

Brotherhood Comment

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BROTHERHOOD
of St LAURENCE

Helping people
build better lives

A regular update from Social Action and Research

The real challenge begins now

The re-elected Howard government faces a number of key policy challenges in its next term. Some of these received attention during the campaign, but others were unfortunately absent.

The election campaign was notable for its focus on the issue of asylum seekers. The present policy of sending recent arrivals to camps in South Pacific island nations is neither logistically sustainable nor financially prudent. It is not morally defensible, and is still subject to legal challenge. It will not change the reasons the refugees are fleeing their homelands. We need to respond in a humanitarian way to their upheaval from homes, separation from family and flight from persecution and terrorism.

However unintentionally, the focus on asylum seekers also had the effect of raising the ugly spectre of racism in Australia, and has widely been seen as divisive and damaging to our social fabric. The government has a major responsibility to ensure that racism is not left to fester.

Employment received too little attention, despite the rise in the unemployment rate to 7.1 per cent during the campaign. We face a world economic downturn which will inevitably affect the Australian economy. As we have seen during the last two recessions, unemployment can rise very quickly – it is starting already – but it takes many more years and much more concerted effort to reverse this trend.

We need a proactive strategy to avert, or at least limit, the forecast rise in unemployment. This jobs creation strategy should recognise

the need for well-paid, secure, full-time positions. It should be integrated with additional spending on health, education and social services physical infrastructure, and investment to repair the environment.

Another two issues did not receive any media attention at all, but remain of great concern. Breaching—penalising of unemployed people receiving social security payments for failing to meet certain requirements—is sadly out of control. Both the incidence of breaching and the level of financial penalty require serious reform. The independent review of the breaching system will propose practical strategies to address this issue, and we hope that the government is receptive to its recommendations.

Finally, the crisis in housing affordability—for both renters and purchasers—is likely to have long-term consequences if it is not addressed soon. A recent Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) report showed a dramatic rise in the percentage of low-income households paying more than 30 per cent of their earnings for housing. A national housing strategy is urgently needed to ensure access to accommodation for people of all income ranges. Linking this with infrastructure investment could have the added benefit of jobs creation.

Clearly the new Howard government has the responsibility to give the lead in addressing these important issues. It is the responsibility of all parties in the Parliament, however, to work towards constructive and creative solutions that take account of the needs of the most vulnerable members of society. Genuine cooperative effort at the

national political level would encourage people in other spheres of activity to find common ground and work together for a fairer Australia.

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In this issue

This issue of *Brotherhood Comment* was compiled against the backdrop of the federal election campaign, as the Brotherhood urged political candidates to commit to policies supportive of a fairer future for all Australians. Stephen Gianni's front page article presents some challenges for all parties in the new parliament.

A major focus of the Brotherhood's message is the need for job creation. Stephen Gianni reports on recent research into labour market trends, and Helen MacDonald reflects on the role of *JOB futures*.

Ainslie Hannan addresses the hot topic of Australia's response to asylum seekers, while Stephen Ziguras points to the problems of

penalising unemployed people who fail to meet the myriad requirements imposed on them.

The Brotherhood's major campaign to engage Australians in building an Australia free of poverty is foreshadowed by Sally Jope and Chris Gill.

Sonya Holm and Tim Gilley report on an innovative host-home respite program and the impact of fees on older women's use of Community health services, respectively.

Serena Lillywhite provides an update on the Ethical Business Project, contributing to understanding of critical issues affecting workers and manufacturers in China and Australia. Janet Taylor outlines the challenges in protecting the health of all Australian children.

In addition to checking the new resources about poverty and related issues on page 15, watch out for the Brotherhood's newly designed web site early in 2002.

Your feedback

Finally, we're in the process of reviewing the format of *Brotherhood Comment*. We'd welcome your comments about its appearance, language/style and contents, and suggestions for future directions by email or another convenient means (see below).

Website redevelopment



The new website design for the BSL will be launched in February 2002.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is currently undertaking a significant project to redevelop its website. We will retain the same web address, www.bsl.org.au, but a new 'look and feel' will be launched early in 2002.

We have carefully considered the composition of our different audiences, and are developing a site which will cater to their diverse information delivery needs.

The new site will continue to offer contact details for all the Brotherhood's services, as well as all the latest research reports and poverty line information, and it will include a gateway to a secure server for online donations, as well as online feedback and subscription forms. It will also provide a snapshot of the organisation, and showcase some of our innovative work.

Accessibility and ease of use are two of the main factors which have driven the redevelopment of the site. While it will feature high quality and contemporary visual design, the site has been built to load quickly on older equipment.

Site navigation will also be significantly improved in the new site, and significant

space on the front page will be devoted to regularly updated content which is unique to the web.

We recognise that a website is always a work in progress, and have set out to build a solid foundation which will enable us to expand and grow in the future. Comments on the new site will be welcome.

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Brotherhood Comment is published three times a year by the Social Action and Research Division of the Brotherhood of St Laurence. The Brotherhood of St Laurence works for the well-being of Australians on low incomes to improve their economic, social and personal circumstances. It does this through direct aid and support, and by providing a wide range of services and activities for families, the unemployed and the aged. The Brotherhood also researches the causes of poverty, undertakes community education and lobbies government for a better deal for people on low incomes.

Labour market myths unravelled

The labour market in Australia is undergoing, and has undergone, massive restructure over the last quarter of a century. Australia's taking its place as a global economy has meant that our economic policy frameworks have undergone significant reform. Tariff reduction, labour market deregulation, privatisation and tax reform are some significant examples. The book *Work rich, work poor: Inequality and economic change in Australia* edited by Jeff Borland, Bob Gregory and Peter Sheehan mentions these reforms at the beginning of a compelling analysis of the growth in the labour market over the past decade.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence, Australian Council of Social Services, the Strategic Industry Research Foundation, the Australian Institute for Family Studies and the Productivity Commission were industry partners with Victorian University of Technology, Melbourne University and the Australian National University in an Australian Research Council funded project that culminated in the book, launched in September 2001.

During the last decade the Australian public has become used to the arguments put by governments, both Labor and Liberal, that unemployment rates somewhere between five and ten per cent are somehow excusable, given the growth in participation rates. The labour market has indeed grown by an extra 1.1 million jobs, an increase of 17 per cent. The connection is continually made between growth in the labour market and an ultimate reduction in unemployment rates. This is in itself a tenuous argument, given our current unemployment rate of seven per cent on the back of the past decade of labour market growth.

Putting that aside, the book goes on to analyse in detail where the growth has been. Eighty-seven per cent of the 1.1 million net jobs growth has been in jobs paying \$500 per week or less (under \$26,000 per annum). Almost all of the jobs growth has been in part-time or casual employment, with a

Table 1: Employment by job type 1990–2000

Job Type	Employment ('000s)		Change in Employment, 1990-2000		
	1990	2000	No. ('000s)	Per cent (%)	Share (%)
Permanent	5317.3	5598.4	281.1	5.3	24.9
Casual	1248.3	2097.3	849.0	68.0	75.1
Full-time, permanent	4855.0	4803.9	-51.1	-1.1	-7.2
Full-time, casual	314.3	647.3	333.0	105.9	29.3
Part-time, permanent	438.8	794.5	355.7	81.1	32.1
Part-time, casual	957.5	1450.0	492.5	51.4	45.8
Total	6565.6	7695.6	1130.1	17.2	100.0

Source: Borland et al. 2001 table 1.4, p11. Used with permission. Data source: ABS *Employee earnings, benefits and trade union membership* 1990 and 2000 issues, Cat. no. 6310.0.

net decrease in full-time permanent positions of 51,000. (see table 1)

While the analysis shows that average earnings for full-time employees increased by 25 per cent over the 1990s, this hides the true nature of the change. Managers received a 41 per cent average increase while labourers' average earnings increased by only seven per cent.

The changing shape of Australia's economy is causing shifts in the types of work that are available in the labour market. The strong manufacturing, agriculture and mining industries that were cornerstones of Australia's economic growth and significant generators of jobs are in decline and can no longer be relied upon to generate well-paid, secure employment in the same way. Australia, like other economic high achievers is looking to communications, tourism and service industries to drive jobs growth and replace our reliance on 'old industries'. However the high profile big business failures this year — One.Tel, HIH Insurance and Ansett — should cause some fundamental questioning of the capacity of the so called 'new industries' to deliver job security.

Work rich, work poor indicates that the labour market is distributing income increases unequally and only generating new jobs that are poorly paid.

Traditionally the concept of poverty applied primarily to those who could not find work. The 1990s in Australia have seen significant change in this regard. The changing shape of our labour market has meant that it is no longer the case that the only people in poverty are those on welfare. The working poor are clearly with us.

The policy development processes in Australia must now deal with not only the availability of jobs but also their security, longevity and remuneration levels. Strengthening the industrial relations system and corporate legislative frameworks may hold some solutions if we as a nation wish to ensure prosperity through work.

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Reference
Borland, J, Gregory, B & Sheehan, P (eds) 2001, *Work rich, work poor: Inequality and economic change in Australia*, Centre for Strategic Economic Studies, Victoria University, Melbourne.

Seven *deadly* laws to prevent refugees seeking asylum in Australia

People seeking refuge in Australia have been silenced while they are demonised by key political figures on both sides of parliament. Forty-eight hours after the September 11 tragedy, Australia's then Defence Minister Reith asserted that the vulnerable men, women and children coming by leaky boat to our shores were not in fact asylum seekers, themselves fleeing from terrorism, but were somehow potential terrorists.

How has this been able to happen? Logic is no match for fear. September 11 made many people afraid. Tragically, it seems fear is a stronger emotion than compassion. To borrow Peter Mares' imagery, after hearing the news from New York and Washington, the impulse for many of us was to shut the curtains, bolt the doors, draw the family close in a comforting embrace and hide our heads. As Mares observes, 'the corollary at a national level is to close the border, to keep out all who appear foreign'. (Mares 2001, pp.22,23)

As Australians we have allowed the events of September 11, the MV Tampa and the needs of asylum seekers to be interwoven. It has caused us to brand people as different. This has serious implications, not only causing damage to our national psyche but clearing the path for seven laws to be rushed through parliament with bipartisan support, severely limiting refugees' ability to seek protection in Australia.

New legislation

The *Border Protection (Validation and Endorsement) Act 2001* gives the Government power to prevent asylum seekers from landing in Australia (and thereby triggering Australia's protection obligations under the refugee Convention). It allows authorised officers to order ships' removal from Australian territorial waters. The officer may use reasonable force. There is no liability for an officer who does not comply with the law and uses unreasonable force. The officer's powers apply even if the master of the vessel does

not receive the order to leave Australia's waters or does not understand it. Furthermore even if the vessel reaches an 'excised' Australian territory (see below), its passengers are barred from making a valid application for asylum in Australia.

The *Migration Amendment (Exclusion from Migration Zone) Act 2001* removes the Cocos Islands, Christmas Island, Ashmore Reef and Cartier Reef from the Australian 'immigration zone'; in effect, it seeks to exempt parts of Australia from international law. Any person arriving at these Australian territories will no longer have the right to seek refugee status there. The question remains, what will Australia do with asylum seekers who do land? Indonesia is unlikely to take them back and Australia's ability to offer financial incentives to islands like Nauru surely has limits. Desperate asylum seekers are likely to take the risk of trying to land on remote parts of the Australian mainland.

The *Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone)(Consequential Provisions) Act 2001* provides certain powers for dealing with 'unlawful non-citizens' entering an 'excised offshore place', including taking them to a declared country in certain circumstances without this being classed as immigration detention. It also prohibits certain legal proceedings relating to the entry, status and detention of these people.

It defines a new Australian visa regime, with a hierarchy of rights, intended to deter further movement from, or bypassing of, other 'safe' countries. Those who make their claims in refugee camps and are approved by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) get permanent residency. Those who are settled in Australia from transit countries (such as Indonesia) may be granted a temporary protection visa, but will not be eligible for the grant of a permanent visa for four-and-a-half years. Those who reach Australia, apart from any directly fleeing

persecution within their country of origin, will only be eligible for successive temporary visas.

The *Migration Legislation Amendment (Judicial Review) Act 1998*, passed only in 2001, removed access to Federal and High Court judicial review of administrative decisions. Two other acts prevent class actions in migration matters before the Federal and High Courts; and remove provisions for a court to correct a legal error or an illegality touching the decision in an asylum seeker's case.

The *Migration Legislation Amendment Act (No.6) 2001* effectively redefines and restricts interpretations of the Refugee Convention and imposes other limits on people applying for refugee status. The Act allows the Minister or his delegates to draw adverse inferences about asylum seekers, for example about those who do not have identity documents, or who refuse to swear an oath or make an affirmation about the truth of their statements. It also prevents a person from applying for refugee status if another member of their immediate family has already had an application rejected. Whilst this may appear reasonable, in practice it may unfairly disqualify family members from protection, simply because the initial application was made (for example) by the father as cultural head and protector of the family, instead of by his wife or daughter who may have a stronger claim of persecution.



Considering the consequences

In our response to asylum seekers, what is needed is the courage to show understanding and compassion. It is crucial, in an atmosphere of fear, for politicians as our elected representatives to consider carefully the messages and impact of legislation they introduce. There must be time for scrutiny by the parliamentary Legal and Constitutional Reference Committee and for public debate, especially concerning legislation which has enormous human rights implications. Instead, Australia now has a series of legislative measures which severely limit the right of people to seek asylum in Australia. The consequence for Australia's reputation is significant; the consequence of the implementation of these laws for individuals may be deadly.

(For further analysis of these laws see *Migration Action* vol. XXIII no.2, October 2001; the author gratefully acknowledges assistance from the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, Amnesty International and the group Justice for Asylum Seekers)

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Research project

The Ecumenical Migration Centre is currently working with Social Action and Research to document the experiences of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants who are excluded from services and income supports available to other members of the Australian community. This information will then be used to raise public awareness and to influence government policy.

The need to listen

It becomes easier not to question, not to hear the desperate voices on the seas, the voices of anguish like that expressed at the Preston memorial service, in November 2001 in Melbourne, for 150 children, 80 women and 120 men drowned. A young mother clutching her baby at the memorial service read her poem connecting her experience with those drowned. It challenges Australians to ask whether we value human lives differently:

Rest in Peace

Her smile's fresh as the morning breeze
Her giggle is so divine

I cuddle her in my arms and feel
Her soft cheek against mine

Despite the warmth and love inside
A chill spreads down my spine

I recall a child drowned at sea
An infant just like mine.

* * * *

The world wouldn't offer a place for him
An illegal asylum beggar

'Wait' they said, 'till your turn is come
No matter how much you suffer'

'No matter if bombs rain down on you
Or hunger is your supper.'

Perhaps inside the cold, dark sea
He found a place much better

Today, the child rests in peace
And lives in our conscience forever.

Saba Hakim

Paying the penalty? Flaws in the breaching system

Breaches are the penalties incurred by unemployed people receiving social security payments for failing to meet requirements. There are two categories: administrative breaches (e.g. for failing to attend Centrelink interviews or to respond to a letter, and activity test breaches (e.g. for failing to keep job search records or to attend job interviews). Penalties have always been part of the social security system, but the number of breaches has increased dramatically. There were around 120,000 breaches in 1997-98, rising to an estimated 349,000 in 2000-01—an increase of 189 per cent.

The severity of penalties is also of concern. For the first activity test breach in a two-year period, a single unemployed adult with no children loses \$837, and for a third activity test breach, \$1431. These amounts exceed the fines for crimes such as assault (ACOSS, 2000). People who are breached make increased demands on material relief agencies, and some may even be forced into crime to survive (Jones 2001).

Why is it happening?

Several factors have contributed to the increase in breaches. Probably the most important is the new requirements imposed on people to continue to receive payments, beginning with mutual obligation and Work for the Dole in 1998. Over the next two years, additional requirements included job seeker diaries, employer contact certificates, and the Preparing for Work Agreement. Moses and Sharples (2000) showed that the rise in breaching coincided with the new obligations.

The introduction of the Job Network in April 1998 added another layer of complexity for unemployed people. Job Network providers are required to report clients to Centrelink if they fail to respond to a referral, or reply to correspondence, in effect becoming part of the regulation of the social security system. The funding mechanism for Job Network provides an indirect incentive for providers

to report breaches, because they cannot place new clients onto their caseloads until existing clients are removed—by the person gaining a job, leaving due to ‘irretrievable breakdown of the relationship’ or being breached. In addition, there is little real choice available to people in selecting their Job Network provider; if clients feel that the service they are referred to is unhelpful they may fail to attend.

Leaving aside the limitations of unemployment statistics, the decreasing number of officially unemployed people (from almost one million to around 680,000) over the last decade means that a greater proportion of current job-seekers receiving income support payments face substantial barriers to employment. These barriers may include homelessness, low levels of literacy, physical or psychiatric disabilities, or substance abuse. Assessment procedures at Centrelink—completion of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI)—depend on people disclosing these personal details in order to set up reduced reporting arrangements, and in the case of homeless people, to document alternative contact methods (such as through an agency).

Many young people distrust Centrelink and are concerned that personal information could be used against them. The procedures for completing the JSCI lack privacy, often being conducted within earshot of other clients, and interviews are often very short. Consequently, many people do not provide information requested, especially in one interview with a stranger.

As a result of these processes, a person’s JSCI score may be out of date or inaccurate. In turn their activity test requirements may be inappropriate so they are more likely to default on obligations and incur a breach. They may also be referred to an inappropriate type of employment service.

Young people receiving help through the Jobs, Placement, Education and Training (JPET) program run by the Brotherhood of St Laurence may be also referred automatically to Intensive Assistance, because Centrelink lacks adequate records services funded by departments other than the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business. If they do not attend, they are breached, requiring substantial negotiation by JPET staff with Centrelink to have the breach withdrawn.

Clients have to put up with long waits on the phone or in Centrelink offices to pass on information. Many also feel that their contact with Centrelink is impersonal, especially over the phone, because they speak to a different person every time they ring.

What needs to happen?

Reducing requirements leading to breaching

First, the requirements of unemployed people need to be revised and simplified. Additional requirements might be justified when work is plentiful (although that has not been the case over the last decade) but seem unreasonable when the labour market is contracting. There are more than 60 different categories for breaching, many of little or no relevance to supporting someone to find work. Recent research suggests that two forms of activity testing in

particular—job seeker diaries, and employer contact certificates—may be counter-productive (Tann & Sawyers 2001).

Improving the information held by Centrelink

Assigning a Centrelink contact person for every client would enable better information collection. Some Centrelink offices have introduced such a system, which clients feel offers a more direct and personal relationship. Providing greater privacy in interviews, and conducting the assessment process over a several interviews would help make people feel comfortable in confiding very personal information. This may require additional staffing.

Early intervention

Since breaches are meant to be a 'last resort' and the fines for second and third breaches are very high, the client's circumstances should be reviewed after the first breach, if not earlier. This might include checking the information held by Centrelink, whether clients know what is required of them and the consequences of failing to comply, and how other agencies, especially Job Network providers, might assist in preventing future breaches. Easier reassessment of clients is also necessary, since the first assessments are often inaccurate.

Advocacy support

Anecdotal evidence suggests that up to a third of breaches are overturned when appealed to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal (SSAT). However many people do not appeal, either because they do not know they can, they do not know how, or because they feel they will not get a fair hearing. Advocacy support (through agencies such as welfare rights centres) is a key mechanism for providing information and assisting people to appeal. Presently such services are inadequately funded to meet demand.

Conclusion

While breaches probably need to be a part of the social security system, the need for compulsion to ensure that people are 'genuinely' seeking work is grossly overstated. Research conducted through the Department of Family and Community Services concluded that:

In summary, it appears that the basic activity test requirement to look for, and accept, paid work is met by the vast majority of unemployed people... This, combined with the fact that most people would seek work regardless of Centrelink monitoring, indicates that on the whole, unemployed people want to work and are taking steps to find it. (Tann & Sawyers 2001, p.13)

The current rates of breaching are excessive and the severity of the penalties imposes enormous hardship. Ironically, the present system may be multiplying the barriers which unemployed people face in finding work, since they must spend untold hours passing on more and more information, getting Centrelink to fix its mistakes, and finding resources to replace those lost through breaching. Reform of breaching procedures would make the social security and employment assistance systems fairer and probably more effective.

(This article summarises the Brotherhood of St Laurence's submission to the Independent Review of Breaches and Penalties in the Social Security System. The full text is available at www.bsl.org.au; more information about the review is available at: www.breachreview.org)

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Towards an Australia free of poverty

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is undertaking a three-year national communications and community mobilisation campaign for an Australia free of poverty. This campaign has been made possible by a grant from a private charitable trust, and will build upon the findings of the Understanding Poverty project (1999–2001).

Much current social and economic policy seems to assume that voters are willing to tolerate increasing inequality and poverty in Australia — by trading high levels of unemployment, job insecurity, casualisation and low wages for low inflation and low interest rates. Research from the Understanding Poverty project (Johnson 2000b) challenges this assumption.

Community attitudes

Although decision-makers and journalists generally believed that the Australian public did not see poverty as a major issue (Taylor 2000a; Muller 2000), our research also found:

- 56 per cent of Australians think poverty in Australia is a major problem and a further 39 per cent describe it as a minor problem.
- 80 per cent are concerned about the adverse impact of poverty on Australia's future.
- Poverty that affects the very young, the very old, the sick and the disabled is considered unacceptable, and families in need should be a priority.

While Australians agreed they had become more accepting of poverty, they attributed this to:

- the hidden nature of poverty in Australia;
- the growth of economic rationalism and its prevalence in the media; and
- their own sense of hopelessness or powerlessness.

Johnson found the community did not feel well informed about poverty. Understandings of poverty were diverse and influenced by socio-economic factors, social awareness and education (2000b p.17). Lower-income earners were generally more prepared to nominate structural causes for poverty, while those on

higher incomes were more likely to blame individual characteristics.

Market research

The next stage of the Understanding Poverty project involved small-scale qualitative market research (Johnson unpublished) to test communication activities which might engage members of the wider community.

This research found that the word 'poverty' itself is associated with a condition that is more likely to exist overseas. Despite this, the market research found no other word capable of embracing the emotional and physical dimensions of that state of disenfranchisement that is poverty. The study also confirmed that people are becoming more concerned with their own survival in an increasingly competitive society.

Nevertheless, people *are* prepared to consider the problem of poverty. Study participants indicated the communication approaches that are likely to be effective:

- Keep it simple.
- Don't blame me, but do encroach on my comfort zone.
- Provide information that is easy to unravel and difficult to dispute.
- Human stories always say more than statistics, but be selective in their use.
- Tailor information for different audiences.
- Be positive and provide solutions.
- Involve the audience ("*this is what you can do*").

Messages that worked best included:

- One in ten Australians are living below the poverty line.
- Poverty isn't a crime; ignoring it is.
- Poverty affects every one of us.
- How would you feel if you couldn't give your child three meals a day?
- An Australia free of poverty will mean a better future for everyone.
- Imagine an Australia free of poverty.
- The poor are always with us.

The study also supported 'describing' poverty rather than 'announcing' it. People want to know more about causative factors, such as unemployment, education and housing. This information, probably best presented as 'real' stories, can arouse curiosity and lead them to understand the nature of poverty in Australia.

The campaign for an Australia free of poverty

These findings and additional market research will inform the Brotherhood's emerging communications and community mobilisation campaign.

Campaign strategies will include some or all of the following:

- a revised marker or indicator of poverty in Australia (a 'social barometer');
- collaborative networks with other stakeholders in the not-for-profit sector to involve them and their members in awareness raising, advocacy and social action on poverty;
- informal activities and curriculum engagement with secondary and post-secondary students, especially those involved in shaping culture (media, journalism, writing, political and social sciences, graphic design, visual and performing arts);
- partnerships with business, and the development and promotion of the social impact auditing third of 'triple bottom line' accounting; and
- communications and marketing activities and materials targeting identified

Innovative host-home respite care

community segments with messages encouraging action on poverty and inequality

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The recent evaluation of an innovative host-home respite program for elderly people with dementia and their carers has found that its distinctive features are enjoyed by the care-recipients and valued by their carers. One carer described it as 'a brilliant, wonderful service'. Another carer whose mother attended the program commented on the homelike environment, saying, 'It's the simple things in life that matter'.

The program is run by the Brotherhood of St Laurence through the Banksia Centre in Carrum Downs. It was initiated to provide another respite option, especially for groups of people who might be unable to use or participate in existing respite programs. In this program, respite is provided in small groups in a care-worker's home, in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, like a group of friends meeting for the day. The host-home program is based on the Family Day Care model and a similar service that is operated in Western Australia by the Alzheimer's Association. It is currently the only example of this model of respite operating in Victoria.

Respite care and dementia

There has been a shift over the last 20 years away from institution-based care, towards care provided in the community. Respite is acknowledged as crucial for carers to remain in their role and for the care-recipient to stay in the community for longer. As the population ages, and more Australians fulfil the role of carer, the demand for respite options covering a range of needs is likely to grow. For those caring for a family member with dementia, the caring role is particularly demanding, so access to appropriate respite can be even more important.

Need for flexible programs

Effective respite services for people with dementia need to take into account the constantly changing needs of both the carer and care-recipient. This means an integrated, coordinated and flexible approach to service delivery. Centre-based respite programs can be

unsuitable for some elderly people, especially for people experiencing communication and language difficulties.

The evaluation found that the smaller-group format of the host-home program enabled care-workers to choose activities which suited the care-recipients' interests and skills. The informal atmosphere encouraged people to take part in conversation and to feel 'at home'. The personal qualities and training of the staff were important in its effectiveness, as was the provision of transport to and from the care-recipients' homes. Carers noted that their relatives were happy to attend, and consequently the carers themselves felt more at ease.

Recommendations

The learnings from this innovative program operating through Banksia suggest some critical issues if the model is to be implemented elsewhere. These include the issues relating to staff skills, the necessity of the program operating from a larger centre, and preventing cost shifting onto staff.

Host-home respite care may offer benefits for people from a non-English speaking background and indigenous Australians. This report recommends further trials with such groups.

A strong recommendation of the research is that the Federal government establish standards for host-home programs. This will avoid potential problems relating to inadequate supervision or exploitation of staff. The establishment of standards would also encourage high quality care, helping to ensure that the success of the program operated by the Banksia Centre could be replicated.

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The full report, *It's the simple things that matter*, will soon be available at www.bsl.org.au. Alternatively, contact Deborah Patterson (03) 9483 1386

Doing business ethically: lessons from China

The Brotherhood of St Laurence's Ethical Business project is a direct result of the acquisition of Mod-Style, a commercial enterprise that imports and wholesales optical frames. At the time of acquisition (July 2000), Mod-Style was sourcing the majority of its frames in China, and the Board of the Brotherhood wanted to ensure that consideration be given to the labour and environmental conditions under which frames are made in China. An advisory group has been established with representation from the Brotherhood executive, the ACTU, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad, the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Body Shop, and the University of Melbourne.

Labour conditions in China

China's adoption of a 'socialist economy with market characteristics' has resulted in immense changes to the social and economic landscape. In 2000, 10 million jobs in the state sector were cut, adding to the urban unemployed of over 25 million (China Labour Bulletin 2000). Human rights abuses persist, with political, labour and religious activists regularly imprisoned and executed.

In the absence of freedom of association and effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining (ILO 1998) in China, it is difficult and at times dangerous for workers to raise grievances and have their disputes settled through independent channels. Consequently cheap and compliant labour is a key factor making China a highly desirable location for both wholly foreign owned factories and multinational manufacturing processes.

Since 1995 China has made rapid progress in labour legislation; however, the system has become increasingly complicated and has largely been ignored by factory managers and government labour departments (Chan 1995). The vast majority (80 per cent) of manufacturing workers in southern China are young single migrant women from poor rural areas. These women are seen as more compliant, less likely to raise grievances and better suited to repetitive, low-skilled jobs (Chan 1998).

Many employment practices violate women's rights; and the harsh conditions mean they often depart the factory by 26 years of age with few savings or skills, and many have health problems as a result of poor occupational health and safety practices (Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee, 2001). Many factories do not meet their legal obligations in social security entitlements for workers, and the practice of imposing fines and withholding pay at some factories, coupled with the need for identification papers, makes it difficult for workers to leave a factory with harsh working conditions.

The Mod-Style supply chain

Considerable work has been done to map Mod-Style's 21 suppliers, most of which are based in China. This has involved visits to seven factories in Guangdong Province, southern China, to investigate factory conditions and to build relationships with factory managers.

All factories visited are wholly Hong Kong owned, yet are located across the border. Generally conditions were better than expected, particularly with regard to the physical environment and occupational health and safety. Most factories were light, clean and well-ventilated, with fire evacuation plans and easily accessible doors and windows. Dust masks were available but not regularly worn. There are issues of concern relating to wages, hours and social security entitlements. For example, workers do considerably more overtime than local labour laws permit, and bonus and overtime payments are irregular. Subsequent discussions with several factory managers have identified a commitment to improvement and greater conformity with local labour law.

Collaboration for change

Efforts have been made to gain the support of the Hong Kong Optical Manufacturers' Association to encourage greater compliance with Chinese labour law and industry-wide improvements in labour and environmental conditions at factories. The

Association has limited capacity, however, to influence compliance. Similarly, attempts to encourage brand name buyers who deal with the same factories to apply alternative mechanisms to improve conditions have been met with a limited response, most choosing to pursue voluntary codes of conduct.

The project has established a good relationship with local non-government organisations (NGOs), namely the Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee and the Asia Monitor Resource Centre, both internationally recognised for their work in labour rights. A draft proposal for a joint community development project and model of engagement is under consideration.

Achieving change: a model of engagement

This project is committed to developing a model of engagement and worker empowerment, as an alternative to voluntary codes of conduct. Codes of conduct are difficult to monitor and adherence is easily falsified. They are generally prepared without worker involvement and provide no real mechanisms for dispute resolution; and they are increasingly acknowledged as having little impact on working conditions. A new approach that encompasses education and training is considered to be the most effective method of achieving ongoing and sustainable improvements in labour standards.

This model has two dimensions:

1. The establishment of a community development project in southern China, implemented and managed through a partnership between the Brotherhood and Hong Kong based NGOs.
2. The building of relationships with factory managers to encourage factory visits by NGOs and the delivery of occupational health and safety education and training.

Applying the learnings

This model is being designed so that findings will be relevant to NGOs, academics and the corporate sector. Within the Brotherhood, the learnings from the Ethical Business project are already being applied to the retail sector to support ethical trading principles at Hunter Gatherer (the Brotherhood's vintage and contemporary clothing outlet) and the Community Store (which will make household white goods available to low-income earners through a system of micro-loans).

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Little gain, more pain:

The impact of podiatry and physiotherapy fees on older women

'Sometimes I've been in so much pain, I've had to get to the physio and just let food go, because if you're in a lot of pain, all you want to do is get rid of that pain.'
(June, who suffers from osteo-arthritis)

The Brotherhood has been concerned for some time about the adverse effects of fees on the use of services by people on low incomes. Even quite small charges can make the difference between whether people use a service or not. When money is tight, people on low incomes are forced to make choices: do they buy food, pay the electricity bill, pay for a school excursion or visit the dentist? The Brotherhood has undertaken research concerning pharmaceutical costs, primary and secondary education, dental health, and increased charges for utilities. Not only have increased costs in each area had a direct impact, but also they may have a cumulative effect, with families facing multiple financial pressures.

Fees for health services

In 1998 the opportunity arose to undertake some research in three inner Melbourne Community Health Centres on the impact of the imposition of fees for previously free podiatry and physiotherapy services. In 1997 the Victorian Government had introduced fees ranging from \$6.50 per visit to recovery of the full cost of a range of services, as a standardised schedule in all Community Health Centres (Department of Human Services 1998). In the research we spoke to 38 older women, since these form the major user group for podiatry and physiotherapy.

The research report presents a dismal picture of reduced service usage, consequent increased pain and reduced mobility and people going without necessities at times to pay fees (Hawkes & Ford, 2001). The direct experiences of these people are recounted in a forthcoming *Changing Pressures* bulletin.

The findings of this small piece of research are consistent with the results of research undertaken by the North Yarra Community Health Centre (Davis & LaRocca 1999), and with a survey of members undertaken by the Victorian Healthcare Association (1999).

Brotherhood call for change

The Brotherhood will be calling on the Victorian Government in their next Budget to abolish fees for Health Care Card holders for these and other services provided by Community Health Centres, and to reimburse the Centres for any consequent loss of revenue. We are presently approaching other organisations to support this call, which is line with Victorian Healthcare Association (2001) policy.

The Brotherhood acknowledges the generous financial support of the Victorian Women's Trust for this research.

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Caring for *all* our children's health

Most people would agree that an 'Australia free of poverty' would be a nation of healthy children. In spite of significant improvements over the last century, there is some way to go before all Australian children enjoy the health services and social conditions that a wealthy 21st century nation should offer to future generations.

This article summarises key findings from the author's chapter in a planned text *Health, Social Policy and Communities* (Liamputtong & Gardner forthcoming).

Compared with children in many other countries, Australian children have generally good levels of health. They also have good health compared with older Australians and with Australian children of past generations (AIHW 2000). Studying children's health remains important, however, both because some children have significantly poorer health than their peers and because childhood health and health-related behaviours are likely to influence the future health of adults.

Death or mortality rates are widely seen as a key measure of children's health. In Australia at the beginning of the 20th century, more than one in ten children died before the age of five, most from infectious illnesses such as diarrhoeal diseases. This rate decreased rapidly in the 1920s with improvements in sanitation, water and milk supplies and continued to decrease after the 1950s with the introduction of antibiotics, improved perinatal care and mass vaccination. The infant mortality rate was 103.6 per 1000 in 1901, falling to 19.5 per 1000 in 1961 and to 5 per 1000 in 1998. The Indigenous infant mortality rate, however, was still 18 per 1000 in 1998 (AIHW 2000, pp.342-3,368).

Overall child death rates are now very low and are mostly associated with conditions modern medical care cannot affect. Injury remains the leading cause of death among Australian children aged 0-14 years (AIHW 2000, p.187).

While overall death rates are low and infectious diseases are less prevalent, an increase is reported in 'complex' diseases including asthma and juvenile diabetes—both lifelong illnesses requiring complex treatments (Stanley 2001). In 1995, 16 per cent of children 0 to 14 years were reported to have long-term asthma (AIHW 2000, p.187). Increases have also been reported over the 1980s and 1990s in autism, behaviour problems and learning disabilities. However, some of these increases may reflect rises in parental concerns and changing fashions in diagnosis (Stanley 2001): the debate about the medicalisation of attention deficit disorder is an example (Levy 2001).

Some groups such as refugee children and Indigenous children experience health conditions which are quite rare among the majority of children.

Refugee children may arrive with residual damage from prior infectious diseases or malnutrition—health problems with which few Australian health professionals are trained to deal. Some refugee children carry the emotional scars of witnessing or being subjected to torture and trauma, which can be manifested in a range of behaviour difficulties (Sims et al. 2000). There has been recent public concern about the health of children of asylum seekers. Research on refugees who have been in detention in Australia while their status is determined indicated that their physical health was undermined by detention experiences, post traumatic stress disorder symptoms and bureaucratic problems (Briskley 2001).

Infant mortality among Indigenous babies is three to four times higher than among non-Indigenous babies, and there are similar differences of mortality for 1 to 14-year-olds. Rates of hospitalisation are higher among Indigenous children than among non-Indigenous children in every age group. Indigenous children are reported to have higher rates of asthma (AIHW 2000

pp.189,212,214). They also have high rates of hearing loss, preventable eye disease, gastrointestinal disease, skin disease and anaemia (Vimpani 1989); and worse dental health (Moon et al. 1998). Petrol sniffing among older primary school children is a problem in remote areas (Vimpani 1989). While there is concern about obesity increasing among Australian children overall (Magarey et al. 2001), malnutrition remains an issue for Indigenous children, especially in remote areas. For those children a number of severe but preventable health conditions often interact.

Change for better or worse?

The answer depends on what we measure. There have been decreases in child death rates, and in infectious diseases, but an increase in and/or high levels of conditions including asthma, mental health problems and the survival of children with severe disabilities. The health of Indigenous children remains, on average, very much worse than that of non-Indigenous children. A range of studies, including the Brotherhood's Life Chances study, link poverty and low family income to poor health of children (Taylor & Macdonald 1998; Mathers 1995; Moon et al. 1998).

Reducing health inequalities

Tackling inequality as a whole is the best way of tackling health inequalities according to a recent report on child health by the British Medical Association (BMA 1999). It calls for a combined package of social, economic and

health policies which are centred on the child. In Australia there is a variety of evidence of poorer health among children in low-income families. That the differences seem less extreme than in other countries is a reason to affirm the strengths of the existing health system and to ensure that socioeconomic disadvantage does not increase. The health of Indigenous children, however, requires urgent and wide-ranging action. We also need to be alert to the particular health issues for refugee children.

Given the diverse factors influencing children's health, a broad policy focus is required across many sectors. To give just a few examples: transport policies are needed to reduce air pollution contributing to asthma, to reduce road deaths and to facilitate access to services; 'family friendly' employment policies to reduce family stresses and facilitate the care of ill or disabled children; income security policies to ensure families can meet the costs of all children; and support for reconciliation and compensation to address the dispossession of Indigenous communities.

Health services for all children

The support and extension of Medicare as an effective universal service is a high priority. Currently the Medicare system faces the threat of replacement by a two-tiered health system, with one tier for the well-off with private health insurance and a residual public health system for the rest. The Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme is also under pressure, and changes could limit even further the affordability of medication for children in low-income families.

The importance of early childhood services is being rediscovered. Will any new services be available to all children? The role of school health and dental services needs revisiting to discover which children miss out when screening is reduced or fees are introduced and to explore the potential role of schools in mental health issues.

Other factors to consider are culture and language (what has happened to our free interpreting services?), cost and, given Australia's size, transport and location.

Future health issues for children

Possible factors affecting future child health range from the impact of greenhouse gases to new infectious diseases. What seems relatively certain is that increases in social and economic inequality are likely to bode ill for the health of the children of the 'have nots'.

The way ahead

Australia's children are relatively healthy, but the policy challenge is both to keep the majority healthy into the future and improve the health of the groups with poor health, in particular Indigenous children.

To meet these challenges we need:

- health policies to ensure ready access to quality health services for all children;
- a wide range of social and economic policies to protect and support children and their families; and
- ways of developing 'health promoting' communities.

It is essential to keep health issues, including prevention of ill health, at the forefront of policy making in an era of service 'reforms' including reductions of public expenditure. In addition to their research and policy work drawing attention to wider health issues of children, organisations such as the Brotherhood can play a role in developing health promoting communities.

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Recent submissions

The Brotherhood puts forward its views when it believes that it can make a considered contribution to a better understanding of the needs of low-income Australians, based on its research or policy analysis or its experience in providing services.

Significant submissions or statements released over 2000–2001 include:

- Inquiry into the Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (More Jobs, Better Pay) Bill (Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Legislation Committee)
- A safety net that helps build fulfilling lives (Reference Group on Welfare Reform)
- A safety net that allows sole parent families to build fulfilling lives (Reference Group on Welfare Reform)
- Interim report of the Reference Group: Brotherhood of St Laurence response (Reference Group on Welfare Reform)
- Parliamentary Inquiry into Substance Abuse (Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs)
- Public education—the next generation (Contribution to review of public education in Victoria)
- High care residential aged care facilities in Victoria (Ministerial Advisory Committee on Nursing Home Regulation)
- Submission to the Ministerial Review of Preschool Services in Victoria
- Submission to the Centrelink Rules Simplification Taskforce

- Submission to the Independent Review of Breaches and Penalties in the Social Security System

These submissions are generally available for the cost of copying and mailing, usually \$9.

Please contact the Brotherhood Library and Information Service on (03) 9483 1388, e-mail: library@bsl.org.au. Or visit our website at www.bsl.org.au

Reflections on JOB *futures*

As a member of JOB *futures*, the national employment network of community-based organisations, the Brotherhood delivers services in the job network to people who are unemployed. JOB *futures* was formed in 1996, initially with 13 members, mainly in New South Wales and Victoria. Currently it links some 35 agencies with about 160 sites nationally.

Through its representation on the Board during 2001, the Brotherhood has continued its involvement in and support for JOB *futures*. Our commitment to JOB *futures* commenced with Jeremy McAuliffe, former manager of the Brotherhood's employment services, who was the first chairperson of the Board and a strong proponent of a national network of community-based agencies delivering employment services in the job network.

The year has been dominated by Board, National Office and member organisation focus on performance and achievement of outcomes across all three service types—Job

Matching, Job Search Training and Intensive Assistance. The systematic, strategic approach to improving outcomes adopted and supported throughout JOB *futures* has been driven by the Department of Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB) system of performance ratings. The outcomes and ratings achieved by service providers will inform the DEWRSB's future allocation of contracts in the third Job Network contract.

Other issues addressed by the Board during 2001, which will influence the longer-term viability of JOB *futures*, were connected with the nature and extent of membership. Among other initiatives, a secure financial situation for the company was achieved through resolution of the question of loan repayments to members and agreement to broaden membership through provision for associate membership. Finalisation of questions of membership will allow JOB *futures* to undertake new business activities with a wider range of organisations in geographic and specialist service areas where there are currently no members.

The hallmark of JOB *futures* service provision in the job network is its national coverage with local expertise. A strategic goal of the organisation is 'to achieve recognition as the employment services provider best connected to its local communities'. This remains a challenging but important goal for JOB *futures* and for its members in the broader policy context that has favoured larger, often centrally administered organisations and promoted competition between them.

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New information on poverty, unemployment and social justice

The following are among the latest significant acquisitions of the Brotherhood Library:

Anglican Church of Australia 2001, *The distribution of work and wealth in Australia: report of the taskforce of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia*. Anglican Church of Australia, Sydney.

Antonetti, E & Horn, M 2001, *Gambling the home away: a study of the impact of gambling on homelessness*. Hanover Welfare Services, Melbourne.

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Information services for the public

The Brotherhood of St Laurence library offers a specialist focus on the issues of poverty, unemployment, aged care, social policy and welfare, taxation and housing. It can also provide, for the cost of copying and mailing, up-to-date information sheets on poverty and unemployment as well as information on the Brotherhood, its services and its publications.

The library is open to students, community groups and members of the public from 9am to 5pm, Tuesday to Thursday. Books can be borrowed by the public through the inter-library loan system (enquire at your regular library).

To find out whether we can help you with the information you require, ring the Library on (03) 9483 1387 or (03) 9483 1388, or e-mail library@bsl.org.au. Further information can be found at www.bsl.org.au.

Life Chances study

The Life Chances study is a unique longitudinal study undertaken by the Brotherhood of St Laurence to explore the impact over time of low family income and disadvantage on children. The study commenced with 167 children born in inner Melbourne in 1990. Their families have been interviewed several times—most recently in 1996, when the children, as 6-year-olds, were in their first or second year of school. We are now preparing to re-interview the families and children, now aged 11.

For stage 6, the research questions include:

- What is the impact of family income and other factors on the children's development and well being as they complete primary school?
- What is the impact of persistent low family income on the children and what factors moderate this?
- What factors contribute to low income and changes in income for these families?

An important focus is to explore what the families see as the critical issues and influences on the children over their lifetime.

The Life Chances study is generously supported by the Bokhara Foundation, the H. & L. Hecht Trust, the Kingston Sedgfield (Australia) Charitable Trust and the Department of Family and Community Services.

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National engagement project

This project has just entered an exciting new phase. In November 2001 the Brotherhood of St Laurence Board signed off on Social Action and Research's proposal for a Trial Study to Explore Australian Values.

Socrates said, 'To be truly alive, we need to be self aware and fully conscious of the meaning and implication of the values we embrace and the virtues we admire'. The Brotherhood sees this Trial Study as a way for the organisation to make sense of the rapid changes which are currently occurring in Australian society, particularly whether and how Australians see themselves 'getting involved' in their communities.

The Trial Study will examine Australian values on two levels. It will explore the links between an individual's values, attitudes and behaviours, such as why there is often an uncomfortable gap between what we say we believe in and how we actually lead our lives; and it will investigate people's views on the future of Australia, the sort of place they believe Australia should become, any obstacles they perceive, and which policies could be effective in achieving that future Australia.

Like the earlier *Understanding Poverty* study, the Trial Study will use in-depth interviews and focus groups to draw people out on poverty and disadvantage. However, its focus will be on the underlying values which shape

people's attitudes, choices and responses to policy. We also want to learn how to engage Australians from all walks of life in a *broad conversation* about the future of Australia and how we should help to shape it.

The findings will allow the Brotherhood to sharpen its policy, advocacy and communication strategies. They will also inform the next stage of planning for the national engagement project.

The findings of the Trial Study will be published in March 2002. Look out for a comprehensive review in the next edition of Brotherhood Comment!

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