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# **Re-imagining Australian Society: Visions and solutions**

**ACOSS 2005 Congress Papers**

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**Australian Council of Social Service**

**March 2006**

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## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Foreword**

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# Contents

<b>Address to the Australian Council of Social Service</b> _____	<b>5</b>
The Hon John Howard MP, Prime Minister (delivered by The Hon Peter Dutton MP Minister for Workforce Participation) _____	
<b>Taking responsibility for creating a better society</b> _____	<b>13</b>
Eva Cox AO, Sociologist, Lecturer in social inquiry UTS, ABC Boyer lecturer _____	
<b>Australia's Agenda - Whose Agenda</b> _____	<b>21</b>
Larissa Behrendt Professor of Law & Indigenous Studies Director, Jumbunna - Indigenous House of Learning, UTS _____	
<b>'Beggars can't be choosers': welfare reform in context</b> _____	<b>31</b>
Alison McClelland School of Social Work and Social Policy La Trobe University _____	
<b>A Working Society</b> _____	<b>37</b>
John Dalziel, Communications Director Salvation Army, Eastern Command _____	
<b>Industrial Relations Changes and the Workplace: Implications for the Community Services and Welfare Sector</b> _____	<b>43</b>
Sheridan Dudley Chief Executive, Job Futures _____	
<b>Industrial Relations Changes and the Workplace: Implications for the Community Services and Welfare Sector, Don't Mourn For Me .....Organise</b> _____	<b>51</b>
Helen Creed, National President Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union _____	
<b>Industrial Relations Changes and the Workplace: Implications for the Community Services and Welfare Sector</b> _____	<b>61</b>
Senator Andrew Bartlett Deputy Leader of the Australian Democrats _____	
<b>Affordable Housing In Modern Australia, Over Our Heads, Housing Costs and Australian Families</b> _____	<b>67</b>
Julian Disney, Director Social Justice Project, UNSW _____	
<b>Great challenges of our times - The role of The Third Sector</b> _____	<b>77</b>
Prof David Yencken AO, Emeritus Professor University of Melbourne, Chair, Australian Collaboration _____	

<b>Address to the Australian Council of Social Service</b> _____	<b>85</b>
The Hon Kim C Beazley MP Leader of The Opposition _____	85
<b>A safe environment for children and families</b> _____	<b>91</b>
Dr Robin Sullivan, Director-General Department of Child Safety, QLD Government	91
<b>A safe environment for children and families</b>	
<b>- support and education for families</b> _____	<b>103</b>
Jane Woodruff, Chief Executive Officer UnitingCare, Burnside _____	103
<b>Strengthening Communities</b> _____	<b>107</b>
Dr Jeff Harmer, Secretary, Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services _____	107
<b>Strengthening Communities and ICT</b> _____	<b>115</b>
Dr Rod Badger, Deputy Secretary, Information Economy, Department of Communications Information Technology and the Arts _____	115
<b>Contemporary Governance Issues for the Community Sector</b> _____	<b>127</b>
Christina Ryan, ACT Council of Social Service _____	127
<b>Isolated and Rural Communities, how do they access health and other services</b> _____	<b>133</b>
Mary Martin, Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council (QAIHC) _____	133

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## **Address to the Australian Council of Social Service**

### **The Hon John Howard MP, Prime Minister (delivered by The Hon Peter Dutton MP Minister for Workforce Participation)**

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Let me firstly pay tribute to Andrew McCallum for his work and congratulate Lin Hatfield-Dodds on her appointment as ACOSS President.

Australia's social policy fabric has been refashioned in the last decade in a way that blends the best of the past with a reformist eye to the future. This morning I want to draw together four strands of the Government's thinking.

The first is the absolute centrality of a strong national economy to a fair and decent society.

The second is mobilising what I have called a 'social coalition' to address social disadvantage.

The third is the principle of 'mutual obligation' in welfare arrangements.

And the fourth is a desire to move beyond coping with the consequences of social breakdown towards policies that address the early warning signs of social exclusion.

Woven together, these four strands go to making a social security net that is comprehensive, compassionate and progressive, but also hard-headed in its focus on self-reliance, personal responsibility and long-term sustainability.

I do not pretend for a minute that Australia's welfare system is perfect. Governments must always ensure an appropriate mix of assistance, incentives and obligations.

And there is always a balance that has to be found.

Of course, redistribution is legitimate. But it is inherently coercive and it should never overwhelm the process of wealth creation.

Similarly, the disadvantaged have a right to assistance and support. But the broader community also has a right to have policies in place which encourage people to break the chains of welfare dependency.

The dividend from economic growth

Getting this balance right is difficult and complex. But there is no mystery about what is required to give all Australians a stake in their own country.

The handmaiden of social mobility and cohesion is economic opportunity. That means the most important contribution government can make to our social well-being is to foster a growing, productive economy.

I'm often bemused by critics who suggest that the Government is obsessed with the economy at the expense of our society. Such claims rest on a profound misunderstanding of the social and moral consequences of economic growth.

Take, for example, our record on employment – 1.7 million new jobs and an unemployment rate near a thirty-year low.

When I first addressed the ACOSS Congress as Opposition Leader in October 1995, our unemployment rate was 8.3 per cent. Today, it is 5.1 per cent.

Clearly, this is not simply economic progress. It is social progress, too.

What I often call the social dividend of economic growth is no less apparent in the realm of social expenditure.

Let me cite three examples, all of which speak to a Government mindful of the pressures many face in modern society by virtue of the fact that fewer people are able to draw on extended families for support.

The first is the significant additional support we have provided to low and middle income families. Strong economic growth has seen us increase total assistance to families by more than \$6 billion a year since coming to office.

The maximum rate of family assistance for a child aged under 13 has increased from around \$2,420 in 1996 to \$4,200 per year.

The \$9.5 billion devoted to child care in the past six years is more than double the amount spent in the last six years of the previous government. Childcare places have risen by 83 per cent since we came to office.

And last financial year, the Government provided a record \$2.2 billion in direct support for Australia's carers, with funding for respite care up seven-fold over the life of the Government.

What about the broader configuration of Australia's social security system under the Government's stewardship?

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has found that, contrary to the received wisdom in some quarters, the Government's family and welfare policies have worked to decrease income inequality as measured by Australia's Gini coefficient.

According to NATSEM, real incomes among the bottom 20 per cent of families with children rose by 18.5 per cent between 1997-98 and 2004-05, compared with 17.6 per cent growth for the real median income for families.

As NATSEM points out, Australia's social welfare system is skewed heavily in favour of low and middle income households. The bottom 60 per cent of households are all net gainers from the tax system and government programmes courtesy of the top 40 per cent of households.

Increased family payments to 2.2 million families with 4.2 million children underpin what the Treasury Secretary, Ken Henry, has called the 'extraordinary progressivity' of Australia's tax and welfare system.

How progressive? As Peter Whiteford of the OECD points out, 'the formula for distributing benefits is so progressive - and the level of taxes paid by the poor is so low - that Australia appears to redistribute more to the poorest 20% of the population than any other OECD country'.

I often say that Australia's economic strength of the last decade is no accident. This social policy outcome is no accident either. In particular, the scale of benefits to low and middle income families reflects a defining philosophical commitment of mine for the last two decades.

I can honestly say, as someone who believes deeply in the virtues of personal responsibility and self-reliance, I am proud of what we have achieved.

The Government's record underscores the peculiar genius of Australian politics which is to maintain economic reform without leaving behind the most vulnerable and those with special responsibilities in society.

Yet we still face enormous social challenges, especially to break the chains of welfare dependency in our community.

And, as I said before, we must strike the right balance in the interests of the broader community. A country that takes wealth creation for granted will soon find itself unable to live up to its social aspirations.

It is in this context that I believe the case for further reform of Australia's workplace relations system can be made not just on economic grounds, but on social and equity grounds as well.

As a means of raising the living standards of Australians in jobs; as a means of getting more Australians into jobs; and as a means of creating wealth that strengthens our capacity to help the most needy members of society.

The Government's reform agenda reflects the simple reality that if Australia is to sustain its prosperity and pay for the services that we will demand increasingly as our population ages, we must boost our workforce participation and productivity growth.

The social coalition

Highlighting the crucial role of government in maintaining a strong economy leads naturally to the second strand of the Government's thinking. That is our vision of a social coalition.

No one section of society has all the answers to all our social challenges. We need to bring the different strengths of governments, business, community organisations and individuals together in partnership.

The idea of a social coalition has nothing to do with government drawing back from its obligations. Rather, it's about finding ways to better deliver on them.

One of the best examples of the social coalition in action is the Job Network, announced early in the life of this Government.

It reflected our belief that central bureaucracies can rarely deliver the mix of local knowledge, motivation, persistence and compassionate support that is necessary to help Australians, in all their variety, into real jobs.

Some may still argue about the Job Network at the margins. But no-one is arguing for a return to the old system because of the success of the community sector in delivering employment services.

Community philanthropy is another example of the social coalition in action. At your congress in 1998, I said that I believe governments have a crucial role in fostering a sense of moral obligation and duty amongst its citizens.

I have made a particular point of challenging the business community to play its part through the Prime Minister's Community Business Partnerships. There are now more than 1,500 such partnerships around Australia connecting business with community organisations.

More broadly, we have seen the generosity of the Australian people continue to grow. Research undertaken by ACOSS put the value of Australians' philanthropy in 2004 at more than \$11 billion with Australians giving and volunteering more than ever before.

Business philanthropy has more than doubled since 2000-01 and more than 87 per cent of adult Australians donated an average of \$424 each in the year to January 2005.

We must never be complacent or lapse into compassion fatigue given the level of need and suffering that still exists in our nation. But those social commentators who see modern Australia as consumed by materialism and narrow self-interest are wrong. They have missed a big and important story.

The heart of Australia is bigger and more generous than any government programme will ever be.

### **Mutual obligation**

The third strand of the Government's social policy I want to mention is the principle of mutual obligation.

By this I mean not only that individuals ought to do something in return for the support they receive from society, but also that in order for society and the Government to help people in need, they need to be willing to do something to help themselves.

Far from undermining social protection, policies that promote responsible behaviour and self-reliance are essential pillars of a comprehensive and compassionate safety net.

As you are all aware, the Government is pursuing comprehensive reform of the welfare system for working age Australians. This is a \$3.6 billion investment over four years in moving people from welfare to work.

It builds on the work that started with the McClure report in 2000 and the Australians Working Together package in 2001 to reduce the number of jobless households in Australia.

Growing up in a jobless household is one of the key predictors of poor later life outcomes, in employment, in health and in a range of other social indicators.

We do not want to see the spread of intergenerational joblessness, welfare dependency and the helplessness that it generates.

We do not want to leave people on welfare.

The evidence is unequivocal. Work is by far the most effective means of shielding households from poverty.

We want to help people back into jobs and towards self-reliance, and we are aiming to do that through a combination of obligations, assistance and incentives.

I do not consider we are doing that in a heavy-handed way, but rather with a reasonable set of obligations and a good deal of support.

The new system will ask single parents to look for part-time work when their youngest child reaches the age of six.

It will ask people with disabilities who are capable of sustained work of 15 hours per week or more to look for suitable part-time work.

I think those requirements are only reasonable.

No-one's payment will be cut. People already on the Parenting Payment and the Disability Support Pension will remain on those payments.

But I think we need to set up a new set of expectations for people entering the welfare system in the future. That is, that they will receive the benefit that supports job search - that is, Newstart Allowance - and not a pension-level payment when we are asking them to look for work.

We are giving people plenty of warning. While parents will be asked to look for part-time work when their youngest child turns six, they will retain access to Parenting Payment until their youngest child turns eight.

And we are looking after the people who cannot reasonably be asked to look for work. Foster parents and parents of children undertaking distance education and home schooling will receive a supplement to ensure they are no worse off than they would be on Parenting Payment.

We are improving the incentives for people on Newstart Allowance to take up paid jobs by reducing the withdrawal rate on the allowance from 70 cents to 60 cents per dollar earned.

This builds on the improvements to incentives introduced in the Australians Working Together package with the Working Credit initiative, and the improvements to withdrawal rates on the Family Tax Benefit announced in the 2004 Budget.

Alongside these changes, we are spending more than \$2 billion on new services and supports through the Job Network and new education, training and rehabilitation places.

Let me be very clear. We are doing this not because we are obsessed about the economy. We are doing it for the health of our society.

In 13 per cent of households with children, no one has a job. Australia is one of only two Western countries where half of the number of sole parents has no job. And the share of the working age population on the Disability Support Pension has doubled in the last twenty years.

Forget the economics. No-one should regard this as socially sustainable.

### **Indigenous policy**

The social malaise caused by passive welfare cuts particularly deeply into our indigenous communities. The Government is under no illusions that the first Australians are, far and away, the most disadvantaged Australians. The statistics are no less appalling for the fact that they are now well known.

Largely because of a new and courageous generation of indigenous leaders, the principle of mutual obligation has found a place in the quiet revolution that's been taking place in indigenous policy.

For example, under Shared Responsibility Agreements, indigenous Australians are actively involved in their own and their communities' futures. So far, these agreements have delivered outcomes as diverse as community stores and improved sporting facilities through to improved school attendance.

The Government also wants to increase the opportunity for indigenous Australians to achieve the economic independence and stability which comes from owning your own home. And we are looking at ways to help overcome other barriers such as the high cost of housing construction in remote locations and low employment and income in indigenous communities.

### **Early intervention and support**

The fourth strand of social policy reform that I want to mention is our willingness to redirect the energies of government away from simply picking up the pieces of social dysfunction towards strategies of early intervention.

We know that opportunities to improve the life chances of a child born into a disadvantaged family exist well before he or she begins school. And there is much we can do to help families deal with problems before they become entrenched.

Last year, the Government announced a major investment in early childhood programmes as part of the Stronger Families and Communities strategy. Initiatives under this strategy rely on the community to identify local needs to support early childhood development and then provide the funding required for local organisations to deliver the services on the ground.

Another significant social policy initiative in recent times is the establishment of 65 Family Relationship Centres across Australia. This is part of the most significant reforms in 30 years to the family law system.

As well as helping separating couples avoid adversarial and costly court procedures, the Centres will also help couples to access pre-marriage education and provide support to families who are experiencing relationship difficulties.

Along with unemployment, family breakdown is the main determinant of whether or not someone has a low income in Australia. Early intervention services such as pre-marriage education can help couples start married life on the right path.

## **Mental health**

Another area where we need to be more proactive is mental health. This is an issue which we do not handle very well as a society.

Three per cent of Australians have a severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or other psychotic disorders, or suffer severe depression. Twenty per cent of Australians suffer some form of mental illness over any 12 month period.

The most common is depression and many of you will be familiar with the Australian Government's efforts in establishing the national depression initiative, beyond blue.

As highlighted recently by the Mental Health Council of Australia and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in their report 'Not for Service', too many Australians are being turned away from treatment for mental illnesses.

Many are committing acts of violence or suicide, ending up in jail or dead.

Mental illness puts a great strain on families and too many people, especially young people, are ending up unemployed and homeless.

There is also growing evidence that many disorders are exacerbated or even brought on by drug use. This is particularly distressing in young people, but we are also seeing increasing numbers of older people with impaired mental function from long-term heavy cannabis use.

I have long been concerned about the relatively lax attitude that has been taken in Australia towards cannabis use. We need to think again as a community about what messages we are sending to people about the dangers of cannabis to their mental health.

In the past, we would have treated many people with severe mental illness in institutions.

Since the 1960s there has been a process of deinstitutionalisation, which gained speed in the 1980s and 1990s.

I think this process has gone too far.

I am not advocating a return to the institutions of the old days. But I do think we need better solutions than having people with mental illness out in the community unsupported and untreated.

We can argue about whose responsibility it is that people are in this situation. The closure of the state-run institutions was meant to free up funds for use in community treatment. But in the end such arguments are fruitless.

What we need now is a serious commitment to finding solutions.

My department will lead an inter-departmental group to examine the Mental Health Council study and report to Cabinet on possible responses. I also announced that I would be raising the issue with Premiers at the next COAG meeting and at least one Premier has since written to me supporting such a discussion.

Of course, the community sector will have an important role to play in helping to guide and to implement reforms in this area.

## **Conclusion**

Ladies and Gentlemen, every Australian deserves the opportunity to share in Australia's prosperity. Let me conclude with a challenge to ACOSS and to its members.

The Government has laid out a bold and ambitious path of reform in this parliament, but I am a sufficient realist to know that we face a challenge to implement these changes in a fair and effective manner.

I come from an intellectual tradition in politics which knows the limits of government and the scope for unintended consequences.

We seek your constructive involvement if we are to make our reforms work for the nation, but more importantly for the individuals who will be affected.

As a Government, we approach the task ahead determined, but also willing to listen and take notice of what is happening on the ground at the local level.

We value the input of ACOSS and we recognise your advocacy for vulnerable and disadvantaged Australians. We want to work with you in the months and years ahead to give even more Australians a stake in this great country.

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## **Taking responsibility for creating a better society**

**Eva Cox AO, Sociologist,  
Lecturer in social inquiry UTS,  
ABC Boyer lecturer**

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### **Imagining a better society – how can the sector offer some leadership?**

There are obvious problems with the status of the community sector as a social and political player. Obviously the failure of the PM to appear at the 2005 ACOSS Congress and his replacement reading/no questions speech effort by a junior Minister, suggest that the sector is neither seen as a source of expert advice, nor as a legitimate source of ideas that needs to be kept onside<sup>1</sup>. This evidence confirms views I had developed that the sector is in a very parlous state which is partly caused by government attitudes and policies but exacerbated by the sector's complicity and failure to actively devise alternatives.

The sector has tended to observe a low profile over the past few years, as far as Federal issues are concerned, and possibly on state issues as well. There has been limited public debate on viable alternatives to current policy settings. The Opposition's lack of profile on these issues is part of the problem, but the lack of effective counter proposals and new ideas from the community sector are a big part of the problem. If there are no informed public debates offering a plethora of new ideas, how do we generate the will for change?

Social change needs to come from the margins as well as the powerful because governments by their nature are respondents and not initiators. Governments depend therefore on activists and interest groups to raise issues, create debate and seek government and public support. The ferment of ideas needs to permeate and influence political structures both through those who enter parliament with ideas to promote and through the activities of outside interest groups. Parliaments are representative elected bodies, given the responsibility to act on all our behalves, not just on instructions of majorities/those who voted for them. It is our role to remind them of this and press them to remember their responsibilities, by offering options, even if they don't welcome wider inputs. Over more than the last decade, however, there have been far too few significant alternative views coming from the community services sector.

This change can partly be explained by major policy shifts that have occurred over this time, and partly by the responses to these from the sector. Funding, from the eighties on, shifted from offering core funding to organisations to support their tasks to funding via contracting out services, often on the basis of competitive tendering. This change has effectively made many agencies servants of the state, and many of

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<sup>1</sup>I could not find a copy of the speech on the PM's or Dutton's website a couple of weeks later, so it is obviously of no account to them.

these have assumed survival depends on their ability to retain contracts. At the same time anxiety about the possible ill effects of not-for profit functioning, ie their lack of the discipline of making shareholder profits, has led to increased financial accountability requirements for all funding. Treasuries have devised specific contracts that demand agencies fully respond to government priorities and service standards and no longer have the capacity to respond to their members or constituencies. This change has accelerated over the past few years with most major agencies now receiving most of their growth from government contracts. Attempts to diversify funding by collecting more donations from the private sector has also changed as business has been encouraged to partnerships and to 'purchase' services to meet supposed mutual needs, rather than donating untied money. So one could speculate that these ties to business and government have meant that much of the sector has lost or maybe muted their independent voices.

This change raises questions about defining the role of this sector, amongst others. Are there differences between governments and others in delivering services? I suggest a model of society<sup>2</sup> containing three main distributive systems for goods and services: the state, the market and the community. In an ideal model, the state delivers legal and mandated services; the market offers choices and risks; the community promotes the voluntary work and diverse passions and commitments of people. Government (public) activities, industry (market forces) and community activities interacting should create a mix that both balance each other and, importantly, act to limit the other sectors' excessive use of powers, as too much power for any one sector can be problematic. Losing their ability to function independently and raise issues can result in either of the other sectors becoming too powerful.

This missing voice has allowed the government to promote its views and policies with relatively little counter argument. Much of the sector has apparently gone along with two toxic aspects of government policy: one is a pessimistic view of human nature and society as requiring more control; the other is that the business/competitive contract model of service provision was the correct way to go. Both of these views create policy problems. The first has allowed the introduction of many policies that are punitive and unfair; the second has devalued the community sector's roles as advocates and possible sources of new ideas and ability to claim the ethical high ground.

The sector's current lobbying exercise on Welfare to Work and Industrial Relations was a copybook exercise in using data and rational argument to explain to the Government why its changes would harm certain groups of people. However, the strategy failed to make any significant changes, partly because the sector seemed to politely accept assumptions that the government was touting about workforce 'participation'. The main reason was that the sector failed to argue against the neo-conservative framework that drove most of the policies. The sector's claims that the government policies should be kind and nicer fell on deaf ears as the policy makers assumed that they were being cruel to be kind, ie making the target groups suffer would increase the participation rates and therefore the reforms were worthwhile even if some suffered for the 'greater good'.

The ideological gap is significant and needs addressing. The long reign of neo-liberalism and markets is over but has left a nasty residue that emerges in the

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<sup>2</sup>Claus Offe social capital debates 1997 Sydney.

assumption that risk has to be shifted to individuals and that responsibility rests there. The current model of neo-conservatism takes that assumption as a starting point but rejects the liberal freedom to choose a model for those who are not self supporting, as such people require directions and control. This illiberal belief in centralised control over those who do not conform to approved behaviours, are therefore being translated into policies creating even more inequities as it targets those already on the margins. Asking the politicians to be nicer in their policies will therefore not work.

Those of us in this diverse sector who do not agree with such strategies need to develop some alternatives that can gain public credence. The social is back on the agenda but we need to decide what version of society we want to see. I want to use this time to question some of the assumptions that drive the current agenda and offer some alternative frameworks that allow us to believe in more generous and optimistic sets of possible futures. We may not always agree on what and how, and it would worry me if we did, but we need to broaden the debates and ideas. We need to work on alternative and more optimistic viewpoints so people are attracted to some new frameworks and ideas.

The sector needs to take on principles and ethical processes which would give it the high moral ground from which to offer leadership in ideas. There is an urgent need to discuss initiatives which will overcome the toxic divides that undermine social well being, and to engage in dialogue and debate on how to make society and its constituent institutions more ethical, responsible and effective. Starting this process at an ACOSS congress requires decisions on how the sector becomes a source of good ideas, a promoter of ethical behaviour in its own operations and a creative critic of both governments and markets when they breach people's trust and behave unethically. One strategy is making sure that the agencies in the sector are ethical in how they do things, as well as what they do, ie to become involved in looking at how our stakeholders view us.

Let's start with the claim that people are primarily social beings, not just individuals or even just families. We operate very much as members of social groups, and in doing so the mores (customs) of the societies we live in become important to our sense of belonging. We conform and we are accepted and this becomes part of our sense of self, but at the same time we want to be respected and recognised and feel we have some control over our lives. Because we are social beings we basically want to do the right thing by others. This is necessary to counter the remains of neo-liberal assumptions that assume we are all disconnected individuals making our own choices.

Our challenge is to develop models of relatedness that can operate in complex, cosmopolitan, mobile societies where place is just one of the connectors and uncertainty can become a threat rather than a challenge. The key to this lies in creating mixes of formal and informal structures and relationships that are both optimistic and trusting. These clusters need to be based on recognising with respect people's needs for both autonomy and belonging, so differences can be explored safely and civilly. We need to feel part of the group but also to retain the sense of agency that allows us to feel we can make our own decisions, even if we choose not to at that stage.

If you start by conceptualising people as basically good, (ie they want to do the right thing and will do so given appropriate opportunities), you end up with different policies and rhetoric than if you assume, as do ideologies of neo-liberalism and neo-

conservatism, that people are driven by self interest and sin. Neo-liberals assume that markets offer some natural controls, but we need to combat the neo-conservative assumptions about the need for considerable state control and their distrust of people's ability to choose how to run their lives. This latter viewpoint is visible in some current public policies, including the present IR bills, the welfare reforms and much of the counter terrorism legislation which assume that government and business know what is best for us.

The sector needs to appeal to the public's 'better angels': to their sense of fairness and desire for the public good. Appealing to them on the basis of self interest, of what might happen to them, reinforces their anxieties about others and their need to self protect. The last election did not prove people were self interested but it did fail to offer any wider sense of communality. Both parties showed their contempt for voters by offering mainly money for their votes with fear as an extra stimulus for self interest. This cash in the pocket approach does work in the short term, if neither major party offers anything more elevating. However, it can cause long term damage to the democratic process by emphasising materialism and distrust.

The question is how to harness interest and good will, and generate some enthusiasm for making society better for all and engender hope. One overarching strategy is looking at how to re-build and extend the trustworthiness of institutions and the trust people may feel in the good will of other people, particularly strangers and those who are deemed 'not like us'!

How does the community sector play its part in a re-imagined Australia? One option is as an incubator and promoter of new ideas; another is to demonstrate through its own operations, more effective and ethical ways of delivering services in increasingly mobile and diverse communities. How does it argue against some problem changes in funding and government relations over the past decades? It needs to reflect on what the sector does to its clients, to constituencies and to other sectors. This involves talk about ethics and responsibilities not just the financial types of accountabilities demanded by funders, whether government or otherwise.

One of the questions is effective governance in the sector, and particularly how this may relate to auspice, size and structures of organisations. There has been growth in many agencies as they have received millions in government funding<sup>3</sup>. Bureaucracies have inherent problems, which can also be seen in the operations of large government units and some big businesses. These big organisations illustrate problems of effective management in very large and complex structures. The question of size and perpetual expansion ie is bigger better, may be particularly questionable in the third sector.

Who does what and how services are delivered are core issues for this sector. One of the arguments that governments raised in defence of devolution of their services, was that contracting these out to those organisations 'closer to the people' would benefit recipients. They used arguments like local knowledge, personal and professional expertise, and even social capital, as reasons why services should not be delivered by government bureaucracies. Size, rules and distances were seen as counter to productive delivery. Groups that had grown organically or otherwise from the communities they served were to be seen as offering expertise and links of trust, friendship and goodwill that would contribute substantially to their capacities to

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<sup>3</sup>Mission Australia turned over \$212M last financial year, up \$30M in a year

adapt and adopt government funding to the diversity of the needs of their constituencies.

These arguments seem to have been abandoned as governments have ignored their own arguments and increasingly offered resettlement and employment services to agencies and commercial corporations that would fail to meet such criteria. Despite the rhetoric, this criterion has never been a condition of funding, which is a pity. The recent moves in indigenous services, eg law funding, again seem to ignore how existing links may provide a good basis for services. The model assumes that objectives can be set and met by efficiencies and costs accountability based on counting items of service. This Taylorisation of services fails to recognise that most services offered in the community sector do not fit such a model. Many may lack efficiency in output unit counting but are able to deliver better outcomes and effectiveness.

However, there is evidence that government funders may feel more comfortable with agencies that look like official bureaucracies, which means that larger corporatised agencies seem to be preferred as tenderers, judging by the distribution of the dollars in many areas. These may have few credible local connections or commitments, even if they deliver 'good' services at the local level. It is time we reclaimed the high ground and decided what our part of the community sector is really on about, and not act as pallid imitations of business or servants of the state, even if some feel they are subverting or enhancing the prescribed services.

What about proposing that the funding body should require competitive bidders for such services to prove their local connections by stakeholder reporting and involvement of clients in their governance, as well as offer evidence of trustworthiness? The current funding models are finance/output driven and ignore the importance, recognised in much of public health and morbidity literature, of attitudes and trust as components of positive outcomes. There is insufficient critique of the plight of clients being shifted to new providers or of productive links with staff being broken.

There is a need to revisit and develop some of the older arguments about the particular ethos and priorities that the community sector could adopt. This involves not being subservient to the rhetoric of business models being best and getting back to looking at questions of the needs and social relations that should underpin our services. We can still run efficiently, but it means services must be effective, ie deliver good outcomes for all, as well! Or else, what is the justification for being there? If we undertook social audits and set standards in looking at our ethical performances, we might be able to insist that those bidding for services should also be asked to do so and be judged on these aspects.

There is increasing demand for evidence based policy, so promote past experiences and ideas that work, particularly with the marginalised and excluded. Owning services, feeling in some form of control over one's daily life and being valued, are intrinsic to taking responsibilities for self and other. However such knowledge is often ignored in debates on who should have rights and what these mean for obligations. This split clearly shows in some of the arguments about the new 'social responsibility agreements' being drafted with indigenous communities. How fair is it to make conditional for them what others get as a right? Can you learn from being forced into doing something?

There are also questions on the ethics of accepting government contracts that are essentially unethical. Programs that force people of working age on some form of income support to take jobs, as long as the contract is legal, but with minimal conditions, may not be ethical. What if these contracts pay no attention to the effect their conditions may impose on workers with little confidence and sometimes less competence? Forms of top down disciplining may create some results in the short term for some of the people involved, and financial rewards for the agencies, but may fail many others. The numbers of vacancies suggest a high proportion will continue to fail to find work, or stay in it, and the system does not look at the demand side of the equation but assumes the problem is supply.

I have been looking at trust and suggest it comes from relationships and expectations that remain positive over an extended period. If people have done it tough over years or even generations, remedying trust deficits takes time and resources. A recent series of honours theses by my students (Annie Harvey, Anna Yussef and Michelle Cloughessy) showed some interesting and relevant results. One traced how stigma operated to reduce trust to the point that very much needed services were not used for children with disabilities. Their sole parents, often long term 'underclass' (her term), were shamed and distrustful and failed to engage with services effectively so their children missed out. Another, worked in an agency that was bidding for refugee resettlement contracts but lost funding; she saw the distress and distrust of workers, competing agencies and clients at the shift to a large commercial group. This agency had long term relationships with settlement communities that were not matched by new contractor. A third examined workers in employment services who felt they were not trusted by the government and found their relationship with clients were seriously affected by the levels of specificity of contracts, as did the resettlement group. Contracts in both cases set items of service that had to be delivered to gain the next funding, even if the client and worker saw no need for it.

All suggest that services run on top down models, competitively funded and controlled by governments, lose their capacity to fulfil their responsibilities to their constituencies. They also show that long term relationships are essential to good results with seriously disadvantaged clients. Rather than working for their constituent groups they ended up focused on accountability to government requirements. The first thesis also illustrated the serious difficulties of working in the short term with client groups that have long histories of stigma.

We need to rethink how to run services so people feel some control over what happens to them and some engagement in the organisations that serve their needs. This is about building trust through creating cultures of integrity/trust for all involved and having both the formal and informal structures that make these relationships possible. This raises many questions about how agencies are run, funded, owned and operated. It raises questions of formal structures such as size and the informal cultures that operate and how these may interact.

There should be differences in roles of states, businesses and NGOs. State machineries have frameworks of law, legal constraints, political processes and other cumbersome forms of operating and reporting. Protocols, procedures and conventions are documented and operate to contain the power of parliaments and executives. Businesses respond to the needs for profits as well as customer needs and can operate ethically but not really altruistically. It is the NGO sector that has few of the above constraints which allows us to operate much more swiftly and sometimes creatively, but this may create dangers.

Who are agencies responsible to and for? Some organisations have members but not all, and sometimes the members differ from those who use the services. Governance is varied and in some cases amongst major charity bodies, hard to find. If the sector wants to be seen as ethical and trustworthy by the broader community, it needs to be accountable to more groups than just financially to its funders. This raises questions about organisational size and transparency as well as financial viability. We need to examine our strengths and our limits. Maybe there should be limits to size so some individual agencies do not become too powerful, or too big to deliver clear accountability and responsibility processes.

The sector should therefore be circumspect and self aware when discussing the roles played in the community. Its value is that it represents people's interests, commitments, passions and undertakes roles that are not appropriate for government. Maybe it should draw much clearer lines between what it and governments do. There are other arguments for another time on what our relationship to business should be.

Organisations need to remember that they are responsible to various constituencies in the community. Whether these have religious, local or particular issues as their base, they expect their organisations to serve their particular groups, causes or outcomes. This responsibility should always be recognised and mesh with the accountability demanded by funding bodies, whether government or private. Agencies need to be wary of selling 'brands' or reputation to the corporate sector in return for funding projects.

If agencies want to deliver a fairer society, they need to be very wary of becoming social control agencies. The sector needs to consider whether delivering services through large NGO bureaucracies is damaging smaller local or constituent based groups like a welfare version of WalMart and undermining capacities to ensure that the myriad of complex needs in our society can be dealt with appropriately.

What are the tasks best done at the local/group levels? Who can be part of up-skilling so those who are part of the problem, become part of the solution? Are there times that groups should step back when offered funds that could be better used by others? Should groups reject funds that may require forms of unethical social control?

The answers requires listening to the voices of the groups that are not well represented and often unheard in these debates, which may also mean running counter to many of the political trends now underway. It involves commitment to the idea that most people do want to do the right thing but this intention may be undermined by too much social control and top down services.

The sector needs to query and discard the legacy of the past two decades, in particular a belief across much of the political spectrum that there is no alternative (Thatcher's TINA principle) and move back into the ideas game. Recognising the changes occurring in the corporate sector, for instance, and measuring social and ethical responsibilities is a good starting point and could be particularly valuable to the community sector, as it may be our area of competitive advantage, if measured.

We need to develop policies based on trusting people's intrinsic good will and argue against neo-liberal and conservative distrust assumptions that individuals are only driven by self interest. We need to recognise the social aspects of neoconservatism but argue against its dismal assumptions about human desires and capacities that makes it judge harshly those who fail, as being sinning individuals. Imagining a future in

which we have a more civil society is hard at present because we need space to talk and work these and other ideas out, not talkfest one night stands, but ongoing dialogues that can grow.

We need ongoing space to develop these ideas and the resources to distribute them so we can capture the high ground once more. That may be one task this Congress can tackle: where do we generate and publicise the very good ideas many of us have? It won't be universities, they are chasing the dollars; Government won't fund its critics, and business will generally want to control the processes. These discussions must not be an optional extra for the sector but core to our continued legitimacy and viability, as without new ideas and energy, we become complicit with injustices. Maybe, we have to do it ourselves, using contributions, maybe from the profits of large agencies, to become our own benefactors!

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## Australia's Agenda - Whose Agenda

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Points of interaction:

How do you get people engaged in the process?

More pessimistic about the challenge:

I was a member of the ACT Bill of Rights Consultative Committee that undertook community consultation processes as part of our inquiry as to whether there should be a Bill of Rights in the nations capital. During those consultations, there appeared a strong reluctance to recognise the rights of minorities. Feedback from those consultations included comments such as "if a Bill of Rights includes the protection of Indigenous people, it will not be for the benefit of all Canberrans" and "if a Bill of Rights mentions Indigenous rights and the rights of other minorities it will have no legitimacy."

What is noticeable in this example is the meanness of spirit about the possible protections that a democratic society can offer. This mentality protectively guards the rights and benefits that are given to citizens within a community and seems to assume that if those rights are extended to the poor, the culturally distinct and the historically marginalised, they - usually middle-class, Anglo-Celtic, Christian - will be worse off. This world view sees the recognition and protection of the rights of the disadvantaged and culturally distinct as being in direct competition with their own position. It is this "us" and "them" mentality that psychologically separates one sector of the community from the other. And it sees the giving of rights protection as a win-lose.

This meanness of spirit about giving protection to others in society is perhaps easy to understand - but not excuse - if we look at the tenacity with which middle Australia clings to its position in this time of economic uncertainty and change.

In his book, *The Experience of Middle Australia: The Dark Side of Economic Reform*, Michael Pusey writes:

We might well ask ... 'If the GDP is up, how come Australia is down?' As we have seen, middle Australia is forming its own answers to this question, as disappointed expectations look for answers and generate resentments of a kind that exploded into the public arena with the advent of the Hanson phenomenon in the late 1990s.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Michael Pusey. *The Experience of Middle Australia: The Dark Side of Economic Reform*. Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.41.

When middle Australia feels as vulnerable about its own economic position as Pusey's research shows, it is no wonder that the fear of change and the fear of the unknown is unsettling. But this explanation does not forgive the way in which the fear of uncertainty and the desire for security translate into racism and xenophobia. And it should not forgive the failure to recognise rights nor to endorse their breach.

Of course, economic uncertainty is just one cause of this anxiety, fear and introversion. There is a wide range of issues that help keep a populace fearful, particularly the war on terrorism. But a fearful population is a conservative and selfish population. And this is having impact on the extent to which middle Australia is being crippled in its capacity to look beyond its own interest.

Eva's vision of a civil society is one that I embrace.

I think it is a necessary prerequisite to getting people to look beyond their own self-interest and re-engaging in society is one way of doing that. And part of the challenge in doing this is to recast the win-lose mentality about transferring the benefits of a democratic society from one sector to another. And my argument for that is this:

If we are to have a society that values fairness, equality and justice, we must strive towards the vision of a caring society. In order to do that, we need to move from an "us" and "them" mentality and realise that the way to measure the effectiveness and fairness of our laws is to test them against the way in which they work for the poor, the marginalised and the culturally distinct.

It is not enough that they work well for the rich, educated and culturally dominant. This measure of fairness and equity rejects an "us" and "them" mentality and holds that our fate and our worth as a society are measured best by how the most disadvantaged within our community fare. By valuing laws, policies and practices that work best because they achieve an equality of outcome, society begins to understand that extending the protections of a democratic society to those who are marginalised does not disadvantage another sector; it actually makes everyone better off. That is, if we improve the lot of the disadvantaged, it is a win-win.

And I think the vision she describes in her Boyer Lectures is one that is conducive to creating that environment. She writes:

My vision of a very civil society involves social connections with political life. Politics must combine the valuing of difference, intertwined with rights and responsibilities, and collective and democratic involvement in decisions which affect us.<sup>5</sup>

One of the core elements in Cox's ideal civil society is to undermine the focus of governments and policy makers on the "lone, greedy figure of the Economically Rational Man"<sup>6</sup> and refocus on the importance of building communities, relationships and trust.

These aspirations for a civil society are contested, but the debate and discussion about what the content and principles of such a "civil" "society" should be is an important national conversation. It is the very public conversation that necessarily involves all sectors of the community and it is a conversation that should be is a new opportunity

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<sup>5</sup>Eva Cox. A Truly Civil Society. 1995 Boyer Lectures. ABC Books, 1995, p.69

<sup>6</sup>Eva Cox. A Truly Civil Society. 1995 Boyer Lectures. ABC Books, 1995, p.71

for nation building, for including previously excluded groups from society. And I would note the following from the writings of another great Australian public intellectual, Martin Krygier.

*"I have, in other places, identified the two principles that I believe are ones that will attract Australians to the notion of a civil society. They are*

- *due process before the law and equality before the law – these enshrine the importance of the rule of law in a civil society and develop trust that people will be entitled to the protection of the rule of law*
- *freedom from racial discrimination and equality of opportunity – which are the embodiment of a contemporary interpretation of "a fair go" and "an even playing field."*

Perhaps this first value highlights the agenda that I think runs parallel to the aspects of creating a civil society that Eva identifies. And that is the importance of ensuring that the legal frameworks provide a structure for achieving a just Australia.

Complementing the need for social capital...

The framers of our Constitution believed that the decision-making about rights protections – which ones we recognise and the extent to which we protect them – were matters for the Parliament. They discussed the inclusion of rights within the Constitution itself and rejected this option, preferring instead to leave our founding document silent on these matters. It was also a document framed within the prejudices of a different era – of its own kind of xenophobia, sexism and racism.

A non-discrimination clause was discussed in the process of drafting the Constitution. George Williams in his book, *Human Rights under the Australian Constitution*<sup>7</sup> notes that the Tasmanian Parliament proposed clause 110 that, in part, stated:

...nor shall a state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, or deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of its laws.

This clause was rejected for two reasons:

- It was believed that entrenched rights provisions were unnecessary, and
- It was considered desirable to ensure that the Australian states would have the power to continue to enact laws that discriminated against people on the basis of their race.

If one is aware of the intentions and the attitudes held by the drafters of the Constitution then it comes as no surprise that it is a document that offers no protection against racial discrimination today. It was never intended to do so. And the tolerance for discrimination on the basis of race and gender that was so prevalent in Australian society at the time the Constitution was drafted has left a legacy in which our contemporary prejudices can find some comfort.

The 1997 High Court case of *Kruger v. The Commonwealth*<sup>8</sup> assists in making this point. This was the first case to be heard in the High Court that considered the legality

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<sup>7</sup>See George Williams. *Human Rights Under the Australian Constitution*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>8</sup>*Kruger v. The Commonwealth* (1997) 190 CLR 1

of the formal government assimilation-based policy of removing Indigenous children from their families. In *Kruger*, the plaintiffs had brought their case on the grounds of the violation of various rights by the effects of the Northern Territory Ordinance that allowed for the removal of Indigenous children from their families. The plaintiffs had claimed a series of human rights violations including the implied rights to due process before the law, equality before the law, freedom of movement and the express right to freedom of religion contained in s.116 of the Constitution. They were unsuccessful on each count, a result that highlighted the general lack of rights protection in our system of governance and the ways in which, through policies like child removal, there was a disproportionately high impact on Indigenous people as a result of those silences.

What we can see in the *Kruger* case is the way that the issue of child removal – seen as a particularly Indigenous experience and a particularly Indigenous legal issue – can be expressed in language that explains what those harms are in terms of rights held by all other people – the right to due process before the law, equality before the law, freedom of movement and freedom of religion. *Kruger* also highlights how few of the rights that we would assume we inherent hold are actually protected by our legal system. It reminds us that there are silences in our Constitution about rights, that these silences were intended, and it gives us a practical example of the rights violations that can be the legacy of that silence.

The inequities perpetuated by the silences in the Constitution have given Australians cause to reflect upon our foundation document in the past. The feeling that this canonical document did not reflect the values of contemporary Australian society gave momentum to the 1967 referendum. The result of that Constitutional change though is often misunderstood. It has been held out as the moment at which Indigenous people became citizens or Aboriginal people attained the right to vote. It did neither. In reality, the 1967 referendum did two things:

- it allowed for Indigenous people to be included in the census, and
- it allowed the federal parliament the power to make laws in relation to Indigenous people.

Marilyn Lake, in her biography of Faith Bandler,<sup>9</sup> goes some way towards explaining why those who advocated so hard for the constitutional change thought it went further than it did. The notion of including Indigenous people in the census was, for those who advocated a “yes” vote, more than just a body-counting exercise. It was thought that the inclusion of Indigenous people in this way would create an imagined community and as such it would be a nation-building exercise, a symbolic coming together. It was hoped that this inclusive nation-building would overcome an “us” and “them” mentality.

Sadly, this anticipated result has not been achieved. One only need look at the native title debate to see how the psychological divide has been maintained and used to produce results where Indigenous peoples rights are treated as different and given less protection. One of the fundamental vulnerabilities of the native title regime, as it currently exists, is that the interests of the native title holder(s) are treated as secondary to the property interests of all other Australians. The rhetoric of those antagonistic to native title interests often evokes the nationalistic myths of white men

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<sup>9</sup>Marilyn Lake. *Faith: Faith Bandler, Gentle Activist*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2002.

struggling against the land to help reaffirm three principles in the public consciousness:

- that when Aboriginal people lose a property right, it does not have a human aspect to it. The thought of farmers losing their land can evoke an emotive response but Aboriginal people can not
- that when Aboriginal people gain recognition of a right, they are seen as getting something for nothing rather than getting protection of something that already exists. They are seen as having “special rights”
- that when Aboriginal people have a right recognised, it is seen as threatening the interests of non-Aboriginal property owners in a way that means that the two interests cannot co-exist. In this context, native title is often portrayed as being “unAustralian”.

The other lesson that can be learnt from the 1967 referendum is that the Federal Parliament cannot be relied upon to act in a way that is beneficial to Indigenous people. It was thought by those who advocated for a “yes” vote that the changes to section 51(xxvi) (the “races power”) of the Constitution to allow the Federal Government to make laws for Indigenous people was going to herald in an era of non-discrimination for Indigenous people. There was an expectation that the granting of additional powers to the Federal Government to make laws for Indigenous people would see that power being used benevolently. This has, however, not been the case and we can see just one example of this failure in the passing of the Native Title Amendment Act 1998 (Cth), legislation that prevented the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) from applying to certain sections of the Native Title Act 1993 (Cth).<sup>10</sup>

When analysing the failure of the amendment of the races power to ensure benevolent and protective legislation as its proponents envisaged, one is reminded of the original intent of the framers to leave decisions about rights to the legislature. History provides us with many examples of where the legislature has overridden recognised human rights or has passed legislation that protects rights, only to override them when there is political motivation to do so.

The only way to begin to amend this is to introduce a Bill of Rights into Australia to fill in those Constitutional silences. A Bill of Rights can be in the Constitution but many jurisdictions, including New Zealand and the United Kingdom, have a Bill of Rights in legislative form. The advantage of this model is that it is the parliament, not judges, who decide how to balance rights. I prefer the legislative bill of rights model that keeps the action of balancing right in the public domain, with judges having more of a monitoring role. This allows for the general population to be much more involved with decision-making either through lobbying or at election time. That is, it can energise the community to participate in debates about what kind of society we should have.

What is the role of the sector? How do you re-engage with the debate on Indigenous issues?

One of the biggest challenges to sophisticated public debate at the moment is the silencing of dissent.

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<sup>10</sup>In addition, we have seen the High Court avoid the question of whether the races power can only be used to promote the rights of Indigenous people in *Kartinyeri v. Commonwealth* (the Hindmarsh Island Bridge case) (1998) 195 CLR 337.

This has been an era for the silencing of voices. As an Indigenous woman I feel it acutely with the dismantling of a representative national voice but this is reflected in other trends – the cutting of the budget to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, the increase in powers to ASIO under the guise of national security and the silencing of many charitable organisations who were social commentators until the job network contracts they signed forbade public comment; many NGO's now have the additional threat to their tax-free status if they engage in what is seen as political activity.

In addition, we have seen the erosion of the neutrality of the public service. This was illustrated very eloquently by David Marr and Marian Wilkinson in their book, *Dark Victory* that detailed the way in which the campaign against boat people led to the re-election of John Howard for a third term. They highlight the way in which the public service has been politicised since 1996.

The upper reaches of the service were purged. The mandarins lost their security of tenure. Cabinet took an interest in the political colour of appointments way down the line. The result was a public service more politicised, more compliant and less able to offer 'frank and fearless' advice to Ministers.<sup>11</sup>

Michael Pusey also writes about this shift. He points to the departments of the Prime Minister, Treasury and Minister for Finance when he writes:

“Together they have destroyed the capacity of the once excellent and highly professional public service, one of the best in the world, to deliver independent advice and policy in the public interest and without fear or favour.<sup>12</sup>”

He notes that the purge of the Senior Executive Service that started in the mid-1980s saw the replacement of experienced officials with economists, accountants and people with degrees in business administration. This had the following result:

For the most part, the new breed are extremely bright model-makers and strategic analysts, with a trained incapacity to think about society or the common interest. They are united by a common determination to give the markets primacy over the society...<sup>13</sup>

Our current political climate has also left those who are uncomfortable with the intolerance and racism so freely and openly expressed on talk back radio and in public conversation, feeling isolated and silenced. But it is in here, amongst this group in our society, that Australia's social conscience lies.

In this climate of silencing dissent, some extraordinary ideologies have found their way back onto the Indigenous policy agenda.

There are three key aspects of some of the ideological underpinnings that I believe are underpinning the approach to Indigenous disadvantage at the moment. They are not mutually exclusive, in fact they are interrelated and feed each other. The first is the re-

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<sup>11</sup>David Marr and Marian Wilkinson. *Dark Victory*. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2003.

<sup>12</sup>Michael Pusey. *The Experience of Middle Australia: The Dark Side of Economic Reform*. Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2003. p.10

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

emergence of the white supremacist view of history, the second is the philosophy of mainstreaming and the third is the philosophy of shared responsibility.

The white supremacist view of history has been lauded and re-established by a few academics and by the media. This is not a view that simply seeks to embrace the successes of white Australia in the founding of our modern state, it seeks to denigrate and write out Aboriginal experience and perspective. It is a white-man-conquering-the-elements view of history that seeks to erase the massacres of Aboriginal people and discredit the voices of the stolen generation. It is a view of history that seeks dominance, not reconciliation.

The competing views that non-Indigenous Australians have about the way in which they want to tell their history has been played out in the "culture wars." Although they used the telling of Aboriginal history as their battleground, the "culture wars" were more about the struggle over white identity rather than about Aboriginal people. Our experience and perspectives of our history remain unchanged by the semantic debates as to what constitutes "genocide" or the numerical debates about the number of Aboriginal people killed. But their debates reveal much about the competing stories Australians want to tell themselves about their own history. And it is more than a mere debate amongst academics. It is a debate whose results will have a profound influence on the values of our society for years to come and will determine whether we move towards tolerance, acceptance, co-existence and diversity or whether we continue to move towards intolerance, suspicion, fear and conformity. It is because the stakes are so high that it has been waged through so many of our cultural institutions, including the Australian Broadcasting Commission and the National Museum of Australia.

If this "war" is lost to those who take an insular, xenophobic and exclusionary view, White Australia will not have the generosity of spirit and the necessary civic responsibility in its heart to be the type of society that can treat all of its members – regardless of race, socio-economic background and religious belief – equally, justly and fairly. And non-Indigenous Australia will be unable to take a place beside Aboriginal Australia. It will be unable to look us in the eye while it refuses to acknowledge our past and current experiences. An inability to acknowledge and respect will be a continuing barrier to the creation of an honest and trusting relationship.

The ideologies of assimilation and mainstreaming have re-entered the approach to Aboriginal issues at the national level. The pursuit of these ideologies has seen the agenda to dismantle the national representative structure that was part of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and it has seen the major programs for Aboriginal people shifted from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services into mainstream departments. No doubt these moves will appease the constituency who has always resented the attention to Aboriginal issues and has interpreted the need for targeted programs as "welfare bludging" or "getting something for nothing".

But the real danger with the move is that the ideologies of "mainstreaming" and "assimilation" have failed in the past to shift the poorer health, lower levels of education, higher levels of unemployment and poorer standard of housing that Aboriginal communities have experienced. These ideologies have not offered ways to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage, interest in land, language. And they have not

offered a way in which Aboriginal people can play the central role in making decisions that will impact on their families and communities.

In the past, the failure of mainstreaming has stemmed from its inability to target specific issues that arise in Aboriginal communities in relation to health, education, housing and employment. This is because mainstream services need to develop specific mechanisms and strategies for Aboriginal clients and they have to do this with stretched resources. In addition to these challenges, Aboriginal people claim that they are often subjected to racism within those mainstream services. Those claims of racism, particularly in relation to the delivery of health services, were well documented in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

There is no evidence to show that the ideologies of mainstreaming and assimilation that failed so dismally in the past will work now. This new shift in the delivery of Aboriginal policy and programs does not offer any new insights or any promise of more effective policy-making and program delivery. In fact, it must be emphasised that there is nothing "new" about this ideological thrust that will shape the thinking behind Aboriginal affairs in the next few years. It should also be added that the approach to Indigenous policy should not be ideologically led, it should be directed by research-based policy so we are not the perpetual guinea pigs for government.

There is, however, new language that has crept in to this policy approach and that is the language of "responsibility". The notion of "responsibility" is also seductive political rhetoric that appeals to the section of the community that resents welfare measures, especially amongst Aboriginal people.

In theory, negotiation with Aboriginal people in order to develop priorities, policies and programs should deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal people through the proven principle that Aboriginal involvement in solutions provides better results.

However, in most instances, the process by which shared responsibility agreements are entered into do not reflect that principle.

Firstly, there has generally been no or little consultation process with communities to set priorities and agendas.

Secondly, the negotiation with "communities" is occurring at the same time that the Regional Council structures are being abolished so the issues of authority and mandate have not been clearly established.

Thirdly, there is no clear logic to the benefits that flow from behavioural changes. Why is cheaper petrol linked to a hygiene program?

Fourthly, there are anecdotal accounts of where the agreements have not been thought through properly, for example, promising a market garden to a community who does not have enough water to sustain it and a community who had all its children turn up to school as part of their agreement, only to find there were not enough teachers.

And, there is also the fact that previously successful programs, such as CDEP projects, now have additional burdens attached through them via the imposition of SRA's. They didn't need to have these coercive aspects to them before? Why now?

There are also questions about what measures are in place to make sure that governments do not include essential services that they should be providing anyway – such as infrastructure, basic health and enough teachers – through these agreements. There are questions about what mechanisms are in place to make sure that human rights are not breached by these agreements. And there are the issues of monitoring and implementation. Who decides if people's faces are clean enough? And who comes and takes the petrol away if they are not? And what happens if it is the government which breaks its side of the agreement? What redress do Aboriginal communities have then?

In this era of shared responsibility agreements, we must be diligent in monitoring the procedures and substance of these agreements, particularly where there are elements of duress and breaches of human rights. And we should push governments to develop transparent and inclusive processes that respect the principle of negotiation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about their priorities, programs and principles.

So these ideologies are creating bad policy. And the silence of social commentators is deafening. Remember what Martin Luther King said: "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends".

While I can understand many of the pressures that are being put upon people who oppose the government orthodoxy, I cannot understand why the left has let itself be overrun in this debate. I fear that our traditional supporters have been incapacitated by their fear of being called "racist" if they disagree with Aboriginal people – even if the policy advice they are giving is bad and flawed – and they have been left nodding when told by advocates of right-wing ideologies that "self-determination doesn't work" or the "left hasn't delivered" nodding in agreement but not thinking about how to re-enter the debate. Or even questioning it.

I can understand the reluctance of those who believe in the importance of Aboriginal self-determination to speak for Aboriginal people, but this is different to the role that those concerned about Australia's social fabric should play. And the role is simple: allow your technical expertise to be available so Aboriginal people can see the alternatives themselves. Through critique of flawed policy and failed ideologies, you hand a powerful tool to the sector of the Australian community that is the poorest, the most marginalised and the most disadvantaged. There is nothing patronising in arming Aboriginal people with the data, the statistics, the analysis and the possible alternatives so that we can more effectively raise our voices in public debate.



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## **'Beggars can't be choosers': welfare reform in context**

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### **Introduction**

This is an historic year and an historic week. Legislation before the Commonwealth Parliament is set to dismantle some unique features of Australia's welfare state; features that previously provided protection and opportunity for Australians both in and out of work. Welfare reform is an indispensable part of the Howard Government's agenda to change Australia's institutional landscape in relation to access to income and work for people of working age.

The current proposals for welfare reform aim to move people from welfare to work and include changed requirements and entitlements for Parenting Payment recipients where the youngest child is six years or older, and for people on the Disability Support Pension (DSP) who are able to work more than 15 hours. Mature aged jobseekers and very long-term unemployed people are also affected. For people on Newstart the modification of the taper rates will provide more incentive and rewards for part-time work.

Today I focus more on Parenting Payment changes, with some comments also pertaining to the DSP. Three relevant aspects of these changes are first, the increased obligation to participate in work or in agreed activities, second, the lower base payment and the tighter income test, plus loss of other concessions that most will encounter over time, and third, measures to help people into work including increased places in child care, the job network, VET, specialist disability employment and so on.

I am most interested in the impact of the reforms on poverty and inequality and in attempting to understand whether they are equitable, I attempt to go beyond slogans such as 'fairness starts with a job' (Andrews 2005) and propose that we need to understand how welfare reform will impact on three harmful aspects of inequality (see McClelland 2002 for more detail).

The first aspect is inequality associated with unacceptable hardship and misery that may compromise a person's capacity to achieve well being in important aspects of life. Here the protective role of government is important and in relation to welfare reform we are concerned to see if changes protect living standards and other important parts of people's lives such as caring responsibilities and meaningful relationships.

The second aspect is inequality of opportunity, meaning that people's socio-economic background should not determine their life chances. Here we are interested in the capacity building and social investment function of government. The relevant question is whether the proposed package of obligations and assistance will develop

the skills, opportunities and capacities of individuals, families and communities to be able to function effectively in a changed economic environment where the position of people with low-skills has declined world-wide.

The third aspect is when inequality undermines the achievement of shared values and experiences essential for social relationships and social cohesion. The question is whether the welfare reforms create a more divided society and a different treatment of people with common needs.

I do not have time for a detailed examination of the changes according to each of these criteria and I raise them as important for others to pursue as the legislation is examined (hopefully) in more detail. However to understand how these changes measure up, we need to examine them in the broader context of economic and industrial relations change and in the context of the experiences of other countries and it is to these matters that I now turn before some concluding observations about choice.

### **Economic and industrial relations context**

The economic and industrial relations context matters because as Cass (1996,p iv) comments, 'economic and social policy choices are fundamentally interconnected'. Australia has been called a 'wage-earner's welfare state' (Castles 1985) because of its orientation toward the achievement of community welfare, and the promotion of equality, more through the regulation of wages and conditions, than through citizenship-based social expenditure. This orientation means that economic policies that impact on work – its availability and its remuneration – have a particular impact on social policy and income support arrangements.

Economic policies that increase market inequalities because of less emphasis on employment growth in secure well-paid work, create pressure for welfare expenditures to increase to compensate for loss of work income or inadequate earnings. Pressure then mounts to contain expenditure and limit entitlement or adequacy of assistance. Welfare to work packages such as the current package are then adopted. Over much of the period since the mid 1970s, economic change in Australia has been accompanied by increased inequality in earnings from work, with increased pressure on the welfare system to compensate. Smyth (2006) comments,

“An inevitable result of Australian governments' giving up on the social regulation of employment and wage policies has been the rising welfare bill.”

One of the main failures of Australia's economic performance over the past two decades, in particular over the 1990s, was the failure to generate sufficient full-time work, with a significant decline in the proportion of men working full-time (Keating 2004).

However unless economic policy can generate sufficient good full-time jobs, welfare to work policies are unlikely to improve living standards. Instead, the living standards of many on income support could deteriorate in real and relative terms, because of the much lower payments people will receive on Newstart Allowance in comparison with Parenting Payment and the DSP, the different indexation arrangements, and the substantially lower remuneration they will receive from part-time work because of the changed income test arrangements, together with other losses. NATSEM research identifies a drop of between \$29 per week to almost \$100

depending on the recipient's category and number of hours worked (Harding, Ngu, Percival, & Beer, 2005a, 2005b).

There are different views about how to generate more jobs. One favours an active role for government through some combination of skill development, regional initiatives and job creation (Smyth 2006). Another advocates freeing up the labour market, the path being followed by the Howard Government through the industrial relations legislation currently before Parliament. In this legislation the changed arrangements for the setting of minimum wages, the reduced power for employees in relation to employers in negotiations over wages and conditions and the changed unfair dismissal laws, all introduce a dynamic for a reduction in wages and conditions for low skilled workers relative to others over time.

The industrial relations legislation highlights the important relationship between wages and welfare payments. Industrial relations changes that reduce the relative wages of low wage earners over time create a dynamic for less generous income support payments, as concerns about work incentives and replacement rates mount. It is not accidental that the welfare to work proposals accompany the industrial relations changes. They are required to maintain work incentives, or to compel participation where work is understood as harmful (to health and well being in the case of people with disabilities) or to caring responsibilities and mothers and children's well being in the case of lone and partnered parents on welfare. The combined impacts of welfare reform and industrial relations changes will harm both workers and people on welfare. Richardson (1999) notes that the historic Australian combination of full-employment, arbitration and social security, "removed two major sources of harsh treatment of workers. One was the 'race to the bottom' whereby firms that adhered to award conditions might be put out of business by those who breached them. The other was the need for workers to accept any terms, legal or not, because they had no alternative source of income: the welfare system increasingly came to provide a 'reservation wage' below which workers need not sink" (1999: 12).

Regulated wages have been important for containing poverty amongst workers in Australia as well as for people on welfare. In relation to workers, citing a recent OECD study Whiteford (2005: 24) concludes that, "work is much more effective at shielding households from poverty in Australia than in almost any other country: the poverty rate for working-age households with one worker in Australia is the second lowest in the OECD after Norway, (respectively, 5.7 and 3.2%) while in the US work is far less effective, with 26.5 % of households with one earner being below the poverty line".

### **International context: the experience of US and New Zealand**

Such high poverty figures for workers in the US illustrate the lessons Australia can take from the experience of other countries with welfare reform. Table 1 shows the different poverty rates of Australia, New Zealand and the US. New Zealand and the US are, like Australia, English speaking countries with 'liberal' (that is more residual), welfare arrangements. But they have responded differently to economic and social change over the past 25 years. They have deregulated their labour markets and reduced welfare entitlements, particularly for those of workforce age, and especially sole parents. The New Zealand comparison is perhaps more instructive because both Australia and New Zealand previously had centralised wage fixation. This is not the case for the US where wages have always been more deregulated and welfare entitlement (unsurprisingly) much more limited. Table 1 indicates that the US is the

most unequal. Australia is somewhat less unequal and more redistributive than New Zealand with the differences being most stark in relation to child poverty; the experiences of the respective countries in relation to child poverty is revealing.

The figure from New Zealand shows the large increase in child poverty between the late 1980s and the early 1990s. This is significant because in 1991 New Zealand introduced a similar combination to that being proposed in Australia - the Employment Contracts Act that abolished the award system, (ACOSS et al 1996) and the Welfare that Works package that cut most welfare benefits between 5 to 27%. Most of those cuts have not been restored. Recent changes by the Labour Government in NZ have been directed more towards rewarding work than improving the position of jobless families (McClelland & St John forthcoming). The next figure illustrates that, in contrast to NZ, in Australia child poverty fell from 14.6% to 11.7% over a similar period, mainly due to the government policy change that improved payments for low income families. And while enterprise bargaining was introduced, the award system and arbitration were preserved allowing minimum wages to be an effective form of protection for both jobless and low wage families, for the reasons discussed earlier. Over the late 1980s and early 1990s in Australia improved families assistance was critical in reducing child poverty but it was in the context of a regulated labour market. We will not have this combination in the future if the IR and welfare reform legislation proceeds.

### **Conclusion - the importance of choice**

However some form of economic and social policy change is needed. The earlier table showed that Australia has one of the highest proportion of jobless households in the OECD at 13.4%. But we have choices in the way we respond and there are 'ominous signs for Australia' (McClelland & St John forthcoming) from the New Zealand experience and from the US example, in the package we have chosen. The Howard Government's proposals for industrial relations and welfare reform contain elements similar to those that led to an increase in child poverty in New Zealand and indicate a move towards a more divided society like the US. Commenting on the answer by Minister Andrews indicating that welfare recipients will not be able to choose to decline a job offer under the new arrangements, the questioner, Barry Cassidy from the ABC Insiders Program (October 23) noted that he really meant that 'Beggars cannot be choosers'. The combination of IR changes plus welfare reform will remove choice from many working and non-working Australians - the choice to accept a job that has reasonable wages and conditions, the choice to combine work and welfare in order to care for children or because of a disability condition or the choice to withdraw totally for a period of time so the family can recover from a painful separation. These are choices that we have held dear in the past and around which welfare states have developed, albeit in different ways in different countries. To remove them is a choice we should not make.

**Table 1:****Australia/ New Zealand/US comparisons on selected social indicators Early 2000s**

<b>Indicator early 2000*</b>	<b>Australia</b>	<b>NZ</b>	<b>US</b>
Relative poverty %	11.2	10.4	17
Child poverty %	11.6	16.3*	21
Income inequality (Gini)	30.5	33.7	35.7
Govt. transfers to bottom 3 deciles (%)	37.2	31.2	17.6
Tax % GDP	32.6	39.1	29.8
Employment/pop (males)	76.4	79.3	76.9
Employment/pop (females)	62.2	65.8	65.7
Unemployment (03)	5.7	4.7	6.0
Long-term unemployment	22.5	13.3	11.8
Jobless households %	13.4	9.6	4.9
Working mother (where Child <6 years) % (1990)	45 (42)	49 (36)	60 (54)

Source: OECD (2005), Whiteford (2005)

Notes: Exact year for individual country may vary and for Australia is generally for 1999.

Poverty rates are proportion of population in relevant households with less than 50% of median equivalised disposable income at around 2000.

Child poverty is proportion of children in households with less than 50% median income. Note that the poverty figure for New Zealand has been disputed (Perry, 2005)

Tax figures are for 2002 and are from Keating 2004.



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## A Working Society

### John Dalziel, Communications Director Salvation Army, Eastern Command

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This presentation entitled 'A Working Society' will examine within the conference theme of 'Re-imagining Australian Society' Welfare reform and consider if we are moving towards a fairer and simpler system. My conclusion is that the welfare system in Australia today is less fair than in the past and is looking like getting worse. We will examine how we got into this situation and some possible solutions.

Some eight years ago the Salvos put out a book called 'A Working Society' in which we proposed 10 ways to develop full employment. That is employment not just for those who are able, intelligent, skilled and mentally stable but also for those who are not.

The Salvation Army summarised at the end of the book a three part solution to developing a working society based on:-

- strategic investment in infrastructure development
- recognition of the social and economic value of non-paid work
- support for those who are most marginalised to participate in employment and community activities.

Such schemes would have to be Commonwealth Government financed and could include for rural communities the roofing of irrigation channels to conserve water or in metropolitan areas the training of people in the service industries which are labour intensive, like house and car cleaning and laundry services. Such schemes would encourage the expansion of the number of jobs in our community and would ensure that these jobs were reserved for the long term unemployed or those on disability pensions. This is in comparison with the proposed IR changes which rely on competition leading to the lowest pay possible with just five safeguards, for unskilled previously long term unemployed, to get them a start in the work force.

We do not want to see the conditions for the existing work force eroded to provide employment for the vulnerable but rather provide true full employment for all. This then leads to everyone enjoying the benefits that Australia has been experiencing during the past 30 years. The expense would initially come from the pockets of Australian tax payers but ultimately the saving on unemployment and disability payments would be more than the investment in these job creation schemes.

In the past 21 years the cost of living index has increased by 140%. During this time The Salvation Army has seen the increased cost of providing our services increase by 1000%. The number of people who come to us asking for assistance is now 1.5 million people a year. We estimate that 98% of our clients receive no earned income but rely

on government benefits and help from welfare agencies. Some receive no income from governments and rely totally on welfare agencies, like refugees and some homeless people.

We have seen a huge increase in the number of people asking for assistance since the recession of 1993. In all previous recessions we had experienced a return to normal once the recession ended but not in 93. We have seen an increase of 10% a year since then.

We are now experiencing the lowest unemployment rate for three decades and yet the community sector has never been more challenged by the number and complexity of the problems people are presenting us with.

We believe the reasons have been:

- the deinstitutionalisation of those suffering from mental disabilities
- the huge reduction in unskilled jobs as machines and computers take over the tasks that were traditionally the first jobs for the uneducated, young and the only jobs for those with limited education and those with mental disabilities.

We are now faced with the prospect of an ever increasing divide between the employed and the unemployed. Our 5% unemployment rate does not include the 8% of the population receiving a disability or other type of pension, who would also like to work at least part time.

The report issued by Mental Health Services in Australia in mid October; 'Not for Service; Experiences of Injustice and Despair in Mental Health Care in Australia', detailed the persistent Federal and State Government neglect that has led to a call for an extra \$5 billion a year to be spent by all governments. The report details preventable deaths and the grave personal and family distress that these failings create. Twelve years after Brian Burdekin, it reminded us how little has happened in the intervening years. It tells us again that while deinstitutionalisation was a great step forward, the cost savings to government have not been reinvested in community services to cope with the results. The partially reformed mental health system has become institutionalised again, still firmly entrenched at the bottom of the pecking order in health care.

About half the people accessing our emergency homeless services are suffering a mental disability. It is not surprising given the lack of care given to this area which urgently needs more resources and continuing reform.

In the past a considerable proportion of the population was intolerant of people who relied on welfare, but this is changing. The paid workforce is far more tolerant of the need for welfare. We even have a significant number of taxpayers who think welfare and social issues are more important than them receiving tax cuts. According to a Newspoll survey in June this year 63% of people think welfare issues are important compared to national security (59%), taxation (53%), defence (49%), interest rates(51%)and industrial relations(41%).

The public gave \$5.7 billion to charities last year an increase of 58%over a seven year period according to 'The Giving Australia' Federal Government report released last month. About 87% of adults made a donation last year up from 69% in 1997. This not only affects the giving of money.

Recently The Salvation Army called for volunteers to give a year of their time with no pay to help the most disadvantaged people of the City of Melbourne. 35 young people are participating in this project which feeds people and provides a refuge during the day for 150 to 200 people and the volunteers participate in a 10 pm to 2 am patrol of the lanes and alleys of the city for those who can't or won't sleep anywhere else, to provide food blankets etc. and an invitation to our 'Life Centre' the next day.

We cannot rely on our political leaders making changes to our welfare philosophies in Australia but they will follow the people/voters if the pressure is strong enough. I believe the mood in Australia is changing.

There is still a perception among political leaders that tax cuts will ensure political success at the ballot box. Once a political party loses an election with inadequate welfare policies and large promised tax cuts, we will know that a new era has arrived for welfare in this country.

Why do we allow \$13.6 billion in our current surplus to be used for other than a fair society that gives everyone the freedom to enjoy employment? That provides skill training for those that school has failed. That then says those who choose to give themselves to the nurturing of their children but don't have assets or a partner to support them, will be supported in their choice; not penalised; not forced to 'work' outside the home. Why do the Salvos in Melbourne have to turn away from our emergency homeless centres more than 35 people a night? Because there are not sufficient public housing or long term low cost housing options and this leads to a shortage of crisis accommodation for the homeless. This year when a new Federal and State arrangement for Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) funding for next five years, (which provides emergency housing for the homeless) was to be negotiated, the starting point for the Commonwealth Government was a 10% reduction in funding. Eventually with intense lobbying from the whole sector we saw the status quo maintained. However the governments know that there is a desperate need for a 40% increase in funding in this area.

For the cost of about \$15 billion a year, the Commonwealth and State Governments could see a major turn around in the solution of all these issues. This represents a 40% increase in SAAP funding; the provision of protected industries for the disabled; the establishment of skill training schemes and schools for homeless children. Legal aid increases for the abused, refugees and others in desperate need. The \$5 billion already mentioned for the correction of our approach to mental health is included in this figure. It also includes addressing the biggest shame of all, which is adequate funding and assistance programs for indigenous Australians. While we have all heard it before it is worth restating that indigenous Australians have: only 76% of the life expectancy at birth of non-indigenous Australians; 44% of the school retention rate to year 12; 380% higher unemployment rate; 1600% higher imprisonment rate.

They need housing, education, and especially improved health services. We need new indigenous leaders to show us the way to solve this blight on our nation and we must insist that our governments follow this lead.

A good example of this lead was a story from the front of The Australian newspaper last month of the Mornington Island elders who stepped in to help the 25 teenagers on their island addicted to glue sniffing, which leads inevitably to paralysis and premature death, frequently from depression-induced suicide. The elders took the troubled teenagers back to their indigenous roots. Along with an immersion in

traditional bush skills and culture, the teenagers heard lectures on the evils of sniffing from police and health workers. The success of the program beamed from the healthy, happy faces on the front of the paper. We need to encourage more aboriginal led initiatives of this type. It reminded me of a homeless youth initiative run in the Western Suburbs of Melbourne. The Salvo Westcare centre wanted to give the homeless teenagers in their care a 'life experience' and organised a trip by bus to Uluru. On the way they stopped off at an aboriginal - run oyster farm in Ceduna in South Australia. The kids quickly developed an affinity with the Aboriginals. Both groups identified with each other as living on the fringes of society and accepted each other unconditionally. So we can also learn from indigenous leaders and apply their approaches to our intransigent problems.

The approaches we have outlined in our 'A Working Society' document for achieving full employment would mean that out of the 1,300,000 people wanting jobs approximately 750,000 people could become wage earners. This would see the payments on unemployment and homeless persons benefits and disability pensions greatly reduced. Those receiving unemployment benefits, disability allowances and homeless people benefits would not be the only ones to benefit. The 15% of children living in poverty would also be dramatically reduced.

However we are not suggesting that total expenditure on welfare should be reduced, rather better deployed. International comparisons put Australia's welfare provisions into perspective. Of 18 OECD countries, Australia spent less on social security payments in proportion to GDP than all countries except Japan, Ireland and the USA. Only Italy and USA pay lower levels of unemployment benefits.

So this is my vision for the future. It is based on the assumption that the problem with our society is not an unwillingness to work by those who are unemployed, but a lack of opportunity. There is an obsession by the Government with work. Those who are not working should be and those who are working part time should be working full time and those considering retirement should resist the temptation. They assume that only those doing paid work count. Those with school age children without the help of a spouse should work. There is the assumption that young unemployed could have jobs but don't want them. All those redundant, late - middle aged, blue collar workers on disability pensions could work if they really wanted to. And all early retirement is voluntary. There is no employer prejudice against older workers, just a refusal to keep working.

Our surveys have shown the alarming effect of unemployment on the mental state of the unemployed. They are among the most unhappy people in the community with the vast majority of the long term unemployed suffering from depression. This is the reality: there are 100,000 jobs and 1,300,000 people looking for work. The real choice for our society is not how to get those with no paid employment working but how we value unpaid work that adds value to our community. Do we want another tax cut, the hoarding of our Commonwealth and State Government surpluses or full employment?

Jesus told a story about the owner of a vineyard who went to the market place to hire workers for the day at 6 a.m. He realised he didn't have enough to finish the job and went again to the market place at 9 a.m and again at 12 and again at 3 p.m. When he went through the market place at 5 p.m. there were still the unemployable waiting for a job. So he hired them too for one hour. At 6 p.m. he told his supervisor to pay everyone a day's wage. Those that started at 6 a.m. said that was not fair.

Like all the parables of Jesus there are many meanings for this story but the one I want to use here is that the employable should receive a fair day's wage and the less employable also. There are no undeserving poor.

I have seen a change in recent years and more people (not necessarily only those who attend church, in fact not all of those either), believe we should be less judgemental in how we distribute our nations resources. We should include those who are having a tough time, not exclude them.

It is the voters who decide what our priorities are as a society. We get the government and the policies we deserve. I trust that this will be reflected in public polling and that governments of all political parties will be forced to listen or miss out at the ballot box; this is the only way we will see progressive change in our society that values all people unconditionally.

Then we will see a true working society.

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# **Industrial Relations Changes and the Workplace: Implications for the Community Services and Welfare Sector**

**Sheridan Dudley**  
**Chief Executive, Job Futures**

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## **Introduction**

I have been asked to speak today on how the proposed industrial relations changes will impact on the community services and welfare sector and to take a particular focus on whether and how we are moving to a fairer and simpler system.

I suspect that when this topic was proposed there had been little public comment on the reforms and their impact. However for months now, it has been impossible to pick up a newspaper or listen to any current affairs commentary where this issue is not being canvassed and I fear you may all be heartily sick of the debate due to overexposure! So there seems little point in outlining the reforms, as everyone who has not been living under a rock must by now know what they are. I am also not going to even attempt to comment on the entire scope of the reforms. Instead I am going to give my comments from the perspective of an organisation whose role it is to work with disadvantaged job seekers.

For those of you who don't know us, Job Futures is Australia's only national network of not-for-profit community-based employment and training providers. It has a particular focus on assisting those most disadvantaged in the community and delivers services through 72 member organisations at 160 sites around Australia. It is one of the largest providers of Job Network services and currently delivers one third of the specialist contracts and 80% of the indigenous contracts under this program.

## **How will the industrial relations changes impact on the community?**

The difficulty with answering this question is that the whole debate on the changes has degenerated into claim and counter claim with both sides locked in rigid, opposing positions. The Government trots out examples of happy employees who will benefit from the reforms. The unions trot out examples of those who won't. There is also a mindset around "all or nothing NOW" that seems to underpin the debate, as though somehow you have to support the entire package or none of it. And that it must happen immediately if dire consequences are not to befall us.

## **And the whole thing begs the question: Fairer for whom? Simpler than what?**

I suspect that the real answer is that for the majority of employers and employees there will be very little difference. However for some, the system is likely to deliver benefits. But others will be worse off. While some of the package is good, some needs

considerable improvement to protect the most disadvantaged in our community. As well, there is no compelling urgency to implement all of the changes immediately. It would make much more sense for sufficient time to be allowed for the lengthy, complex, detailed legislation to be properly considered so that it can be ensured that the changes do not cause harm that could have been prevented.

### **Are the changes needed?**

One of the difficulties with making sense of the entire issue is that the “Chicken Little” Syndrome has taken hold. The Government and business groups claim that our economic prosperity is at risk if we don’t undertake the full scope of the reforms immediately while almost everybody else claims that our social fabric will be damaged, family life destroyed and individuals turned into robots if we do it at all.

For example, Hugh Stretton, in his new book *Australia Fair*, argues that in Australia, which long has had one of the best institutions in the world for determining pay and conditions, “it seems crazy to be doing what we are doing now”. Ross Gittins suggests that the reforms put means ahead of ends by focusing on the income and forgetting why we want it, robbing us of our humanity by taking away our leisure and our ability to nurture family relationships and making us more like robots. There are also concerns that we will create a class of “working poor” – those who have jobs but cannot afford the basic necessities of food and shelter - as has occurred in the USA.

As a starting point in dealing with Chicken Little and setting a framework for assessing the impact of the reforms, it may be helpful to consider what we know and what we don’t know about the context in which this is occurring.

Firstly, a lot of the rationale for the changes is driven by demographic analysis. Every conference you go to produces more figures about this and we rely on it, almost unquestioningly. But what if the predicted impacts of the changes are wrong? Before I am burned at the stake as a heretic, let me remind you of Barry Jones famously saying that we would all have to be retrained to use all the leisure time we would have by the 21st century. Thirty years ago we did not doubt that there would not be enough work for everyone by 2000 – we even lowered the retirement age to 55 on the strength of it. It was wrong. What if we are wrong here too? Or right about the direction and shape of the change but wrong about the timing and magnitude?

Secondly, while overseas comparisons may be useful pointers in social policy analysis, we have to remember that conditions and issues vary and just because something has happened elsewhere does not necessarily mean it will happen here. For instance, the outcomes of industrial changes in Australia are likely to be very different from the USA, with its supply of cheap labour and cheap imports from Mexico, coupled with an overall welfare system which is inferior to our own.

What we do know, is that we need more flexible workplaces and a more flexible labour market system. This is not just to meet the demographic changes, some of which will certainly occur, but also to meet the needs of current job seekers, the people who members of my network are working with every day.

## **Need for more flexible workplaces and more flexibility in the labour market**

There are a number of underlying structural demographic issues driving the need for more flexibility in the labour market.

The demand for labour is projected to outstrip supply by 2010 (only 4 years away) meaning that there will simply not be enough workers to fill all the jobs which are available. Skills shortages which are already apparent in many areas, such as health workers and trades, will worsen. It is already common to hear employers complain that it's hard to get employees with the skills you want, and it is set to get worse.

There is already an imbalance between those who are over-employed and those who are under- or un-employed. Hugh Stretton, in Australia Fair, argues that we now overwork two million or more people, at least half of them against their will. At the same time, he says, "we leave behind between one and two million unwillingly unemployed or underemployed". The recently-released HILDA research supports this and there is also no likely rise in the pool of unemployed.

### **Where will the workers we need come from?**

Research undertaken for Job Futures by MacroPlan Australia concludes that in the medium term a stage will be reached where there are not enough people in Australia willing or able to do the jobs that need doing, from agricultural work to personal care. At that time, there will be an unavoidable need for Australia to compete internationally for guest workers, regardless of the current political position on this issue.

Until that point is reached, there are four main sources from which our workforce needs can be met.

The first source is the pool of under-employed. There are a large number of workers in Australia who want more hours than they have and we often overlook this pool of labour in our statistics. It is masked by the fact that in Australia, being unemployed is defined as not having worked at least one hour in the previous week. I venture to say that most people would not think having a job for one hour in a week would count as being employed. The common view of unemployment might be more in line with that used in Germany where you are counted as unemployed if you work less than 15 hours in a week and would like to work more. If we used this definition of unemployment in Australia our unemployment rate would be over 10%. But it also might lead the Government to encourage and support agencies such as my own to work with this group, in addressing our impending skills and labour shortages.

The second source of labour is through increasing participation rates which are lower in Australia than in comparable OECD countries. However this is not as simple as it sounds. Research recently carried out for Job Futures by MacroPlan Australia makes it clear that the only group where there is a predicted increase in the participation rate is for women over 45 years.

The third source of labour is the retired baby boomers. There seems to be an assumption that the baby boomers will retire early and stay retired. However if you consider that 45% of people do not have any superannuation and of those that do,

about one third do not have sufficient, it is inevitable that many retired baby boomers will have to work part time in order to live at a reasonable level of comfort in retirement.

And finally there is the pool of sole parents and those on the Disability Support Pension who have the ability to do at least some work, a group which the welfare to work reforms is already beginning to address.

These four groups comprise people who may or may not be participating in the labour market already but who don't see themselves as "unemployed". However as we exhaust the supply inherent in these groups, our remaining source of labour within Australia will be unemployed people with increasingly high levels of disadvantage.

### **Who would benefit from more flexible workplaces and labour markets?**

The groups from which the future labour pool will be drawn have one thing in common: they are likely to either want or need flexible and often unorthodox work patterns and would be likely to benefit from more flexible work places and labour markets. They will want hours that suit their needs within a relatively stable framework of an ongoing employment relationship, even during periods they are not working. Some examples of these types of groups are:

- underemployed workers wanting additional, but regular, hours in another job
- sole parents who can only work during school terms and school hours but need the certainty of continued employment rather than on a term by term basis
- retired baby boomers, women over 45, other older workers and those seeking social connection wanting to work only a few hours a day, or a few days a week. They may not be interested in annual leave and would rather have the cash in their pockets
- partners of fly-in fly-out workers (research commissioned by us shows this group is growing in number) available to work two weeks in three
- seasonal workers seeking the certainty of a continuing relationship with an employer, despite only working when the work is available
- people with physical or mental disabilities or other barriers to employment requiring flexible hours and specially adapted work places or additional support and a gradual increase in hours and responsibility during transition to work
- people in education or training needing to alter the hours they work each semester and take time off for study and exams
- older workers retraining in trades needing reasonable wage levels and quicker progression that recognise and reward their experience, rather than the low wages and four year courses which apply to young apprentices. The old classification of "journeyman" would be appropriate for this group

I believe that we need an industrial relations system that creates more flexible workplaces and allows for these types of employment patterns in the future if we are not to simply run out of people to do the jobs in our society that need to be done. We need a system which is nimble and adaptive and allows people to match their life circumstances to their employment in a way which maximises both.

The problem will be attracting these people into employment, especially those who do not see themselves as “unemployed” and who would like to participate. However they will simply not bother unless it is on the terms they want. It is therefore essential that the industrial relations changes encourage, rather than discourage, such potential workers into the workforce.

In the past our awards-based industrial relations system has not been very good at this. One of the most frustrating experiences of my life was trying to employ a security guard on a split shift: 6 am to 9 am and 6 pm to 10 pm each day. This would have allowed him to look after his two small children each morning while his wife worked in her part time teacher’s assistant role, helping a disabled child at school. They could then spend each afternoon together with their own children and have dinner as a family. The union would not allow it as split shifts were not provided for in the Award.

We cannot afford to allow situations like this to prevent sensible outcomes in the future.

I think changes that enable more flexible work patterns are essential in a world where every category of worker, not just those who are skilled, will increasingly be in short supply. And I think the industrial relations changes will allow this to happen.

However I believe there is more work to be done before they can deliver the benefits we need without causing harm. In this lie challenges and opportunities for the community sector both at the individual and policy levels.

Policy and system challenges and opportunities for the community sector.

At the policy level we are going to have to work in a new framework.

An immediate role is to ensure that the legislation contains individual safety net provisions. One of the problems with it at present is that it seems to be all one way – the employer’s way. There need to be sufficient safeguards to ensure that people are not forced to work unreasonable hours and that if benefits are traded for cash, there is some transparent formula which ensures trades are of equal value.

It is also not acceptable for those on benefits to have those benefits suspended by Centrelink if they refuse to accept a job offer because of the conditions imposed. Any job is not automatically better than being on welfare if the conditions cause hardship and dysfunction for the job seeker and/or their family. And this is a licence for unscrupulous employers to force the unemployed to accept conditions no-one else will, as they know they will lose their benefits if they do not.

Job Futures is opposed to any blanket requirement that required us to breach job seekers for refusing a job that we believed was unsustainable and not in the job seeker’s best interests. We strongly believe that in order for someone to return to the workforce successfully, we must find them not just any job, but the right job – one they are likely to want to stay in. To move away from this philosophy is unlikely to create sustainable outcomes or to encourage participation in the labour market.

This is an issue the community sector must take up to ensure that the most disadvantaged in our society are not unfairly impacted by this policy. I have already raised this with the Minister and made a Submission to the Senate Inquiry on it.

In the longer term there will be other policy tasks to tackle.

The industrial reforms create the Fair Pay Commission with its remit to set minimum wages and minimum award rates “with the primary objective of promoting the economic prosperity of the people of Australia”. This effectively removes the base-line for the minimum wage as being what was required to enable a man supporting three children to live in modest comfort established almost a century ago in the Harvester Case.

This is a fundamental shift in philosophy, separating welfare payments from wages. So a new challenge for the community sector will be to ensure that if minimum wages fall below that required for an individual to properly provide for their dependents, the welfare support system will step in to fill the gap.

This leads to the next challenge. If the system is to deliver benefits for individuals as well as the economy generally, it will be necessary for the welfare, employment and education and skills systems to link more tightly. At present the Job Network system seems to be running a little behind the intentions of the welfare to work reforms and the industrial relations reforms. For example, it doesn't recognise continuing relationships of seasonal workers with employers as real and ongoing employment, so that a Job Network member is not rewarded for placing a person in a job which delivers employment in 6 or 8 week trenches, spread across the year with gaps in between.

Similarly, there does not seem to be enough recognition that education and skills are not solely things which happen at school or shortly thereafter. Flexible workplaces, coupled with flexible education and welfare support systems, are going to be necessary if we are to address the skill shortage.

Governments are not good at getting out of their silos, and the community sector can play a significant role here in bringing a more holistic focus to the policy debate.

One of the problems the community sector faces in taking up that challenge is that over the last century, the traditional tripartite social structure of government, business and community has become increasingly unbalanced with the rise of the welfare state and the corresponding diminution of the role of the community sector. It is time for the community sector to actively seek to rebalance this structure by championing not just the rights of those we support, but the legitimacy of our own role in a healthy society.

There is the potential for our sector to be an equal partner with business and government in working to deliver sustainable communities. But this role will not automatically drop into our laps. If we can't clearly identify and articulate our distinctive competency and contribution we run the risk that the private sector, in partnership with government, will capture the more important aspects, as it seems to be doing in the industrial relations reforms, thus reducing the community sector to an irrelevant rump.

We will need to become more strategic, more focused on outcomes and more professional and business-like. We must be recognised as adding value to policy development, rather than being seen as hand wringers and problem makers. And in doing so we must not sell our soul to either business or government.

## Challenges and opportunities at the individual level

If there are big challenges at the policy level, the community sector also has a responsibility to individuals who are affected by the industrial relations changes.

For networks such as Job Futures, the industrial reforms will present a challenge and an opportunity.

The opportunity is that we may be able to get people into jobs where we couldn't previously, by working more closely with employers to create flexible agreements to respond to the needs of the increasingly diverse needs of job seekers.

For example, one of our members has worked with an employer to develop an arrangement where sole parents can work the 10 week school terms and not work during school holidays. The reforms, with their averaging provisions for the 38 hour week, may enable us to negotiate such arrangements in abattoirs, fishing, agricultural and other seasonal industries where only short term employment opportunities currently exist. As an aside, it may be worth wondering whether in such a situation there is any point in being required to have any annual leave provisions at all.

However there is a general agreement that the reforms will impact most on those who are most personally powerless, who have no experience of negotiation, and those who have the lowest range of bargaining chips, that is those with few skills and with disabilities.

So our challenge as community organisations is to give those who are powerless the means to improve their bargaining power by giving them real skills which make them valued employees. And to do that we are going to have to increasingly take a "one size does not fit all" approach both in customising assistance to our job seekers and recognising that they may have different values from our own regarding what are acceptable conditions of employment.

Before you say "but that's unrealistic because we are dealing with those with illness and disability", I'm going to suggest that firstly this is a challenge that we, as the community sector must take up, and secondly, it is possible to do so.

Job Futures has recently been trialling an Intensive Case Management system, working with just these clients - those who have been unemployed for many years, who have physical and mental disabilities and who every other agency had given up on. We have had extraordinary success, but let me tell you about just one of these clients.

### **Case Study: Stephen**

For most of us, our dream job might seem out of reach. Now imagine you suffer from serious back, neck and knee injuries, have history of depression and you have been on the DSP for 12 years. How much harder would it be to find successful employment, doing the job of your dreams? Yet for Stephen, a 40 year old man from Capalaba in Queensland, this very question began a process that would change his life.

Stephen says, "After 300, 400 knock backs, I began to think I wasn't going to find employment...I didn't want to be a 40 year old pensioner, especially in front of my child's eyes."

When Marian, the Job Futures/Horizon Intensive Case Manager asked Stephen what his dream job would be he didn't hesitate. He would be a motorbike mechanic, but felt this is an impossible goal due to his age, injuries and perceived limited opportunities in the field. Stephen's neck injury and chronic pain prevented him from working more than 15 hours per week and restricted the type of work he could do. These employment barriers were compounded by a history of depression and low literacy and numerical skills.

After addressing issues of motivation, self-esteem and confidence with Marian, Stephen made a list of all the motorbike shops in the area. He compiled a suitable resume that suited this type of employment and distributed his resume to potential employers. Then Stephen and Marian went out together and introduced themselves to prospective employers, canvassing work opportunities for Stephen.

Within weeks Stephen received a positive response from a local employer.

After successfully negotiating a wage incentive, he started work on a trial basis. During her regular workplace visits, Marian discussed the need for a set of tools and special benches for Stephen that meant he did not have to crouch near the bikes when repairing them. The Job Seeker Account was used to cover the cost of these items.

Today Stephen is a different man. He is working full time as an indentured motorcycle mechanic and, because of prior learning, has been able to reduce his 4 year apprenticeship down to one and a half years.

He says, "My whole life has changed since I started work...My self esteem has jumped a million percent."

While Stephen clearly had the capability to work in his chosen field, he needed his Case Manager's innovative approach to help him see that.

He says, "Marian knew I could achieve what I wanted...but that I needed to know what I wanted to do first."

(Stephen's Case Study is extracted from the Job Futures 2005 Annual Report) Stephen's case, and others like it, demonstrates what is possible.

## **Conclusion**

My view is that instead of trying to overturn the entire industrial relations changes appcart, we should acknowledge that demographic change will require more flexible workplaces and labour markets. That we do need a more flexible industrial relations system and that there is some merit in what the government proposes.

The changes may well provide opportunity for employment for some, but as currently proposed they will not provide protection for thousands of other people like Stephen. For some they may be fairer and simpler. For others they will not be.

In any event, no case has been made out that the changes are so urgent they justify being rushed through without sufficient consideration being given as to how those who may be harmed can be protected.

The challenge they pose for the community and welfare sector is to ensure that the changes have sufficient individual safeguards built in, while delivering both good economic and social outcomes in the longer term.

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# **Industrial Relations Changes and the Workplace: Implications for the Community Services and Welfare Sector Don't Mourn For Me .....Organise**

**Helen Creed, National President  
Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union**

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## **Acknowledgement of traditional owners.**

The title of my presentation, "Don't Mourn for me ..... organise" is one I have deliberately chosen. If I was at a union forum, all of the participants would assume it was a union text, because organising is what unions do. But I'm sure many of you in this audience recognise it as the title of a book written by David Scott from the Brotherhood of St Laurence and published in 1981.

In his chapter titled "Revolution Reaction or Reform" David makes the comment that "the prospect of trade union militancy in the interests of the poor is less likely than ever before". John Howard's proposed changes to industrial relations and the so called Welfare to Work initiatives provide the basis today of a very strong alliance between us - one that we have seen building particularly since the week of action in June.

Significantly, the week of activity showed that this campaign is about whole communities. Representatives of Churches, Councils of Social Services, and ethnic groups told our rallies about the risks for vulnerable communities.

In WA where we've already experienced these sorts of industrial relations changes the pre-rally publicity demonstrated what the week of activities was all about - the links between our work, our living, our family, our state, our community, our neighbours, our beliefs, our values.

Through that first stage of the campaign, the show of strength by the union movement, joined by community groups and ordinary families and coupled with the media campaign, was strengthened by public endorsement from community leaders. Among the most influential of those leaders were those from mainstream churches, who sent a clear message that this campaign is determining the future direction of Australia.

Just how effective the church leaders were was demonstrated by Kevin Andrews' angry response - captured in a Weekend Australian headline: "Stay out of IR Row, Andrews Tells Churches."

The academic community released a comprehensive communiqué, and a raft of papers, addressing aspects of the proposals and the likely impact, have continued to be published.

Even those academics normally seen as supportive of the Government's position have raised concerns. We have seen Mark Woden disassociating himself from the claim that these changes will create more jobs. Don Harding, upon whose research the government has relied for its claim that changes to unfair dismissal laws will create new jobs, recently said he did not think anyone should be saying with any certainty what the effect would be.

The Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils passed a resolution opposing the proposed changes and identifying the issues for ethnic communities. Campaign material in a message from Sharan Burrow was translated into over 20 languages.

Women's groups weighed in to the many family issues, such as the threat to annual leave, and the range of other issues for women workers, including the issues of pay equity, and the concerns that the gender wage gap increases under a de-regulated industrial environment.

Since the tabling of the Work Choices legislation in Parliament last week, just how profound these changes are has become apparent.

We anticipate the opposition to them will keep growing as the detailed analysis of the real impact of the legislation continues.

In general terms, what the Government is doing in this legislation can be summarised as:

1. Remove employment conditions from Awards
  - 1.6 million people rely on awards for their wages and conditions.
  - millions more on Agreements rely on awards to underpin their conditions.
2. Change the way minimum wages are set to make them lower.
  - for 100 years, Australian Industrial Relations Commission has set and increased minimum wage rates in awards (currently \$467 pw; \$12.30 per hour).
  - in the USA, the minimum wage is \$5.15 per hour; no increase in 8 years.
3. Individual contracts to undercut existing rights and conditions.
4. Keep Unions out of workplaces and reduce bargaining rights.
5. Abolish redundancy pay and protection for unfair dismissals supposedly for small business employees, but effectively for all workers.
6. Reduce the powers of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission and abolish State Commissions.

The relationship between the industrial relations changes and welfare legislation will also become clearer. Mind you it is pretty obvious already.

As Ross Fitzgerald writing in the Australian on 1 September 2005 under the headline "*Caught in a poverty trap*," said:

*"Industrial relations reform is only half of what it is up to. The other part of the equation, which presumably the Senate will rubber-stamp without inquiry or pause, is draconian welfare changes that aim to create a desperate class of mothers, injured and disabled all willing to take up work on the low-wage, insecure jobs that will come about from the IR changes.*

*Well, that's the plan, anyway. Many will probably remain on the welfare scrap heap for less money than before because employers will favour the able-bodied and unencumbered. These employers will reason it is better to offer their existing workforce less as a first step. In this new*

*Gotham, the twin forces of lowered wages and a meaner safety net will conspire to enlarge our population of working poor and further impoverish those below them."*

There are some however, who don't think there is any link at all. Michael Keenan, the Federal Member for Stirling elected at the 2004 election, responded to a request from one of our officials to bring a group of low paid members to meet with him during Poverty Week, with the following:

*"I am happy to discuss poverty with you but if you intend to really discuss industrial relations changes then just say so. There is actually no linkage between our proposed changes and poverty and you would be completely wasting your and my time if you intend to come and argue that there is."*

There are many areas where our interests will intersect at both the level of the individual and broader policy questions.

- The unemployment benefits recipient who will fail the activity test by refusing to accept a job on the basis of an Australian Workplace Agreement which undercuts the award wages and conditions. The first criteria the new Fair Pay Commission must "have regard to" in "performing its wage setting function" and promoting "the economic prosperity of the people of Australia" is "the capacity of the unemployed and low paid to obtain and remain in employment".
- Any worker, not just those employed in a business with less than 100 employees, is now at risk of being fired at will, which is effectively what "economic, technical or structural reasons" is a euphemism for.
- Employees and an employer who, believing the Government's rhetoric about choice, negotiate an "employee collective agreement" and find themselves subject to the penalties of up to \$6,600 for "seeking to include prohibited content in an agreement or lodging an agreement containing prohibited content." The Government will be publishing in regulations a list of items that cannot be included in agreements.

Your traditional clients and our union members are potentially likely to be in the same queue at your door for assistance.

Both of us are also concerned about issues of social cohesion.

These laws will do nothing to improve this; they will in fact damage them. The failure to protect penalty rates and overtime rates is not just an attack on take-home pay; it is also an attack on shared community time. As Sharan Burrow ACTU President told a Monash University seminar last month:

It is not true, as some argue, that in a 24 by 7 economy, each hour worked is the same as another. Research tells us that, on average, when an employee works on a Sunday they forego 2 hours of time with their family. That time is not made up during the week, it is not shifted, and it is lost. (Bittmann, in NCEPH 2004)

British research tells us that workers who work non-standard hours have less time reading with their children, less capacity for doing homework together, and fewer shared meals. (Millward, C in NCEPH 2004)

A 2003 Relationships Australia survey found that lack of time together has displaced financial pressure as the most commonly cited cause of relationship pressure.

Research undertaken at the ANU using Canadian data showed that parental work times are particularly important for child wellbeing in families with young children. Even after controlling for socio-economic status, work intensity (i.e. full or part time), demographic factors, and childcare use, the children with parents working non-standard hours, especially young children, were more likely to have an emotional or behavioural problem than those working standard hours. It appeared that maternal night time rosters had the strongest associations with children's wellbeing.

And while we are talking about social cohesion, lets not forget that these laws criminalise union activity and deny human and labour rights. Being banned from workplaces or fined for asking for basic protections for workers is unbelievable in a democracy. It is staggering to understand the lengths this Government will go to try and de-unionise Australia. The Government will argue that workers are free to join a union but why join a golf club if you are prohibited from playing there!

Some argue that the passage of these laws will address one of the greatest causes of social dislocation and childhood disadvantage, which is parental joblessness, which is most acute in sole parent households.

There is no doubt joblessness in households is a risk factor in children's development. But the problem with this argument is twofold.

- Firstly, this argument assumes that lowering wages will increase employer demand, creating jobs for sole parents. But the barriers to sole parent's employment appear to be related to job design and incompatibility with their caring roles, not wages. Sole parents do return to the labour market - on current data single mothers with children in secondary school age are as likely as couple mothers to be employed.
- Secondly, even if there were a wages impact, the cut to the minimum wages would need to be substantial to create new, low wage, low skill jobs. This would bring its own social dislocation not to mention a risk to consumer confidence. Potentially it would also create an incentive to reduce welfare payments, with the flow on to welfare recipients.

I'm sure that many of you are familiar with the comments made by Michael Chaney:

*"A fundamental flaw is that people have tried to use industrial relations policy as a tool to achieve not only productivity and growth in the economy, but fairness."*

If fairness is left to the taxpayer, more workers on minimum wages would be made more reliant on various forms of government income support. This simply means taxpayers subsidise inefficient enterprises with consequently fewer tax dollars for services such as the already stressed areas of health and education.

Fairness was a key element of the minimum wage setting process in this country. The current Workplace Relations Act 1996 explicitly says at Section 88B(2):

"In performing its functions under this Part, the Commission must ensure that a safety net of fair minimum wages and conditions of employment is established and maintained, having regard to the following:

- (a) the need to provide fair minimum standards for employees in the context of living standards generally prevailing in the Australian community."

As the ALP has pointed out, the only place the word “fair” is mentioned in the new legislation is in the title!!

We have seen in WA what happens when the minimum wage process is taken out of the Industrial Relations Commission.

Graham Kierath the then Minister for Labour Relations, in his Second Reading speech introducing the Minimum Conditions Legislation said :

“One of the most fundamental equity considerations is the provision of appropriate minimum standards and conditions. Any society which holds dear the democratic principles of fairness and justice must provide protection of the weak against the strong, and this applies as much in employment relations as elsewhere.

Our Bill establishes a safety net of core minimum conditions which will extend to and bind all employees and employers and will be taken to be implied in any contract of employment including those governed by a workplace agreement, an award or industrial agreement.”

The WA legislation did not completely remove the Commission from the wage setting process - Graham Kierath described his system in his Second Reading speech in the following terms :

“The Commission will review the minimum weekly rates of pay and make a recommendation to the Minister by the 31 May each year. The Minister may accept that recommendation or determine a rate or rates different from the recommendation.”

### **So what happened?**

At least Graham Kierath was honest about this. At a breakfast on 13/8/93, he was asked :

“How would you ensure that new workplace agreement legislation will not pave the way for employers to seriously cut existing award provisions and negotiate terms which are below those existing under the current system so that employees have the potential to be worse off and have no choice in setting their work conditions?”

to which he replied :

“Well firstly, you know, simply you can’t. But the important thing is the last part of that question where it says that they will not have choice in setting their work conditions.”

and then he continued to talk about choice.

Minimum wages did decrease under this system. Look at the comparison between the Minimum Award rate and the rate provided for under the Minimum Conditions of Employment Act (MCE rate) during the second half of the 1990’s.

Year	Minimum Award rate	M.C.E. rate	Difference
1996	\$349.40	\$332.00	\$17.40
1997	\$359.40	\$335.00	\$24.40
1998	\$373.40	\$346.70	\$26.70
1999	\$385.40	\$346.70	\$38.70
2000	\$400.00	\$368.00	\$32.40

In the first term of the Gallop Labor Government, WA's minimum wage was realigned with the national minimum wage. This saw WA's minimum wage increase by \$99.40 which for many of our members represented an increase of around 30% to the minimum hourly adult rate in just under 4 years.

Let me give you an example of how this applied in a specific industry - contract cleaning:

	Award	Workplace Agreements			
Wage rates	Contract Cleaners Award	ABC Cleaning Services	Airlite	Quirks	Select Cleaning
Ord rate of pay (per hr)	11.71	9.97	10.75	10.75	12.00
6pm to 6 am	12.85	9.97	10.75	10.75	12.00
Saturday	16.76	9.97	10.75	10.75	12.00
Sunday	22.34	9.97	16.50	16.10	12.00
Public Holidays	27.93	9.97	16.50	16.10	12.00
Pay rise	State Wage Decision	No provision	No provision	No provision	No provision

There was also a gender dimension to the impact of reductions in the minimum wage. In 1999 during the State Wage Case, the TLC of WA insisted that the report prepared by 2 Curtin University academics - Crockett and Preston which the then Minister for Labor Relations, Cheryl Edwardes had commissioned be made public. That report demonstrated that a widening of the gender wage gap had occurred in WA. It stated :

"Using well established techniques to measure the extent of gender wage discrimination in WA we conclude that in dollar terms this translates to an extra earnings disadvantage associated with residing in Western Australia of between \$18.33 and \$20.95 per week."

The establishment of the so called Fair Pay Commission is clearly designed to lower our minimum wage in comparison with average wages. It is designed to slow increases at the bottom. It is an instrument of inequality. And remember, it is overwhelmingly women and young people who rely on minimum wages: 31 percent of women employed in the private sector are award dependent and 51% of women earn under \$32,300.

It is the agenda of Big Business. Compare the legislation with the proposals put forward by business groups earlier this year.

The Business Council of Australia advocated slashing allowable award matters from the current 20 allowable matters to just six -

1. minimum rates of pay (adult, junior apprenticeship)
2. sick leave
3. annual leave (excluding loadings)
4. personal/carer's leave
5. parental leave; and
6. dispute resolution

They see the reduction in allowable matters would be a step along the way to axing the award system and adopting a new single set of legislated minimum conditions.

The Australian Mines and Metals Association has proposed that, if an award system was to be maintained, allowable matters should be cut back from the current 20 to just seven :

1. four weeks annual leave (or cash out)
2. one week sick leave
3. 52 weeks unpaid parental leave after 12 months service
4. a minimum weekly wage based on a 38 hour week
5. a minimum weekly wage for juniors based on a 38 hour week
6. a "fair treatment" process and
7. an obligation to consult employees about change that might lead to redundancy.

I think its time we turned our attention on Big Business.

Last year, when big business opposed a 40 cents per hour increase in the minimum wage, 40 CEO's in the big business lobby paid themselves \$173 million. That's 4.3 million dollars each.

The Australian Council of Super Investors Inc. (ACSI) has also been looking at both CEO pay and termination payments for Executives. From papers published in September 2005 a range of information is provided for CEO's across the Top 100 companies.

Key observations included:

- Over the period from 2001 to 2004, median CEO fixed remuneration increased by 76%. This is many times greater than the level of inflation and the increase in average employees earnings over that period (15%). As base salary and other aspects of fixed remuneration are (by definition) not explicitly tied to the company's performance, companies should

disclose clearly the reason or reasons behind a significant increase in base salary. Investors can reasonably expect this disclosure regardless of whether the prior year's performance was good, mediocre or poor.

- In some cases, CEO pay has been large and increasing over a period of poor or at least uneven corporate performance.
- Over the period from 2001 to 2004, the median short-term incentive has increased by 136%. This is a very substantial increase, both in an absolute sense and also relative to wage increases in the general community.

ACSI also commissioned research that looked at termination payments for Executives which lead that organisation to call upon company directors and regulators to :

- Stop payments for failure.

The report found executive service contracts routinely stipulate lengthy notice periods or pre-determined large payouts even where dismissal occurs as a result of poor performance.

- Excise bonuses from just termination

The research identified some termination benefits also included 'bonuses' that executives departing for poor performance otherwise had no entitlement to collect.

- Reduce the incidence of lump sum payouts

Australian companies have been slow to embrace the international trend of monthly termination payments which cease or reduce if the departing executive finds another position.

- Make more termination arrangements subject to shareholder approval.

The existing threshold for shareholder approval of termination benefits (up to 7 times annual salary) was too high to be meaningful in Australia.

- Review the merits of one year 'rolling' contracts for executives.

The report found such contracts that whilst on foot, always have a maximum of one year to run are becoming commonplace in the UK.

- Bring disclosure of executive service contracts into line with other jurisdictions.

The US and the UK now compel detailed contemporaneous filings on termination benefits. The latitude in Australia's continuous disclosure regime has meant that key details often emerge only when an annual report is published.

Not only should we be focusing on regulating the excesses of big business, but in my view as the union movement and the community services and welfare sector, we can work together to focus attention on the key labour market problems in this country which John Buchanan from ACIRRT has identified as :

- sustainable labour productivity growth
- skill shortages
- labour supply shortages as population ages
- work/life balance.

John presented information on the participation of women in Australia as compared to other OECD countries to a seminar I attended last week.

Participation Rates: Women in Australia vs OECD (%)

	No Children	1 Child	2 or more children
Australia	68.4	55.3	43.2
OECD	73.7	70.6	61.9

How we can increase the participation rates of women through positive measures not punitive welfare or industrial relations changes, is the sort of debate we should be having in this country.

It's a debate not about unions, but about values, about what sort of country we want :

- where a deal is a deal – not a situation where an employer can agree to a collective agreement one day and introduce individual contracts the next
- where workers earn a decent wage, enough to live on – or at least enough to buy a bus ticket to escape a situation like Hurricane Katrina
- where workers are treated like people, not an economic commodity.

If you believe in fairness, in dignity for working people, in social justice, be part of the fight against these changes, as we build a wall of opposition to them. Opposition that will not be silenced by these laws, but will get stronger and louder – in workplaces and in communities.

Rights at work sit at the core of our democracy and both are worth fighting for!

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## **Industrial Relations Changes and the Workplace: Implications for the Community Services and Welfare Sector**

**Senator Andrew Bartlett  
Deputy Leader of the Australian Democrats**

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Thank you for inviting me to speak here today

I would like to start by saying that the Democrats do not support the Government WorkChoices Bill.

Its basic philosophy is one we cannot accept.

The Bill is based on ideology, it is unnecessary, it is economically and socially risky and it will excessively tip the balance of workplace relations to favour employers, leaving many workers vulnerable.

We believe that many employers will also not be happy with the bill as it will create uncertainty and it will force better employers to bring down their wages to compete with less scrupulous employers.

We think that this Bill will lower wages and conditions across whole industries to the detriment of living standards and to the detriment of the Australian economy and society.

We argue that the Prime Minister has failed to provide any empirical economic evidence to support these changes.

In fact there is economic evidence to show that further labor market deregulation isn't necessary. The Scandinavian countries have higher regulation of IR than Australia, but they are better at creating jobs, are more productive and are wealthier than we are. On the World Economic Forum's 2005 Global Competitiveness Ranking, Australia is ranked 10th most competitive country in the world compared to Finland No 1, Sweden No 3, Denmark No 4, Iceland No 7, and Norway No 9. On average the Scandinavians do better on jobs than Australia. Australia's unemployment rate is 5%, Norway's 4.6%, Sweden's 6.3%, Denmark's 4.8% and Iceland's 3.0%. Norway, Iceland and Sweden all have lower long-term unemployment rates than Australia. Scandinavia seems a more attractive workplace model than countries like the US which have much larger numbers of working poor, higher income inequality, higher levels of crime, and a failing health system.

The Prime Minister has also failed to provide genuine choice, and he refuses to give a guarantee that no workers will be worse off because he knows that poor disadvantaged or powerless workers will be worse off.

It is our view that our present federal IR system is not broken; instead it makes a very positive contribution to Australia's economy and society. Australia now has lower unemployment, low interest rates, higher productivity, higher real wages and very significantly lower levels of industrial disputation than in the past.

We do not think the changes will increase productivity, in fact evidence from New Zealand suggests that productivity will fall.

We think productivity can be achieved in other ways. Increased investment in education and training, research and development, energy efficiency, reform the taxation system.

We also think that importance of social cohesion has been ignored by this Government. Unless an economy is genuinely in dire straits and needs radical surgery, economic reform is not more important than social cohesion. Both are important.

Academics have long argued that the preservation of social capital is crucial to economic and social success in the long run.

It is important that we balance employee and employer rights. If employers have all the power, then what we would see in many cases is a race to the bottom where wages will be driven down, people will be forced to work longer for less and job security will be non-existent. The social contract would move from cooperation to opposition and conflict.

Employment, wages and working conditions directly affect the standard of living and quality of life of individuals and their families. Thus, while it is important that labour market arrangements foster the efficient use of labour and promote participation in the workforce, they also need to recognise that labour is a distinctive 'input' to production, and that wider social objectives and relationships are involved – including the relationships between work, leisure and family, providing safe workplaces and the role of workers in society at large.

At a first glance many would assume that the community and welfare sector would be immune to the negative aspects of the WorkChoices Bill because it is a "caring" sector.

Unfortunately it is our view that the Orwellian named WorkChoices Bill in combination with the welfare-to-work changes will have a detrimental impact on the community and welfare sector.

In short the new legislation will change the way wages are set to make them lower; remove conditions from awards and undermine the award system; enable workplaces to become award free; reduce the power of the Industrial Relations Commission to settle disputes and set fair minimum standards; enable workers to be forced on to individual agreements; take away the award-based 'no disadvantage' test and instead rely on 5 minimum conditions; take away protection from unfair dismissal; make it almost impossible to take protected action; and make it harder for unions to enter workplaces to protect and fight for employees rights.

In the social and community sector there has been little enterprise bargaining, and for most workers in the sector, the conditions in the awards are what people get paid.

My understanding is that much of the sector is governed by state awards.

Under WorkChoices the Government aims to reduce reliance on awards and as part of the move to a single national regime, the majority of state awards will disappear into the ether.

The Federal Government will use corporations power, rather than the conciliation and arbitration power to govern industrial relations in Australia. This means all trading, financial and foreign corporations plus Commonwealth agencies. A trading company is any company, incorporated association or other corporation that has significant trading activities which would for instance include universities, councils and many other not-for-profit bodies and state public sector agencies. In other words many welfare and community service organisations will be forced into the federal system.

However it is by no means clear and many organisations will need to get careful legal advice.

What is clear is that there will be no choice for employees or employers as to which system they are in.

Where state award conditions apply to a worker at the date the new system comes into place, they will become part of a "notional agreement" that will have the force of the federal law. Any "prohibited content (i.e. unfair dismissal protection)" will be unenforceable. This notional agreement will operate for 3 years unless replaced by workplace agreement or a federal award.

At the end of 3 years if the state award is not replaced by a workplace agreement or a federal award, it will revert to a federal award.

The only new awards will be federal and will be those created as part of the "award rationalisation" process, which will see awards consolidated and allowable matters further reduced.

This could for example include abolishing incremental pay increases, which would mean your wage rate would not move unless you are promoted or your position is reclassified to a higher level within the award

The Government has argued that employees on current awards (state or federal) will have their conditions preserved until they leave the place of employment.

However, the Bill provides for a number of ways that workplaces can become award free, without seeking the consent of employees. Once a workplace agreement is in place for a given employee or group of employees, they can never again be covered by an award while working for that employer. Even if an agreement is terminated, any previous award conditions will not revive. Instead the employee's conditions of employment will be governed only by the 5 basic standards.

The Bill will make it easier for employees to be put onto Australian workplace agreements (AWAs).

The Democrats' view is that collective agreements and awards under the existing Federal Act are often better for workers overall than individual agreements, but we recognise that individual agreements are common (about 33% of agreements are

individual agreements) and are a part of working life. One of the reasons the Democrats support AWAs is that for unregistered agreements there are major disadvantages when there is a breach of contract or dispute, as they are hard and costly to enforce since that requires resort to common law courts. In addition, there can be confusion when a relevant award or agreement will override the terms of a contract where there is a difference in entitlement. We believe that the statutory protections provided in AWAs are superior to common-law protections.

But there is a proviso. AWAs must not disadvantage anyone, they must be underpinned by an adequate safety net, employees should have choice and there should be adequate processes and resources set aside to ensure compliance.

However the report from the Democrats - initiated inquiry into agreement making revealed that there are significant flaws in the current system, particularly with the regulation of the system. In particular we are concerned with:

- workers presented with 'take it or leave it' contracts
- duress being regularly complained of with no effective remedies available
- evidence of pressure and coercion into moving from collective agreements or awards to signing AWAs
- failure of the OEA to diligently apply the global 'no-disadvantage' test
- that the OEA is both the promoter and regulator of AWAs.

The Government's proposal to abolish the global 'no disadvantage' test adjudged against awards covering 20 allowable matters, and to replace it with a new 5 minimum conditions standard; and to allow agreements to come into force before they have been approved and checked will only exacerbate the situation.

I have so far painted a bit of a depressing scenario. I could say 'don't worry' because many of you work for employers who are reasonable and are not interested in driving down wages and conditions.

Unfortunately it may not be entirely up to the employer. Social and Community services organisations receive funding from the Commonwealth. There is a real concern that the Government may, like they have done in the training and education sector, tie funding to AWAs. The consequences of such action would be that employers would be forced to put workers on AWAs.

The Democrats oppose such tactics; this is not about choice and it is third party interference.

As many in the welfare and community sector are dependent on awards, they are also dependent on the AIRC annual wage decision for wage increases. This Government has been boasting that workers' real wages have increased by 14.7 per cent since 1996. But this is not their doing. Under the Workplace Relations Act that they plan to gut, it is the Australian Industrial Relations Commission and the National Wage Case that has delivered these outcomes. Yet they have taken that AIRC power, trashed it, and introduced a low-pay commission which will reduce the very real wage increases that the Prime Minister has been boasting about! It should be remembered that the Government argued on the basis that the minimum wage should be \$50 a week less than it is now. The Government refuses to guarantee that there won't be a decline in real wages. They won't index the minimum wage. They won't give any idea of compensation. So it's quite clear that over time real wages will deteriorate.

Another key change that will impact on the welfare and community sector is the scrapping of the Unfair Dismissal laws for organisations with 100 employees or less. While unlawful dismissal protection still exists, this process is costly and difficult to prove. The Democrats have opposed scrapping of unfair dismissal for the last decade. There is no empirical evidence to support that scrapping the protection will create jobs as the Government has argued, but more importantly it should be a basic human right.

The Government WorkChoice legislation will drive down wages, and reduce hard fought for conditions, it will create job insecurity, will isolate employees, it will make it harder to balance work and family life, and in the end it will drive down productivity.

As I said in my introduction the Democrats do not support these changes; we believe there is nothing essential wrong with the current federal system.

- We support the role of strong and independent Australian Industrial Relations Commission
- We support all forms of agreement making
- We believe that all independent contracts should be underpinned by awards and choice
- We strongly support the right for all employees to be protected by unfair dismissal laws
- We believe that a national well-resourced independent regulator should be established
- We believe that a requirement for employers and employees to bargain in good faith be included in the Act (which we have moved amendments to before)
- and we believe that genuine choice should be built into the system

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# **Affordable Housing In Modern Australia, Over Our Heads, Housing Costs and Australian Families**

**Julian Disney,  
Director Social Justice Project, UNSW**

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I am going to speak about problems arising from the high cost of housing, especially from the viewpoint of families and the younger generations. I will outline some ways in which we could improve opportunities for all Australians to enjoy affordable housing in decent environments.

What is affordable housing? It can be broadly defined as housing of an adequate basic standard that provides reasonable access to work opportunities and community services and that is available at a cost which does not cause substantial hardship to the occupants.

That definition is inevitably rather vague and subjective. But there is widespread agreement amongst housing experts that for households in the lower half of the income scale affordable housing should not cost more than 25-30% of their income. This applies especially to renters, who do not receive the compensating benefit of full or partial ownership.

Affordable housing is crucial to a country and its people. Without it, people are impoverished, families and communities eroded, jobs lost, the economy weakened, and the environment damaged. During the last 20 years or so in Australia, and especially over the last decade, these impacts have become increasingly apparent.

A number of key factors have contributed. They concern house prices and debt, the supply of rental housing, changing patterns of employment and urban development, and aspects of the general economy. I shall say something briefly about each of them.

## **House prices and debt**

During the last decade, average house prices in Australia have almost doubled relative to income. This huge increase is measured after allowing for general economic inflation (the CPI) over that period. It also allows for the increase that has occurred in average household income. Yet much of that increase probably results from couples working longer hours to help meet the rising cost.

Substantial price increases have occurred in other developed countries, but our increase has been about 50% higher than the average. Some of the price rise may be due to increases in the average size of new homes. But against that factor must be weighed the tendency towards smaller block sizes, more apartments and, for most new homes, greater distances from urban centres.

Discussion about house prices often focuses on the situation in and around Sydney. Certainly its prices are very substantially higher than elsewhere and some of its problems are more acute. In recent years, however, prices have risen proportionately as much or more in other parts of Australia. Moreover, average incomes are considerably lower in other States.

Some people respond to these increases by citing the major falls in interest rates that have occurred over the same period. As inflation has also fallen, however, the drop in real interest rates is not as large as may appear. More importantly, benefits from lower interest rates have been far outweighed by huge increases in prices and, consequently, in the size of housing loans.

Over the last decade or so, there has been an increase of about 50% (\$6,000 per year) in average payments on new loans for housing. For an average household, this increase alone represents about 10% of their take-home pay, the equivalent of losing more than \$200 per fortnight. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the proportion of first-time buyers has fallen considerably and the overall proportion of home ownership in the community is dropping by what I believe will be eventually be at least 20%, as its full impact is felt.

During the last year or so, prices in some parts of the housing market have stabilised or even fallen a little. But the overall magnitude of increases during the last decade, and of the even greater increases during the last two decades, has not been substantially affected.

Moreover, the recent falls do not reduce the unprecedentedly high levels of housing debt that have been incurred – the level has quadrupled over the last decade yet assets have no more than doubled. Continuing price falls will deprive struggling borrowers of the comfort of a continually appreciating asset.

The high level of housing debt is especially worrying when one considers the probability of further increases in interest rates. Also, during the last few years there has been a strong growth in loans that involve little or no deposit and few if any checks on the alleged property value and ability to repay. The potential for disaster in a falling market or struggling economy is very high.

### **Private and public renters**

Later family formation and greater job mobility have contributed to a growing number of people opting to rent for longer periods, or even permanently, rather than to buy a house. This may suit some long-term renters but it will leave many others more vulnerable in later years without the security of a paid-off home. Alleged “preferences” amongst many young people for remaining as lifelong renters may stem principally from their belief that ownership has become impossible or from failure to realistically assess their future needs.

Average rent levels have not increased over the last decade to anything like the same degree as house prices. This is probably due largely to landlords having the benefit of huge capital gains over the period and preferring in many instances to incur tax-deductible losses rather than maximise their rental income (that is, take advantage of the “negative gearing” process).

It is widely expected in the property market that rents will now climb substantially as many landlords face little prospect of further capital gains and may even lose some of their earlier gains. Yet even now the great majority of low-income renters pay more than the benchmark 30% of their income on rent. Many pay more than 50%.

The position for low-income renters has been aggravated by a substantial drop in the proportion of low-rent accommodation that is actually occupied by low-income tenants. It has also been aggravated by increased pressure on the private rental market as a result of deterioration in the availability of public housing, boarding houses and caravan parks. The widespread closure of major residential institutions for people with disabilities has also been a major factor.

Government investment in public housing has fallen by about one-third (half a billion dollars or so) during the last decade and opportunities to enter public housing rental have already fallen by a similar proportion. Sell-offs of public housing have become common and much of the remaining housing is remote from work opportunities and community facilities. The overall reduction in public housing supply relative to overall population is at least 100,000.

### **Patterns of employment**

The growth of two-income households has brought benefits for many women and often their families, in both material and other respects. It has substantially increased the amount of income in many households that can be devoted to housing costs.

But it has also helped to fuel competitive bidding-up of price levels, leaving many couples under acute pressure to undertake more paid work (often two full-time jobs) than would otherwise be in their own interests or those of their children.

One of the most common impacts of these pressures is severe stress on household relationships which in turn can trigger family breakdown, inadequate parenting, welfare dependency and other major problems. Another impact of great importance is on the fertility rate, as the price blowout convinces many young people that they cannot afford to marry and have children (at least until they are in their late thirties, but perhaps for ever).

Over the last twenty years or so, the proportion of jobs that are part-time or casual have risen to higher levels than in almost every other industrialised country. For many people, especially many women, this has provided new and welcome opportunities.

For many others, however, these jobs are very poor substitutes for full-term and secure work, especially if they involve long and expensive travel to and from home. They often mean insufficient job and income security to take out a housing loan (or even perhaps a rental bond) or to incur the expense of moving closer to work.

There has also been a major increase in average working hours amongst people in full time work, reaching one of the highest levels amongst developed countries, and in hours worked at evenings and weekends. These changes have further increased the impact on families of long travel times, especially where both parents have jobs, and the difficulties of combining work with responsible parenting.

## **Urban development and infrastructure**

By comparison with most other developed countries, Australia has a very high proportion of its population in large low-density cities. The cities have a relatively heavy dependence on private cars and congested roads rather than, for example, having adequate rail and freeway networks.

Substantial population growth has continued to fuel urban sprawl but governments have generally failed to ensure provision of adequate infrastructure, especially for rail transport. Yet house price inflation in older suburbs means that many of the new outer suburbs have an especially high concentration of low- or middle-income families with young children and long trips to work.

In many countries, at least one-third of the population lives in medium-sized cities (defined by the UN as those with between ½ and one million people). We have no such cities in Australia. Yet, especially if linked with rapid transport systems, they can provide greater economic, social and environmental efficiency than relentless metropolitan expansion.

Some governments have sought to limit urban sprawl but generally they have provided little practical encouragement for development in provincial centres. Indeed, they have retained key policies that actively discriminate against it. Instead, the main response of governments in the last decade or two has been increasing urban consolidation, especially in the form of smaller block sizes and more high- and - medium-rise apartments.

This approach partly responds to the decreasing size of families and the continuing growth in sole-person households as a result of later marriages and longer lives. For many families, however, highly compressed housing without open space is becoming the only affordable alternative to the relative isolation of outer suburbs.

Acute shortages of appropriate child care and reliable public transport, especially out of standard hours, greatly aggravate the difficulties for many working parents. The practical necessity in outer suburbs of having two or more cars per household substantially increases the flow-on costs for families of living in outer areas without adequate public infrastructure and services.

## **Developments in the general economy**

Despite much triumphalism in political and media circles, it has become increasingly clear over recent years that the Australian economy is dangerously over-extended and vulnerable. This applies especially to the levels of household debt and the trade deficit, both of which are now much higher than in all but one or two other developed countries.

Competitive bidding-up of house prices has been a major contributor to both of these problems. It has led to excessive borrowing for home purchases and, especially, for speculative investment in rental properties. It has also fuelled excessive consumption of luxury imports by people borrowing on the inflated value of their homes and has diverted an undue share of investment resources away from export-generating industries.

Interest rates have now been belatedly increased to combat some of these impacts. But this may have an adverse effect on other sectors of the economy that did not need to be cooled down. It is notable that each of the major housing price peaks during the last forty years has been followed immediately by one of the three periods of greatest economic difficulty.

The general efficiency and competitiveness of the economy may also suffer from the need for wage rises to compensate workers for the huge increases in housing costs. This is one of several ways in which Sydney's problems may come to have an even greater impact on national policy-making and the economic fortunes of other States than currently applies.

### **Casualties of housing failure**

Overall, more than one-and-a half million lower-income Australians are incurring housing costs above the benchmark 30% of their income. This applies especially to renters and relatively recent purchasers. In addition, there may be as many as 100,000 people who are homeless on any particular night.

But some of the greatest problems arising from housing costs are not captured by these statistics. An increasing proportion of families with young children have only found affordable housing by living long distances from urban centres in which most work opportunities and community services are located. Severe social isolation, family stress, unemployment and welfare dependency are amongst the consequences.

Housing problems are especially severe amongst indigenous people. Their home ownership rate is about half as high, and their rate of homelessness about four times higher, by comparison with other Australians. Other groups amongst which housing problems are particularly widespread include sole parents, long-term unemployed people and people with disabilities.

Without vigorous and far-sighted reform, hardship, unfairness and divisiveness will become more widespread amongst our younger generations and those yet unborn.

### **What Should Be Done?**

Some of the problems to which I have referred may be partially self-correcting. For example, high housing costs in the major cities may encourage the growth of medium-sized cities which have an adequate supply of work opportunities and community facilities but have fewer problems with housing and transport. Also, secure job opportunities may improve for future generations, as labour becomes scarcer in an ageing population.

It is unlikely that house prices will rise much further, even over the longer term, and indeed they may fall significantly. While this could reduce some of the problems and concerns to which I have referred, any major benefits in that respect would be accompanied by losses for families of modest means who entered the market in recent years through fear that prices would rise to even more unaffordable levels.

Moreover, other factors are likely to aggravate some of the problems. This includes the impact on future generations' ability to meet housing costs as well as repaying large debts for tertiary education, paying high superannuation contributions to cover

lengthy periods of dependence in old age, and facing greater pressures to fund their own health insurance and aged care.

The recent National Summit on Housing Affordability in Parliament House, Canberra, identified a number of areas for action. They included stronger national leadership and cooperation, expansion of rental housing for low-income people, wide-ranging tax reform, and better planning and investment in urban development. I shall suggest some priorities in each of those areas.

### **National leadership and cooperation**

It is remarkable that the Commonwealth Government has no Minister for Housing, let alone one with the requisite seniority and breadth of responsibilities that are needed to provide national leadership in an area of such fundamental economic and social importance. No other area is of greater importance to the daily lives of Australians or to the country's future.

Each of the policy initiatives that could achieve major improvements in housing affordability, rather than just tinkering at the edges, is crucially dependent on Commonwealth action on issues such as taxation and infrastructure investment. Yet there is no Minister around the Cabinet table with principal responsibility for promoting the interests of affordable housing and sound urban development.

The Commonwealth should take the lead in negotiating with the States a National Affordable Housing Agreement, renewable every five years, to integrate, rationalise and strengthen government assistance for affordable housing. The Agreement should include major tax reform and stronger public investment as well as increasing the role of local governments in helping to meet affordable housing needs.

### **Assistance for low-rent housing**

At present, the total amount of housing assistance by governments is at least \$25 billion per year. Most of that assistance is provided in tax concessions for homeowners of relatively wealthy means. Less than a fifth of it goes to low-income renters, yet it is they who tend to have lower incomes and the greatest incidence of unaffordable housing.

The quickest and most cost-effective way of achieving substantial improvements in housing affordability would be to change the balance of government assistance by providing more help for low-income renters. This applies especially to rental housing provided by government agencies or non-profit organisations.

Assistance for public housing has fallen sharply during the last decade or so. Yet demand has greatly increased as other affordable housing options have dwindled and the numbers of low-income sole parents and deinstitutionalised people with disabilities and other substantial difficulties have risen sharply.

Very few but the most deeply disadvantaged people can now obtain public housing. Moreover, a very high proportion of new public tenants are housed in outer areas which have difficult social problems, few work opportunities and unfavourable reputations.

A substantial portion of the expanded public housing stock should be available on limited-term tenancies to people in the workforce whose income is presently too high to obtain public housing. This would help to reduce counter-productive concentrations of severe disadvantage in public housing and to meet the broader need for job mobility and social diversity across metropolitan areas.

State and local governments should cooperate more closely to help meet affordable housing needs. Developers should have to commit a modest proportion of new housing for management by accredited non-profit organisations as affordable housing for low-income people. Sales of public land should also be subject to requirements of this kind.

### **Wide-ranging tax reform**

The current system of tax concessions for housing is upside-down and back-to-front. It provides more assistance for the wealthier than the poorer sectors of the community. It provides more assistance for people in their later years of declining responsibilities than when they are facing the heavy demands of building careers and raising families.

The main cause of this unfairness and inefficiency is the total exemption from the capital gains tax and land tax that is enjoyed by owner-occupied housing. Some degree of exemption is desirable to encourage people to invest in the long-term security of home ownership. But there is no justification for providing a limitless tax shelter.

The total exemption grossly favours the wealthiest members of the community, inflates the general level of house prices and diverts national resources from genuinely productive investment. The current system does not even favour maintenance of high rates of home ownership over the long term. Its inflationary price impact has contributed substantially to the current decline in ownership rates.

Another major cause is over-use of stamp duties and under-use of land tax. Instead of taxing people most when they are trying to get into the housing market, it would be much better to spread their contribution more evenly over the period of ownership (as well as at the end if they achieve substantial profits).

Despite recent cuts, stamp duties often impose unfair and inefficient penalties on people entering the market. They also deter transfers to housing which may be more suited to changing family responsibilities and work opportunities. It would be a much better approach to rely more on broader land taxes applying above, say, median land value. Lack of cash flow for the annual tax payments could be addressed by allowing partial deferment until sale.

One of the most damaging weaknesses in the current tax system involves excessively generous concessions (often summarised as “negative gearing”) for investors in rental property. This has been a major cause of the over-heating and over-supply that eventually left the Reserve Bank with no alternative but to raise interest rates.

The explosive growth of negative gearing in recent years arose from a combination of a misguided cut in the rate of capital gains tax and the exceptionally generous tax deductibility that is allowed for landlords’ costs and depreciation. At the very least, the previous tax rate should be restored and the deductions tightened in line with common overseas practice.

## **Better public investment**

During the last two decades, short-term thinking and blinkered cost-benefit analyses have dominated economic policy-making. One of the main casualties has been long-term investment in public infrastructure of the kind which earlier generations bequeathed to the baby boomers.

While rightly encouraging homebuyers to regard mortgage debts as a price worth paying for their long-term security, governments have become obsessed with budget surpluses. Indeed, they have become even more obsessed than the credit rating agencies whose AAA-approval they have adopted as akin to a constitutional obligation.

Recent public discussion of infrastructure shortfalls has focused largely on transport and other infrastructure for export industries. But there has been even greater neglect of public passenger transport needs, especially in outer suburbs and between urban centres.

The prospects of attracting businesses and workers to areas where housing costs are likely to be lower have also been gravely weakened by failure to provide basic community infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals and recreational facilities, in an adequate and timely manner.

General tax and rate revenue should continue to be the main funders of infrastructure for these community purposes, even if developers (and through them their customers) are also required to contribute. The Commonwealth Government's new Future Fund could be used as a vehicle for developing a substantial and sustained program of community infrastructure development, especially in provincial cities and regional centres.

Governments could establish "affordable housing bonds" which provide private investors with a guaranteed rate of return and are used to provide low-cost housing and related infrastructure development. Government funding of, say, \$250 million (less than 3% of next year's Budget surplus and less than 2% of the Future Fund's opening balance) could trigger private funding at least equivalent to the current government investment in low-cost housing.

A more modest but still valuable option is to provide Commonwealth grants through a program like Building Better Cities. At very modest cost, this program catalysed a number of important regional developments in the early 1990s. It often attracted substantial private investment to complement the initial public seed money.

## **Some other options**

A large number of recent housing loans have been made without sufficient security and on terms which the lenders are unlikely to be able to meet if the general economy or their own fortunes suffer a setback. Regulatory agencies have again been asleep at the wheel and much of the risk that has been allowed to develop may not now be readily mitigated. Urgent remedial steps must be taken to avert further deterioration.

Early access to superannuation entitlements is often urged as a response to problems of housing affordability. Extensive access, however, would re-start house price

inflation, aggravate the already excessive tax concessions for wealthy home-owners and increase pressure on the age pension budget.

There is a case for allowing some early access to superannuation for lower-income people, provided that withdrawals are strictly limited in amount but are not limited solely to home purchase. It would not be fair or efficient to allow access only for those people who wish to buy a home rather than, for example, help other action such as re-training or a new business venture which will increase their long-term security.

### **The Way Ahead**

The last decade has been a housing boom for many people, especially those who were already relatively wealthy. But their windfall gains have come at a heavy price for many other Australians who are less fortunate or materialistic.

Politicians and the media often assess change from the perspective of established home-owners. They regard pauses in price inflation as being bad news rather than rays of hope for young families who are desperate to begin buying a home. They regard moderation in the frenzy of rental investment as a setback for the economy rather than a welcome opportunity to avert further increases in interest rates, inflation, household debt and the trade deficit.

Ignorance, apathy, greed and hypocrisy have been regrettable hallmarks of public and political discussion about affordable housing in recent years. The lasting damage to genuine economic development and social justice will become even more unpardonable if principled and long-sighted reforms are further delayed. For people concerned about strengthening Australian families and helping people in hardship, there should be no higher priority.

Julian Disney is Convenor of the Affordable Housing Program which is sponsored by UnitingCare Burnside and the Dunstan Foundation and based at Macquarie University. He chaired the National Summit on Housing Affordability and the NSW Government's Task Force on Affordable Housing.



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## **Great challenges of our times - The role of The Third Sector**

**Prof David Yencken AO,  
Emeritus Professor University of Melbourne,  
Chair, Australian Collaboration**

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In the last few years there has been an encouraging effort to set out the great challenges facing the world today and to specify specific goals and targets to deal with them. Of particular importance are the Kyoto Protocol related to climate change and the United Nations eight Millennium Development Goals.

These challenges and the goals related to them are of several distinct kinds. Some are environmental such as climate change and water; others relate to poverty and hunger; others such as HIV/AIDS and malaria to health; others such as education or gender equality to the means of improving social conditions; and others such as aid, debt relief and tariff free access to markets, to economic frameworks. Terrorism and war pose continuing threats. Another challenge of a different order is the implication of China's and to a lesser extent India's growing development as dominant economies and superpowers. All these challenges and issues are in some way related. They must all be tackled with purpose and with understanding of their environmental, economic and social connections.

In considering these global challenges, in this paper I will concentrate especially on climate change and its implications. I have chosen to do this because I believe that climate change now poses the greatest threat to human civilization. Furthermore, those associated with ACOSS are likely to be well informed about the main social issues facing the world and in Australia. I want to lay this critical environmental issue alongside these important social issues. For those interested in a fuller description of global social and environmental problems and the United Nations commitments to their resolution the UN Millennium Development Goals web site is shown under "References" at the end of this paper.

### **Climate change - a global problem of increasing significance**

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) - established in 1988 as a subsidiary body of the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organisation - reports every five years. The third Assessment Report released in 2001 was the work of 426 experts whose conclusions were refereed twice by 440 reviewers and overseen by thirty three editors. One of its important conclusions was that the earth's average surface temperature was likely to warm by between 1.4 and 5.8 degrees centigrade between now and 2100, depending on the manner in which human societies control their emissions of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). These, says Tim Flannery, are enormous rises (even at the lower end) and they are expected to have similarly enormous impacts. But the IPCC report is a consensus document and has to be approved by government representatives. Their influence, Flannery argues, is to reduce the report from mainstream science to lowest common

denominator science. As a consequence, he says if the IPCC says something you had better believe it – and then allow for the likelihood that things are likely to be far worse (Flannery 2005).

In April 2005, the British Government held an international conference on climate change in Exeter. Its purpose was to inform policy makers everywhere on the latest research on and modelling of climate change science. The conference was told of two major new threats to the world. The first concerns Antarctica, with a warning from the British Antarctic Survey that, perhaps because of rising temperatures, the vast ice sheet covering the western side of the continent might be starting to break up. Were it to collapse into the sea, the West Antarctic Ice Sheet would raise global sea levels by more than 16 feet. A second issue, the acidification of the oceans, was little known to many of the scientists present. The billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide now being released dissolve in seawater to produce carbonic acid. Marine organisms have, however, developed in an alkaline environment and will not be able to live in an acid sea. Both of these findings were based on actual observation not on modelling. The predictions from the super computer model were grim. They included the effect on ecosystems and species of temperature rises and increasingly ominous assessments of the potential melting of the ice-sheet covering Greenland which could cause global sea levels to rise by 20 feet. Significantly, it was also pointed out at the conference that if all emissions stopped now all over the world, there is enough CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere to cause a further rise of 0.6 degrees C. But we all know that emissions are not going to stop now (McCarthy 2005).

In the last three months since the Exeter conference, further disturbing evidence has emerged. In August this year, an article in the New Scientist reported evidence that the world's largest frozen peat bog, a million square kilometres in Siberia, is melting.

This sudden melting could unleash billions of tonnes of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, into the atmosphere (Pearce 2005). Another research finding reported in August 2005 was of the loss of carbon in soils in the UK - and most likely elsewhere in the temperate regions of the world - leading to increased carbon levels in the atmosphere (Radford 2005).

The most striking overall change that has occurred over the last decade has been the increasing concern of scientists. This is remarkable because scientists are typically very cautious in their pronouncements. Other examples of this increasing scientific concern are the Millennium Assessment report prepared by 1360 scientists and the United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Water Development report. The scientific sceptics are now very few in number, no matter how great the publicity engendered by their supporters. Prudent risk assessment gives us little reason to dismiss the finding of mainstream science. It would be the height of folly to do so.

### **Major problems facing Australia**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics "Measures of Australia's Progress" now gives us annual reports on environmental, social and economic performance. From these reports it is clear that our worst and deteriorating performance is environmental - related to greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity loss, land salinisation and increasing stress on our water resources.

The main social and economic picture painted in “Measures of Australia’s Progress” is of healthy development. But those attending this conference know well that these trends and conditions hide conditions that are unacceptable for a rich society such as Australia. They include aspects of disadvantage such as those relating to Indigenous people, poverty and inequality and the plight of refugees.

Also serious are the attacks on our democratic systems and civil liberties that we have witnessed in the last decade. These are the more serious in Australia because of the absence of a bill of rights. We are the only English speaking country in the developed world without a set of constitutional or legislated rights. The power of such bills is exemplified by the influence the British bill of rights has had on the framing of anti-terror laws in Britain.

### **The Responses Needed**

When we look at these problems the first thing that is immediately striking is the distortion of government priorities. Let us take terrorism as an example. Terrorism is certainly a very disturbing phenomenon. But there is nothing new about terrorism in itself. It has been constantly present in different parts of the world in recent as much as earlier times. What is new is where terrorism is now being practised. Even then it should be remembered that the two western countries, the UK and Spain which have had recent terrorist attacks, have both suffered regularly from such attacks in the last 50 years, Spain from Basque terrorists and the UK from IRA terrorists. Every reasonable effort must of course be made to provide safeguards against terrorism but the questions remain: “How should we define reasonable?” and “What is the balance between protection of longstanding rights and security measures?” Secondly, the threats to our civilizations from terrorist attacks are miniscule compared to other threats. Climate change is a problem that could lead to the loss of life of billions of people, disrupt the lives of billions of others and change the social and material circumstances of every person on the planet. Natural disasters such as the tsunami in the Indian Ocean off the Island of Java, the earthquake in Kashmir and others, have claimed infinitely more lives than any lost through terrorist attacks.

The strategic response from the non-profit sector, the third sector, must be to redouble all its efforts related to the real issues facing the world and Australia. Required are watches and campaigns concerning matters such as:

- climate change
- biodiversity loss, water stress and salinisation
- poverty, inequality and disadvantage
- education, health and housing
- Indigenous people
- media, democracy and civil liberties
- cultural diversity
- a knowledge and creative nation.

The watches and campaigns associated with them are happening. Many are well done but overall not consistently enough. What we need is a collective focus on these core issues. The Australian Collaboration’s work is significantly devoted to this task. If this can be done and widely shared we should all be able to exert much greater influence on public policy.

## **Strengthening the capacity of The Third Sector to influence the debate**

The third sector has a very important role to play. One key task is to stake out more clearly and strongly the significance of its role. The National Roundtable for Nonprofit Organisations and Philanthropy Australia have taken a leading role in doing this over the last four years. Both the Roundtable and Philanthropy Australia have posted up a fact sheet covering size, economic contribution, sources of income, overseas comparisons, philanthropy, volunteerism, the sector's importance to democracy and the future of the sector.

This is all valuable information. There are, however, some important additional messages that need to be included. Of particular note is the trust reposed by Australians - and others worldwide - in this sector. Opinion poll after opinion poll has found the same answers. Late in 2005 the published results of a study of opinion leaders - that is high ranking executives, bureaucrats and senior journalists - by the global public relations giant Edelman once again found that NGOs were given the highest rating for trustworthiness.

Another argument relates to representation. A standard neo-conservative criticism is that the NGO movement is unrepresentative. According to this thinking (public choice theory), the actions of groups in the nonprofit sector are self seeking and distorting and the state should not support such bodies in any way. What public choice theorists conveniently choose to ignore is that it is only the NGO movement that speaks out for the forgotten, for the poor and needy and for the fate of future generations faced with devastating environmental change. In its diversity, it speaks for a myriad of community interests that without it would have no voice. Many of the larger organisations are also representative of extensive networks of opinion. Some such as the Australian Conservation Foundation have a very large number of members (15,000). Others such as ACOSS and FECCA are umbrella organisations that have extensive networks of member bodies.

## **Mastery of the framing of ideas debate**

This brings me to the second issue, the debate about the framing of ideas that has been sparked by books such as *Don't Think of an Elephant* and by the analyses of the systematic ways in which the far right has set about winning the battle of ideas in the United States. An understanding of this debate should be part of the armoury of all leading NGOs in the country. This understanding should not be uncritical; the ideas will likely have to be shaped for use in our political context. Nevertheless it is a very important debate.

For those of you not familiar with this debate let me pull out a few commentaries about it. Bill Bradley, former US Senator, writing in the New York Times has described the development of right wing think tanks in the US in the following way:

*When the Goldwater Republicans lost in 1964, they didn't try to become Democrats. They tried to figure out how to make their own ideas more appealing to the voters.... (They) built a comprehensive structure.... Visualize that structure as a pyramid.*

*Big individual donors and large foundations ...form the base of the pyramid. They finance conservative research centers ...that make up the second level of the pyramid. The ideas these organisations develop are then pushed up to the third level of the pyramid - the political level. There, strategists ...take these new ideas and, through*

*polling and focus groups ....convert them into language that will appeal to the broadest electorate. ...The development process can take years. And then there's the fourth level of the pyramid: the partisan news media. Conservative commentators and networks spread these finely honed ideas.*

*It is an impressive organisation built consciously, carefully and single-mindedly. ...True, there's lots of money involved, but the money makes a difference because it goes toward reinforcing a structure that is already stable.*

(Bradley, 2005)

George Lakoff, Professor of Cognitive Science and Linguistics has further commented on the development of US right wing think tanks:

*Conservatives through their think tanks figured out the importance of "framing" (developing ideas and language that reflected and promoted their world view) and they figured out how to frame every issue.*

(Lakoff 2004)

## **Collaboration**

A third critical issue is collaboration between NGOs. There are many arguments for collaborations between NGOs.

First, we need a body such as the Roundtable to represent the nonprofit sector to make a case for its significance, to defend it when it comes under attack and to help to act to strengthen it in any way it can. I have already described some of the Roundtable's work in this respect.

Siting alongside the Roundtable is the Australian Collaboration, a collaboration of seven national community organisations:

Australian Council of Social Service  
Australian Conservation Foundation  
Australian Consumers' Association  
Australian Council for International Development  
Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia  
National Council of Churches in Australia; and  
Trust for Young Australians.

The Collaboration is concerned with the generation and propagation of ideas and policies and acts as an information source related to social and environmental issues. Its role thus complements the Roundtable perfectly.

What we have found in the five or so years of the Collaboration's existence is that there are very significant benefits in collaborations of this kind. The first is that the meetings provide an opportunity for the member organisations to raise and discuss issues of concern to them and of potential concern to others. Members have frequently said that they had intended to arrange meetings with other organisations between meetings but they don't happen because everyone is too busy. The meetings thus play a very important role. Second, the Collaboration provides an opportunity for the member organisations, working as a group, to tackle issues, carry out research and to publish material on matters that span all the interests of the members. Third, the interaction between the organisations helps to ensure that recommendations from one organisation to solve a particular problem do not generate a problem elsewhere.

Finally, the Collaboration, by working with leading thinkers and authors, provides an intellectual base for the work of the group and in part for like-minded organisations in the nonprofit sector.

### **Keeping major issues on the agenda**

It is a primary function of the Australian Collaboration to keep major issues in the public eye and to emphasise that the primary goals of any society should be the well being of its people and the health of the ecosystems on which it depends, however much the economy may be important in helping to achieve the first of those goals. It is not, of course, alone in doing this. Other bodies working in this way are Australia 21, which has set up major medium term research projects, the Australia Institute and the web magazine New Matilda, to mention only a few.

The links between these organisations are not nearly as strong and effective as they might be. This is not because of animosity between them but because it takes real effort to make and maintain the connections. We all need to make that effort.

### **Developing and strengthening progressive think tanks**

In Australia today, by far the most influential think tanks are the neo-conservative think tanks, particularly the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) and the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA). There are several left of centre think tanks but, whatever the influence they may have within the ALP, none has a strong public presence. A possible exception is the Fabian Society. The only independent progressive think tank of any significance is the Australia Institute. There is therefore a strong case for the development of alternative think tanks, unaligned to any political party.

In a US context, George Lakoff has described the difficulties facing progressive think tanks in this way:

*The right wing think tanks get large block grants and endowments. They are very well funded.... Furthermore they know that they are going to get the money next year and the year after. These are block grants – no strings attached.*

*There are very few grants like that from progressive foundations. Progressive foundations like to spread the money around. ... recipients have to do something different from what everyone else is doing because the foundations see duplication as wasting money. Not only that, but they are not block grants; the recipients do not have full freedom to decide how to spend the money.*

(Lakoff 2004)

Similar comments have been made about Australian think tanks. Marsh and Yencken (2004) have observed:

*While in the UK a number of think tanks have been established offering alternatives to the views of the neo-liberal group, in Australia, there is little substantial capacity for the representation of alternative views... One explanation is that there are few private trusts in Australia with the resources to sponsor such activity. The proliferation of think tanks in the UK in recent years has largely been the result of backing by private trusts and foundations rather than by business. (Marsh and Yencken 2004)*

These obstacles cannot be allowed to stand in the way of success. The route to success seems to me to be to clear. It is to do good and effective work, building up a reputation for excellence, relevance and consistency. Then, some money will start to flow to the organisation for well-considered individual projects. Later, money will start to flow for infrastructure, for the support base needed to employ, first, part time and, then, full time help and finally, hopefully, a small core of able people able to ensure the long term future of the group. It is hard work and often very discouraging; in some instances organisations may fail to survive. But I can see no better path. Most think tanks in Australia, right or left, have started on a shoe-string.

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<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>



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## Address to the Australian Council of Social Service

### The Hon Kim C Beazley MP Leader of The Opposition

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Thanks Andrew for your introduction. It's a great pleasure to be here today.

After nine long years of the Howard Government and its sustained attack on the most vulnerable in our society, it's heartening and inspiring to see that ACOSS is still standing up and fighting to push fairness back on the national agenda.

Now more than ever, we need your voice.

I'd also like to congratulate Andrew on his leadership and contribution and welcome the incoming president Lin Hatfield-Dodds.

#### Values

Today marks two important anniversaries in our history.

Eighty seven years since the guns fell silent on the Western Front after four years of continuous warfare. At 11.00 o'clock we pause to remember all who died or suffered in all wars. A debt of gratitude we can never fully repay. Labor people remember another sombre event on this day - the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor Government. In the Labor Party we value our history; we take pride in the legacy of the Whitlam government - its determination to make Australia a modern, inclusive, tolerant country. In the ranks of the Whitlam Government were people who knew first hand what poverty and hardship meant - who pushed for reforms like the Supporting Mothers' Benefit and the Handicapped Child's Allowance. It was a Government that matched the big picture with the practical. Bold strokes like the recognition of China in cohort with practical advances - like sewerage the Western suburbs of Sydney. Thirty years on we need to re-ignite the national debate on what constitutes an advanced, sophisticated and tolerant society. On our side of politics it's definitely a debate in progress. Some of you may have read Wayne Swan's book *Postcodes - the Splintering of a Nation*. It lifts the lid on nine years of neglect, complacency and indifference that is breeding two Australias - the lucky and the unlucky.

Where our social fabric has become a patchwork quilt of the forgotten homeless, the hidden unemployed, the working poor and a fragmenting middle class. Wayne wrote this book after six years in the Family and Community Services portfolio because he was saddened and alarmed by what he was seeing. It is a dialogue that goes far beyond the rigid confines of the economic debate. Now, let's be clear. We need a strong economy. The machinery of wealth creation must keep turning. And governments must be able to make hard choices to ensure ongoing prosperity. Nobody who looks at Labor's record of government in the 80s and 90s could doubt our resolve to make hard decisions in the nation's long term interest. But we must pursue and achieve prosperity for a purpose. And it's time we asked ourselves, just

what that purpose is. Alongside our prosperity, we're experiencing unprecedented levels of stress, mental illness, depression and family break-up. Is that the sort of society we want? I don't think so. When government puts the demands of the market ahead of the lives of families, it undermines society. When society becomes a market, it loses its values. Do we choose to be only a market? Or are we a society – a community that has values, that believes the purpose of a healthy economy is to improve the quality of our lives. Do we want our society to be an economic market– a robotic cycle of eternal supply and demand? Or are we a society driving and using economic growth to improve human life? I know what side of the debate Gough Whitlam took. Gough Whitlam believed passionately in a decent and compassionate Australia. He believed its achievement required national leadership – he believed it and he showed it. Today, in that tradition, I say to you I passionately believe it's our job to harness economic growth to bring all Australians forward - not just the lucky few.

### **Industrial Relations**

Yesterday, the House of Representatives passed the Howard Government's industrial relations laws. In my 25 years in Parliament I have never seen anything so fundamentally out of touch with basic Australian values; so deliberately targeted to undermine the security of Australian families and so deceitful. John Howard is determined to tear this country apart – to set worker against worker; family against family. We enter barren territory where life is a contest for survival - the survival of the fittest, or the richest or the smartest - with the poor and the vulnerable regarded merely as "collateral damage". What is now being played out is John Howard's tired, old dream turning into a 24/7 nightmare for Australian workers and their families.

No one will escape their impact. No one will be untouched. Aspects of the Australian way of life that have been sacred for generations – a fair minimum wage for all workers, decent working hours, protection from unfair dismissal, holiday leave, redundancy pay and penalty rates, family-friendly workplaces – will be struck down.

Stripping of awards for all Australians is at its most brutal for the most vulnerable. The Government's removal of award conditions from the test for suitable employment will see job seekers forced to take jobs at below award conditions under threat of having their income support stopped. The work choice for sole parents and people with a disability under this regime is get exploited or get nothing. The Government calls it WorkChoices but they are false choices. We're told we must choose between prosperity and security. We're told you must choose between competing with India and China and not being competitive at all. We're told we must choose between flexibility and fairness. We're told we must choose between keeping your job and spending more time with your family. Well this is not right. These are false choices. Concocted from an extreme outdated ideology that other nations have tried and rejected. Take for example, Australia and New Zealand – two countries with similar wage and productivity levels in the 1980s. In the 1990s we parted company. Australia went down Labor's road – creating a modern, flexible system of enterprise systems based on collective bargaining. And we boosted investment in training Australian workers. New Zealand opted for a system of individual contracts, dismantling employment standards. It went down the road that John Howard wants us to take now; the low-wage, low-skill road. And what was the outcome? Australia's productivity was four times the rate of New Zealand's; our wages growth was three times as much and our economic growth outstripped New Zealand's.

## Welfare Reform

We hear a great deal these days about reform. Sadly it's a much-abused word used cynically by this Government to disguise their agenda of extreme, ideologically driven change. Reform doesn't just mean change for change's sake - it means change for the better, an improvement. When John Howard and Kevin Andrews talk about welfare reform it's code for the punishment of the vulnerable. Nothing at all about building a society where those who can work, do. And those who can't, are cared for. Their idea of reform does not encompass giving disadvantaged Australians the help and support they need to live with self-respect and dignity; the chance to realise their potential through education and training; universal health care and fairness in the workplace. Again the Government peddles false choices. We're told we have a choice between cutting income support to sole parents and people with disabilities or allowing our low rate of workforce participation to threaten our future economic prospects. Meanwhile, the Government neglects to look at why we have low rates of participation in the workforce and fails to provide practical solutions. Not just for people with a disability and sole parents but for others who are struggling in the labour market. The under-employed who are working but want more work. Mature age workers who have much to offer but who have been retrenched because their old jobs don't exist any more. Then there are young Australians. The Prime Minister says more teenagers should leave school at Year 10 - despite the fact students who don't finish Year 12 are more than twice as likely to be unemployed or not in full time study. Let's put this in perspective. These are real people not stereotypes. In many cases we are talking about people who may have poor vision or hearing; possibly suffer from episodic mental illness or endure chronic physical pain. These are some of the most disadvantaged Australians but they are also our neighbours, our sisters and brothers, our parents and our friends.

## Sole parents

Or sole parents like Susan, with four young children, who says: "I am constantly, totally exhausted. I must juggle finances and health matters, emotional and at times psychological issues for the children and myself. Their father has spent only 15 days with his children in the last two and a half years. I cannot give my children the loving and involved father that they want. I parent 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. There is no one to step into the breach for me. I wish I could work, I want to work. I want to feel a sense of value but my children are so little. To reduce them from a two parent home to a one parent home and then to a zero parent home where all I am able to do is shuttle them between home and care - I cry at the very thought of it". Real people trying to keep their heads above water but for the Government they are just numbers. They don't understand that people don't live in neat demographic boxes. They don't understand that:

- Kids get sick.
- They fall off the monkey bars at school and when mum, employed in a casual job, has to pick up the pieces - she misses out on a day's wage.
- That weekend and evening work is obligatory in many sectors like retail and hospitality and child care centres are closed.
- That changing the disability support pension work test from 30 hours to 15 hours doesn't take into account people whose health fluctuates and who may be able to work 15 hours one week but not the next.

This Government attempts to address complex issues with a financial sledge hammer.

Real welfare reform goes far beyond cutting the welfare bill. It means tackling the reason someone isn't working or can't work and fixing it. Real welfare reform provides more reward for effort, helps balance work and family life and understands the practical elements like skills, training, transport and child care. Real welfare reform means recognising that child care is an integral part of the welfare to work equation. Labor believes that all working parents should have access to top quality affordable child care. At the moment, many don't. In Labor's view this is not simply a market failure. It is a Government failure as well. Affordable child care is absolutely essential for sole parents. Without it, they can't do paid work. Take Danielle, for instance, a sole parent living in Albany. She's in full time employment with no income support. Danielle will be forced to quit her job next year as her youngest son is about to start school and there are no places for him at the only after school service in her area. She's working full time; she's doing just what the Government wants but they're letting her down. The reality for a sole parent is this - when you are the only carer for children and you go to work - someone else needs to care for your kids at an affordable price. Five months ago Labor forced the Prime Minister into an embarrassing back-flip on his welfare reforms, with the concession that "if no suitable child care is available, or the cost of care would result in low or no financial gain from working, a sole parent will not be required to accept the job". Unfortunately only half of his promise has been kept. Yes, the Welfare to Work Bill provides that parents will not be forced to work until they can get child care. But there is nothing in the Bill which allows a sole parent to turn down a job where the child care bill wipes out what is earned. Ministers Andrews and Dutton say a welfare recipient will not have to take a job where commuting time is more than 60 minutes; and where travel costs are more than 10 per cent of the gross wage. But what about the time it takes to get to the child care centre and the cost of child care as a proportion of the job seeker's wage? The Government is prepared to arbitrate the maximum amount a sole parent should pay in travel costs - but not on child care.

### **Extreme, incompetent and out of touch**

It's clear, under the Howard Government's changes, people will be worse off when they try to move from welfare to work. When single parents and people with a disability go to work, they'll give most of what they earn back to John Howard. Where's the incentive in that?

There are no real incentives and inadequate practical measures. You'll recall that the 2005-06 Budget's welfare changes were touted as a significant economic reform that would raise workforce participation rates and encourage the transfer from welfare to work; offering people on welfare a chance to participate in the workforce and get themselves a ticket to financial security. But now we see that the Government's approach to welfare reform is extreme, incompetent and out of touch. Extreme because it cuts the household budget for families who can least afford it - for no good reason. Incompetent because it won't help people extricate themselves from the welfare cycle and find jobs. All it does is dump people from one welfare payment to a lower welfare payment. According to the latest published figures, this includes more than 75,000 people with a disability; 85,000 parents and their children. Out of touch because it fails to provide adequate investment and commitment to vocational training - 600,000 parents and thousands of mature aged unemployed will be fighting over a paltry 12,300 training places.

## Disability

One of the big give-aways in the changes is the proposal to move sole parents and people with a disability on to the dole. Instead of seizing the opportunity to bring disability support pensioners into the productive economy, the Howard Government's welfare package takes money from the pockets of these people and shifts them from one Centrelink database to another. Instead of encouragement for employers to employ and retain employees with a disability it's all spin and no substance. From July 2006, all people who apply for the Disability Support Pension will be assessed under the extreme new capacity test. In addition, everyone who applies for the DSP between 10 May 2005 and 1 July 2006 will soon be reassessed under this extreme new test. If they are judged as being able to work a minimum of fifteen hours a week, they will be put on the dole. This new work test is unreasonable, and doesn't take proper account of episodic conditions. But what's most shocking is that this new test also effectively determines a person's level of income support. So someone who's assessed as being capable of working 14 hours a week gets the Disability Pension but someone who can work 16 hours a week only gets the dole. Research by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), an organisation that even the Prime Minister has described as "respected", "objective", and "independent", has shown just how much people with a disability will lose under these changes. According to NATSEM, if a person with a disability works fifteen hours a week at the minimum wage, they will keep only 25 cents of every dollar they earn, while John Howard takes back the other 75 cents.

That makes such a person \$122 per week worse off by moving into work under these changes than if they moved into work under current arrangements. The Howard Government is effectively asking people with a disability to work for a return of \$2.27 an hour. And for those moved to the dole under the Government's cost-cutting plan, there are a range of financial disadvantages. The dole has a harsher income test and steeper withdrawal rates for earnings; there is no additional income-free threshold if you have children; the income free threshold is not indexed; the payment cuts out sooner meaning the Pensioner Concession Card is lost sooner; there is a harsher assets test; and there is less support to study - including the loss of the Pensioner Education Supplement. Evidence indeed, that at the cold heart of their package is a cut to payments.

## Conclusion

My Shadow Ministers, Chris Evans, Penny Wong, Tanya Plibersek and Jan McLucas, have been working hard to develop policies that will deliver real welfare reform and not merely shuffle the numbers from one ledger to another. Talking to organisations like ACOSS. As we move towards the 2007 election we'll be outlining policies that offer practical solutions underpinned by a clear set of principles. We will give Australians more than enough time to make an informed choice. And let me tell you today, they will be in no doubt about the stark differences between Labor and our conservative opponents. Labor supports welfare reform that goes far beyond moving people from one welfare queue to the dole queue. Welfare reform should not increase alienation; it should have nothing to do with punishment and everything to do with hope. Welfare reform should be a bridge to independence and inclusion. Labor believes people who can work, should work. And those who can't we should care for. Work is the fundamental building block of social and economic inclusion. Like family and friends, it gives meaning to our lives. Everyone benefits when more people participate in the social and economic mainstream. That's why Labor wants real

welfare reform that tackles the reason someone isn't working, and delivers practical solutions. Real welfare reform that gives people the chance of getting the skills an employer needs. That encourages employers to give people with a disability the opportunity to demonstrate their ability.

That understands that being a parent is an important job in itself and that work makes families more secure. That helps parents find the balance between supporting their family and raising their kids. And real welfare reform that makes sure people get a fair reward for effort. The policies we take to the next election will be based on these Labor principles and we will argue for real welfare reform until we are in Government to deliver it. The right incentives, practical measures and a commitment to making Australia the truly advanced and civilised society it can be.

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## A safe environment for children and families

### Dr Robin Sullivan, Director-General Department of Child Safety, QLD Government

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In preparing for this presentation, I undertook the usual evidence gathering process – and became quite perplexed.

Here was a child sitting on a pile full of books, of which there are currently a vast array in print. Books with titles including ‘Positive Parenting’, ‘The Gifts of Parenting’, ‘Dr Spock’s Baby and Child Care’, ‘More Secrets of Happy Children’, ‘Complete Baby and Child Care’, ‘Motherhood’, and ‘Kids’.

And here was Wendy Harmer, the Australian comedian, pretending to be a contemporary child suffering:

*In between baby gym, swimming lessons and my educational toys, my schedule is hell at the moment. I realise that Mum and Dad want to spend quality time with me and I do try to have something going to entertain them...a new sound, a tooth maybe or some new facial expression. But the pressure of it gets to me and I just end up cranky and I vomit and ruin everything. I’m seven months old and I feel like a failure. All I want is a bit of down time to stare at the shadows on the wall and suck my toes. Am I being selfish?<sup>14</sup>*

So it appeared as if children and young people were quite safe, and if anything, were suffering from under parenting or over parenting.

However, the third piece of evidence I gathered, and one which lies at my elbow every day are the current figures on child abuse notifications.

National figures show the number of child protection notifications in Australia is increasing. The latest data available shows that in 2002-2003, the total number of notifications across the country was 198,355 and this rose to 219,384 in 2003-2004. The number of notifications increased in all jurisdictions during this period except Victoria.<sup>15</sup>

I dealt with my cognitive dissonance by reverting, like a good public servant, to the elements in the vision of the new Department of Child Safety:

Confident children and young people who are safe and valued by society, especially those children and young people who have been harmed or are at a risk of harm.

And like someone who has to both act locally and think globally, I thought I should interrogate, as a first step, ‘how does such a vision relate to an international context?’

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<sup>14</sup> Rossmannith, A. (1997) When Will the Children Play? Making Time for Childhood. Mandarin, Victoria, p.65.

<sup>15</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2004) Child Protection Australia 2003-04. Child Welfare Series, No. 36, p.17.

## The international context

It has been assumed across the globe that as countries improve their economic prosperity, this prosperity would automatically translate into improved health, well being and happiness for individuals, families and communities.<sup>16</sup>

Broadly, across the past 100 years, this has been true. But it appears that in recent decades, we have not done so well in some areas.

Canadian researchers have called this 'Modernity's Paradox'. They have looked at the trends in their society and their research indicates that while increasing prosperity and 'globalisation' has enabled greater access to opportunities, we still have cause for concern.<sup>17</sup>

They have found, on the basis of key indicators in 2000, that the health, development and well being status of Canadian children and youth are not improving. In fact, they are discovering, for many children and young people, health and development indicators seem to be worsening.<sup>18</sup>

## The Australian context

Let's turn our attention to Australia. Should we be as concerned as these Canadians were?

The data in Australia shows that, over the past 30 to 40 years, many of our children and young people are doing better than ever before. It tells us that:

- rates of survival at birth and in infancy have improved
- deaths due to severe diseases such as cancers have decreased
- overall life expectancy has improved
- school retention rates, and participation in university and further education, have improved enormously, particularly for girls.<sup>19</sup>

*Growing Up in Australia*, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children administered by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, is the first ever comprehensive study of Australian children as they grow up.

During 2004, over 10,000 children and their families were recruited to the study from a sample selected from the Health Insurance Commission's Medicare database. The children and their families will be followed at two yearly intervals until 2010, and possibly beyond.

Interim findings released in May 2005 offer us some more insights into the lives of children in contemporary Australian society. Their data tells us that:

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<sup>16</sup> Stanley, F., Richardson, S. & Prior, M. (2005) Children in the Lucky Country: How Australian society has turned its back on children and why children matter. Pan Macmillan, Sydney, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Rothman, L. (2005) Reducing Child Poverty to Increase Productivity: A Human Capital Strategy. Brief to the Standing Committee on Finance Pre-Budget Consultation, Campaign 2000, Toronto.

<sup>18</sup> Rothman, L. (2005) Reducing Child Poverty to Increase Productivity: A Human Capital Strategy. Brief to the Standing Committee on Finance Pre-Budget Consultation, Campaign 2000, Toronto.

<sup>19</sup> Stanley, F., Richardson, S. & Prior, M. (2005) Children in the Lucky Country: How Australian society has turned its back on children and why children matter. Pan Macmillan, Sydney, pg 3.

- Parents had a positive view of work, on the whole, but a substantial number indicated they would like to work fewer hours than they do now.
- By about six months, around one half of all babies were still being breast-fed. This compares to the 80% goal of dietary guidelines established by the National Health and Medical Research Council.
- 16% of four to five years olds were consuming little or no fresh fruit or vegetables and 28% were having high fat foods at least three times a day.
- 7% of infants and 18% of four to five year olds were hurt or injured or had an accident that needed medical attention from a doctor or hospital.
- 35% of infants had been looked after by someone other than a parent at regular times during the week – 76% of these had one type of care arrangement per week, and 21% experienced two types of care. Most commonly care was with grandparents and day care centres.
- 11% of infants and 17% of older children had a parent who did not live with them – 20% of children up to five years of age did not see the non-resident parent on a daily or weekly basis, and four to five year olds were more likely to have once a fortnight or less frequent time together.<sup>20</sup>

When we continue to look at what is happening for children in Australia, we start to see that numerous problems are affecting our children and young people. The rates of these problems seem to be worryingly high and they appear to be increasing.

The proportions of children and young people experiencing complex diseases such as asthma, obesity and diabetes are increasing. In the 1970s around 10% of children suffered from asthma, and this has risen to around 30%. The rate of type 2 diabetes is similarly high at 30%, and more concerning is the fact that this type of diabetes typically occurs in adults, is related to being overweight and, historically, was hardly ever seen in children.

There have been no improvements in the proportions of our children born prematurely or underweight, or in those diagnosed with intellectual and physical disabilities.

There has been a perceived dramatic increase in a range of behaviour problems such as attention deficit disorder and hyperactivity.

It seems that dangerous activities such as substance abuse, and juvenile crime are increasing, and are more likely to begin at a younger age. Girls are now involved almost as frequently as boys.<sup>21</sup>

Let's take a closer look at the emotional and mental health of our children and young people.

Sue Richardson and Margot Prior (2005) suggest that the mental health of young people is a barometer of how well a society is meeting the developmental and nurturing needs of its population.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Families Australia. (2005) Australia's Children: the Latest Research. Bulletin No. 6, Spring 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Stanley, F., Richardson, S. & Prior, M. (2005) Children in the Lucky Country: How Australian society has turned its back on children and why children matter. Pan Macmillan, Sydney, p. 3-4, 45-78.

<sup>22</sup> Richardson, S. & Prior, M. (2005) 'Childhood Today' in Richardson, S. & Prior, M. (Eds) No Time to Lose: the Wellbeing of Australia's Children. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 21.

The Child and Adolescent Component of the Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Well-being included 4,509 children aged four to 17 years. The findings indicate that:

- 14% of children and adolescents were found to have a clinically significant level of mental health problems - this is almost certainly an underestimate, since anxiety problems, which have a prevalence rate of around five to eight per cent were not included.
- Boys showed a higher rate of problems than did girls.
- Young people on the clinical range were more likely to come from low-income families with single parents or step-parents, and to have parents who left school early and were unemployed.
- Health-related quality of life was also measured – not surprisingly, was rated worse in the group with clinical problems.
- 12% of adolescents reported suicidal thoughts.
- Only a very small minority of children and young people had accessed professional help.<sup>23</sup>

If we agree that the mental health of young people does offer us an analysis of how well a society meets the needs of its people, how do we respond to such significant levels of distress among our children?

What do we find when we turn our attention to one of the more vulnerable groups in Australian society – Indigenous children?

- Indigenous children are over-represented in most statutory child protection systems.
- Indigenous children are six times more likely to be removed from their families than other Australian children – they are 2.7% of the population, yet over 20% are placed in out-of-home-care.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are disadvantaged across a range of socio-economic measures, are more likely to live in a community with inadequate and poorly maintained infrastructure and to be in poorer health.
- One third Indigenous children leave school before 15 years, compared to 15% for all Australian children.
- Unemployment rate is higher for Indigenous people – 20% compared with 5.3% for all Australians (ABS 2004).
- Indigenous people continue to suffer from high levels of ill health than the rest of the Australian population, are more likely to smoke, consume alcohol at hazardous levels and be obese.
- Life expectancy is lower for indigenous people.
- Indigenous children continue to have significantly higher rates of mortality and morbidity.<sup>24</sup>

When we explore this data, a theme clearly emerges. We see that the children and young people most likely to be experiencing these problems are those from disadvantaged and marginalised groups.

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<sup>23</sup> Richardson, S. & Prior, M. (2005) 'Childhood Today' in Richardson, S. & Prior, M. (Eds) No Time to Lose: the Wellbeing of Australia's Children. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Stanley, J., Tomison, A. & Pocock, J. (2003) Child abuse and neglect in Indigenous Australian communities. Child Abuse Prevention Issues, Australian Institute of Family Studies, No. 19, Spring 2003.

In fact, different outcomes between the social levels of the Australian population have not levelled out as anticipated but instead have become more marked. Unfortunately, with some problems, it seems the levels have actually worsened for the most disadvantaged.<sup>25</sup>

Victor Nossar, Senior Paediatric Consultant, Child and Youth Health in South Australia says that although children are healthier than ever before, there are growing concerns for children and young people.

He suggests that socioeconomic inequities in health persist and are even increasing. He tells us that children living in social or economic adversity are more likely to experience significant health and developmental problems, and that these problems can extend into their adult lives.<sup>26</sup>

At this point, we must wonder if Australian children and young people are more troubled than those in similar societies?

Reasonable comparisons with the US, Canada and the UK can be made on the grounds that their social and economic contexts are similar to those in Australia, even though we do tend to find more severe inequalities and harsher social conditions in these countries, particularly in the US.<sup>27</sup>

Certainly child poverty rates in Australia are comparable with those in Canada. In 2000, Australian child poverty rates were estimated by the Smith Family to be 14.9% of all dependent children.<sup>28</sup>

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) suggested that there were between 2.5 and 3.5 million people living in poverty in Australia in 2000. That is between 13.5 percent and 19 percent of our total population. Of this, they suggested that between 800 000 and 1.3 million children were living in poverty.<sup>29</sup>

A recent review paper on adolescent health in the US documents comparable findings to the Australian context. It suggests a significant relationship between ill health and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor. Similarly it suggests that gender, racial and ethnic differences have a significant impact on health and well being.<sup>30</sup>

We can see, then, that there is a strong and consistent link between social and economic disadvantage that emerge in all countries when we look at the issues confronting children and young people, and the environments in which they live.

To return to the vision of the Department of Child Safety, what do children need to be confident, safe and valued?

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<sup>25</sup> Stanley, F., Richardson, S. & Prior, M. (2005) *Children in the Lucky Country: How Australian society has turned its back on children and why children matter*. Pan Macmillan, Sydney, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Nossar, V. (2005) *The choices or society has to make to improve children's health*, Lecture.

<sup>27</sup> Richardson, S. & Prior, M (2005) 'Childhood Today' in Richardson, S. & Prior, M. (Eds) *No Time to Lose: the Wellbeing of Australia's Children*. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> Department of Industrial Relations. (2005) *Draft report into poverty and inequality*. Queensland Government, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Department of Industrial Relations. (2005) *Draft report into poverty and inequality*. Queensland Government, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Richardson, S. & Prior, M (2005) 'Childhood Today' in Richardson, S. & Prior, M. (Eds) *No Time to Lose: the Wellbeing of Australia's Children*. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 23.

Despite these worrying trends for children and young people across prosperous Western societies, we actually know more about child and youth development today than we ever have before.

Until recently, much of the academic and public policy discussion on children in Australia and internationally has tended to focus on atypical development and children with special needs. During the past decade there has been a heightened interest in describing and understanding the dynamics of healthy child and youth development beyond merely the absence of disorders and problems.<sup>31</sup> We now know more about the environments children need so they can flourish; so they can 'thrive', not just 'survive'.

Graham Vimpani (2003) tells us that the nature-nurture debate is increasingly seen as sterile. Both, nature and nurture he suggests, are 'inextricably linked in an ongoing dance across the developing years...'<sup>32</sup>

We know how important the early years are in a child's life and we know those environments in which young children live don't just affect us as children – they affect our prospects across the lifespan. We know that the nature of children's relationships with their primary caregivers provides a model that will determine how children will approach and value all future relationships.<sup>33</sup>

We know that children, regardless of their culture, have universal needs and goals. They need environments that can foster a sense of:

- belonging – where they have secure attachments to people and groups
- competence – where they can develop skills and achieve goals
- independence – where they can manage their feelings and thoughts, and later, where they can have a say and look after themselves and defend their rights
- connectedness to their social environment – we humans are gregarious beings, and we flourish in social contexts where we are valued and we value others.<sup>34</sup>

We also know that there are characteristics within children that will contribute to their development, including their temperament, their adaptability, their persistence, their intelligence and their ability to contain their own emotions. These qualities do have an effect on how children experience their environment and how they deal with challenges.<sup>35</sup>

We know that children are amazingly and enormously resilient. It is our job to nurture, stimulate and encourage children's development in positive ways, so that these glimmers of potential become well-established assets for their future. It is our job to create and enhance every opportunity for children to connect with that which makes them strong and resilient.

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<sup>31</sup> Richardson, S. & Prior, M (2005) 'Childhood Today' in Richardson, S. & Prior, M. (Eds) No Time to Lose: the Wellbeing of Australia's Children. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 163.

<sup>32</sup> Vimpani, G. (2003) 'Theoretical frameworks for promoting children's healthy development in the early years'. Developing Practice, Autumn 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Vimpani, G. (2003) 'Theoretical frameworks for promoting children's healthy development in the early years'. Developing Practice, Autumn 2003.

<sup>34</sup> Stanley, F., Richardson, S. & Prior, M. (2005) Children in the Lucky Country: How Australian society has turned its back on children and why children matter. Pan Macmillan, Sydney, p. 15-32.

<sup>35</sup> Stanley, F., Richardson, S. & Prior, M. (2005) Children in the Lucky Country: How Australian society has turned its back on children and why children matter. Pan Macmillan, Sydney, p. 15-32.

Our challenge, as Fiona Stanley put to us is to create a society that is good for children - to nurture children and in doing so, create a future as a competent and developed nation.

### **Child protection practice**

As we begin to explore how we meet this challenge of creating a society that values its children and young people, I believe it is most appropriate that, as the Director General for the Department of Child Safety in Queensland, I now turn our attention to those most vulnerable children in our society - those at risk of, or experiencing, harm.

Our concerns for children in our contemporary society certainly extend to issues of child abuse and neglect. Reported incidents of child abuse and neglect are increasing, although we know that many cases of abuse and neglect still remain undetected and unreported.

Figures released recently for Queensland indicate a substantial increase in notifications of child abuse and neglect to the Department of Child Safety over the past three years. They also show us that there has been a significant increase in the numbers of individual children subject to a child protection notification.<sup>36</sup>

Queensland's data for children in out of home care over the last three years also shows increases.<sup>37</sup>

Internationally, we have seen many influences in child protection practice over the years. The medical model has had a major impact and seems to view issues of child abuse and neglect as an individual event, rather than an interaction of numerous and complex factors.

The medical model is increasingly being replaced by a legal model - where the legal definition of evidence determines the response to the child. Wattam believes that this trend will place the rights of the child in jeopardy - that the child will be viewed as evidence and the best interests of the child may be in conflict with gaining legal evidence. He warns us of the danger that as the definition of abuse is narrowed, issues of neglect and emotional abuse, undoubtedly the most difficult to establish in a court case, may be overlooked.<sup>38</sup>

Another theme that has emerged in discussion and debate has been a rights based approach to child protection as promoted by the Advocate for Children in Care in Victoria. They argue that a charter for children in care acknowledges and targets the specific issues and vulnerabilities experienced by this group of children and young people.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Department of Child Safety, 2004-2005 Performance Report.

<sup>37</sup>Department of Child Safety, 2004-2005 Performance Report.

<sup>38</sup>Stanley, J. & Goddard, C. (2002) *In the Firing Line: Violence and Power in Child Protection Work*, John Wiley and Sons Australia, Brisbane, p. 26.

<sup>39</sup>Advocate for Children in Care (2005) *Development of a charter of rights for children and young people in care: A discussion paper*. State Government Victoria.

In Queensland, the Child Protection Act 1999 includes a charter of rights for a child in care. The Chief Executive must ensure this charter is complied with when a child is in the Chief Executive's custody or guardianship.<sup>40</sup> (Refer Appendix 1)

If these are the international and national themes, let's narrow our focus, and examine in more detail what is happening in child protection across Australia.

A national audit of child protection services across Australia by the National Child Protection Clearinghouse has highlighted the need for a national approach to issues of child abuse and neglect and child protection. They have suggested that we need consistent and similar data collection processes across states and territories to enhance a more integrated approach to child protection across jurisdictions.<sup>41</sup>

At this point, I am pleased to say that Queensland is leading the way in establishing such a national approach to child protection. Endorsed by the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference, this approach will develop common frameworks and terminologies for child protection, prevention and early intervention. This understanding will facilitate closer work between governments in the area of policy and will improve services to children at risk and vulnerable families.

Within Queensland, the child protection system has undergone significant and major reforms since January 2004. We have rebuilt the child safety system into a specifically child-focused department that emphasises outcomes for children in care. We believe that children in Queensland have benefited from our reforms and I am proud of our achievements.

The priority of my department, the Department of Child Safety in Queensland, is the child. We are a child focused organisation where the rights and needs of the child are paramount. We are concerned with families and communities – but we always view these concerns through the lens of the child.

Indeed, ensuring that the needs of children are the priority when considering their safety was a key focus of the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) Report 'Protecting Children: An Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Foster Care' and its associated Blueprint (2004).

The CMC recommended that Queensland needed to engender confidence in the child protection system by sharpening the focus on the safety and security of the child. It recommended the creation of a new department - the Department of Child Safety, and it highlighted that the practice of this department must be directed towards meeting the needs of children at risk and be undistracted by any other tasks or goals.<sup>42</sup>

Placing the needs of children at the centre of the child protection system seems consistent with the findings of several recent Australian reviews including that of the Victorian Child Review Committee.

This Committee states that 'it is not uncommon for reports to comment on a worker's failure to listen to particular concerns raised by children or young people'. They go

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<sup>40</sup>Child Protection Act 1999, Queensland Parliamentary Council, Reprint No. 3.

<sup>41</sup>Bromfield, L. & Higgins, D. (2005) National comparison of child protection systems. Child Abuse Prevention Issues, Australian Institute of Family Studies, No. 22, Autumn 2005.

<sup>42</sup>Crime and Misconduct Commission. (2004) Protecting Children: An Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Foster Care. Crime and Misconduct Commission, Queensland, p.133-4.

on to stress that casework should focus on the client 'rather than becoming enmeshed with the family'.<sup>43</sup>

Another of our achievements has been to establish a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach to child protection. We know that the diverse and complex needs of vulnerable children can only be met through government agencies working together, and in partnership with the community sector. It is our vision to provide a holistic and seamless service system response to child safety.

May I share with you an example of how we have embraced a whole-of-government approach?

We recognise that many agencies have a key role to play in responding to the needs of children, and we acknowledge their role in assisting families and reducing their contact with the child protection system. To ensure that cross agency child safety services are coordinated and integrated, in Queensland we have established positions of Child Safety Directors within 11 government agencies.

This is an initiative unique to our state, and includes essential agencies such as the Department of Housing, Queensland Health, the Department of Education and the Arts, Queensland Police Service, Disability Services Queensland and the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy.

It is understandable that we may at times feel that words of 'collaboration', 'integration' and 'partnership' are used frequently, and have become rhetoric, or in Don Watson's terms 'weasel words'. I think that here in Queensland our practice is meeting our verbal aspirations.

Previously, we have discussed some of the serious issues faced by Indigenous children and young people and it would be most remiss of me not to discuss how Queensland is reforming our system without addressing how we are working in partnership with Indigenous Queenslanders.

The Queensland Government has established Partnerships Queensland – this is our policy framework that will guide the provision of services until 2010. Our vision is that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders have their cultures affirmed, heritage sustained and the same prospects for health, prosperity and quality of life as other Queenslanders.

The framework is based on a life stages model and includes the four key goals of:

- strong families, strong cultures
- safe places
- healthy living
- skilled and prosperous people and communities.<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, Queensland is committed to ensuring that child protection and family support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people,

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<sup>43</sup>Stanley, J. & Goddard, C. (2002) *In the Firing Line: Violence and Power in Child Protection Work*. John Wiley and Sons Australia, Brisbane, p. 33.

<sup>44</sup>Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. (2005) *Partnerships Queensland: Future directions framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy in Queensland 2005-10*. Queensland Government.

families and carers are culturally appropriate, accessible and responsive to individual needs.

I must acknowledge the vital role of non-government agencies as we have rebuilt the child protection system in Queensland. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the non-government organisations in Queensland and across Australia which offer such support, care and encouragement to vulnerable families and children.

We have talked about the environments children need to 'thrive' rather than 'survive' and the role of the community sector in establishing safe environments for children cannot be overestimated. It may indeed be in your organisations that children and young people meet that one person who shows them unconditional regard, who supports them and makes all the difference to their future.

I place enormous personal and professional value on your ability to provide children and families with opportunities to flourish and I applaud you in how you foster a sense of belonging and a sense of community for Australian children and families.

## **Leadership**

In conclusion I want to reflect back on the theme of this congress - 'Re-imagining Australian Society: Visions and Solutions'.

We have seen what is happening for Australian children and we know that despite being healthier than before, children and young people today are facing enormous challenges.

Fortunately, I am pleased to say, we know more than ever just what it is that children need to ensure they reach their potential as adults.

We have explored issues of child abuse and child protection - which are close to my heart - and I have shared our vision and some of our solutions within the Queensland context.

You may be asking where do I go from here? What will I take back to my workplace? How will this make a difference to my Monday mornings?

Let me remind you that you are leaders within organisations, within groups and within communities. I have no doubt that the energy and wisdom in this room is boundless, and I am confident that you are the people to lead us in a process of 'Re-imagining Australian Society'.

I think I have a welcoming audience when I suggest, as did Somerville, that there has been a trend towards 'intensive individualism' and that there is 'a connection between individualistic tendencies in our society and a growing indifference to the pursuit of the common good'. And yet, she continues, and I suspect we would all agree, 'we

humans cannot live fully human lives without having a sense of belonging to a community'.<sup>45</sup>

Leaders should challenge unethical and immoral practices wherever we find them. This takes courage, and I urge you to take hold of your courage, because leadership that is socially responsible takes courage.<sup>46</sup> It is only through daring leadership that we can reverse this tendency towards individualism and create a cohesive sense of community.<sup>47</sup> We must ensure that as leaders we are a part of the solution and not part of the problem.

I have also been moved and inspired by the current dialogue about the role of hope in leadership, and would like to finish today by exploring hope.

John Gardner tells us that 'the first and last task of a leader is to keep hope alive'<sup>48</sup> and Burns suggests that 'hopes are closely influenced by leaders who arouse or dampen them'.<sup>49</sup> Like Koestenbaum, I believe that 'what is needed is hope, the realistic perception that there is a way out, that there is a future, that there is a solution...the leader has the capacity and the will to take charge of generating hope.'<sup>50</sup>

I want to invite you to be conscious of how you offer hope and how you can lead others into lives of learning, flourishing and celebrating life. I believe that hope is an empowering force in our lives and our communities. Hope validates, enriches and supports the present, yet looks to the future.

My hope for us all here today is that we will connect to our feelings of hope, share our sense of hope with others and nurture our hope every Monday morning.

As leaders we can make meaning of the Department of Child Safety vision in multiple sites where we imagine Australia's future as not only a prosperous society but one in which 'confident children and young people are safe and valued by society, especially those children and young people who have been harmed or are at risk of harm'.

## Appendix 1

Child Protection Act 1999, section 74, Charter of Rights for a child in care.

Schedule 1 - Charter of rights for a child in care.

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<sup>45</sup>Gardner cited in Duignan, P. (2005) "Socially Responsible Leadership: Schools for a more just and democratic society", *Leading and Managing, Journal of the Australian Council for Educational Leader*. Vol. 11, No. 1, Autumn/Winter 2005, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup>Burns cited in Duignan, P. (2005) "Socially Responsible Leadership: Schools for a more just and democratic society," *Leading and Managing, Journal of the Australian Council for Educational Leader*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Autumn/Winter 2005, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup>Koestenbaum cited in Duignan, P. (2005) "Socially Responsible Leadership: Schools for a more just and democratic society," *Leading and Managing, Journal of the Australian Council for Educational Leader*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Autumn/Winter 2005, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup>Walker, K. (2005) "Fostering Hope: A leaders's first and last task," *Australian Council for Educational Leaders Monograph Series*. No. 37, September 2005, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup>Walker, K. (2005) "Fostering Hope: A leaders's first and last task," *Australian Council for Educational Leaders Monograph Series*. No. 37, September 2005, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> Walker, K. (2005) "Fostering Hope: A leaders's first and last task," *Australian Council for Educational Leaders Monograph Series*. No. 37, September 2005, p. 13.

The Parliament recognises the State has responsibilities for a child in need of protection who is in the custody or under the guardianship of the chief executive under this Act, this Act establishes the following rights for the child –

- to be provided with a safe and stable living environment
  - to be placed in care that best meets the child's needs and is most culturally appropriate
  - to maintain relationships with the child's family and community
  - to be consulted about, and to take part in making decisions affecting the child's life (having regard to the child's age or ability to understand), particularly decisions about where the child is living, contact with the child's family and the child's health and schooling
  - to be given information about decisions and plans concerning the child's future and personal history, having regard to the child's age or ability to understand
  - to privacy, including, for example, in relation to the child's personal information
  - if the child is under the long-term guardianship of the chief executive, to regular review of the child's care arrangements
  - to have access to dental, medical and therapeutic services, necessary to meet the child's needs
  - to have access to education appropriate to the child's age and development
  - to have access to job training opportunities and help in finding appropriate employment
  - to receive appropriate help with the transition from being a child in care to independence, including, for example, help about housing, access to income support and training and education.
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## **A safe environment for children and families - support and education for families**

**Jane Woodruff, Chief Executive Officer  
UnitingCare, Burnside**

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Let me start with some recent items from the Sydney press on:

1. Sunday Telegraph 23/10/05  
Dog kicked to death by gang on reserve of public housing estate
2. SMH 24/10/05  
Second man charged over street slaying. 19 year old HSC student dies after being stabbed during a fight on Sunday night
3. Daily Telegraph 26/10/05  
Brutal theft caught on cab camera. Taxi driver attacked in Sydney's South West and is suffering serious facial injuries.

Each of these events occurred on (unnamed by me) public housing estates, where UnitingCare Burnside works with children, families and young people. We would most likely regard them as unsafe environments, not conducive to the raising of children, or maybe not our children.

In this brief paper I want to look at some aspects of social inequality and some strategies from improving environments for children and families with a focus on those that are disadvantaged or particularly vulnerable.

As I was finishing off this paper I was much concerned with the papers given on day one of the Congress and especially Bob Gregory's questions - What would you do?, and Why haven't they done it? I start in my paper with the modernity paradox, and raise another - Why is it that, although we know what will make the difference, we do not do it?

Modernity's paradox is a term used by Keating and Hertzman in their book *Developmental Health and the Wealth of Nations* - it describes the situation where, in spite of increasing economic prosperity, many indicators of health and well being of children and young people are not improving and many are worsening.

Just to provide a few examples - the August 2005 edition of the Medical Journal of Australia points out that

- rates of developmental and behaviour disorders in children are high (15% of those aged 4-12)
- the rate of children in Out Of Home Care (OOHC) has been rising consistently since the national data collection commenced in 1966
- a third of deaths in children aged 1-4 years are preventable
- they calculate that in Australia each year 1500 deaths of children 0-14 years can be attributed to socio economic disadvantage.

Fiona Stanley, Sue Richardson and Margot Prior in their recent book, *Children of the Lucky Country*, state that whilst most are doing well in Australia in material terms, a substantial proportion (about 20%) live in a situation of considerable risk which is likely to impact on their development.

The significance of the Fiona Stanley statement is that this no longer exists in the esoteric realms of medical journals. This is now the stuff of mainstream (or at least ABC) promotion and discussion.

The statistics for child abuse and neglect are even more disturbing. In 2004/5 in NSW child protections notifications rose to 210,000. Whilst there is some significant controversy about this data the Director General of the NSW Department of Community Services said these figures are 'scary' and 'there is something seriously wrong out there'. It is hard not to agree.

Social and economic disadvantage and inequality clearly increases the likelihood of negative outcomes which are reflected in the social indicators of health and wellbeing illustrated earlier. In other words disadvantage is associated with a range of risk factors and fewer protective factors.

The Government's IR and welfare reform strategies may well be designed to increase the number of people in the workforce and provide the benefits of employment to the (among others) 680,000 living in families where no parent is employed. However there is very little discussion of how benefits such as child safety, secure accommodation, school retention, improved health outcomes, and increased supervision and care of children will be achieved. The exercise of choice and increased disposable income will not of themselves provide the skills, confidence, time and intangible resources and services required. Raising children is a long term and complex business.

So what can we do to improve the safety and well being of children and families, especially those who are most disadvantaged?

I want to suggest 4 ways forward

- an environmental perspective
- a focus on investing in healthy child development
- doing more of what we know works
- taking up the challenges of program replication and dissemination

You will notice that I am focusing on what agencies can do in quite practical terms. The bigger issues are crucially important but for many of us, we aim to make a difference on a daily basis with the families and others with whom we work. We need to believe that we can make that difference even in the extremely difficult social, political and economic environment in which we currently work.

### **Firstly, an environmental perspective**

To shape the environment in which children grow up requires action at different levels as the determinants of health and wellbeing also operate at these different levels. This includes the children themselves, their families, the immediate neighbourhood, the school, social systems such as health and welfare and the wider context in which they live.

There is a natural tendency for child and family services to focus on the first few areas of influence and neglect the macro issues of the economy, employment, income support and housing. Yet it is in these areas that the boundaries of advantage and disadvantage, of opportunity and limitation, of thriving and struggle, are most powerfully set. It is why being connected (remember the importance of relationships and connections) to the voice of ACOSS and the various COSSs' is so important.

Secondly, a broad focus on investing in healthy child development rather than a narrow preoccupation with addressing risk.

Di O'Neill from St Lukes Bendigo, commenting on the new Protecting Children legislation in Victoria has written,

*'Protecting children and childhood should not be built around rescuing children who suffer from lack of opportunity, but by ensuring that all children have access to the resources they need for healthy development. All children need protection from unjustifiable risk and at times children will need community intervention to ensure their needs and rights are being met.....If we begin a service that focuses on secondary and tertiary services (eg child protection investigation and placement) before developing a sound base for desirable outcomes for all children, we will develop systems that further marginalise – services will be for parents having 'problems' rather than for people who want to learn new ways of contributing to their children's development'.*

If we are to see a reduction in the extent and severity of problems we will have to act earlier.

### **Thirdly, doing more of what we know works**

Here is my second paradox. We know more about child and youth development than we ever have before. We know about crucial early brain development for intellectual, social, emotional and physical capacity. We know lots about risk factors to avoid and the protective factors to encourage.

There are at least 3 types of programs that have been well researched so that we know that they could make a difference to the health and wellbeing of children, especially those who are more vulnerable. These programs operate at the level of the child, the family and the local community.

They are early childhood education and care; intensive professional home visiting and community level initiatives designed to improve social capital. Many child and family agencies are involved in some or all of these programs. Many initiatives are supported by Government funding such as Families First in NSW or the Federal Stronger Families and Communities.

However the overall picture is patchy; funding is short term and/or is shifted from area to area. Families get some of the assistance they require but not all. There is little policy coherence. For example, take the area of children's services and child care. The research tells us that children, particularly disadvantaged children, need both yet the Commonwealth focus is on return to work ie child care, and States are variable in their willingness and/or capacity to provide educational opportunities. This is yet another situation where the debate quickly degenerates into whether it is the Commonwealth or the States that are not pulling their weight.

It is extraordinary, is it not, that a country as competent, rich and orderly as it is, cannot sort out how to provide every child with educational opportunities from birth (or antenatally if you prefer) that will in turn enhance school readiness, school retention, educational success, more skilled workers and a competitive workforce?

Shifting, just for a moment, to young people. Is it not also extraordinary that this country cannot provide care and accommodation to 20,000 young people across Australia? 20,000 may be a large number but it is certainly not insurmountable. Likewise the number of children and young people in OOHC - 23,000 across Australia.

### **My fourth point is taking up the challenge of program replication and dissemination**

Even assuming that we could get governments, both at the local and state levels and in terms of Commonwealth/State relationships, to see the advantage of co-operation and 'joined up solutions', we are not good at sharing skills and resources and programs. It is not enough, if it ever was, to do 'good work'. We have an obligation to analyse, understand and replicate what actually works. It is very easy to substitute belief for research - we cannot challenge others for acting on poorly based assumptions if we do it ourselves.

We need to find ways to balance program fidelity (keeping the elements associated with the positive outcomes intact) with community empowerment and input into how programs are implemented. There is some tension here. Larissa yesterday talked about the importance of making technical knowledge and skills available so Aboriginal communities could assess policy and programs themselves. This view is shared by Prilleltensky et al in their use of the term 'transactive structures and partnerships' - creating space where expert knowledge and local wisdom can meet in order to make better decisions through ongoing debate and adaptation.

We also need to build better relationships with politicians, bureaucrats and media who can act as champions for the implementation of effective programs and protect them from being watered down and/or discontinued prematurely.

In conclusion, if we are serious about the wellbeing of children, we need to be putting children at the centre. Imagine what welfare reform would look like if this is the lens through which we re-imagine Australian society.

The issue that confronts us all in Australia now is that it is becoming increasingly unequal and the solutions are becoming increasingly individualistic. The children for whom we wish safety and good education and interesting jobs and rewarding futures are our children. The children who inhabit the child protection system, or become involved in crime are their children.

Ultimately our ability to create safety and wellbeing for children and families will depend on our willingness to nurture all children and to act accordingly.

A child is a child is a child.

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## **Strengthening Communities**

### **Dr Jeff Harmer, Secretary, Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services**

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My presentation today is about building stronger communities and developing the social coalition, and it is structured around five key areas. Firstly, I'll talk about the changes to the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) since the machinery of government changed in 2004, and the priorities for the New FaCS. Next, I'll briefly cover what we are doing to strengthen communities and support community engagement, particularly through the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy.

I'll also talk about some of our new work with Indigenous families and communities, and with the Muslim community after the Prime Ministers' Summit with Muslim Community Leaders in August 2005. Finally, I will outline our vision for the future in building stronger communities, which we're progressing through our New Communities Agenda.

#### **The New FaCS**

Before I speak about strengthening communities, I want to give you some background on the New FaCS and why the changes we are making matter to you. FaCS is a major Federal Government department with an annual budget of about \$45 billion, which is around 25 per cent of the federal budget. We have the largest annual budget of any federal agency and responsibility for some of the government's most important and sensitive programmes, such as family payments, age pension payments, Commonwealth-State Housing and Disability Agreements, and 80 community service programmes delivered through some 16,000 private and non-government providers.

In 2004 the Prime Minister announced a series of changes to federal government agencies, and there were significant changes for FaCS. The focus of the department shifted to families, their children, and the communities in which they live. We have a stronger focus on community groups and senior citizens. The department is now also responsible for gender issues and the Office of the Status of Women, now called the Office for Women, which moved to FaCS from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C).

Some of FaCS' responsibilities moved to other departments. The Finance portfolio was expanded through the creation of a new Department of Human Services, which brought together six agencies, including Centrelink and the Child Support Agency. FaCS still has significant policy responsibilities for these two agencies. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations was expanded to include assistance for Australians moving from welfare dependency to employment.

These changes affected the number of staff in FaCS. With around 1,800 staff now working throughout Australia across about 30 locations, FaCS is more engaged in community affairs at the local level. We run the greatest number of programmes of any Commonwealth department, with around 80 programmes.

In creating a New FaCS, we have put a major emphasis on developing a framework for our strategic direction and on our business planning and processes. We celebrated the first anniversary of the New FaCS only the other day with the launch of our One FaCS strategy and a commitment to reduce red tape for FaCS stakeholders. Our new purpose is to improve the lives of Australians by helping to build the capacity and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. Our values reflect a desire to provide committed and responsive service to government in a collaborative way while demonstrating innovation, creativity, respect for clients and for each other, and a striving for excellence.

What isn't changing about FaCS is our commitment to strong and resilient communities. We will continue to provide services and assistance that promote community partnerships and encourage participation in the local community by individuals, families, business and government.

'Strong and resilient communities' is one of the five outcomes we are working towards. Our other outcomes are:

- an integrated social support system
- greater self-reliance and engagement for those in need through shared responsibility, practical support and help with housing
- seniors, people with disabilities, carers, youth and women are supported, recognised and encouraged to participate in the community
- families and children have choices and opportunities.

FaCS has developed a set of five major policy themes. They reflect the key directions of the government for this term that are most relevant to the FaCS portfolio. All the work we do needs to be considered in the context of each of the following policy themes:

- maximising active engagement
- focusing on early intervention
- assisting those who are most disadvantaged
- responding to an ageing population
- developing the social coalition.

Policy priorities complement our policy themes and are the areas where we need to focus our attention in terms of new activity. These are the areas where there are major opportunities and challenges for refocusing government policy and responding to emerging risks. FaCS' performance will be judged, in large part, by the extent to which we rise to the challenge in these areas. We have adjusted our resource allocations and established new taskforces to ensure we deliver on these policy priorities.

We have nine short-term and medium-term policy priorities, and they include areas such as:

- child care and child support
- financial well-being and improvements in financial literacy
- further support for carers
- contributing to the whole-of-government Indigenous policy effort

- further developing FaCS' community policy solutions
- developing a seniors' agenda and a whole-of-government youth agenda.

How does this re-focusing help the community sector and FaCS to improve the lives of all Australians? FaCS aims to become more accessible, more consistent and more efficient in its development of policy and delivery of programmes. We have been working on streamlining our reporting requirements and funding processes through more effective programme guidelines and better use of information technology in our new FaCS Online Funding Management System, known as FOFMS.

We have devised five core business processes that will provide FaCS with a common language and a consistent way of working that will provide clarity to our stakeholders. These processes cover:

- policy development and advice
- programme design and implementation
- stakeholder management
- issues management
- governance and resource management.

We are now working through the transition to a One FaCS way of working, which will support a FaCS culture of professionalism, productivity and high performance. The One FaCS way is about working better together across the department, to help us build a strong and sustainable FaCS for the future that delivers efficiently and effectively on key priority areas for government.

## **Strengthening Communities**

I'll now move to FaCS' aims in building stronger communities. The framework for public policy development and social programme delivery is very different from how it was even 10 years ago. It is a re-orientation of thinking away from static and universal views of problems to perspectives that better reflect the dynamics and diversity in the broader social environment and the interplay between policy strategies.

There is more emphasis on early intervention and on intervention combining the different areas of government - welfare, health, education and employment - and a broader range of disciplines: economics, sociology, psychology and demography. It involves viewing individuals in the context of their families and their communities. Social policy concerns merge with economic concerns. And if social policy is increasingly recognising the importance of economic policy, economic policy makers are increasingly recognising the significance of social policy.

So what does it mean when we say we want to strengthen communities and why should this be a focus for government? Research shows that a strong community is protected against the worst effects of poverty and disadvantage, and that support services work more effectively in these communities<sup>51</sup>. We know that stronger communities have the capacity to address the problems that they identify, and to find local solutions to these problems.

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<sup>51</sup>Putnam RD, Bowling Alone, New York, 2000.

One of the challenges for governments at all levels in building stronger communities is how to re-engage the community. Hugh Mackay, the Australian social researcher, suggests that Australians have a sense of disengagement from the national agenda and a declining engagement with community life, yet they have a desire to, as he says:

*... reconnect ... to obtain a stronger sense of identity and of emotional security from re-creating communal connections ...*<sup>52</sup>

Much of the social policy direction of the Australian Government over the past few years has been underpinned by this concept of community engagement. This involves developing partnerships between individuals, families, business, government, welfare and charitable organisations (and) collaborating to solve social and economic problems<sup>53</sup>. Prime Minister Howard calls this the social coalition. Developing the social coalition is one of FaCS' five major policy themes, which were developed as part of our new strategic framework. This will ensure we take a consolidated approach to the government's community development initiatives.

In practice, building stronger communities is a big challenge. This is where my department is undertaking some significant policy development work on a New Communities Agenda. We have learned many lessons from our Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, which attempts to put some of the existing theories into practice. I'll now talk about some examples from that strategy.

### **The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy**

Firstly, I'll describe what constitutes FaCS' Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. It is a government initiative to give families, their children and communities the opportunity to build a better future. In total, from 2000 to 2009 the Howard government will have invested over \$700 million in promoting the wellbeing of Australian children, their families and communities.

There are four main streams to the strategy from 2004 to 2009:

- Choice and Flexibility in Child Care
- Early Childhood – Invest to Grow
- Local Answers
- Communities for Children.

I'll now just look in a bit more detail at the last two: Local Answers and Communities for Children. Communities for Children provides funding of \$142 million over four years, and is based on the principles of early intervention and prevention. The initiative aims to assist children from birth to five years of age to have the best possible start in life and to influence the contexts within which they live - their family and community, and the broader social, economic and cultural environments. The initiative is grounded in community development principles.

Since its announcement in April 2004, Communities for Children has been implemented in 45 sites across Australia through non-government organisations. It reflects the Australian Government's interest in helping communities to consider local issues, circumstances and characteristics, and to develop local solutions to suit. It is a

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<sup>52</sup>Mackay H, Australia at a Turning Point, <http://www.naa.gov.au/exhibitions/events/mackay.html>

<sup>53</sup>Prime Minister John Howard, Quest for a decent society, The Australian, 12 January 2000.

response that improves the coordination and administration of public, private and community sector activity, particularly in areas experiencing high levels of economic and social disadvantage<sup>54</sup>.

In this way, Communities for Children utilises the expertise of the community and ensures local ownership and local responses. It also recognises that a whole-of-community approach provides stronger and more sustainable outcomes for children and families, and that initiatives for children need to be considered in the context of their family and the broader community.

I'll now turn to the Local Answers programme, which aims to help strengthen disadvantaged communities by funding local, small-scale, time limited projects. These projects help communities build the skills and capacity to identify opportunities and take action for the benefit of their members. Local Answers gives communities the ability to develop their own solutions to local problems and helps them help themselves. This approach recognises that government alone cannot solve community issues and that communities themselves know what their local issues are, how these issues can best be addressed and who they need to work with to implement solutions.

Projects funded by Local Answers involve working in partnership with other local community organisations and often prove to be the catalyst that makes a real difference in the lives of participants, as well as providing children with a better start in life. One such project that has had life-changing outcomes is the Frankston Community Kitchen, where people come together to prepare meals. It is a community driven initiative that aims to improve the overall health and well-being of its participants, their families and the wider community. The project aims to help disadvantaged and homeless people, people on low incomes, Indigenous Australians and young people in the local community and focuses on building skills, developing new relationships and encouraging self-reliance.

In the 2004-05 financial year, the numbers of people benefiting from Local Answers community owned projects exceeded all expectations. More than 26,000 people participated in Local Answers projects. Around 7,000 parents or carers participated in parenting or relationship skills programmes. Over 900 people - mostly young people - participated in leadership and mentoring projects.

## **Indigenous Programmes**

The government's reforms to the way services are delivered for Indigenous communities are another example of initiatives to strengthen communities. The Howard government has introduced a whole-of-government approach which brings governments at all levels together with Indigenous people to identify and facilitate real solutions to long-standing problems. The FaCS statement of commitment to Indigenous people recognises that 'Indigenous business is everybody's business', and the department strives to integrate this thinking into everything it does. FaCS administers a number of Indigenous-specific programmes, and its overall vision for Indigenous people is:

*'Indigenous people having the capacity and opportunity to participate fully in Australia's economic, social, political and cultural life'.*

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<sup>54</sup>Walsh P, Improving Governments' Response to Local communities - is Place management an Answer? Australian Journal of Public Administration, June 2001.

Today we have a new whole-of-government focus on Indigenous affairs which supports flexible and collaborative responses. There are many encouraging signs that the work to date is beginning to take root but there is a long way to go in strengthening those communities that have suffered so much for so long.

We are imagining a future where strong Indigenous communities are realised through a developmental approach that aims to help people address the root cause of problems in their communities. We are imagining communities that are self-supporting, that are proud of their culture and achievements in contemporary society, and that make unique contributions to Australian society.

An example of this is the Wadeye trial site, where my department is the lead agency and where the Australian Government has invested heavily. FaCS is working in a tripartite arrangement with the community and the Northern Territory Government to help create a better future for the community. We are actively engaged on the ground, and so far we have supported many programmes and projects within the community, such as the establishment of a fledgling construction industry by funding a concrete factory and providing training to local people.

Initiatives have been developed at the school to increase school attendance, including the establishment of a centre that employs local people who assist the students to settle into school and the establishment of a cultural studies curriculum. An association has been formed to promote women's and family activities, with local women being trained in business and computer skills, the development of a sewing business, and a focus on organising social events for the community.

## **Muslim Communities**

I mentioned at the beginning that I would talk about how FaCS is planning to work with the Muslim community to build community strength. Following the Prime Minister's Summit with Muslim Community Leaders on 23 August 2005, FaCS was asked to play a major role in helping Muslim communities better engage with mainstream Australia. As part of this process, a Muslim Community Reference Group was established. The Reference Group established seven subgroups to progress its work. FaCS has assumed a significant role in assisting with three of these subgroups relating to our portfolio activity: 'engaging with youth', 'engaging with women' and 'family and community'.

The growing number of terror attacks undertaken by Muslim extremists has significantly affected Australian Muslims, with some being subject to vilification and discrimination from the broader Australian community. One example of how we are better tailoring our services to meet the needs of young Muslims in our community is through a series of Youth Summits, organised by the Australian Multicultural Foundation. These will form the core of the consultation strategy for the 'engaging with youth' subgroup. The first Youth Summit will be held on 3 December 2005.

I extend an invitation to ACOSS to work closely with us on this important issue. Together, we may be able to make a useful contribution to a better future for Australian Muslims.

## The Vision for the Future

We have defined the purpose of FaCS as improving the lives of Australians by helping to build the capacity and well-being of individuals, families and communities. We will continue to refine the department's strategic framework. We will provide a whole-of-government approach by working with our key partner departments to achieve the best possible outcomes.

I have mentioned our policy themes. Our priorities are also clear - those areas that are major opportunities for re-focusing government policy settings and responding to emerging risks. We will also continue to build on our relationships with non-government organisations like ACOSS to ensure a two-way flow of information between their members and government.

FaCS is in the process of change, but are community organisations repositioning themselves as well to meet today's needs? If ACOSS is to influence public policy, it must also take into account the changing social environment. We all need to consider carefully and honestly how challenging the community agenda is. FaCS has learned from its current work and looks forward to engaging key community stakeholders in its New Communities Agenda. Thank you for inviting me to speak at this important conference.

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## **Strengthening Communities and ICT**

**Dr Rod Badger, Deputy Secretary,  
Information Economy,  
Department of Communications Information  
Technology and the Arts**

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Information and communications technology (ICT) is impacting on our everyday lives, in our workplaces and in our communities.

The term 'ICT' has a breadth and pervasiveness reaching across our modern society.

### **Defining ICT**

ICT includes computers and communications systems, telephony, internet, radio and television broadcasting, digital cameras and mobile phones.

All of these have increased our communication and entertainment options and transformed how we interact with each other.

For the purposes of today's presentation however I will be concentrating on internet enabled technologies and in particular broadband-based technologies.

But this needs to be set against over 30 years of gradual acceptance of computers across Australian society, from the widespread use of Desktop computers from the late 1980s to the emergence of the Internet as a publicly available resource since the late 1990s.

Now we accept as commonplace Internet access, geographically independent through wireless connections and portable digital devices. Digital technology is now so widely available and accepted that it is now embedded and part of everyday life.

In fact internet access is becoming so ubiquitous that it could be considered an essential infrastructure like roads or services, like the telephone. One of the more recent - and exciting - developments is the growing convergence of the telephone and internet through the emergence of what is referred to as 'VoIP' or voice-over-Internet Protocol (IP) technology.

ICT is impacting on the communities in which we live and the many ways in which individuals, business, government and the community sector interact and develop.

## Snapshot of Internet Use in Australia

Australian connectivity and usage of the internet continues to grow. Data presented in the Current State of Play report<sup>55</sup> shows that 67% of persons aged 14 years and over in Australia used the Internet one or more times in April 2005 (up from 54% in September 2001) and that 87% of users accessed the internet from home.

Younger Australians tended to use the internet more than older Australians in April 2005, 86% of 14-17 year olds used the internet compared with 40% of users aged 55 years or older.

Out of 10 categories of online activities recorded: electronic mail was the largest category at 84% followed by searching for product information, general surfing and downloading files and software.

Email is by far the overall largest category of online activity and is really the “killer application” that attracts people to get online. Email communication is a tool for keeping touch with family and friends, gaining information and meeting others.

The frequency and type of email use has been identified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics<sup>56</sup> as an important indicator of social capital formation in society.

Clearly as a society – and in our communities - we are becoming increasingly more reliant on ICT in our everyday interactions but does this mean that ICT is helping us become more cohesive or more alienated from one another?

## Australia’s Strategic Framework for the Information Economy

Australia's Strategic Framework for the Information Economy 2004-2006<sup>57</sup> sets out the government’s vision to create a vibrant and inclusive information economy and society.

The first strategic priority that it identifies is to:

*“Ensure that all Australians have the capabilities, networks and tools to participate in the benefits of the information economy”.*

The Strategy gives particular attention to the need to:

*“Develop the networks and capabilities needed by people living in regional communities, Indigenous Australians; older Australians, people living with disabilities and others facing economic or social barriers to participation in the information economy.”*

There are many economic and social benefits in creating a coherent information society and in managing the change and opportunities so that no communities are left behind.

Communities that make effective and creative use of information, knowledge and ICT have the most to gain.

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<sup>55</sup>Current State of Play (DCITA 2005) [http://www.dcita.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/33120/CSP2005.pdf](http://www.dcita.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/33120/CSP2005.pdf)

<sup>56</sup>Information Paper: Measuring Social Capital: An Australian Framework and Indicators (ABS, 2004) <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/12e3fa31d28c73a4ca256e36007761f5?OpenDocument>

<sup>57</sup><http://www.dcita.gov.au/ie/framework>

## **Productivity benefits of ICT**

ICT has been found to have delivered major productivity gains within Australian organisations and businesses as well as transforming the ways in which citizens, consumers and clients interact and engage with each other.

Australia has been found to be very successful at creating productivity gains from ICT and embracing the opportunities and challenges it presents.

Effective use of ICT has contributed strongly to Australia's productivity growth overall and in key sectors such as manufacturing and in service industries.

An important finding from recent Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) studies<sup>58</sup> on this issue is that ICT has had a much more significant direct influence on productivity growth than previously reported.

These studies have also revealed that there is a strong relationship between the level of intensity of ICT use and the extent of productivity growth.

Interestingly it is not the actual investment in ICT infrastructure that gives the competitive advantage but the changes to processes and management practices in organisations as part of their adoption and application of ICT.

This is highlighted in the DCITA report<sup>59</sup> *Achieving Value from ICT: Key Management Strategies*, which identified a core set of management strategies for organisations of all types and across all sectors of the economy:

- being ICT-aware – that is, having clear, strategic reasons for your investment in ICT and also being informed about how ICT can best serve your organisation
- being open to organisational change and transformation – this is vitally important because if businesses and organisations simply purchase the technology and do not change anything else in how they operate, then they will achieve a lot less benefit than if they are prepared to exploit the changes and opportunities which the technology makes possible
- being patient and persistent in realising ICT benefits.

Strong ICT capability by the businesses and organisations in communities can in turn be a catalyst for improved job opportunities and contribute to building the overall capacity and renewal of communities.

## **Social and community benefits of ICT**

Strong ICT capability can also serve as a tool for building stronger communities and social capital through connecting isolated populations and economically and socially disadvantaged groups.

ICT has the potential to support greater community participation, leading to improved equity, social cohesion and increased social capacity.

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<sup>58</sup>Productivity growth in Australian manufacturing (NOIE, 2004) and Productivity Growth in Service Industries (DCITA, 2005) <http://www.dcita.gov.au/ie/environment>.

<sup>59</sup>*Achieving Value from ICT: Key Management Strategies* (DCITA, 2005) <http://www.dcita.gov.au/ie/publications/2005>

## **Social Software**

In Australia and overseas the term “social software” is being used to describe the role of ICT as a means of enabling individuals, groups and communities to communicate or collaborate.

In this context, social software includes email as well as weblogs, wikis, messenger systems, chat rooms, listservs, group diaries, discussion systems and teamwork spaces.

## **Blogs**

The recent blog phenomenon is very revealing as to the form and flexibility of social software in that it combines elements of a diary, email and even a newspaper as often public events and current affairs are presented and commented upon. Blogs are often lively spaces and encourage interplay and comment between individuals. They are also self organising around groups of participants with common interests and views generally from a “bottom-up” manner.

Blogs are an example of our social networks becoming more technological and therefore due to the nature of information technology more structured, codified and trackable.

Social software is also enriched by the ability to add still and moving image and audio but is only possible by higher (broadband) connectivity levels.

These tools can facilitate the formation and strengthening of research, business, social and community networks in collaborative ways that have not been possible under traditional geographically based social networks.

It is worth reminding ourselves that the Internet is itself a “network of networks” and is having a profound impact on individuals, businesses, governments and communities across the globe.

As the noted Canadian scholar Barry Wellman observed:

*“The internet is the largest and most fully connected social network of them all.”*

There are over 600 million Internet users worldwide, with that figure growing at an astounding rate.

The ability to make many connections all over the world is one of the defining features of internet enabled communication and transcends our traditional use of the telephone by giving us the capacity as one single individual to communicate by one click to dozens, or hundreds or thousands across the globe.

But this power also raises with it other issues very familiar to those of you schooled in social capital theory: issues of trust and reciprocity.

## **eBay: the business of connecting people**

An interesting example where trust, reciprocity and participation have been created online is within the online auction marketplace called eBay.

eBay is an online person to person trading community that has both streamlined and globalized traditional person-to-person trading that may have been conducted in the past through auction and garage sales, collectibles shows, trash and treasure markets and advertised through a newspaper.

What is notable about eBay is that its mission statement is about:

*“Being in the business of connecting people, not selling them things.”*

### **RSVP.com: from online to face-to-face**

Initially with the rapid development and acceptance of the Internet, there were concerns that the internet would damage communities by reducing face to face contact.

There are however some interesting examples of where operating in the online realm has been a means of making face-to-face social contacts and connections.

One need only look at the success and proliferation of online dating services like RSVP.com or MATCH.com as evidence of this trend.

Overall introducer sites are the biggest category of paid content on the internet. So it seems like we have adapted even the most personal of activities to the online environment. It is increasingly commonplace to have a friend of a friend who met their current boyfriend/girlfriend or even partner through discussion lists and email contact based on common interests.

Online “virtual” communities are also forming across business, government and the community where ICT is allowing us to transcend distance, to build new links and reinforce bonds between groups, organisations and communities.

Many of these virtual communities are forming in response to personal and community trauma, disasters and other events.

### **ICT assisting communities in distress**

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the USA in September 2001, the Internet was used as a source of emotional release and comfort – not just for victims and their families, but for millions of other Americans. Indeed, those events triggered global online expressions of distress and support.

Closer to home, technology of a more traditional form played an important role in informing and uniting the Canberra community during the January 2003 fire-storm. Local station 666 ABC Canberra continued to play an important role afterwards, providing many opportunities for people across the Canberra community to share their experiences and tell their stories.

And in the days and weeks following the fire-storm the Internet came to the fore as a means by which people exchanged photos and stories. The trauma of the event created a strong desire for people to connect – new relationships formed on the basis of shared experience and a stronger sense of a Canberra community emerged from the disaster. Many people used digital cameras to capture the extraordinary images of

that day for emailing to family and friends and a number of those images later appeared on websites.

Online information and services were important resources in the aftermath of the Bali bombing of October 2002. The Bali Assist and the Red Cross websites provided the opportunity for victims and their families to access practical information, share stories and develop support groups.

## **Role of ICT in building communities and social capital**

The potential for the Internet to play a role in building and strengthening communities, both physical and virtual forms, and in contributing to social capital formation was explored in a DCITA report released earlier this year<sup>60</sup>.

The report concluded that ICT has a significant role to play in the formation of social capital and the development of communities but found that the context and impetus within individual communities impacted on the long-term sustainability of this role.

It also concluded that telecommunications can – and should – now be considered as one of the critical elements of the underlying community infrastructure, as essential as electricity, water and roads.

DCITA also released a set of 31 Community ICT Transformation case studies<sup>61</sup> which illustrate the benefits and social capital value of ICT investment by nonprofit organisations and communities around Australia.

These case studies demonstrated how nonprofit organisations and communities are benefiting from their use of ICT through:

- enhancing operational efficiency and capability
- delivering services and support
- building communities, networks and connections.

In the latter, ICT is clearly playing a significant role in building a sense of community in both geographic and virtual settings and in building networks or connections within and between groups, organisations and communities.

The three case studies outlined below are of particular interest.

### **Deadly Mob <http://www.deadlymob.org>**

Based at the Gap Youth Centre in Alice Springs, Deadly Mob is encouraging an online community of Indigenous young people to actively express their views, hopes, activities and talent online.

Deadly Mob using a website, discussion lists, to create online opportunities for Indigenous young people anywhere in Australia. Using strong role models and mentors, it helps young people participate in community development, and connect with each other and with the wider world.

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<sup>60</sup>The Role of ICT in Building Communities and Social Capital (DCITA, 2005)  
[http://www.dcita.gov.au/ie/community\\_connectivity](http://www.dcita.gov.au/ie/community_connectivity)

<sup>61</sup>Community ICT Transformation case studies (DCITA 2005)

[http://www.dcita.gov.au/ie/community\\_connectivity/community\\_ict\\_transformation\\_case\\_studies](http://www.dcita.gov.au/ie/community_connectivity/community_ict_transformation_case_studies)

Deadly Mail lets people separated by long distances communicate. It uses visual and audio tools to communicate in an environment where English is not the first language, and text-based material is isolating and a barrier, using humour and an informal style.

Deadly Mob generates a sense of community in a number of ways by giving young people a voice. It focuses on positive aspects of Indigenous life, culture and people.

**University of the Third Age Online** <http://www.u3a.org.au/>

The University of the Third Age Online applies to the voluntary self-help principles of a conventional university of the third age in an online environment to meet the need of isolated older people including those with disabilities, geographically isolated or who are carers with home responsibilities.

The U3A gives older people opportunities to continue learning throughout life in an informal environment. It provides learning opportunities using the principles of self-help and adult learning.

Learning throughout life brings broader benefits such as a healthy lifestyle, civic participation and personal and community wellbeing.

**The Queensland Rural Women's Network** <http://www.qrwn.org.au>

The Queensland Rural Women's Network was formed in 1993 and has used technological solutions to bridge the tyranny of distance for women living in remote areas. It includes a partnership with a training provider, BridgeIT which is an innovative training scheme that helps people living in remote and rural areas of Queensland to use the internet and build ICT skills.

The training has helped overcome difficulties associated with communication in remote areas including inadequate infrastructure and fear of technology. It has helped rural business enterprises make the transition to using telecommunications and technology and thus remain commercially viable. Socially it allows people using the internet and email to maintain social contacts.

Other features include that it has raised the status of rural woman, encouraged country and city relationship building and encouraged service provision between government agencies and private organisations.

A number of the 31 Community ICT Transformation case studies were established and supported by funding through the government's Networking the Nation program.

## **Networking the Nation**

Hundreds of ICT projects in regional, rural and remote communities across Australia received funding over the period 1997-2004 through the Australian Government's Networking the Nation program over the seven years of its operation, at a cost of \$421 million.

"Networking the Nation helped Australians bridge the technology gap between the city and the bush", (Senator Helen Coonan).

The program outputs included:

- internet access centres, training and awareness programs
- lower cost internet access enabling local call access to the internet
- communication infrastructure including mobile and cable infrastructure
- video conferencing, websites and online services.

The program's recently released evaluation report<sup>62</sup> found that positive community impacts included:

- email and video conferencing facilities have enabled families to stay in touch with family members living or studying away
- improved opportunities for social interaction and community building
- improved opportunities for personal capacity building
- ability to locate and develop communities around areas of interest (including politics, health issues and education) that would otherwise not be catered for in small regional centres.

Improved mobile phone access also created flexibility and freedom for individuals and their communities.

## **Potential of Broadband technology**

With the greater penetration of broadband connections the range of online activities undertaken and sophistication of use has also increased, implying increased confidence and skill levels across communities.

Broadband allows users fast, 'always-on' online access to digital content, applications and a range of services, some or all of which can occur simultaneously.

Broadband access is of critical importance to communities if they are to take full advantage of new communication tools and next generation applications.

## **Broadband Use Statistics**

The proportion of home Internet users using broadband technology rose from 5% in June 2001 to 57% in July 2005<sup>63</sup>. The reasons for this upward trend include a greater level of market competition and the lower entry prices experienced in Australia, as well as the increasing level of sophistication of Australian Internet users who, through broadband, can perform more complex online activities at a greater speed than that offered by a dial-up connection.

The number of broadband users has now hit the 2.1 million mark, with more than 1.1 million new broadband subscribers in the last 12 months<sup>64</sup>.

Rapid growth in the use of broadband technology is not confined to households and population, with data produced by Sensis in 2005 indicating that the percentage of online Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) with a broadband connection increased from 43% in 2004 to 63% in 2005.

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<sup>62</sup>Networking the Nation evaluation – Connecting more Australians (DCITA, 2005) <http://www.dcita.gov.au>

<sup>63</sup>Current State of Play 2005

<sup>64</sup>'Broadband take-up hits the 2.1 million mark', Media release 20 September 2005  
<http://www.dcita.gov.au/newsroom>

## National Broadband Strategy

The Australian Government's National Broadband Strategy was released in March 2004 and provides an overarching policy framework that establishes a collective vision, objectives, principles and priorities for broadband development in Australia.

The strategy takes into account the range of broadband development needs, the varied geography, the different economic conditions and the stage and type of initiatives already in place in different jurisdictions.

Australia's National Broadband Strategy<sup>65</sup> highlights the social benefits of broadband connectivity:

*"A high level of community connectivity can serve to break down isolation, aid the acquisition and transfer of knowledge and skills, and promote the creation of mutually beneficial partnerships and alliances.*

*Broadband connectivity can enhance community cohesion through novel and enhanced communications as well as deliver better choice and convenience for families and individuals in work and other aspects of daily life."*

Already high broadband applications are transforming distance learning programs in schools and allowing students and teachers access to interactive and graphics intensive content. It also supports videoconferencing and facilitates large data set transmission.

## Broadband Programs

The Australian Government's commitment to assisting communities to access broadband technologies and services is evidenced through the following broadband programs:

- Higher Bandwidth Incentive Scheme (HiBIS)
- Coordinated Communications Infrastructure Fund (CCIF)
- Demand Aggregation Broker (DAB) Program.

The Higher Bandwidth Incentive Scheme (HiBIS) aims to promote equitable and affordable access to higher bandwidth and broadband services in regional areas.

HiBIS provides registered Internet service providers with incentive payments to supply broadband services in regional, rural and remote areas at prices comparable to those available in metropolitan areas.

The HiBIS scheme currently has 43 registered retail providers and five wholesale providers. As at 14 October 2005, over 60,000 customers have received a broadband service under the HiBIS program – up from 16,000 in May 2005.

The \$23.7 million Coordinated Communications Infrastructure Fund (CCIF) aims to encourage further investment in broadband infrastructure in regional areas.

This infrastructure will support improvements in the delivery of health, education and government services that will lead to significant economic and social outcomes.

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<sup>65</sup><http://www.dcita.gov.au/ie/broadband>

Seven preferred applicants were announced on 20 April 2004 for the first round of the CCIF. A further six preferred applicants were announced on 6 April 2005 for the second round of the CCIF.

The \$8.4 million Demand Aggregation Broker (DAB) Program will allow broadband development strategies to be formulated at the national, state and community level.

Two National Broadband Advisers are focusing on multi-jurisdictional broadband initiatives in the health and education sectors respectively. Peter Nissen was announced as the national education adviser on 3 March 2004 and Dr John Youngman commenced as the health adviser on 26 December 2004.

The Education Adviser has worked closely with schools, universities and vocational education and training associations, to promote better practice in bandwidth procurement and to explore ways that the deployment of fibre infrastructure by the higher education and research sector can provide wider community benefits.

The Health Adviser has facilitated the engagement of health stakeholders in the discussion and planning of broadband initiatives, as well as providing advice on how best to strategically coordinate financially sustainable broadband strategies for the health sector.

State and territory based brokers are working with governments and communities within a state or territory to develop broadband demand aggregation projects, both across sectors and within particular geographic areas.

Community based broadband demand aggregation brokers are assisting community organisations to aggregate demand in their region and to negotiate with service providers to progress broadband rollout in their local area. Thirteen preferred projects were announced on 5 July 2004. A further eleven preferred applicants were announced on 19 May 2005 for the second round of the community based broadband DAB program.

## **Future of Broadband**

Broadband is evolutionary - what is perceived as fast in today's context may be overtaken by technological developments. Different users in the economy have different needs from broadband. Some users will have a need for very high capacity and high speed, while for others low latency or guaranteed redundancy may be more important.

Broadband connectivity might be achieved through a myriad of delivery platforms in addition to the traditional copper network - local loop wireless, cable, satellite or combinations of these, or via a new technology that we are yet to invent.

It's about getting high capacity access to the Internet or other online networks and using the connectivity creatively and flexibility to meet the different needs of communities.

## Connect Australia

Ongoing government investment in ICT through the Australian Government's \$1.1 billion Connect Australia<sup>66</sup> will support the development of telecommunications infrastructure including increased broadband internet connections and more effective use of ICT to achieve both economic benefits, enhance social wellbeing and strengthen communities.

This is through the provision of increased availability, accessibility and affordability of sustainable and reliable services. This has positive economic and social benefits for society in general and presents a vision for a digitally capable and inclusive Australia.

The main elements of the Connect Australia program are:

- \$878 million for Broadband Connect to provide affordable broadband services to regional Australia over the next four years. It will expand on the existing Higher Bandwidth Incentive Scheme (HiBIS) which provides subsidies to ISPs to connect homes, small businesses and nonprofit organisations to fast, reliable and affordable broadband services. Broadband Connect will also incorporate the Metropolitan Broadband Connect program, and commences on 1 January 2006.
- \$113 million for Clever Networks to rollout new broadband networks for innovative applications to improve the delivery of health, education and other essential services. Clever Networks will build additional infrastructure to support Broadband Connect in extending the reach of competitive broadband services to rural and regional communities. It will seek to attract additional funding from commercial partners and State governments. It will seek to build on broadband infrastructure already provided under programs such as the CCIF.
- \$30 million for Mobile Connect to extend mobile phone coverage in smaller regional communities and along highways where a case for strategic location or economic importance can be established and where services will have ongoing commercial viability. The program will seek to attract additional funding from commercial partners and State governments. It will also extend the existing Satellite Phone Subsidy Scheme which offers up to \$1,500 for the purchase of a satellite phone to people living or working in areas without standard mobile phone coverage.
- \$90 million for Backing Indigenous Ability will target the deficiencies in telecommunications services in remote Indigenous communities. The program will provide community phones, upgrade and support public Internet access points, replace ageing and unreliable radio infrastructure and strengthen access to the cultural benefits of Indigenous television.

The Australian Government's long term vision is for a nation with the capability to apply ICT across the economy to foster innovation and social wellbeing.

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<sup>66</sup> [http://www.dcita.gov.au/tel/connect\\_australia](http://www.dcita.gov.au/tel/connect_australia)



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## Contemporary Governance Issues for the Community Sector

Christina Ryan, ACT Council of Social Service

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### Context

In early 2005 ACTCOSS was funded by the ACT Government to undertake a project supporting the committees of incorporated associations.

ACTCOSS is regularly called upon to provide training and resources on governance to community sector organisations as part of our Sector Development work. Prior to this project ACTCOSS' capacity to undertake governance support initiatives has been ad hoc and dependent on the expected outcomes of other projects and funding agreements – a little bit here and there. This significantly reduced our ability to provide a consistent level of support in line with both the community sector's and wider community's demands.

The governance work being done by ACTCOSS is part of the greater whole of sector development and organisational support, which encourages and resources good practice in both governance and management for community sector organisations. However, it also represents a discreet area of need in the community sector which must be supported consistently over the longer term.

The project included a series of short seminars on basic governance principles and practices. The seminars were targeted specifically at committee members of incorporated associations and were held at times that would be more suitable to those committee members.

The seminar series is now backed up by a web resource enhancing the Organisations Information Kit (OIK) on the ACTCOSS website.

Some capacity to provide extra individual organisation support was also possible as part of ACTCOSS' regular consultancy work.

This whole project was designed to complement and build on ACTCOSS' role in providing community sector development support, which includes consultancy services, seminars, organisational development and facilitation of sector networks.

### Specifics

The core element of the project was the seminar series. The content of the series was based around the main issues that are raised with ACTCOSS through the course of our consultancy work with organisations and through our knowledge of the broader issues affecting the community sector in the ACT.

The seminars were:

- principles and practice of good governance

- effective meeting procedure and tools
- financial report reading skills
- legal obligations under the Associations Incorporations Act.

The third and fourth seminars are fairly self explanatory, but the first two were more specifically designed around the principles and practices that support good governance. The content was modelled around ACTCOSS' regular governance training work, coupled with some more in depth work on specific areas of shortfall.

We always start our governance training and seminars by asking "who owns your organisation?"

It is often one of the hardest questions for committees to answer and regularly takes some time to work through before a clear answer emerges. This cuts to the heart of what is happening with governance today in the community sector as we are pulled between our obligations to our membership and the organisation, and the accountability to our funding body for the work that we do.

Expectations of good governance are quite rigorous now, with recent high profile bad governance examples creating concerns in the community about the people behind organisations - both profit and non-profit.

ACTCOSS raised the principles behind good governance by focussing on the role of oversight / monitoring and strategic guidance. Our core question each seminar was "how am I providing guidance by doing this?" This assisted in drawing participants back to their key responsibility which is to act in the best interests of the organisation. All else flows from that.

Even with completely voluntary organisations there is a distinct line between providing a governance oversight and guidance role, and the actual doing of the day to day work. This is a common area of confusion, a potential cause of lengthy meetings, and a regular source of misunderstanding around the assumptions that can be made as to who is doing what.

In looking at the principles of governance we also looked at what governance isn't. This helped to clarify between the doing and the guiding.

Once the principle of oversight and guidance was explored we moved onto the core documents. For many committee members this provided some real insight into their obligations and also some realisations about what they had actually been doing at meetings.

The lack of governance support for the community sector becomes apparent when looking at the role of the core documents in oversight and guidance. Many committee members were unaware of the nature of many of the documents, didn't know if they existed in their organisation or not, and often had no knowledge of when they had last been updated.

A central focus of the governance project was to familiarise committee members with what core documents there might be, how they can fit into the cycle of governance, and the responsibility that board members have to ensure that the documents exist and are current. Naturally this fed into the actual process of meetings and how an agenda is mapped out.

When we moved onto effective meetings we looked at the process of meetings, collective responsibility for a meeting actually working, the importance of good facilitation, and how to develop a cycle throughout the year to ensure the core documents are covered. Several Organisations Information Kit (OIK) website references have now been developed around this critical area.

A key indicator of the development of the community sector over recent years is the way that committees actually function in meetings. Apart from board members having some ownership and responsibility for the core documents, there is still some work to be done on the structure of meetings and how things are presented to them.

Most of us would be familiar with organisations that have started out as small voluntary groups and developed over time into larger service and advocacy providers. With the lack of consistent governance support for the community sector many of these organisations are still operating a committee system with a level of informality that is hampering their effectiveness.

The practice of presenting reports verbally at meetings is still common, as is the tabling of financial reports at the time of the meeting, and the use of “other business” to discuss major issues. Working through these sorts of practices with board members is a consistent need for ACTCOSS’ consultancy work and it had to be given some coverage at the seminar on effective meetings.

When asked what sort of notice should be given for meetings seminar participants were fairly uniform in expecting a week, but in practice this isn’t necessarily what they are supporting (ask – what is happening elsewhere?).

### **Ongoing needs**

Core documents – While we were able to touch on the importance of core documents there was no capacity to explain their role or to provide a basic grounding in what each of these documents does. We need to develop resources on core documents.

Conflict of interest – this is a big discussion area in both seminars and consultancy work. ACTCOSS has developed resources on our website OIK, but it is clear that it continues to need attention with a clear delineation between a financial conflict and an ethical conflict.

Ethical Framework including human rights practice – committee members are responsible for setting the ethical direction of their organisation (vision, values, and moral framework). Once again this was referred to regularly during the seminar series, but it became clear that real resources need to be developed, and discussion facilitated, to assist in understanding what an ethical framework is, how it is used regularly in the committee’s oversight capacity, and how it ties in with new human rights expectations in the ACT community. Many committee members also raised ethical dilemmas and conflicts as an ongoing concern that they would like support in overcoming.

ACTCOSS continues to work on developing resources around models of governance that incorporate human rights principles. This work is ground breaking on an international as well as national level and is one of the flow on effects of having Australia’s first Human Rights Act.

Financial – This is a major area of need and can't be covered in short seminars or by general principles. It is better for more formal training to be available to ensure that committee members are properly resourced in this critical area of responsibility.

Annual General Meeting – many committee members wanted more information on the nuts and bolts of running annual general meetings. ACTCOSS has developed some resources for this, but it is a symptom of the greater problem of high turnover of committee members.

Legal & legislative- there needs to be a community sector governance induction pack to outline the basic legal requirements, changes to the Incorporations Act, etc. Once again the high turnover of committee members contributes to this need.

Membership/organisational – there were some real areas of need expressed around membership and its role in governance, and the accountability mechanisms that need to be in place to inform members of an organisation's operations. Many community organisations struggle to recruit committee members and to retain those committee members. Having an active and engaged membership is a key contributor to overcoming this difficulty and it remains a core responsibility of the governing body.

Governance for managers - we turned away a number of applicants for the seminar series who were managers of organisations rather than committee members. All expressed a need for greater understanding of governance principles and practice and ACTCOSS has now put together a seminar on "Governance for Managers".

Industrial relations – the current industrial climate has caused a high level of anxiety in the community sector, which correctly interprets the heavy impact that it will have on our operations.

ACTCOSS has also identified the need for specific training for departmental funding managers on the governance of incorporated associations. Many do not fully understand the nature of incorporation and the demands placed upon the committee members and staff of incorporated associations.

### **Broader needs on governance support for the community sector**

There are some more general areas of need for ACTCOSS in our work on governance in the community sector:

- a capacity to work after hours when management committees are most likely to be able to come together. This includes weekday evening and weekend work
- continuing to develop the Organisations Information Kit (OIK)
- general resource development: it is critical that we have good quality resources that the community sector can rely on, and which have relevance to the local environment. The OIK was originally developed to assist in overcoming this gap, but there is also a need for publications and for specific resources.

### **Conclusion**

The prototype governance project has reinforced ACTCOSS' awareness that this is a large area of unmet need in the community sector. It has confirmed our anecdotal

evidence that turnover on committees is high and that this leads to an ongoing need for orientation in good practice and principles.

It is clear that the community sector will take up any opportunities made available to improve management committee practice, and that there is a low capacity to pay commercial rates for this support. Many committee members operate in isolation and welcome the chance to share experiences and skills with other committee members in the sector.

The community sector has governance needs that are not supported by commercially available governance support, particularly within the new environment of funding and the community sector's increasing human rights awareness. This overlays a legislative expectation of good governance which has changed markedly over the last couple of years. A great deal of this work requires specialised knowledge from staff who are also able to maintain currency with their skills and their awareness of emerging trends.

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## **Isolated and Rural Communities, how do they access health and other services**

**Mary Martin, Queensland Aboriginal and  
Islander Health Council (QAIHC)**

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Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin by acknowledging and paying my respects to the Traditional owners on which Brisbane is situated. I would also like to thank ACOSS and QCOSS for inviting QAIHC to speak to you today. This is a timely opportunity to share experiences and look at developing stronger links not just with ACOSS and QCOSS but between our organisations at a local and regional level.

In discussing today's topic about access to health and health-related services in isolated and rural communities, I will begin with an overview of who we are at QAIHC and what we do specifically relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. I will then talk about some of the positives and some of the challenges and discuss some specific case studies that are providing outcomes. In closing, I will highlight a few key points about where QAIHC is heading.....

Before I begin, I want to stress that the issues and experiences of access to health and health-related services for our mob is NOT limited to isolated and rural communities. In fact when you look at access to any type of service, the rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is significantly low.

Some key statistics about the current status of our mob are:

- education - year 12 retention rates: males = 70.9% vs 34.1% (Ab/TSI); Females = 81.9% vs 42% (Ab/TSI)
- housing - overcrowding: 3.4% vs 18.9% (Ab/TSI)
- unemployment (over 15) - 7.2% vs 20% (Ab/TSI) - is understated because majority of our mob are on CDEP
- income - household income: \$500 vs \$280 (Ab/TSI).

When we talk about health, the statistics are dramatically worse:

- life expectancy - males = 77 vs 56.3 (Ab/TSI), females = 82.4 vs 62.8 (Ab/TSI)
- infant mortality - 5.7% vs 12.7% (Ab/TSI)
- child protection - 8% vs 24% (Ab/TSI). Of the Ab/TSI, 50% are due to neglect (lack of hygiene and nutrition).

The Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council (QAIHC) is bedding down a range of approaches to address the health situation in Queensland. We are the state peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Services.

A community controlled health service (CCHS) is a primary health care service initiated by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to deliver holistic and culturally appropriate health care to people within their communities. The Board members are elected by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

QAIHC was initially established as a Forum in 1990 and reconstituted in 2004 as a Council. The vision of QAIHC is:

*For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to achieve a state of wellness in line with our evolving notion of cultural well-being.*

QAIHC subscribes to the philosophy that:

*Health does not just mean the physical well-being of the individual but refers to the social, emotional, cultural and spiritual well-being of the community. . . For Aboriginal peoples this is a whole way of life view and incorporates the cyclical concept of life-death-life. Health services should strive to achieve the state where every individual can achieve their full potential as human beings and thus contribute to achieving the well-being of the whole community (National Aboriginal Health Strategy, 1989).*

Membership of QAIHC comprises twenty (20) primary health care services and approximately twelve (12) health-related services – these include community housing and training organisations. Our member organisations are situated with urban, regional and remote communities across Queensland.

In 2004, QAIHC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Queensland Indigenous Substance Misuse Council (QISMC) to represent and support their sixteen (16) member services. QAIHC also has a similar MOU with the seven (7) Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCAs).

The QAIHC Board of Management is comprised of elected representatives from member organisations. QAIHC is supported by a Secretariat of approximately twenty-five (25) staff who provide a range services including:

- Corporate Administration
- Policy and Advocacy
- Member Support
- General Practice Education and Training
- Child Protection
- Centre for Clinical Research Excellence.

The role and function of the QAIHC Secretariat is to:

- provide a link between Community Controlled Health Sector and Government
- promote, increase and develop and expand provision of health services through CCHSs
- liaise with Government and other providers of health services on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, research and programs
- assist member organisations with planning, development and provision of health services to their communities
- assess health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and taking steps to meet identified needs.

The Community Controlled Health Sector in Queensland is over thirty (30) years old and began with the establishment of the Aboriginal and Islander Community Health Service (AICHS) in Brisbane in 1973. It was soon followed by others throughout Queensland. These services have been established by our communities in response to the failure of mainstream health services to address our health needs. They are all explicitly founded on the principle of self-determination – on our right to make our own decisions.

Community Controlled Health Services form an integral component of the health sector for our communities – in 2003/2004 our sector delivered 1.6 million episodes of health care nationally. This is an increase of 100, 000 from the previous year.

The advantages of our model are many, including:

- better access – because our mob have ownership and control of the services, and because service delivery is flexible and responsive Aboriginal people are more likely to access the care they need (for example, outreach services are often a feature)
- the full range of primary health care services is available in one place – service delivery is holistic, rather than being built around different specialities or ‘body parts’
- the care provided is culturally appropriate – the organisation is run by Aboriginal people, employs Aboriginal or culturally aware non-Aboriginal people and delivers care in a sensitive and inclusive way
- the sector delivers value for money – based on local knowledge, services are targeted at areas of local need
- the sector represents a major source of education and training, and ultimately of empowerment and cultural pride for Aboriginal people
- the knowledge required to improve Aboriginal health status is not innate – it must be acquired. The Community Controlled Health Sector has developed a large pool of knowledge and expertise about Aboriginal health issues, which enables it not only to delivery appropriate care, but also to advocate effectively for Aboriginal people in health.

The Australian Government and State Government through their commitment to the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health 2003 recognize that:

*Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) are the best practice model for the delivery of comprehensive primary health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.*

However while this may be recognised in a strategic policy document, accessing substantial ongoing resourcing for the Community Controlled Health Sector is a challenge. There is a lack of funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services across Australia. Community Controlled Health Services receive the majority of their funding through the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing (Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health). The level of this funding does not equate to the number of staff required to address the level of need within local communities. In many cases, member organisations access funding from a range of other government departments, philanthropic and non-government agencies. This creates an increased administrative burden on our member organisations, as they continue to seek and report to, in some cases, up to sixteen (16) different government program areas for band-aid level resources.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has estimated a shortfall in primary health funding of \$400 million annually given the burden of disease experienced by our mob. Imagine the difference this could make?

Clearly, there are a number of regions within Queensland where NO Community Controlled Health Service is present – our communities therefore need to access care from mainstream service providers. In some cases, this has been a challenge. Ms Pat Anderson, former Chairperson of our national peak body – the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) made this point at the Australian Division of General Practice Forum in Brisbane in November 2002:

*It is universally agreed in the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health today that medical or clinical care is not enough. We need a broader approach – specifically we need an approach based on comprehensive primary health care which includes medical care but goes beyond it to address the deep-seated health problems of our communities. The most pressing health issues we face are not going to be solved medically. There is no injection for alcohol misuse or violence. There is no pill to promote healthy lifestyles. There is no bandage to fix powerlessness and discrimination. Yet these things are at the core of the health problems we face and to address them requires community action and advocacy.*

*To address the issues that lie at the core of our health problems therefore requires community action and advocacy. By definition, this community action must be controlled by the community – this is the principle of community control. What we require is a mainstream health and welfare system that supports and nurtures this approach.*

The picture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is not all bad news. There are good examples to highlight. For example:

*At the state level, both levels of government are committed to ongoing engagement with QAIHC through the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnership (the Partnership).*

The Partnership aims to improve health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland. This will be achieved through joint needs-based planning to guide investment in the following key priority areas:

- Improving Access to Health Services
- Capacity Building
- Joint Health Planning including the non-health sector
- Integrated Health Workforce Development and Planning
- Data and Information Management
- Quality Improvement
- Health and Risk Factor Strategies
- Monitoring and Evaluation

At the local community level, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services are now achieving some significant outcomes. Most notably is the Mums and Babies Program at the Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service (TAIHS). Through a community-based, collaborative, shared antenatal care intervention, TAIHS has seen an increase in patterns of antenatal visits, an increase in the proportion of women undertaking key antenatal screening and improved perinatal outcomes including a significant increase of birth weights. This has been monitored and well documented since 2000.

### **So where to from here?**

In closing, I just want to stress that the majority of our mob in Queensland are living a significantly poorer quality of life and lower levels of social wellbeing.

No single approach will change this situation quickly. The success stories that I have given are all working because they are partnerships that are led by our communities.

It isn't hard to see that if we are going to continue to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, we need sincere and ongoing partnerships led by our Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services that is adequately resourced. Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is everyone's business....

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