

Current activities

Southern Melbourne is progressing a range of activities to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.

Children in out-of-home care

The partnership has established three working groups to improve the health, education and social outcomes of children in out-of-home care.

Improve health and development

Children in out-of-home-care often have poorer health outcomes than other children. We focused on improving these children's access to General Practice, Maternal and Child Health and Oral health Services.

Strategies include:

- developing a Partnering Agreement to support health care access for children in care, in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services Child Protection unit and Monash Health
- developing a resource guide for carers to promote access to universal and targeted health services, led by Enliven (PCP)
- supporting Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home-care to have timely and appropriate health assessments via working group support to the Koolin Balit Monash Health Healthy Koori Kids (HKK) program, and
- a rapid review of oral health strategies for children in out-of-home care for us by the University of Melbourne. We are drawing on this evidence to prototype possible strategies.

Engaging in learning

Through our work on education, and the establishment of the Lookout Education Support Centre we have seen an increase in school attendance among children in out-of-home care in Southern Melbourne and an increased rate of children supported by a Learning Mentor. This is a result of ensuring that:

- all children in out-of-home care are engaged with early childhood services, enrolled and engaged in school or participating in an alternative educational setting, and
- effective implementation and monitoring of the School and Early Childhood Partnering Agreements across Southern Melbourne.

We have introduced a communication protocol between Southern Melbourne Departments of Education and Training and Health and Human Services which gives staff from both departments a clear process and contacts if they need to come together to support a student, especially for child protection matters. This protocol will make it easier for schools, child protection and community services to be more responsive to clients and students.

A LOOKOUT Centre has been established in the South Eastern Victoria Region as an additional resource to support schools, Child Protection Practitioners and case workers to meet their obligation under the Out-of-Home Education Commitment. The LOOKOUT Centre has supported the training of "designated teachers" who are the first point of contact with the LOOKOUT Centre and advocate for students in out-of-home care.

For more information

see: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/schools/teachers/health/Pages/oohcsupport.aspx#link79>

Engaging in regular social activity

All children and young people have the right to play, engage in recreation and enjoy friendships with their peers. Our survey of nearly 80 primary school-aged children and young people in out-of-home care in Southern Melbourne showed us that many are not engaged in regular social activities, including sport and recreation. Many had limited to no contact with friends outside of school. Harnessing this information, we are working on a range of actions to:

- Support and empower carers in the community to better support children in out-of-home care to participate in sports and recreation and maintain friendships, including by linking up carers
- Build case managers capacity and provide them direct support to enable children's participation in sport, recreation and social activities in a child's community
- Build connections with sports and recreation clubs and community groups, peak bodies and business and across services, to reduce the barriers to children in out-of-home care accessing sport and recreation

This group has already successfully forged a partnership with Aligned Leisure and YMCA, the major sports and recreation providers for Cardinia Shire and City of Casey offering foster families voucher books, providing free access to family swims, tennis court hire, stadium access and other opportunities.

For foster families residing in the Shire of Cardinia, interested in obtaining a **voucher book**, please contact Mila Waise on (03) 9096 12 46 or mila.waise@dhhs.vic.gov.au

New focus on improving outcomes for young people

Our partnership is exploring the issue of youth disengagement and looking to hear from the young

people about their experiences.

Reducing chronic school absence

In Southern Melbourne a large number of school aged young people are missing more than a month of school each year, and in some schools there is a large proportion of students with high absence. Every day of attendance in school contributes towards a child's learning and educational engagement is fundamental to future life outcomes. The Area Partnership has taken up a collective focus on a school attendance, as chronic absence isn't something that schools can tackle alone. As underlying this issue is often a complex range of individual and/or family or community issues.

Young people and parents lived experiences and ideas about chronic absence

The Area Partnership wanted to first learn from young people and their families about *their* lived experiences of chronic school absence, in order to effectively understand the problem and design *effective* solutions. Qualitative research was undertaken by Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) on behalf of the partnership. In mid-2017, BSL engaged with 32 young people and parents about their views & experiences of chronic school absence & ideas on what was needed to address this issue. A few examples of the experiences of young people & parents in Southern Melbourne are described below:

PARENTS /CARERS - Carrying a heavy load

- ***I lost a lot of friends because of behavioural issues with him. They would just stop calling, stop catching up because they didn't want to deal with it.***
- ***He didn't really have any relationships with friends. For me it was the norm. I'm going to get 'the' call. It's going to happen. It happened every day. But the pressure built for me. I knew it was coming, but still, what could I do to change it?***
- ***I was doing the Coles services, which is the cleaning. I was just waiting for the phone call. As soon as I got to work I was waiting for the phone call to come and get him. [My supervisor] was starting to get pretty frustrated with me.***
- ***But if I'm just going to be sitting there and being attacked about how bad my child is, I don't want to know. So I stopped going to parent-teacher interviews. I stopped answering their phone calls.***

YOUNG PEOPLE

- ***Even just waking up I'd just know what the day would hold for me and just want to go back to sleep and just stay in my bed for the whole day. It just became emotionally draining every single day ... I didn't want to socialise with my family, I didn't want to socialise with the [few] friends that I did have. It's like having multiple chains weighing you down to all***

the problems that you're facing. They're all connected to you but there's nothing really there in a sense. For [my brother] and my mother it was probably one of the hardest times in their life to try and deal with me in general because they didn't know what I was going through. I was just a very touchy bomb really.

- ***When you miss a year, you miss out on people your own age and your friends. It's embarrassing to fall so far behind in the first place, and being with younger kids. It's hard socially.***
- ***I found that in high school you're either the shark or the fish, you can't be anywhere in between. You either swim with the fish or you're someone like a shark, which is the bullies or the popular people ... But, to be honest, there's always something worse than fish, there's always bait, which was people like me.***

Action learning teams established with three school communities

Three placed based 'action learning (co-design) teams' have been established in **Cranbourne, Noble Park, and Pakenham** to support school communities in these areas to understand the local core issues and test strategies in response over 2018. The action learning teams are seeking to capture diverse perspectives to gain new insights and design effective solutions. The team members currently include school principals, parents, DET, family services, local council - youth services, School Focused Youth Services, Student Support Services, Local Learning & Employment Network, Navigator and Oakwood/flexible learning providers. Action learning team members have come together to share data and insights to understand the local core problems underlying chronic absence. Possible solutions that respond to agreed problems were identified, and selected ideas are now being further designed and refined by action learning teams for testing over 2018.

Early intervention and prevention of youth offending

The work of the partnership on youth offending

Some very vulnerable young people in Southern Melbourne are engaging in high risk behaviour and criminal offending above the state average. While the overall number of violent offences committed by these young people remains small, this offending understandably generates significant public concern.

A multidisciplinary/cross agency panel supported by SMCYAP and Chaired by Victoria Police is meeting monthly to support early intervention with young people engaged in low- medium level offending. The Area Partnership with Victoria Police, has also facilitated exploratory work to understand the common themes across young people engaged in early offending, to inform area wide early intervention and preventive efforts. A report of these workshop findings was prepared and has been considered by the SMCYAP Leadership Group.

"Young people disengaged from education and young people with challenging behaviours in the school environment" was identified as a possible shared Southern Melbourne priority

focus for youth offending prevention efforts.

Collaborating for impact project-Supporting alignment across local partnerships

More than 40 partnerships and alliances work in the Southern Melbourne Area to support vulnerable families, children and young people. We don't want to duplicate work in the area - we want to support and enhance it. We held a *Collaborating for Impact forum* in August 2016 that brought together many partnerships to investigate ways to improve both coordination and impact. We found that in Southern Melbourne, there are:

- 47 partnerships
- 21 backbones or auspice organisations
- 240 member organisations
- 33+ people facilitating the partnerships and
- 282 meetings held every year.

Here are some of the comments the mapping prompted:

'How do we get best use of all this effort?'

'It's overwhelming; how do we create meaningful relationships?'

'How hard must it be for the community to navigate this space?'

'What is the quality/depth of each partnership?'

'Membership and active participation are different'

Forum recommendations across local partnerships:

- Common agendas with outcomes measurement
 - Common resourcing of core partnership enablers/functions
 - Targeted effort to high-impact areas of focus and target groups
 - A streamlined partnership architecture (eventually)
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- Within specified target groups and area of focus bring existing partnerships together to create a shared vision, with supporting principles, and identify common themes / goals with quantifiable indicators.
 - Within separate age cohorts target a population with which the biggest difference can be made
 - Create a mechanism to allow for whole-area resourcing for common partnership functions:
 1. data aggregation;
 2. plan coordination;
 3. training; and
 4. information sharing and communications.

Additional common functions could also include:

5. coordination of joint advocacy for funding;
6. coordination of collaboration on joint bids for funding;

7. service and activity mapping to better understand duplication / gaps

The report describes both our complex landscape and opportunity to align our effort for greater impact. A copy of the report is available below:

 [Summary report_collaborating for impact_Andrew Hollow_Aug 2016.pdf](#)

Working with Aboriginal communities

The Southern Melbourne Area Partnership has established the Southern Metropolitan Aboriginal Children and Young People Alliance. This group provides an opportunity to bring together Aboriginal workers from across the Southern Metropolitan Area to positively influence the future of Aboriginal children and young people through the coordination of efforts and shared work.

Alliance members recently met and agreed to focus on exploring how they could best collectively impact young Aboriginal people in residential care and on youth justice orders, and are considering what preventive work could be done to better support young Aboriginal people who are at risk.

Leadership and support

The SMCAYP has update its governance structure and scope to ensure that maximum benefit is being achieved from the broad cross sector representation around the table working together to achieve better outcomes for vulnerbale childre, young people and their families in Southern Melbourne. For more information see SMCYAP Governance see:

SMCYAP governance_April 2018.pdf

 [SMCYAP governance_April 2018.pdf](#) [1]

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<https://melsouth.areapartnerships.vic.gov.au/community/southern-melbourne/current-activities>

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