

Employment assistance Time for a fresh approach

The Job Network has played a significant role over the past decade in assisting those who are job ready to re-enter the workforce. However, its model of assistance was designed for labour market conditions that existed in the mid 1990s, with double the unemployment level of today. Despite an unprecedented period of economic growth, there are still over one million Australians of working age who are either unemployed or are seeking more work than they have. In June, there were over 760 000 income support beneficiaries being assisted by the Job Network, over half (51%) of whom had been on benefits for over 12 months, and 22% unemployed for over 3 years (DEWR 2007a).

It is now time to reconfigure employment assistance to invest in better integrated approaches that will be more effective for the longer term unemployed who invariably have multiple barriers to work. The current 'work first' philosophy is inadequate to assist those most distant from paid work.

Overseas research indicates that a mixed model with emphasis on investment in joined-up assistance and support to build the skills and capacities of job seekers, resolve their barriers to participation (including health and housing) and provide paid work experience is more effective.

Limitations of the current system

The current employment assistance system is characterised by:

- high and increasing levels of regulatory burden and contractual obligations

- misunderstanding of the aspirations and barriers faced by disadvantaged job seekers
- inefficient fragmentation and complexity of programs with separate accountabilities
- reliance on sequential forms of assistance
- inadequate and skewed allocation of resources
- relatively weak outcomes for the most disadvantaged job seekers.

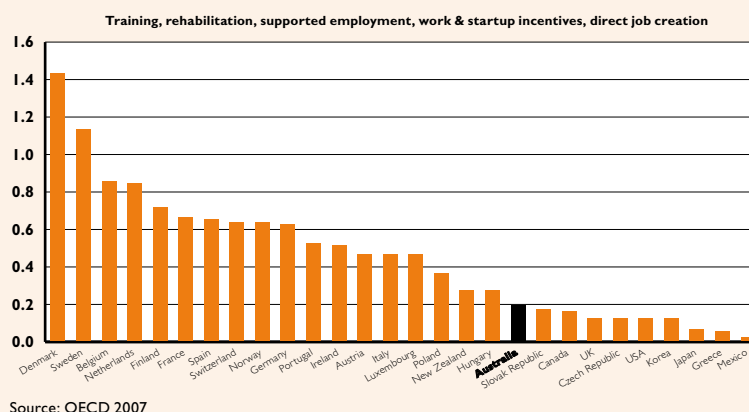
To illustrate these weak outcomes, over half (55%) of Work for the

Dole (WfD) participants (93 000 commencements annually) have been on income support for over two years, and one in five have less than Year 10 education (DEWR 2007b). Yet only 13% of WfD participants achieve full-time employment (measured three months after exit), while the 59% remain unemployed and 10% drop out of the labour force altogether.

Spending priorities

Australia has underspent on active labour market assistance compared with the OECD. We rank

Figure 1: Direct expenditure by OECD nations on active labour market assistance as % of national GDP (2005–06)



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10th from the bottom in terms of direct expenditure on vocational training, work incentives, supported employment and other investment to assist those who are not 'job ready' (Figure 1). Within this, Australia spends only 0.04% of GDP in the area of vocational training to help the unemployed, compared with Denmark which spends 13 times more and New Zealand which spends 4 times more (OECD 2007).

In this time of economic prosperity and growing wealth, we are significantly underinvesting in training and skills development, despite the growing industry shortages and continuing underutilisation of those in the labour market.

New approach

The Brotherhood is therefore calling for a fresh approach to employment assistance, to be introduced on expiry of the current contracts in 2009, that:

- simplifies the current system
- strengthens the initial assessment and engagement process to consider fully job seeker barriers and capacities for work
- invests more resources in integrated approaches that build skills and capabilities of the long-term unemployed
- offers concurrent assistance which includes meaningful paid work, skills development and personal support.

In addition to the above reform of the universal system for employment assistance, it is essential to address

regional and local disadvantage. This requires targeted strategies to resolve infrastructure barriers to employment (such as public transport and child-care) and to support individual job pathways.

The current labour market environment offers a unique opportunity for partnership between governments, employers and community support agencies to invest in innovative approaches to address local needs. As leading economist Saul Eslake (2007) concluded in his recent Sambell Oration,

Perhaps now, with an economic imperative as well as out of a sense of moral and social obligation, we may finally begin to make inroads into entrenched disadvantage and poverty.

An emerging form of employment assistance aimed at disadvantaged job seekers is the Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) model of up to 12 months paid work in a supportive environment. ILMs typically operate as small businesses run by not-for-profit organisations and compete with private businesses in the open market. Overseas evidence, initial findings from the Brotherhood's latest research and cost-benefit modelling point to substantial gains from investment in ILMs (Mestan & Scutella 2007). The Brotherhood urges expansion of ILMs through capital seed funding and social procurement commitments by governments in Australia.

Increased investment *now* will pay off in the longer term—through a better skilled and

more productive workforce to meet the dynamic changes in the economy over the next decade.

No matter what the outcome of the federal election, a new vision for employment assistance is urgently required, placing greater emphasis on human capital development as a key element of a social inclusion framework. The Brotherhood will continue to focus on turning this vision into program reform based on our service delivery experience and research evidence.

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Brotherhood Comment is published three times a year by the Research and Policy Centre of the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence works for the well-being of Australians on low incomes to improve their economic, social and personal circumstances. It does this by providing a wide range of services and activities for families, the unemployed and the aged. It also researches the causes of poverty, undertakes community education and lobbies government for a better deal for people on low incomes.

Published in November 2007 by
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From the General Manager

The closing months of 2007 have been good times at the Research and Policy Centre. We have had additions to staff, and the new Senior Management structure reported in the last issue has given the Centre a lift. But most of all a more favourable climate for social policy development in Australia, reported in previous issues, does seem to have taken hold. In the recent organisational review of strategy, it has been widely reported that our framing of policy around the themes of social investment, inclusion, and governance, with a focus on the four transitions, is resonating with a new political will to tackle social disadvantage.

The policy context

Three factors in particular are said to be shaping this more expansive policy horizon; and in each area the Brotherhood of St Laurence is already well and truly engaged. The first has been the consolidation of the consensus that governments, industry and welfare organisations must act to boost economic participation and productivity under the pressure of skill shortages and the ageing population.

In this issue, Michael Horn reports on the BSL's innovative work on new models of employment assistance which can engage effectively with the long-term unemployed; and Paul Smyth reflects on recent key developments in the light of his Foenander Public Lecture at the University of Melbourne.

In partnership with the Centre for Public Policy at the University of Melbourne, the BSL held a seminar on 'Low Paid Work in Australia: Realities and Responses'. Daniel Perkins and Rosanna Scutella spoke about their Australia Research Council funded project looking at how to strengthen upward mobility through policies to secure

retention and advancement once people are in employment.

A highlight of the day was the launch of the third issue of the Brotherhood's Social Barometer, dealing with the 'working years'. We were delighted to have it introduced by Professor Stephen Sedgwick, the new Director of the Melbourne Institute for Applied Economic and Social and Research. In his response, Tony Nicholson referred to the Institute and the BSL as 'two great Melbourne institutions' together in a most welcome partnership.

A second key factor has been the growing impact of climate change, with the pressing need for an active government role in addressing both economic and social implications. The BSL has been a leader in addressing the equity implications; and 'flagship' research and policy projects have been put in place to address these over the next three years. Two new staff have recently joined Janet Stanley who is driving the work in this area. In this issue, Janet outlines this work and reports on early findings about the regressive nature of a carbon tax.

Janet is also working with Victoria Johnson and Paul Smyth on a project dealing with transport and social inclusion. Victoria reports on related publications and ongoing research arising from this ARC-funded project in partnership with Monash University Institute of Transport Studies and the Victorian Department of Infrastructure.

A third factor has been the new convergence of interest between welfare groups and business interests. Our sense a year ago that 'good social policy can be good for business' has since matured enormously. We are encouraged by the heartening sentiments

expressed recently by the Business Council of Australia, reported in this issue; and the BSL is engaged in serious partnership initiatives with peak business organisations such as the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Emer Diviney and Serena Lillywhite have completed their research report on corporate social responsibility (particularly relating to labour rights) in the garment industry, generating considerable interest from the sector.

Also in this issue, Gerry Naughtin reports on the findings of a series of workshops on ageing and social exclusion which he conducted with Sandra Hills, the BSL's General Manager of Aged and Community Care, in order to establish clear directions for the new research and policy program focusing on retirement and ageing.

Kemran Mestan comments on the intersection between human rights and social inclusion and Lucy Nelms introduces work in progress on an evaluation of the innovative Neighbourhood Justice Centre. Finally, Nicole Oke reports on research about playgroups, one of several projects relating to the well-being of families and young children which are nearing completion.

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Our framing of policy around the themes of social investment, inclusion, and governance, with a focus on the four transitions, is resonating with a new political will to tackle social disadvantage.

Spotlight on working age Australians The Brotherhood's third Social Barometer

Australia's working age population is the engine room of the nation's economy. These workers produce the goods and services that generate national wealth, and their taxes fund government spending on health and aged care, social security and education. Many have prospered in the last 15 years. However closer examination shows that too many people are missing out on sharing our national prosperity.

The working years

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is particularly concerned that Australia lacks agreed standards for understanding the extent of social disadvantage. For this reason we have established the Brotherhood's Social Barometer. The third report in the series has just been produced, following *Monitoring children's chances* (Scutella & Smyth 2005) and *Challenges facing Australian youth* (Boese & Scutella 2006). It examines disadvantage among Australia's working age population in eight key dimensions of life. Each dimension reflects basic capabilities and opportunities that every person should enjoy, including employment, education and training, access to adequate economic resources

and housing, good physical and mental health, physical safety and participation in the community.

People's working lives, defined in this report as the span from 18 to 64 years, are now less linear and involve many more changes and shifts in direction. It is important that all Australians are well equipped to negotiate these transitions successfully.

Findings

This third Social Barometer has confirmed that Australia is a very prosperous nation. In each dimension of life we have examined, the vast majority of the working age population is doing well. In many areas, the outcomes and capabilities of working age people are improving, and the level of disadvantage is receding. Most working age people are living longer, they are more highly skilled, and they are earning substantially higher incomes than in the past.

However, not all working age people are better off. Some people continue to experience deep disadvantage, and some problems are actually becoming more

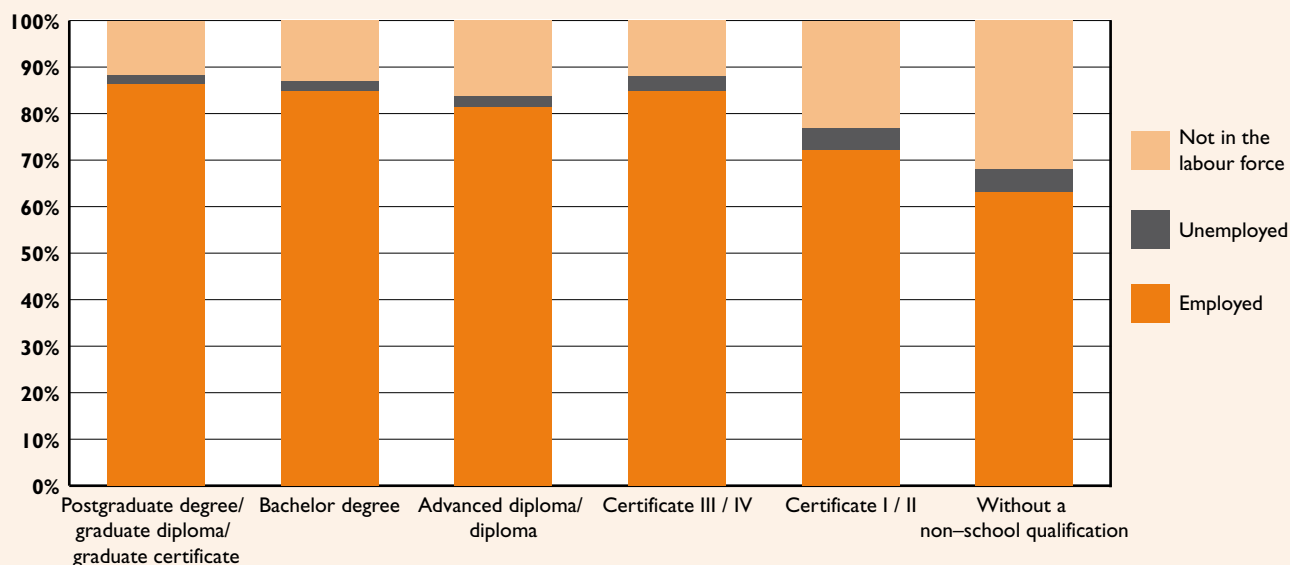
widespread. A divide is emerging within the working age population: while a growing number of Australians have a bachelor degree, a significant number of others lack any non-school qualification. This is of particular concern given that a larger percentage (up to 37%) of those with limited education are unemployed or not in the labour force than of those with higher qualifications (see Figure 1).

The extent of relative poverty has increased over the last two decades in Australia as income distribution has become more unequal (Wilkins 2007). Wealth is distributed much more unevenly than income, with the net worth of the wealthiest Australians averaging 54 times the net worth of the poorest Australians (see Figure 2).

More working age people are overweight or obese, and this is contributing to a rise in the prevalence of chronic health conditions such as diabetes. Various long-term physical health problems, as well as mental illness, are restricting the ability of some people to participate in the

Low education is correlated with poor health, and both are causes of unemployment and low income.

Figure 1 Labour force status of those aged 15 to 64 by highest qualification, Australia, May 2005



Source: ABS 2006, *Education and work, Australia 2006*, Table 11.

workforce, at considerable cost to them personally and to the nation.

It is evident that, despite the prosperity that most Australians have enjoyed, too many people remain entrenched in disadvantage during their prime working years. These groups experience poor outcomes across several dimensions of life. Low education is correlated with poor health, and both are causes of unemployment and low income. This has a compounding impact on their well-being and on their ability to move out of disadvantage.

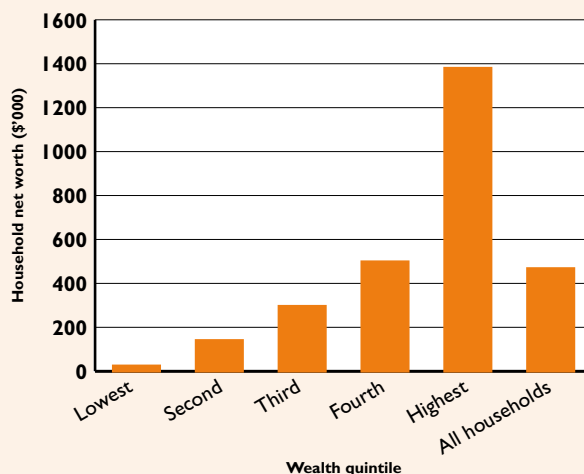
What we must do

State and federal governments in Australia have recognised specific areas of concern, but further investment is needed to ensure that all people of working age have the capabilities to engage productively in the workforce and to lead healthy and rewarding lives.

Better integrated models of assistance are needed to address the multiple barriers faced by disadvantaged working age Australians, so they can gain the skills and confidence to participate fully in the labour market. Particular groups requiring assistance include Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities and long-term health conditions (physical and mental), and people with low levels of education and inadequate work skills.

Australia must improve on its low levels of spending on active labour market assistance for the unemployed relative to other OECD countries. Additional investment is required to build on joined-up models of employment assistance that provide pathways to sustainable careers through individualised training, meaningful work experience and job opportunities. There also needs to be increased

Figure 2 Net worth of households by wealth quintile, 2003–04



Source: ABS 2006, *Household wealth and wealth distribution*, Table 6.

investment in education and training over the life course, to ensure that the skills and productivity of workers marginally attached to work are kept up to date with employer needs.

One of the fundamental policy reforms required is to address the growing housing crisis, since the lack of affordable, secure-tenure housing is a substantial barrier to participation in training and work. The Brotherhood of St Laurence supports proposals for a national affordable housing plan as a matter of urgency.

A new approach is needed to assessing the capacity for economic and social participation of people with physical and mental health conditions. Increased emphasis must be placed on ensuring that people facing extra barriers or with caring responsibilities are able to develop their full potential in the workforce.

It is also important to ensure that the well-being of those who remain unable to participate in the workforce is protected through an adequate safety net.

It is critical to maximise the economic and social participation of all Australians if we are to further strengthen the nation's overall prosperity and community well-being over the next decade.

Note

The full report, *The Brotherhood's Social Barometer: the working years*, launched by Professor Stephen Sedgwick of the Melbourne Institute on 17 October, is available on the Brotherhood's website.

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The lack of affordable, secure-tenure housing is a substantial barrier to participation in training and work.

Forging new directions

Research and policy development in retirement and ageing

The ageing of Australian society is resulting in new and changing patterns of disadvantage amongst older people. This article discusses the ways in which the Brotherhood is redeveloping its work to respond to the issues facing an ageing Australia.

We began this work with a series of consultations with consumers, academics, government, philanthropic, community and business organisations, and service providers, to enable the Brotherhood to listen to a broad range of views. The workshops have examined key trends, research priorities and ways in which the Brotherhood can contribute to the discussions about emerging patterns of financial and social disadvantage which will affect older people over the next decade. KPMG were commissioned to undertake a review of the literature on disadvantage and older people. On the basis of this work, three issues have been identified as initial priorities for further research and policy development. These are financial disadvantage, housing affordability and mature age employment.

Financial disadvantage

The indexing of age pensions to Male Average Weekly Total Earnings in 1997 provided a formula that was expected to guarantee that the age pension would keep pace with the costs of living (The Treasury 2007). Recent research evidence and the experiences of the Brotherhood suggest that this optimistic scenario does not apply to all older people and that there are substantial groups of older Australians who are missing out on a fair share of the increasing wealth of the nation (AMP & NATSEM 2007; Warren & Oguzoglu 2007).

Consumer organisations such as National Seniors and the Council

on the Ageing Australia are arguing that the age pension is not keeping pace with the actual costs of food, housing, medication, health care and transport, resulting in financial hardships for a significant number of older Australians. Research by Westpac and the Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia (2007) highlighted a difference in June 2007 of around \$4000 per year between what they identify as the costs of a modest lifestyle and the full age pension for a single person. This research identified single older people as the most vulnerable to financial stress.

Housing affordability

The cost of housing for older people renting is also emerging as a significant cause of disadvantage amongst older Australians. The combination of the increase in private rental costs and the shortage of public housing for seniors is created significant housing stress for older people on fixed incomes who do not own their own homes. The number of people aged 65+ living in lower-income rental households is projected to increase by 115 per cent from 195 000 in 2001 to 419 000 in 2026. The greatest projected change is in the 85+ age range, where the number of low-income renters is estimated to grow by 194 per cent from 17 300 to 51 000. This will create a strong and continuing demand for rental housing suited to older, lower-income, sole-person households. These households are projected to more than double in number over the same period, from 110 800 to 243 600. Approximately two-thirds of these households will be single women (Jones et al. 2007).

The issue of housing affordability for seniors has not been considered as part of the broader housing debate. Consequently, the Brotherhood has identified it as a further priority of our future research and policy work.

Mature age employment

A further dimension of our review has been consideration of how we can contribute to preventing poverty among future older Australians, as well as responding to those currently experiencing disadvantage. Traditionally, the Brotherhood's focus in ageing has been on people aged over 65 years—that is, those already in retirement. However, if financial stress in older age is to be avoided, then we need to broaden our focus to include strategies for improving retirement savings for people on low incomes, by exploring avenues such as savings plans, continuing employment and re-training for those in the 50 to 65 age bracket. The challenge is to improve opportunities to assist mature-aged employees to remain in the workforce longer, build their retirement savings and increase the equity in their home (Encel 2003).

Reshaping our directions in retirement and ageing

In response to these changing patterns of disadvantage amongst older Australians, the Brotherhood has identified the following strategic directions for our service provision and research and influencing work in retirement and ageing over the next five years:

- Building an informed and evidence-based understanding of poverty, social exclusion and social isolation amongst older people and becoming a national voice on these issues by investing in our research and policy development capacities and in running campaigns.
- Capacity building amongst 45 to 65-year-old pre-retirees to reduce levels of redundancy and early retirement amongst older workers on low incomes, improve savings and provide training opportunities.

- Demonstrating, to governments, older people and service providers, new ways of delivering and governing services which create greater consumer choice and independence and control.
- Developing policies and influencing strategies to improve housing affordability for non-homeowning older people on low incomes.

Unless timely, fair and equitable policy solutions are found, a significant minority of older people will experience disadvantage and poverty in our ageing Australian society. The Brotherhood of St Laurence is committed to working to bring about constructive change on these issues.

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Seeking justice in the neighbourhood Neighbourhood Justice Centre evaluation

The Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC) was established by the Victorian government as an innovative approach to local crime and civil disputes, to operate as a pilot from early 2007 to October 2009.

Its central purpose is to provide both client-centred and community-based legal processes, using restorative and therapeutic means where appropriate. The multi-jurisdictional court is located in a centre housing a range of community and legal services. The presiding magistrate hears cases in which at least one party resides in the City of Yarra. In this sense, it attempts to operate as a truly local court.

The Centre is the first of its kind in Australia and is influenced by community justice centres such as Red Hook Community Justice Center in Brooklyn, New York.

The Research and Policy Centre, together with the Department of Criminology, University of Melbourne, has been contracted by the Department of Justice to carry out a three-year evaluation of the pilot project. PricewaterhouseCoopers will conduct a cost-benefit analysis and the Social Research Centre is responsible for community telephone surveys.

The evaluation will assess the workings of the centre in terms

of charter, process and outcomes. Participants will include court users, key stakeholders, local community members and NJC staff and service providers.

This project will enable the Brotherhood to develop an understanding of multiple disadvantage in a legal context and of a demonstration model where the law attempts to take into account, and address, multiple disadvantage.

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Equity in response to climate change

An issue of critical importance

Climate change has become a critical issue, with governments, business and households becoming increasingly aware that extensive action is needed to reduce the levels of greenhouse gases and assist people and businesses adapt to a changed environment. Australians have already been affected by rising sea levels. Photos taken last year on Iama Island in the Torres Strait show people wading knee-deep along the roadway covered by water at high-tide.

In the shadow of a federal election two emissions trading schemes are being designed for Australia, one by the Coalition and one by Labor. Such a cap and trade scheme will bring into play market forces: when a price rises, people look for alternatives. The carbon price is yet to be determined, but Stage Two of the emissions trading scheme in the European Union has priced carbon between \$A30 and \$A40 (Colebatch 2007).

Unequal cost burden

Irrespective of which scheme is used, electricity and petrol prices will rise. We can expect business to pass on these cost increases to consumers. The Brotherhood commissioned economic modeling of the impact on households of a carbon price set at a conservative rate of \$25 per tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent (NIEIR 2007).

Based on 2001 ABS figures, at \$25, the average additional expenditure for a high-income household (defined as one whose weekly income is approximately double that of an average Victorian household) would be \$1530 per year, or 0.4% of their total expenditure. By comparison, a poor household (with weekly income about half the Victorian household average) would experience an additional cost of

\$670, which amounts to 2.5% of their household expenditure.

The regressive impact of carbon pricing occurs despite the fact that higher income groups typically have a higher carbon footprint—57 tonnes of carbon annually for the higher income household, compared with only 22 tonnes for a poor household (NIEIR 2007).

These figures are calculated after adjustment for household size, and adjustment for utility or ability of various household types to adjust to a carbon tax. The figures account for the direct carbon components associated with energy use (petroleum products, gas or electricity)—about half of the total carbon usage—as well as indirect sources of carbon through the manufacture of goods and services. About two-thirds of the carbon content of products consumed by Victorian households comes from Victoria, the remainder from interstate and overseas.

This analysis shows that the four household categories most adversely impacted by carbon pricing are poor households, unemployed households, retired age pensioner households and households with children where government benefits exceed 30% of income. The lowest impact is on double-income households with no children, households with income greater than \$70 000 where the head is aged over 50, and high-income tertiary-educated households.

Spatial variations

This work has recently been extended (forthcoming report). The information on carbon usage per \$1000 expenditure has been mapped for Melbourne metropolitan areas and Victorian Local Government Areas. The mapping shows how spatial factors

may affect the carbon use by households. In Melbourne, areas with the highest carbon footprint for lower income households tend to cluster around the outer suburbs (Melton, Brimbank, Yarra Ranges and Cardinia). This largely reflects the quality of and accessibility to public transport networks, and the consequent need for these households to spend more on private vehicles than households with similar incomes in areas such as Boroondara, Stonnington, Yarra, Bayside, Port Phillip and Melbourne. Those low-income households who live in the outer suburbs will experience the most hardship from the introduction of a carbon price.

Policy responses

Clearly, policy responses to climate change will have major implications for disadvantaged Australians. Generally speaking, these Australians lack access to the financial resources and knowledge needed to install new technologies and adopt behavioural changes that will reduce their use of energy.

The way carbon emission permits are issued will be critical to the ability to include equity outcomes in social policy on climate change. The trading schemes presently being drafted propose to issue some free carbon emission permits and auction the remainder.

The Brotherhood argues that issuing free permits would not only allow the heaviest polluters to continue to emit greenhouse gases, but also remove the opportunity to distribute revenue on the grounds of equity. Revenue raised under a trading scheme should rather be used to provide assistance to low-income households to offset both direct increases in energy and transport costs and other price increases arising from businesses passing on to consumers emission

trading related costs. The revenue could also be used to fund training to meet a high demand for skilled workers to upgrade houses to meet energy efficiencies and withstand more extreme weather patterns. Providing these skills to unemployed people through a Transitional Labour Market (a bridging program to the open labour market) has been shown to be a successful approach to assisting unemployed people (Howe 2007).

There is a need for clear equity principles to be built into any carbon trading scheme. The principles for an emissions trading scheme should be:

- responsibility: those who created the problem of emissions have the primary responsibility for reducing its cause and ameliorating harm
- capacity: those with the greater capacity to reduce emissions have greater responsibility
- vulnerability: those most vulnerable need special protection and assistance on the grounds of both equity and efficiency (BSL 2007).

The need for early action

It is clear that climate change will cause a major transformation of the economy, as considerable changes will need to be made in how energy is generated. Yet past economic transformations, such as that of manufacturing in the 1980s, have not been handled well, causing unemployment in some outer Melbourne suburbs.

The Australian Business Roundtable on Climate Change (2006), a group of six leading companies and the Australian Conservation Foundation, undertook some economic modeling of early action and

delayed action scenarios. They found the early action scenario:

- has a modest impact on economic growth, compared with delaying action
- reduces the risk of a major disruptive shock to the Australian economy
- increases the rate of jobs growth
- reduces the electricity price impacts.

Early action, such as the determination of the carbon price, not only creates greater certainty, but also allows more time for planning to assist low-income households to respond to climate change. If the scale of the transformation required is recognised and mitigating factors are put into place early, then the capacity is there not only to prevent further inequality and disadvantage but also to use the new opportunities to address Australia's human capital shortage and thereby boost economic development.

The Brotherhood is continuing a significant research program to promote the understanding of the impact of climate change on low-income households and to examine the most effective responses. The program includes investigating the locations where people be most adversely impacted, the most effective ways of climate proofing homes and assisting those in the private rental market, the interface between climate change and transport, and how climate change will provide employment opportunities for low-skilled workers and those unemployed.

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Social policy

The new main game

Researching for this year's Foenander Lecture was an eye-opening exercise. It revealed just how myopic is much of the writing about the role of wages in Australian social policy. Important as the minimum wage remains for the protection of low-paid workers, it is not the main game in any 21st century social policy strategy.

Beyond the wage-earners' welfare state

Social policy researchers have long repeated the mantra of the 'wage earners' welfare state' (WEWS) created by Frank Castles to describe a system where 'wages substituted for welfare' following the Harvester Judgment. However, none has studied how wages were actually set by the various 20th century arbitration tribunals. Hence my surprise to discover that eminent IR scholars such as Hancock and Richardson (2004, p.150) regard the WEWS as an 'ingenious conceit' but 'almost entirely inferential: examples of policy makers explicitly attributing the structure and content of social services to the adequacy of wage levels are, to our knowledge, non-existent'. Indeed as long ago as 1966, the practice of setting a needs-based wage in the Harvester model ceased with the creation of the 'total wage'. Moreover, in 1974 the Commission explicitly discarded 'family wage' components, declaring that it was an 'industrial arbitration tribunal, not a social welfare agency' (Hancock 1998, p.53).

Social regulation and the market

A second learning was that industrial relations scholarship reflected similar dilemmas about renegotiating the role of social regulation and the market, and carried similar underlying assumptions about protecting people from markets. These assumptions were increasingly at odds with the pro-market order which had emerged since the 1980s.

Now, however, the main division of opinion in both industrial relations and social policy is between those who think markets work best when simply deregulated and those who think efficiency requires extensive government investment and regulation, both in providing public goods such as education and in steering economies towards higher income, knowledge-based structures.

Efficiency and fairness

Most important for our social agenda has been the widening recognition that we do need new forms of investment and regulation to lift efficiency as much as fairness. This was evident in retiring Business Council of Australia President Michael Chaney's (2007) address on 'Growing Social Prosperity in a Growth Economy' and in ANZ Chief Economist Saul Eslake's 2007 Sambell Oration which critiqued recent failures to invest windfall budget surpluses in people still excluded from economic and social participation.

Such ideas represent the new main game in Australian social policy. This game requires those in social policy to widen their focus from the safety net of income support and minimum wage protection to the new safety net of entitlements of each Australian to achieve full economic and social participation. Chaney (2007, p.3) expressed a vision 'to make Australia the best place to live, work, learn and do business'. The Brotherhood's Social Barometer is a modest attempt to establish empirically the key areas across the life cycle where some are missing out. It is surely within the capacity of a national government to set the evidence-based benchmarks to realise a Chaney-style agenda.

Governance mechanisms

A third key learning from the industrial relations literature relates

to the kind of agency needed to develop and implement such a program. It is true that when most workers were covered by awards there was an institutional basis for a more coordinated approach to economic and social policy, as the 1980s 'social wage' deals attest. Currently we do not have a governance mechanism to integrate economic and social policy. New Labour's Social Exclusion Unit provided the Blair government with a more 'joined up' approach to social policy, but it was not integrated with economic policy. A new Australian Economic and Social Inclusion Unit would need to reflect its primarily economic purpose. Business groups, as much as welfare, employee and key government economic agencies, would need to drive it.

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This game requires those in social policy to widen their focus from the safety net of income support and minimum wage protection to the new safety net of entitlements of each Australian to achieve full economic and social participation.

Going nowhere fast

Transport as a cause of social exclusion

Transport disadvantage is a pervasive issue in fringe urban, regional and remote Australia. Due to the dispersed character of Australian cities and transport networks, transport accessibility is uneven, and commonly decreases the further one moves away from city centres. For some people social and structural barriers combine to make available public transport inaccessible.

Access to affordable appropriate transport is vital to carry on daily lives. Transport is also an important enabler for positive outcomes in health, education and employment. European researchers have quantified links between transport disadvantage and social exclusion. For example, the UK's Social Exclusion Unit (2003, p.2) found that for two out of five job seekers lack of transport was a barrier to getting a job; and Mollenkopf et al. (2006) found a strong correlation between subjective well-being and mobility in later life.

However, the role of transport disadvantage in social exclusion in Australia is not well understood. Collaboration between the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the Monash University Institute of Transport Studies and the Bus Association of Victoria has recently resulted in a book, *No way to go* (Currie, Stanley & Stanley 2007), which canvasses the issues.

These three partners, together with the Victorian Department of Infrastructure and others, are undertaking the first comprehensive study of transport disadvantage in Australia. The Australian Research Council funded project, *Investigating transport disadvantage, social exclusion and well-being in metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria*, will compare the mobility needs and travel and activity patterns of

disadvantaged and advantaged Victorians and investigate links between these patterns and access to transport. The research will evaluate poor access to transport as a cause of social exclusion and explore how this relates to other causes. It will also test the relationships between these factors and psychological well-being.

Other areas of investigation include:

- how well public transport and community transport meet transport needs
- 'forced' car ownership
- strategies to cope with limited transport
- the impacts of higher fuel costs on the transport disadvantaged
- the social and economic benefits of improving access to public transport
- the extent to which transport disadvantage results from a conscious home location decision.

Early findings

Needs gap

Gaps between public transport supply and needs in Melbourne have been identified by Currie and Senbergs (2007a) using a Geographic Information System (GIS) model of public transport service availability. When service supply was matched with the Australian Bureau of Statistics Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage/Disadvantage (IRSAD), areas of greatest 'needs gap' were identified. These areas cluster on the urban fringe, in particular the municipalities of Cardinia, Yarra Ranges and the Mornington Peninsula.

Forced car ownership (FCO)

Low income and high car ownership, combined with a lack

of alternatives such as walking or public transport, suggest that families may be 'forced' into car ownership. Currie and Senbergs (2007b) found 20 831 outer Melbourne households with a weekly income below \$500 running two or more cars. These households had zero or very low walk access to local activities, and limited public transport. Yet the cost of operating two or more cars represents as much as 50 per cent of their total income.

Further information

Materials will be available on the BSL website and the Social Research in Transport Clearinghouse at <www.sortclearinghouse.info>.

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Currie, G & Senbergs, Z 2007a, *Exploring forced car ownership in metropolitan Melbourne*, paper presented at 30th Australasian Transport Research Forum, Melbourne, 25–27 September.

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Areas of greatest 'needs gap' cluster on the urban fringe, in particular the municipalities of Cardinia, Yarra Ranges and the Mornington Peninsula.

Ethical threads

Examining corporate social responsibility in Australia's garment industry

The Ethical Business Unit's latest report, *Ethical threads: corporate social responsibility in the Australian garment industry*, is the first study to draw on insights from all stakeholders—companies, unions, workers, non-government organisations, industry groups, government and educational institutions.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence undertook this study in support of decent employment as an important means of reducing social exclusion and disadvantage, providing economic benefits to individuals and the community.

Ethical threads documents the Australian garment sector's awareness of labour conditions of employees and suppliers in both Australia and Asia. It also discusses companies' understanding of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and their willingness and capacity to implement responsible supply chain management.

Awareness of conditions

Due to restructuring and tariff reductions, the Australia garment industry is no longer vertically integrated, resulting in complex supply chains and much outsourcing. Consequently, many principal companies know little about the labour conditions in their supply chains and some consider that labour rights are the responsibility of their suppliers.

Yet inquiries have consistently found that garment outworkers in Australia receive pay and conditions significantly below award and statutory entitlements (Productivity Commission 2003; Industry Commission 1997). Indeed, outworkers interviewed for this report indicated that they were paid \$2.50 for a shirt that took an hour to sew. According to studies of conditions in low-wage countries,

garment makers often work long hours at high speed under conditions that do not comply with local labour laws (Connor & Dent 2006).

Uptake of protective mechanisms

The study found that the industry has been slow to embrace both mandatory and voluntary mechanisms to protect workers. Australia's regulatory framework for local workers, according to Marshall (forthcoming), is a model of regulatory design; but non-compliance with award wages and conditions has been so widespread that the Senate Economics References Committee (1996) described it as normal. In relation to international supply chains, unlike Europe and the US, Australia has no mandatory CSR mechanisms and voluntary reporting has been limited.

Many companies believed it was difficult to comply with Australian law and the Homeworkers Code of Practice, or implement corporate social responsibility strategies. They cited issues of access to suppliers, small manufacturing bases and limited organisational capacity.

Further, smaller companies generally believed that Australian consumers did not care about the conditions of garment manufacture and that no business case existed for developing CSR strategies.

The way forward

Steps to address these issues include establishing a multi-stakeholder CSR platform for the industry and setting up a production hub where smaller companies can have their garments manufactured by outworkers under ethical conditions.

Companies could improve their CSR performance relating to labour conditions by consulting individuals and organisations representing both supplier and worker perspectives

and by making public their CSR processes and results.

The research confirms the value of increasing the industry's awareness of worker conditions, relevant state and federal legislation and awards and international regulatory mechanisms. Events including fashion festivals and trade shows should be targeted for awareness-raising activities.

There is also scope for governments to support vulnerable workers by purchasing from companies which monitor and improve workforce conditions.

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The industry has been slow to embrace both mandatory and voluntary mechanisms to protect workers.

Human rights and social inclusion

On 1 January 2008, the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities will be enacted. Similar legislation has been introduced in other parts of Australia, such as the A.C.T. The charter focuses on civil and political rights but currently excludes social rights. However, it will be reviewed in 2011 and 2015, partly to assess whether the list of rights should be expanded. In conjunction with the charter, human rights is gaining popularity as a framework for addressing disadvantage. This is evidenced by at least two events, the establishment of the Australian Centre for Human Rights Education at RMIT University, and an updated version of George Williams' book that calls for an Australian charter of rights (Williams 2007). This article explores how the human rights framework can be fruitfully utilised in social policy.

Historical perspective

A rights approach to social policy is most associated with the articulation of social rights by T H Marshall around World War 2. Marshall pointed out that civil rights had emerged to safeguard the individual's freedom from coercion and were guaranteed through the courts. Political rights, which enabled a citizen to participate in the exercise of political power, came later and were legislated in parliaments. Social rights were developed through the welfare state and were to secure 'economic welfare and security ... and [allow a person] to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society' (Marshall 1950, p.8).

Marshall thought that the legal structure of social rights differed from civil and political rights in that 'They cannot be precisely defined ... A modicum of legally enforceable rights may be granted, but what matters to the citizen is

the superstructure of legitimate expectation' (p.34). Hence, social policy development is based less in courts of law than in the continuous evolution of public expectations about how the well-being of citizens can be promoted and what should be citizen entitlements.

Synergising rights and social inclusion

Marshall's insights have resonance today as we witness a revived public debate about social entitlements. Public debate is required about the role of rights in promoting the well-being of citizens. In participating in the debate, it should be considered how human rights can combine with the increasingly popular social inclusion framework, in order to enable participation and social justice.

Social inclusion

According to the social inclusion approach, social policy should aim to re-engage excluded people. Poverty should be addressed by fostering disadvantaged people's capabilities, allowing them to participate in the economy and society. The Brotherhood's Social Barometer is one attempt to identify the key capabilities in which we need to invest (see pages 4–5). Drawing on the work of Amartya Sen (1992), the Brotherhood emphasises that some citizens may require additional resources to develop their capabilities. More investment for disadvantaged people is justified on the basis that a more inclusive society is good both for the economy and for society as a whole.

Rights underpinning social inclusion

This social inclusion model allows us to rethink social rights. As Deakin and Wilkinson (2005, p.351) propose:

a capability approach ... could justify a wide range of ... social

rights ... in order to guarantee that individuals are equipped with what a given polity regards as a minimum ... capability set to participate in society.

Sen, of course, has famously refused to specify concrete capabilities. The identification of the specific moral claims that ought to be converted into social rights is a matter to be negotiated through social discourse.

As Marshall's framework suggests, the contest over the definition of legitimate entitlements within the new framework might only be partially focused on human rights charters. Although a charter of rights can strengthen the moral legitimacy of citizens' social entitlements, it cannot address what Marshall called the entire superstructure of legitimate expectation. Concrete social provisions require more than mere proclamations, but wider social discourse.

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Public debate is required about the role of rights in promoting the well-being of citizens.

Playgroups in Greater Dandenong Benefits and barriers

The growth of playgroups in Australia is linked to increasing awareness of what young children need for well-being during childhood and enhanced opportunities in later life (Cowen 1996; Prilleltensky & Nelson 2000; Shonkoff & Phillips 2000). In particular, there is an emerging understanding of the value of play, which encourages learning and exploration (Sneddon & Haynes 2003), builds social skills such as self-confidence, and offers fun and enjoyment. Playgroups are now also seen as providing a significant function linked to the growing knowledge about the importance of the family environment, of community linkages, and of family support and participation (Dahlberg et al. 1999).

The Brotherhood of St Laurence recently researched the ways in which playgroups in Greater Dandenong can be inclusive of a diverse community where many parents are newly arrived in Australia and belong to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. This project was undertaken on behalf of the Communities for Children and Intensive Support Playgroup programs, both funded by the Australian Government.

In late 2006, 22 parents and 12 service providers associated with playgroups were interviewed about the barriers and facilitating factors to playgroup attendance. Some of the parents were currently attending a playgroup, others were not.

Benefits of playgroups

Parents currently attending playgroups reported that they and their children enjoyed the experience. Their children learned about getting used to routines and sharing with other children. Parents also commented on benefits for themselves, including meeting other

parents or learning specific skills, such as English, or ways to improve their interaction with their child.

Barriers and facilitating factors to playgroup attendance

Lack of familiarity with the playgroup concept is a barrier, especially for parents from newly arrived and CALD communities. Many of the respondents were unfamiliar with playgroups in the form understood in Australia. However, when the concept was explained, most were interested in attending. Some felt playgroups would assist contact with the wider community and improve their English skills.

Respondents with a first language other than English said that the language in which a playgroup is conducted could be a significant barrier. Not only did they find it difficult to communicate with the other parents and children in English, but also it could also involve feelings of stigma. However, respondents had mixed views about whether they would prefer to attend a playgroup in English or in a more familiar language. Being able to attend a playgroup where their community language was spoken was important to some parents. It made them feel more comfortable and they enjoyed speaking their own language. Other parents, who said they would prefer to go to an English language playgroup, tended to talk about the benefits of mixing with a wider community and learning English.

Parents reported that having a paid and skilled playgroup leader was valuable. The leader provided continuity for the group and routine and activities for children, and helped parents to access other services.

The location of playgroups and a lack of transport came up repeatedly

as barriers to playgroup attendance. Many parents said they would only be able to attend if the playgroup was situated locally, as they were reliant on public transport. Some parents and service providers reported that co-locating playgroups with other services provided the opportunity to make use of other services in the building.

Conclusion

There is not likely to be one 'right' playgroup model, but different models to meet different expressed needs. These should include less conventional options for parents, such as playgroups which 'officially' teach English, playgroups held on weekends and early evenings, and playgroups associated with childcare centres.

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Respondents had mixed views about whether they would prefer to attend a playgroup in English or in a more familiar language.

New information on poverty, unemployment and social justice

The following are recent acquisitions of the Brotherhood Library. Check *What's New* on the website for more titles:

ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS

Bromfield, L M, Higgins, J R & Higgins, D J 2007, *Barriers, incentives and strategies to enhance recruitment of Indigenous carers: perspectives of professionals from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, non-government agencies and government departments*, Australian Institute of Family Studies Melbourne. (Also many other titles from this project)

Gunstone, A 2007, *Unfinished business: the Australian formal reconciliation process*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, Vic.

CHILDREN

Henman, P, Percival, R & Harding, A 2007, *Costs of children: research commissioned by the Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support*, Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA), Canberra, A.C.T.

Yu, P 2007, *Mortality of children and parental disadvantage*, paper presented at ASPC conference 2007, <http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/ASPC2007/papers/Yu_228.pdf>

CLIMATE CHANGE

Lowed, I 2007, *Reaction time: climate change and the nuclear option*, Black Inc, Melbourne.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2007, *Climate change policies*, OECD, Paris, <<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/58/18/39111309.pdf>>

DISABILITY

Beresford, B, Rabiee, P & Sloper, P 2007, *Priorities and perceptions of disabled children and young people and their parents regarding outcomes from support services*, Social Policy Research Unit, University of York, UK, <<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/pdf/priorities.pdf>>.

EDUCATION

Bonnor, C & Caro, J 2007, *The stupid country: how Australia is dismantling public education*, UNSW Press, Sydney.

Davidoff, I & Leigh, A 2007, *How much do public schools really cost?: estimating the relationship between house prices and school quality*, Australian National University, Centre for Economic Policy Research, Canberra, <<http://cepr.anu.edu.au/pdf/DP558.pdf>>.

Groark, C J, Mehaffie, K E & McCall, R B (eds) 2007, *Evidence-based practices and programs for early childhood care and education*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2007, *Lifelong learning and human capital*, OECD, Paris, <<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/43/50/38982210.pdf>>.

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

Jordan, L & Horn, M 2007, *Still looking for a break: welfare to work: so what's changed?*, Melbourne Citymission, Melbourne.

Lester, L H, 2007, *Immigrant labour market success: an analysis of the index of labour market status*, Flinders University of South Australia, National Institute of Labour Studies, <<http://www.socsci.flinders.edu.au/nils/publications/workingpapers/WP159.pdf>>

HOUSING

Australians for Affordable Housing 2007, *Addressing housing affordability: a 5-point plan for the next 10 years*, Australians for Affordable Housing, Fitzroy, Vic., <<http://www.affordablehousing.net.au/pdf/AAH%20Policy%20Summary%20final.pdf>>.

MEDIA

O'Rourke, A 2007, *Media on a shoestring: media tactics for community organisations*, Media Team Australia, Manuka, A.C.T.

MIGRATION ISSUES

Ahmed, B M 2006, *Report of the African-Australian community's initiative workshop on issues affecting the resettlement of African[s]*, African Think Tank, Melbourne, <http://www.union.unimelb.edu.au/conferences/att/img/pdf/att_report.pdf>.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2007, *Building pathways: resources to support transitions for young people from refugee backgrounds*, The Department, Canberra, <<http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/settle/transitions.htm>>.

Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture & Horn of Africa Communities Network 2007, *Raising children in Australia: a resource kit for early childhood services working with parents from African backgrounds*, Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture & Horn of Africa Communities Network, Brunswick, Vic.

OLDER PEOPLE

Leamy, M & Clough, R 2006, *How older people became researchers: training, guidance and practice in action*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York, <<http://jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/9781859354353.pdf>>.

Orzechowska-Fischer, E & Wei, H 2007, *Population ageing and the accumulation of human capital in Australia, 1981–2001*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, <<http://digbig.com/4tpgh>>.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION/POVERTY

Marks, G 2007, *Income poverty, subjective poverty and financial stress*, FaCSIA, Canberra.

SOCIAL POLICY

Social Policy Research Centre 2007, *Building Community Capacity and Social Resilience conference 11–13 July 2007*, University of New South Wales, Social Policy Research Centre, Sydney, <<http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/ASPC2007>>.

SOCIAL WELFARE

Saunders, P 2007, *The government giveth and the government taketh away: tax-welfare churning and the case for welfare state opt-outs*, Centre for Independent Studies, St Leonards, N.S.W.

WORK AND FAMILY

Elton, J, Bailey, J & Baird, M 2007, *Women and WorkChoices: impacts on the low pay sector*, Centre for Work + Life, University of South Australia, Adelaide, <<http://www.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cwl/documents/women-work-choices-full.pdf>>.

Kalb, G & Thoreson, T O 2007, *The case for labour supply incentives: a comparison of family policies in Australia and Norway*, Melbourne Institute, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Vic., <<http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/wp/wp2007n27.pdf>>.

YOUTH

Berry, H, George, E & Butterworth, P 2007, *Intergenerational reliance on income support: psychosocial factors and their measurement*, FaCSIA, Canberra.

Freedman, M 1999, *The kindness of strangers: adult mentors, urban youth, and the new voluntarism*, 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, [New York].

Information services for the public

The Brotherhood of St Laurence library offers a specialist focus on issues such as 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, ring the Library on (03) 9483 1387 or (03) 9483 1388, or e-mail <library@bsl.org.au>.

Further information including the online library catalogue can be found at <www.bsl.org.au>.

New publications

Investing in people:

Intermediate Labour Markets as pathways to employment

Kemran Mestan and
Rosanna Scutella with the
Allen Consulting Group

This research report presents initial findings about the effectiveness of the Brotherhood's Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) programs, drawing on interviews with staff and participants and also proposing a framework for a cost-benefit analysis.

Full report (50 pages) and 4-page summary are both available on the Brotherhood's website. Printed report \$6.00 (plus p&cp).

The Brotherhood's Social Barometer: the working years

The third Social Barometer (see pages 4-5) focuses on Australians of working age. It presents indicators of their capabilities covering eight key dimensions of life from employment and education and employment to health and social involvement.

Full report (46 pages) and 4-page summary are both available on the Brotherhood's website. Printed report \$6.00 (plus p&cp).

Ethical threads: corporate social responsibility in the Australian garment industry

Emer Diviney and Serena Lillywhite
This research (see page 12) is a timely investigation of the Australian garment sector's attitude to, and knowledge of, corporate responsibility in relation to labour rights in their local and international supply chains.

The report (16 pages) is available on the Brotherhood's website. Printed copies free.

To obtain printed copies of these and other Brotherhood research publications, use the order form on the website or phone (03) 9483 1386.

Diary date

**Brotherhood of St Laurence
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Recent submissions

Submissions or statements made by the Brotherhood of St Laurence in the last year include:

- Response to Global Reporting Initiative request for public comment on the Draft Apparel and Footwear Supplement [to the Sustainability Reporting Guidelines], August 2006
- Contribution to Anglicare Australia's submission to the Department of Health and Ageing's Review of Subsidies and Services in Australian Government Funded Community Care Programs, January 2007
- Response to Review of the ASX Principles of Good Corporate Governance and Good Practice Recommendations, February 2007
- Submission on the Education and Training Act 2006 proposed regulations, March 2007
- Submissions to the Review of the Victorian Children's Services Regulations 2007, April 2007
- Joint submission to Prime Ministerial Task Group on Emissions Trading from Brotherhood of St Laurence, Catholic Social Services Australia and National Welfare Rights Network, April 2007
- Response to the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Scheme Issues Paper, May 2007
- Submission [re] Productivity Commission Consumer Policy Framework, May 2007
- Submission to Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee Parliament of Victoria Inquiry into Local Economic Development in Outer Suburban Areas, June 2007
- Submission to National Emissions Trading Taskforce Secretariat: Design for a National Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme, July 2007

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