



# Australians in Poverty

**a resource book**

**Brotherhood of St Laurence**



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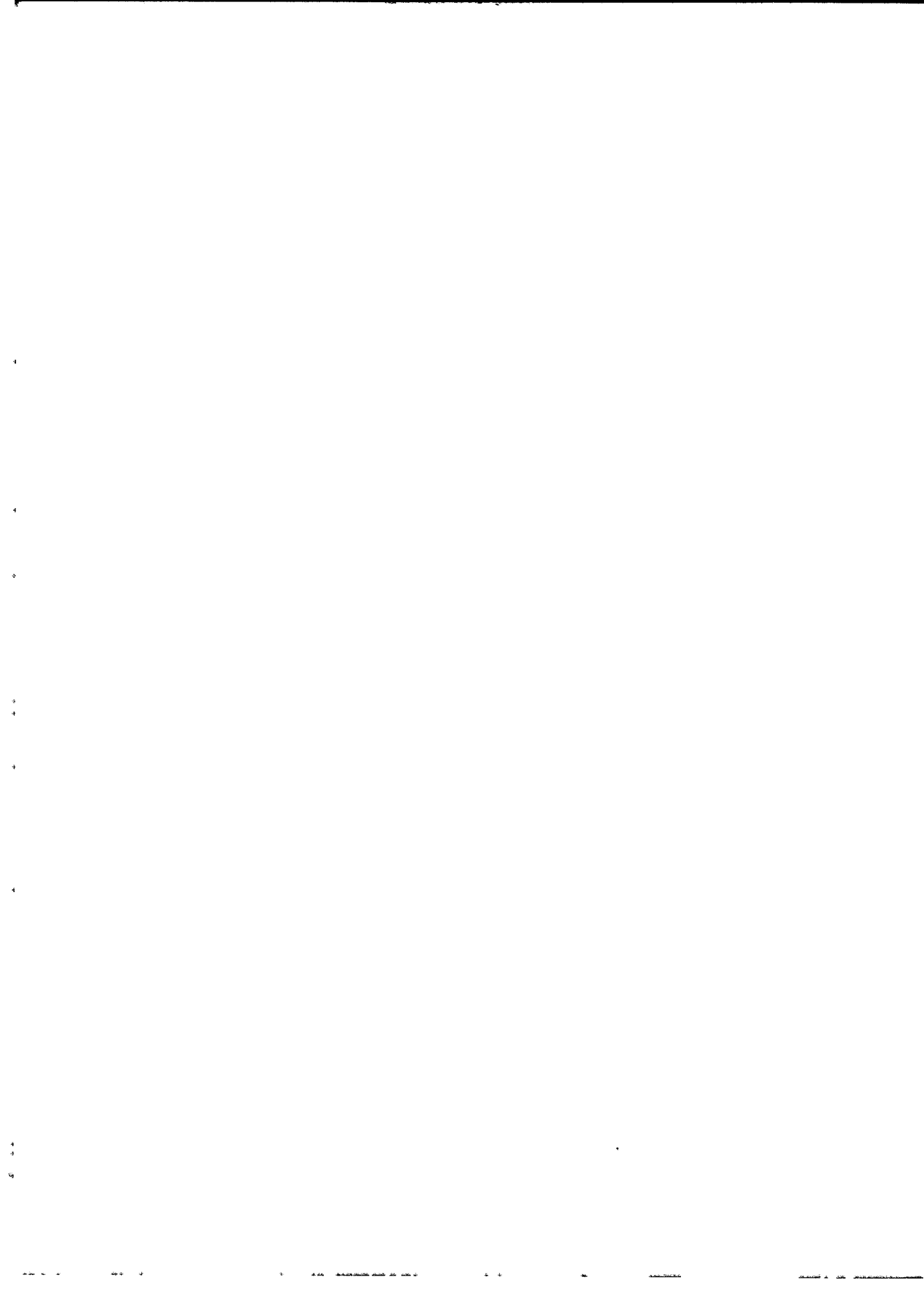
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Brotherhood of St Laurence

Melbourne 1990

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# I N T R O D U C T I O N

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Inequality is translated into poverty when people's incomes are so low that they are unable to purchase, or have access to, those resources which affect their life chances and opportunities.<sup>1</sup>

You can't give your kids what your next door neighbour just takes for granted.<sup>2</sup> (A parent on a low income)

Mum came up to the school and I translated for her. She said we didn't have enough for excursions and all the school uniforms. When the other kids were going on about me, a teacher explained that my family didn't have the money.<sup>3</sup> (Migrant family with six children)

For a long time, people have thought of Australia as a country where everyone has a "fair go", a full and equal chance. But this is more a vision of the future than a reality of the present. Poverty in Australia is widespread. Some do get a "fair go", but many others are missing out, both materially and socially. The divide between these two groups is growing.

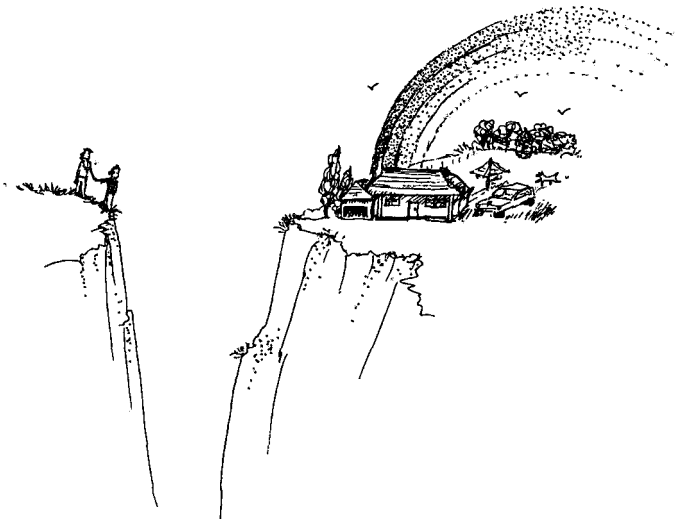
For those missing out, the standard of living is below the average. Their quality of housing, the amount of food they can afford, or the degree to which they can participate in social and recreational activities falls well below that which average Australian families expect and mostly enjoy. One way to get some idea of this average Australian standard of living is through the images of advertising. Advertising presents us with a steady stream of images; images of the average Australian family, the average "Aussie kid", the average individual. Cars, recreation, ample food, good health, friends and comfortable homes are always part of these images.

*An estimated 500,000 (one in eight) Australian children will still live in poverty in 1990.*

*One in eight Aboriginal children aged five to nine years do not go to school.*

*The number of Aboriginal children continuing on to senior school is three to five times lower than for the community as a whole.*

*High Income families spend: 40 per cent more on housing, fuel and power, 45 per cent more on food, 46 per cent more on transport, 67 per cent more on clothing, and 70 per cent more on recreation than low-income families.*





The lifestyles of many Australians is a far cry from that presented in advertising. Those excluded from work, and those working for low wages or receiving low levels of income-support payments are deprived of access to an adequate basic income, essential goods, and supportive services. Many are disadvantaged by gender, age, ethnicity, or physical or mental disability.

While the distribution of Australia's resources is inequitable, people will continue to miss out on what others both expect and take for granted. The great divide between the average living standard and that of families in poverty will remain.

*In 1986 54.5 per cent of single parents and their children lived below the poverty line. 88 per cent of sole parents are women.*

*Nearly 20 per cent of children live in a family which depends on a pension or benefit as its sole source of income.*

### An Australian standard of living?

In your own words, write down in your notebook the elements which make up what you think is a basic standard of living in Australia — all the things which are essential for everyday life for you and your family.

During the next week, collect examples of advertisements from both print and electronic media which depict Australian families. Make a list of all of the elements of everyday life which they reveal, e.g. telephone, playing space, refrigerator, fresh food, car, dental care, social activities such as sporting events. Share your lists.

Now divide the class list into two categories:

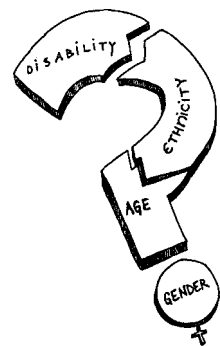
- Material Items
- Opportunities to Participate

Divide into groups and, using your lists, discuss the following questions.

- 1 What factors influence people's access to the things on your lists?
- 2 Which is the most important factor?
- 3 Which things on the lists do you think people in poverty would not have access to?

Report to the class on the conclusions you came to in your discussion. Is there a wide range of views in the class?

Look again at the "standard of living" definition you wrote at the beginning of this activity. Does it need revising?



Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Harris, P (1989) *Child Poverty, inequality and social justice*, Child Poverty Policy Review No.1, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, p.2.
- <sup>2</sup> Brotherhood of St Laurence project "Community services and practices for disadvantaged women", unpublished material.
- <sup>3</sup> Trethewey, J (1989) *Aussie battlers: families and children in poverty*, Collins Dove/ Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, p.70.

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# EXPLAINING THE DIVIDE

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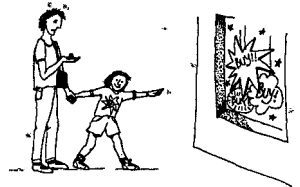
## What is poverty?

Relative poverty means not having enough money to afford a decent standard of housing, diet and health care. And not being able to take part in employment, education, recreation and social activities.<sup>1</sup>

My children have to wear gumboots in the summer as they have no runners.<sup>2</sup>  
(Mother of three children, husband employed full-time)

Some Australian people live in absolute poverty, living without basic survival needs. This is the kind of poverty experienced by homeless young people, or by Aboriginal children deprived of adequate nutrition and health care. Poverty in Australia, however, is more often relative poverty; relative to the average standard of living.<sup>3</sup> The notion of relative poverty is based on a much wider definition of "basic needs" which includes a range of factors — material needs, the need for goods and services, and the need to participate in activities connected with work, education and leisure.<sup>4</sup>

Poverty is not only a low level of income. It is a lack of choice, a lack of access and a lack of power. As well as powerlessness, poverty means missing out on opportunities and resources, on an adequate standard of health care, education and food.



## Defining poverty

Look again at some advertising images of the "typical" Australian family. Keeping these in mind, write five sentences each beginning, "A person is in poverty if . . .".

Divide into groups and work together to choose five sentences with which you all agree. Share your agreed sentences with the rest of the class. How do your's compare with other group's. Can the class agree on five sentences?

Return to your groups. Make a list of all of the things that you think may be the *effects* or *consequences* of poverty, e.g. poor housing, boredom, hunger, social isolation. When you have finished your list, discuss these questions.

- 1 Are all the effects negative?
- 2 Are some worse than others?
- 3 Can you group the effects into different categories?

Share your conclusions with the class.

Now try to write your own definition of poverty. Write it in your notebook and keep it for later reference. You may want to alter or add to it as your study progresses.

### Extension

Choose one of the main effects of poverty which you identified in your group work. Write a short story, report or play which depicts how poverty has affected a family or individual in this way. For instance, you could show how lack of money can harm personal relationships; how lack of resources prevents an individual from improving themselves or reaching their full potential.

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### Notes:

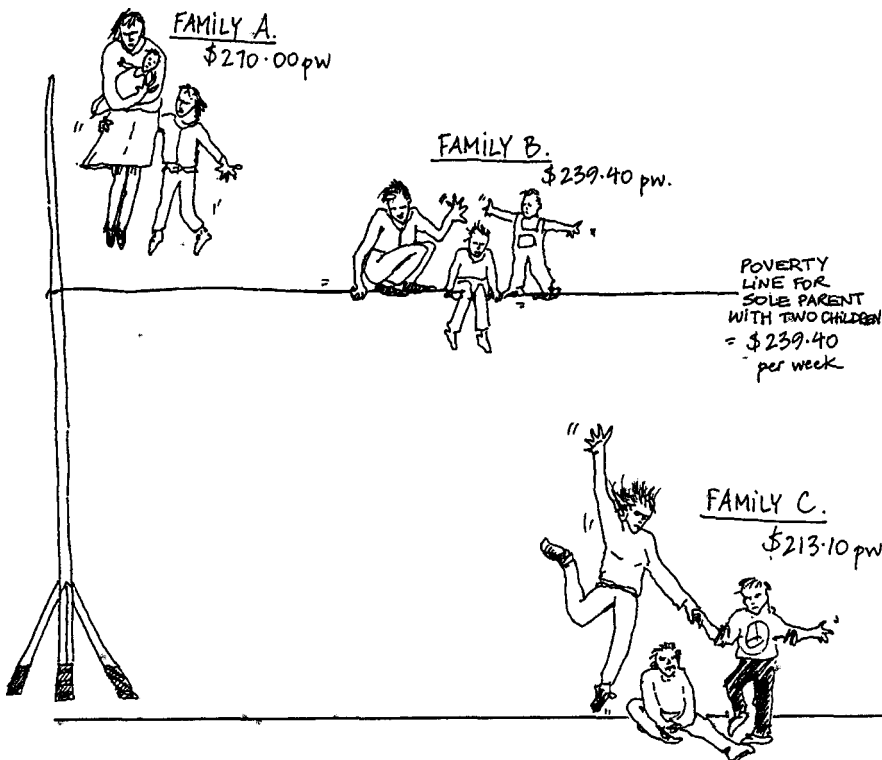
- 1 Trethewey, J (1989) *Aussie battlers: families and children in poverty*, Collins Dove/ Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, p.9.
  - 2 Trethewey, J (1986) *When the pressure is really on: interim report of the Income and Expenditure Study*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, p.33.
  - 3 Trethewey, J (1989) *Aussie battlers: families and children in poverty*, Collins Dove/ Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, p.5.
  - 4 Trethewey, J (1989) *Aussie battlers: families and children in poverty*, Collins Dove/ Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, pp.8-9.
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# MEASURING POVERTY

## What are the poverty lines?

To live in poverty in Australia is to have a living standard well below that which is commonly experienced or accepted. A means of measuring what is an unacceptably low living standard and how many and what kinds of Australians live in poverty is needed in order to work out how poverty can be best combated.

This was a task tackled by the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty (1972-1975) conducted by Professor Ronald Henderson. The Poverty Inquiry (as it is often called) calculated how much money a family required to cover basic living costs and have an "austere" living standard. The amount varied according to the number of dependents in a household (the number of children and non-earning adults) and whether the head of the household was working. These calculations have come to be known as the Henderson Poverty Lines. They are updated each quarter in line with national income movements by the Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research and the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research in Melbourne. So, as Australian living standards increase, so too does the poverty line. (Likewise, if living standards fall, the poverty line reduces too.)



At a particular time, the poverty line for a sole-parent family with two children is \$239.40 per week.

Family A, with an income of \$270.00 per week, has an income which is \$30.60 higher than the poverty line level. Family A can be said to be living above the poverty line.

Family B, with an income of \$239.40 per week, has an income which is equal to the poverty line level. Family B can be said to be living on the poverty line.

Family C, with an income of \$213.10 per week, has an income which is \$26.30 lower than the poverty line

The poverty line has become a useful dollar benchmark against which to measure how families are faring. As such, it has become an accepted means of measuring the extent of poverty in Australia. Reference is often made to the number of Australians with incomes "below the poverty line" or the amount of money a person or family's income falls short of the poverty line.

## How are the poverty lines calculated ?

The poverty lines were developed by the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty. They were calculated from two data sets on income and expenditure. Family income data was collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1973. Incomes for 1972-73 and weekly incomes for the most recent week were recorded. Income was defined to include earnings, pensions and benefits, superannuation, rent, scholarships, dividends, business income and family allowance, after deducting effective income tax paid.

Information about expenditure also formed part of the calculation of the poverty lines. However, there was no available Australian data on expenditure. The Commission therefore based its calculation on American data from the 1954 calculations of the Budget Standard Service of New York. These estimated the amount of money an individual needed to spend to meet scientific requirements for good nutrition, health and "social standards". The number of people in a family, the age, sex and work status of individuals was taken into account. Food, clothing, education, recreation, transport and housing costs were included.

From these two data sets the Commission established a benchmark income. This benchmark specified the disposable income required to support the basic needs of a "standard" Australian family — a working man with a dependent wife and children. The living costs of such a unit equalled 56.5 per cent of current average earnings, and this became the poverty line for this family type. Poverty lines for each other family type were calculated against this benchmark. For instance, a single person with no children requires less income to have a living standard equivalent to that of the standard family, and a couple with four children requires more income. These calculations, which estimate the amounts of money different family types require to have the same living standards, are called equivalence scales.

The poverty lines are regularly updated. This is done by using an index of per capita household disposable income. A detailed description of the calculation and use of the poverty lines is published in the Australian Economic Review, 4th Quarter, 1987. Quarterly data is supplied by the Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research.

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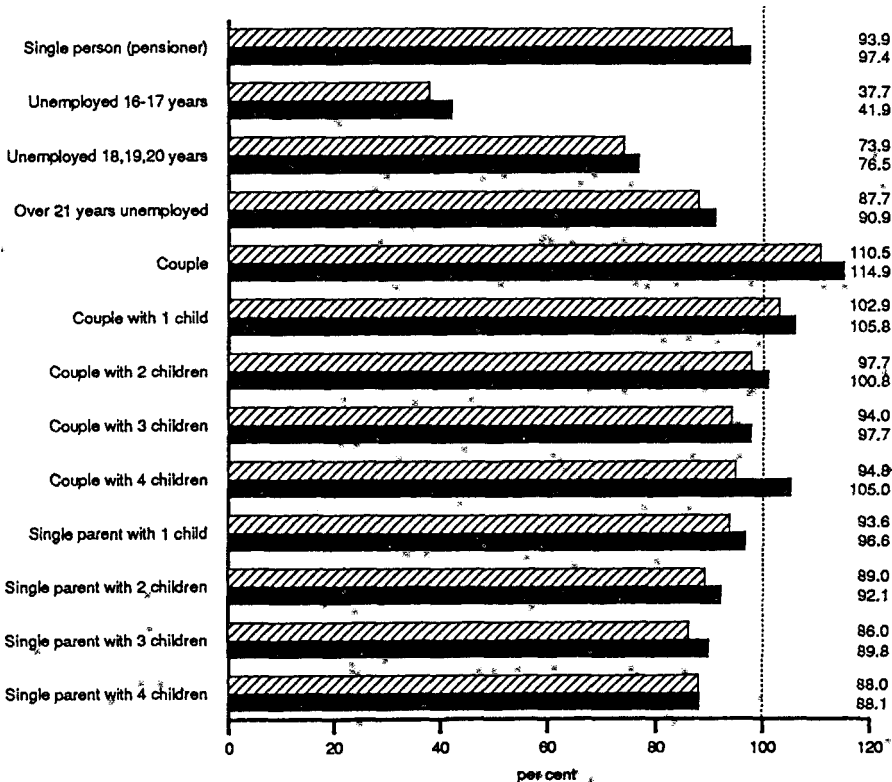
### Analysing poverty line data

Look at the graph which shows pensions and other benefits as a percentage of the poverty line for 1987 and 1989. Look carefully at all the data provided in this graph and then write answers to the following questions.

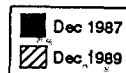
- 1 Were the recipients of pensions and other benefits better off in 1987 or in 1989? Explain your answer.
- 2 Which groups received above-poverty-line income in 1987 and below in 1989?
- 3 Which group's income changed the most from 1987 to 1989?
- 4 Which group do you think was better off in 1989? Why?
- 5 Which group do you think was worse off in 1989? Why?

When you have finished writing your answers, discuss them either in small groups or with the whole class. Is there much variation in response to questions 4 and 5?

**Pensions, benefits and family allowances as a percentage of the poverty line for various income units: Dec. 1987 and Dec. 1989**



*This chart shows, for example, that for a single-parent with one child the Sole Parent's Pension plus Allowances for children was 96.6 per cent of the poverty line. In 1989 this income was 93.6 per cent of the poverty line. As the poverty line is updated, these proportions change.*





## How are the poverty lines used?

Poverty lines may be put to a number of uses:

- showing how the incidence and level of poverty has changed over time;
- assessing the relative incidence of poverty among different social groups in order that assistance may be directed towards those groups whose needs are greatest;
- assessing the impact of government policy on the alleviation or increase of poverty;
- showing how wider economic and social change is having an impact on families and individuals in poverty;
- providing a means by which people in poverty can be identified so that a clear picture can be used in arguments for social and political change;
- identifying and understanding the causes and problems of poverty;
- providing a standard of adequacy for social security payments and a benchmark for determining means tests.

## How adequate are the poverty lines?

Many arguments have been put forward in order to draw attention to the inadequacies of the poverty lines in the measurement of poverty.

### *Disadvantages*

#### a Income units

The calculations for the poverty lines were not based on research into actual need in Australia. For instance, the housing component used in the Henderson poverty line, derived from the New York equivalence scale, has been criticised as being inappropriate to today's conditions in Australia. Henderson himself recognised the problems of using equivalence scales which had been developed in America in the 1950s.

Omissions and weaknesses have been pointed out in the statistical data used in subsequent calculation of the poverty lines. The data provided on young people and the self-employed is not considered to present an accurate picture of their financial well-being. It therefore prevents an unrealistic assessment of how many people in these groups are living in poverty. The data also excludes the institutionalised population.

#### b Data used

There are a number of limitations in working with an income-based measure. Poverty lines are generally based on an income definition of poverty, concentrating on material aspects. There is a risk of reducing a very involved concept to a simple measure and thereby obscuring its



social complexity. There is also a risk of further simplification in implying an exact cut-off point below which people are considered to be in poverty and above which they are not. Henderson himself argued that poverty should be seen as occurring over a range of incomes and should also be recognised as a concept which is qualitative, one which needs to highlight and convey deprivation in all areas of life in Australia — health, housing, employment, education, training, leisure, social support, child-care and so on. A definition of “poverty” based purely on notions of material deprivation could work against a desire for social change. If such a definition becomes the driving force of policy, emphasis may be on income support measures at the expense of policy development in other areas.

Poverty measurement therefore needs to be consistent with the definition of poverty as relative deprivation — as “missing out”. This kind of broad measurement would not only be based on income data but would include information about lifestyle and degree of access to necessary services. Defining just what is “necessary” to “ordinary living” could also be based on community perceptions — what people themselves see to be vital to the current living standard. For example, frequent participation in recreational activities, or being part of a firm social network are two factors which could be taken into consideration.

#### c Unit of measurement

The poverty lines assume a particular income unit in which income is shared. This unit is a breadwinner with dependent spouse and children. With such an income unit as the standard, other income units are examined as variations from this standard using equivalence scales. Defining income units in this way assumes that income resources are equally distributed amongst family members. It also assumes that a male-headed family with dependent wife and children is the norm. Both these assumptions are questionable. Focusing more on individuals as income units would give a more accurate count of people in poverty.

#### d Austerity

Henderson himself described the line that was chosen as so austere as to make it unchallengeable. It is set in terms of the ability to achieve a minimum standard of living, a standard which might be questioned in the light of qualitative notions of deprivation. A less austere line may give a more appropriate picture of poverty in Australia: one which represents a minimum more clearly aligned with the standard of living which Australians themselves perceive as the “average”.

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### *Alternatives*

The poverty line's definition of poverty in terms of income is important in our society, which places so much stress on consumption. It is clearly relevant in determining social security payments which do not presume to alleviate any deprivation other than the financial. However, such a definition is narrow and ought not to be a substitute for the sociological analysis of inequality. Poverty measurement which is largely reliant on income data needs to be complemented by qualitative studies which attempt to identify what it really means to live on a low income and how people move in and out of poverty.

Using other poverty measures can broaden the view offered by the standard poverty lines. Here are some examples.

- The "poverty gap" is an alternative measure which is sometimes used. This measure focuses on the distance between actual incomes of people in poverty and the relevant poverty lines. The sum of the differences across all groups of people in poverty gives an aggregate poverty gap.
- Comparisons can also be made with after-housing-costs poverty lines, by deducting housing costs from income. Rental costs are removed from the income of renters; mortgage repayments, land, water and sewerage rates from the income of house buyers; and land, water and sewerage rates from the income of home owners. Such a measure may give a more accurate assessment of relative poverty when families pay different amounts, in different ways, for housing which is essentially the same. For instance, a family paying a high proportion of its income in rent is shown to have fewer resources left to meet its other needs compared with a similar family that has low housing costs because of home ownership. Use of the after-housing-costs poverty line in this way would highlight groups experiencing the greatest difficulty. However, the result of comparing people's incomes after they have paid for their housing with the after-housing-cost poverty line is that many low income people who own their own homes are no longer considered poor.

### *Advantages*

Despite acknowledged deficiencies, the poverty lines are still of great importance in the measurement of poverty in Australia. Identifying need is a vital part of working towards improved resource allocation and political and social change. As yet there is no satisfactory alternative measure. It is therefore crucial to use existing measures critically and to supplement them with alternative and more qualitative studies which give a broader picture of people in poverty. The cost of not doing this is that groups of people in poverty will remain unidentified and uncatered for.

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## Living on poverty-line income

Find the poverty-line data for the current year. The school or local library may be able to help you or your teacher may supply you with it. Identify the group in the pensions and benefits table which is most like your family.

Make a list of the features of your daily life which you regard as absolutely essential, e.g. food, housing, clothing, (entertainment?). Try to calculate the average weekly cost of these for your family. Compare this figure with the amount which the poverty-line data provides. Your original figure will probably be much higher.

Now decide what you will do without or change in order to reduce your costs to the level of the poverty line. How successful are you? How do you think the changes you suggest would affect yourself and your family?

### Sources:

- Child poverty: the facts* (1989) Promise the Children Action on Child Poverty campaign, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- Oxley, C (1989) *Measuring poverty — The use of poverty lines*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne (unpublished).
- Trethewey, J (1989) *Aussie battlers: families and children in poverty*, Collins Dove/Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- Saunders, P & Whiteford, P (1989) *Measuring poverty: a review of the issues*, Report prepared for the Economic Planning Advisory Council, Canberra.

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# M A K I N G   E N D S   M E E T

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A low-income family's own story powerfully conveys what poverty and inequality can mean in Australia.

I'm a sole parent, and I have been for nearly two years. I've got three kids, 9, 11 and 13.

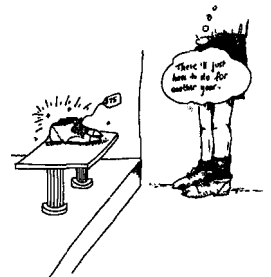
I used to start work at seven in the morning. I'd get up, get the kids organised, then they'd sit here and watch TV until whenever and they'd go off to school on their own. I worked 'til three in the afternoon and if I had to work overtime, they'd go to the after-school program. But I'd try to be home before they got home. They'd have to walk, no matter what the weather. During the holidays I'd have to pay to have them looked after and that would take at least three-quarters of my wage. But, it was either that or, if you're lucky enough, relatives took them. But, you can't ask people "can you have the kids while I work"? It's not fair on them. The worst thing they ever did was bring in four lots of school holidays, as far as I am concerned. I was working, trying to cope with the kids, run the house and keep everything together and that was too much. So I quit and went on the pension and I've been in poverty ever since.

It's been pure hell on the pension, I've done nothing but fight with the social security. I don't get maintenance because of the house. I made a deal with my ex-husband, he wanted the house sold and I didn't want it sold because I couldn't see anywhere that I would be able to afford to live. I'd never get another house again. So the deal was, I bought him out for \$10,000 so he paid no maintenance for five years. That was better than losing the house. So I just survived on the pension. I'm still paying off the mortgage.

I went through the Ministry of Housing, they brought out a scheme called "Priority Homes", where a woman can buy out her own mortgage. Whereas before that you couldn't, and you can't get any help from the banks, once you're on a pension no one wants to know you. It took seven months for that to come through. I had a bank wanting to sue me because I was that far behind. But, we finally got it all sorted out in July this year and now I'm just managing to survive. The Ministry's pretty good and I pay \$74 a week. My pension at the moment is \$180 a week.

I'm known around the neighbourhood as the local lady fix-it man because I do everything. I do odd jobs, I go and mow people's lawns, do their gardens, anything just to survive. I washed somebody's ceiling the other day, that was a thrill! You make ends meet, you have to, you've got no choice.

But, I can't survive this way, I mean, I don't know what others spend but I can't go over a hundred dollars a fortnight for the four of us. That's two dollars per day per person for food. We eat very basic things, thank God for blue and white label food! I just haven't got the money to spend any more. I never buy anything at a milkbar because they're too expensive.



At the supermarket my milk is 10 cents a carton cheaper, the same for bread, etc. So, if we run out of anything it's just tough. You learn where to shop and what to spend on. We eat very little meat, only the cheaper cuts, like on Saturday morning, what they throw out, the quick sale stuff. We eat mainly vegetables because they're about the cheapest thing, except potatoes. I substitute that with pasta or rice, that's a lot cheaper. I used to say I could probably think of a hundred recipes you could do with mince, but you can't even afford mince these days. Meat is a problem, though the kids love sausages and fish fingers, that's handy. But, I don't think they're suffering from it. I mean they're not unhealthy kids, they eat a lot of fruit.

You just do without. I suppose to me it's probably like living through the depression with the way the food was like then. That's what you've got, you do what you can with it and that's the end of it. There's no big splash outs, there's no takeaway, no nothing. There's no money for extra things. Simple things like buying a tub of ice-cream when you go shopping, you have chocolate biscuits, everybody else gets them, mine don't. They don't get pocket money, they don't get lollies, they don't get this, they don't get that. You're left standing there trying to explain to these kids why they can't have these things.

We rely on a lot of other people for secondhand clothes. My weekly shopping consists of going through the pamphlets that come on Sundays and I get a real thrill out of reading them, but that's about as far as it gets — no buying!

The High School uniform this year cost me just under \$500 and it was only basic: two shirts, one jumper, two pairs of school pants and desert boots. They're supposed to wear a spray jacket in the winter (it wouldn't keep you warm anyway). I didn't buy him one, he just wears an old one from home.

If they wear another coat you must write a note about why he's out of uniform (because they class that as out of uniform). He's only got one jumper and if I put his jumper in the wash during the week I have to write a note about why he's out of uniform. It drives me potty, as if you haven't got enough problems, you've got all these little nagging things that come in on you. You sit there scratching your head and you think, "is it worth it"? He's fronting up at the office every other day, "What are you doing in the office? Are you in trouble again"? He's not, it's just that we can't afford the clothes.

His books were \$219. You get an education allowance of course, \$127 twice a year for the one at High School and \$127 each, once a year, for the primary school, so that was a help. But, it's still hard.

This is the so-called free education with no fees. Last year the State School fees were \$57 each for them. It really annoys me. You read in the papers, "now don't pay your fees, you don't have to pay your fees". You try it! You go up to the school and tell them I'm not paying those fees. They can't enforce the fees but, it's what they do to your kids, you really do feel like a second class citizen and that probably gets to you more than anything else.



It's very hard when you can't send the kids on excursions. They've got pressure from school, because the school sends home a note and they say "the grade threes are going on this excursion. It's part of their education and we'll be doing a lot of school work the weeks following that excursion covering this". You think, if they don't go what's going to happen to them, they're going to get left behind because they haven't been on the excursion to start with. So, something else has to go to pay for it. You're robbing Peter to pay Paul.

If it's anything I don't think is educational, like a swimming program, they don't go, it's as simple as that. They've gotten used to it now, they're good like that, they say: "No, I don't really want to go". Or a camp will come up and they'll say "I don't really want to go on that" when you know they really do, but there's nothing you can do about it. I let them have that day off, because it's either that or they go to school and they're put in another grade, usually below their level, and they sit there bored all day. So, I say to them, "Well, you didn't go on the excursion, so you can have the day off with me if you want to". So, they're quite happy with that.

I think the biggest thing about being on the pension or on any sort of welfare is that you are definitely treated like a second class citizen. The point is that you, the person next door, anybody, can be thrown into poverty just like that. That's what they don't realize. It just makes me boil, I suppose I'm a pretty proud person and I don't like people bringing me or my kids down because of our financial situation. I can really get on my soapbox about that.

Going out, what's that? We don't go out, the only time we socialise is with family. I've got a large family, so that's an outing. There's nothing else, there's no pictures, no anything. Maybe once, on the holidays I try to take them out somewhere, it might be MacDonaldis, but that's it. There's nothing else, not even for their birthdays, we don't go anywhere.

They're going to my ex-husband's for Christmas. This is a really bad year for me to get things for them. If I was working I'd probably spend \$100 to \$150 on clothes and one toy each. This year all they're getting is clothes, new underwear, shorts and T-shirts, that's it. That's where your family, I think comes in a lot. They will buy them their toys or whatever. But, I had to explain to them, you know you won't be getting much from me. But, I think the kids cope very well, I think they cope better than me, probably because I feel for them.

I've given up now, I went for an interview last week and I start work in February because I can't handle all this. The kids are that much older now they can manage a lot more on their own, they're not babies. So I got a job working for the government.

The way I look at it I'll have two full-time jobs. I'll go there for eight hours, I've probably got at least three hours travelling a day, then come home and start work all over again. I didn't have any choice about working in the city. I sat the government exam and they rang me and said if I wanted a job the only one I'd be offered is in the department in the city. Jobs around here are

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non-existent, it's a case of who you know or how well you're qualified and I've neither. I've applied a couple of times to the council, that's probably the biggest employer around here, but no good.

I'll probably have to leave no later than seven in the morning to start at eight thirty and I'll probably get home at six or half past six at night. I'll have three kids at school and two in primary, they'll get themselves off to school in the mornings and they'll have to go to an after-school program. Then I'll pick them up, cook tea, do everything same as normal, homework for the three of them (that's the fun time!). They've got the clubs they go to, Youth Group with the church and that, I suppose that will still stay the same, running kids round here there and everywhere. I'll probably do the housework all weekend and the garden and that's about it. But, there is an end to it. One day they'll all grow up, leave home, if not I might! I've got no idea what I'll do with the kids over the holidays, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. We'll probably go back to using the holiday programs. They're not too bad, but I don't think they run every holiday around here, they only run some of the time, but, I don't think there will be any great problems. The kids are a lot older now and they could sort of be split up amongst the family...

## Discussion

- 1 What choices did the writer have? What choice would you make in her situation?
- 2 The writer swapped hardships when she decided to take the pension. Identify some of these.  
As a sole parent working                      As a sole parent on a pension
- 3 What were the disadvantages for the children when their mother decided to leave work? What were the advantages?
- 4 What do you think about her decision to return to the work force?
- 5 Can you think of any solutions for a person in the writer's situation? Should more be done for her by the Government for instance? If so, what?

*Source:* Promise the Children Action on Child Poverty campaign, resource file, Brotherhood of St Laurence (unpublished).

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# WHO DOES POVERTY AFFECT?

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The most vulnerable are sole parent families, families with an unemployed breadwinner, families with a breadwinner on a low wage, or families with a breadwinner who is ill or disabled.<sup>1</sup>

Many Australians are affected by the growing divide and the lack of choice, access and power which poverty creates. Families comprise 49 per cent of Australia's poor. There are also constant movements in and out of poverty. A marriage may end, a family break down or a parent lose his or her job. As opportunities are reduced the chances of children in these families experiencing homelessness or unemployment in adulthood are increased.<sup>2</sup>

## Who does poverty affect?

The above extract from *Aussie Battlers* mentions four groups who are particularly vulnerable to poverty. People within these groups are more likely to experience poverty than people outside these groups.

Draw squares on the board or on large sheets of paper to represent each of these groups. Add more squares if you can think of other groups of people who may be vulnerable to poverty, e.g. large families. There may be people in more than one group. Draw lines between the groups to indicate this.

Divide into groups, each adopting one of the squares. Consider how each of the following might increase the likelihood of the people in your square experiencing poverty.

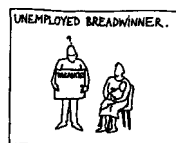
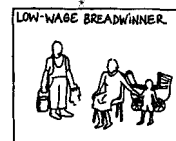
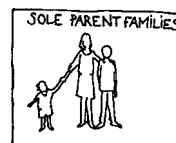
**Race**, e.g. Can they speak English? Are they subject to prejudice? Are any qualifications they may have recognised?

**Gender**, e.g. Are they excluded from certain jobs? Are they discriminated against by banks or other institutions? Do they fear for their safety?

**Age**, e.g. Are they excluded from certain jobs? Does illness reduce their earning capacity? Is transport a problem?

Consider also things like **disability** and **lack of opportunity**, especially in childhood.

When you have finished your group work, try as a class to answer in general terms the question, "Who does poverty affect?"



## Groups and organisations

The following groups and organisations work through advocacy and/or the provision of services to meet the needs of people on low-incomes.

### Rights

- Welfare Rights Unit 193 Smith Street FITZROY 3065 Ph: 416 1111
- Legal Aid Commission of Victoria 179 Queens Street MELBOURNE 3000 Ph: Library 607 0234
- Equal Opportunity Board 10th Floor 356 Collins Street MELBOURNE 3000 Ph: 602 3222
- Tenants Union of Victoria 8 Johnston Street FITZROY 3065 Ph:419 5577 (kit on tenancy issues available)

### Poverty

- Uniting Church Division of Community Services 130 Little Collins Street MELBOURNE 3000 Ph: 654 2488
- Mission of St James and St John 8-12 Batman Street WEST MELBOURNE 3003 Ph:329 6133
- CARE 415-419 Camp Road BROADMEADOWS 3047 Ph:309 3388
- The Smith Family Victoria Ltd 46-48 Cambridge Street COLLINGWOOD 3066 Ph:419 8500
- Victoria Council of Social Service 290 Wellington Street COLLINGWOOD 3066 Ph: 419 3555
- Preston Care Force 239 Murray Road PRESTON 3072 Ph:478 7122
- Anglican Mission to Streets and Lanes 136 Napier Street FITZROY 3065 Ph:417 6122
- Salvation Army 69 Bourke Street MELBOURNE 3000 Ph: 650 4851
- Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau 5 Osbourne Ave SPRINGVALE 3171 Ph:546 5255
- Hanover Welfare Services PO Box 447 6 Riddell Parade ELSTERNWICK 3185 Ph: 523 0935

### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Trethewey, J (1989) *Aussie battlers: families and children in poverty*, Collins Dove/Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, p.11.
- <sup>2</sup> *Child poverty: the facts* (1989) Promise the Children Action on Child Poverty campaign, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

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# EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT

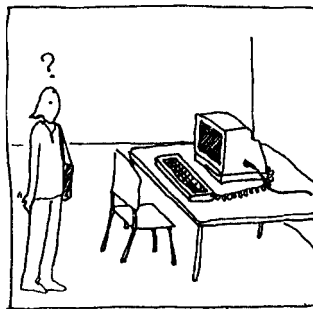
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They think I'm too old. I don't think I'm too old and it affects you. Once you start to think you're too old you're over the hill and that's it. There's no hope. Unemployment is a stigma. It shouldn't be but it is. At my age, you're a dole bludger or you're stupid. Until I was unemployed I'd never been through it. I'd have thought the same — you can get a job easy, there's hundreds of jobs. There's hundreds of jobs in the papers — for skilled workers between the age of 16 and 18 and I don't know any skilled workers between the age of 16 and 18.<sup>1</sup> (A woman aged 39 looking for employment)

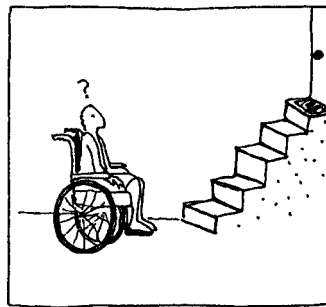
He has a lot of skills but they're not the proper ones or he has the skills but they don't want to pay the money anymore... He needs work to get him out and get a bit of self respect back. He would be a lot happier if he got a job.<sup>2</sup> (A woman speaking of her husband)

Gary Crowe had young children. He earned more money when he worked full time compared to when he received a Sole Parent's Pension. But he was not paid enough to give his family a decent standard of living, to cover the extra costs of work, such as child-care and transport.<sup>3</sup>

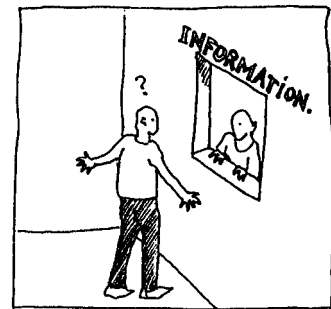
## SOME FACTORS AFFECTING ACCESS TO PAID EMPLOYMENT



EDUCATION & TRAINING



DISABILITY



LANGUAGE

## Identifying unemployment

Over the next few days, look in the newspapers for any articles or advertisements about:

- job creation schemes
- training
- closures
- redundancies
- new businesses
- jobs available.

Collect these and display them on a noticeboard in your classroom. Examine them closely and decide what they tell you about the current employment situation. Use these questions as a guide.

- 1 What types of jobs are the most readily available?
- 2 What types of jobs are the hardest to find?
- 3 How might job seeking be influenced by a person's age, training and place of residence?

Try to find a suitable job for each of the following people.

Person A: Male, aged 54  
Experienced factory foreman  
Back injury  
lives in inner suburbs

Person B: Female, aged 22  
6 months experience as shop assistant  
No training  
Lives in outer suburb, no transport

Person C: Aged 17  
No experience/No training  
Lives outer suburb on train line

When you have completed your job search write a brief report on the jobs you found (if you did) and what you discovered about the availability and suitability of jobs for these people.

There are many factors which influence people's access to paid employment:

- parenthood and the availability of full-time, affordable child-care and after-school care
- age
- standard of spoken English
- work experience
- education, skills and access to job training
- health
- disability

People who are already working in paid jobs can also be limited by these factors.

*Nearly half of all full-time low-wage workers are women.*



## Discussion

- 1 Discuss each of the factors listed above.
- 2 How might each influence a person's chance of gaining paid employment?
- 3 How might they affect a person's freedom of choice about a future occupation?
- 4 To what extent can a person control these factors?

The word "unemployed" suggests "not in use" or unoccupied. What value judgments might this imply about:

- a person who does not have paid employment?
- unpaid work, e.g. child rearing, voluntary work, housework?

Does this person seem unoccupied?

*I get up at six a.m. to clean the flat then get the kids off to school. I cook breakfast, take the kids to school, come home and wash up, then I do any washing they've left around. If I work fast I'll be able to make the beds and do the shopping by mid-morning. When I was working the beds sometimes got left until the evening and I had to do the shopping in my dinner break. These days I go down to the pensioners club – they need volunteers to help at lunchtimes. After that I visit my Mum. She's getting on and needs help with the cleaning and shopping. By three have to be ready to pick up the kids, then I . . .<sup>4</sup>*

What other words can you think of which more accurately describe the situation of people who do not have paid work?

## Employment

Those who attain paid employment may not necessarily escape poverty. People in casual, part time or intermittent work, or people in junior wage positions may be disadvantaged by low wages. Inadequate levels of government income support can reinforce their disadvantaged position.

***In September 1989, 32 per cent of families receiving the Family Allowance Supplement were receiving at least one full-time wage.***

## Discussion

What jobs do you think are low paid? Discuss the working conditions of some of these jobs.

Why do people take low-paid work?

Can low-paid workers do anything to improve their situation?

## Unemployment

Unemployment is one of the main causes of increasing poverty in Australia. The more people there are who cannot find work or who are retrenched from their jobs, the more families there are who suffer hardship because they have insufficient income on which to live.

In January 1990 there were 550,400 people in Australia without paid employment. Of these people, 26.1 per cent had been unemployed for a year (Australian Bureau of Statistics). Yet these figures do not give the full story. A great deal of unemployment remains "hidden".

This hidden unemployment is the unemployment experienced by the following people:

- discouraged job-seekers who have given up hope of finding work
- older workers who have been retrenched
- people who have retired early
- married women who are not eligible for unemployment benefits
- parents who are without suitable child-care
- young people who stay at school because of poor job prospects
- migrant people who cannot speak sufficient English to hold a job

Unemployment can have a number of effects.

- **Increasing poverty:** Unemployment benefits are set at such a level that people having to live on the benefits alone automatically fall below the poverty line. They simply do not have enough money to adequately clothe, feed and house themselves.
- **Prejudice:** Media coverage and the common community attitude that people who are unemployed are "dole bludgers" means that unemployed people are frequently the subject of prejudice. They can become socially isolated and there is a greater risk of families breaking down.
- **Loss of marketable skills:** The longer a person is unemployed the more difficult it is to get work. Skill levels diminish and the type of skills which are in demand may change.
- **Loss of self-esteem:** Unemployment often causes people to lose self-confidence. They may become depressed, hostile, sick, or experience feelings of helplessness or disorganisation. This makes the search for employment even harder because the person's motivation is eroded.
- **Long periods out of the work force:** Duration of unemployment differs from group to group. Young people between 15 and 19 and older people who are approaching retirement, often experience long periods of unemployment with little hope of getting a job.

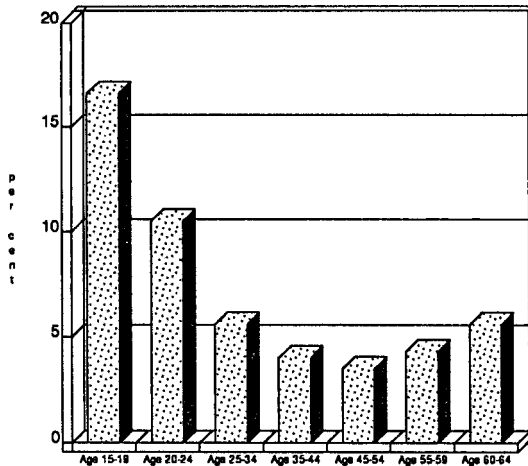
With so many factors limiting people's chances of obtaining jobs, so many people without paid jobs, and such serious effects on the health

*In the past 20 years, the teenage share of full employment has fallen from 14.1 per cent to 7.6 per cent nationally. In January 1990, the unemployment rate for 15 to 19-year-olds looking for full-time work was 16.3 per cent.*

*The average duration of unemployment is 27.5 weeks. The average duration of unemployment for early school leavers is 50.9 weeks, almost twice the*

and well-being of people, unemployment is a major problem in Australia. In order to reduce unemployment, and the poverty it causes, we need to work towards removing those factors which limit people's chances of employment.

**Unemployment rate (per cent) by age**



### Unemployment rate data

Look at the Australian Bureau of Statistics' graph showing unemployment rates for various age groups. Write answers to the following questions. Try to suggest reasons for each of the answers.

- 1 Which age group has the highest rate of unemployment?
- 2 Which age group has the lowest rate of unemployment?
- 3 Between which age brackets is there the greatest change in the unemployment rate?
- 4 Why do you think the unemployment rate increases after a certain age?
- 5 Look again at the types of hidden unemployment. In which age group do you think hidden unemployment would be highest? lowest?

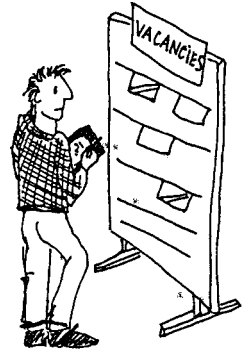
### Discussion

- 1 Why might some people be unable to gain the qualifications needed for employment. List as many reasons as you can think of.
- 2 Make a list of all of the future occupations that you think you might like to pursue. Rank these in order from most to least difficult to achieve. Consider the reasons why some jobs will be easier to get and maintain than others. Consider also the reasons why some jobs are paid more and have better conditions than others. What factors will affect your freedom of choice about your future.

## Groups and organisations

The following organisations and groups focus on employment and unemployment through advocacy and/or the provision of services.

- Victorian Council of Social Service 290-292 Wellington Street COLLINGWOOD 3066 Ph: 419 3555
- Australian Council of Trade Unions 393 Swanston Street MELBOURNE 3000 Ph: Library 663 5266 (for information on the Trade Union Movement)
- Employment Action Centre 109 Victoria Street FITZROY 3065 Ph: 419 7055 (for information)



### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Taylor, J (1990) *Giving women voice: feminism and community services*, Research for Action No.1, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, pp.50-51.
- <sup>2</sup> Trethewey, J (1989) *Aussie battlers: families and children in poverty*, Collins Dove/ Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, p.66.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p.66.
- <sup>4</sup> Child Poverty Action Group (1987) *Across the divide: a resource pack about poverty in the U.K.*, Unit 4, p.3.

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# HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

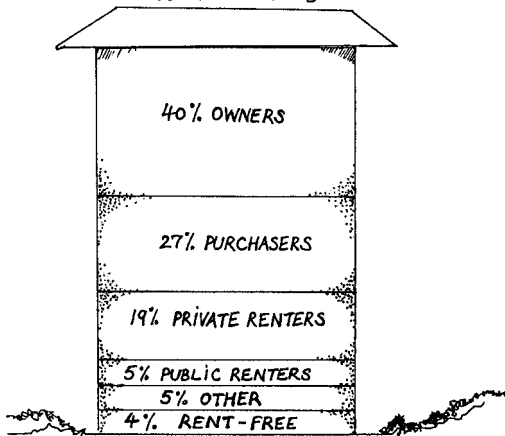
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It's pathetic. There's nowhere for them to play, there's playgrounds downstairs but they're glass strewn and it's really dangerous. (Sole parent, two children)<sup>1</sup>

The impact of high housing costs has had a drastic effect on low income families' living standards. More people now have incomes of poverty-line levels after paying their housing costs. Eleven per cent of Australian households are estimated to live in poverty after paying for their housing. This compares to under 7 per cent in the early 1970s. And some families are particularly vulnerable. Twenty-one per cent of private tenants live in poverty after paying their rent. Among sole parents, 62 per cent of those who are tenants of private landlords live in poverty.<sup>2</sup>

The percentage of Australian households in each of these three areas is shown in the following diagram.

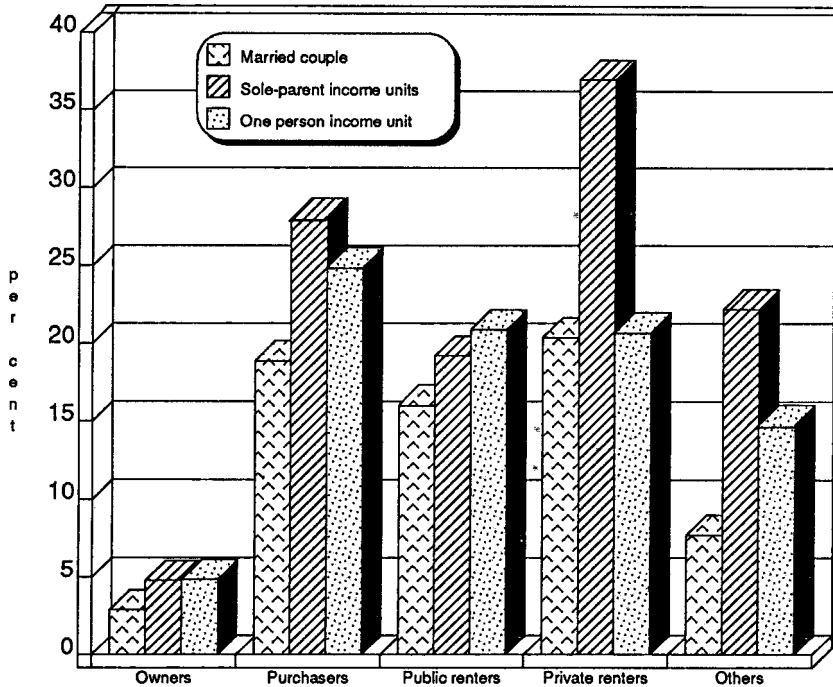
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF AUSTRALIAN HOUSEHOLDS  
BY OCCUPANCY



Source: Housing Survey 1988, ABS.

A large number of low-income people do not have access to housing which is both adequate and affordable through any of these three avenues. Often, their weekly expenditure on housing is so high that they cannot afford other basic necessities — food, clothing, transport, health and recreation. The diagram opposite shows the percentage of income for various income units which is spent on housing.

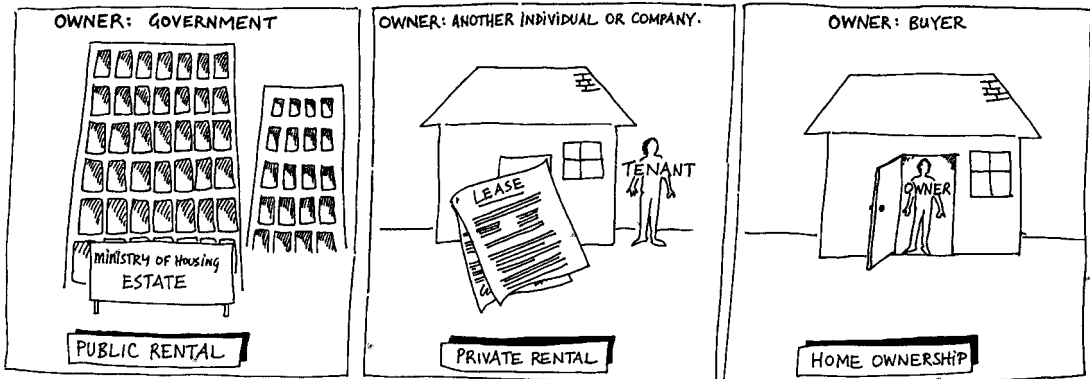
**Housing costs as a percentage of medium income for various income units**



*For example, married couples who are purchasing their own homes spend 18.9 per cent of their incomes on housing. For sole parent families renting in the private market, housings costs make up 37 per cent of their incomes.*

In Australia there are three main areas of housing:

- 1 Housing through the private rental market, where people rent houses or flats owned privately by individuals or companies.
- 2 Housing through the public rental market, where people rent government-owned houses or flats through the Ministry of Housing.
- 3 Housing through home ownership, where people own or are in the process of buying their own houses or flats.





## The great Australian dream

In many ways the "great Australian dream" is to own a house and garden of your own. This "dream" is promoted through the media, particularly in advertising. Collect examples of advertisements for homes and home ownership, e.g. by building companies, banks, material suppliers. Look also in the classified ads section of the newspapers for houses and flats for sale. Make a display of the material you collect. How does the "dream" compare with reality.

Look at the ABS statistics on home ownership. What percentage of Australian households either own their own home or are in the process of purchasing? What percentage are renting their home?

Compare the degree of control enjoyed by a home owner to that of a person renting a house or a flat. Compare the degree of responsibility which a home owner has to that of a person who rents their home. What would you prefer? Why? Prepare a short statement in which you explain your preference.

Those most affected by high housing costs are people on low wages, pensions or benefits. In the private rental market, these people are often discriminated against, and are forced to compete with people on higher incomes. The cost of rent, once a family or individual has obtained a flat or house, is often very high.

For many, home ownership is even more inaccessible. For a family on a low income, basic necessities may leave little in the way of disposable income to accumulate savings. Even if they were to receive a government grant towards a deposit, many such families would not be able to meet the monthly costs of mortgage payments.

In contrast to this, public housing can offer affordability, security of tenure and absence of discrimination. Some significant problems exist however. A major problem is that the demand for public housing in Australia is far greater than the amount of housing stock available. In early 1990 in Victoria alone there were 36 800 people on the waiting list for public housing. Only 2343 new dwellings were acquired by the Ministry of Housing in 1988/89 (Victorian Ministry of Housing).

*In 1988, there were 195 000 people on public housing waiting lists throughout Australia.*



People are thus forced to remain in the private rental market or to add their names to already crowded waiting lists. Public housing stock is also often of a low standard, consisting of high-rise or walk-up flats which are unsuitable for most families.

Many of these problems have damaged the image of public housing in the community. However, of Australia's three areas of housing (private rental, home ownership and public rental) public housing is by far the most equitable. Increasing the number of houses and flats available and upgrading the conditions of this stock, would improve Australia's public rental system.

### The cost of housing

Look at the ABS statistics on the cost of housing as a percentage of income. Write answers to the following questions.

- 1 Which group of people spends the highest proportion of their income on housing in the private rental market?
- 2 Amongst people purchasing their homes, which group has the lowest housing expenditure as a percentage of their income.
- 3 For what reasons might the other two groups be disadvantaged in comparison?

### Agencies and groups

The following agencies and organisations provide advice and services on housing.

- Tenants Union of Victoria 80 Johnston Street FITZROY 3065 Ph: 419 5577 (Kit on tenancy issues available)
- Victorian Council of Social Service 290-292 Wellington Street COLLINGWOOD 3066 Ph: 419 3555
- Youth Accommodation Coalition Suite 1, 250 Gore Street FITZROY 3065 Ph: 417 4099
- Shelter National PO Box 138 Civic Square ACT 2608 Ph: (062) 57 2679
- Hanover Access 177 Clarendon Street SOUTH MELBOURNE 3205 Ph: 696 0262

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Trethewey, J (1989) *Aussie battlers: families and children in poverty*, Collins Dove/ Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, p.148.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.148.

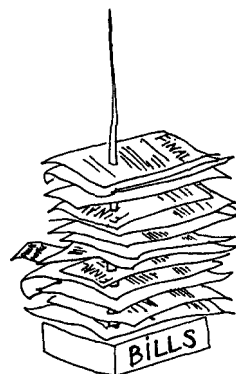
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# INCOME SECURITY AND SUPPORT

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We could live because we did not do anything. If anything breaks down or the children need shoes, we are in trouble.<sup>1</sup> (Unemployed family with four children)

Many Australians obtain the money they need to live through their wages. More than 7.5 million people in Australia are in paid employment of one sort or another. Whilst most are paid enough to keep themselves and their families above the poverty line, others are disadvantaged by low wages. A wage which might be quite sufficient for a couple with no children may be far from adequate for a large family.



## Family budgeting

Find out the cost of each of the items or services listed in the table below. Calculate what each would cost for a week for a married couple and for a single parent with three children. How do the two compare?

<u>Weekly costs</u>	<u>Family (4)</u>	<u>Couple</u>
Bread ) any other groceries		
Milk ) could be included		
Vegetables )		
Fruit )		
Meat, Fish, Poultry		
Transport		
Entertainment (in or outside the home)		

Certain events in a person's life — ill health, disability, parenthood or loss of a job — mean they are unable to work for short or extended periods of time. Or that they are only able to work part-time and receive a wage which is not sufficient to support themselves and their children. The Social Security system has been designed to provide people with income support during these periods.<sup>2</sup>

There is a range of pensions and benefits available from the Commonwealth Government. These include:

- Age, Invalid and Widow's Pensions, and Sole Parent Pension.
- Sickness, Unemployment and Special Benefits.

In February 1990, 2.6 million people in Australia were dependent on pensions and benefits. Fifty-two per cent of these recipients were aged pensioners. Most pension and benefit rates hover on or below the poverty line.

The table opposite compares pensions, and benefits at June 1990 with the appropriate poverty lines.

**Poverty line and pensions and benefits, June 1990 (Aust. \$ per week)**

	Pensions, Benefits & Family Allowances	Poverty Line	Difference
<b>Head in the labour force</b>			
16-17 years unemployed	57.60	184.46	-126.86
18, 19, 20 years unemployed	105.15	184.46	-79.31
Over 21 years unemployed	130.00	184.46	-54.46
<b>Head not in the labour force</b>			
Couple	235.40	211.86	23.54
Couple with 1 child	268.85	261.72	7.13
Couple with 2 children	302.30	311.58	-9.28
Couple with 3 children	335.75	361.43	-25.68
Couple with 4 children	372.30	411.29	-38.99
Single person (pensioner)	141.20	149.57	-8.37
Single parent with 1 child	187.55	201.89	-14.34
Single parent with 2 children	221.00	251.74	-30.74
Single parent with 3 children	254.45	301.60	-47.15
Single parent with 4 children	291.00	351.46	-60.46

Source: Poverty Update, June 1990 Quarter, Brotherhood of St Laurence (in-house publication), Melbourne, 1990.

The table shows, for example, that the income of a sixteen-year-old person receiving unemployment benefits is \$123.50 below the poverty line. Generally the situation is more difficult for households with dependent children, whether they are pensioners or wage earners. And, the more children they have, the further below the poverty line they live. Unemployed young people are in the worst situation.

Thus, either through low wages or inadequate levels of social security payments, many Australians lack the security of a regular and adequate income, while others expect and enjoy this as a right.

### **Your own budget**

Find out what the current rate of social security payment is for a single 16 to 17-year-old living independently. Imagine that you are 17 years old and living alone in a flat. In groups, list the expenses you would have and the things you would need to buy.

Join up with other groups to discuss your lists. Combine your ideas and write a list on the board.

Return to your groups with an agreed list and decide how you will divide your limited money amongst the items on the board. What expenses do you consider most important? What areas will you cut back on? What will you do without altogether?

Compare your group's response with those of others. Is there wide agreement or disagreement regarding any of the items on the list? If so, why do you think this is so?

## Discussion

Consider the following statement.

I don't want to depend on anyone else. I've got a bank loan at the moment — that's for my care, but apart from that, I don't really like to depend on anyone else... if I need it [support from parents] it would be there... but I don't want to have to do it. "Miriam" in *What Price Independence?* (page 109)

What do you think Miriam means by "depending on someone else"?

Discuss ways in which financial dependence might affect:

- choice
- self-esteem
- an individual's control over her/his own life

For information see:

Harley, Robyn (1989) *What price independence?: a report of a study on young people's incomes and living costs*, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria; Australian Institute of Family Studies.

## Agencies and groups

The following agencies are concerned with issues to do with income security and support.

- Victorian Council of Social Service  
290-292 Wellington Street  
COLLINGWOOD 3066  
Ph: 419 3555

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Trethewey, J (1986) *When the pressure is really on: interim report of the Income and Expenditure Study*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, p.12.
- <sup>2</sup> Trethewey, J (1989) *Aussie battlers: families and children in poverty*, Collins Dove/Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, p.124.

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# SOLE - PARENT FAMILIES

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I've been a sole parent for almost two years now. I was working on an okay income, a survival income at that stage but I stopped working about three months ago because my littlest child had a lot of asthma and I was spending more time away from work than there. So, I just thought I've got a responsibility here to this kid, not work. Its been a real financial struggle...<sup>1</sup>  
(Sole parent supporting a sister and two children)

Financially, single parents can't go out to work anyway. I mean I'm a pensioner even and I can earn up to \$60 a week but if I go out to work, you can't save, you've got child-care. I've got two kids! Your Ministry of Housing rent goes up — everything. You just financially can't do it, not if you're on a pension. I mean your child-care costs will be enough as it is ... I mean that's half of your wage.<sup>2</sup>

In Australia, as in many other Western countries, the number of sole-parent families is increasing. Most of these families are formed as a result of divorce, separation or widowhood. Nearly 90 per cent of sole-parent families are headed by women. The parents within these families face demands which are often in conflict — caring for and supporting children, and maintaining an adequate income. These demands make sole-parent families highly vulnerable to poverty. A lack of day or after-school-hours child-care often precludes a parent from gaining full-time employment. It can also place many restrictions upon the type of part-time employment available to that parent. Often sole parents are forced to spend up to two-thirds of their income on accommodation.

*Of those sole-parent families who rent in the private market, 62 per cent live in poverty after paying their rent.*

While social security payments to sole-parent families are inadequate, both parent and children continue living below the poverty line. Lack of access to paid employment perpetuates this situation.

## Discussion

- 1 From the comments provided, identify some of the difficulties of being a sole parent.
- 2 What difficulties not mentioned here can you think of that a sole parent might experience?
- 3 What are some of the conflicting demands a sole parent might be faced with? e.g. full-time work and the need for adequate, affordable child-care.
- 4 Can you think of ways in which these conflicting demands could be reduced?

## Agencies and Groups

The agencies listed here can provide further information on sole-parent families:

- Australian Institute of Family Studies  
300 Queen Street  
MELBOURNE 3000  
Ph: 608 6888
- Council for Single Mother and Child  
3rd Floor, 246 Collins Street  
MELBOURNE 3000  
Ph: 654 7211

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### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup>Promise the Children Action on Child Poverty campaign, resource file, Brotherhood of St Laurence (unpublished).
- <sup>2</sup>Taylor, J (1990) *Giving women voice: feminism and community services*, Research for Action No.1, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, p.44.

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# DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

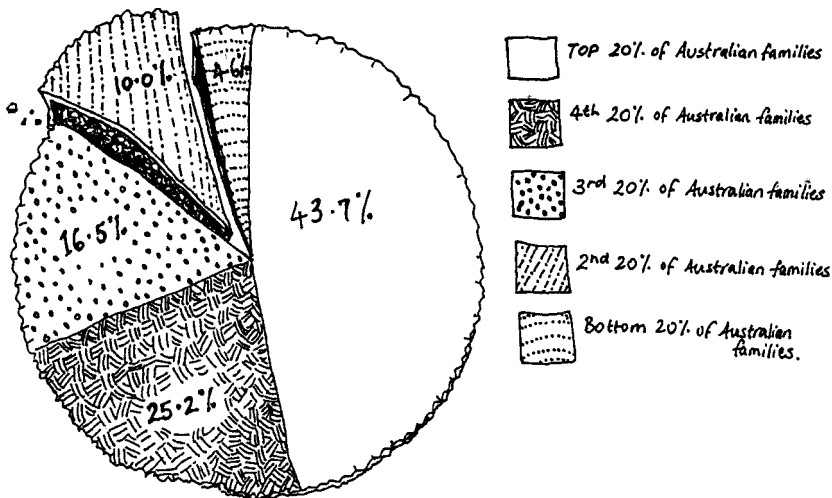
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Each day in Australia we are confronted with images of people who are wealthy — successful business people, movie stars, prominent professionals. Whether directly or indirectly, these images are contrasted with those of people on low incomes, people who struggle to meet basic needs and whose lifestyles are vastly different.

These familiar images simply reflect an existing inequality in Australian society, an inequity in the way the country's wealth is divided.

Income distribution is skewed towards the upper reaches, with around 80 per cent of income units earning less than average weekly earnings. The bottom quarter of wage earners earn just over half average weekly earnings.<sup>1</sup>

The following pie chart shows how the total gross income of all Australian families is distributed:



Source: Saunders, Peter, Hobbes, Gerry & Stott, Helen (1989) *Income Inequality in Australia & New Zealand: International Comparisons & Recent Trends*, Social Welfare Research Centre Discussion Paper No.15, September.

The top 20 per cent of Australian families are shown to be receiving almost 45 per cent of the total gross income of all families. The bottom 20 per cent receives less than 5 per cent — close to a tenth of the amount received by their counterparts at the top. Moreover, the combined income of the bottom 80 per cent of Australian families constitutes only 56.3 per cent of the total gross figure.

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### Who gets what?

- 1 Develop definitions for the terms "income" and "wealth". How do the two terms differ?
- 2 Examine the pie chart very closely. Write down the percentage of total income which each of the five groups earns. Using the information provided, write a newspaper headline and story which highlights a feature of Australia's income distribution. Present your work appropriately and display the article in your room or combine the reports into a class book for use by other classes or in the library.

In many ways the taxation system is an attempt to correct the imbalance.

The taxation system seeks to divide Australia's wealth differently, to redistribute our financial resources. For example, workers' taxes contribute to the pensions of retired workers; unwaged people can receive an unemployment benefit from others' taxes. However, this redistribution of wealth and income is inadequate while some Australians continue to live in poverty.

### Decision making

Each year, government members make decisions about how Australia's money will be spent. Divide into groups of four or five and imagine that you are responsible for the decision making this year. In your groups, allocate funds in the following areas using percentages of the whole.

- Defence
- Education
- Health
- Housing
- Social Security and Welfare
- Culture and Recreation
- Transport and Communication
- Labour and Employment
- Industry Assistance and Development

Allow yourselves a fixed time for the decision making — say 15-20 minutes. You must come to a group decision on each item. When you have finished, report to the rest of the class on your allocation of funds explaining and, if necessary, justifying your decisions.

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## Agencies and Groups

The agencies listed here can provide further information on the issue of wealth distribution in Australia.

- Victorian Council of Social Service 290-292 Wellington Street  
COLLINGWOOD 3066  
Ph: 419 3555
- Australian Institute of Family Studies 300 Queen Street  
MELBOURNE 3000 Ph: Library 608 6888

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Child poverty: the facts* (1989) Promise the Children Action on Child Poverty campaign, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

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# EXAMINING ATTITUDES TO POVERTY

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Here are some common views about poverty in Australia. To test your own views, place a tick in the appropriate column after each statement.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1 People are only poor because they are bad money managers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Society's failure to provide good schools for everyone contributes to the existence of poverty.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Most people could improve their condition if they tried.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 The government should reduce poverty by taxing wealth more to increase pensions and benefits.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Too many people receiving pensions or benefits spend their money unwisely.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 In general, people on higher incomes have little idea of the difficulties faced by low-income people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 It is part of the natural order that some people live in poverty while others do not.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 In Australia there is one law for high-income people and another for people on low incomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 There are too many people receiving government benefits and pensions who should be working.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 Being wealthy in Australia has a lot to do with knowing the right people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11 When people are given things free, their initiative is destroyed and they become lazy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12 People in poverty generally lack the power to change their situation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13 People receiving unemployment benefits for more than a few weeks should be compelled to do some kind of community work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14 More often than not people are in poverty because of circumstances beyond their control.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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There are a number of identified attitudes to issues like poverty and powerlessness in our community. The questionnaire which you have completed assesses two of these attitudes.

- a The individualistic attitude. Individuals are seen to be primarily responsible for their situation.
- b The structural attitude. The way society is organised is seen to be primarily responsible for people experiencing relative poverty, discrimination or powerlessness.

#### Scoring your answers

For each "strongly agree" answer score 1.

For each "agree" answer score 2.

For each "neutral" answer score 0.

For each "disagree" answer score 4.

For each "strongly disagree" answer score 5.

Now add up your answers for questions 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13. This will give you your score on the individualistic attitude. If you score 19 or less on this scale it suggests a tendency towards an individualistic attitude towards poverty. Add up your answers for questions 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14. This will give you your score on the structural view of poverty. If you score 19 or less, it suggests a tendency towards the structural attitude.

Because these scales are not totally mutually exclusive you may find that you hold each of these attitudes to a varying extent. What explanations can you think of for this?

Source: Hollingworth, Peter (1979) *Australians in poverty*, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne.

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# POVERTY IN AUSTRALIA — CHALLENGING SOME OF THE MYTHS

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*"There's no poverty in Australia—not like there is in some parts of Africa".*

It means things like, not being able to get a good car, not enough money for new clothes. We can't go places, like we can't go to restaurants, we can't go to most places in the city, we can't go to visit people because it costs too much petrol, so we don't get to go places and we just have to stay around here. There's nothing much to do around here, just watch TV. We don't have the same things to work with at school, you run out of books and can't afford to get them. Most of the time if you miss out on excursions you have to do more school work, like I didn't get to go to the puppet show, I didn't want to go in any case but I got four sheets of maths to do, that's not fair. (Eleven-year-old boy).

Poverty is a relative concept, dependent upon a particular society's notion of a basic standard of living. In Australia, the media gives an accurate reflection of popular expectations, a clear idea of the way the "average" individual or family should live. This average is inaccessible to many low-income people — adequately paid employment, affordable housing, education, child care, social support and health services. Poverty in the sense of deprivation, is a constant reality to thousands of people in Australia. Though they may have more income or possessions than people in third world countries, they still do not have what is needed to meet all their basic needs or participate equally in our society.

In Australia people in poverty are deprived of a lot of things which most Australians take for granted. Simply having a television, or a video, does not prove that a family is not living in poverty. They may still be missing out — on movies, on day trips, on holidays...

We have to think about whether Mum can afford to let us go to camps and on excursions. We don't get to go to a movie theatre. I've been in high school four years and I've only got to go to a movie once and that was with my Dad. It's hard too because all the other children at school talk about the latest movies on at the moment and go to see all the latest releases. So it's really hard to talk to them. (Sixteen-year-old girl)

There are a lot of things which low-income families miss out on. Restricted by scant financial resources, such families often live very home-bound lives. Perhaps more than most families, low-income families depend on television and videos because these are often the only form of entertainment which is financially available to them. Low-income families cannot afford outings to the movies, or to

*In Australia, "poverty" means something different than it does in a place like Africa. But it still means missing out, going without — and it's just as real to people who are in poverty.*



*"They're not poor — they've got televisions and video recorders..."*



restaurants, or theatres. As a result, they depend heavily upon these alternatives. The purchase of such items frequently places great pressure on incomes which are already strained.

*"Young girls get pregnant deliberately, just to get the benefit."*

I don't smoke, I don't drink and I don't go out, my life existence is within the home. So if I did do all those things it would be even harder. I put my son's needs first, whatever he needs comes first and then I sort of look at me second. (Sole parent with one child)

The latest ABS statistics show that the number of teenage single women who become pregnant is declining and is currently around 8 per cent of the total population of sole parents receiving benefits. The Sole Parent's Pension is by no means an incentive to pregnancy. Sole parent families are among the poorest groups in our community living below the poverty line. A study by the Victorian Ministry of Housing found that sole parents pay an average of .66.6 per cent of their income in rent. No-one would choose poverty as a way of life. It is the result of community prejudice against sole parents that people have been lead to believe that young women would make such an unattractive choice.

Money is often so short, that money management becomes in reality a process of elimination — it takes considerable skill to prioritise, to "budget" on a income which refuses to cover basic household expenses.

My income is \$440 a fortnight, my bills are \$445. My social worker agrees that not even my budget can change this.<sup>1</sup> (Couple, two children, husband employed full time)

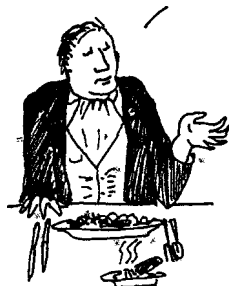
We'll start the clothes money in turns in January and we'll start with the oldest child downwards, then my husband and I'll have a turn — one month per person, \$40 each. This will be better than \$20 per fortnight, you can't buy much with \$20, and it will give us a summer and a winter month each.<sup>2</sup> (Family of six)

As "money managers" people in poverty face an almost impossible task. Any examination of the budget of a low income family shows that such a family experiences extreme difficulty in supporting itself on an income which is at levels around the poverty line. The Henderson poverty line, as its author clearly stated, is set at a very austere level. For example, currently it is \$229.70 per week for a single parent with two children. The total income from social security is \$207.20 per week — \$22.50 under the poverty line. Money allocated for expenses in a low-income family is largely taken up by rent. This excludes outings or trips of any kind for any member of the family; holidays of any sort including school camps, personal items,

*Life as a sole parent, dependent on a social security benefit is often an extremely difficult existence, one which very few would opt for, given the choice.*



*"People are only poor because they can't budget — they're just bad money managers"*



above a basic minimum, children's sports, hobbies, any allowance for unexpected expenses such as broken appliances, or the costs of running a car or having a telephone. It is not that low-income people are bad money managers. It is simply that there is very little to manage. Many families show real skill in keeping afloat on very meagre incomes.

*"Young people just don't want to work".*

I left school in the middle of 1987 before I finished Year 9, because I wanted money and work. Since then I've had two factory jobs which lasted four and two months. I've been looking for work for two months now.<sup>3</sup> (17-year-old boy)

Young people want to work. Recent surveys of young people's attitudes and aspirations reveal that young people make considerable efforts to find work and are willing to accept wages of less than \$160.00 per week to obtain it. They want to be able to earn a decent income, to afford the things they want and to get on in life. The level of social security available to 16 and 17-year-olds ranges from \$35 to \$53.55 per week. Living costs such as rent, food, transport and other general expenses are the same for independent young people as they are for adults. Many do not receive support from their parents. As a result of their own poverty, or a breakdown in family relations, their families do not give adequate financial support. Some young people have no families at all. All available evidence shows that young unemployed people are at a severe disadvantage. Living in impoverished circumstances, they are certainly unable to survive only on the benefit provided by the Government.

*"There are lots of jobs around — they're just not being filled".*

I worked in a bank for three years, and then we had our family business and I drove a school bus, so I've done a bit of everything. But then again, I don't know what people are looking for nowadays. I know a couple of the ads when they do advertise for people with experience, when I've written to them I've written down what I've done in the past, but they're looking for experience within the last one or two years and looking at what you did. (Sole parent with one child)

For every registered job vacancy there were seven unemployed people looking for work as at May 1989. There is a significant mismatch between the skills required by new jobs and the skills of those people available for employment. Further jobs are unlikely to emerge in areas of greatest unemployment. The jobs which do emerge frequently require a higher level of skills or new skills altogether. Some communities, especially in rural and industrial areas, have had to bear the burden of economic restructuring more so than others — this

**Young people both want and need to work.**



**There may well be jobs out there, but they may not demand the particular skills which job-seekers possess. The answer is access to training, not simply a need to "try harder".**



means they are more likely to have lost jobs due to industry closures, mergers and relocations, and the skills of people working in those areas are likely to have become redundant.

This situation has led to the growth of a large group of long-term unemployed people who find it harder and harder to get back into work because they lack either the skills or confidence to return to work. Secondly, employers are reluctant to hire people who have been unemployed for long periods of time. Often, the only jobs that are available to them are short-term, casual, and low-paid.

All families need the support of income security and services. Parents and children in poverty face constant pressure through being deprived of such support, often surviving against tremendous odds.

I'll probably have to leave no later than 7 in the morning to start work at 8.30 and I'll probably get home at 6 or half past 6 at night. I'll have three kids at school, one in high school and two in primary, they'll get themselves off to school in the mornings and they'll have to go to an after-school program. Then I'll pick them up, cook tea, do everything, same as normal... I'll probably do the housework all weekend and the garden and that's about it... I've got no idea what I'll do with the kids over the holidays, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. We'll probably go back to using the holiday programs. They're not too bad, but I don't think they run every holiday around here, they only run some of the time. (Sole parent with three children)

Low-income families live in real hardship. Immense stresses are created when there is simply not enough money for families to clothe, house and feed themselves. Poverty like this results in social isolation and family breakdown. It also results in loss of confidence and self-esteem. All these factors contribute to the view that children are not well looked after. The problems lie in there not being adequate income, nor adequate community support services to assist families. The cost to the state of having a child in care is around \$600.00 per week. Socially and economically it is much better to provide families with the services they need to avoid family breakdown. This could be as simple as providing occasional child-care.

*"Most of the poor are homeless old men".*

Low-income people naturally have the same needs and aspirations as the rest of the population. A recent study into the spending patterns of all types of families concluded that children in low-income families are being deprived of many necessities that are taken for granted in most Australian families.

We are a family of three, soon to be four, surviving from week to week on one wage... We are only able to afford the necessities from week to week and in comparison to the lives which my spouse and I lived prior to having a family, with two incomes, we have now a drastically reduced standard of living.

*"They don't look after their kids properly".*



*The groups most vulnerable to poverty in Australia today are children, sole parents, people who are unemployed and people on low wages – in many ways the homeless old men we see in the streets are simply the visible face of Australian poverty.*





A great deal of the poverty in Australia is hidden, making it difficult for the public to get an accurate picture of those who are in poverty. It has never been the case that only old men experience poverty. The "poor" in Australia consist largely of sole-parent families dependent on social security for their income; families whose main income-earner is unemployed or inadequately paid; and young people who are out of work, and often homeless. Conservative estimates suggest that at present 500 000 Australian children live in poverty.

It's extremely rare that people are actually "ripping off" the social security system.

The media is quick to pick up on a scandal. Its portrayal of alleged welfare fraud has left the impression that fraud is rife in the social security system. In fact, only half of 1 per cent of welfare recipients have been found guilty of defrauding the system. Each year, the Government has introduced more and more stringent administrative mechanisms to reduce the incidence of fraud. These measures have been very successful. However, this additional surveillance of people receiving social security benefits increases their sense of insecurity and their feeling of being threatened by the system. Research from June 1989 revealed that the over-payments made by the Department of Social Security constitutes only 1 per cent of the total payments made by the system. This figure includes payments incorrectly made by the Department.

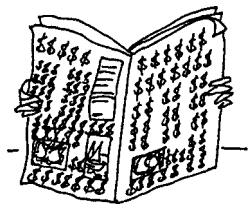
Ensuring that all Australians have adequate income security does not mean increased taxes. We can choose the way in which existing tax revenue is spent.

Australians and their government make choices about how to spend our tax revenue. For example, at present three billion dollars of this revenue is foregone each year through superannuation concessions. These concessions can be up to seven times what a pensioner can expect to receive through the Age Pension over the whole of their retired life. In addition, two billion dollars in the form of tax deductions are returned each year to people investing in property and similar areas. Expenditure choices such as these benefit high-income earners much more than people on low incomes. Expenditure on social welfare in Australia (social security, health and education) as a percentage of GDP is well below that of other OECD countries — 18.4 per cent as compared to 34.2 per cent in France, for example.<sup>4</sup> More often than not it is political or electoral reasons, not economics, which dictate welfare spending.

*"Too many people are just ripping off the social security system".*



*"The country just can't afford to support these people. Our taxes are too high already".*



## Poverty and the media

The mass media is able to reach huge numbers of the population: With such a vast audience, the power and the influence of the information it presents can be considerable. The media is a constant source of information and often deals with issues related to poverty. During the next fortnight (or longer if you wish) gather material on poverty-related issues from the newspapers, magazines and, if possible, from the radio and television. While you are collecting your material, keep these questions in mind:

- What issues are covered day to day?
- What differing attitudes are expressed?
- What is your attitude? Is it changing?

Consider also the images presented by the mass media — of women, young people, families, workers, ethnic groups and so on. What kind of images are portrayed and what do they suggest about the different groups?

Present your collection as a display or as a report to the class. In your report, comment on the following:

- the view of poverty which is projected overall
- any recognisable "myths" about poverty
- differing views on a particular issue (e.g. housing) which emerge from different articles or programs
- the extent to which our attitudes are shaped by media images

### Notes

- 1 Trethewey, J (1989) *Aussie battlers: families and children in poverty*, Collins Dove/Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, p.120.
- 2 Ibid, p.76.
- 3 Trethewey, J & Burston, O (1988) *Changing entitlements for the young unemployed*, Research for Action No.3, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, p.15.
- 4 "The real facts about welfare spending and poverty in Australia", *Impact*, Oct/Nov 1989, p.20.

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# BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: HOW CAN POVERTY BE REDUCED?

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## Responsibility for change

If change is to occur, poverty and inequality, the growing divide, need to be considered in the context of those responsible. In thinking about possible action, we need to work out where this responsibility lies. It could be seen to rest with governments, with local community groups, and/or with individuals.<sup>1</sup> In some cases, responsibility might be shared at a number of these levels, as in the following example.

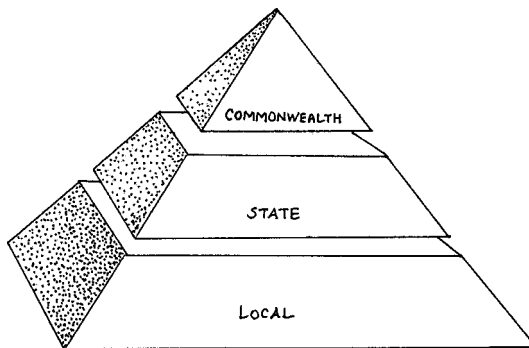
Rosemary was employed by a hotel owner who exploited her pensioner status. He knew she could only earn a limited amount of money before her pension would be reduced and as a result did not pay her properly for the hours that she worked.

In this case, individual employers have a responsibility to be fair and honest with their workers. As a community, we also expect governments to set minimum wage rates and monitor employment practices to ensure they are standard and fair for all workers.<sup>2</sup>

By asking yourself, "Who is responsible?", you can work out where the powers of change lie, what direction to aim your action and ideas, and how you can become involved.

### *Government*

In Australia, there is a constitutional division of powers between different levels of government — Commonwealth, State and Local. Overall, these powers encompass powers of resource allocation and powers to introduce strategies which will increase equality, access and participation for Australian people. Through their policies, governments express their aims and the programs and measures to achieve these aims.<sup>3</sup> Government responsibilities are shared between the three levels.



### Commonwealth

The Commonwealth Government plays an important co-ordinating and advisory role. Through consultation with State ministers, and the terms and conditions of the money it allocates to various areas, it is able to promote quality health, education and community services. It is also able to ensure that access and participation are preconditions for these services. For example, it might ensure that education is free, or that people using community services participate in the direction and running of these services. Similarly, the Commonwealth Government might determine eligibility for Health-Care cards. Responsibilities for ensuring such access and participation may be variable. They often require different things from government.

Making sure that there is equality in access requires an interventionist role — the Government is required to intervene through making laws and through planning based on people's needs. Through Equal Opportunity Legislation, for example, it intends to ensure that all people are free from discrimination in the workplace.

Making sure that community services encourage participation requires an empowering role — the government is attempting to ensure that minority groups have the power of involvement in decision-making, and therefore of having their interests heard.

At present the Commonwealth Government's role includes:

- Social Security administration generally (Austudy, Family Allowance Supplements, Unemployment Benefits etc.)
- administration of the taxation system
- child-care
- a state-shared responsibility for employment and housing.

### State

State governments have a major responsibility for the delivery of health, education, transport and community services. For example, they are responsible for the administration of schools and community health centres. They are also responsible for the allocation of resources to local governments and non-government organisations.

### Local

The role of local government extends beyond roads' maintenance, rates and rubbish collection. It includes the provision of community-based health and welfare services. Local government is also responsible for the control and regulation of land use, and for recreational and cultural services. The way a local government exercises its powers will depend largely on the type of local population, their budget, and the council's own perception of what the community needs.

**Non-government organisations**

Non-government organisations play a critical role in the provision of services and advocacy for minority groups. Their interdependence allows new and often experimental services to be started. Local communities are able to take control of their own lives, having a direct say in the design and running of such services. Non-government organisations are also able to play a strong advocacy role. They are often responsible for changing the attitudes, behaviour and priorities of those in power towards people who are disadvantaged. They therefore have a major responsibility in the area of social action and change.

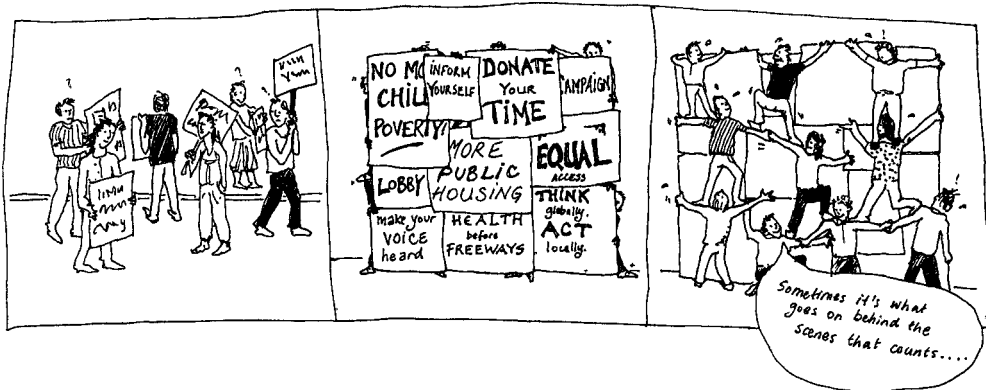
**Sharing responsibility**

It is important that responsibility is shared.

Responsibilities need to be shared by the Commonwealth, state and local government in a consistent and co-operative way.

In recent years, for example, the Commonwealth Government has sought financial commitment from state and local governments to increase the number of places available for child-care. The terms and conditions of services across three government levels need to be consistent and open to regular review. Also, at the commonwealth level a balance needs to be reached between the interventionist and empowering roles of government.

The interdependence of governments and non-government organisations needs to be increased. Increasingly, grants are being given to non-government groups so that they can fill gaps in areas where governments wish to cut down their responsibilities. Instead of reducing their role, governments could combat poverty and inequality more successfully by increasing their activity and working co-operatively with independent organisations.



## Changing structures

### The structure of power in your school

If you wished to:

- change part of the curriculum because you thought it irrelevant.
- introduce compulsory or non-compulsory wearing of uniform
- challenge an exam or essay mark
- change class to a more compatible teacher
- remove a disruptive student from your class

how would you go about it?

### Consider

What form of organisation would be best suited to your purpose? How would you create this organisation? (Act alone or in a group.)

What figures in power would you deal with?

What communicative powers would you need?

Have you personally got these skills? If not, what can you do?

Would you be prepared to confront the figures of power?

Have you got a sound knowledge of the issues involved?

Is it possible for you to research the issues?

Are there any risks if you undertake your campaign?

Would any finance be necessary, e.g. for paper, typing?

What are your greatest problems going to be?

In small groups select one of the topics listed above or one of your own choosing. Discuss the considerations as they relate to your topic.

Think about ways in which people can work towards bringing about change in Victoria, e.g. voting, demonstrating, starting an action group.

All these things are attempts to change attitudes, particularly the attitudes of those in power. This in turn leads to changes in policies and services.

### Sources:

Harris, P. (1989) *All our children*, Child Poverty Policy Review 4, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

Promise the Children Action on Child Poverty campaign, "Who's Responsible?", Action Kit, 1989.

Trethewey, J (1989) *Aussie battlers: families and children in poverty*, Collins Dove/ Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Trethewey, J (1989) *Aussie battlers: families and children in poverty*, Collins Dove/ Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, p.108.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.108.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p.108.

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# IDEAS FOR ACTION — WHAT YOU CAN DO

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You may feel that you'd like to do something about poverty and inequality in Australia. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

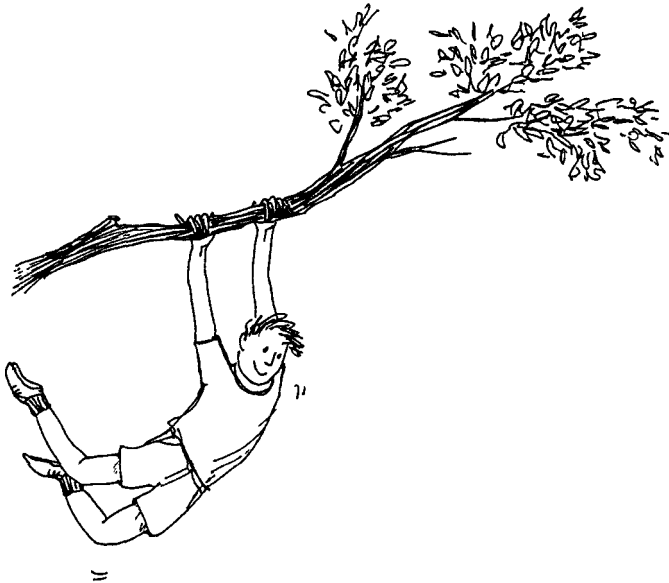
## Individual actions

- Volunteer your time and skills to a local group working to support low-income people.
- Write a letter of concern to the newspaper explaining your views.
- Make a financial contribution to an organisation or group working to support low-income people.

## Group actions

- Encourage your group to learn more about and to discuss poverty in Australia.
- Find out about the needs of low-income families and children which aren't being met in your area (public transport, health and dental services, safe playgrounds, activities for young people, and so on).
- Start a letter-writing campaign.
- Conduct eye-catching events which draw attention to the issue of poverty. e.g. poster competition and display, a cycle-a-thon. Invite local people and the local media.

Source: "Ideas for Action", Child Poverty Action Kit, Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Victorian Council of Social Service.



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# C O N C L U S I O N

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Poverty can be seen as a lack of access, opportunities and resources, as missing out. In explaining poverty it is necessary for us to look at how social and economic factors, such as employment or high housing costs, affect the lives of individuals and create poverty and disadvantage. Solutions to poverty, therefore, lie in tackling such problems. Our aim should be to ensure that all Australians share the same opportunities and access to resources, regardless of age, gender, race or disability, and that adequate income security and support is available to all.



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# R E A D I N G L I S T

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There are many books and articles on poverty and related issues. However, it is often difficult for teachers and students to select those which are most relevant to their needs. This bibliography has been compiled to assist you in this task. It lists books and articles in addition to those cited elsewhere in the kit. It is not an exhaustive list and we would like to hear from teachers and students who have found other useful books and materials not included here.

The bibliography comprises books and articles listed in broad sub-groups which attempt to identify major issues related to poverty in Australia. Some of the materials overlap across sub-groupings but have been listed only once.

Where possible, we have indicated the degree of difficulty of each item. However, it is probably best if teachers planning to tackle the complex topic of poverty with their classes, spend a little time scanning some of the items listed to determine their suitability for their particular students.

All the items listed are held in the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Library, and teachers are welcome to look at them there. Photocopying facilities are available. Publications marked with an asterisk are available for sale at the Brotherhood of St Laurence, 67 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, 3065; Ph: 419 7055.

We hope this reading list will be useful to you.

## General

- ACOSS (1986) *Social justice: the struggle ahead*, Proceedings of the Australian Council of Social Services Congress, ACOSS, Sydney.
- Anderson, G (ed.) (1987) *Small, rural and isolated youth groups: report of an investigation*, Joint Board of Christian Education, Melbourne.
- Australian Catholic Welfare Commission (1989) *A fair go for Australian families*, Collins Dove, Melbourne.
- \*Brotherhood of St Laurence (1989) *Raising the standard of children in poverty*, Brotherhood Comment No.1, Melbourne.
- \*Brotherhood of St Laurence (1990) *Child poverty: the facts*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- \*Carter, J (1989) "Child poverty and our future", Grace Vaughan Memorial Lecture, University of Western Australia, 23 January.
- \*Carter, J, Burston, O, Floyd, F & Stewart, J (1988) *Mandatory reporting and child abuse*, Policy in Practice No.1, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- \*Carter, J & Trethewey, J (1990) *Promising the children: a discussion paper on a national plan for children*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- Cass, B (1989/90) "Solving poverty requires a total community response", *Impact*, 20(1) December/January, 11-15.
- Child Poverty Action Group (1985) *Across the divide: a resource pack about poverty in the UK*, London.
- \*Choo, C (1990) *Aboriginal child poverty*, Child Poverty Policy Review 2, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- Crisp, L (1990) "The underclass", *The Bulletin*, April 3, 48-56.
- Grant, M (ed.) *Readings in economics*, Hargreen, West Melbourne.  
(A wide-ranging collection of economic readings, including four essays on poverty in Australia.)
- \*Harris, P (1989) *Child poverty, inequality and social justice*, Child Poverty Policy Review 1, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- Hollingworth, P (1985) *Australians in poverty*, 4th edition, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne.
- \*McClelland, A (1988) *Ending child poverty: budget policy options*, Brotherhood Comment No.2, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- \*--- (1987) *Investing in our future: a better deal for children*, Policy in Practice No.3, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- Promise the Children Action on Child Poverty (1989) campaign material, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

- \*Taylor, J (1990) *Giving women voice: feminism and community services*, Research for Action No.1, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- \*Trethewey, J (1989) *Aussie battlers: families and children in poverty*, Collins Dove/Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- \*--- (1986) *When the pressure is really on: the interim report of the Income and Expenditure Study*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- VCOSS (1989) "Action Kit: information and ideas for your campaign", Material for National Councils of Social Service, Victorian Council of Social Service, Melbourne.

## Inequality

- Horin, A (1988) "Equal pay: the gap won't budge", *Australian Society*, July, 36-37.
- Rosewarne, S (1988) "Economic management, the accord and gender inequality", *Journal of Political Economy*, 23 August, pp.61-86.
- Sharp, R & Broomhill, Ray (1988) *Short-changed: women and economic policies*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
- (Provides valuable background for more indepth study.)
- Western, J (1983) *Social inequality in Australian society*, Macmillan, Melbourne.

## Poverty Lines

- Bradbury, B (1987) "Measuring poverty: what do we mean?", *Australian Social Welfare Impact*, 17(6) September, pp.9-10.
- (The author explains what the poverty line really is.)
- Johnson, D (1987) "The calculations and use of poverty lines in Australia", *Australian Economic Review*, 4th quarter, pp.45-56.
- Manning, I (1982) "The Henderson poverty line in review", *Social Security Journal*, June, pp.1-13.
- (Examines the poverty line used in the 1973 Poverty Inquiry. Informative discussion, for advanced students.)
- Richardson, S & Travers, P (1987) *The poverty of poverty lines*, (Working paper, University of Adelaide, Department of Economics; 87-3). Adelaide: University of Adelaide, Dept of Economics.
- (Looks at the problems associated with measuring poverty and proposes alternative methods of assessment.)
-

Saunders, P & Whiteford, P (1989) *Measuring poverty: a review of the issues*, Report prepared for the Economic Planning Advisory Council. (Discussion paper/Economic Planning Advisory Council, 89/11), AGPS, Canberra.

*(Clear discussion of recent developments in thinking about concepts of poverty, its measurements, and the implications of alternative concepts for poverty measurement.)*

## Sole Parents

Allen, P (1984) *Single parents: work or welfare*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

Barclay, S (1989) *Taxing the poorest: tax and income reform for sole parent families*, Council for Single Mothers and their Children pre-budget submission to the Minister for Social Security, March, Melbourne.

Jackson-Nakano, A (1989) "Kapow! Mr Bat, take that!", *Atcoss News*, 5, pp.29-32.

Kupke, D (1980) *Just me and the kids: how to survive and succeed as a sole-supporting-parent in Australia*, Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria.

*(In suggesting survival strategies this book identifies the range of difficulties confronting single parents.)*

Lone Father Association (1979) *The lone father: his problems and needs*, Lone Fathers Association of Victoria, Melbourne.

McClelland, A (1989) *Supporting sole parents: the financial position of parents bringing up children alone*, ACOSS paper No.31, Surry Hills, NSW, Australian Council of Social Service, Sydney.

*(A clear statement on the significant disadvantages experienced by single parents; discusses possible income-support measures to improve their position.)*

\*Montague, M (1981) *Hard labour: sole parents and social security*, Policy in Practice No.5, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

\*Morris, H & Trethewey, J (1988) *Sole parents and the 1987 amendments to the Social Security Act*, Brotherhood Comment No.1, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

Raymond, J (1987) *Bringing up children alone: policies for sole parents*, Social Security Review Paper No.3, AGPS, Canberra.

## Homelessness/Housing

Foard, G (1989) *Housing poverty in the private rental market: problems and solutions*, Tenants Union of Victoria, Melbourne.

Hagedorn, B (1989) *Report on homelessness and health*, Melbourne District Health Council, Melbourne.

Hirst, C (1989) *Forced exit: a profile of the young and homeless in inner urban Melbourne*, Youth Homelessness Policy Development Project, Crossroads Youth Project, Salvation Army, Melbourne.

\*Hollingworth, P (1987) "Be it ever so humble... there's no place like home", G.T. Sambell Oration, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

Human Rights Commission (1989) *Our homeless children: report of the National Inquiry into Homeless Children*, Burdekin Report, Canberra, AGPS.

Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (1987) *Housing Australians: proceedings of the 1987 Social Issues Conference*, Melbourne.

Maas, F & Hartley, R (1988) *On the outside: the needs of unsupported homeless youth*, Policy background paper/Australian Institute of Family Studies, No.7, AIFS, Melbourne.

Murphy, L (1989) "Homeless young people: beyond Burdekin", *Policy Issues Forum*, December 1989, 14-16.

\*Prevost, D & Rado, A (1987) *Living places (twenty houses)*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books, Melbourne.

*Why do young people leave home? A background to youth homelessness* (1989) Western Port Emergency Relief Network, Dandenong, Victoria.

## Income/Distribution of Wealth

Choo, C (1988) "The marginalisation of the poor: reflections on the distribution of wealth in Australia", *National Outlook*, June, pp.9-12.

(A useful overview, good starting point for secondary students.)

\*Dixon, D & Henderson, R (1988) *Taxing wealth*, Brotherhood Comment No.3, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

Henderson, RH (ed.) (1981) *The welfare stakes*, Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, Melbourne.

(Focuses on policies relating to poverty and welfare; explores some innovative approaches to providing solutions to poverty and inequality.)

Manning, I (1985) *Incomes and policy*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

(Describes income distribution in Australia and the need for income policy and redistribution.)

Mendelsohn, R (1983) *Australian social welfare finance*, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

(Demands some economic background but provides a comprehensive account of funding policies and problems in relation to welfare, housing, education, health and income. Data cut off point: early '80s.)

Piggott, J "The distribution of wealth in Australia - a survey", *Economic Record*, 60 (170), pp.252-265.

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- (1988) "The distribution of wealth: what is it, what does it mean and is it important?", *Australian Economic Review*, 3rd Quarter, pp.35-41.  
(Both Piggott's articles are suitable for advanced students.)
- Raskall, P (1986/87) "Who's got it? Who needs it?", *Australian Society*, March 1986, pp.12-15, and (update) May 1987, pp.21-24.  
(Surveys distribution of wealth in Australia.)
- Sheehan, P (1980) *Crisis in abundance*, Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria.  
(Good general work, though dated.)
- Smith, P (1982) *Living on the edge: study of 90 low income families*, Australian Council of Social Services, Sydney.  
(Examines in detail the lives of 90 families — possibly useful to compare their experiences with those of the families described in Aussie battlers.)
- "Trends in wealth and income distribution in Australia", *Shelter Victoria Newsletter*, April 1988, pp.12-14.  
(Gives some concise data, useful as a starting point for more detailed reading and discussion.)
- Uniting Church in Australia's Assembly, Social Responsibility and Justice Committee (1988) "Economic justice—the equitable distribution of wealth: a discussion paper, St James, NSW.  
(A useful outline of major issues.)

## Unemployment/Employment

- Bradbury, B et al. (1988) *Poverty and the workforce*, SWRC reports and proceedings, No.72, Social Welfare Research Centre, Kensington, NSW.  
(Surveys several aspects of the nature of poverty among people who are in the workforce, covering the period from the early '70s to the end of 1987; useful overview and detailed information.)
- Bureau of Labour Market Research (1986) *Unemployment and the labour market: anatomy of the problem*, Research report No.9, AGPS, Canberra.
- Chalken, A, Morton, R, Tanner, A & Teasdale-Smith, L (1989) *Is our future working?: a discussion paper on young people, unemployment and the future*, Youth Initiatives Unit, Adelaide.
- Dixon, D (1989) "Unemployment: the economic and social costs", *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 65 (9) February, pp.13-19.
- Fineman, S (ed.) (1987) *Unemployment: personal and social consequences*, Tavistock, London.  
(English data, but provides relevant background and insights.)
- \*Gillèy, T (1988) *Inequality in the workplace*, Research for Action No.4, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

- Grates, B (1987) "Unemployment, social policy and public opinion", *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 22 (1) February, pp.321-331.
- \*McClelland, A & Sheen, V (1988) *Unemployment: the reform of benefits and training*, Policy in Practice No.3, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- Morrell, S (1987) "Where do they come from?: the development of LEI's in Australia", *Create*, 11 March/April, pp.17-19.
- Polk, K (1990) "Changing youth labour markets and youth lifestyles", *Youth Studies*, 9 (1), February, pp.17-24.  
(*This is on local employment initiatives.*)
- Pott, D (comp.) (1988) *In and out of work: personal accounts of the 1930's*, History Institute of Victoria, Carlton, Victoria.  
(*Are people's stories of hardship in the depression different from today's? Also includes suggested questions for discussion, and two useful appendices: Business schemes for the unemployed, 1980s; Rules for the dole since 1972.*)
- Roe, J (ed.) (1985) *Unemployment: are there lessons from history?*, Southwood Press, Marrickville, NSW.  
(*A broader perspective on unemployment, including the experiences of other countries.*)
- \*Sheen, V (1987) *Community work for unemployed young people*, Policy in Practice No.1, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- \*Trethewey, J (1989) *Aussie battlers: families and children in poverty*, Collins Dove/Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- Vipond, J et al. (1987) "Unemployed and poverty: measures of association", *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, 13 (3), June, pp.179-192.
- Watson, I (1985) *Double depression: schooling, unemployment and family life in the Eighties*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.
- Windschuttle, K (1980) *Unemployment in Australia*, revised ed., Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria.  
(*Important examination of the problem, although now dated. Includes discussion of social attitudes to unemployment.*)
- Wiseman, J (1988) "Full employment and income security", *Equity*, 2 (4), March, pp.1-2.

## Welfare Economics

- Economic Planning Advisory Council (1987) *Aspects of the social wage: a review of social expenditures and redistribution*, Council paper No.27, Canberra.
- Saunders, P (1987) "An agenda for social security in the years ahead", *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 22 (2), May, pp.409-423.
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Stephenson, A (1987) "The May Economic Statement, winding back welfare", *Legal Service Bulletin*, 12 (4), August, pp.172-175.

*(Discusses the impact of new conditions for various benefits and their effect on real security for the poor.)*

*Towards a fairer Australia: social justice budget statement 1989-90*, Budget related paper, No.8, AGPS, Canberra.

The *Brotherhood Library* has an extensive collection of books, reports and periodicals in the areas of poverty, care of the aged, employment and unemployment, social policy, social welfare, taxation and housing. Researchers and students and other members of the public concerned with welfare issues are welcome to use the library for reference purposes. The library does not lend directly to individuals apart from Brotherhood personnel, but loans can be arranged by means of the inter-library loan system. The Library is open 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. Monday to Thursday. Telephone: (03) 483 1388/7.

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# G L O S S A R Y

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**closure** The closing down of a place of work, such as a mine, factory or business.

**gender** A person's sexual identity, feminine or masculine, as opposed to their biological sex, male or female. Gender identity is constructed by the culture and society in which that individual lives. For example, the notion of "femininity" held in a traditional Muslim community would differ from the way in which an Australian rural community viewed "femininity".

**household disposable income** The income of a household after tax.

**income support payments** Payments made by the government to people whose incomes are inadequate, for example, the Family Allowance Supplement.

**lifestyle** The overall way in which a person lives — the nature of their housing, occupation, recreation, social interaction, culture and so on.

**materially (missing out materially)** Missing out on the material aspects of life, the physical needs — food, clothes, health care, housing, transport and so on.

**per capita** For each person; per head.

**redundancy** When an employee's skills or workpower are no longer needed by the employer.

**resource allocation** The way in which goods and services are distributed. This allocation can be through different mechanisms. One of these mechanisms is through policy decisions which select priority groups or areas, for example, Aboriginal children or Aboriginal child health.

**socially (missing out socially)** Missing out on the social aspects of life such as education, recreational activities, entertainment, travel, opportunities to mix with other people.

**What is poverty in Australia?  
Who does poverty affect?  
What is the poverty line?**

*Australians in poverty* will assist senior secondary teachers and students to answer these and other questions about poverty in Australia. Activities and information also encourage the questioning of common attitudes and assumptions about poverty.

This book will provide teachers of Australian Studies, Economics, English and a number of other VCE studies, with invaluable information and lesson ideas. For senior secondary students it provides a comprehensive basis for discussion and research.

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