



*Changing lives together*  
Patron - Tim Winton

## **Opening address to the SWMPF inaugural annual meeting by its Chair, Michael Piu.**

Welcome everyone to the inaugural annual meeting of the SWMPF - it's great to see so many of you here today.

One definition I have seen of the word collaboration is "the action of working with someone to produce something". What struck me about this definition is its reference not just to the process of working together, but that in the end an outcome is produced from those efforts.

It's a step beyond other similar concepts, such as "cooperation", which is the process of working together to the same end. I think often the two concepts are confused.

There are plenty of examples of cooperation in the human services sector, particularly inter-agency meetings within specialised subject areas, such as homelessness and mental health. However, broad-based collaboration is rare, particularly involving multiple sectors, government and non-government, let alone community, business and philanthropy.

A collaborative approach makes sense, for so many reasons. We know very well that carrying on with past approaches is not resulting in a substantive break in the cycle of disadvantage. We also know that we need to make do with less in present economic circumstances. We know that wicked social problems are complex and cannot be addressed by focusing on a single approach or area of need, and that therefore there is common interest amongst all agencies to share resources and work together to produce the common outcome they all ultimately seek - that all individuals achieve their full potential, participating effectively in all areas of life and living. This is the vision of the SWMPF.

However, we must accept that this is not an intuitive way of working for the sector. The notion of the sovereignty of each organisation, and specialist human service area, has been strong for us up till now. To be effective in producing something worthwhile together, we need to lower our defences, put aside our organisational egos, build trust and be prepared to be vulnerable.

This process takes time, proactive work and good will on the part of all participants. It involves strong change management and a good dose of emotional intelligence on the part of all involved.

In this context, I feel we can stand proud as to the achievements of our Forum so far. A strong level of engagement has been built which has permitted new projects and partnerships to flourish not only within but parallel to the Partnership Forum, such as the Aboriginal youth programs in Willagee, or the collective approach to seeking funding from last year's DSS grants round to address commonly identified needs.

What we need to develop, to borrow an example from Dylan Smith of Fremantle Foundation, is the same sense of shared vision and commitment you would see in, say, a sporting club – if the club, or one of its members, has a need, everyone unhesitatingly pulls together and puts the club and its members first. If the change room needs renovation, the members quickly rally around with one finding the cheap tiles, others committing the labour, and so forth, so the job is done economically, quickly and well.

This is the sort of collaboration that we are beginning to see in the SWMPF, and thanks to the wonderful efforts of the Leadership and Working Groups, I am confident that this approach will become routine across every aspect of the Partnership Forum.