New ways to work

Joanna Dimopoulos, the Brotherhood's General Manager for Employment Opportunities, recently spent time in the UK examining employment initiatives.

In the United Kingdom, New Labour's policies of sustainable social and economic inclusion, particularly the emphasis on 'economic participation' and an 'employment first' welfare system, have facilitated a major paradigm shift to more holistic and broad-based approaches to job creation. New jobs and training are integrated with economic, cultural, social and environmental strategies.

A feature of the new approach is that it takes place largely at the local level, where the linked problems of unemployment, low incomes, low skill levels, poor housing, poor health, family breakdown and high levels of crime ironically create fertile ground for community-based solutions.

Due partly to national political will and the need to address the issue of social exclusion, local authorities throughout the UK have become facilitators of community and individual regeneration and renewal. They have invested in the creation of new departments of 'Regeneration' which work across boundaries, avoiding the 'silo' mentality that previously separated health from housing from job creation.

As Prime Minister Tony Blair explained:

> Social exclusion is about income but it's about much more. It's about prospects and networks and life chances. It's a very modern problem, one that is more harmful to the individual, more damaging to self-esteem, more corrosive to society as a whole, more likely to be passed down from generation to generation, than material poverty. (Tony Blair, Stockwell Park School, Lambeth, December 1997)

Partnerships

Inclusive and purposeful partnerships are a critical element in the implementation of the 'employment first' and 'regeneration' approach to job creation.

Local Strategic Partnerships, as demonstrated by the Glasgow Alliance and Liverpool City Council, bring stakeholders and planners together to develop holistic, multi-pronged community strategies for regeneration and service provision. Alongside these relatively broad strategies is the *social inclusion partnership (SIP)* which is often narrowly targetted to engage a specific group in a neighbourhood.

Labour market intermediaries: a key partner

Organisations that operate as intermediaries in the labour market, bringing together long-term unemployed people and jobs, are key partners in the agenda of local regeneration. Such organisations stimulate transitional employment but also contribute to local people and community social and economic development.

Responding to local needs

In suburban Glasgow, the 'Roots Out' SIP brought together representatives from community, government, business, a labour market intermediary and commercial sex workers to address a complexity of issues surrounding prostitution and its impact. Outcomes from this SIP included improved health and safety for the sex workers; training in childcare which led to alternative employment opportunities; and improved community relationships resulting from better mutual understanding.

Also in Glasgow, a housing estate based SIP identified security as a major concern of residents. This led to the WISE Group, a member of the Glasgow Alliance, developing training and offering transitional employment in fitting safety and security features in all homes where residents felt vulnerable. In the process, residents met together and other community benefits ensued—notably estate-based childcare, and mentoring for people in the employment program.

From the ground up

Groundwork is a leading UK environmental regeneration charity, comprising a federation of local trusts. It seeks to reconnect people with their natural surroundings by providing salaried work and training that support local economies. In 2000–01 Groundwork created 1000 jobs, worked with 100,000 young people and adults and through this improved 6000 hectares of land. Groundwork also reports that 53 per cent of participants go on to further employment after this experience.

Contents

Social business as intermediary

CREATE is yet another labour market intermediary providing salaried employment to long-term unemployed people in repairing, refurbishing and selling affordable household white goods. Based on a 'triple-dividend model', CREATE aims to be socially, environmentally and financially sustainable. Ironically, one of its most significant challenges is its success as an intermediary. The flow-through of employees who gain other jobs slows down CREATE's production and sales as it loses acquired skills and expertise.

The way forward

Developing sustainable jobs for long-term unemployed and highly disadvantaged citizens is a necessity for Australia as well as for the UK. The experience in the United Kingdom reveals that the most effective programs are those which fulfil multiple policy, community and individual objectives by providing real work, real wages and real skills development as well as offsetting the 'front-end' costs by creating lasting benefits for communities.

The role of labour market intermediaries is to adopt deliberate strategies that involve one or more of the following:
• assistance with training, placement and temporary jobs;
• development of community enterprises to create sustainable jobs; and
• new projects which address unmet community and individual needs.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence's 2002-03 strategic directions identify job creation as pivotal in addressing intergenerational and localised poverty in Australia. Drawing on learnings such as these from the UK, the organisation will be devoting research and service development resources to work with others to implement creative and inclusive ways to address job creation in neighbourhood settings.

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In this issue

This *Comment* includes a wide cross-section of the Brotherhood's current work in policy and service development. Several articles are accompanied by stories of people whose experience illustrates our concerns.

In this issue Joanna Dimopoulos reflects on learnings from UK organisations involved in transitional employment, and Pam Beaumont reports GAPCo's experience of providing access to employment services for asylum seekers and refugees.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence's submission outlining priorities for the Victorian budget in 2002-03 is summarised on pages 8 and 9.

Sarina Greco outlines a workable and more generous approach than mandatory detention for asylum seekers. Alan Gruner and Philippa Angley point to challenges in the aged care sector, and Sally Jope to the importance of affordable housing for those on low incomes.

On a global scale, Stephen Ziguras compares income inequality in Australia with other OECD countries, and Nic Frances reports his impressions from the World Economic Forum in New York in February 2002.

Frank Hytten draws attention to the unfinished business of reconciliation, and the work of ANTaR (Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation) now based at the Brotherhood's head office.

Comment also lists new resources available in the Brotherhood's library and on the web.

Bonus publication

Precarious work, uncertain futures (included in the mailout of this *Comment* to subscribers) is the latest *Changing Pressures* bulletin, highlighting the impact of the fragmentation of work on 25 to 34-year-olds.

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Reminder:
Annual subscriptions for 2002 are now due. Please use reply coupons on address label or back page. Your prompt payment is appreciated and helps to offset production and mailing costs.

Pathways to employment

An innovative response to refugees and asylum seekers

The Brotherhood of St Laurence's GAPCo grew out of its long-running Open Employment Unit. Created in April 2001, GAPCo is an innovative program funded through FaCS to assist disadvantaged job-seekers to enter the workforce and achieve their career goals, with special emphasis on people with disabilities.

Over the last year GAPCo has been able to respond to the particular needs of people seeking refuge—both those recently granted temporary protection visas and long-term asylum seekers awaiting determination of their situation.

The need for such a response became apparent about four years ago after the Open Employment Unit assisted a traumatised East Timorese girl who had been referred by the Red Cross Asylum Seekers' Support Scheme. Because the Brotherhood was able to provide support, training and job search assistance, the girl was able to find work. She later returned, seeking help for two other East Timorese, who in turn found employment.

Meeting needs

News of the helpful program spread, leading to greatly increased demand to which GAPCo responded more formally. Brotherhood staff recognised that asylum seekers and temporary protection visa holders suffered considerable disadvantage, especially the 'disability' associated with torture and trauma. Though GAPCo was not itself a counselling service, it could assist these groups to obtain a Centrelink assessment which acknowledged their disadvantage. GAPCo was then able to include these people in its services funded by FaCS, providing help with compiling work histories or resumes, making applications, preparing for interviews and other vital stages of the job search process. GAPCo also actively recruited potential employers. The Brotherhood assigned some funds for employer incentives to correspond to other employment services: a one-off payment is made to employers of people who remain employed after three months.

Participants have included some asylum seekers who have been living in the community in Melbourne for years waiting for clarification of their situation. Some are people who fled East Timor after the Dili massacre. With minimal education, their opportunities to gain new skills in Australia have been limited. Many asylum seekers are excluded from assistance other than the small allowance received through Red Cross. Helping them to find employment is a key step in the rebuilding of their lives.

Some of the more recently arrived Temporary Protection Visa refugees have more formal skills and varied work experience (see story of Mohammad). Like the asylum seekers, they are very keen to find employment. As well as their traumatic experience they have other hurdles to overcome in filling out the multiple forms required, without the assistance of a settlement support worker.

Because GAPCo has attracted such interest, it has become necessary to be selective in accepting participants. People are now advised to improve their English skills (for example by using neighbourhood services like the Fitzroy Learning Network) and to gain some work experience (even by visiting factories or offices where acquaintances work) before approaching GAPCo for assistance.

GAPCo staff have been encouraged to learn that other agencies are exploring similar initiatives, which will enable more refugees and asylum seekers to access services.

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Profile

Mohammad Aljanabi trained as a physiotherapist in Iraq before being forced to flee and ending up in Australia. After spending seven months in the Woomera Detention Centre, he was finally recognised as a refugee and granted a temporary protection visa. Because of the effects of his traumatic experience, his assessment by Centrelink identified him as having sufficient disadvantage to receive assistance at GAPCo. Mohammad took the initiative to attend English classes and was keen to work in a health-related environment, though his formal qualifications had not yet been recognised in Australia. A personal assistant's position was found in an aged care facility and Mohammad was helped to complete the language requirements of the application. Outside his working hours, Mohammad has become an articulate advocate of the needs of asylum seekers.

Given the Chance project

The Brotherhood's Ecumenical Migration Centre has received funding from the Victorian Women's Trust, the Invergowrie Foundation and the Victorian Government's Community Strengthening Initiative for a three-year project. The program will seek to build, with Employment Services support, successful employment outcomes for young people with a refugee experience, by introducing them to Australia's workforce cultures, fostering self-confidence, and offering mentoring and traineeships. A key aim will be to involve the participants as part of the wider community in advocacy and policy advice to government.

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State budget priorities 2002-03: submission from the Brotherhood

Late in 2001 the State Government invited the Brotherhood of St Laurence to submit a paper outlining a small number of priorities for consideration in the development of the 2002-2003 State budget. Two main factors contributed to the decision by the Brotherhood to make a submission: the extensive information the Brotherhood has gained from working with people on low incomes; and a recognition of the fact that the State Government is in a strong position to improve the lives of low-income people.

Features of such a strategy would include:
• increased government spending on community aged care, health and community services, education and environmental management;
• development of avenues of support for social entrepreneurs and social enterprise as a part of a jobs creation strategy;
• a greater emphasis on employment in the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund;
• incorporation of administrative funding in the Community Jobs Program, targeted to disadvantaged regions;

be considerable, even though the individual charges may not appear very large. Fees for some services may even be counter-productive in the longer term since they can provide a real barrier for people on low incomes. Such services (for example many community health and family support services) can play an important role in preventing or delaying the need for more costly intervention. In

The State Government could do more to reduce the inequality and disadvantage

In keeping with the request for a small number of broad, high-level priorities the Brotherhood focussed its attention on three main areas, areas in which it was felt the State Government could do more to reduce the inequality and disadvantage currently experienced by many families and communities. Specifically, the State Government was asked to direct greater effort to creating jobs, to increase the supply of affordable housing and to lessen the burden of the costs of services through increased concessions and by the waiver or reduction of fees. The reasons for focusing on each of these areas and the specific proposals put to the Government are outlined below.

Employment
Unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment, is the most significant cause of poverty and disadvantage in our community. The unemployment rate for Victoria jumped to 7.0 per cent in October 2001, suggesting that an increasing number of Victorians may face a period of joblessness and associated hardship. The Brotherhood of St Laurence believes the State Government should develop an integrated, whole of government approach to employment growth, linking programs and strategies across departments.

• an increase in the period of funding for the Community Jobs Program to between 6 and 12 months;
• an increase in public sector traineeships and entry-level jobs; and
• greater integration of policy and programs to overcome the fragmentation of the employment, education and training systems at all levels of government, supported by the planning of an employment summit.

Cost of services and the role of state concessions
The State Government has responsibility for the provision or regulation of a wide range of goods and services: this enables it to impact significantly on the disposable incomes of low-income people. The cost of these goods and services should be structured in such a way that they neither prevent access by low-income people nor compromise their living standards. The use of concessions enables precise targeting to individuals in need, without undermining the pricing structure of the commodity.

Currently, individual programs and departments determine fees or charges for services with little or no reference to each other, or to the overall effect on clients. Because fees or charges are applied to a wide variety of services, the cumulative impact on people on low incomes can

addition, concessions for some charges are provided for holders of Health Care Cards, but these concessions have not kept pace with inflation for the last ten years.

The State Government should take action to improve the lives of low-income Victorians by:
• undertaking an analysis of adequacy and the distributional impact of State Government fees and concessions;
• increasing the Education Maintenance Allowance for primary school students to $257 p.a., and for secondary students to $515 p.a., and paying the entire amount directly to the parent/guardian;
• cancelling fees for services for Health Care Card holders in community health centres and public dental services, and compensating providers through increased funding; and
• improving the adequacy and equity of transport concessions for people with low incomes.

Affordable housing

For many low-income individuals and families, housing is the single largest expense in their budget. Any increase in the relative cost of housing can have serious financial consequences, and in some situations, result in periods of homelessness. Recent research by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute indicated that there is a growing number of people who are unable to afford private rental or home purchase and who face long waiting lists for public housing. Access to public and community housing reduces the rate of poverty

currently experienced by many families and communities

among low-income people and helps reduce broader social and economic inequalities.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence acknowledges the inadequacy of the Federal Government's current contribution to public housing, and requests that the State Government, during forthcoming negotiations on the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement, make strong representation on behalf of people who need housing assistance. However the State Government, in its own right, has a critical role to play in facilitating social or community housing development, and in encouraging greater institutional and private investment in affordable housing. It also has a role in broadening the available stock to ensure it meets the diverse living arrangements of individuals and families.

Demand for affordable public housing greatly exceeds supply, resulting in tight rationing. A result of this tight rationing has been the increase in the numbers of people with high support needs living in public housing stock. Current support structures are inadequate to meet the needs of many of these people, with issues frequently escalating to crisis situations. The State Government must provide sufficient community workers to support residents with high support needs who are living in both public and community housing.

The State Government should increase the quantity of affordable and appropriate housing by:
- increasing investment in public and community housing stock;
- piloting ways of encouraging greater private investment in affordable housing; and
- diversifying the range of accommodation types, sizes and locations available to people on low incomes.

Addressing poverty and disadvantage

Poverty and inequality are the biggest challenges facing Australian society. Our society is clearly divided into two groups—one that has benefited from the economic growth of the past decade and is well resourced, both economically and socially; and another in which poverty, disadvantage, and limited opportunity are commonplace.

The Brotherhood has called on the State Government to commit to budget measures that will improve the lives of people living on low incomes. In addition the Government has been asked to prioritise services to and funding for Indigenous Australians and newly arrived refugees, two groups who face the greatest disadvantage in our community.

The full submission made to the State Government can be viewed at the Brotherhood of St Laurence website <www.bsl.org.au>

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In search of shelter
The Brotherhood's Public Housing Support workers often encounter families who have come close to homelessness, due to the shortage of affordable housing.

A mother with four children came to Victoria from interstate so one child could pursue a special educational program. With several health problems, the family relies largely on income support, including the mother's disability pension.

They applied for private rental housing, and obtained a three-month lease, at $250 per week. They soon had to move because the site was to be redeveloped; but they were also behind with the rent. The next place cost $350, which they managed to pay till one son and his girlfriend lost their jobs. They fell into rent arrears and other debt. The landlord served an eviction notice. Because the tenants did not understand their rights, the landlord was able to call the police to throw them out.

The family was desperate. Fortunately, through two community agencies, they found emergency accommodation—three members in a hotel and two in a private home. They applied for transitional housing, and for priority housing with the Office of Housing.

This family's multiple health needs finally gained them a high-rise flat. In reasonable health, they would have faced years of waiting for public housing, with little prospect of finding secure accommodation in the meantime. Over 40,000 households are on waiting lists for Victoria's public housing.

Measuring the income divide:
how does Australia compare?

Inequality and poverty are topics widely debated, and there is a strong community perception that the gap between rich and poor is growing. How accurate is this perception, and how does Australia compare with other countries? And if the gap is growing, does it matter? This article discusses trends in income inequality in Australia over the last twenty years, and compares the Australian experience with other OECD countries.

There are several types of income. 'Wage and salary earnings' refers to before-tax income from work, 'gross income' covers before-tax income from all sources, and 'disposable income' refers to income after tax and social security are paid (Saunders 2001).

A separate analytical issue is how income for families of different sizes should be compared. Families living together can achieve a higher standard of living on the same income per person than someone living alone, because they can share the cost of heating, rent, cooking and so on. This issue is addressed by calculating 'equivalent household income' based on a set of equivalence scales which vary with the size of the household and the number of children.

Studies of income inequality generally use equivalent household disposable income as the measure of income. The measure of inequality most often used is the Gini coefficient. Theoretically,

this could range from 0, which would mean that income was distributed equally among all people, to 1, which would imply that one person received all income. An increase in the Gini coefficient suggests that income is becoming more unevenly distributed.

Income inequality in Australia

Saunders (2001) analyses recent trends in income inequality in Australia. Table 1 shows changes in the distribution of income over the last decade by presenting data on the change in Gini coefficients for different types of income.

Clearly, there was a large increase in inequality in full-time wages – an increase of almost 23 per cent over the decade, or an average of around two per cent each year. There was a smaller but still significant increase in the inequality of the distribution of equivalent disposable income over the same period. This suggests that the tax-transfer system has played an important role in limiting overall inequality in the face of a major change in earnings inequality.

These figures from an analysis by Saunders are very similar to those derived from another study by Harding and Greenwell (2001) which show an increase of 0.53 per cent per year in the Gini coefficient for equivalent disposable income over the last decade, despite some differences in data and methods.

Why has earnings inequality increased so dramatically?

A few key factors contributed to earnings inequality. There has been an increased demand for more highly skilled workers, causing the wages of this group to rise dramatically. The move to individual and enterprise bargaining has rewarded those with greater bargaining power. As women have gained better paid jobs, an even wider gap has developed between high-income households with two wage-earners and low-income households where neither partner has a job (Dawkins and Scutella 2001).

How does income inequality in Australia compare with other industrialised countries?

Figure 1 shows increases in inequality in equivalent disposable income for several OECD countries. It should be noted that the figures for Australia refer to the period 1989-1999, while the other countries cover the period from 1979 to the mid-1990s. Australia's rate of increase in inequality exceeded all of the other countries covered by Burtless' study (2001).

Why should we be concerned about increased income inequality?

It is often argued that people on low incomes are better off even if inequality is increasing, because increased inequality is associated with higher economic growth which benefits everyone in real terms—the 'rising tide lifts all boats' argument. Burtless (2001)

Table 1. Changes in distribution of household weekly income 1990 – 1999/2000 Gini coefficients

	1990	1994/95	1999/2000	Change 1990-2000 (%)	Annual rate of change (%)
Wage & salary income[1]	0.224	0.271	0.275	22.8	2.075
Gross income	0.427	0.436	0.445	4.2	0.412
Equivalent disposable income	0.330	0.338	0.346	4.8	0.470

[1] Includes only full-time workers

Source: Saunders (2001)

Figure 1. Average annual increases in Gini coefficient for equivalent disposable income since 1979 (Australia since 1989)

France	0%
Canada	0.04%
Italy	0.04%
Germany	0.13%
Japan	0.31%
USA	0.39%
UK	0.46%
Australia (Saunders)	0.47%
Australia (Harding)	0.53%

0.0% 0.1% 0.2% 0.3% 0.4% 0.5% 0.6%
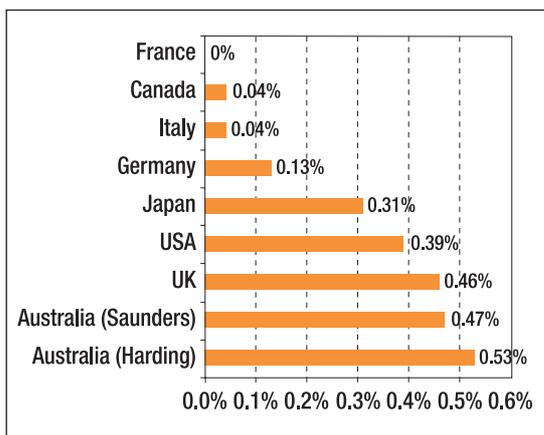
Sources: Burtless 2001, Saunders 2001 and Harding and Greenwell 2001.

has shown that inequality has increased most rapidly in countries with the highest average levels of economic growth. There does therefore seem to be an association between increased inequality and increasing overall wealth of a country. In terms of how the wealth is shared, however, Burtless argues that the poor in European countries have done better over the last decade, despite having lower rates of growth than the UK and the USA, because the benefits have been more equally distributed.

Research from the Luxembourg Income Study supports Burtless' argument. While acknowledging the methodological difficulties of making international comparisons, this international study of well-being examines real income differences between income groups in each country, with a particular focus on children. It does this by adjusting income for purchasing power—what someone can buy for a given amount of money in their own country. Importantly, it allows us to explore the question 'Is someone on a particular income (measured as a point in the income distribution) in Australia better or worse off in absolute terms than someone on an equivalent income in other countries?'

The answer depends on whether you are rich or poor. Children of the rich in the USA (belonging to a family at the 90th percentile of the income distribution) are better off in terms of purchasing power than the children of the rich in any other country. Australia comes in at about the middle. For the children of the poor (a child in a family at the 10th percentile of the income distribution) the story is the opposite. Poor children in the USA are worse off in real terms than poor children in all of the other 12 OECD countries in the study, except for the UK. Australia comes 11th out of 13: only in the UK and the USA are the poor worse off than in Australia. These findings mirror those of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on poverty rates in developed countries where Australia comes 14th out of 17 countries, followed only by the UK, Ireland and the USA (UNDP 2001).

Incidentally, why do Australian policy makers and economists tend to turn for ideas on combating poverty to the two countries which seem to be worse at it than we are—the UK and the USA? Perhaps it is time to think outside the directions encouraged by language barriers or shared neo-liberal doctrines.

Implications

These findings about inequality have significant implications for policy concerning people on low incomes. We must find ways to distribute the benefits of growth more equally rather than continue down the 'high growth–high inequality' road promoted by economic and political elites. Not only will this make Australia a fairer country, it will also make people on low incomes better off in real terms. And we must start looking for lessons on combating poverty to European countries who have demonstrated a superior capacity for reducing it than our English-speaking counterparts.

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Mandatory and non-reviewable detention of asylum seekers: Is there a better way?

Increasing numbers of concerned people regard Australia's current mandatory, non-reviewable detention of asylum seekers as an indefensible policy towards people in need of protection. The Brotherhood of St Laurence believes that an alternative approach by the federal government is both urgently needed and achievable.

What's a better way of responding to asylum seekers?

Changes being proposed by the state coalition Justice for Asylum Seekers recognise the government's role in ensuring national security and border control. Once security and health checks are adequately addressed, however, the task is to manage people with humanitarian concerns during the time it takes for the Department of Immigration to process their asylum claims. After all, asylum seekers arriving in a country without prior authorisation commit no crime. Indeed, there are already people seeking asylum who live in the community and are not detained: it is mainly those who make the dangerous journey by boat who are held in detention centres.

An *independent assessment panel* would oversee decisions and provide review mechanisms.

A case management approach is already adopted by the Australian Red Cross for asylum seekers who are living in the community, having lodged an asylum claim after arriving with a valid visa at an airport. Most Australians would accept a broadening of the role of a respected humanitarian agency such as the Red Cross to all asylum seekers.

Independent case management and risk assessment are key planks in any monitored community-based system. When reasonable compliance mechanisms are also in place, changes such as these are very likely to be acceptable to many Australians.

What are better ways of housing asylum-seekers?

Australia's experience in managing people in other compliance systems shows that options for housing asylum seekers include:
- *community or church-based housing for those cleared as low risk*, including all unaccompanied minors and families;

Are community fears about national security well-founded?

Far from posing a threat to Australia's national security interests, most unauthorised arrivals are fleeing from abusive regimes and threatening situations in search of peace and safety. Just 11 of the more than 13 000 people who sought asylum in Australia in 2000 were rejected on 'character grounds' (Edmund Rice Centre 2001).

Two-thirds of people seeking Australia's protection are already living in the community. Their rate of compliance with the process is excellent: in 1996-98, no asylum seeker absconded. It is clearly in their interests to comply with the process they are seeking to access.

Detention should be kept for specific purposes, time-limited and used only when needed

A better way uses detention only when it is needed and for specific, time-limited purposes, namely:
- when people arrive on shore, to establish their identity and conduct health and security checks;
- at the end of processing, if a claim is unsuccessful, to ensure ready access to a person being returned to their country of origin or another country;
- to prevent absconding of those (few) deemed high risk (but with set periods of judicial and administrative review).

A better way uses *case managers* whose role would include:
- undertaking a risk assessment, recommending accommodation and assisting with reporting obligations;
- providing on-going information and referral to essential services;
- managing relations between asylum seekers, the Department of Immigration, security providers and support organisations including health, counselling, legal and community volunteer services.

- *open hostels with curfews for those (smaller numbers) considered medium security risk* or needing further investigation to establish identity, security and health clearance (similar to the migrant hostels successfully used in Australia during the 1970s and 1980s); and
- *ongoing (short-term) detention for those (few) deemed high security risk* during the processing of claims and for those preparing to return.

Additional insights can be gained from the experience of many other countries using a mixture of detention and community release for asylum seekers.

What are some advantages of these proposed changes?

Through a case management approach, prompt handling of issues and timely advice and information—about the claim process, progress and likely outcome—offer asylum seekers a degree of control in critical decisions about their lives. This in turn reduces anxiety and the likelihood of psychological damage or self-harm which are increasingly linked with the current detention system. Even if a claim is unsuccessful, a less stressful return can be achieved.

Nevertheless, community fears about the motives, character and legitimacy of asylum seekers are seized upon and fostered by some for political gain. These fears must be seen as unfounded and somewhat illogical when the vast majority can prove a well-founded fear of persecution and are accepted by Australian authorities as refugees.

A better way also requires a shift in the nature of public statements about people who claim asylum, from denigration and suspicion to explanation of their rights and obligations under Australian law and acknowledgment of the

A case management

conditions from which they have fled. Protection of national security is legitimate but does not necessitate abandoning a sense of humanity or alarming the public about border control.

Photo by Joe Sabljak, Herald & Weekly Times Photographic Collection

Conclusion

It is simply not true that the government has no alternative but to use mandatory non-reviewable detention of asylum seekers. Many of the changes proposed above are already working well with other asylum seekers here and overseas as well as in other areas of government responsibility. By drawing on this experience, government and community members can be confident of applying proven systems which also respect people's human rights. There is a better way.

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Will such changes be more expensive?

The current detention system cost around $104 million in 2000-2001 and the average cost of keeping a person in a mainland detention centre was $120 per person per day (Ruddock 2002). Community based programs are much cheaper—for example, in New South Wales, parole costs $5.39 per person per day, probation costs $3.94 and home detention costs $58.83 (NSW Parliament Legislative Council Select Committee 2000).

Meanwhile, the current system continues to produce significant longer term fiscal and social costs, as signalled by increasing unrest, riots, despair and self-harm often resulting from psychological deterioration during the detention period.

approach with timely advice and information offers asylum seekers a degree of control in critical decisions about their lives

'Talking treaty': taking up the unfinished business of reconciliation

Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) in Victoria accepted the challenge from ATSIC to 'provoke debate' among non-Indigenous communities about the concept of a treaty with Indigenous Australians. ANTaR does not see a treaty as a predetermined document that is to be discussed and signed. Rather, ANTaR believes that this is an opportunity for non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians to share ideas and explore the questions of what should go into such agreements and why.

ANTaR is developing 'Talking treaty', an education and action consultation project that aims to engage with the widest possible audience, at every level of community from national to neighbourhood; and to enlist formal commitment to specific principles that deal with 'Unfinished Business'. ANTaR believes that it is only through these processes that reconciliation can occur.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence has joined ANTaR in pursuing the shared objective of promoting reconciliation through the 'Talking treaty' project. To this end, the BSL now houses ANTaR's office and makes available to ANTaR many other resources.

- commits parties to consulting within and across constituencies;
- encourages and supports binding local agreements and activities that action the principles; and
- commits the resources necessary to achieving the agreement within agreed timeframes.

What constitutes 'Unfinished Business'?

A critical issue for Indigenous people is 'Unfinished Business'. The former Council of Aboriginal Reconciliation identified 'Unfinished Business' as including the following:

- an acknowledgment of the truth of our shared history (e.g. the aggressive dispossession from the land, accomplished by massacres, other systemic violence, sickness and the removal of children);
- greater government accountability (e.g. in the areas of education, health, custody and housing) to the ends, and by the means, agreed to by Indigenous people;
- legislative processes to resolve such issues as achieving land justice, self-determination, enabling traditional law, enshrined through

**GET INFORMED….
GET INVOLVED….
GET ACTIVE….**
ANTaR is preparing a series of factsheets to address many of the issues and concerns discussed in the community. These will be available on the ANTaR(Vic) website at <www.nativetitle.org>.

ANTaR is also willing to visit any organisation to discuss these issues, run workshops or develop a simple action plan for that organisation to work towards reconciliation.

You or your organisation can join with the BSL and ANTaR in taking seriously the challenge and to 'provoke debate' on issues related to a possible treaty.

For more information or an ANTaR speaker, presentation or workshop,

'Talking treaty' is a consultative education and action project that aims to engage with the widest possible audience, at every level of community from national to neighbourhood

What is a treaty?

A treaty is a formal agreement between two or more parties. Any such agreement must be the result of consultation and negotiation and be deemed as binding upon each signatory. In the Australian context, having a national document that establishes specific principles that encourage, support and enable local treaties (or agreements) may be a better option than trying to develop one treaty that covers all the Indigenous communities on this continent.

At a minimum, a treaty between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of this land must foster justice for Indigenous people. Therefore any treaty must create a framework that:
- commits all levels of governments to principles that aim to remedy past injustices and current disadvantages;

constitutional reform; and
- recognition of Indigenous knowledge, culture and spirituality as being of value to non-Indigenous people and society.

The most obvious and urgent place to start is the implementation of the recommendations of the government's own reports. However, the key recommendations of landmark government reports such as the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) and 'Bringing Them Home' (Stolen Generations) (1997) have been largely ignored to date.

The present Federal Government's rhetorical aim of 'practical reconciliation' cannot be achieved while the promises made are largely ignored, systemic injustice remains and the history of conflict,

contact Frank Hytten at ANTaR by email or phone.

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Finding common ground

The Brotherhood's executive director Nic Frances accepted an invitation from the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship to attend a gathering of social entrepreneurs followed by the World Economic Forum in New York in February this year. The Forum and preceding gathering provided a unique opportunity to network and engage in dialogue with the world's economic and corporate leaders on global agenda areas, including reducing poverty and improving equity; sharing values and respecting differences; redefining business challenges.

Nic Frances observed that an important message from the conference was the need for the various parties to search for and find common ground and language for bringing about global change.

may not be fully aware of the amount of influence their organisations wield, compared with some national economies. They may consult elected leaders or even UN agencies, for example, without realising the extent to which their own size makes it difficult for anyone to reject their approach.

'On the other hand, they may see social activists as spoilsports, because they always seem to be saying what's wrong with big business. We in the social welfare sector need to think about whether we're speaking in language they understand. Is our ideology getting in the way of our information, preventing us from being heard? Are we really interested in change, or are we more interested in adopting a position and being "right"?

working for an Australia free of poverty is to provide and present relevant information in ways that make sense to the corporate world, and that acknowledge that businesses too are seeking to meet their diverse responsibilities to shareholders, customers, staff and the wider community.

Nic Frances was interviewed by Deborah Patterson
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An important message was the need to search for and find common ground and language for bringing about global change

'During the World Economic Forum I spent half a day with the marchers who were protesting outside,' he said. 'Virtually all their placards were raising the same issues as were being discussed inside— things like "Jobs not war" and messages about environment and community. It was very striking that the protesters' concerns were substantially the same as the main themes of the Forum.'

Many of the Forum's plenary speakers focused on themes close to the Brotherhood, and clearly acknowledged that they had a global and national corporate responsibility. Much of their language signalled a readiness to explore such things as triple-bottom-line accounting, which takes into account social and environmental costs and benefits alongside financial expenses and profits.

There appeared to be considerable room for dialogue, so long as it is based on mutual respect and willingness to understand the other's position.

Understanding other views
'Business leaders are used to thinking big and they know that money can bring results, but they

'We need to be willing to find common ground, and goals that we can share for society and security, the economy and the environment. That might require being open to a different point of view.'

Building cooperation
'There are very powerful people who are already interested in working on this. For example, George Soros, chairman of Soros Fund Management, a leading private investment firm, and founder of the Open Society Foundation, offered at the Forum to support a cooperative effort involving the International Labour Organization, United Nations Environment Programme and the International Monetary Fund in developing processes of triple-bottom line accounting at the global level.'

One result of the New York meetings is that one of George Soros' team will be coming to Australia to discuss micro-credit initiatives with the Brotherhood.

According to Nic Frances, a continuing challenge for community organisations like the Brotherhood

11

Caring for homeless elderly people

A group of members of the Victorian Association of Health and Extended Care (VAHEC) are concerned about the long-term financial viability of providing residential aged care to homeless elderly people. This group, who provide more than 500 residential aged care places for the homeless elderly in Victoria, believe that the needs of their residents, and the staff who look after them, far exceed the care that is currently available and provided for under the Aged Care Act 1997.

The 'homeless elderly' are defined in this context as 'elderly people who are in non-permanent housing such as rooming houses and caravan parks or who have an unstable history in public housing or who live in squats or in the streets'. Too many of these older people continue to miss out on adequate shelter and care.

A paper to highlight issues associated with providing care to this group was prepared by VAHEC, with the support of residential care providers (including the Brotherhood of St Laurence) who provided services to large numbers of homeless elderly. Central to concerns of these providers was the knowledge that homeless elderly often experienced great difficulty gaining access to residential aged care, and when they did, meeting their care needs within current resources was difficult.

Homeless people who need residential aged care frequently often have multiple cognitive problems (including psychiatric disability, intellectual disability, dementia, or alcohol-related brain impairment and associated permanent memory loss). Many also suffer from poor health status, poor nutrition, premature ageing and social isolation. Complex needs often result in these people needing extensive staff support over a long period of time to settle into residential care community life.

Many mainstream residential aged care services feel they do not have the resources or the level of expertise to provide accommodation, care and support for this growing 'special needs group'. The current aged care system also favours elderly people who are more financially secure and able to pay higher accommodation bonds, and inadvertently encourages low-care facilities to admit residents who fit those criteria. Homeless elderly are possibly the most disadvantaged elderly group and their needs are not currently being adequately addressed.

Recommendations in the issues paper focused on:
• implementing measures to improve the access homeless older people have to residential aged care;
• undertaking research to document and cost the care needs of older homeless people who have high and complex needs; and
• improving the long-term financial viability of services that provide care to a large number of homeless older people by changing the structure of concessional payments (e.g. removing the differential rates for people admitted to care pre- or post-1997) and providing access to adequate capital funding subsidies.

The paper has been endorsed by the Australian Community Services Association as a position paper, and is being used nationally, as well as in Victoria, to lobby to ensure the long-term availability of appropriate, high quality care for homeless elderly people.

Further information about these issues can be obtained from the Brotherhood of St Laurence or VAHEC.

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Joe's story

Now aged 78, Joe (not his real name) has lived and slept in many places. He has known unemployment and often been unable to pay his rent. He has acquired brain injury and has been socially isolated. He finds it difficult to relate and is inclined to become angry and even physically abusive with other people.

Given his special accommodation needs, it was fortunate that Joe was able to move into one of the Brotherhood's hostels in 2001. Still, his behaviour requires one-to-one supervision at meals and when he mixes with other residents; patient monitoring to ensure that he does not endanger lives by smoking in his room; and reassurance that his finances are being managed correctly by his solicitor. Because the hostel provides a supportive environment, Joe is able to lead a full life.

There are many other older homeless people, like Joe, who would benefit from safe but flexible care. The total care model, with one staff member assigned as the primary care-giver for each resident, has been found very effective. Though it requires more staff hours, it gives dignity and meaning to life, especially for people who have little support from family or friends.

Work in progress

Community care workforce study

A joint funding application to the Department of Human Services from the Victorian Association of Health and Extended Care (VAHEC) and the Brotherhood of St Laurence for $60,000 to conduct research into 'Improving Direct Care Staff Recruitment and Retention in Community Aged Care Services' has been approved. Planning for the research is under way and the first meeting of the Advisory Committee was held on 14 March 2002.

Since the introduction of the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program in 1985, there has been a strong and increasing demand for community care services. The dependency level of people seeking support and assistance has also risen, along with consumer expectations about the quality and availability of care. Unfortunately, service providers are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain sufficient direct care staff to meet community demand.

This research will seek to identify strategies that are effective in improving direct care staff recruitment and retention. Specifically, it aims to:
• investigate the extent and type of work being undertaken by aged and community care providers to improve the recruitment and retention of direct care staff;
• document key strategies in some detail and, where available, analyse existing service data to assess effectiveness; and
• publicise initiatives being undertaken so that they may be implemented more widely across the sector.

Further information about the project can be obtained by contacting the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

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Precarious work, uncertain futures

This is the latest *Changing pressures* bulletin, highlighting the impact of the fragmentation of work on 25 to 34-year-olds.

It challenges the assumption that people in this age-group, having undertaken training and gained work experience, can readily find secure employment. Instead, the increase in casual and part-time rather than full-time work means that many workers face fewer entitlements and irregular earnings.

The bulletin documents the experiences of young men and women who have not found full-time permanent jobs, and the effects of uncertain employment on their lives and their plans. The research was part of the New Social Settlement project funded by the Australian Research Council, the Committee for Economic Development of Australia, the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Myer Foundation.

Precarious work, uncertain futures can be downloaded from the Brotherhood's web site at <www.bsl.org.au >. Extra copies may be requested by calling (03) 9483 1386.

Recent submissions

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

Significant submissions or statements released in 2001-02 include:

• Submission to the Centrelink Rules Simplification Taskforce, April 2001

• Submission to the Residential Tenancies Act (1997) Review, May 2001

• Towards a fairer future: Brotherhood of St Laurence call to the parties for the 2001 federal election, October 2001

• Submission to the Independent Review of Breaches and Penalties in the Social Security System, November 2001

• Submission to the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness: Response to National Homelessness Strategy Consultation Paper, November 2001

• Pain and penny-pinching: how charging fees for podiatry and physiotherapy services affects older women, *Changing Pressures*, No. 9, November 2001

• State Budget 2002-03 priorities: submission to the Victorian State Government, December 2001

• Brotherhood of St Laurence response to FaCS Briefing on Australians Working Together [welfare reform] package, February 2002

In addition, Brotherhood staff contributed as members of the Victorian Association of Health & Extended Care (VAHEC) to VAHEC's Issues Paper, The Homeless Elderly in Residential Care, August 2001 (see article page 12).

Affordable housing for all

Homelessness is on the policy agenda, but what about housing?

The Brotherhood of St Laurence has an interest in the supply of affordable, secure, well-located and appropriate housing for a number of reasons:

• Access to housing is fundamental to the organisation's vision of an Australia free of poverty;
• The Brotherhood is a provider of residential and community based aged care and independent living units for low-income elderly and a provider of the state-based Public Housing Advocacy Program (previously the Rental Housing Support Program);
• The current shortage of affordable housing puts pressure on all other Brotherhood services including employment services—in particular the Community Support Program and Job Placements Education and Training program, community services, and settlement services provided by the Ecumenical Migration Centre; and
• Recent research found the lack of affordable, well-located housing has significant impacts on the lives of people with low incomes (Taylor & Jope 2000).

The next few years will be critical for housing policy in Australia. The Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) has in the past funded the major supply of affordable, public housing for low-income earners. The CSHA, which is renegotiated periodically, is currently being reviewed in anticipation of negotiations around its renewal, which had been due to begin in August 2001.The current CSHA is effective to 30 June 2003.

The review of the CSHA may result in significantly different arrangements for the future funding and development of social housing in Australia. Core issues to be addressed include the Commonwealth's role in social housing, potential shifts in fiscal responsibility from the Commonwealth to the States, and the development of uniform standards of service across the country. Any new agreement post 2003 will be shaped by the outcomes of this review.

Both the Federal and Victorian governments have been reminded of the importance of the CSHA in providing affordable housing to low-income households by advisory committees commissioned to recommend strategic responses to homelessness.

Decline in affordable housing

A key cause of homelessness for low and fixed income households identified by both committees is the decline in affordable private rental housing, in an environment of shrinking capital funds for public housing stock. Since 1989-90, annual Commonwealth funding to Victoria through the CSHA has declined by approximately 30 per cent or $90 million in real terms (DHS 2002, p.8).

• The Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness (CACH) proposed developing an increased supply of low-cost private and public rental housing by promoting investment in low-cost housing in the private market and expanding social housing stock through the CSHA (CACH 2001).

• The Ministerial Advisory Committee to the Victorian Homelessness Strategy has urged the Victorian government to use the forthcoming CSHA negotiations to lobby for additional funds to increase the supply of affordable housing (DHS 2002, p.17).

In response to the current crisis in affordable housing (Housing Justice Roundtable 2001) and in anticipation of the forthcoming CSHA negotiations, the Brotherhood of St Laurence is developing its capacity to advocate for expanded supplies of affordable housing, especially for people living on low incomes:

• Representatives of Brotherhood services meet regularly with staff of Social Action and Research to consider action on housing issues.
• Housing has been identified as a priority area of research and policy analysis for the coming year and advocacy in partnership with key coalitions and peak bodies is planned around the negotiations for the 2003 CSHA.

Any strategy to address homelessness needs a housing component. This relationship between housing and homelessness was put simply by the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations (AFHO) in a paper at the National Housing Conference in October 2001.
On one hand, it is the lack of adequate, affordable housing that causes many people to become homeless or experience housing-related poverty; and on the other, people who are homeless need appropriate housing (AFHO 2001).

Let's not wait until people become homeless before we respond to their housing needs.

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Department of Human Services (DHS) 2002, *Victorian homelessness strategy: executive summary*, Housing and Community Building Division, DHS, Melbourne, Vic.

Housing Justice Roundtable 2001 (unpublished), Housing for all. Powerpoint presentation.

Taylor, J & Jope, S 2001, *Poverty on the metropolitan fringe*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy, Vic.

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14

New information on poverty, unemployment and social justice

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

Ageing and aged care
Jackson, N 2001, *The policy-maker's guide to population ageing: key concepts and issues*, Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra, ACT.

Cluning, T (ed.) 2001, *Ageing at home: practical approaches to community care*, Ausmed Publications, Ascot Vale, Vic.

Education
Holdsworth, R (ed.) 2000, *Discovering democracy in action: learning from school practice*, Youth Research Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne & Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training.

Nieuwenhuysen, J, Lloyd, P, & Mead, M (eds) 2001, *Reshaping Australia's economy: growth with equity and sustainability*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Horne, M 2001, *Classroom assistance: why teachers must transform teaching*, DEMOS, London.

Lamb, S, & McKenzie, P 2001, *Patterns of success and failure in the transition from school to work in Australia*, ACER Press, Camberwell.

Lamb, S 2001, *The pathways from school to further study and work for Australian graduates*, ACER Press, Camberwell.

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Australian National Audit Office 2000, *Management of Job Network contracts: Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business*, Australian National Audit Office, Canberra, ACT.

Burkitt, N (ed.) 2001, *A life's work: achieving full and fulfilling employment*, IPPR, London.

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

Evans, J, Lippoldt, D, & Marianna, P 2001, *Trends in working hours in OECD countries*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris.

McCall, L 2001, *Complex inequality: gender class and race in the new economy*, Routledge, New York.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2001, *Innovations in labour market policies: the Australian way*, OECD, Paris.

Globalisation
Bentley, T, & Stedman Jones, D (eds) 2001, *The moral universe*, Demos, London.

Ellwood, W 2001, *The no-nonsense guide to globalisation.* New Internationalist, London.

Giddens, A (ed.) 2001, *The global third way debate*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK.

Health
Commonwealth Department of Public Health, Flinders University, South Australian Community Health Research Unit 2000, *Improving health services through consumer participation: a resource guide for organisations*, Department of Health and Aged Care, Canberra.

Norden P, 2001, *Unequal in health: standing in solidarity with those in need*, Jesuit Social Services, Richmond, Vic.

Housing
Badcock, B, & Beer, A 2001, *Home truths: property ownership and housing wealth in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic.

Grigg, S, Johnson, G, & Coutts, S 2001, *Partnership in action: a discussion paper on the housing information & referral role undertaken between Argyle Street Housing Services and the Salvation Army Crisis Services*, Argyle Street Housing Service & The Salvation Army Crisis Services, St Kilda, Vic.

Immigration
Burnley, I 2001, *The impact of immigration in Australia: a demographic approach*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne.

Income distribution
Harding, A & Greenwell, H 2001, Trends in income and expenditure inequality in the 1980s and 1990s. Paper presented at the 30th Annual Conference of Economists, 24 September 2001. *Website: <http://www.natsem.canberra.edu.au/pubs/cp01/2001_007/cp2001_007.html>.*

Kelly, S 2001, Trends in Australian wealth – new estimates for the 1990s. Paper presented at the 30th Annual Conference of Economists University of Western Australia, 26th September 2001. *Website: <http://www.natsem.canberra.edu.au/pubs/cp01/2001_008/cp2001_008.html>.*

Leadership and management
Hesselbein, F, Goldsmith, M & Somerville, I (eds) 2002, *Leading for innovation and organizing for results*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Spitzer, R, 2000, *The spirit of leadership: optimizing creativity and change in organizations*, Executive Excellence Publishing, Provo, Utah.

Poverty
Colvin, K 2001, *The women and poverty report: 'More than half - less than equal'*, Victorian Council of Social Service, Melbourne.

Harding, A, Lloyd, R & Greenwell, H 2001, *Financial disadvantage in Australia1990-2000: the persistence of poverty in a decade of growth*, The Smith Family, Camperdown, NSW.

Rowntree, B Seebohm 2000, *Poverty: a study of town life: special centenary edition*, The Policy Press, Bristol.

Serr, K 2001, *Thinking about poverty*, Social Work Services, East Melbourne.

Single-parent families
Millar, J & Rowlingson, K (eds) 2001, *Lone parents, employment and social policy: cross-national comparisons*, The Policy Press, Bristol.

Social change
Edgar, D 2001, *The patchwork nation : rethinking government: re-building community*, Harper Collins, Sydney.

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Andreason, A 1995, *Marketing social change: changing behaviour to promote health, social development, and the environment.* Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Drake, R 2001, *The principles of social **policy***, Palgrave, Basingstoke, Hampshire.

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Jamrozik, A 2001, *Social policy in the post-welfare state: Australians on the threshold of the 21st century*, Pearson Education/Longman, Frenchs Forrest, NSW.

Social trends
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Wills, J 2001, *Just, vibrant, and sustainable communities: a framework for progressing & measuring community wellbeing*, Local Government Community Services Association of Australia, Townsville.

Social welfare
Adema, W 2001, *Net social expenditure*, 2nd ed., Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2001, *Australia's welfare 2001: the fifth biennial welfare report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare*, AIHW, Canberra.

Yenken, D 2001, *Where are we going?: comprehensive social, cultural, environmental and economic reporting*, The Australian Collaboration, Melbourne.

Youth
Green, A, Maguire, M & Canny, A 2001, *Keeping track: mapping and tracking vulnerable young people*, The Policy Press, Bristol.

Johnston, L, MacDonald, C, & Mason, P 2000, *Snakes and ladders: young people, transitions and social exclusion*, The Policy Press/Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Bristol, U.K.

Information services for the public

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

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

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

Telling stories

This is the clever title of a recent publication from the Financial and Consumer Rights Council, written to help workers in the human services field optimise the use of case studies in social policy advocacy work.

Only 25 pages long, *Telling Stories* suggests practical ways to use case studies to bridge the gap between people experiencing poverty and those making policy decisions which affect them. It recommends cooperation between caseworkers and policy workers within organisations to achieve this aim.

It addresses the strengths and potential weaknesses of case studies and the ethical considerations of confidentiality and obtaining people's informed consent to have their story told (even if identities are changed). The writers stress the importance of presenting the story in such a way as to foster empathy and expand understanding rather than to encourage blame, reinforce negative stereotypes, or directly challenge strongly held beliefs of the readers.

Telling stories also points out that case studies can be most effective when multiple sources are used to demonstrate their validity.

This is a useful guide and checklist for policy and caseworkers seeking to ensure that social policy is sensitive to actual human experience.

Goldsworthy, J (ed.) 2001, *Telling stories: Using case studies in advocacy and social policy*, Financial and Consumer Rights Council, Melbourne.

Useful website on social security and welfare rights

The new National Welfare Rights Network's (NWRN) website contains an excellent range of information on social security payments and people's rights under social security legislation.

The website is a handy reference point for community agencies and for people receiving income support. It provides a lot of information in plain English. As noted on the site, its independent advocacy assistance is designed to be helpful but is not a substitute for specific advice from a welfare rights centre or other legal advisor.

Contents include:

- More than 30 factsheets and self-help guides on social security payments and client rights

- Self-help information about appealing to tribunals

- Welfare Rights Centre's 'guide to social security payments' listing the latest payment rates, conditions and assets tests

- Forms to obtain file papers under Freedom of Information

- Two complete chapters (chapter 3 about helping clients in dealing with Centrelink and in making appeals; chapter 27 about qualifications for Special Benefit) from *The Independent Social Security Handbook*, 4th ed., Welfare Rights Centre, Sydney, 2001

- Details of current NWRN policy projects and recent submissions

- Numerous links to other organisations' web sites.

The website has a straightforward address <http://www.welfarerights.org.au>

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