

Productivity Commission – Review of Philanthropy – Submission Colman Education Foundation – May 2023

About Us

[Our Place](#) is a holistic place-based approach to supporting the education, health and development of all children and families in disadvantaged communities by utilising the universal platform of government schools. Our Place is an initiative of the Colman Education Foundation, supported in partnership by the Paul Ramsay Foundation, Dusseldorp Forum, Ray & Margaret Wilson Foundation, Sabemo Foundation, RM Ansett Trust, William Buckland Foundation and Kennards Hire Foundation.

Our vision is that all children and their families succeed in life. Our work enables schools to be the central place for learning, health, wellbeing and support services to overcome barriers to educational achievement – including for parents and community.

Our Place was developed from the learnings and outcomes in our original lighthouse site at Doveton College which was founded in 2012. The College is a Victorian Government school, designed in partnership with Colman Education Foundation to holistically meet the needs of children and families. Outcomes from Doveton College show a significant reduction in the number of children identified as developmentally vulnerable (from 55% to 37%) as well as large improvements in parent and student engagement (see **Attachment A**). Following on from the success at Doveton College, in 2017 the Colman Education Foundation and Victorian Government agreed to implement the Our Place approach in schools at ten sites across Victoria over a ten-year period in each location. Doveton was joined by schools in Officer, Carlton, Frankston North, Mooroopna, Morwell, Corio, Robinvale, Seymour and Clayton South.

This submission draws from our experience of working in partnership with government to highlight **the role of government in supporting philanthropy** as part of the Commission’s interest in understanding and increasing philanthropic giving in Australia.

For further information, please contact Sean Cory, CEO



Context for a unique partnership

In November 2017, a landmark agreement was signed between the Victorian Government and the Colman Education Foundation to establish a unique place-based and integrated education approach at ten school sites across Victoria called Our Place. The agreement put in place a commitment to work together over a 12 year period – recognising that long term commitment is required to influence intergenerational disadvantage in these communities.

As a result of this agreement, substantial combined government and philanthropic investment has been committed in the state’s most disadvantaged schools:

- \$102 million from the Department of Education for enabling infrastructure for all ten schools in addition to in-kind support from school and department leaders
- Over \$29 million in infrastructure and service investments by local governments
- \$30 million from the Colman Education Foundation for establishment and implementation
- Up to \$30 million in additional contributions from the Our Place philanthropic partners to support implementation, research and organisational costs
- Over \$1.5 million to date in targeted program funding from other government agencies to increase service delivery at Our Place school sites.

This level of investment has been made possible through the unique partnership that has been developed between government and philanthropy to genuinely “walk alongside” each other to empower children, families, and communities to thrive. This partnership has endured – through two elections, changes in Ministers and changes in government and philanthropic staff – and in 2023 will once again be recommitted to, reflecting the lessons and progress to date.

This submission outlines what can be learned from this partnership. It shows how, with courage and vision, government can increasingly work with philanthropic organisations to create sustainable positive change and impact in policy areas that have historically proven difficult to address.

*‘Even though government is already involved as a strong partner, **philanthropy can bring that risk capital**, which sometimes is needed to be able to pilot a program or test a thought, and then have evidence to then progress and get some sustainability around that idea.’ The Ross Trust*

New ways of working are required between government and philanthropic organisations

The Commission’s remit is focussed on identifying how the Australian Government can respond to trends in philanthropic giving, including tools to grow giving such as regulation and tax policies. From the experience of the Our Place Partnership, a key tool which should also be considered is the *ways of working by government with philanthropic funders*.

A key role for philanthropy is to support ‘risk taking’ in the development of new, innovative ways to overcome long term challenges. However, these new approaches are best undertaken in partnership with government, to ensure that the lessons are more deeply understood by policy makers and that implementation can be jointly supported. Importantly, collaborative partnerships of this kind provide an authorising environment for staff at all levels to work differently to achieve change. This way of working will be increasingly important as government seeks to unlock additional forms of investment.

Collaborating with philanthropy requires new ways of working as well as suitable policies to enable partnerships to succeed. As outlined in the [2019 ‘Exploring the Our Place Partnership’ publication](#), the enabling conditions that allowed government and philanthropy to work together included:

- Working to a shared vision: ensuring alignment of core purpose to guide the partnership's development and implementation
- Enrolling senior stakeholders from the start: providing authorisation and endorsement for new ways of working at the highest levels
- Taking the time to build relationships and trust: these are key for successful collaboration and require investment to be developed
- Unleashing cross-portfolio champions: developing staff to have the skills to work outside of their comfort zone and across portfolio, sector and departmental silos
- Getting the governance right: developing and resourcing bespoke governance arrangements from the site to state-wide level to provide authorisation and collaboration across organisations and ensuring that partnership arrangement endure beyond individuals (see **Attachment B**).

Noting the significant development of the Partnership in recent years, the 'Exploring the Our Place Partnership' report is currently being reviewed and updated, with a revised version to be published on the Our Place website in the coming months.

Government can leverage greater investment by actively collaborating with others

The partnership between the Colman Education Foundation and the Victorian Government has been a lightning rod in attracting additional philanthropic investment to the implementation of Our Place.

There are now eight philanthropic organisations supporting Our Place over the long term. Each has come on board because they see great potential in the Our Place approach and understand the importance of sustained support to achieve lasting change. In particular, the ability to take a strategic, systemic approach as part of a long term, direct partnership with government resonates with philanthropic partners many of whom have previously funded programs with little lasting impact or have attempted to influence policy externally.

Since our establishment, Our Place has observed a greater appetite among philanthropic partners to invest in strategic, systemic opportunities that have a clear pathway of influence. As a result, we believe the creation of more partnership opportunities with government will help to access resources to support innovation on entrenched and complex problems.

"Systems don't generally innovate themselves. A child's education is provided by the Education Department, with teachers being paid, and that's the system operating as it is in status quo. It would be fantastic if the government also resourced the innovation required. But generally, this is hard and they don't. And so that's where I can see philanthropy making a massive difference, resourcing the work that's required to both reimagine those systems, how they need to be different, but then actually demonstrate them operating differently." Dusseldorp Forum

The long term commitment to Our Place by the Victorian Government has also led to improvements in how philanthropic organisations are working together to provide support for the Our Place vision. This includes the establishment of the Our Place Philanthropic Alliance which all long-term funders have committed to joining. The Alliance has enabled:

- Development of a standardised partnership agreement for all funders including streamlined reporting and administrative requirements
- Regular shared meetings to hear updates from Our Place implementation as well as to build on each other's expertise, knowledge and relationships
- Opportunities for funders to explore ways to collectively promote systemic changes through policy advocacy to government.

The ten-plus year commitment from investors and government has been critical and enables Our Place to take a longer term, strategic approach to our work of addressing intergenerational disadvantage. It has also meant that less resources have been dedicated to attracting and pursuing funding, reducing overheads and ensuring more funds go directly to supporting children, families and communities.

Recommendations

Building on our experience of working in partnership with government and convening philanthropic support, Our Place recommends that the Productivity Commission consider in its recommendations:

- Greater awareness within government of ways of partnering with philanthropic organisations to tackle complex policy challenges
- Policy adaptation to encourage cross-portfolio collaboration and long-term commitment to philanthropic partners
- Investment in governance structures and staff capability to authorise and auspice joint government-philanthropy investments.

*'The Our Place model itself is **becoming more accepted by Government**. There are nine more sites, there is 15 hours of government paid pre-school available to every child in the state, and there are 50 new early childhood centres that have recently been announced. These are all steps showcasing that the model is getting traction. The change this could have on future government built schools and early childhood centers is huge. This a live **example of the role that advocacy and philanthropy can have on the wider system**, made possible by Our Place's practice from the outset in gathering data and evidence to prove the positive impact and outcomes.'* The Ray & Margaret Wilson Foundation

Attachment A – Impacts at Doveton College

High-quality schooling

- Students made substantially above-average gains for reading and numeracy, compared to students from similar backgrounds with the same starting score (MySchool website, 2021).
- Rated in the Top-25 most-improved government schools for years 7–9 (2017 NAPLAN).
- One of only a few schools in Victoria where My School shows that the longer you're at the school, the better you do (MySchool website).
- Students consistently reported positive feelings of connectedness to school and are positive about their experience while at school.

High-quality early learning

- Reduced number of children identified as developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains by nearly one-third, from 55% in 2012 to 36% in 2021 (AEDC 2021).
- Reduced number of children identified as developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains dropped by nearly half, from 24% in 2018 to 13% in 2021 (AEDC 2021).
- The early learning centre obtained an excellent rating twice from the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) – in 2014 and 2017. At the time, there were only fifteen of 16,000 centres in Australia to have been rated excellent twice.
- 100% of students who attended the early learning centre in 2013 and continued at Doveton College into 2017 were at or above national minimum standards for reading and numeracy in Year 3 (NAPLAN).

Engagement and enrichment

- Participation in before and after-school activities increased eight-fold increase between 2015 and 2019 (engagement and enrichment program data collected by Doveton College).

Adult learning and engagement

- 115 employment outcomes obtained by parents or community members who either accessed employment support and/or attended educational opportunities offered at Doveton College.
- 300 attendees participated in English language courses offered at Doveton College since 2015. These courses provide English language proficiency for community members with a non-English speaking background, building the capability to support their children in their education.
- 300 adult attendees from the Doveton College community have completed life-skills and prevocational courses and a further 200 attendees at Certificate III, Certificate IV or Diploma level courses since 2013.
- More than 300 adult attendees from the Doveton College community have completed life-skills and pre-vocational courses (including some Certificate I courses) and a further 200 attendees at Certificate III, Certificate IV or Diploma level courses since 2013.

Wrap-around health and wellbeing

- Introduced a range of new services available at the school, including maternal child health nurse, speech pathology, occupational therapy, dietician, paediatrician, physiotherapy, counselling and GP clinic referrals and bulk-billing for allied health services and provision of Mental Health Care Plans.
- Introduced NDIS access onsite that allows children to spend far more time in class, compared to if they accessed this support away from the school, which would typically be the case.

Attachment B – Governance of the Our Place Partnership

Our Place Governance Structure



INTER-DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE (IDC)

Provides a pathway across government to deliver the integrated services required to operate the ten Our Place sites under one umbrella. Chaired by the DE Secretary, the IDC develops strategic direction, ensures work is conceptually aligned with system-level service delivery reforms and maximises the breadth of strategies being used across portfolios.

The IDC comprises representatives from Colman Education Foundation, Department of Education, Department of Premier & Cabinet, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Department of Justice and Community Safety, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions and Department of Treasury and Finance.



PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT GROUP (PMG)

Sustains and enhances the effectiveness of the partnership over the long-term. Shares collective learnings, identifies system-level barriers, supports issue resolution, facilitates access to expertise and resources, fosters accountability and monitors outcomes.



SITE PARTNERSHIP GROUPS (SPG)

Coordinates and supports the implementation at each Our Place site. Chaired by a senior representative nominated by DE and supported by the Our Place site team, the site partners co-design and agree to long-term work plans and shared ownership for action and outcomes.