

# Faith Group Volunteers in Government Schools

Commencing in 2007 the Australian Government began funding the National School Chaplaincy Programme. This programme recognises the range of faiths within the Australian community and offers schools funding for Christian or other faith support workers such as those from Hindu or Buddhist groups.

Participation in the programme must be supported by school community consultation.

Schools do not manage the funds for this program. A project sponsor model is outlined in the programme guidelines and in the case of a Christian chaplain, this means funding is directed to the local ecumenical Christian employing group. In relation to other faiths, a similar incorporated religious affiliate should be identified. DEST, which administer project funds, can assist schools in identifying an acceptable project sponsor.

Government schools in SA must comply with the DECS Administrative Instructions and Guidelines (AIGs): *Religious activities in government schools*.

The term pastoral support worker (PSW) is to be used to describe the role, not the term 'chaplain'. The guidelines refer specifically to the Christian Pastoral Support Workers (CPSWs) programme. The same guidelines apply to a pastoral support worker of any other faith. School communities that choose a person from another faith must use the term pastoral support worker with the faith identified i.e. Hindu Pastoral Support Worker.

The role of any person employed under the Australian Government program must comply with the role of a Pastoral Support Worker outlined in the AIGs. Two roles are identified:



- To support the school in its aim to be a safe and supportive learning
- To link families to community resources and services

These roles are described in detail and must be followed to ensure teachers meet their duty of care to students and to ensure that the PSW operates within the scope of the role.

Pastoral Support Workers are not employed by the Government and work as volunteers in government schools. As is the case with any volunteer, supervision and support is the responsibility of the school principal.

The role of the PSW includes providing information and support to students, staff and community members and to act as a point of reference for social, religious and spiritual issues.

However, the role does not involve religious education and PSWs must refrain from promoting any particular religious ideology or doctrine; advertising any particular religious activity or group

to the exclusion of others; or being involved in or setting up of any school activities that may discriminate on the grounds of ideology or doctrine.

In some schools, consideration is being given to applying for funding for a pastoral support worker of a non Christian faith to reflect the diversity of their community. In this instance the role must be consistent with the AIGs CPSW programme with the only exception being the inclusion of the appropriate faith.

For information about the pastoral support workers program please refer to the DECS AIGs: Religious Activities in Government Schools-Faith group volunteers in the governance section of the SAASSO website [www.saasso.asn.au](http://www.saasso.asn.au)

*Schools engaging a pastoral support worker from another faith are invited to contact: Ms Maureen Cochram, Manager Community and Tertiary Liaison Ph: 8226 1576. Induction, information and relevant training will be negotiated with the nominated faith group. ■*