
# **About the 2022 Community Sector Education Forum**

The Community Sector Education Forum is a flagship event held annually by the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), supported by the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET).

Each year the Community Sector Education Forum focuses on a theme that explores DET and community sector priorities in education. This year’s theme was *Bringing everybody along: education equity and a wellbeing economy*. This theme reflects the need for education settings to focus on achieving education *and* wellbeing outcomes for all learners as we continue to navigate the effects of a global pandemic.

The event is attended by:

* CEOs and executives from community service organisations.
* community services managers who oversee the design and delivery of wellbeing programs, mentoring, education support and education re-engagement programs for vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people.
* a small cross-section of senior bureaucrats from DET, along with peak bodies and industry associations representing the education sector.

# **Forum overview**

This year’s event explored the dimensions of a wellbeing approach and wellbeing priorities for children and young people, their families, carers and communities, schools and other education settings.

Discussions included:

* how a wellbeing economy approach can set ambitious goals for a post-pandemic recovery
* the importance of belonging and connection as vital components of wellbeing for learners
* how we can build on existing initiatives and universal platforms, such as early childhood education and school, through setting clear goals and building trust with and within communities, to boost outcomes for learners
* the importance of including children and young people in conversations and decisions that impact them
* when considering how to measure what matters, learners need to be consulted about what’s important to them.

Speakers included Minister for Education, The Hon. Natalie Hutchins MP, the Minister for Training and Skills and Minister for Higher Education, The Hon. Gayle Tierney MP, and the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, The Hon. Ingrid Stitt MP.

Other speakers included young people, community sector and education leaders, and other speakers with specialist insights into the theme of wellbeing.

The agenda and a full list of speakers can be found in the appendix.

# **Summary of key reflections**

* A wellbeing approach can shift the dial on educational disadvantage by looking at the root causes of why some students are struggling. This includes breaking down silos to look at what happens beyond the school gate.
* Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal community perspectives on wellbeing centre around social and emotional wellbeing. This includes physical health, individual connection to mind, body and emotions, and then a wider eco system of community that includes connection to culture, kinship, country and ancestors. The broader service system and community can learn a lot from this approach.
* Education settings need to work for 100% of learners so no one is left behind. Everyone should be able to access a high-quality education regardless of where that school is, and what type of school (for example a flexible learning school).
* Adults and professionals can’t assume to know what wellbeing means and looks like for children and young people. The only way to know is to engage with children and young people continuously and meaningfully.
* Cost of living pressures impact engagement in education from the early years through to adult community education. Additional pressures on families and students differ depending on their background, family commitments (including caring responsibilities), and cultural expectations.
* Access to transport, including cost, is a significant barrier. This increases in regional areas.
* Starting with strengths is important.
* Students who are struggling need more support to prevent informal school expulsion and exclusion.
* Targeted measures (and proportional universalism) are needed to shift persistent challenges (like starting school developmentally vulnerable and student disengagement). One size fits all approaches don’t provide equal outcomes.
* A whole-of-family approach is needed. Parents/carers need to be ‘brought along’ with young people. Some parents need more support so to get the best outcomes for children.
* Community sector organisations need greater funding certainty – short-term cyclic funding should be replaced by long-term contracts. Contracts should also enable providers to have greater flexibility in how they design and deliver place-based initiatives.
* It’s not always easy to measure the important things. We should be considering concepts like ‘distance travelled’ and looking at engagement and connection to learning and the broader community. Other measures include whether children are happy, if they feel safe, and whether they’re socialising with peers.
* Partnerships and collaboration, and the time to do this, will support a more holistic approach to wellbeing for students, families, educators and the community.

# **Appendix – 2022 Community Sector Education Forum Agenda**

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| **Time** | **Activity** | **Speaker(s)** |
| **9.00am** | **Welcome to Country** | Uncle **Perry Wandin**, Wurundjeri Tribe Council |
| **9.07am** | **Welcome and VCOSS opening** | **Emma King**, CEO, VCOSS |
| **9.12am** | **Department of Education and Training address** | **Jenny Atta**, Secretary, Department of Education and Training |
| **9.17am** | **Minister Hutchins’ address** | Minister for Education The Hon. **Natalie Hutchins** MP |
| **9.24am** | **Minister Tierney’s address** | Minister for Training and Skills, The Hon. **Gayle Tierney** MP |
| **9.31am** | **Minister Stitt’s address** | Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep The Hon. **Ingrid Stitt** MP |
| **9.38am** | **Q&A with the Ministers**  | Facilitated by **Emma King**, CEO, VCOSS |
| **10.15am Stretch break** |
| **10.25am** | **Making Victoria the Wellbeing State for students and learners** | **Emma King**, CEO, VCOSS |
| **10:35am** | **International insights on a wellbeing approach** | **Dr Katherine Trebeck**, Co-founder of WEAII and advocate for economic system change in conversation with**Emma King**, CEO, VCOSS |
| **10.55am** | **Experts by lived experience – what wellbeing means** | **Madhuri Prashar**, Early Childhood Educator, Kids First Australia |
| **11.00am** | **Experts by lived experience – what wellbeing means** | **Nahzi**, Student, Wellsprings for Women |
| **11.05am** | **Break-out group discussion: Where are we now?** |  |
| **11.25am Stretch break** |
| **11.40am** | **Building on foundations: Ideas and work we can leverage in a wellbeing economy** | Facilitated by **Emma King**, CEO, VCOSSPanellists:* Professor **Sharon Goldfeld**, Director, The Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children’s Hospital & Murdoch Children’s Research Institute
* **Abe Ropitini**, Executive Director, Population Health, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
* **Dr Claire Tobin**, Acting Executive Director, Wellbeing, Health and Engagement, Department of Education and Training
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| **12.00pm** | **Audience Q&A** |  |
| **12.10pm** | **Student perspectives on wellbeing** | Facilitated by **Bec Percy,** Youth Engagement Project Coordinator, Y-Change, Berry StreetPanellists:* **Kirra Horley**, Lived Experience Consultant
* **Geordie Armstrong**, Lived Experience Consultant
* **Janelle Graham**, Lived Experience Consultant
* **Madelaine Smales**, Lived Experience Consultant
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| **12.30pm** | **Break-out group discussion: Where do we want to get to?**  |  |
| **12.50pm** | **Measuring what matters** | Facilitated by **Emma King**, CEO, VCOSSPanellists:* Professor **Kitty te Riele**, Deputy Director (Research), Peter Underwood Centre for Education Attainment, University of Tasmania
* **Murray Geddes**, Principal – LOOKOUT Centre, South East Victoria Region, Department of Education and Training
* **Cathy Connop**, Centre Manager, Farnham Street Neighbourhood Learning Centre
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| **1.10pm** | **Close** | **Emma King**, CEO, VCOSS |