

Partnership Agreement

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

2014 – 2018



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Preamble

The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (the Department) and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), on behalf of the Victorian community sector, recommit to a Partnership Agreement (the Agreement) that reflects a shared commitment to working together to ensure every Victorian is provided with support, services and resources for learning and development.

This Agreement renews the Partnership Agreement signed by the Department and VCOSS, on behalf of the Victorian community sector, in June 2010.

The Department recognises that the community sector helps to improve the lives of many children, young people, adults and families through direct service delivery, social support and advocacy on behalf of vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians. 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 state-wide learning and development services for Victorian children and families, young people and adults.

This Agreement acknowledges the important work of both partners, and constitutes a commitment by them to increase collaboration and communication, respect the other's mandate, and to achieve the best possible learning and development outcomes for all Victorians.

Vision

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

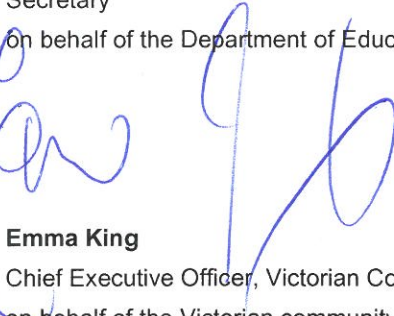
Signed on the 25th day of July 2014, by:



Richard Bolt

Secretary

on behalf of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development



Emma King

Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Council of Social Service

on behalf of the Victorian community sector

Policy Context

The 10-year goal of the Department is to make Victoria a world leader in learning and development, to contribute to a vibrant economy and society and to deliver on its outcomes. To achieve this goal the Department will support the development of the whole person, focusing on literacy, maths and science, work and life skills, and health and wellbeing. It will also build on the system's strengths and capitalise on opportunities for improvement.

The Department is also focused on implementation of its key reforms across each of its portfolio areas, as outlined in the following policy statements: *Early Years Strategic Plan*, *Victoria as a Learning Community*, *From New Directions to Action: World class teaching and school leadership*, *Principles for Health and Wellbeing*, and *Refocusing Vocational Training in Victoria*.

Victoria's Vulnerable Children – Our Shared Responsibility Strategy 2013-2022 is a whole-of-government strategy designed to drive broad, transformational change across government and the community to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families. The strategy draws together all parts of government that have a responsibility for the health, social and economic factors that can make someone vulnerable and potentially lead to child abuse and neglect. It is designed to drive the broad-based change required across government and in the community over the next decade. Children and Youth Area Partnerships are a key plank of a collaborative and broad-based model of governance to drive the Victoria's Vulnerable Children reforms at the local level, and an important step in developing a new way of working together with community sector organisations to better join-up social supports in Victoria.

The community sector is active across all areas of health and social wellbeing, and plays a significant role in the lives of many Victorians 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, a provider of services for vulnerable children and young people, an involved and informed advocate in improving the life chances of disadvantaged and vulnerable Victorians, including through the provision of education services, and is also a key partner in the development of good policy and research.

The Community Sector Reform Council was formed in December 2013 to advise on the implementation of community and human services reform, and brings together senior government representatives and leaders from the community sector across a diverse range of areas including education, child protection, health and mental health, justice, disability, police and the Aboriginal community. The Council is a practical demonstration of the importance of government and the community sector working together on innovation and reform.

The Department recognises that its agenda for improving the learning and development outcomes for all Victorians 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. This renewed Agreement will continue to guide relationships, agreements and activities undertaken between the Department and the community sector.

Partnership Agreement

Discussion about a stronger model of engagement between the Department and the community sector led to the 2010-14 Partnership Agreement, which built upon existing mutual support and collaboration in order to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and their families.

This Agreement renews the 2010-2014 Partnership Agreement to consolidate the collaborative relationship between the Department and the Victorian community sector. It also reflects the machinery of government changes since the last Agreement was signed, which broadened the Department's scope to include tertiary education pathways, vocational training and adult, community and further education.

The Partners

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

The Department provides education, training, development, wellbeing and child health services (i.e. learning and development services). It exists to support Victorians to build prosperous, socially engaged, happy and healthy lives by supporting lifelong learning, through strengthening families and helping people to gain the skills and knowledge they need to thrive and participate in a complex and challenging economy and society.

The Department recognises that supporting the needs of vulnerable children, young people, adults and families is the responsibility of a number of government departments, and is committed to whole-of-government approaches to respond to these needs. It also recognises the necessity of the community sector in the delivery of its mandate and in pursuit of the early childhood, education and skills reform agendas.

The Department is a learning organisation. In its relationships with colleagues, partners and stakeholders and with all those who use its services it is committed 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 social and community services sector provides a diverse range of services and supports to both promote the health, development, and wellbeing of children, young people, adults 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 and 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 to services for children, young people, adults and their families and to support healthy communities.

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

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) is the peak organisation of the non-government social and community services in Victoria. VCOSS raises awareness of the existence, causes and effects of poverty and inequality, and works to create a more just society through policy development and public and private advocacy.

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 learning and development outcomes for all Victorians 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 learning and development outcomes for all Victorians
- 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 learning and development outcomes for all Victorians
- display open and informed decision-making and share evidence-based policy decisions, where possible
- participate in 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 Victorians
- build strong partnerships between the Department and the social and community services sector 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, adults and their families
- collaborate on forums and events around key issues and themes as opportunity presents
- 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 shared development of an annual Action Plan to outline joint work for the Department and VCOSS. 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 and to work constructively to honour the terms of the 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 as considered jointly necessary.

Term of the Agreement

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