report

Uniting is an organisation in its formative years– only one year into the integration of twenty-four Uniting Church entities, but with over **130 years of experience and expertise in supporting people** living life at the margins. We are the recipients, stewards, and continuity of the Uniting Church supporting people in need.

In July 2017 we became one organisation to ensure our important work is sustainable in the face of major changes across the social services sector. Today we are over 7000 skilled, passionate and imaginative people providing over 770 programs and services across Victoria and Tasmania.

We have a grassroots understanding of the issues people face – our work makes a difference. We partner with communities, government, congregations and many social sector organisations, and commit to maintaining and evolving a range of services that offer specialist expertise and local knowledge. We combine our strengths to have greater impact for our communities and the individuals we support – broadening our services in new ways to create an inclusive, connected and just world.

I am excited to share how we have come together in our first year, where significant structural changes have further connected our vision with our purpose and paved the way forward to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice.

This year we launched our inaugural strategic plan; a formative process which defines our ongoing role in the communities we serve, focusing our efforts to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable and marginalised. Our new strategic plan outlines the changes we want to effect by 2025, as well as more specific steps we will take over the next three years to be agile, innovative and responsive in light of major reform and social advancements and expectations.

Together, we learn from our challenges and successes to enhance our service models. We use our collective resources, connection to community, and insights to confront and address poor public policy and the structural injustices inherent in our society.

On behalf of the Board of Directors I would like to thank our employees, volunteers, partners, congregations, donors and supporters. Our collective efforts realise our potential to achieve our purpose – we have the tools, resources and expertise of a united team, equipped to make meaningful change and create positive impact.



Bronwyn Pike  
**Board Chair**



# CEO report

This year we commenced a new chapter in the history of Uniting Church community services. The establishment of Uniting in Victoria and Tasmania presents us with the **opportunity to re-imagine our future** and consider how we can best bring about positive social change.

The challenge of integrating twenty-four entities into a single organisation has been significant. Our first year has been a process of building and learning.

Minimising disruption to our consumers and ensuring service and relationship continuity in the communities we work in have been our highest priorities. While navigating changes, we also shared and leveraged our collective strengths to respond to wider sector reforms – enabling us to secure funding for a range of new services.

With a strong commitment to involve consumers in shaping our direction and services, we established a Consumer Co-Design Advisory Group. We now have a Consumer Partnership Framework to guide consumer participation practice across our organisation.

We have introduced common systems, processes and ways of working, in areas such as finance, payroll and human resources. They are the necessary foundations for a more efficient, and responsive organisation, which means going forward we are better positioned to support our work in communities.

To draw upon the diverse voices in our organisation we have commenced employee working groups across a number of areas including Cultural and Linguistically Diverse (CALD); Gender and/or Sexuality Diverse; Sustainability; and the development of our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

These successes demonstrate that as a diverse organisation we share the breadth of expertise, commitment and geographic reach to address significant community issues and stand with the most vulnerable and marginalised in communities.

During the year I was fortunate to connect with many of our skilled and passionate employees and volunteers across the organisation. I am grateful to the many people who enable and deliver our services across Victoria and Tasmania.

UnitingCare Australia has been an important forum to ensure consistent engagement with the Australian government. Our collaboration with UnitingCare Queensland, Uniting NSW.ACT and Uniting AgeWell is becoming more focused and we appreciate the sharing of knowledge and resources. Similarly the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania Moderator, General Secretary and Synod team have guided us and offered real support along the way.



Paul Linossier  
**Chief Executive  
Officer**



## Our purpose

# Working to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice.

## Our values

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### **Imaginative**

We challenge convention, explore new possibilities and dare to dream for a better future.

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### **Respectful**

We act with honesty and integrity, and open our hearts to all people without exception.

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### **Compassionate**

We are nurturing, generous and thoughtful in our words and deeds.

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### **Bold**

We face injustice head on and stand up for what is right and true with confidence and strength.



## Our foundation

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**Christ invites us to serve humanity by creating an inclusive, connected and just world.**

# Director of Mission report

**“ Churches don’t unite, people do. That is, our work depends on people who will build relationships.”**

— Rev Nigel Hanscamp, Director Priorities, Focus and Advocacy, Equipping Leadership for Mission unit of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

Our partnerships with over 70 congregations and the support we receive from hundreds of others depends upon our mutuality of heart and spirit and a shared vision – an inclusive, connected and just world.

In November the Synod Standing Committee endorsed our model of mutual engagement across the Uniting Church. This model acknowledges the important role of local congregations in providing for the needs in their local community. As part of this model, local engagement groups are formed with the help of presbyteries and in consultation with the new Leadership for the Mission unit of the Synod.

Together, we led the Synod’s advocacy position and adoption of a sound and progressive policy for a Medically Supervised Injecting Centre in Richmond in collaboration with the Justice and International Mission Unit of the Synod, theological partners Rev Randall Prior and Rev Dr Sally Douglas and with advice from Uniting NSW.ACT.

Spirituality is an essential part of humanity – it is what drives our thoughts and actions as an organisation. We have adopted a Spiritual and Pastoral Care policy— a commitment to meeting the spiritual and pastoral needs of our workforce and consumers.

We continue to deepen our collaborations with Uniting Housing Vic and equally, our work with Uniting AgeWell—to broaden services for people experiencing housing crisis and older people.

The role of the Mission and Ethos team, Rev Gavin Blakemore and Rev Lisa Stewart, is to lead our engagement with presbyteries and congregations. Our focus is to continually strengthen and grow relationships; including initiatives that introduce education sessions and contributing to new induction resources for employees and volunteers.

Rev Hanscamp reiterates, “Churches don’t unite, people do. Agencies don’t unite, people do. But as we work together as corporate in the best sense, agencies and churches offer us the ability to do it better – to give the best of community, advocacy and services.”



Rev John Clarke  
**Director of Mission**



# Our shared history

## Faith in action.

**For over two centuries we have responded to the needs of many Australians**—some of our earliest work dates to the mid-1800s where individuals and congregations of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches responded to the need they saw in their communities.

All around people were left behind as the Gold Rush and pastoral expansion generated unfathomable wealth. Spurred on by their belief that faith must be expressed through action, congregations helped the poor, the homeless and the vulnerable, particularly children.

As the years went by the story repeated itself in a different context, but the need remained. Working together, local congregations responded, and these church-birthed agencies grew in size, capability and expertise. In 1977, the Uniting Church was formed, bringing together the Congregational Union in Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

With a united church came the opportunity to combine experience and resources. Agencies and missions started to join forces for greater impact, and the name UnitingCare emerged.

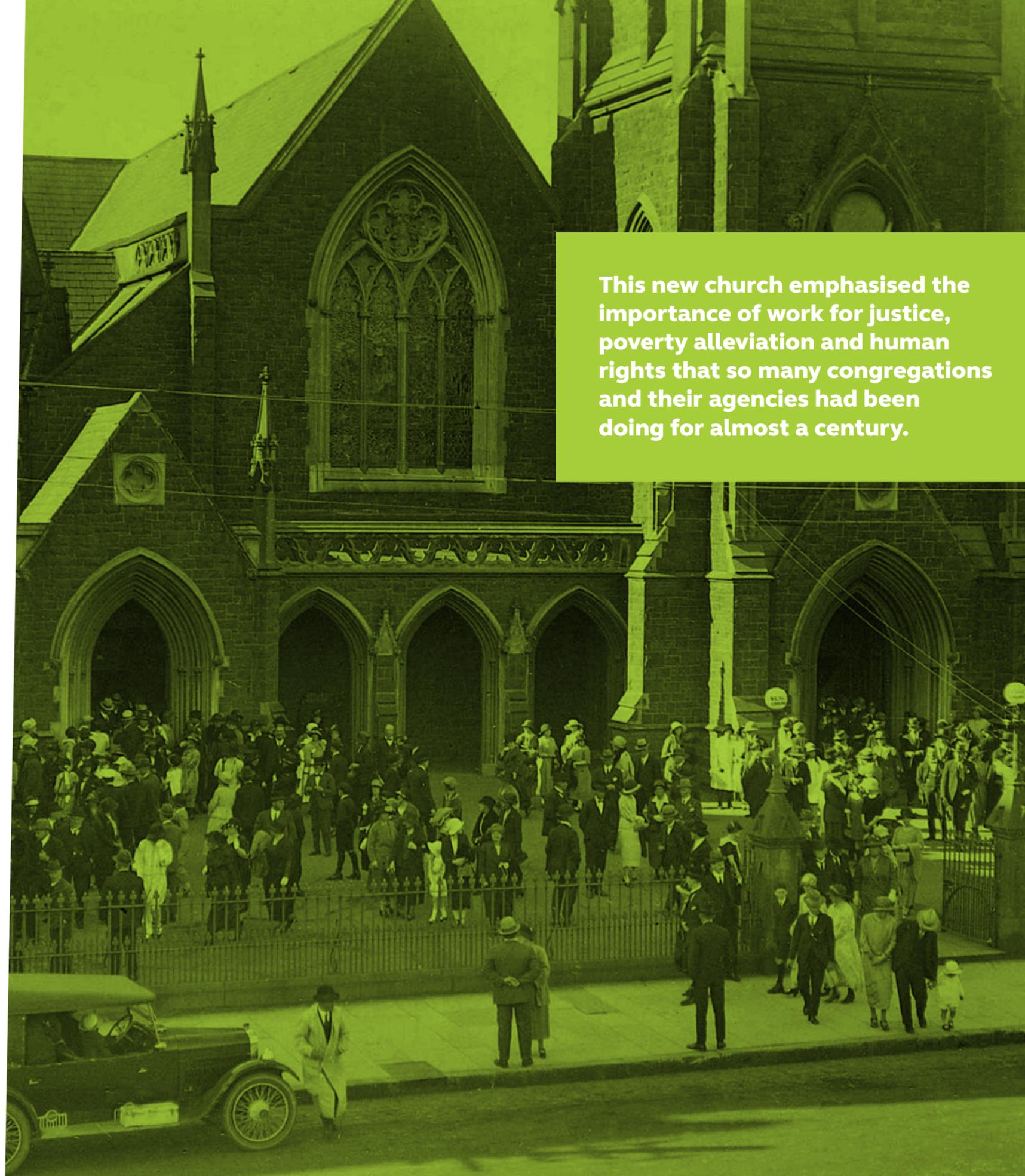
The world around us continued to change, affecting both the Church and its community services agencies. In 2015, Synod's strategic review of the life and work of the Uniting

Church in Victoria and Tasmania recommended that all UnitingCare agencies come together to strengthen their efforts to create an inclusive, connected and just world. In 2016, Wesley Mission Victoria elected to come together with UnitingCare organisations, and soon after Share the fundraising arm of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania was also to join.

And so, in July 2017, 21 UnitingCare agencies, Wesley Mission Victoria and two Uniting Church business units became a single organisation, Uniting in Victoria and Tasmania, with a common purpose, values and identity.

It is our commitment to integrate services across agencies and programs, partnering with key stakeholders and working towards co-creating solutions for whole communities. We continue our founding agencies' long history of life-changing work, providing essential services that people rely on every day.

**This new church emphasised the importance of work for justice, poverty alleviation and human rights that so many congregations and their agencies had been doing for almost a century.**



# Who we are

**We are the carers, thinkers, doers, darers** who strive to make a difference, in everyday trials and triumphs, for everyone— just as they are.

We act with impact. We draw upon the voice deep within us and raise a collective cry that cannot be ignored. **For us, enough is not enough. We want safer, fairer, brighter, better,** for the people we work alongside— for all humanity.

As an organisation, we celebrate our diversity and welcome all people regardless of ethnicity, faith, age, disability, culture, language, gender identity or sexual orientation.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as Australia's First Peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land on which we work. We welcome lesbian, gay, trans, gender diverse and intersex (LGBTIQ) people at our services. We pledge to provide inclusive and non-discriminatory services.

We base our work on human rights that are recognised and articulated in international declarations, treaties and covenants that aim to ensure peace and equality among people.

Photo: Karyn who volunteers to help with community outreach at the Sunbury Drop-In Centre.



# Operational Plan

“Our first year as Uniting has been a process of **building and learning** as we have worked to integrate twenty-four entities into a single organisation while committing to minimise disruption for our consumers.”

— Paul Linossier, CEO

July 2017 marked a milestone in establishing the legal, funding and employment frameworks for us as a single organisation. In our first year of integration our operational plan focused on ensuring our consumers' needs are reflected in everything we do.

## Four priority pillars

During phased integration our activities were mapped and measured in four key areas.

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### Service continuity

We prioritised minimising disruption to our consumers and clients to ensure service and relationship continuity in our communities.

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### Connecting our people

We built on strong foundations as an organisation by supporting and joining up our people.

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### Building blocks for integration

We shared and leveraged our collective strengths to build common systems, new processes and ways of working.

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### Strategy

We worked together to imagine and envision our future in order to live out our purpose and values.

# Highlights

**Over 200,000  
service  
interactions**



**908**  
people  
placed in  
meaningful  
work

## Employment Services

## Consulted on our strategy



**1 in 5**  
Employees & volunteers  
contributed to our strategic  
priorities by survey.

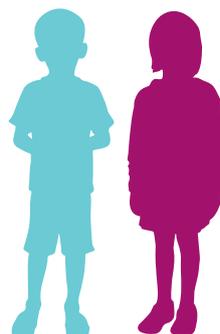


**30**  
Workshops with employees  
& volunteers shaped our  
vision for the future.



**12**  
Consumer focus  
groups highlighted  
what people need.

**Trialling**  
new ways to keep  
siblings connected  
while in out-of-  
home care.



**3,500**  
confident and  
creative learners  
nurtured in 71  
early learning  
services

**20%** increase in  
donations  
Share Winter Appeal

## Service expansion

**Supporting those  
with alcohol  
and other drug  
challenges.**

- Family Reunification Program rolls out in the Wimmera, Gippsland, Ballarat and Melbourne
- Overdose Prevention Program to reduce the risks and impacts of opioid overdose.



**3,015**  
volunteers  
contributed



**1.3m hours**  
valued at \$48.4m

# Strategic Plan

Changing lives  
and communities.

Changing how  
we work.

For the better.

We have and will continue to **truly listen and respond to the voices and experiences** of the people we stand beside. Our strategic framework articulates those voices by recognising their differing requirements, so we can adapt our service response and facilitate stronger engagement with governance and decision making.

This inaugural strategic plan paves the way forward for our organisation; ensuring we are innovative, agile and responsive to effectively deliver on our purpose and create positive social change.

Framed through ‘Changing lives and communities’ and ‘Changing how we work’ to enable us to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice, with particular commitment to vulnerable individuals and communities.

The strategic framework is the collective voice of our organisation. It drives our vision over the next three years and creates momentum to achieve our goals beyond today to 2025. Bringing together our views, ambitions and connecting our collective actions, our strategic plan will align all our efforts to change peoples lives.

We build on our history and our culture; one that is known for being welcoming, inclusive and supporting diversity in all its forms.



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**April says the Breezeway Meals program** gives her a chance to have a break from caring for her son and be part of a community where people look out for each other and feel safe.

April knows firsthand what it means to be homeless, and the impact it has on personal wellbeing and family life.

For 10 years, April shared a secure rental home with her son, daughter, her daughter's partner and her grandson, all of whom live with a disability.

In 2010, the family were asked to leave their home. The move prompted eight years of instability, and ultimately they were forced to live separately.

April and her adult son spent time in hotels and short-term crisis accommodation. They were often fearful and vulnerable. The persistent instability took its toll.

April experienced anxiety and other mental health impacts, and her son's challenging behaviours escalated.

April visited our services in Ballarat, desperate for support and understanding. We worked alongside her and her family to secure housing

and connect her to social supports.

April regularly attends our BreezeWay Meals program to access hot nutritional meals and connect with people and community.

April attended the 2018 National Homelessness Conference in Melbourne with our support. She now plans to get more involved in her community and share her experiences.

# The future is bright.



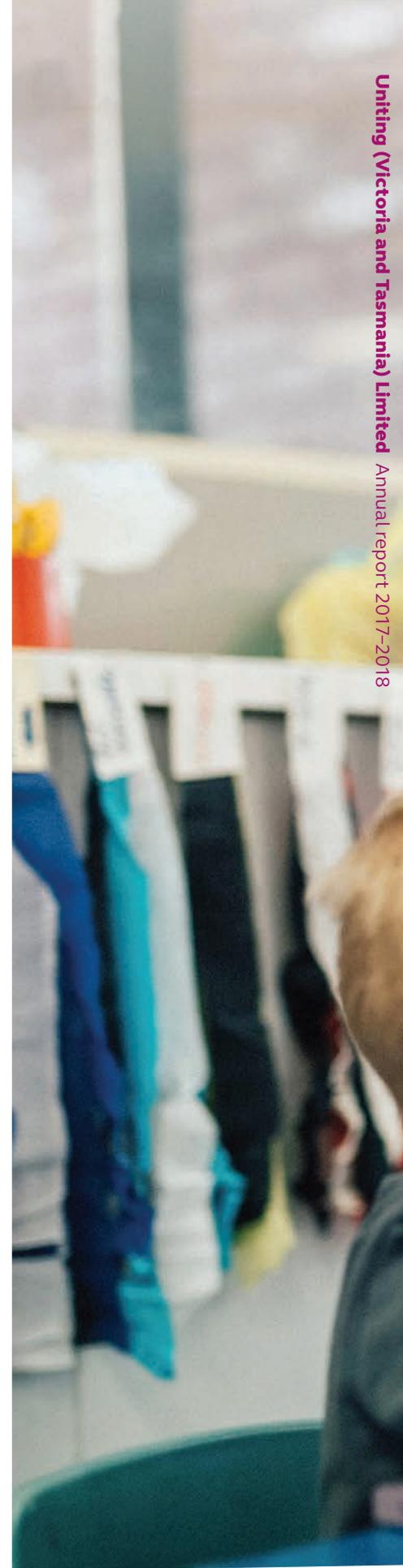
When we respect our history, unite toward achieving a common purpose and share common values, a collective spirit is born.

This gives us the foundation to dare to reach further than ever before and be informed by the voice of our consumers and communities to drive real, positive social change.

**Empowered by the contributions of our people, supporters, stakeholders and the communities we work alongside, we will continue to innovative our services and live our vision for the future.**

**Learn more**  
[vt.uniting.org](http://vt.uniting.org)

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Cover photo: Cooper, with early learning educator Angela at St Andrews Kindergarten.