

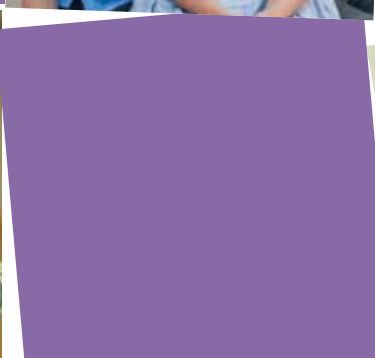
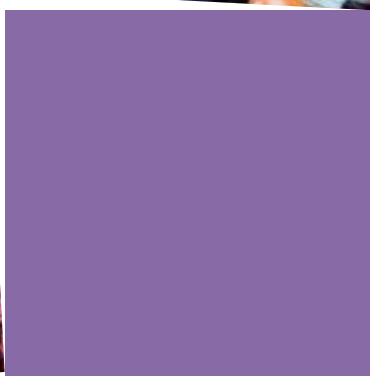
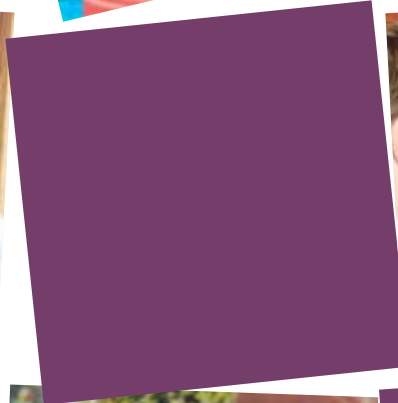
Partnership Agreement

Between the Department of Education and
Early Childhood Development and
the Victorian Community Sector

2010–2014



*Every
child,
every
opportunity*



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Preamble

The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Department) and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), on behalf of the Victorian community sector, commit to a Partnership Agreement (Agreement) that reflects a shared commitment to working together to ensure every young Victorian thrives, learns and grows to enjoy a productive, rewarding and fulfilling life.

The Department recognises that the community sector helps to improve the lives of many children, young people and their families through direct service delivery, social support and advocacy on behalf of the vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians they work with. The Department respects the practice, diversity, knowledge and autonomy of the community sector and acknowledges its right to advocate on behalf of those they work with.

The Victorian community sector acknowledges the role and responsibility of the Department in delivering, facilitating and funding high quality universal education and early childhood services within legislative parameters and Government policy.

This Agreement acknowledges the important work of both partners, and constitutes a commitment by them to put children and young people first, respect the other's mandate, increase collaboration and communication, and to achieve the best possible outcomes for children, young people and their families in Victoria.

Vision

The Department and the Victorian community sector will work together to improve the learning, development, health and wellbeing outcomes of all Victorian children and young people, particularly those who are vulnerable or experiencing disadvantage.

Signed on the 15th day of June 2010, by:



Prof. Peter Dawkins

Secretary,
on behalf of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development



Cath Smith

Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Council of Social Service
on behalf of the Victorian community sector

Policy Context

The creation of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in late 2007 increased the focus of the Victorian Government on the learning, development, health and wellbeing needs of all young Victorians from birth-to-adulthood. This led to a new, ambitious reform agenda to bring together early childhood and education services, improve outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people, give children the best start, ease the transition to school and deliver world-class school education.

This agenda is outlined in the *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development* (2008).

In addition, Victoria has committed to a number of the Council of Australian Governments' National Partnerships on improving educational outcomes in low socioeconomic status school communities, youth transitions and participation, teacher quality, literacy and numeracy outcomes, early childhood service quality, increasing the provision of early childhood programs in the year before school and improving outcomes for Indigenous children in their early years.

The community sector is active across all areas of health and social wellbeing, and plays a significant role in the lives of many young Victorians and their families in the communities in which they live, and in many of the services and supports they access. It is a major provider of early years services, an involved and informed advocate in improving the life chances of disadvantaged and vulnerable Victorians, and a key partner in the development of good policy and research.

The Department recognises that this agenda can only be delivered successfully in partnership with the community sector. Governments in other jurisdictions have reached similar conclusions, and recognise the importance of forging stronger relationships with the community sector. On 17 March 2010, the Commonwealth Government released the *National Compact: Working Together*, aimed at building a new and stronger relationship with the 'Third Sector'.

A number of existing Victorian Government policies and frameworks set the broader context for a closer relationship between the Department and the community sector. These include:

- *Growing Victoria Together: A Vision for Victoria to 2010 and Beyond* (2005), a reform document that outlines a wide-ranging Victorian Government vision for quality health and education, a healthy environment, caring communities and vibrant democracy
- *A Fairer Victoria: Real Support – Real Gains* (2010), the Government's primary framework for addressing disadvantage and improving the lives and wellbeing of all Victorians
- *The Victorian Government's Action Plan: Strengthening Community Organisations* (2008), a strategy for strengthening and supporting community organisations to innovate, grow and build capacity
- *The Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*, which outlines a vision where every young Victorian thrives, learns and grows to enjoy a productive, rewarding and fulfilling life. Key Blueprint goals include improved partnerships and better outcomes for disadvantaged young people
- *Growing, Learning and Thriving: Building on Victoria's Achievements in Early Childhood Development* (2009), which outlines the Victorian Government's vision to achieve increased access to high-quality early childhood health, education and care for all Victorian children, and to improve outcomes for disadvantaged young Victorians.

This Agreement will guide relationships, agreements and activities undertaken between the Department and the community sector.

Development of the Agreement

Discussion about a stronger model of engagement between the Department and the community sector commenced in 2009, when the Secretary of the Department opened discussions with VCOSS on how the Department could work better with the community sector to achieve improved learning and development outcomes for children and young people.

The Department commissioned VCOSS in early 2010 to consult with the community sector about the key elements the sector feels should be in this Agreement. VCOSS conducted five formal consultations and more widely sought the views of as many community sector organisations as possible. The information from these consultations has informed this Agreement.

The partners

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

The Department brings together a range of services for children and young people from birth-to-adulthood. It is responsible for providing policy advice to its Ministers, implementing Victorian Government policy on school education and early childhood services, and driving continuous improvement in the delivery of primary and secondary education in Victorian government schools. The Department works within the parameters of legislation, regulation and Government policy.

The Department recognises that support for vulnerable children and families falls across a number of government departments, and is committed to whole-of-government approaches to respond to these needs. The Department also recognises the necessity of the community sector in the delivery of its mandate and in pursuit of the early childhood and education reform agenda.

The Department is a learning organisation. In its relationships with colleagues, children and young people, parents and families, partners and local and global communities, its staff commit to the following values:

- Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing – we proactively share expertise and information, and willingly works with others
- Outcomes – we always strive to do things better and to deliver quality outcomes
- Respect and Diversity – we respect others and value diversity
- Empowerment – we enable individuals to reach their potential and maximise their contribution.

The Victorian community sector

The Victorian community sector provides a diverse range of services and supports to both promote the health, development and wellbeing of children, young people and their families, and to support improved community health and wellbeing. The majority of community sector organisations are independent bodies that are accountable, in accordance with their constitutions, to their constituencies, to the wider community, to donors and funding bodies and to their peers/other sector organisations.

Community sector organisations work within the requirements of legislation, regulation, program parameters and professional standards. They also contribute substantial funds through non-government sources for both services to children, young people and their families and to support healthy communities.

In Victoria, community sector organisations comprise an extremely diverse group – ranging from the very large with budgets of several hundred million dollars, employing hundreds of staff and having many different interfaces with Government departments – including DEECD, to very small organisations that employ only one staff member and are largely run by volunteers.

Shared principles

This Agreement is based upon a model of engagement emphasising cooperation and commitment to the following principles:

- a **shared vision** to achieve the best possible outcomes for all children and young people, particularly the vulnerable or disadvantaged
- **mutual respect** for each partner’s autonomy and responsibilities, while recognising that true partnership may require change, innovation and risk
- **collaboration** and the fostering of opportunities to work together on issues of mutual benefit or concern
- **communication, consultation** and **engagement** on decisions by one partner that will impact upon the other
- **transparency** of financial relations between the Department, VCOSS and the sector, subject to relevant legislation and policies
- a **relationship** that celebrates success, addresses challenges and acknowledges contributions to outcomes that are achieved
- **joint leadership** of the partnership, including joint agenda setting.

Intent of the partners

The Department intends to:

- recognise the importance of working with the community sector to achieve positive outcomes for Victorian children, young people and their families
- build strong relationships with the community sector at a central, regional and local level in a consistent and positive manner
- ensure cooperative and meaningful consultation around issues or opportunities of mutual concern
- ensure that specific contracts, arrangements, policies and plans entered into or carried out by the partners are consistent with the Agreement
- explore joint work and resource sharing in areas of mutual interest, where possible, with a view to improving outcomes for children and young people
- display open and informed decision-making and evidence-based policy decisions, where possible
- collaborate on forums and events around key issues and themes as opportunity presents.

The community sector intends to:

- recognise the importance of working with the Department to achieve positive outcomes for Victorian children, young people and their families
- build strong partnerships with the Department at a central, regional and local level
- ensure cooperative and meaningful consultation around issues or opportunities of mutual concern
- ensure that specific contracts, arrangements, policies and plans entered into or carried out by the partners are consistent with the Agreement
- explore joint work and resource sharing in areas of mutual interest, with a view to improving outcomes for children, young people and their families
- seek to understand and respect the roles and responsibilities of government, and communicate openly and constructively with the Department
- participate in decision-making processes and support evidence-based policy decisions, where possible
- commit to working constructively and collaboratively with the Department in policy development and program planning, review, research, innovation and evaluation.

Action Plans

The partners commit to the joint development of an Action Plan in each financial year of the Agreement to outline joint work for the Department and VCOSS to undertake. The partners commit to implementing, resourcing and evaluating these Action Plans to the fullest extent possible, given resourcing and other considerations.

Relationship of this Agreement to other documents

This Agreement is not intended to supersede or alter any existing contractual or other Agreements between the Department, VCOSS, VCOSS members, or any other community sector organisation.

Managing difference

The partners agree that they have legitimate differences in governance, roles and responsibilities.

Though the partners intend to give effect to this Agreement, they acknowledge that it does not create, and must not be construed as creating, a legally binding and enforceable contract.

The partners agree that in the event of a partner stating that one or more undertakings in the Agreement are not being fulfilled, the partners will endeavour to ensure that the undertaking is satisfied or that an alternative solution is agreed.

Evaluation and review

The partners agree to monitor the implementation of the Agreement and evaluate its effectiveness after the first year of operation, and following that, as considered jointly necessary.

Term of the Agreement

The Agreement will have a four-year term, commencing from the date of signing.

