

Leading the Way

The Victorian Government's Strategic Framework on Mentoring Young People 2005-2008



*Department for
Victorian Communities*



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Message from the Minister



The Victorian Government is paving the way for its approach to mentoring, becoming the first Australian state to adopt a strategic, coordinated framework for mentoring young people. I am proud to be at the forefront of the Government's work in this area by presenting *Leading the Way: The Victorian Government's Strategic Framework on Mentoring Young People 2005-2008*.

Led by the Department for Victorian Communities through the Office for Youth, all Victorian Government departments now share a strategic approach to mentoring that will support the delivery of high-quality, cost effective programs that meet safety and community standards.

Through research and experience, we know that mentoring programs are most effective when they involve strong partnerships with communities, youth agencies, businesses and philanthropic organisations. We also know that good quality mentoring really works, with young people benefiting through higher school retention rates, better relationships with peers and family, higher levels of participation in community activities and lower levels of drug and alcohol use.

Most importantly, we recognise that mentoring is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Successful mentoring programs are those that are tailored to the specific needs and characteristics of the young people involved. If we are to ensure that *all* young people are able to achieve their full potential and contribute to building a caring and connected community, it is vital that specific groups of disadvantaged young people are given every opportunity to become active and valued participants in their communities.

In April 2005, the Victorian Government announced a new social policy action plan called *A Fairer Victoria*, which addresses disadvantage in our community. As part of *A Fairer Victoria*, the Government has injected \$2.9 million over three years to boost mentoring programs for young people. This will be used to provide funding and tools, like a Good Practice Guide, to organisations running programs for young people who are isolated and disadvantaged – either socially, economically or geographically.

I encourage all sectors across the community – businesses, community groups and philanthropic organisations – to support this strategic framework and join the Government to improve the way mentoring for young people is delivered across Victoria.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacinta Allan". Below the signature is a large, stylized blue circular graphic element.

JACINTA ALLAN MP
Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs



ULTRA

Young people and mentoring



What is mentoring?

For the purposes of this strategic framework, the Victorian Government defines mentoring as:

...the formation of a helping relationship between a younger person and an unrelated, relatively older, more experienced person who can increase the capacity of the young person to connect with positive social and economic networks to improve their life chances.

There are several key elements that identify a mentoring relationship with a young person. For example:

- the mentor has greater experience, influence and achievement in a particular setting;
- the mentoring relationship is a ‘helping’ relationship focused on achievement;
- the mentoring relationship is a reciprocal one because the benefits flow both ways;
- the relationship includes emotional and psychosocial support, direct assistance and role modelling; and
- the relationship is personal, with direct interaction between the mentor and the young person.

What are the benefits of mentoring?

When it is implemented well, mentoring carries significant benefits. Indeed, the mentor, the broader community and the business community, together with the young person, all stand to gain from a successful mentoring program.

For the **young person**, mentoring can increase their confidence and self-esteem; improve their career opportunities; reduce the likelihood that they will engage in harmful behaviour such as violence, risk-taking and substance abuse; and alleviate feelings of isolation, particularly for young people living in rural or remote areas.

There is a growing body of evidence that indicates that the development of ‘good’ social behaviours in young people occurs when they are in supportive and consistent environments, where standards of behaviour are clear and they have strong bonds to their families, schools, communities and peer groups. Research shows that a child living in a high-risk environment can be protected from adverse behaviour by a strong, positive relationship with an adult who cares about them and is committed to their healthy development. The most critical aspect of this relationship is that the young person has a long-term investment in the relationship, and believes that the relationship is worth protecting.

Risk factors are elements in a young person’s life that increase the likelihood of them engaging in compromising behaviours. By forming a relationship with a suitable mentor, there is opportunity for young people to reduce the potential impact of risk factors by developing more positive behaviours and improving their social and emotional competence.

Australian research provides evidence that participation by vulnerable young people in mentoring programs is associated with significant benefits. These include:

- improved school attendance and academic outcomes;
- increased school retention rates and completion of secondary school;
- continued engagement in education and training;
- increased employment rates;
- improved self-confidence, social and interpersonal skills;
- increased involvement in social activities;



- reduced rates of risk-taking behaviours, including lower rates of alcohol use and drug abuse, later age of sexual debut and reduced rates of teenage pregnancy;
- less involvement in gang-related activity, including violent offending;
- lower rates of juvenile offending; and
- improved relationships with parents and other family members.

It is important to note that these outcomes are dependent upon a successful match between the young person and the mentor, and whether the relationship is sustained for a sufficient length of time. For example, many of the young people who participate in mentoring programs are exposed to conflict associated with parental custody disputes, or experience social isolation or economic adversity and poverty. Success of the mentoring match is primarily influenced by the mentor's knowledge and awareness of the young person's situation, and their capacity to respond constructively.

For the **mentor or volunteer**, mentoring can promote a sense of achievement and satisfaction through providing the opportunity to have a positive influence on a young person's life. It can also create opportunities to meet new people, add variety to life and develop new skills through associated training.

The benefits of mentoring to the **community** are extremely important. As an effective form of volunteering, mentoring impacts intensely on the Victorian community by developing positive relationships and increasing the participation and contribution of young people within the community. This helps to build community assets, capacities and abilities and increases community connectedness and strength.

Businesses can benefit from contributing to mentoring programs through an increased sense of corporate responsibility. Businesses may support mentoring by providing opportunities for involvement in their business, by providing funding, and also by encouraging staff to become mentors. This not only provides the opportunity for employees to contribute to the welfare of a young person, but research suggests that businesses can also gain economic benefits through the additional skills acquired by the staff involved.

Mentoring also creates **inter-generational** benefits. When the mentoring relationship is formed between a young person and an older person, it not only assists the young person to gain confidence and practical skills, but also provides the older person with a sense that they are valued and that they are contributing to the future of the young person. A mentoring relationship can also 'close the gap' between young and older people in the community, increasing understanding and dispelling some of the myths about the ageing process.

Development of the strategic framework



Why a strategic framework is needed

The Government is committed to ensuring that its program investments for young people are guided by contemporary policy and evidence-based perspectives, and that they achieve clear outcomes for young people. The Government must also ensure that activities involving community participation are safe, meet community standards, are coordinated and are delivered where they are most needed.

Both government and non-government organisations are increasingly recognising that mentoring can be an important part of mainstream programs. There is a strong community volunteer base from which to recruit mentors, with significant private and philanthropic interest in providing quality mentoring programs.

Existing Australian research indicates that mentoring relationships sustained for at least a year can lead to improved academic confidence and performance, reduced absenteeism and fewer incidents of drug and alcohol abuse. However, the research also clearly shows that mentoring relationships sustained for less than three months may in fact be actively damaging and lead to lowered self-confidence and reduced academic confidence.

The Government recognises that a more integrated, coordinated and evidence-based approach is required in order to improve the quality of Victoria's mentoring programs, and that information about approaches to program design and delivery must be shared across all sectors involved in mentoring.

This framework will help the Victorian Government to identify what works best when mentoring young people, and enable articulation of clear directions that will guide the delivery of highly effective mentoring programs and activities for young Victorians.

While the Government is committed to providing the leadership needed to achieve positive and measurable results, it firmly believes that the success of the program depends on it working in collaboration with key community, business and philanthropic partners. Active participation is needed at all levels of government and throughout the business sector, the wider community, philanthropic agencies, schools and local councils.

Who the strategic framework is for

The framework informs formal government-funded mentoring programs that target young people aged 12 to 25 years. It also takes into account programs and activities that receive funding from other sources, such as philanthropic and business sponsorship.

The framework guides mentoring programs that focus on young people who have less opportunity and face disadvantage due to social, cultural, geographic or economic barriers. Young people who want to go back to school or enter training or employment are also targeted, together with those who want to be more active, involved and confident within their local communities.

How the strategic framework aligns with other Government policies

Because mentoring is recognised as having the potential to deliver significant benefits within a range of priority areas (such as health, education and employment), it is already included in a number of existing Victorian Government policies.

This framework supports *A Vision for Victoria to 2010 and Beyond: Growing Victoria Together 2005*, the Government's vision for Victoria for the next five years, by acknowledging the themes of valuing and investing in lifelong education; creating high-quality, accessible health and community services; creating safe



streets, homes and workplaces; and creating cohesive communities and reducing inequalities.

The strategic framework also supports the Government's recent social policy statement, ***A Fairer Victoria***, which outlines the Government's commitment to building active, confident and resilient communities, addressing disadvantage and reforming the way government-funded services are delivered. Similar to *A Fairer Victoria*, the strategic framework articulates the actions the Government will take to improve young people's access to mentoring services, reduce barriers to opportunities, strengthen assistance for disadvantaged young people and ensure that mentoring programs are delivered where they are most needed. All this will be achieved through strong partnerships with communities, businesses and other levels of government.

The strategic framework also supports a range of initiatives, including:

Respect: the Government's Vision for Young People – the Victorian Government's commitment to ensuring that young people are valued and respected; supported through social, educational, cultural and employment opportunities; able to live healthy, satisfying lives; and able to realise their full potential.

Safer Streets and Homes – a practical way of addressing youth crime prevention by recognising that young people are at greater risk of being both victims of crime and offenders, and that these risks can be reduced if vulnerable young people have access to a consistent, competent and caring adult.

Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement – designed to maximise the Koori community's leadership and participation in the development,

delivery and implementation of all justice policies and programs that have an impact on the Koori community.

Blueprint for Government Schools – with a focus on generating effective leaders and teachers and creating a stimulating, secure learning environment, this provides opportunities to build effective mentoring relationships for young people in school settings.

Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy – ensuring that young offenders are supported by a significant adult so that they can connect to employment, education and training opportunities after custodial sentences or youth attendance orders have been completed.

Volunteering and Community Enterprise Strategy – identifies resources that look at how volunteer mentors play a significant role in the lives of young Victorians.

In a national context, the Department of Family and Community Services currently administers the Mentor Marketplace program and will continue to provide funding to support existing and new mentoring projects for young people.

A research study about the future of mentoring young people in Australia was undertaken in 2004 by the Smith Family, the Dusseldorp Skills Forum and Big Brothers Big Sisters Australia. A key recommendation was that a national strategy for mentoring young people be developed.

This framework is consistent with recommendations made at a national level and positions Victoria as the first Australian state to implement a coordinated and strategic approach to mentoring young people.

Principles guiding the strategic framework



The Victorian Government's vision for mentoring young people is that young people (aged 12–25 years) have access to quality mentoring programs that enable them to achieve their full potential and contribute to building a caring and connected Victorian community.

There are five principles that will guide the Government's future investment in mentoring for young people and influence the Government's leadership role within the broader community.

1. Taking a holistic approach

The Government will ensure young people are viewed in the context of their family, peers and community. The specific experiences and characteristics of young people must be understood so that mentoring responses are tailored to meet their individual needs.

2. Knowing what works

The Government will improve understanding of effective mentoring by supporting agencies to identify and replicate cost-effective and safe mentoring programs that provide positive outcomes for young people.

Underpinning this principle is the need for quality, evidence-based programs that focus on the diversity, culture, skills and knowledge of young people and mentors, and on achieving defined outcomes. Programs must also take into account local community contexts and incorporate sound planning, data collection, research, monitoring and evaluation.

3. Linking up and partnering

The Government will improve young people's access to mentoring programs and promote the benefits of mentoring for those young people seeking assistance to achieve their aspirations and break the cycle of disadvantage.

For this approach to be successful, integrated and collaborative partnerships are needed across all sectors including schools, juvenile justice, local government, business and research facilities.

4. Being accountable and flexible

The Government will provide direction to key sectors and networks so that they can develop high-quality, well-planned and sustainable mentoring activities and programs.

Underpinning this principle is the need for mentoring programs to undergo frequent review to ensure they are of the highest quality, and that issues such as diversity, cultural relevance and access are addressed.

5. Providing good governance

The Government will ensure all participants feel confident and safe by putting in place the right checks and balances to protect the safety of young people and volunteers. In doing so, the Government will address welfare, safety and security issues and take into account any legislative changes that may impact on the delivery of mentoring programs for young people in Victoria.



The Government's goals for mentoring young people in Victoria



By 2008, the Government aims to achieve:

1. a coordinated and evidence-based approach to investing in mentoring;
2. an increase in young people's involvement in high-quality mentoring programs; and
3. an increase in the participation of all community sectors in support of mentoring.

In order to establish **a coordinated and evidence-based approach to investing in mentoring**, the Government will:

- increase its knowledge of best-practice mentoring programs for young people;
- establish a baseline for better mentoring policy and program development and implementation;
- increase its ability to manage risk and ensure that current standards of safety and duty of care (including privacy and confidentiality for both young people and mentors) are met;
- extend and apply the knowledge of risk and protective factors; and
- ensure that information about mentoring is more accessible to young people, potential and current volunteer mentors, relevant agencies and other stakeholders.

In order to **increase young people's involvement in high-quality mentoring programs**, the Government will:

- ensure that departments work collaboratively with service providers to coordinate policy and target mentoring initiatives for young people;
- increase the amount of information available to young people about mentoring and mentoring programs; and
- increase young people's access to and participation in quality mentoring programs (as both mentors and mentored).

In order to **increase participation across all community sectors in support of mentoring**, the Government will:

- improve understanding across all sectors of the community of the role and value of mentoring in young people's lives;
- increase the number of appropriately-trained, high-quality volunteer mentors;
- ensure better sharing of information and resources by strengthening local, regional and state-wide government and non-government mentoring networks;
- give business and philanthropic organisations greater opportunity to provide financial and in-kind support to mentoring programs; and
- improve the resources available for long-term and sustainable community involvement in mentoring programs.

Priority initiatives for 2005-2008



The Victorian Government will implement a range of initiatives to meet its goals for mentoring young people. These include:

- A mechanism within government to provide ongoing coordination for current and future mentoring programs
- Targeted funding to boost youth mentoring in rural, regional and other areas where young people may be isolated by social and economic status
- A 'Mentoring Good Practice Guide' detailing evidence-based guidelines for program design and risk management, evaluation and other areas critical to best practice mentoring for young people
- Consultations with young people and people who volunteer as mentors
- Forums with key stakeholders to investigate the benefits of mentoring
- Training for mentors and coordinators of mentoring programs
- Networks that are linked to volunteer resource centres
- Opportunities for government employees to volunteer as mentors

A partnership approach – the roles of key sectors engaged in mentoring



The Victorian Government believes that a ‘whole of government and community’ approach is the best way to achieve more targeted mentoring programs, better access to mentoring programs and higher levels of volunteering in mentoring. The Government will work closely with volunteer networks, mentoring and other youth agencies, businesses, research organisations and philanthropic foundations to improve mentoring programs and provide leadership in promoting the positive role of mentoring in young people’s lives.

What is the role of philanthropic agencies?

Philanthropic agencies can provide funding for research and innovation so that mentoring can be delivered across diverse communities. They can support networking activities, invest in new ideas that support mentoring for young people and support the development of new and innovative initiatives in partnership with government and community groups.

How can businesses get involved?

Businesses can provide financial contributions, sponsorship, in-kind contributions for promotional activities and fundraising, and opportunities for staff to participate in mentoring programs. A number of large, well-established mentoring programs already have substantial and ongoing corporate support.

The Victorian Government will work with employers to explore ways of building a more widespread culture of mentoring for young people in both large and small enterprises.

What about the union movement?

The Young Unionists Network can support young people to gain skills in leadership and development by participating in mentoring as both peer mentors and as young people being mentored. Mentoring offers opportunities to build alliances between young unionists as mentors and young people connected to

community organisations. The trade union movement presents a significant opportunity to recruit volunteer mentors in partnership with the Young Unionists Network.

Does the wider community have a role?

Community volunteers can participate as mentors through volunteer resource networks. Volunteering Victoria Inc., the peak body representing the volunteer movement in Victoria, can provide a range of services to people in the community who are interested in volunteering, and to organisations who engage volunteers.

Volunteering also provides opportunities for young people themselves to participate in planning and developing mentoring programs.

How about community agencies?

All agencies, whether large or small, can help to identify existing networks and develop and maintain stronger ones. They can also help build a stronger evidence base through program research and evaluation.

There are several large and experienced providers of mentoring programs in Victoria, including Big Brothers Big Sisters Australia, Reach, Whitelion Inc., Jesuit Social Services and St Vincent de Paul. These are just some of the organisations that provide vital mentoring services for young people. Other agencies that undertake training, research, advice and discussion to support the delivery of mentoring include VicHealth and the Dusseldorp Skills Forum.

What about schools?

Many mentoring programs are currently delivered on-site at schools. Schools can help young people gain leadership and other skills through mentoring, whether as peer mentors or recipients of mentoring. Schools can also encourage additional mentoring opportunities, particularly for young people at risk of dropping out or not succeeding.



How the Government will know it's meeting its goals



Measuring the impact of a coordinated and sustained approach to mentoring requires collaboration between the Government and the wider community.

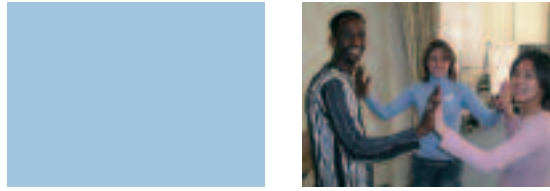
One of the most obvious signs that this strategic framework is working will be an increase in the number of young Victorians participating in mentoring programs, particularly for the first time, along with an increase in the number of volunteer mentors involved in mentoring for the first time. Mentoring programs will be better targeted to communities with high levels of disadvantage.

Another sign that the Government is meeting its goals will be the establishment of ongoing and open discussions with businesses and philanthropic organisations (through formal means such as forums), and the development of effective information-sharing networks (both formal and informal) at and between all levels of government.

The positive outcomes and benefits for young people will include higher school participation and retention rates, better relationships with peers and family, higher levels of participation in sport and community activities and lower levels of drug and alcohol use.



Acknowledgements



In developing the strategic framework, the Victorian Government sought input and advice from an expert reference group. Comprising representatives from key sectors engaged in mentoring, including philanthropic, business and community organisations, this group provided invaluable information and insights into the roles, strengths, weaknesses and opportunities that exist to improve mentoring in Victoria.

Membership of the group included:

Ms Rosalyn Buchanan MP

Member for Hastings (Chairperson)

Mr Neil Coulson

Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Ms Melanie Roberts

Young Unionists Network Coordinators, Victorian Trades Hall Council

Mr Bernie Geary

Manager, Membership & Development, St Vincent De Paul

Mr Mark Watt

Chief Executive Officer, Whitelion Inc.

Ms Lesley Tobin

Project Manager, Dusseldorp Skills Forum

Ms Liz Gillies

Grants Officer, Helen Macpherson Smith Trust

Ms Irene Verins

Senior Project Officer - Mental Health & Wellbeing, VicHealth

Mr Carl Gardiner

Managing Director, Mushroom Marketing

Importantly, the strategic framework also recognises the unique perspectives and needs of young people. The views of young people currently participating in mentoring projects throughout Victoria have significantly contributed to the development of the strategic framework.

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A Fairer Victoria is the Victorian Government's social policy action plan.

