

# Media Release

**The Hon Natalie Hutchins MP**  
Minister for Jobs and Industry  
Minister for Treaty and First Peoples  
Minister for Women



Friday, 8 March 2024

## TEACHING STEM TO TWO YEAR OLDS CAN BE AS EASY AS ABC

Young girls will benefit from a world-first model that teaches STEM concepts, developed by two recent inductees into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women.

Minister for Women Natalie Hutchins today celebrated International Women's Day with Professor Marilyn Fleer and Aishwarya Kansakar at an early daycare and kinder centre in Melbourne's west to hear about their ground-breaking project which is teaching STEM to kids in early education in an entirely new way.

The pair first met in 2022 at the Victorian Honour Roll of Women induction ceremony and quickly realised they had a shared goal, the crucial need for STEM education for women and girls.

They have since gone on to collaborate on the world-first initiative that engages young children in kinder with STEM concepts through play using Professor Fleer's Conceptual Playworld Model.

The model teaches complex STEM topics including robotics, manufacturing and automation in fun scenarios involving educators and children solving challenges together.

In Australia, only 28.8 per cent of jobs in the manufacturing industry and only 15 per cent of people in STEM-qualified occupations are women.

Professor Fleer and Aishwarya Kansakar's initiative makes learning and understanding complex STEM concepts accessible and fun for children, so they can have access to career paths in STEM when they're older.

Professor Fleer was inducted into the Honour Roll in 2022 in the Change Agent category for developing ways to help young students learn STEM as director of Monash University's Monash Playlab research project.

Aishwarya Kansakar was inducted into the Honour Roll in 2022 in the Emerging Leader category for her work in automation, robotics, manufacturing and AI and as a champion of STEM education and entrepreneurship.

The Honour Roll is open to any Victorian woman who has made a lasting and significant contribution at a local, state, national or international level, and can be nominated by themselves or peers.

Nominations for 2024 open on Monday 18 March.

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Women Natalie Hutchins

*"Women should be publicly celebrated and each year the Victorian Honour Roll of Women does just that – honouring the success of so many incredible women, who make Victoria a great place to live."*

*"We can see a great example of that today, with two former Honour Roll recipients launching their own exciting initiative focused on engaging young girls with STEM concepts."*