

# 2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN





# Values driven, growing to deliver more

Founded in 1883 as the Try Society, Sparkways has a long and proud history, working to empower children and young people to reach their potential.

## It started with a bold idea

Born in 1846, William Mark Forster was a successful and well-connected clothing merchant and philanthropist, concerned for the plight of under-privileged children left behind by a rapidly expanding Melbourne society in the late 19th century.

His simple idea was that with opportunity and guidance all young people could accomplish, all they had to do was try. Forster's thinking and practice were bold for their time and predate current strength-based practices in youth welfare work in Australia.

Fast forward to 2023, where the organisation is starting a new phase and mapping out its trajectory for the next three years.

This document articulates our roadmap and our plan to continue to achieve for the period 2023 to 2026.

By the end of this time Sparkways will have a strong reputation as a leading provider of Early Years Management, Education and Care services and Youth Programs in Melbourne and surrounding areas.

Sparkways will be a more sought after and highly regarded employer with a quality, diverse workforce reflecting our communities.

The organisation will have achieved its financial objectives and be in a position for continuing growth.

Quality will be at the core of program practice and the organisation will be a leader in the achievement of quality standards.

**“We are in a great place, with a strong team and the resources to coach the organisation to grow sustainably over the next three years.”**

**- Daniel Findley, Chief Executive Officer.**



We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as Australia's First Peoples and as the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we work. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

## VISION

Spark opportunity, belonging and growth.

## PURPOSE

To create pathways for lifelong learning and social inclusion.

## CORE VALUES



### INCLUSION

Build our diverse and inclusive culture.



### INSPIRATION

Inspire children and young people.



### COMMITMENT

Commit to each other.



### GROWTH

Strive to increase quality, impact and outcomes.



# Our focus areas



## Social inclusion for young people experiencing vulnerability

1 in 3 young Australians are unemployed or underemployed, and 1 in 5 have been unemployed for 52 weeks or more.

The experience of unemployment, early in life, puts young people at greater risk of mental health issues, poor economic wellbeing and long-term financial disadvantage. With many young people going on to be welfare dependent for their whole lives.

Loneliness and social isolation are growing health risks for young Australians, leading to poor adult health outcomes, with more than one in four young Victorians reporting significant levels of loneliness, a fact not alleviated during multiple COVID lockdowns.

Sparkways will continue to deliver mentoring and job readiness initiatives to support young people in developing key protective factors such as financial stability, relationships with caring adults and networks with peers, along with building skills and capabilities for life.



## Early childhood education and care

Learning starts at birth and 90% of our brain's growth has occurred by the age of 5. High quality early childhood education and care is an investment in children and families that will return enormous dividends to society and ultimately reduce costs being spent in other areas.

Not only that but making early education **more accessible to all children** is one of the best ways they can get ahead and boost social mobility. Geography plays a large part, as where children live impacts their progress against developmental milestones.

Sparkways will continue to focus on operating services where the social need is greatest and to deliver high-quality, positive play-based experiences which, early in life, are proven to have long lasting effects on academic performance, wellbeing, and social outcomes.

## Early Years Management

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) providers have a unique role to play in the health and wellbeing of children and their families. ECEC services are uniquely positioned to not only provide quality social and educational experiences for children but to provide important links to community for children and families early in life.

On an ongoing basis the ability to trust an organisation that offers proven pedagogy, efficient processes and professional support for staff is proving to be important for Governments, Councils and organisations seeking Early Years Managers (EYM).

Sparkways will continue to be a quality service provider not only for Government, Councils and communities, but to ensure we secure the future of the children in our care.

# Our approach

We are committed to making a difference for individuals and communities, which will last a lifetime. We choose to be positive. We seek opportunities to be responsive and innovative.

## 1. Child and youth centred

With child safety at our heart, we seek the voices of children and young people to allow us to provide and build professional practice and services together, that optimise their outcomes. To empower through involvement and implement strength-based practices.

## 2. Trusted and collaborative partnerships

We work alongside individuals, communities, our team, and our partners, to build competency, confidence and resilience in children and young people. Our collaborative approach empowers communities with the capacity to create and access more opportunities, and to make the most of them.

## 3. Safe and inclusive environments

Our programs, services and departments are safe for children, young people, families and staff to thrive and grow. Creating an environment where families can entrust their children and young people into our care takes planning, assessment, management, and foresight. Without it, we risk so much more than our reputation. We celebrate diversity and pride ourselves in creating environments that are welcoming and inclusive.

## 4. Impactful and evaluated results

Our passion is for empowering people to share and action ideas that will generate positive, meaningful social change. We ensure that the legacy of our founder W.M. Forster is honored. We are passionate about delivering outcomes through new and innovative programs and services, and measure their effectiveness and impact for children and young people.



# Strategic priorities and objectives

Under each of the strategic priorities sit several objectives designed to be delivered over the next three years. At the top level they are:



## Delivering our Best

- ✓ Foster innovative evidence-based best practice
- ✓ Implement an organisation-wide Quality and Compliance Framework (QCF)
- ✓ Enhance indoor and outdoor environments

## Ensuring Operational Sustainability

- ✓ Diversify funding sources
- ✓ Sustainable growth across all programs and services
- ✓ Build on and maintain contemporary systems

## Develop Youth Strategy

- ✓ Refine our future direction for youth programs
- ✓ Incorporate young people in program development
- ✓ Grow programs and program reach

## Alongside our Community

- ✓ Implement external feedback systems
- ✓ Build reputation
- ✓ Increase diversity and accessibility
- ✓ Implement next level environmental policies and practices

## Investing in our People and Culture

- ✓ Continue to retain quality staff
- ✓ Increase staff engagement
- ✓ Align culture to our values
- ✓ Build on existing systems, internal processes, and training

## Building our Partnerships

- ✓ Develop existing / new partnerships
- ✓ Increase the shared value we can offer partners
- ✓ Increase advocacy opportunities for our services



# Statements and Acknowledgements

Sparkways is a child safe organisation. We have zero tolerance for child abuse and are committed to working with our communities and partners to ensure the provision of a safe environment for all children, young people and families.

Sparkways celebrates diversity and the lived experience of people of every ethnicity, faith, age, disability, culture, language, gender identity and sexual orientation.

We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children and young people, the cultural safety of children and young people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children and young people with a disability.







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