

Reichstein Foundation - history

Innovation

After a decade of traditional philanthropy, the Foundation's Trustees agreed in 1984 on a new agenda ... 'to be amongst the vanguard of philanthropic trusts, attempting to bring about social change with innovative projects.'

That commitment to innovation and social change was soon reflected in support for a range of projects, including community-led initiatives in Aboriginal health through the **Victorian Aboriginal Health Worker Co-operative**; new paradigms of engaging with poverty through the **Action Research Centre** and the **Brotherhood of St Laurence**; investments in **Ross House** to develop as an epicentre of community groups and social action; and avant-garde support for community-based social enterprises, especially through the **Macaulay Credit Union Co-operative**.

New ways of demonstrating injustice and telling the stories of discrimination were found through theatre and community broadcasting with support for projects such as the disability-focused **Arts Access** network, women's prison-based **Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company** and the **Open Channel** community network.

Pioneering support was provided to advance the rights of people facing homelessness, people with disability, newly arrived migrants, victims of domestic violence and prisoners, with numerous grants for **community legal centres**, the **Ecumenical Migration Centre**, **Welfare Rights Unit** and **Reinforce** among many others.

An early major initiative, in partnership with the Myer Foundation, was funding to establish **Foundation House** (the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture), a vital and highly successful innovative service to asylum-seeking survivors of torture or trauma. Over the past thirty years, Foundation House has earned international acclaim as a leader in its field, modelling services that have been replicated in each state of Australia and that demonstrate the most effective ways to enable people to rebuild their shattered lives after fleeing war and violence.

Advocacy

By 2001 the Foundation was recognised as 'one of Melbourne's strongest supporters of social justice' and was working closely with community partners in many sectors.

For example, crucial financial support for the **People Together** campaign in the early 1990s fostered a voice for Victorians concerned about growing inequality in the state; the **Fairwear Campaign** stepped up to eliminate the exploitation of home-based workers in the clothing and textile industry; and **Project Respect** emerged as a leading advocate for the needs of women marginalised through sex work. Important seed funding led to the establishment of the **Environment Defenders Office**.

More recently, support from the Reichstein Foundation has been instrumental in introducing controls over land clearing in Queensland; assisting the **Australian Conservation Foundation** to focus on climate change; and enabling **The Wilderness Society** to raise awareness of the proposed pulp mill in the Tasmanian Tamar Valley. Significant long term

support is also directed to the **Human Rights Law Centre** and the **Federation of Community Legal Centres**.

A major initiative, recognised as one of *Australia's Top 50 Philanthropic Gifts*, was support for the **Yorta Yorta Nation** and **Friends of the Earth** to establish a co-managed (Indigenous and parks service) Barmah-Millewa National Park. With other partners, a total of \$180,000 was invested in creating 200,000 hectares of new red gum conservation areas and national parks, including a ban on logging and cattle grazing in these areas.

Collaboration

Collaboration and partnership is central to the Reichstein Foundation's philosophy.

From major capacity building grants to **VCOSS** in the 1980s through to more recent support that enabled **neighbourhood houses** to achieve Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status, the Foundation has supported the community sector to grow and have greater reach and impact.

It works closely with individual donors and other trusts and foundations to build social change at scale and to grow the circle of philanthropy.

It actively links funders via a series of networks such as the **Australian Environmental Grantmakers Network**, the **Australian Women Donors Network**, **Changemakers** and the Indigenous-philanthropic partnership, **Woor-Dungin**.

It has shared space and resources with many others also seeking to give for the common good, including the Small Change Foundation (later the Education Foundation); Lumbu Foundation; Melbourne Community Foundation (later the Australian Community Foundation); Donkey Wheel Foundation; Pilotlight Australia (later Igniting Change); Dot Philanthropy; Changemakers Australia; and the Family Business Office.

A major initiative was a series of establishment grants and investments of time and skills from 1988 to 1996 for the fledgling Australian Association of Philanthropy. From these seeds **Philanthropy Australia** has flowered and is now the peak body responsible for promoting giving and developing the philanthropic sector in Australia.

[1] *Australian Financial Review*, 17-18 August 2013, p40