

# VCOSS Reconciliation Action Plan

March 2018 - March 2019





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Elements of the artwork  
*Untitled* by Clinton Walker,  
made available through  
the Torch project are used  
throughout this RAP.



**VCOSS pays respect and acknowledgement to the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we work and walk, to Elders past, present and emerging, and the children who are so important to our future and vision for this country.**



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# Foreword



It has been a genuine privilege to be part of the process to develop this Reconciliation Action Plan.

This is the first phase of a continuing journey to respectfully partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, organisations and communities to advocate for community-led solutions to achieve reconciliation, understanding and meaningful self-determination.

VCOSS believes this commitment is integral to our mission of social change to create greater equality, eliminate poverty and overcome disadvantage.

Reconciliation is an essential element of who we are and what we strive to achieve. This is reflected in our core values, and our commitment to respecting, understanding and supporting opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This RAP is centred on the three pillars of Relationships, Respect and Opportunities, as outlined by Reconciliation Australia.

Embedding these pillars into our organisation will enable VCOSS to build strong and respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, organisations and communities.

VCOSS is also committed to supporting Victoria's Korin Korin Balit-Djak strategic plan and Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement and Strategic Action Plan.

This RAP provides a framework to translate our commitment into action. The development of this RAP was initiated through a participatory process with VCOSS staff and members, with people having an opportunity to contribute to our journey, as well as provide reflections from their own personal journeys.

We would like to acknowledge the immense contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their cultures to our past, present and future, and recognise everyone who contributed to the development of this—our first RAP.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the longest surviving continuous culture in the world, having lived in this country for more than 60,000 years.**

**VCOSS recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as First Peoples of this nation and respects their inherent rights, cultures and strengths, embedded within a rich history and sense of identity.**



**Stella Avramopoulos**  
President



**Emma King**  
Chief Executive Officer

# Our vision for reconciliation



**VCOSS's vision is of a society that respects and values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples of this nation, and is strengthened by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and identities. We envisage a just and equitable Victoria, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the same opportunities and quality of life as other Australians, and contribute their skills and knowledge to strengthen the community.**

We recognise the dispossession, colonisation and marginalisation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced and continue to experience, and the ongoing effects and barriers to opportunity this creates. We wish to find ways to address and make some amends for this. We further seek to recognise, learn from, celebrate and help promote the strength, diversity and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories, and promote its potential to strengthen our society overall.

**We believe the full potential of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can best be realised through empowered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities making decisions about their own futures, helping determine all policy that affects them and delivering a range of programs and services to communities. We commit to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to help build self-determining and empowered communities.**

VCOSS works closely with a wide range of community organisations to support people facing poverty and disadvantage across Victoria, and seeks to strongly support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations as part of this work. As the peak body for Victoria's community sector, we aim to promote and support reconciliation within our sector and provide a strong example by demonstrating our commitment to reconciliation in all our work.

# Our business



**The Victorian Council of Social Service is the peak body of the community sector in Victoria. VCOSS works to ensure all Victorians have access to and a fair share of the community's resources and services, through advocating for the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society.**

**We achieve this through the goals and objectives in our 2015-18 Strategic Plan.**

## **A fair and just Victorian community**

- VCOSS is a powerful voice for the Victorian community sector to pursue social change that creates greater equality, eliminates poverty and overcomes disadvantage.
- VCOSS advances social justice issues and solutions to pursue social change.
- VCOSS gives voice to the direct experiences of people affected by poverty and inequality.
- VCOSS works with members to amplify the stories they have to tell.

## **A thriving community sector**

- VCOSS fosters a diverse, independent, collaborative and innovative community sector, which meets the complex needs of people facing disadvantage in Victoria.
- VCOSS facilitates collaboration, knowledge, resources and information exchange to support organisations' capability and development.
- VCOSS works with the community sector to foster community-building approaches and solutions that can tackle and prevent disadvantage in communities.

## **A healthy organisation**

- VCOSS operates effectively in a fiscally responsible, ethical, efficient and sustainable manner, and exemplifies best practice standards
- VCOSS remains financially sustainable and has the necessary resources available to operate as a peak body now and into the future
- VCOSS's organisational culture emphasises inclusion, participation and environmental responsibility
- VCOSS members reflect a wide diversity, with members ranging from large charities, sector peak organisations, small community services, advocacy groups and individuals involved in social policy debate.



## VCOSS Board

The VCOSS Board is comprised of nine directors elected from the VCOSS membership and up to three co-opted directors.

VCOSS currently employs 21 staff, none of whom are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

VCOSS contributes to a national voice against poverty and disadvantage through membership of the nationwide network of state and territory council of social service and the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).



**Wurundjeri Elder Uncle Ron  
delivers the Welcome to  
Country at the ACOSS-VCOSS  
Conference, October 2017**



# Our RAP journey



**The VCOSS board, management and staff team are committed to the development and implementation of this RAP.**

**We aim to set measurable targets to contribute towards reconciliation in Australia.**

Our journey of developing a RAP was primarily sparked by the entire VCOSS team participating in cultural safety training delivered by the Victorian Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) in March 2015.

This training highlighted to us the strength of the history and culture of Aboriginal people in Australia, the struggles people have faced since white settlement, and the particular barriers people continue to face in everyday society.

It also highlighted to us both on a personal and organisational level, our own gaps in understanding of Aboriginal people, communities, culture and customs, as well as the importance of building this knowledge and understanding if we are to be able to work more closely and supportively with Aboriginal communities, community groups and leaders.

It is important to VCOSS as an organisation, and our staff individually, that we begin to do more to achieve this. We chose to develop a RAP to pursue these goals, as it provides us with a structure, framework and basis to guide our efforts.

**It is our hope that by developing a RAP, and working to deliver the actions it contains, we will develop our own learning of Aboriginal people, history, culture and customs, incorporate greater cultural safety into our everyday practices and policies, demonstrate our genuine commitment to reconciliation to Aboriginal communities and the broader community, and enable ourselves to stand proudly and work alongside Aboriginal communities, community groups and community leaders to strengthen reconciliation**

**in our nation, within the Victorian community sector, and help empowered Aboriginal communities command a strong, proud and leading presence in our society.**

The development of our RAP was driven by our Cultural Safety working group, comprised of interested staff following the all-staff cultural safety training day delivered by VACCHO.

A second staff workshop facilitated by Reconciliation Australia was convened in May 2016 to develop a RAP driven by ideas and enthusiasm from all staff.

The Cultural Safety working group evolved into the VCOSS RAP Working Group (RWG). This group is responsible for championing our RAP and maintaining oversight of our planned actions.

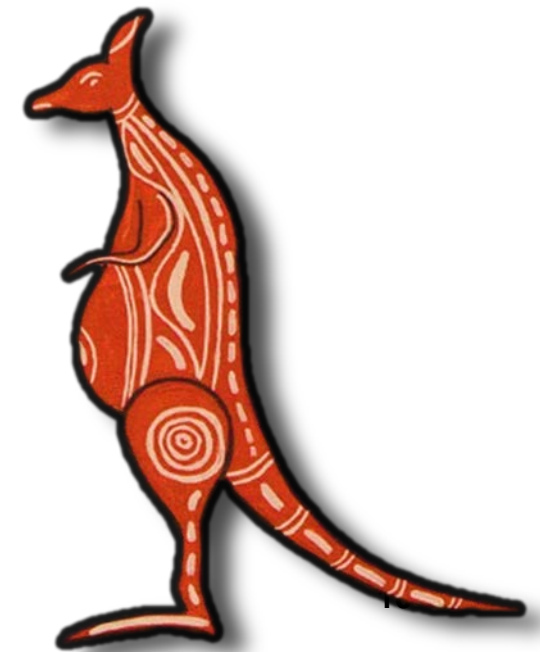
The RWG includes representation from the management, policy, and communications and administrative teams within VCOSS, including:

- Deputy Chief Executive Officer
- Communications Manager
- Communications and Events Officer
- Policy Officer
- Publications Editor.

Conscious of the need to ensure the RAP was developed in full consideration of Aboriginal views and experience, VCOSS 'co-opted' one Aboriginal person from outside the organisation (working as a Project Officer within the community services sector) to become a member.

The draft RAP was circulated for feedback from VCOSS board members and stakeholders, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations.

**VCOSS is also looking to build relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be interested in participating in and advising our RAP/Cultural Safety working group.**





# Our partnerships and current activities



**VCOSS's commitment to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples precedes this RAP.**

## **Recent activities have included:**

- Participating in and providing financial support to the Coalition for Aboriginal Health Equality, led by the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO).
- Consulting with local members of the Aboriginal community on the impacts of the Hazelwood Mine fire on health and wellbeing for inclusion in the VCOSS Submission to the second Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry.
- Contributing to the development of *Korin Korin Balit-Djak*, the Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan and the Aboriginal Community Engagement Framework through written submissions and participation in consultation processes.
- Publishing articles about issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and community projects in the VCOSS membership magazine *Insight*.
- Advocating for strategies to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the out-of-home care system.
- Arranging for all staff participation in cultural safety training, to enhance our knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, practices, values and expectations.
- Developing an internal policy around acknowledging Traditional Owners of land throughout Victoria.
- Meeting with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that are VCOSS members and key stakeholders, including the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), VACCHO, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) and Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI), to strengthen partnerships and inform VCOSS policy and advocacy work.

# About the Reflect RAP



**The Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is about organisations from every sector turning good intentions into real actions and rising to the challenge of reconciling Australia.**

A RAP is a business plan that uses a holistic approach to create meaningful relationships, enhanced respect and promote sustainable opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The RAP program includes four types of RAPs, each offering a different level of engagement and support.

In developing a Reflect RAP, our organisation commits to completing the following actions over the next 12 months to ensure we are well positioned to implement effective and mutually beneficial initiatives as part of future Reconciliation Action Plans.

Our future RAPs will identify relationships, respect and opportunities actions specific to our business and our sphere of influence.

**This Reflect RAP will allow our organisation to focus on building relationships both internally and externally, and raise awareness with our stakeholders to ensure there is shared understanding and ownership of our RAP within our organisation.**

Development of our future RAPs will involve consultation with staff across our organisation, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and/or stakeholders to achieve our vision for reconciliation.



## Relationships

**VCOSS recognises our work and advocacy with and on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must be in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. VCOSS is committed to developing and maintaining respectful and meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations in a range of ways, and values the contribution they make to our work and to our understanding of the experiences, cultures and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians.**

**Over the next 12 months, our VCOSS commits to:**

### Action

**RAP Working Group (RWG) actively monitors RAP development and implementation, tracking progress and reporting**

<b>Deliverables</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>1. Define terms of reference for the RWG, including reporting and governance arrangements.</b>	January 2018	RWG Chair
<b>2. Oversee the development, endorsement and launch of the RAP.</b>	January 2018	RWG Chair
<b>3. Invite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be represented on the RWG and provide input to the RAP.*</b>	January 2018	RWG Chair
<b>4. Meet at least twice per year to monitor and report on RAP implementation.*</b>	May 2018 and November 2018	RWG Chair

\* - Denotes actions where significant progress has already been made.



### **Build internal and external relationships**

<b>5. Develop an engagement plan which identifies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence that we could approach to connect with on our reconciliation journey.*</b>	March 2018	Deputy CEO
<b>6. Develop a list of RAP organisations and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to connect with on our reconciliation journey.*</b>	March 2018	Communications Manager
<b>7. Work with community sector organisations to promote Aboriginal self-determination.</b>	July 2018	Deputy CEO
<b>8. Investigate strategies to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to join VCOSS and/or engage in VCOSS policy consultations and networks.</b>	July 2018	Policy Manager
<b>9. Work with Reconciliation Victoria to promote RAPs to the broader community sector.*</b>	December 2018	Communications Manager





### **Participate in and celebrate National Reconciliation Week (NRW)**

<b>Deliverables</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>10. Include NRW in annual planning calendar to help plan participation and promotion of events.</b>	January 2018	CEO
<b>11. Encourage staff to attend a NRW event.*</b>	May/June 2018	CEO
<b>12. Ensure RWG members participate in an external event to recognise and celebrate NRW.*</b>	May/June 2018	RWG Chair
<b>13. Circulate NRW resources and materials to staff.*</b>	May/June 2018	RWG Chair



## Action

### Raise internal awareness of the RAP

Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
14. Develop and implement a plan to raise awareness amongst all staff across the organisation about our RAP commitments.	March 2018	RWG Chair
15. Develop and implement a plan to engage and inform key internal stakeholders of their responsibilities within our RAP.	March 2018	RWG Chair
16. Include RAP actions in VCOSS Operations Plan.*	July 2018	CEO
17. Develop a communications strategy to communicate RAP activities and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and experiences to VCOSS members and stakeholders.	August 2018	Communications Manager
18. Include RAP as a standing agenda item in staff meetings and board meetings.	January 2018	Advisor to the CEO
19. Create a poster display of reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural resources and materials in the VCOSS office.*	February 2018	Office Administrator



## Respect

VCOSS respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures, and recognises the contribution Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make to the Victorian community. We commit to demonstrating our respect by adopting appropriate protocols and procedures.

We recognise the dispossession, colonisation and marginalisation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced, and the ongoing effects and barriers this creates. We seek to recognise, learn from, celebrate and help promote the strength, diversity and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities.

Over the next 12 months, our organisation commits to:



## Action

### Investigate cultural development

Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
20. Review staff knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and achievement.	April 2018	RWG Chair
21. Develop a plan for increasing staff awareness of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and achievements.	September 2018	RWG Chair
22. Conduct a review of cultural awareness training needs within VCOSS.*	March 2018	RWG Chair
22. Include participation in cultural awareness training in new staff induction process.	January 2018	Office Administrator





### **Celebrate NAIDOC Week 3-10 July 2017**

<b>Deliverables</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>23. Raise awareness and share information amongst our staff of the meaning of NAIDOC Week which includes information about the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.</b>	June/July 2018	RWG Chair
<b>24. Introduce our staff to NAIDOC Week by promoting community events in our local area.*</b>	June/July 2018	RWG Chair
<b>25. Ensure our RWG participates in an external NAIDOC Week event.*</b>	June/July 2018	CEO
<b>26. Promote NAIDOC Week events to VCOS members and stakeholders through the blog, website and enews.*</b>	June/July 2018	Communications Manager



### **Raise internal understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols**

<b>Deliverables</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>27. Develop and implement a plan to raise awareness of the meaning and significance behind Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols.*</b>	December 2018	RWG Chair
<b>28. Obtain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags for display in the VCOSS foyer and/or boardroom.*</b>	January 2018	Office Administrator
<b>29. Explore who the Traditional Owners are of the lands and waters in our local area.*</b>	January 2018	RWG Chair
<b>30. Scope and develop a list of local Traditional Owners of the lands and waters across Victoria.*</b>	February 2018	RWG Chair
<b>31. Review content and use of current Acknowledgement of Country protocol, and identify strategies to improve its use.</b>	March 2018	RWG Chair



## Opportunities

VCOSS commits to creating opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations to participate in and influence our work at all levels of the organisation, including in governance, strategic planning, policy development, sector training opportunities and communications. We will also work to create and maintain a welcoming, inclusive and culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be part of, both as partners in community sector work, and as VCOSS employees.

Over the next 12 months, our organisation commits to:



### Action

#### Consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment

Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
32. Develop an employment strategy that supports the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	November 2018	CEO
33. Review VCOSS human resources policies and procedures to ensure they encourage recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	August 2018	CEO
34. Advertise VCOSS jobs through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander networks.*	July 2018	Office Administrator
35. Develop and include inclusive statement of employment practice in job advertisements.*	March 2018	Office Administrator



<b>36. Advocate for stronger government commitment to reaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment targets.</b>	November 2018	Policy Manager
<b>37. Advocate for increased employment and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the community sector.</b>	November 2018	Deputy CEO



## Action

### Consider supplier diversity

<b>Deliverables</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>38. Develop an understanding of the mutual benefits of procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses.</b>	September 2018	Finance Manager
<b>39. Develop a social procurement policy that supports purchasing from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses where appropriate.</b>	December 2018	Finance Manager
<b>40. Develop and maintain a register of Aboriginal businesses and suppliers.</b>	December 2018	Office Administrator



## Action

### Build support for the RAP

Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
41. Define resource needs for RAP development and implementation.	December 2018	Deputy CEO
42. Define systems and capability needs to track, measure and report on RAP activities.	December 2018	Deputy CEO
43. Complete the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire and submit to Reconciliation Australia.	December 2018	RWG Chair



## Action

### Review and refresh RAP

Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
44. Liaise with Reconciliation Australia to develop a new RAP based on learnings, challenges and achievements.	January 2019	RWG Chair
45. Submit draft RAP to Reconciliation Australia for formal review.	February 2019	RWG Chair
46. Submit draft RAP to Reconciliation Australia for formal endorsement.	March 2019	RWG Chair





Clinton Walker  
*Untitled*, 2016  
Acrylic on canvas