

Successful partnerships: A brief guide



Learning from
the South Australian
Social Inclusion Initiative

A publication of the
Social Inclusion Board



Government
of South Australia

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Acknowledgments

The Social Inclusion Board acknowledges the contribution of all those involved in the School Retention Action Plan and the Suicide Prevention Initiative who have so willingly shared their learning.

The Social Inclusion Board is grateful to the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) upon which some of this material is built, and for granting permission to reproduce the diagram on p.4.

Glossary

ACE	Adult and Community Education
ICAN	Innovative Community Action Networks
SRAP	School Retention Action Plan
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VicHealth	Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

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ISBN 978-0-9804697-0-7

Partnerships in a social inclusion context

Good partnerships have become an essential component of successful programs and services in the contemporary human and community service environment. Achieving good partnerships involves more than using certain words in funding submissions and program plans. It requires thoughtful decisions based on an appreciation of the types of partnership relationships, the situations to which they are suited, the benefits they offer to all partners, and the qualities that support their success.

The willingness and enthusiasm of business and community organisations to step up and be involved in Innovative Community Action Networks (ICANs) has resulted in a great range of programs and a great deal of success.

Monsignor David Cappo AO
Commissioner for
Social Inclusion

Working in a joined-up way through partnerships is a primary expectation of the South Australian Social Inclusion Board in the implementation of the various initiatives and action plans arising from the Board's work in areas such as homelessness, school retention and suicide prevention. Partnerships are advocated across government departments, between different sectors, and between government and non-government organisations and community groups.

Through the social inclusion work, existing partnerships have been strengthened and new partnerships created amongst workers and organisations who had not previously worked together. Working in partnership has been seen as positive, contributing different and valuable perspectives and resources that may not have been provided or available otherwise. But they have also required new and different skills for the partnerships to be successful.

The work of two Social Inclusion initiatives—school retention and suicide prevention—provided an opportunity to explore characteristics, examples, and benefits of different partnership relationships in more detail in order to gain a better understanding about what contributes to making partnerships successful.

Whenever an organisation considers entering into a partnership with another group, it is necessary for all parties to be clear about the parameters and expectations of all potential partner organisations if the partnership is to succeed. From the social inclusion experience, lack of clarity of expectations at the outset can lead to dissatisfaction with partnership arrangements and even an irretrievable breakdown of the relationship altogether. On the other hand, successful partnerships can often exceed expectations in terms of the benefits they deliver, including other unanticipated positive outcomes.

What is this guide?

This brief guide is designed to support organisations to make considered decisions about the type of partnerships they might want to establish to support their service or specific projects, and what benefits they may hope to gain. It provides organisations with some ways for thinking about and considering the possible partnerships that they might want to establish or strengthen, and ways for making decisions about joined-up working that will support specific programs or their overall service.

The guide builds on the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) model (2004a), which describes four different types of partnerships. These have been extended and enhanced to incorporate the learning and draw on the experiences gained from implementing the Social Inclusion initiatives. This guide outlines:

- the different types of partnerships and
- the ways organisations might consider creating partnerships.

We encourage people to use this brief guide and share it widely.



Different types of partnerships

If everyone works together in the community, we're much more likely to succeed in creating a brighter future for our young people.

ICAN newsletter #1



The term 'partnership' may be used loosely to describe a range of connections between agencies or groups, from a referral option through to highly involved joint planning and delivery of programs or program components with shared resources. Partnerships are lived and experienced very differently depending on their purpose and nature.

Therefore, for partnerships to be successful, it is important to take a strategic approach to forming partnerships that clearly outlines the purpose and parameters of partnership arrangements.

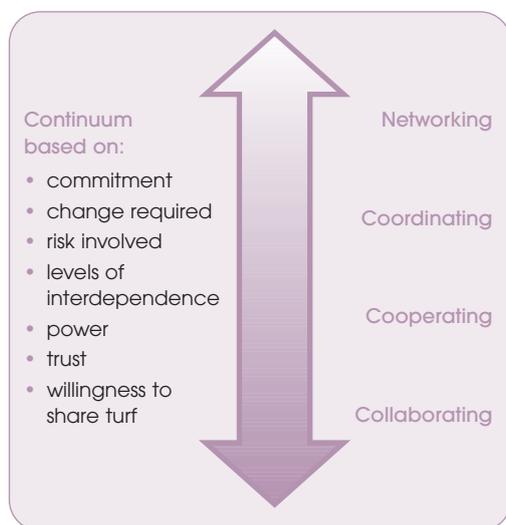
It is important for organisations to be clear about what, exactly, they mean when talking about partnerships. A way of identifying different types of partnerships is provided by the VicHealth *Partnerships Fact Sheet* (2004a). The fact sheet outlines four types of partnership relationships, based on Himmelman's (2001) work:

- networking
- coordinating
- cooperating
- collaborating.

While developed for a health promotion context, this categorisation is equally applicable to other contexts and settings. It is used as the basis for discussion in this section of the guide.

The social inclusion work found that the skills and time necessary to form and maintain the different partnerships were a significant factor in the type of partnerships that developed.

VicHealth suggest that 'most partnerships move up and down a continuum which shows progression based on degree of commitment, change required, risk involved, levels of interdependence, power, trust and a willingness to share turf' (2004a, p. 1). This is demonstrated in the accompanying diagram.



VicHealth, 2004a, p.1

Although the partnerships are placed in a continuum in the VicHealth model, this does not imply that one type is better than another, just that they are different and it is important that each organisation's expectations of any partnership correspond to the type of partnership it is. There is a place for all of these types of partnerships.

The *Partnerships Analysis Tool*, produced by John McLeod for VicHealth (2004b), provides a handy checklist for organisations to use in assessing the current status of their partnerships and in identifying areas that need further support and work. The key features highlighted in the checklist match those found in successful partnerships within social inclusion initiatives. When establishing partnerships, it is useful to consider what each partnership is seeking to achieve and choose the relationship that 'fits' best by considering what the different types of partnerships have to offer.

To assist organisations in determining what kind of partnership they might want to establish, *Successful partnerships: A brief guide* has, for each of the four partnership types identified by VicHealth, drawn on the findings of the social inclusion initiatives to provide:

- a description of the partnership characteristics
- an explanation of the situations in which it is useful
- examples of how it is being used
- the benefits it offers.

Networking partnerships

Networking occurs when organisations agree to **share information** with each other about programs, activities or specific people that is of **mutual benefit** to their organisation or the people with whom they work. It takes relatively little time and trust to do this. Organisations may make **referrals** to each other or **advocate** for their client group with each other. At times, organisations may be in regular contact and spend considerable time **networking** with each other, but the partnership does not extend beyond **information exchange**.

Networking partnerships are useful to a program or organisation if it:

- wants to **identify** potential groups for more involved partnerships
- wants to **promote** itself to the individuals, families and communities the partner supports
- needs to **access** a broad and responsive range of referral sources.

Examples	Benefits
<p>A network of services with a shared focus (eg young people, community support, mental health) meets regularly for information exchange and service promotion.</p> <p>A school refers children and families to a non-government organisation that provides educational scholarships: the children may also be offered tutoring support or literacy programs.</p> <p>A community organisation approaches training organisations to accept young people into their existing courses.</p>	<p>A networking partnership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• heightens awareness of what services and programs can be accessed in local regions, statewide or nationally• provides opportunities to reciprocally promote partner organisations and programs• improves responses to identified needs with practical service, program or support options• identifies opportunities for building partnerships with other groups• increases satisfaction by contributing to the work of other groups with shared goals.

We've built relationships with agencies and we have seen the benefits very clearly of those links because it's given us new ways of making referrals for our young people.

Families SA, *Joined-up*
SRAP film clips

Coordinating partnerships

Coordinating occurs when, in addition to sharing information, organisations start to **alter how, where, when or with whom** they undertake their activities to support each other's work for a **common purpose**. It involves more time and trust, but does not usually involve sharing control. Organisations draw on each other's knowledge and expertise to **review and reshape their regular activities** so that they better meet their shared client base, target audience or purpose. They may operate in a complementary way, but more **alongside each other** rather than together. Organisations may meet to **collectively advocate** on an issue of shared concern or plan a **coordinated approach** to an issue, but implement their particular aspect of it within their organisations.

Coordinating partnerships are useful to a program or organisation if it:

- needs or wants to **reach specific groups** of people with whom the partner has existing relationships
- **strengthens access** to the individuals, families and communities it aims to support
- **strengthens the breadth or depth of what it can offer** the individuals, families and communities it aims to support
- needs **support to undertake advocacy** on priority issues
- is able to **gain essential resources** and/or **expertise** from the partner at no or limited cost.

We've improved the connections with schools from our work and this helps schools and agencies to do things differently.

Christies Beach Learning Centre, *Joined-up* SRAP film clips

Examples	Benefits
<p>Schools or community agencies provide access to venues, resources and, if needed, supervisory staff in order for an external organisation to hold an event or provide a program or service within their environment, and they change local scheduling to accommodate this.</p> <p>A TAFE college changes their course content so students participate in a suicide prevention workshop, provided by an external group, as a core component of their community services course.</p> <p>A community organisation runs a youth centre which young people access as a pathway to re-engagement and through which they are case managed, thereby supporting the aims of a government initiative through a coordinated approach.</p> <p>A non-government agency provides specific expertise through training or ongoing consultancy advice that resources a community group's program or service.</p> <p>A local health authority holds an expo or promotion day at which various community groups coordinate their contributions to it.</p> <p>A government agency, wishing to consult with a particular population group, approaches the key agencies in the identified area, works with them to access the population group, seeks the views of the population group and advocates for providing additional support for them.</p>	<p><i>In addition to the benefits of networking partnerships, a coordinating partnership:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotes a picture of coordinated effort and cross-communication between different organisations to target audiences or community members • increases access to locations and resources that make it possible for a program or event to be run • improves specific knowledge and expertise that assists in developing, strengthening and monitoring programs • meets the needs of target audiences more effectively through pooling of resources and effort • gains connections to individuals and communities that partners need to include and may otherwise find difficult to reach • integrates information on issues of shared concern into other organisations.

Cooperating partnerships

Cooperating occurs when organisations agree to **share** both **information and resources**, as well as **alter their activities** based on a **common purpose**. In these partnerships, organisations are sharing control, putting in significant amounts of time to support each other and have developed higher levels of trust. Formal agreements may be created about what resources are shared and how. Organisations may decide to **pool resources** to make a program available that they could not manage or resource on their own, or they may **co-deliver** existing or new programs. They may **gain access** to a target audience that they find hard to reach, or **provide services** in each other's locations to **increase access** for people who need these services. Cooperating might occur as a once-off event or program or on a continuing basis.

Cooperating partnerships are useful to a program or organisation if it:

- works together with the partner to provide **joined-up support** to the same individuals, families and communities
- wants to **influence** and/or **support whole of community** local or regional initiatives
- enables the **provision of more comprehensive and/or additional services** compared to what it can do alone and at a lower cost
- wants to **learn** from a partner's organisational approach and strategies
- aims to identify partners who will develop and support **joint funding initiatives**.

It works fantastically having the double agencies working together with the one young person. What they can't provide I can, and what I can't provide they can.

Mission Australia,
ICAN newsletter #7

Examples	Benefits
<p>A community centre is the hub for a range of activities and services (eg child care, adult education, health, counselling). It coordinates many of the activities offered by the different organisations within their location and offers shared resources to support the activities: resources are pooled by services to administer and support the activities.</p> <p>A cultural arts organisation who wishes to reach a particular population group, provides a tailored program for another agency, then cooperates with them to design and implement a subsequent program with the same population group.</p> <p>A local government regional association provides funding, management, promotion and coordination support for a regional suicide prevention program to help meet the objectives of a local suicide prevention network.</p> <p>An Aboriginal community group facilitates an external agency's access to community members for consultation on suicide prevention. It then supports the planning and implementation of a targeted program by being members of the Program Advisory Group, promoting the program in the community and participating in program activities.</p>	<p><i>In addition to the benefits of networking and coordinating partnerships, a cooperating partnership:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides a range of services for the community in a central, accessible and relatively 'friendly' location • promotes greater uptake of services for programs that would otherwise be unknown • ensures local or regional initiatives are well supported so that a consistent message is communicated to the target audience or community • minimises the infrastructure costs of providing programs and services • develops the trust and respect of community leaders who can support and promote partner programs or services, which may lead to the joint development of subsequent programs.

Collaborating partnerships

Each workshop had a participatory process so that people's knowledge, skills and experience were valued, and the practice wisdom emerging from local initiatives and the overall initiative was shared and strengthened.

'Suicide prevention in country Australia'¹,
Auseinetter issue 27

Collaborating occurs when, in addition to the activities described above, organisations are willing to **focus time, energy and resources to strengthen the capacity** of the other partners for **mutual benefit** and a **common purpose**. There is **shared control** over programs and activities, which involves the highest levels of trust and considerable time to achieve and sustain the partnership. Collaborative partnerships will frequently **add capacity** for partners; are frequently **ongoing**; are often formally established; include **pooling of resources and governance arrangements**; and are guided by **co-developed long-term plans** with substantial commitments. Partners **share in the dilemmas and risks** involved, but also in the **rewards**, which can be considerable for organisations as well as the people with whom they work.

Collaborating partnerships are useful to a program or organisation if it:

- adds a potentially **greater capacity** to support a wider group of individuals, families and communities with a broader range of services in joined-up ways
- wants to commit to a **long-term relationship** based on joint planning and decision-making processes
- sees benefit in **cross-mentoring and support** for mutual professional and organisational development
- sees benefit in **sharing responsibilities and risks** with partners.

Examples	Benefits
<p>A school and external agencies create formal agreements to engage qualified staff who provide direct services to children and families, and work with school staff to design responses for identified issues at a classroom, community and/or school culture level.</p> <p>An Aboriginal and mainstream organisation jointly identify objectives and strategies for undertaking suicide prevention work, with each allocating staff, time and program funding, or jointly applying for funding.</p> <p>An Aboriginal parent group and a school share development of community information and education materials on issues of joint interest, or on a jointly developed and implemented program.</p> <p>A community group works with a general agency to develop and implement a program in their area of expertise with shared responsibility for the plans and outcomes, eg a young men's camp that generated the idea for an ongoing local youth group.</p> <p>A community member or consumer works alongside organisational staff to develop an idea or program, becomes an Advisory Group member, gains employment in another agency, then works with the organisation to deliver the program in that context with full support of that agency.</p>	<p><i>In addition to the benefits of networking, coordinating and cooperating partnerships, a collaborating partnership:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • minimises the infrastructure costs of providing programs and services, and shares the responsibility and resourcing of planning and evaluation • improves access to personal, practical and professional support from the partner by pulling together to achieve similar outcomes • builds foundations for further collaborative efforts on areas of shared interest or commitment • increases the capacity of the organisation or program to more responsively deliver joined-up services to a greater number of people in a broader range of ways, leading to better outcomes.

¹ Stacey & Keller (2006)

Creating partnerships

The social inclusion experience has demonstrated that good partnerships can make a real difference in responding to pressing social needs in ways that benefit individuals, families, organisations and communities. Working in partnerships has also become a valued skill.

One organisation—many partnerships

It is important to remember that effective organisations need a range of different partnerships to meet a variety of purposes to provide joined-up services. Each of the four different partnership types have value in their own right: for example, a collaborating partnership, which requires the most time, effort or resources, may not always be appropriate. Ostrower (2005) points out that while collaboration has become increasingly viewed as a commendable approach to providing services and support, such partnerships are not always easy to manage and can, at times, be resource and time-intensive to establish and maintain.

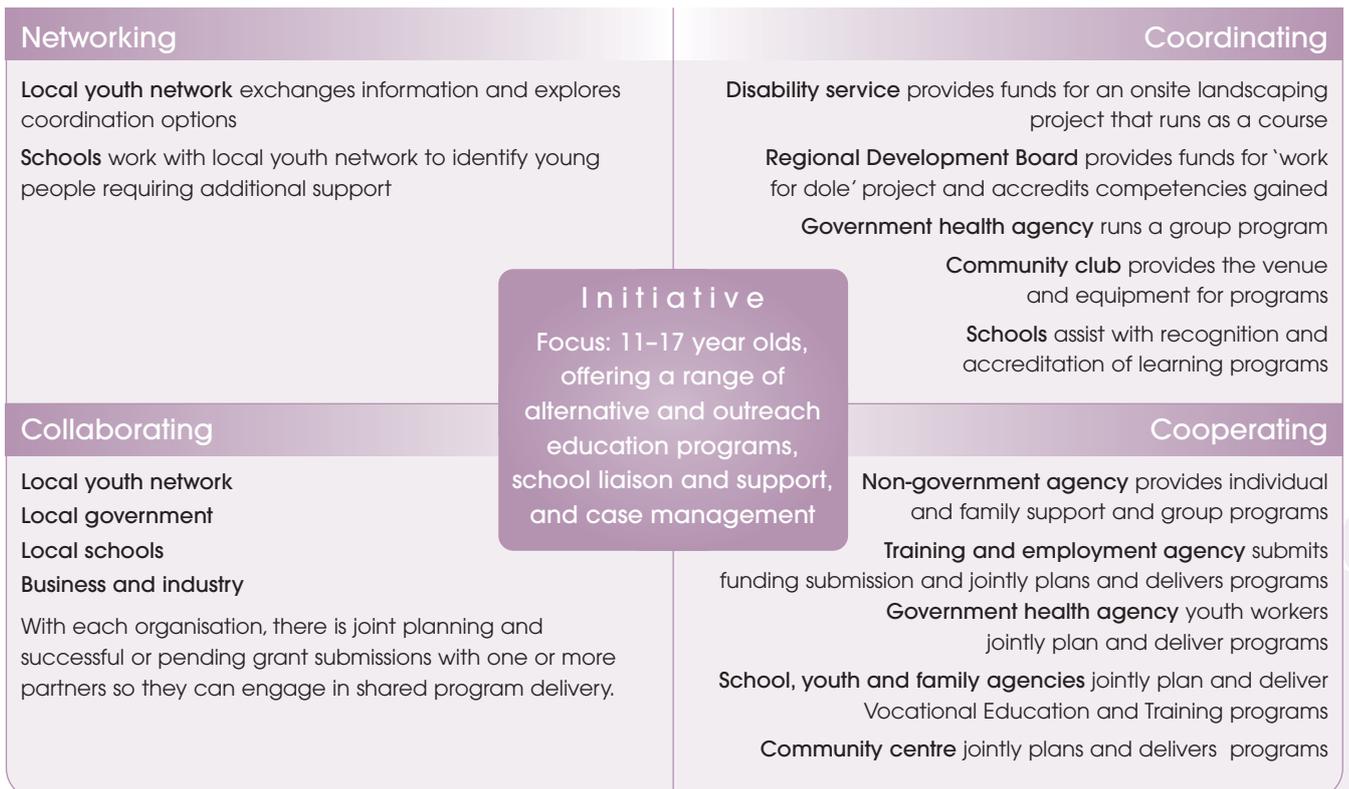
The figure below provides an example of the multiple relationships that a program may enter into, drawing on all four partnership types as they meet different needs. It draws on a rurally-based social inclusion school retention initiative.

The **networking** partnership ensures wide knowledge and promotion of the program, and is also the seeding ground for identifying groups with whom other partnerships can be developed.

The **coordinating** partnerships provide access to venues, skills and resources that support the program to provide diverse, accredited, 'real' and community-based education programs.

The **cooperating** partnerships extend the capacity of the program to serve the young people and families it supports as part of a regional strategy where several groups are focused on strategies for engagement and re-engagement with education, training and employment pathways.

The **collaborating** partnerships aim to create long-term relationships and commitments, based on shared goals, funding sources and responsibility for program delivery.



Increased cooperation amongst agencies in the delivery of services has led to more innovative and flexible responses to the often very complex needs of the young people involved and their families—forming a ‘web of services’.

Social Inclusion Unit, 2006a, p.41

What makes a successful partnership?

The qualities of successful partnerships identified through the findings of the various social inclusion initiatives hold much in common with those identified in other recent literature on partnerships among government agencies, non-government agencies, community groups and/or schools (eg Ausyouth, 2003; Stokes, Stacey & Lake, 2006; Taylor, Wilkinson & Cheers, 2007).

Clearly, as relationships become more involved and reflect cooperating and collaborating partnerships, these qualities become increasingly critical. They include:

- clarity and agreement about the purpose of the relationship
- shared goals and visions
- a good ‘fit’ between the partnership purpose, shared goals and visions, and the articulated needs of the communities in which the partnership operates
- identification of mutual benefits that respond to each partners’ needs
- leadership support, both organisational and program leadership, for the partnership
- good communication, including reflective processes to review how the partnership is working for all partners and whether shared goals are being achieved
- the capacity of partners to support the chosen partnership type
- a foundation of trust, fostered through continuity of relationships, and mutual respect
- recognition of each other’s strengths, expertise and credibility among particular population groups
- a willingness to be flexible, to support each other, and to share responsibility.

These qualities of successful partnerships apply equally to a range of services which focus on a variety of population groups. They are consistent with the six facilitating factors for working collaboratively to improve outcomes for young people, as identified by Rawsthorne and Eardley (2004). The Social Inclusion Initiative found that these facilitating factors also supported partnerships in both the school retention and suicide prevention initiatives, as outlined in the following table:

Facilitating factor ²	Social Inclusion Initiative finding
Create shared responsibility and common goals	When organisations rated their partnerships highly in terms of success and effectiveness, regardless of the type of partnerships, the partners shared common goals and at times similar philosophies. Those involved in more complex cooperating or collaborating partnerships benefited when a person from either partner played a ‘partnership facilitation’ role to assist all involved partners to speak a similar language and head in the same direction.
Adopt a holistic perspective and tailor services to people’s needs, ie have a common approach and understanding	In networking and coordinating partnerships, one partner usually took a lead in setting the approach and adopting a holistic perspective to meet the needs of the individuals, families or communities that it aimed to support. The other partner was asked, or offered, to tailor programs, services and experiences to address these needs, ie to fit into the approach to at least some degree. Partners in cooperating and collaborating partnerships needed to discuss and make conscious commitments to adopt a holistic perspective and a common approach to meeting the needs of their shared target population in order for their relationships to work.
Allow time to establish trust and respect	Cooperating and collaborating partnerships required more trust and respect to operate effectively compared with networking and coordinating partnerships, although a level of trust was still required for communication to go smoothly. This was enabled through early successes in the partnership, which strengthened goodwill and often led to community partners increasing their commitment and, on occasions, moving from networking/ coordinating to cooperating or collaborating partnerships. How the partnership was lived with respect and dignity did more to strengthen and sustain it than formalising the relationship through documents.

² Rawsthorne and Eardley (2004)

Facilitating factor ²	Social Inclusion Initiative finding
Provide staff with support and resources	Partners that could easily identify 'shared business' were better able to share resources, as could partners who were co-located. Other valuable ways that partners resourced each other included moral support; peer debriefing; facilitating links to other partners; sharing ideas and strategies; offering expertise in needed areas; and advocating on each other's behalf at a personal, program or service level. When these aspects were built into funding arrangements or considered in initial planning between partners, the over-extension of partner capacity, goodwill and available in-kind support was avoided. This was particularly important in cooperating and collaborating partnerships.
Be creative and flexible	Partners in successful relationships were committed to working together to develop local solutions. If they had access to substantial funding from other sources, this increased their flexibility in tailoring local solutions, provided they could find creative ways to meet the requirements of the external funding source and partners. Some partners came with this funding in place, while others identified external funding sources that fit with the collective agreements about local needs and how to address them. For example, a regional youth network, made up of a mix of large and smaller players, successfully gained external grants and auspiced them through a local agency to provide program options for a local program.
Expand knowledge of other agencies by sharing skills, ideas and approaches	Successful relationships, across all partnership types, occurred when partners had something to offer each other that complemented or expanded the other organisation's skills, capacities and activities. This became more possible in cooperating and collaborating partnerships, particularly when two or more partners met together for joint planning, problem-solving and skills sharing. This assisted them to develop a coordinated and coherent approach to the overall programs or activities they were collectively supporting.

Preparing to partner

There are a number of resources available, both in hard copy and online, which provide tools, guidelines and advice on setting up different types of partnerships, for example:

- *School and community partnerships for youth development* (Ausyouth, 2003) includes advice on preparing for partnerships, critical pathways and indicators of good practice.
- *The partnerships analysis tool for partners in health promotion* (VicHealth, 2004b) includes a useful checklist on the need for a partnership, selecting partners, collaboration and minimising barriers.
- *Creating effective ACE and VET partnerships: Good practice guide* (Gelade et al, 2006) includes advice on planning and setting up partnerships, specifically in the ACE and VET sectors, but which could be adapted for other systems.
- *Toolkit: How to build a partnership* (renewal.net, 2004): an online British toolkit which includes deciding on roles and membership; working in partnership; building community capacity and establishing accountability.
- *Forming, developing and sustaining social partnerships* (Billett et al, 2005) includes principles of partnership work, such as building capacities, shared goals, relations, leadership and trust.

Further details for all these resources are in the bibliography.

Benefiting communities

When communities share the responsibility for responding together to the identified needs of individuals, those individuals are also connected with their communities. By working together in joined-up ways through partnerships, we will collectively reap the benefits, as responses are more targeted, efforts more coordinated, outcomes more effective, and satisfaction is greatly increased.

The work of the Social Inclusion Board and its programs strongly support the new 'joined-up' ways of working to achieve the best possible outcomes for members of the community who may be facing many disadvantages.

Monsignor David Cappo AO
Commissioner for
Social Inclusion

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Communities who work in successful partnerships collectively reap the benefits, as responses are more targeted, efforts more coordinated and outcomes more effective.



The South Australian Social Inclusion Initiative experience has shown that working in joined-up ways through partnerships leads to more effective responses and better outcomes. However, for partnerships to succeed, partners need to be clear about the expectations they have of themselves and one another.

This brief guide presents ways for considering different partnerships and the factors that facilitate joined-up working that assist in the development of successful partnerships.