



Media Release

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Open Family Australia and Whitelion announce merger

Today in Melbourne two like-minded non-profit organisations, Whitelion and Open Family Australia (OFA), are merging to enhance and widen their range of services for at risk young people across Australia.

Open Family Australia and Whitelion have a combined 40 years experience supporting vulnerable young people in the areas of homelessness, youth justice and out of home care.

The merged organisation will provide wraparound services that will take young people from homelessness – with acute health, safety and shelter needs – to a real job with real wages, a mentor and other positive opportunities to support them.

Whitelion co founder Mark Watt will lead the merged organisation while current OFA Chief Executive Officer, Dr Emma Cassar has accepted an exciting role as Victorian State Director at Mission Australia.

Dr Cassar was very pleased with the merge and said the most exciting aspect of the merge was the improved service it will provide for vulnerable young people.

“Whitelion and OFA offer complementary, but different programs for the same target group – in effect the merged organisation will provide an enhanced service, minimising the risk of young people becoming lost where one service ends and another one starts”.

Ready for the challenge, Mark ensured that all programs and responsibilities will remain unchanged at the time of the merger.

“Any changes to programs in the future will only occur after extensive consultation and only if it improves the service for our young people. The merge also creates greater opportunities for staff to learn and grow.”

Mark, who has steered Whitelion through its expansion from Victoria into South Australia, Tasmania and New South Wales, said he was looking forward to taking both organisations forward.

“Most importantly I am excited about delivering a more comprehensive service to the area of the community I am most passionate about – young people.”

The merger has also gained significant support from former VicHealth CEO and current Professor of Global Health and Melbourne University, Rob Moodie.

Mr Moodie said, “In an era of increasing fragmentation of services it is wonderful to see Whitelion and Open Family uniting. Through the merger these two highly respected and committed organisations can work much more effectively for kids who are struggling to make their way through life.”

Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Robert Doyle, added his support to the merge, describing it as a great step forward for the charities, its clients, staff and the areas in which they operate.

Mr Doyle said "I am pleased that two such highly regarded community organisations will come together to provide better service and outcomes for vulnerable young people. I am also pleased that all of the experienced and committed staff will continue with the new organisation."

Whitelion cofounder, AFL premiership player Glenn Manton said he was genuinely excited by the future that the merge presents.

"The core focus - being to best serve the most disadvantaged young people in the community regardless of their background – will not falter. 2012 will see positive growth in all that we do within the community".

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