

# VCOSS



**Annual Report 2008/09**

# VCOSS

## Who are we

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) is the peak organisation of the non-government social and community services sector. VCOSS raises awareness of the existence, causes and effects of poverty and inequality, and contributes to initiatives seeking to create a more just society.

VCOSS provides a strong, non-party political voice for the community sector and consults regularly with more than 600 members, in order to effectively represent issues relating to disadvantage to government and the wider community. We do this by developing and critiquing government and related policies, speaking out through diverse networks, carrying out research and promoting these views through publications and the media.

## Mission

As the peak body of the social and community services sector in Victoria we pursue just and fair social outcomes through policy development and collaborative advocacy.

## Vision

VCOSS envisages a society where social well being is a national priority and:

- Everyone has access to and a fair share of the community's resources and services
- All people are involved as equals, without discrimination
- People participate in decision making about their own lives and their community
- The land we live in is respected and we recognise the Indigenous custodians of the country
- Injustices have been reconciled between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

## Values

The values that guide VCOSS in all the work we do are:

- Energy and vision
- Integrity and result
- Collaboration, inclusiveness and team work
- Continuous improvement and sustainability
- Open constructive communication

# Strategic Objectives

## 2008 – 2010

VCOSS Strategic Plan 2008-2010 provides the over arching framework for all year-to-year organisational and campaign planning. The plan has been developed by the VCOSS Board in conjunction with staff, VCOSS members and a range of external stake holders. The plan includes five key strategic objectives:

- 1** Advocate for equity, social justice, fair access to resources and participation for all.
- 2** Build a strong sector that can lead social change.
- 3** Create a strong public presence for the changes required.
- 4** Sustain just, equitable and efficient outcomes through collaboration.
- 5** Sustain an effective, ethical, healthy organisation.

# President's Report



The work of VCOSS is directed by our strategic plan with priorities set annually at a Board and staff retreat. The year 2008/09 has presented a particular set of challenges for the community sector which could not have been envisaged in June 2008.

Firstly we saw the immediate prospect of global recession following the collapse of the Wall Street investment bank Lehman Brothers. The impact on charitable and investment income on which our members depend has been significant. At the same time as a result of the Federal Government's stimulus packages in October 08 and February 09 there have been important initiatives which have improved the lives of vulnerable Australians and provided opportunities for strengthening the capacities of the community sector.

In February 2009, bushfires burned large parts of Victoria taking lives, removing essential community infrastructure and revealing both deficits and great capabilities within our social support system. Again, hugely challenging for all community service agencies but particularly for our members who were engaged in emergency relief and the bushfire case management service.

Learnings from the bushfire recovery prove the relevance and capacity of community and voluntary organisations at times of emergency. There is a clear need for all statutory planning and recovery efforts to include, consult and work closely with community sector organisations during all stages of an emergency situation. Where pre-existing partnerships were strong between all levels of government and the community and voluntary sector, communities as a whole have been better placed to deal with such a major emergency.

VCOSS has been proud to support and learn from members active in supporting the bushfire recovery effort as well as glean a sense of what the economic downturn means for disadvantaged Victorians - and the organisations they seek assistance from.

Finally an active reformist Federal Government with numerous policy settings impacting across a wide array of portfolios has presented VCOSS and its members with particular challenges in how to ensure ongoing engagement and advocacy on behalf of vulnerable Victorians.

In this context, the goals of the VCOSS Board have been to maintain a focus on ensuring the organisation is well placed to address our strategic priorities but sufficiently flexible to respond to fast moving changes in the sector. The 2008 Strategic Workshop used an appreciative inquiry approach to develop ten priority actions for 2009. These were to pursue:

- Whole of government and whole of sector mechanisms to achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable Victorians
- Equity of access outcomes for vulnerable Victorians, particularly to universal services
- Secure resources for community service sector development and training
- Whole of sector approach to sector sustainability
- Support sector leadership and futures focus
- Effective public affairs and media strategy
- Improved member engagement
- Resourcing alliances and networks to deliver outcomes
- Consolidation and improvement of internal processes and systems
- Strengthening core funding and other revenue streams

These actions are reported on in relevant sections elsewhere in this report.

The financial challenges of ensuring resources to undertake the broad range of VCOSS work are great. The core contribution made by the

is great. The core contribution made by the Victorian Government to our work is critical to our ongoing policy and advocacy engagement. At the same time project work funding enables specific responses to emerging priority areas. In 2008/09 we were able to balance these requirements and build IT and internal support while returning a small deficit in a difficult financial environment.

Members are critical to a robust VCOSS. In 2008-09 we saw a slight decline in membership after the Card Shop was wound down and the economic conditions began impacting on the budgets of community service organisations. In addition our social policy journal Just Policy which has flagged critical social justice issues in Victoria for over ten years has been discontinued to be replaced by a new publication. In response to these issues in relation to membership, the Board pegged fee increases to the CPI of 2.5% and established a membership sub-committee which has been undertaking a review of our membership and priorities for membership support. Two other established committees underpin the work of the Board: the Finance sub-committee which has continued to develop the financial reporting and risk framework; and the Strategic Policy sub-committee which integrates high level policy movements into our strategic directions.

At the national level VCOSS has contributed to a joint strategy with ACOSS and the COSS network around Council of Australian Government initiatives and the proposed National Compact with the not for profit sector. These cooperative initiatives mean that a whole of Australia response can be made with the combined resources of the network.

Our Board has witnessed changes in 2008/09. In November 2008 David Pugh stepped down as VCOSS President after three years which were significant for consolidation of VCOSS' financial reporting and governance processes. We thank him for his enormous contribution to the leadership of the Board, support of Cath Smith and the management team. We also thank Merilee Cox who stepped down in November 2008 for her contribution to the Board over a period of two years. At the same time Deb Tsorbaris, Micaela Cronin and Paul Linossier were elected to the Board for three years and Melissa Afentoulis for two years. To all new Board members and those remaining, including our co-opted experts, Tony Lang, Eric Passaris and Dale Renner, I thank you for your effective and constant attention to the wellbeing of VCOSS and the role it plays in the community.

To Cath Smith, CEO, the management team and all staff at VCOSS, thank you for your great contribution to the policy, advocacy and sector support and leadership you have provided during 2008/09. To Cath particularly who has forged high quality collaboration and engagement across multiple sectors on extremely complex issues- your work means that disadvantaged community members have a voice and the community sector has a source of strength and leadership which is highly valued.

Marilyn Webster

President

# Chief Executive Officer's Report



## **“Oh, is that what you're doing? I'd better renew our membership then!”**

The past year has been very productive for VCOSS. Internally we have consolidated many of our systems and policies and externally, we have had positive feedback from members regarding our relevance and policy and sector development priorities.

The VCOSS training and development clearinghouse has helped broker more than \$1m worth of free training, services and in-kind help to 1500 organisations across the state. At the end of June 2009, the future funding of the clearinghouse from the Victorian Government was looking uncertain, however we are hopeful that a successful case will be made for on-going funding. The Doing IT Better project, the OHS training project and the Disability Advocacy Resource Unit are all delivering as well - or better than expected.

The cross-sector policy campaigns supported by VCOSS in the lead-up to the state budget helped achieve some important outcomes. These included the increase of water concessions to keep pace with significant price increases, expansion of transport services, new kindergarten places and early childhood intervention reform, as well as resources to 'close the gap' in Indigenous life outcomes and the negotiation of a 3.14% NGO price index for service providers from the Departments of Human Service (DHS) and Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD).

VCOSS warmly welcomed additional government funding into out of home care services for children and young people, and funding of the *Mental Health Matters* strategy to support Victorians struggling with mental illness in a system that does not currently meet their needs.

VCOSS expressed some disappointment with

the state budget relating to the lack of resources critically needed in supported accommodation for people with disabilities, generalist services for young people and early intervention family support services.

While VCOSS welcomed the creation of the Victorian Government's Office of the Community Sector in July 2008, we will also continue to strongly advocate and support effort outside government, between business and philanthropic partnerships, to build the capacity and voice of our vital non-government sector. During the year, we continued to advocate for sector supports that are strategic and sustainable – such as a portable long service scheme for community service workers that meets the needs of both workers and employers.

## **“A community lens – to filter and focus movement and effort”**

Internally, we have finalised a new Collective Agreement with VCOSS staff, and consolidated organisational growth through completing internal policies on a wide variety of issues. We now employ 26 staff, totaling about 19FTEs. Our great strength is the strength of our people – board members, active members and of course, our staff. VCOSS is committed to being an 'employer of choice' in a very tight employment market for skilled, experienced staff, and has worked to improve conditions to be fair, flexible and try to be well placed to recruit and retain staff that can help the sector lead social change and generate positive social impact. As a staff, and with the assistance of Board member Dale Renner from Growth Solutions Group, we have worked to unify our many projects and activities under the metaphor of a 'community lens' that helps filter and focus movement and effort into positive impacts.

Some restructuring of our team was undertaken later during the year, splitting our organisational services to create a communications and membership team, and this will be further developed in the new year.

New eras were enacted in other ways, with three staff taking maternity leave during the year – Kate Colvin, Priscilla Blake and Nicole Wiseman. We bid farewell to some staff who continue their journey in other pastures - Carolyn Wallace, Richard Duffy, Tanya Nikolovski, Stephanie Cauchi, David Imber, Rivkah Nissim, Jess Brown, and our interns Mona Matuschek and Ruchi Saraf. During 2008-09, we welcomed into VCOSS, Sharon Stevens, Claire Bauska, Loren Polzet, Louise Collett, Pauline Snell and intern Stephanie Chen.

The publication of edition 50 of Just Policy in April marked the end of an era, and we are now working on a replacement publication that will bridge the requirements of academic publishing, sector news and lively commentary in a contemporary way. Long term strategy work on the future of the community sector, responses to climate change, and focus on rural and regional development needs also continued during the year, a tribute to the determination of those involved at a time when many short term pressures compounded their responsibilities.

VCOSS greatly appreciates the efforts of all our staff – from our frontline office staff through to the senior managers. Our staff go out of their way to help build a team and organisation, and ultimately a wider sector, that can lead social change and generate a positive social impact in our changing world. The energy and dedication of our staff is inspiring.

I would like to thank all members of the VCOSS Board for their committed attention and strategic questioning to develop our future approach. The pressure on community leaders has been extreme in the past year but Board members have continued to make time to assist the sector as a whole, and in some way represent the interests and aspirations of the sector through their sense of cohesion and solidarity. In particular I would like to thank our President, Dave Pugh who stepped down as President after last year's AGM after several years of successful and inspiring leadership. Our new President Marilyn Webster has picked up the baton. With many years experience in the sector and on the VCOSS Board she is exceptionally well placed to continue to lead the strategic directions identified for attention.

And finally, I would like to thank all of you who share our endeavour. All of you who sit on our task groups, working groups and reference groups, or who collaborate with VCOSS from within government, business, or other parts of the non-government and philanthropic sector. Active members and partners of VCOSS offer ideas, knowledge, data, wisdom, energy, time, good humour at times of pressure, networks, research and pro bono resources, and access to the individual people and families whose stories of struggle can positively impact in the media and with politicians at key moments. There have been many times in the past year where staff felt 'this is all too hard' but it is always members, and active partners within other sectors, who remind us that what we are doing is worthwhile and is achieving change.

With my great appreciation for your support.

Cath Smith, CEO

# VCOSS Board and Staff

## List of Board Members for Annual Report 2008-09

Marilyn Webster  
*President from 28/11/08*

David Pugh  
*President from 28/10/05-  
28/11/08*  
*Vice President*

Micaela Cronin  
*Vice President*

Eric Passaris  
*Treasurer, Chair of Finance  
Committee*

Barry Pullen  
*Chair of the Strategic Policy  
Sub Committee*

Dale Renner  
*Chair of the Membership  
Sub Committee*

Melissa Afentoulis

David Brant

Georgie Ferrari

Anthony Lang

Deb Tsorbaris

Paul Linossier  
*Appointed 18/11/08*

Merilee Cox  
*Resigned 18/11/08*

## VCOSS Staff

At 30 June 2009

Cath Smith  
*Chief Executive Officer*

Carolyn Atkins  
*Deputy Director*

Claire Bauska  
*Executive Support Officer*

## COMMUNICATIONS

Pauline Snell  
*Membership and  
Communications Manager*

Louise Collett  
*Marketing and Communications  
Officer*

Anna Tito  
*Publications and Web Officer*

## ORGANISATIONAL SERVICES

Mary Latham  
*Business and Development  
Director*

Sharon Brown  
*Finance Officer*

Sharon Stevens  
*Reception*

Claire Steinke  
*Human Resources Officer*

Jennifer Heaney  
*Resource Officer*

## SOCIAL POLICY

Kate Colvin  
*Policy Manager*

Michelle Lane  
*Administration Assistant*

Lauren Matthews  
*Policy Analyst*

Jess Fritze  
*Policy Analyst*

Paula Grogan  
*Community Sector  
Development Policy Coordinator*

Sarah Toohey  
*Energy Policy Officer*

Loren Polzot  
*Transport & Disadvantage Policy  
Officer*

## SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

Marina Henley  
*Sector Development Manager*

Erin Wicking  
*Administration Assistant*

Kate Johnson  
*Clearinghouse Coordinator*

Sharon Granek  
*DARU Coordinator*

Melissa Yong  
*DARU Project/Administration*

Laura Mondon  
*OHS Projects Coordinator*

Nicole Wiseman  
*Project Coordinator - Workforce*

Dean Lombard  
*ICT Projects Coordinator*

# 1. Advocate for equity, social justice, fair access to resources and participation for all

## Children and families, young people and education

At the core of our work around children, young people and families, education and early childhood development is our continued advocacy for the ongoing development and investment in an integrated service system for children, young people and families, along the continuum of service provision from universal services, early intervention secondary through tertiary services.

During the year we built on our work around the development of partnerships between mainstream and Indigenous community-controlled organisations, including advocating for investment in culturally competent organisations.

Investment in early intervention and generalist services for families and young people continued to be a central focus of advocacy and member collaboration.

We continued to focus on improving the health, wellbeing and learning outcomes for children and young people, particularly those who are experiencing disadvantage.

In October we welcomed the development of the *Vulnerable Youth Framework* by the Victorian Government, recognising the opportunity to develop and invest in a youth service system that all young Victorians can access.

As well as participating in the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) Roundtable for Vulnerable Youth Framework, in the VCOSS submission to the *Vulnerable Youth Framework* consultation, VCOSS called on the Victorian Government to invest in the development of a continuum of integrated youth services to support and promote young people's wellbeing. The VCOSS stance was that it is vital that the Vulnerable Youth Framework moves beyond the rhetoric and invests in services that can support young people when and where they need it.

We remained focussed on the need for investment in education and early childhood development and the past year has seen investment and policy commitment through Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the Victorian Government in these areas, along with significant additional resources and reform to improve outcomes for children and young people in Out of Home Care.

The collapse of ABC Learning Centres in late 2008, highlighted what many people in the community sector had already known, that the neo-liberal policy vision of leaving the provision of child care to the market was never going to ensure the provision of high quality services to children and families. VCOSS was concerned about the impact of the collapse of ABC child care on the community sector, particularly for existing community based early childhood services, along with other child and family services. We also felt that the collapse of ABC Learning Centres presented significant opportunities for the broader community sector to step into the delivery of early childhood education and care. VCOSS, in conjunction with Community Child Care, hosted a forum for our members to explore the potential role that a diverse range of community sector organisations can play in working collaboratively to take over the operations of existing child care centres.

## Climate Change

In 2008 VCOSS successfully secured twelve months funding from the Department of Sustainability and Environment for a climate change policy position to build knowledge within VCOSS and the community sector and to facilitate greater community sector involvement in the development of Victoria's response to climate change. In February 2009 VCOSS hosted the *Communities in a changing climate* forum with the University of Melbourne's McCaughey Centre which brought together community sector, local and state government representatives to discuss emerging social equity issues associated with climate change.

VCOSS called for stronger action from Governments to protect low income and disadvantaged Victorians from dangerous climate change.

The impacts of climate change will be greatest on those in our community who are already vulnerable and have the least ability to adapt including rural and remote communities, people living on low incomes and those experiencing social exclusion. With many communities already feeling the early effects we need strong action to stop further impacts.

While VCOSS welcomed the *Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme*, we were deeply disappointed by the low targets which we believed were insufficient to protect the most vulnerable Victorians. While the cash compensation to households would help them in the short term, the significant and overly generous compensation to many major emitters did not appear designed to transition to a lower emissions future and also reduced the amount of money available to the Government for important programs such as energy efficiency.

In light of these low targets, VCOSS called on the Victorian Government to undertake significant measures to ensure that low income and disadvantaged people were not more negatively impacted by dangerous climate change. VCOSS was particularly keen to see the Government regulate for energy efficiency standards in all dwellings, commence a program of upgrades of Government buildings - including public housing - and invest in the people and communities most affected by the transition to a lower carbon economy.

Investing in jobs creation during tough economic times is critical. This investment needs to be targeted towards sustainable green jobs, green industries and energy efficiency – especially in

areas with high levels of unemployment.

VCOSS also worked to provide timely responses to new and unforeseen challenges including the economic downturn and the Victorian bushfires. Through the climate change policy role, VCOSS was also able to coordinate a response to the February 2009 bushfires working with our members to ensure that issues for community sector organisations were communicated to key decision makers. This included hosting the *Community Sector Bushfire Roundtable* in March 2009, completing a submission to the 2009 *Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission* and VCOSS input to a range of government advisory committees.

## Disability

A key focus of the year was to research and advocate on non-Department of Human Services (DHS) disability issues, such as access to transport and access to the built environment. Also see DARU and sector sustainability work in Section 2

## Emergency Relief

VCOSS continued to support the research and advocacy efforts of Emergency Relief Victoria. See Section 4.

## Housing

The past financial year was again one where low income Victorians struggled to afford rising rents and homelessness appeared to be on the rise. VCOSS advocated strongly for an integrated housing framework in Victoria and focused its work on a range of housing issues, from the development of universal housing to better protections for rooming house residents. VCOSS intervened in many debates including expressing concern about the poor targeting of the *First Home Owners Grant* and the lack of action to ensure lower income renters are not pushed beyond the fringes of Melbourne. In a collaboration with the Australian Conservation Foundation we produced and promoted a booklet on the importance of sustainable housing that enables affordable living, beyond the cost of rent or mortgages alone. With the need for low cost housing increasing, the economic crisis brought the surprising benefit of significant Commonwealth money for stimulus building of much needed public and community housing and VCOSS has been working with the Victorian Government to ensure this housing is well located and of high quality.

In July VCOSS launched the *Victorian Universal Housing Alliance* (VUHA) with a plan that ensures that 25% of Victoria's housing is universally accessible and reduces tens of millions of dollars a year in unnecessary health spending at the same time. VCOSS was joined by a diverse and influential group of over 30 organisations - all committed to campaigning for regulated measures by the Victorian Government.

Universal housing is housing designed to be used by all people to the greatest extent possible. Homes designed to a universal standard are liveable for the majority of the population and accommodate whatever comes along in life easily and inexpensively. Design features typically include low and no cost features such as slightly wider hallways, open plan kitchens and living areas and level entry to houses.

Universal Housing makes sense at a time when our population is ageing so the design features benefit everyone. VCOSS research also indicates that the Victorian Government could save more than \$70 million each year solely on the basis of savings in home care, residential aged care and hospital costs based on the ageing population. International experience shows that only regulated standards, not just education measures, ensure that these benefits flow to all.

## Human Rights

VCOSS continued to support the development of a human rights culture within the community sector as part of our work to implement the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities*. This included a significant report, *Using the Charter in policy and practice*, that documented the changes that had been made by community sector organisations to incorporate the Charter - and human rights principles more broadly - into organisational policies, procedures and/or service delivery.

In 2008 VCOSS co-presented a series of disability rights workshops with the Disability Advocacy Resource Unit (DARU), the Disability Discrimination Legal Service, Action for Community Living and the Disability Resource Centre.

In December VCOSS welcomed the Federal Government's decision to consult with the people of Australia about how human rights should be protected, stating that human rights protections are important for everyone, but especially important for people who are vulnerable through disadvantage or discrimination. VCOSS urged the Federal Government to draw on the Victorian experience to ensure the consultation is inclusive, and we encouraged the Government to pay particular attention to the voices of the many people who have experienced breaches of their human rights.

## Indigenous Victorians

VCOSS continued to build on and strengthen work around the development of partnerships between mainstream CSOs and Indigenous community-controlled organisations, including supporting the development of a cultural competency framework to be applied to all government-funded services.

VCOSS continued to support the *Positioning Aboriginal Services for the Future* work being led by the Department of Human Services, which has identified six key areas for action and has established working groups to progress the achievement of the strategic priorities for each action area.

## Transport

VCOSS launched the *Community Transport Snapshot Report* at the 2008 AGM calling for government to plan provision of community transport services, instead of the current ad hoc approach. A positive outcome was the creation of the social transit unit in the Department of Transport. VCOSS also advocated strongly for the *Victorian Transport Plan* to include major new public transport infrastructure and not further entrench car dependency. The Government's commitment to a new metropolitan underground rail line, regional rail link and expansion of bus services was a major policy win. VCOSS continued to advocate for improved public transport, particularly in regional, remote and outer suburban areas of the state.

The *Accessible Public Transport Watch Project*, a partnership with disability advocacy organisations, actively monitored the Government's compliance with the *Disability Standards for Access to Public Transport* (DSAPT). VCOSS campaigned for an expansion of platform stops to improve access to trams and as such welcomed the increased platform stop numbers in 2008-09.

Our work with the Transport Ticketing Authority on the accessibility problems with the new MYKI ticketing system resulted in the development of the *Access Travel Pass* which will mean that people who are not able to use the ticketing system will be able to travel for free.

## Utilities

VCOSS continued to highlight the right of all Victorians to access electricity, gas and water at prices they could afford. The impacts of climate change and drought had a significant impact on utility prices and they continue to rise. With the Victorian Government no longer having retail price regulation, our advocacy has focused on ensuring the new national regulatory system takes account of the needs of low income and disadvantaged Victorians. We remained active in addressing concerns to the Victorian Government and relevant Government departments while participating in collaborative forums and advocacy with consumer focused bodies across the country. VCOSS advocacy wins included a 14.2% increase in the water concession in the 2009 State Budget.

VCOSS welcomed the Victorian Government's education campaign on choosing an energy retailer, but we were disappointed that the campaign failed to say exactly why choosing the right deal is so important.

While consumers can never have enough good information about energy plans, information isn't nearly as powerful nor as protective for consumers as price regulation.

As well as requiring retailers to publish at least one market offer on the Essential Services Commission website, the Government's legislation allowed retailers to set their own price for the standing offer – removing Government oversight. Energy companies will no longer have to submit their standing offer prices to Government for scrutiny.

VCOSS was concerned that a significant proportion of vulnerable consumers - including those without access to the internet, with few English language skills or low levels of literacy - would not be able to truly access choice. Vulnerable consumers would be left to search through complex energy contracts or rely on door to door salespeople to access gas and electricity.

# State Budget Submission

The budget had good news in a number of important policy areas. Bolstered by additional revenue from the Federal Government, including joint federal and state programs, the Victorian Government directed well targeted investments to transport, education, early childhood development, out of home care and housing.

VCOSS welcomed state funding for additional services in mental health and out-of-home care; new kindergartens places; early childhood intervention services reform; and resources to close the gap in Indigenous outcomes.

A big budget positive was the 14.2% increase in the water concession cap to ameliorate price increases for low income households. VCOSS will continue to work towards adequate cap increases to match further price rises in subsequent years.

Also welcome is increased price indexation for community sector services to 3.14% for three years plus continuation of \$2 million pa capacity building payments. Indexation will enable the value of current funding to keep pace with costs. However, services continue to subsidise their programs and face demand that exceeds funded service levels.

Given that this year had a tighter budget outlook, VCOSS was pleased critical resources were not squandered on tax cuts.

Expectations not met in the budget included resources critically needed in supported accommodation for people with disabilities, generalist services for young people and early intervention family support services.

# 2. Build a strong sector that can lead social change

## Sector sustainability

VCOSS recognises that social inclusion and social equity can be enhanced through building a vibrant, diverse and sustainable community sector. Our priorities are to support and coordinate sector development and training against needs expressed by community organisations. We also aim to support the sector to explore and plan its future directions, role and sustainability.

Sustainable funding is key for the future viability of the community sector. VCOSS hosted a *Victorian Community Sector Advocacy Day* at Parliament House on 11 March 2009 as part of the campaign for a sustainable level of price indexation. The day provided an opportunity for community sector delegates to meet with Members of Parliament (MPs) to highlight the valuable work of the community sector and the funding pressures faced by organisations. The strength of the Advocacy Day was the breadth of the sector that was involved combined with the strong common message. MPs expressed support for the day as a way of building relationships between the sector and parliamentarians.

The increase in the Non-Government Organisation (NGO) Price Indexation of 3.14% for three years plus continuation of \$2 million per year was the result of many months of campaigning by the sector. This was a collaborative effort, coordinated by the cross sector Price Index Working Group. It's a key issue as adequate indexation of funding is essential to ensure a productive community sector where funding keeps pace with costs.

A similar cross-sectoral working group has been established to assist negotiations with government about the introduction of a Portable Long Service Leave scheme in Victoria. This work will continue into the next year.

## Greening the sector

On 24 March 2009, VCOSS convened the *Greening the Sector* forum to bring together people working on organisational environmental sustainability within the community services sector.

The event showcased key environmental issues facing the sector and provided an opportunity to showcase the work of a range of organisations.

More than 50 participants attended the forum and identified opportunities to support the environmental sustainability work of the sector including:

- better online access to resources tailored to the sector including templates for environmental policies and case studies of successful initiatives;
- networks and regular communication about organisational environmental issues; and
- low or no-cost training in sustainable purchasing; implementing an environmental management system; environmental auditing; supporting behaviour change and working with vulnerable communities on sustainability.

## Sector Development

Community organisations invariably prioritise program and client needs ahead of organisational requirements. Yet to deliver the complexity and volume of current and future needs in the community, there is a need to strengthen the organisational capacity of the community sector in a variety of areas.

The VCOSS Sector Development team works across a number of projects to build organisations' professional capabilities to enable them to deliver their programs and services more effectively and efficiently.

## Showcasing the sector events

VCOSS has been hosting a project to promote work opportunities in the community sector.

- 27 & 26 July 08, VCOSS Community Careers stand at ReinventYour Career Expo
- 27 & 28 March 09, NW EOC Group Hosted Community Careers stand at the National Careers and Employment Expo

## CEO and President Roundtable

(financially supported by the *Helen McPherson Smith Trust*)

Over the past year, VCOSS has hosted a series of forums for CEOs and Board Chairs/Presidents of community sector organisations. The intention is to invite guest speakers to stimulate discussion around key strategic issues for the Victorian community sector. The forums are designed to have a different focus from the operational imperatives that often dominate the work of community sector organisation. The focus is on the 'big picture' issues and trends that will affect the sector in the medium to long term.

- 14 July 2008, VCOSS CEO and Board Chair Roundtable: *The War for Talent: how the community sector can attract and retain skilled employees in the coming decade* on workforce issues. Andrew Marty, Director SACS consulting, Tony Keenan, CEO Hanover Welfare and Michael White, EO Community Sector Industry Training Board
- 21 August 2008, VCOSS CEO and Board Chair Roundtable on leadership: *Leadership beyond our organisation. The decline of the voice of the churches in public discourse leaves a moral leadership vacuum. Is this a role the leaders of community organisations could more purposefully play?* Ellen Koshland, Bishop Phillip Huggins and Tony Douglas on the moral voice of the social sector
- 09 October 2008, VCOSS Leaders Dinner: *Is the current community services model of care sustainable?* – Robert Fitzgerald Productivity Commission Commissioner on the sustainability of models of care. Respondent Fiona Smith, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner.

- 18 May 2009, VCOSS CEO and Presidents' Forum *Local action in a global crisis: Leading the sector through tough times*. Hosted by Tony Nicholson, CEO, Brotherhood of St Laurence. Stella Avramopoulos, CEO, Kildonan Child and Family Services, Sarah Davies CEO, Melbourne Community Foundation and Bruce Bonyhady, Chair of Philanthropy Australia and Yooralla considered the impacts of current economic challenges on governance, planning and funding issues.

## Clearinghouse

The VCOSS Training and Development Clearinghouse continued to deliver organisational capacity building support to community organisations across Victoria.

To date, through partnerships with business, pro bono and philanthropic organisations, the project has delivered more than 200 training and development opportunities to more than 1200 community sector workers.

This year many of these training opportunities were delivered through the 2009 Regional Training Calendar which included governance, finance, management and Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) training.

A new partnership, modeled on that with the Australian Institute of Management was formed with Pathways Australia. These two relationships alone delivered \$180,000 worth of free training to community organisations.

Hundreds of organisations used the hands-on referral service that supports the information on the website and the monthly e-newsletter PIECES is distributed to over 2000 recipients across Victoria.

The sector accessed half a million dollars worth of support from skilled volunteers from Oxfam Skill Share, Leadership Victoria and PILCHconnect.

New relationships were forged with networks across Victoria, including sport and environment networks.

## CLEARINGHOUSE EVENTS

- 24 July 08, VCOSS Clearinghouse Training Program - Workplace Supervision
- 27 August 08, VCOSS Clearinghouse Training Program - Getting Along at Work
- 10 September 08, VCOSS Clearinghouse Advocacy Training - What is Good Advocacy?
- 17 September 08, VCOSS Clearinghouse Training Program - Making Sense of Financial Reports for Boards
- 17 September 08, VCOSS Clearinghouse African Women's Organisations Information Session – Philanthropy
- 08 October 08, VCOSS Clearinghouse Advocacy Training - Before you lobby: Going from worthy to worthwhile – Communication strategy development.
- 12 November 08, VCOSS Clearinghouse Advocacy Training - Getting your ideas on the table: How ideas get communicated
- 12 November 08, VCOSS Clearinghouse Advocacy Training - Understanding the political parties and how they work
- 14 November 08, VCOSS Clearinghouse Training Program - Financial Literacy for Not-for-Profit Organisations (MORWELL)
- 03 December 08, VCOSS Clearinghouse Training Program – Recruitment and Retention
- 10 December 08, VCOSS Clearinghouse Advocacy Training - How caucus works / lobbying backbenchers
- 10 December 08, VCOSS Clearinghouse Advocacy Training - How Departments work
- 03 February 09, VCOSS Clearinghouse – Corporate Social Responsibility Forum
- 11 February 09, VCOSS Clearinghouse Advocacy Training - How Treasury works – the Budget process
- 26 February 09, VCOSS Clearinghouse Training Program - Financial Literacy for Not-for-Profit Organisations (Melbourne)
- 11 March 09, VCOSS Clearinghouse Advocacy Training - Submission writing for legislative change / law reform
- 23 March 09, VCOSS Clearinghouse - Financial Literacy for Not-for-Profit Organisations (Portland)
- 23 April 09, VCOSS Clearinghouse Training

Program - Financial Literacy for Not-for-Profit Organisations (Sale)

- 28 April 08, VCOSS Clearinghouse Training Program – Managers as Coaches (Ballarat)
- 29 April 09, VCOSS Clearinghouse Advocacy Training - Beginners guide to Parliamentary processes
- 07 May 09, VCOSS Clearinghouse Training Program - Financial Literacy for Not-for-Profit Organisations (Castlemaine)
- 13 May 09, VCOSS Clearinghouse Advocacy Training - Feedback from experts: Participants make a presentation to a panel of experts for constructive feedback.
- 14 May 09, VCOSS Clearinghouse Training Program - Financial Literacy for Not-for-Profit Organisations (Ballarat)
- 15 May 09, VCOSS Clearinghouse Training Program - Financial Literacy for Not-for-Profit Organisations (Melbourne)
- 19 May 09, VCOSS Clearinghouse Training Program - Board Members: Roles, Responsibilities, Liabilities and Protections (Wangaratta)
- 26 May 09, VCOSS Clearinghouse Training Program - Board Members: Roles, Responsibilities, Liabilities and Protections (Warrnambool)
- 18 June 09, VCOSS Clearinghouse Training Program - Financial Literacy for Not-for-Profit Organisations (Geelong)

## DARU

The Disability Advocacy Resource Unit (DARU) continued to strengthen the total advocacy effort for people with disabilities in numerous ways. In particular, DARU has held two strategic planning workshops to ensure DARU's priorities are driven by the sector and has developed an effective evaluation process which will be implemented in 2009.

Two highlights during this period have been the *Strengthening Disability Advocacy National Conference* and the launch of the DARU Disability Advocacy Code of Conduct. This Code identifies the ethical principles that underline effective advocacy and promotes consistency among disability advocacy organisations and disability advocates.

A highlight in the calendar for sector development was the National Advocacy Conference, with the

theme Strengthening Disability Advocacy on 7-8 October 2008. DARU along with Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) and Victorian Disability Advocacy Network (VDAN) partnered for the conference. DARU sessions focussed on improving advocacy practice – and were well attended by just over 200 participants.

DARU has worked to strengthen the disability advocacy sector and lead sector wide approaches to disability issues through topical forums, training and resource development. This includes a comprehensive database of disability advocacy organisations and networks, available on the DARU website. The DARU Update continues to provide relevant information to the sector on a regular basis.

DARU has developed a comprehensive state-wide resource and equipment library for the sector.

VCOSS was proud to work with the Office for Disability Policy to promote and enrol over 100 community organisations into developing their own Disability Action Plan (DAP).

## DARU EVENTS

- 22 July 08, DARU Disability Related Legislation - How Do the Pieces Fit
- 11 August 08, DARU Disability Rights
- 10 September 08, DARU Disability Rights
- 15 September 08, DARU Disability Rights
- 30 October 08, DARU Effective communication
- 30 October 08, DARU Submission Writing
- 12 May 09, DARU GG Meeting Bi Monthly Governance Group Meeting
- 13 May 09, DARU Forum Inclusive Education Forum
- 14 May 09, DARU How the Different Levels of Government Works

## Doing IT Better

Doing IT Better is a three-year collaboration with Monash University addressing information and communications technology (ICT) issues in the community sector.

Through intensive case studies in a handful of organisations, Doing IT Better identified common ICT problems and road-tested workable

solutions. The project also conducted a series of practical information seminars that over 160 different organisations attended. Topics included IT Strategic Planning, Network management, and Useful Free and Low-cost Tools. Many organisations also accessed resources and information via the project website.

During 2008 and 2009, an 'interoperability' working group formed to investigate the problems of multiple data entry and quality reporting and defined the issue in detail. Practical solutions were proposed and VCOSS started building a community of interest across the sector, academia and government that was committed to sorting it out.

## DOING IT BETTER EVENTS

- 17 July 08, VCOSS Doing IT Better Seminar: data security, maintenance and disaster recovery
- 11 September 08, VCOSS Doing IT Better Seminar: accessing hardware and software donations
- 10 December 08, VCOSS Doing IT Better Seminar: finding funding for ICT projects
- 19 February 09, VCOSS Doing IT Better Seminar on Integrating Quality Assurance reporting
- 05 March 09, VCOSS Doing IT Better Forum: Addressing the Interoperability Challenge – Forum
- 02 April 09, PILCH Present at seminar on legal issues with regard to ICT for community organisations
- 20 May 09, VCOSS DIB Seminar on ICT audits
- 18 June 09, VCOSS Doing IT Better Conference

## OH&S

In 2008, VCOSS continued to raise the profile of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) in the community sector through three OHS Projects, supported by Victorian Workcover Authority and Worksafe Victoria. Good OHS practices are an essential part of a strong sector and have been consistently identified as an area of need.

By administering over \$200,000 worth of grants to purchase OHS equipment, the roll out of a community sector tailored OHS training program and the launch of the Community OHS website, VCOSS assisted organisations to build their knowledge and improve the health and safety of staff in the sector.

## **OH&S EVENTS**

- 27 November 08, Training: Occupational Violence & Bullying in the Workplace
- 10 & 11 February 09, VCOSS OHS Introduction to OHS for Managers- Carlton
- 24 February 09, VCOSS OHS Introduction to OHS for Staff- Melbourne
- 2 April 09, VCOSS OHS Introduction to OHS for Staff- Carlton
- 3 April 09, VCOSS OHS Dealing with Occupational Violence and Bullying- Managers- Melbourne
- 20 & 24 April 09, VCOSS OHS Rep Training- Carlton
- 05 May 09, VCOSS OHS Introduction to OHS for Staff- Melbourne