

Good Policy

NEWSLETTER OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICE SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH UNIT



ABN 61 354 551 576
ISSN: 1833-1130

Unfair Welfare to Unfair Work

by Barry Pullen

Policy Consultant, Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service

In this issue

Unfair Welfare to Unfair Work 1

Corporate Social Responsibility – The public policy challenges of changing roles 2

News: Welfare to Work Forum 4

Women exiting prison 5

Neighbourhood renewal in Hastings 6

'Children are our treasure as are those who care for them' 7

News: Henderson Research Foundation 8

'WE ARE GOOD SHEPHERD. Our mission is shaped by our inheritance of the vision, courage and audacity of Saint Mary Euphrasia Pelletier and the Good Shepherd tradition she began. Ours is a vision for promoting a world of justice and peaceful co-existence. Ours is the courage to embrace wholeheartedly innovative and creative ways of enabling people of all cultural, religious and social backgrounds to enjoy the fullness of life, which is the right of every human being. Ours is the inheritance to boldly challenge those structures and beliefs that diminish human dignity. We work to ensure the value of every human being, the communities that enable us all to thrive and the integrity of the environment that guarantees both.'

Many church and community-based welfare agencies are very critical of the Federal Government's Welfare to Work measures designed to encourage a shift from welfare dependency to paid work.

They are particularly concerned at the harm that might be done to vulnerable people and families, many of whom are their clients.

Troubling also is that in setting up the new system the Government has largely ignored its own McClure Report, including recommendations which provide discretionary packages of income and welfare service supports for social security recipients, particularly vulnerable welfare clients (Carney, 2006). Mutual obligation is apparently meant to work in one direction only. Also problematic is the contrast between government claims that Welfare to Work will provide extra resources, and actual figures gleaned from Senate Estimate Committee hearings. Laura Tingle for instance shows the Government plans on net budget savings of \$211.3M from disability pensioners and \$81.3M from single mums from implementing Welfare to Work (Tingle, 2006).

These problems have led most welfare agencies to take the unusual step of refusing to

become contractors for the government when people are breached for non-compliance with the new regulations and are subjected to 8-week non-payment penalties.

But what are the positive steps that should be taken? To answer this question it is important to put the situation in its broader context. While it is true that Australia is not alone in following this path and that the UK, Sweden, The Netherlands, New Zealand and the USA are implementing various similar models (Considine, 2001), the model the Australian government has adopted is at the far end of the draconian scale of coercion.

For existing welfare recipients the encouragement is meagre and the penalties for non-compliance severe.

Single parents and people on disability pensions are heavily targeted. A basic problem for sole parents and people with lower level disability is that Newstart rates are nearly \$57 a fortnight less than pension rates for a single person with a child (Carney, 2007). And people can get short shrift if they complain: a Good Shepherd client who tried to point out some of her problems at a Centrelink session was informed that she could leave; if she did leave this could be counted towards a breach.

Thus the most vulnerable unemployed under this Welfare to Work regime, and this includes sole parents

and people with low-level disability, will be forced into not a 'good job' but 'any job'. This, together with the WorkChoices legislation, has the potential to create a growing pool of workers forced to accept low pay and conditions. The new measures have caused some observers to place Australia along with the USA and Japan as one of the most authoritarian and coercive OECD nations with respect to treatment of low-wage workers and the unemployed (Dean, 2006).

It could be said that Australia has come to a fork in the road on employment and social security policy. With WorkChoices and the current model of Welfare to Work we have started on a path to treating people as commodities rather than individuals and families.

In doing so, we are turning our back on the concept of the right to a 'living wage' based on principles originally established in the historic *Harvester Case* in 1907, and used in the Henderson *Poverty Inquiry* to assist in establishing a poverty line below which no citizen should have to exist in a prosperous nation.

It is not too late to turn away from this course, but deliberate choices must be made. Other OECD countries have introduced policies and processes aimed at maintaining egalitarian and inclusive societies without ignoring the importance of labour markets.

Continued on page 4 >

Corporate Social Responsibility

– The public policy challenges of changing roles*

by Marilyn Webster

The rise of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has far-reaching consequences for the community sector. It is part of a wider discourse that commenced in the latter years of the twentieth century about who should be responsible for social provision.

Changing the role of government inevitably produces major shifts in the roles of the corporate and community sectors. The community sector was jolted by the rapid move to government outsourcing, competitive tendering and the privatising of social provision in the 1990s. There is now a new challenge to look beyond government and the community sector, at the roles mapped out for business in improving social wellbeing.

Mark Considine (2004) has identified the rise of corporate social responsibility as a feature of social provision through social networking. Social networking marks a shift in the way public goods are distributed and governed and implies an active role for government in bringing together partnerships or coalitions which include corporates, to make social provision. Both the community sector's effectiveness and the entitlements of citizens can be challenged by these arrangements.

Types of corporate engagement

King (2000) proposes three paradigms of corporate citizenship or CSR, each encapsulating a different role for business and different relationships with the community sector.

The economic paradigm encapsulates a view of corporates in which we expect them to comply with the letter and spirit of the law in their corporate behaviour e.g. non predatory marketing. The desire of Government, usually supported by the corporate sector, has been to reduce regulatory control of business. Traditionally regulation has corrected market failure, when people are not able to participate in the market or are excluded from the market. Under 'light touch' regulatory regimes

corporate social responsibility is seen as an alternative way of addressing the needs of those who fall through the net. An example of this is the desire of the Australian banking sector to avoid regulatory approaches to exclusion from financial services.

The philanthropy paradigm

characterises the most traditional interface between the corporate and community sectors. For many years philanthropic assistance has provided sponsorship and direct gifts to support the work of community organisations. Recent Good Shepherd examples include funding from Tattersalls for a youth mentoring program and from South East Water for financial counselling. These have been backed up by appropriate volunteer participation of corporate staff within the programs. Such arrangements support the work of community sector organisations and enhance the reputation and profile of the corporate.

The strategic engagement paradigm

views corporates as being given the privilege of a licence to operate by society and as having an obligation to respond to social needs in constituencies beyond their market based partners. Some of the impetus for this newer paradigm arises from constraints on government (including expenditure), with business invited to fill the gaps.

This approach closely aligns with the social networking approach to service provision described by Considine. A recent tripartite agreement was brokered by the Department of Victorian Communities to expand No Interest Loans Schemes[®] across Victoria as part of the Government's A Fairer Victoria strategy. A \$4.8 million line of credit is available through Good Shepherd, courtesy of the National Australia Bank, while the Victorian Government is providing \$4.2 million over four years to support associated community development and infrastructure. A project reference group comprising the three partners gives high level direction and a vehicle for ongoing cooperation.

The Prime Minister's Partnerships Awards reflect the intent of the Federal Government to foster the role of corporates in this domain. The National Bank was a recent recipient of one such award for its work with Good Shepherd in setting up a Low Interest Loans Program (StepUP).

Social justice, social provision and CSR

While providing services with corporate partners is important, Good Shepherd is known for its social justice advocacy. This key component of our mission is challenged by, but also explains, our engagement with the corporate sector. Advocacy in this context becomes a conversation in which new understandings of need can be forged. Corporates are often responsive when the impact of their policies is known and they can find new ways of doing things. Sometimes however systemic advocacy is required to address a wider problem and it is vital that in receiving money from corporates we safeguard the capacity to publicly advocate and lobby for systemic change. We have found that our partners acknowledge the importance of our key goals of influencing corporate and government policy frameworks even where it may directly impinge on their activities.

Understanding each other

The discourse concerning corporate social responsibility is often conducted with reference to terms such as 'social capital', 'capacity building', 'cross-sector collaboration', 'partnerships', 'community strengthening', 'sustainability' and 'social advocacy'. While the community sector is familiar with these terms I think for corporates this language can be quite difficult and even when these concepts are used they may not imply mutual understanding. It is useful to think also of another set of concepts and terms which shadow the more general terms of the conversation but which can be just as influential as motivators for CSR. These are 'reputational management', 'business sustainability', 'light touch regulation', 'responsible business practice' and 'business development'.

Weighing risks and benefits

How we understand corporate social responsibility is very important for all in the community services sector. We could have a collision of world views which, if not identified, could lead to misunderstanding and disengagement. It is important to be realistic about what corporate social responsibility can achieve in addressing issues of general social need. Gary Johns (2005) of the Institute of Public Affairs says of CSR "...*The dangers of corporations involving themselves in full blown CSR are that they may begin to play the role of governments, either in service provision or deciding public priorities*".

The IPA supports, among other beliefs, a "limited and efficient government" (IPA 2007). That said, Johns does point to the seductive powers of the corporate social responsibility discourse and the need to be hard-headed about CSR and business involvement with the community sector. CSR cannot be expected to deliver social justice. If we have a clear understanding of the different roles, however, there can be benefits to the community as a whole and particularly to some groups of people who are poor or excluded. CSR can provide at least three major contributions.

Participation in setting the social agenda. While it is important that government sets the social agenda, not least because of the safeguards of democratic process, corporates also have a role to play in identifying social need, engaging in the debate and assisting responses. This response need not necessarily be solely profit-driven, as evidenced by the StepUP and NILS® contributions of the National Australia Bank.

Promoting innovation. While the market itself may not be good at producing fundamental innovation to address areas of social need, corporates can support innovation through philanthropy, research and development, and opening the doors to government for good ideas. Often government is not good at innovation for the same reasons, but is receptive to approaches by corporates in partnership with community sector experience.

Assisting with long lasting service provision. For a period of time Victoria was known as the land of the pilot rather than of comprehensive and sustainable social programming. The community sector is concerned with fundamental change and the corporates are vital to economic and social access. They provide an opportunity to mainstream important innovations and reforms through their commitment to corporate social responsibility.

There are, however, a myriad of challenges in CSR for the community sector including:

- > safeguarding the centrality of community sector roles and values while being flexible to innovation
- > maintaining the independence of advocacy
- > providing for ethical decision-making and transparent processes when engaging with corporates
- > engaging respectfully with corporates across differences in a way that is sustainable and maintains control where it is needed; and
- > meeting the demands on organisational infrastructure and capacity resulting from partnerships with corporates.

Fortunately these are issues of approach and resourcing. None are irresolvable and corporates themselves can do much to assist the community sector in working through them. The possibility is then that the opportunities of corporate social responsibility will become realities in enhancing community and social wellbeing.

* *This paper was presented at the Victorian Council of Social Service Congress 2006*

References

- Christian Centre for Socially Responsible Investment (2004), *The Responsibilities of Transnational Corporations and Related Business Enterprises with regard to Human Rights*, Submission to the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights
- Considine, M (2004) *Enterprising States: the Public Management of Welfare-to-Work*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Fosler, S (2000) *Changing Roles, Changing Relationships: The New Challenge for Business, Non-profit Organizations, and Government*, A Three sector collaborative project of the Conference Board Council on Foundations. www.independentsector.org.
- Government of Victoria (2006), *A Fairer Victoria – Progress and Next Steps*
- Institute of Public Affairs (2007), *About the IPA*, www.ipa.org.au/about.asp
- Johns, G (2005) *Deconstructing Corporate Social Responsibility* Speech to CSR in Focus, Institute of Public Affairs, Melbourne
- Joseph, E (2002) *Promoting corporate social responsibility: is market-based regulation sufficient?*, in *New Economy* 1070-3535/02/02096+05
- Kay, J *The Spirit of Rockefeller is vital to scientific innovation*, Financial Times, June 27th 2006
- King, D. (2000) *Stakeholders and Spindoctors: the Politicisation of Corporate Reputations* Hawke Institute, Working Paper Series No 5. University of South Australia. Magill, SA.
- KPMG (2005) *Financing issues for social enterprises and the not-for-profit sector*, Community Strengthening and Volunteering Division, Department for Victorian Communities, State of Victoria, August 2005
- Loza, Dr J and Ogilvie, S (2005) *Corporate Australia Building Trust and Stronger Communities? A Review of Current Trends and Themes*, Department of Family and Community Services, Australian Government, November 2005
- Not for Profit Newsletters, *CSR Parliamentary Report Points to NFP's*, Vol 13, Edition 13, 3/07/2006
- Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services (June 2006) *Corporate Responsibility: Managing risk and creating value*, Parliament of Australia, Canberra. www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/corporations_ctte

COMING EVENTS

GOOD SHEPHERD SPIRIT IN THE PUB IN THE WEST

St Albans Social Action Group and the Social Policy Research Unit

Unfair Welfare to Unfair Work?

Guest speaker:

SENATOR PENNY WONG, Shadow Minister for Workforce Participation

Monday 23rd April

5.30 pm

Plough Hotel, Barkly Street, Footscray

Why a Social Policy Research newsletter?

'Good Policy' is the newsletter of the Social Policy Research Unit of Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service. We aim to bring the latest news of research and policy developments in areas of importance to our service users, supporters, colleagues, service partners, interested donors and funders. This is an initiative responding to the ongoing interest in the policy voice and research outcomes of Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service. We are now in our third volume of 'Good Policy'. Thank you to all the contributors, supporters and readers. 'Good Policy' is a free newsletter, which comes out three times a year, in March, July and November.

Please let us know what you think of our newsletter and what you would like to see in future 'Good Policy' editions. All feedback is welcome. Additional and back copies are available on request.

NEWS: Welfare to Work – the Facts, the Impacts and How we can Respond

The Social Action Group at St Albans Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service organised a forum on 15th November 2006 to discuss the effects of the Government's recent Welfare to Work changes that came into operation on 1st July 2006. This was very well attended with a good cross section of participants.

Barry Pullen, Consultant within the Social Policy Research Unit, commenced proceedings by highlighting that the Federal Government has moved away from the idea set up under the Harvester Agreement (1907) that a job provides a basic wage to support a family. Rather, the current thinking is about cost-cutting and moving people from welfare to employment using a 'carrot and stick' approach. The aim of the forum was to consider how these changes to welfare will impact on the most

disadvantaged members of our community, and how we can respond to ameliorate the most severe effects of the policy.

Barry introduced the three speakers:

- > Rivkah Nissim of Victorian Council of Social Services outlined the Welfare to Work changes and how they would disadvantage people
- > Jess Permezel of the Council of Single Mothers and Their Children spoke about case studies and specific impacts on sole parents; and
- > Megan Street, a spokesperson from Centrelink, outlined the new system and administrative measures being put in place.

The speakers then participated as a panel in an extensive plenary session, which was followed by four workshops. Points brought up in discussion are included below:

Negative Impacts	Solutions/Ways forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Insufficient assistance or incentive to support people with disability getting employment > People with undiagnosed mental health problems are severely disadvantaged in the process > Loss of choice for single parents > Economic pressure to stay in 'bad' relationships > De-skilling > Loss of confidence > Loss of freedom to choose job pathway > Complexity of the system – how do you calculate 'am I better off?' > Restricted eligibility for financial case management, particularly for those experiencing mental health problems > The impact on crisis services – overloaded, under-resourced, tightening of criteria > 'Breaching' customers – the language around this such as 'failure' and 'excuse' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > ACOSS Case Studies research – use as a resource, to identify issues, identify impacts, to be transparent > Build strategic alliances > Have social action group locally based > Community education around Welfare to Work > CSMC: to start 'speaker bank' > Political lobby > Individual responses: be passionate about change, provide pathways, information to share > Get people into careers, e.g. apprenticeships > Campaign for more resources for people with disability to enter employment > Are UK and US evidence based approaches the best method to counter the problem? – no Australian based evidence > JPET was very effective > Need for people to be aware of their individual rights > Strategic links with key people, e.g. Centrelink SW, Job Network

The social action group is preparing a forum report for circulation to participants and further action is anticipated (see also 'Coming Events' in this edition).

Unfair Welfare to Unfair Work

Continued from page 1

Addressing two interacting areas should be a priority. First, drastically remodel the Welfare to Work system to provide adequate support and incentives for people to make the move to useful paid employment and to remove the unjust penalties being imposed on vulnerable people. Second, recognise the structural factors operating in Australia that are leading to gross work inequalities and increase investment in and access to education and training as a lifelong endeavor. This must include support for the transitions that people are increasingly required to make in their employment and life course.

References

- Carney, T (2006b) 'Welfare Reform?' Paper delivered at Conference *Our Social Rights and Responsibilities: The new politics of welfare*, Melbourne, Dallas Brooks Hall, Brotherhood of St Laurence, 30 August 2006
- Carney, T (2007) 'Reforming Social Security: Improving incentives and capabilities?' Paper delivered at *From Welfare to Social Investment: Reimagining Social Policy for the Life Course*, Melbourne University Centre for Public Policy Conference 21-22 February 2007
- Considine, M (2001) *Enterprising States: The Public Management of Welfare to Work*, Cambridge University Press
- Dean, H (2006) 'The Ethics of Welfare-to-Work in the UK (and Beyond.)', Paper delivered at the conference: *Road to Where: The politics and practice of implementing welfare-to-work*, Brisbane, University of Queensland, July 17-18, 2006
- McClure, P (2000) *Final Report: Participation Support for a More Equitable Society*, Reference Group on Welfare Reform, Canberra
- Tingle, L (2006) 'How spin turns saving into spending' *The Australian Financial Review*, 29th September

CALL TO ACTION

YOUR 'WELFARE TO WORK' CASE STUDIES ARE URGENTLY NEEDED BY ACOSS!

Australian Council of Social Service, AFDO (Australian Federation of Disability Organisations) and a number of other organisations have set up a confidential online library for collecting case studies about the impacts of Welfare to Work.

To fill in a case study see www.afdo.org.au
For more information contact Rivkah at VCOSS
rivkah.nissim@vcoss.org.au

Services for Women Exiting Prison: Exploring the Good Shepherd Model

by Amy Carson, Honours Social Work student, La Trobe University

Over the last decade workers within Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service (GSY&FS) have been growing increasingly concerned at the rate of women being incarcerated within and returning to the Victorian prison system.

GSY&FS has traditionally targeted its support to disadvantaged women and it is recognised that women who have experienced incarceration often have multiple, concurrent sites of disadvantage¹.

Good Shepherd Tradition

The Good Shepherd sisters have historically led the way in working with disadvantaged women with an ethos shaped by values of human rights and social justice. Fittingly, a Good Shepherd sister continues to hold a chaplaincy position within Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, maintaining the traditions of 'walking with' people in need and being active in the community².

The Context

The number of women being imprisoned in Victoria has increased over the last decade to double that of 1995³. While this trend is worth noting, it is also important to view this in a wider context: the increase in women's incarceration is not unique to Australia, but is symptomatic of a general trend amongst Western countries⁴.

There was also an increase in the sentence lengths in Victoria during the period 1995-2005, which appears consistent with the rise in numbers of women committing more serious offences. This upward shift in the seriousness and violence of the crimes women commit warrants further investigation, especially as it is not paralleled in the male prison population⁵.

Interestingly, while sentencing practices appear to have remained stable in Australia, there continues to be significant disparity between men and women in sentence lengths. Women continue to receive lesser sentences than men for similar offences and there is some suggestion that notions of 'chivalry' and 'paternalism' on the part of the sentencers may impact on sentence lengths⁶.

Demographics of Women in Prison

While it is acknowledged that there is not a singular explanation for women's involvement in criminal behaviour, it is widely agreed that women in prison generally have similar backgrounds of socio-economic disadvantage⁷. Research shows the female prison population has high rates of mental illness, and drug use, and that 85 per cent of women in prison in Australia are survivors of sexual abuse⁸.

Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service Programs

GSY&FS has a range of services accessed by women who are incarcerated and/or who have experienced incarceration. These services are part of an extensive range of pre and post release services in Victoria which form the Post Prison Release Network. While women who have experienced incarceration may access a number of services within GSY&FS, the main services are listed in the table below.

Themes in Service Provision

A number of common themes are evident within these Good Shepherd services:

- > Women who have experienced incarceration have similar needs to other women accessing services
- > A strength-based approach is used, viewing women within a positive framework where change is possible; and
- > Women are defined by their 'core being' rather than fixed within a 'criminal' identity and as such, there is always hope and opportunity for change.

During a presentation and group discussion with GSY&FS workers in December 2006, it was widely agreed that assertive outreach is an important practice method in working with women who have experienced incarceration. GSY&FS workers also highlighted the importance of continuity in service provision pre and post release, which suggests the need to further explore how this can be effectively achieved.

Services for Women Pre and Post Release Provided by GSY&FS

Site	Target Group	Services Provided
St Albans	Women at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (outreach on a fortnightly basis)	Financial counselling Advocacy Information provision
St Kilda	Women at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (outreach on a weekly basis) Women (who may or may not have experienced incarceration) who reside in or have links to the City of Port Phillip	Reiki and support BaySis – mentoring for women Outreach support Holistic Health and Wellbeing Group Project Me Counselling
Collingwood	Women recently released from Dame Phyllis Frost Centre who reside in and around Collingwood, St Albans and St Kilda	No Interest Loan Scheme

1 Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women (2003) 'The Health and Wellbeing of Women in Prison: issues impacting on health and wellbeing', *Focus of Women* No. 8, Canberra, p. 7
2 Kovesi, C (2006) *Pitch Your Tents on Distant Shores*, Playright Publishing Pty Ltd, Caringbah, p. 356
3 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004) 'Crime and Justice: Women in Prison' in *Australian Social Trends*, Canberra

4 Willis, K & Rushworth, C (2003) 'The Female Criminal: An Overview of Women's Drug Use and Offending Behaviour', *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, p. 4
5 Gelb, K (2003) *Women in Prison: Why is the Rate of Incarceration Increasing?* Proceedings at the Evaluation in Crime and Justice: Trends and Methods Conference, Australia, p. 8

6 Ross, S & Forster, K (2000) *Female Prisoners: Using Imprisonment Statistics to Understand the Place of Women in the Criminal Justice System* Proceedings of the Women in Corrections: Staff and Clients Conference, Australia, p. 2-3
7 Willis & Rushworth, *ibid*, p.3
8 Lievore, 2002 cited in Willis & Rushworth, *ibid*, p.3

Neighbourhood Renewal in Hastings

Building Cohesive Communities and Reducing Inequalities

by

Leanne Farnsworth (Community Programs Manager, Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service, Hastings),
Sam Hickingbotham (Community Development Worker, Hastings Neighbourhood Renewal Program) and **Kathy Landvogt**

The community development tradition of building local solutions to local problems in areas that experience high levels of social disadvantage has found new form in the Neighbourhood Renewal Program of the Victorian Government.

Good Shepherd on the Mornington Peninsula, in partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Department of Human Services, has now joined this initiative to establish Hastings Neighbourhood Renewal Program.

Solid foundations

Good Shepherd mission urges us to work to “ensure communities that enable all to thrive”, and our strategic plan gives “priority to being present within and committed to communities experiencing disadvantage”, so this is a welcome opportunity to extend our work with the Hastings community. Not only that, but the focus on community members themselves taking up leadership in the community renewal process reflects Good Shepherd’s commitment to “services and activities that respect local need, strengthen local leadership and empower people to advocate for their own wellbeing and that of their community”¹.

Good Shepherd Community House has been located in Hastings Office of Housing Estate since 1992. The West Park Consultative Group was established in 2001 to improve the image of the estate by upgrading the physical infrastructure and developing community building activities. The community consultative group consists of local residents and representatives from the Mornington Peninsula Shire, Peninsula Community Health Service, West Park Primary School, Office of Housing, Neighbourhood Renewal Program, Wallaroo Child and Family Centre and Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service. Neighbourhood Renewal has now become an important partner, and with similar objectives, has brought valuable resources to the group.

The program logic of Neighbourhood Renewal is also consistent with important recent research conducted by Jesuit Social Services², which found that when numbers of people and families who are disadvantaged are concentrated in the one geographic area then their individual disadvantage is compounded by the additional factor of ‘locational disadvantage’. Correcting this requires a bundle of specific, multi-faceted, place-based and participatory interventions to increase life opportunities over a considerable period, in addition to requiring services for each specific disadvantage (eg education, child protection, early childhood services). **These intensive local interventions also build social cohesion, which provides a vital buffer against the effects of compounded disadvantage. In the 2006 update of this research, Hastings is listed as one of the more disadvantaged areas.**

A Fairer Victoria

The Neighbourhood Renewal Program is part of the State Government’s ‘A Fairer Victoria’ strategy and commits to tackling tough questions with sustained resources. Importantly, the programs are funded for nine years, although they will still be required to be picked up elsewhere by agencies after that. The aim is to bring together residents, resources, community groups, local government and business to identify strategies that address disadvantage and increase community cohesion. The six key objectives for the project are to:

- > increase community pride and participation
- > improve employment, learning and local economic activity
- > enhance housing and environment
- > reduce crime and increase safety
- > boost community health and wellbeing; and
- > increase access to services and improve government responsiveness.

Since 2001, fifteen Neighbourhood Renewal Projects have been launched across Victoria and an evaluation process is currently underway.

In 2005, Hastings was identified as one of four new sites, along with Delacombe, East Reservoir, and West Heidelberg. Good Shepherd was involved in lobbying for Hastings to be nominated and supports the program by being on the steering group, employing the Community Development worker and having the Community House actively involved.

Community consultation

In each Neighbourhood Renewal location the program is facilitated by a project team that employs a Place Manager, a Community Development worker and an Employment and Learning Coordinator. The project team invites residents and other key stakeholders to take part in a community reference group that guides and oversees the process. During a community consultation phase local priorities are identified and a local area action plan is developed.

The Hastings Neighbourhood Renewal Program is about to conduct a major community consultation, which will, no doubt, lead to a raft of new local initiatives. Already things are being done differently, with 12 local residents selected and trained to conduct the survey. The training itself also provides encouragement to undertake further education by being part of an accredited course. Collaboration with Monash University’s Frankston campus on the research aspects adds other resources, and the survey will contribute to a statewide picture being gathered in neighbourhood renewal areas.

Early outcomes: diverse, high quality local spaces

- Neighbourhood Renewal’s focus on partnerships and local consultation is evident in its achievements to date:
- > undertaking estate improvement with West Park Consultative Group, Mornington Shire and DHS funding, to address serious flooding issues and to create a village square at the estate entrance with new landscaping and community art works;
 - > lobbying for the creation of an open space pathway for the local

'Children are our Treasure as are those who care for them'

by Janet Elefsiniotis (Family Services Team Leader, Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service Collingwood)

community and an environmental management plan for the Kings Creek Reserve, home to sugar gliders, a species of rare skink and important native vegetation; and

- > investigating the development of a proposal that will encourage a range of users of the Hastings Community Hub.

Where to from here...

While cooperation and partnerships between local organisations are central to the program's success, they add to its complexity and time demands: the tripartite management structure means that even setting up phone lines becomes complicated. As always, finding practical ways of meshing community development approaches with existing casework services is also a challenge. Yet these are all important components for the long-term sustainability of the renewal process and the assets of each participant add value to the overall project. Good Shepherd's local knowledge and goodwill are actively available to the project workers through the Community Development worker. DHS provides project management and of course funding, while the Brotherhood of St Laurence brings the training and education component.

Good Shepherd will continue to work closely with the local community and support the Neighbourhood Renewal Program in activities that benefit the local community. It is hoped that this long term investment by the Victorian Government will create a climate for sustained cooperation between service providers, organisations and the community and build exciting places where people want to live.

1 Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service *Strategic Plan 2005-2009*.

2 Vinson, T (1999) *Unequal in Life: the Distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales*

Vinson, T (2004) *Community Adversity and Resilience: the distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and NSW and the mediating role of social cohesion*

Vinson, T (2007) *Dropping off the edge*

Good Shepherd recently sent two delegates, myself and foster-parent Christine Peterson, to the International Foster Care Organisation conference in Hamilton New Zealand on *Fostering our Taonga: Children are our Treasure as are those who care for them*. The conference was attended by over 500 delegates from 30 countries.

Some excellent research was presented at the conference but a highlight of particular interest to Share Care* (Good Shepherd's respite care program based in Collingwood) was some contemporary research promoting respite care as a positive family support intervention. Entitled *Support Care Project – the preventative face of foster care*, this research was conducted by the Fostering Network, United Kingdom's leading charity for fostering.

With the publication of the UK government paper *Care Matters* (Department for Education and Skills, 2006) there is renewed emphasis on preventative services. This paper stresses the need to support children on the edge of care, and 'support care' (as respite care is known in the UK) is well placed to meet this challenge.

Support Care sits at the interface of fostering services and family support services, offering a preventative intervention that avoids families becoming separated. Planned, time-limited, short breaks away from home are combined with family support work to promote change. Resources offered are flexible and tailor-made to suit family circumstances. They provide day, evening, and overnight or weekend breaks that meet the needs of individual families, giving practical intervention when it is needed most.

A three-year evaluation of UK Support Care programs found that:

- > the majority of referrals were for children aged 10 or over
- > most young people lived in single parent households and one in 10 lived with grandparents
- > the most common resource requested by families was weekend care, including overnights (45 per cent of cases studied); and
- > the most common reason for referral was parent and adolescent conflict.

Foster care programs constantly struggle to recruit sufficient full-time carers and they rarely have the capacity, within existing mainstream carers, to offer planned short breaks to children and families in need. Support care

offers the option to foster part-time and is attracting a new population of carers who no longer wish to foster full-time. Support carers are recruited, trained, assessed, approved and reviewed in similar ways to mainstream foster carers. The majority (88 per cent) of carers in this study were in paid employment and, more often than not, within a related profession that brought them into contact with children and families in need. Support carers' payments constituted one of the largest variations found between the schemes in the study – fees ranged from 25 to 200 pounds per 24-hour period.

The study found that a wide range of tasks is undertaken by support carers including:

- > providing 'time out' for children and families
- > working to set routines and boundaries
- > contributing to social work assessments
- > supporting children through school exclusions; and
- > employing a shared therapeutic approach in working with children.

Agencies throughout the UK are being strongly encouraged to develop support care services as an integral part of their preventative services to support children and families in need and avert family breakdown. My eventual hope is that here in Victoria, the government will provide programmatic funding for similar respite care services in every local community throughout the state.

* Good Shepherd is indebted to the City of Yarra for their ongoing funding of the Share Care program since 1983.

References

Cosis Brown, H., Fry, E. and Howard, J (eds) (2005) *Support Care – how family placements can keep children and families together* Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing

Greenfields, M and Statham, J (2004) *Support Foster Care – developing a short-break service for children in need* London: Institute of Education, University of London

More details are available on the Fostering Network website www.fostering.net and on the Support Care website www.supportcare.org

