Berry Street Yooralla's Bridges Program



Better outcomes for children and young people with disability in residential and home-based care

About the Bridges Program

The Bridges Program brings together specialist disability, health, and care expertise to improve life outcomes for children and young people with disability in residential and home-based care.

We know that:

- More than 40% of children in care have a disability (according to national data cited in Disability Royal Commission).
- Disability and trauma are deeply interwoven in the lives of many children in the child protection system.
- Children and young people wait up to 18 months for assessments, often leaving care without NDIS eligibility or supports. They may also face NDIS access barriers where there is no formal diagnosis or unclear guardianship.
- Carers and staff face increased pressure due to unmet needs and placement instability.

The Bridges Program addresses the intersection of disability and trauma head-on, providing timely, targeted, and specialist interventions – bridging the gap between residential and home-based care, disability services, health supports and the NDIS.

Bridges is available to providers working with vulnerable children and young people in Victoria, including in disability services, residential and home-based care and child protection.

What we offer

Bridges brings together a highly experienced, multidisciplinary team who work together around each child, to provide tailored NDIS support, positive behaviour strategies and other specialist therapies.

Supports and interventions are tailored to the individual and can be provided as a single service or as a bundle of integrated supports. We offer a flexible fee-for-service model across Victoria.

Specialist Support Coordination

- Expert guidance on navigating the NDIS, including eligibility, access, implementation, and reviews.
- Strategic coordination of services to ensure linkage with appropriate disability, therapeutic, and mainstream supports that align with needs and goals.
- Support in crisis planning and stabilisation, reducing the risk of placement breakdown and ensuring continuity of care.
- Capacity building for Child Protection practitioners to better understand and engage with the NDIS, disability systems, and support pathways.
- Advocacy to address service gaps.

Psychology and Positive Behaviour Support (PBS)

- Comprehensive assessments to identify cognitive, behavioural, sensory, and developmental needs.
- Functional behaviour assessments and Positive Behaviour Support plans to address behaviours of concern in trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate ways.
- Capacity building for Child Protection practitioners, families and carers through tailored advice, consultation, and training on disability, neurodiversity and behavioural supports.
- Improved case planning and placement stability by aligning support strategies with a child's specific needs, helping to reduce placement breakdown and restrictive practices.
- Enhanced collaboration with NDIS and allied health providers, ensuring access to appropriate supports.

Occupational Therapy

- Functional assessments to identify strengths, support needs, and daily living skills across home, school, and care settings.
- Sensory profiling and regulation strategies to better understand behaviours and reduce restrictive practices.
- Environmental and equipment recommendations to improve accessibility, safety, and participation.
- Support for skill development in areas such as emotional regulation, self-care, social interaction, and independence.



- Capacity building for carers and Child Protection staff through training and practical strategies.
- Improved engagement in care and education by ensuring communication barriers are identified and addressed.

Speech Therapy

- Communication assessments to identify speech, language, and social communication needs, including non-verbal and augmentative communication methods.
- Developing communication strategies and tools (e.g. visuals, AAC devices) to enhance ability to express needs, make choices, and participate meaningfully.
- Advice on feeding, swallowing, and mealtime safety, particularly for children and young people with complex medical or sensory needs.
- Capacity building for carers and caseworkers to better understand and respond to a child or young person's communication style, reducing frustration-driven behaviours.
- Improved engagement in care and education by ensuring communication barriers are identified and addressed.

Our experienced team

The Bridges Program is delivered by a highly skilled, multidisciplinary team with decades of combined experience in providing trauma-informed care and disability supports:

- Specialist Support Coordinators – experts in navigating the NDIS and supporting care teams.
- PBS Practitioners – skilled in trauma-informed, evidence-based practice.
- Disability Health Clinical Team – experienced in nursing, complex care coordination, and disability health.
- Allied Health (Speech Pathology and Occupational Therapy) – expertise in early intervention, developmental delays, mobility and fine motor skills and supporting complex disability needs.

Benefits and outcomes

The program has already supported dozens of children and young people in care, with:

- Faster access to NDIS plans and services.
- Increased placement stability.
- Reduced reliance on expensive contingency placements.
- Better preparation for transition from care to adulthood.
- Improved health, wellbeing and participation in education and community life.
- Reduced pressure on carers and frontline staff.

Bridges Program - a success story

Tim*, a 17-year-old with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Level 2), was preparing to exit out-of-home care. A coordinated effort between his Specialist Support Coordinator and PBS Practitioner supported transition planning and NDIS access.

The PBS Practitioner provided ongoing input through weekly care team meetings, focusing on motivational interviewing, supported decision-making, and strategies for managing sexualised behaviours of concern. Both practitioners attended the NDIS planning meeting to advocate for a tailored, comprehensive plan aligned with Tim's goals.

The resulting plan is expected to be funded at approximately $110,000, supporting a smooth transition to adulthood and independence.

Key supports advocated for and secured for Tim:

- **Improved Relationships:** Supports for emotional regulation and social engagement
- **School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES):** Pathway to employment
- **Plan Management:** Flexible and transparent financial oversight
- **Increased OT Hours:** Skill-building for independent living and home and living.

Why Bridges matters

- Early, coordinated intervention prevents crises.
- Specialist expertise ensures the right supports are accessed at the right time.
- Tailored services mean no child falls through the cracks.
- Reduces demand on contingency funding, improves staff retention, and delivers long-term savings for government.

Berry Street Yooralla's Bridges Program works to bridge the gap for children and young people with disability in care – giving them the stability, support, and opportunities they deserve.

Contact

For more information on how Bridges can support children and young people, please contact the Bridges team.

Email: bridges@yooralla.com.au

Phone: 03 9666 4500

* Name has been changed to protect privacy.