**KORUS CONNECT: PARTNERING FOR COMMUNITY**

**Introduction**

Korus Connect (the trading name of the Council for Christian Education in Schools) is a Christian not-for-profit organisation that partners with like-minded organisations including churches, to deliver initiatives that foster connection and collaboration, with the conviction that unity and collaboration bring holistic, real and lasting transformation in local communities.

Like many organisations, including The Victorian Council of Churches, the challenge for Korus Connect during 2021 was to find creative ways to reconnect, rebuild and restore communities as they continued to see-saw in and out of lockdowns. We have been reminded that people matter more than things; that relationships need to be prioritised over possessions, experiences or programs. Relationship building and activities continued in person and online as necessary across chaplaincy, Special Religious Instruction (SRI) and through our community connector initiative. We also started exploring how we might serve churches better through training and equipping.

During 2021, our more than 450 paid and volunteer workers continued their commitment to serve individuals and local communities, helping to connect people with their purpose and full potential and to build communities that are connected, supported and whole.

**Special Religious Instruction (SRI)**

SRI was predominately offered online, using the existing materials repurposed for online use, along with some of the videos created in the previous year by SRI instructors. We are thankful to God that some in-person SRI sessions were able to be offered early in the year as well as in the latter part of Term 4. This varied from school to school across the 13 schools registered for SRI.

**Chaplaincy**

During 2021, online and face-to-face support to parents and families was an important aspect of the chaplains’ work as well as morale boosting for school communities. Chaplains provided pastoral care to many students and staff, as well as facilitated groups around friendships, grief and loss, community development, role modelling, mentoring and spiritual support to more than 16,000 students. Each week, nearly 5000 conversations were held with students. Formal conversations primarily focused on mental health and friendship / peer issues. As two chaplains commented,

*Many students… have shared that they are more inclined to have angry outbursts and that they are fearful of the strength of their emotions and how readily they get out of control.*

*Good connection has been made with two students who are usually [reluctant] to talk. Using different strategies with each, these students have opened up and talked about significant family issues which they are struggling with.*

Such students are part of the 60% of students who enjoy ongoing pastoral support from their chaplain; chaplaincy is relational and committed to the overall wellbeing of the individuals served.

**Community Connectors**

During 2021, our community connector initiative was offered in five Local Government Areas (LGAs): in an aged care centre, in two shopping centre precincts, in a local community service area and at Melbourne Airport. In each location, the role provided pastoral care, connection to local services and the building of relationships, reducing loneliness and social disconnection.

**Summary**

Thank you for your commitment and interest in the work of Korus Connect. We very much appreciate your support, your ongoing prayers for more workers and your interest in this wider Christian work.

Dawn Penney
**Chief Executive Officer**