



## CLIMATE CHANGE AND RISING ENERGY PRICES

### Can home retrofits help reduce the impact?

In Australia, growing concern about climate change and rising prices has renewed interest in residential energy efficiency. Since 2007, energy prices have risen by 72 per cent (ABS 2012). Low-income households, which spend a higher proportion of their weekly income on energy than other households, are particularly vulnerable to these price rises. Increasing numbers of residential electricity disconnections at the same address suggest bill-paying difficulties (Table 1). Taken together, these point to growing energy-related financial hardship.

We are also beginning to experience the impacts of climate change—including more intense heatwaves, to which low-income households are highly vulnerable (see Edwards & Wiseman 2009).

In some circumstances energy-efficient homes can reduce the impact of rising energy prices and heatwave-related problems. However, many residential energy efficiency schemes require significant upfront householder contributions. The cost and complexity of improvements creates barriers to action for many households.

Table 1 Residential electricity disconnections

Year	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Total disconnections	9,568	13,486	17,871
Disconnections per 100 customers	0.43	0.59	0.77
Reconnections in same name and address within 7 days (percentage)	44	44	47

Source: Essential Services Commission 2009, 2010, 2011

### Home energy efficiency programs in Moreland

To address these issues, the Brotherhood of St Laurence partnered with the Moreland Energy Foundation (MEFL) to develop Warm Home Cool Home (WHCH) and Concession Assist (CA). These are two of a number of Moreland Solar City projects, part of the Australian Government's Solar Cities program to trial models for electricity supply and use in seven pilot locations, administered by the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, in partnership with local and state governments, industry, business and local communities. The BSL/MEFL programs delivered free energy efficiency upgrades to 1000 low-income households in the City of Moreland.

The programs consist of a home energy audit, recommended actions to reduce energy use, and assistance in implementing some of these recommendations, such as installing draught stripping on doors and windows, tap flow adjusters and low-energy light globes (Table 2).

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Table 2 Hardware measures installed as part of retrofit

Measure	Number of homes	Percentage of (N=69)
Install draught stripping	63	91.3
Replace standard globes with low-energy globes	49	71.0
Install 3-star showerheads	17	24.6
Increase number of fans	7	10.1
Install tap flow adjuster	6	8.7
Install ceiling insulation	3	4.3
Install external shading	1	1.4

Source: Audit data

## RECENT POLICY SUBMISSIONS

Policy submissions can be accessed at <[www.bsl.org.au/Hot-issues/Policy-submissions](http://www.bsl.org.au/Hot-issues/Policy-submissions)>

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

- Submission to ASIC National Financial Literacy Strategy 2014-16, June 2013
- Submission to the Senate inquiry into care and management of younger and older Australians living with dementia, May 2013
- Pathways to social and economic inclusion: submission to the Australian Government on employment services from 2015, March 2013
- Submission to the Independent Review of Centrepay, February 2013
- Joint submission to the Essential Services Commission re Energy Retail Code harmonisation, February 2013
- Response to *Grey areas: age barriers to work in Commonwealth laws* discussion paper, November 2012
- Response to Department of Justice discussion paper *Practical lessons, fair consequences: improving diversion for young people in Victoria*, October 2012
- Submission to the Senate Select Committee inquiry on electricity prices, September 2012
- Response to *Grey areas: age barriers to work in Commonwealth laws* (Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry), August 2012
- Towards a fair and decent social security system: submission to Senate inquiry into adequacy of the allowance system for jobseekers and others, August 2012
- Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Fair Incentives to Work) Bill 2012, July 2012
- Submission to the Victorian Government consultation Pathways to a Fair and Sustainable Social Housing System, July 2012
- Submission to the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers, July 2012
- Tackling racism at a broader community level: submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission re national anti racism strategy, May 2012

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*Brotherhood Update* is a monthly newsletter which contains updates about reports, working papers, submissions, research events and other news from the Research and Policy Centre. Register to receive the newsletter at <http://www.bsl.org.au/getupdates>

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The Brotherhood of St Laurence works not just to alleviate but to prevent poverty, focusing on people at the greatest risk at key life transitions. It is a national voice on matters of disadvantage, understanding that poverty's remedy lies in integrating social and economic policy so as to strengthen the capacities of individuals and communities. Its research, service development and delivery, and advocacy aim to address unmet needs and translate the learning into new policies, programs and practices for implementation by governments and others.

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## FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER

My role as General Manager of the Research and Policy Centre will conclude at the end of November and I will be enjoying long service leave between now and then. The role will continue as a joint position with the University of Melbourne and has been advertised. Happily, our Professorial Fellow, Simon Biggs, has agreed to hold the reins of management until the new appointment is made. Next year I will continue in an honorary capacity at the university where I will be teaching into the Master of Social Policy and contributing a part-time thought leadership role for the Brotherhood. Ten years is a long time to have been at the helm and much has changed in that time, very much for the better.

Few today would appreciate the low ebb to which national thinking on social policy had sunk at the turn of the century. Vacuous media ranting about welfare dependency and the phoney 'poverty war' constituted what passed for public debate, while academic institutes became increasingly involved in consultancies for governments and disengaged from the public scene. Then the Brotherhood played what sometimes seemed a lone hand in reconnecting national welfare debate to the best of progressive research.

Happily today other agencies share high research standards and public debate is positively enriched by numerous other bodies—such as the Grattan Institute, Per Capita, the Centre for Policy Studies, Social Policy Connections, the Centre for Social Impact and the Social Policy Institute at the ANU—which have all appeared in that time. This issue of *Comment* is itself testimony to how far social policy debate has now matured.

Three Big Ideas have driven our own thinking. The first is what we now call *inclusive growth*. Ten years ago we helped social inclusion make a tentative entry to the Australian policy scene with public acceptance that some people had indeed been left behind by economic growth. While it was long considered mickey mouse on the policy scales, Robbie Kerr's article in this issue shows how the reintegration of economic and social policy has now moved centre stage.

The revealing work reported by Francisco Azpitarte on why growth has not been pro-poor is at the cutting edge of Australian social research, while Eve Bodsworth revitalises the classic Brotherhood arguments that the causes of exclusion are

fundamentally structural and not about individual behavioural failings.

The second big idea that has shaped our agenda was to take a *life-course approach*. This afforded a systematic way of thinking about the new social risks and transitions of contemporary society. Focusing our research on four life transitions (early years, youth, working years and retirement and ageing) allowed us to pursue depth in each area while making connections across the life course.

This issue updates us on new research in three of these transitions. George Myconos reflects on the implications of the digital age in relation to young people and Bonnie Simons in relation to older adults in residential care. Helen Kimberley reports on the latest big development in relation to ageing: the federally funded TRACS project which involves establishing a Centre of Excellence which combines research, teaching, learning and service delivery at Sumner House, the Brotherhood's residential facility in Fitzroy. In relation to the early years, Fatou Diallo Roost and Ashley Perez report that the Brotherhood has welcomed the next stage in the national rollout of the HIPPPY early childhood enrichment program, which will be extended to 25 more sites in six states in 2014, and a further 25 sites in 2015.

The third big idea has been *equity in response to climate change*. Very much the initiative of Executive Director Tony Nicholson, our research program in this area commenced well before most understood its significance for poorer Australians. In this issue Victoria Johnston and Damian Sullivan explain our latest thinking on the overlapping concerns of greenhouse emissions and energy prices, while Barry Pullen argues

that there is still wide scope for the community sector to advocate about the social dimensions of climate change.

Of course, big ideas and research excellence have only been a part of the story. The great privilege of researching at the Brotherhood derives from being shoulder to shoulder with so many dedicated people working alongside those in need. This can be demanding: no impact, no job. But done well it helps turn the Brotherhood into that lightning rod of social concern which Australians have come to expect. Long may it be so.

**Paul Smyth**



## UNDERSTANDING CHANGES IN THE PROGRESSIVITY OF AUSTRALIA'S TAX-TRANSFER SYSTEM

The tax-transfer system is the main institutional tool through which income is redistributed in modern democracies. Understanding the changes in progressivity is of interest to academic and non-academic audiences. First, the level of income redistribution reflects each government's preferences, and information from tax progressivity measures indicates their efforts and effectiveness in redistributing income. Second, investigation of the effects of policy reforms on progressivity not only improves our understanding of trends in income redistribution but can also inform the design of future redistributive policies.

This article presents early findings from an ongoing project at the Brotherhood of St Laurence which involves analysing the trends in progressivity and redistribution in Australia between 1994 and 2009. This was a period of strong economic growth, with an uneven distribution of income gains among the population. Like other high-income countries (Atkinson 2005; Piketty & Saez 2003; Saez & Veall 2005), in recent decades Australia has witnessed an upward trend in income differences and an increased concentration of income at the top of the distribution (ABS 2011; Saunders & Bradbury 2006; Wilkins 2007).

### Policy changes

Australia's social security system has undergone reforms clearly aimed at reducing welfare dependency and promoting self-reliance through paid work. In fact, major policy reforms such as *Australians Working Together* (2003) and *Welfare to Work* (2006) introduced policies which clearly affected individuals' access to income transfers (such as income support payments and tax rebates and deductions), and therefore the income distribution. These included the tightening of access to unemployment benefits via tougher activity tests and higher penalties for non-compliance, as well as longer waiting periods for those who had accumulated some savings and for new immigrants. Furthermore, the Disability Support Pension was restricted so that only individuals unable to work more than

Table 1 Changes in household income distribution, Australia

Year	Inequality (Gini)		Redistributive effect*	
	Market income	Disposable income	Income taxes	Transfers
1994	0.498	0.280	0.030	0.154
1995	0.504	0.281	0.031	0.157
1997	0.511	0.279	0.038	0.158
1999	0.507	0.284	0.039	0.147
2000	0.509	0.289	0.033	0.153
2002	0.498	0.285	0.034	0.145
2003	0.477	0.282	0.035	0.129
2005	0.476	0.290	0.036	0.120
2007	0.474	0.305	0.039	0.107
2009	0.477	0.300	0.038	0.115

\* The redistributive effect is measured using the Reynolds-Smolensky index and it is equal to the Gini of market income minus the Gini of market income plus (minus) transfers (taxes).

In this table higher values mean greater inequality, or larger redistributive effect, respectively.

15 hours per week are now eligible for a pension, while those able to work between 16 and 30 hours are entitled only to a lower unemployment allowance.

Changes to the tax system were also oriented to promote labour market participation. The last fifteen years saw a significant reduction in tax rates, especially for high incomes. This came alongside a rise in the tax-free threshold and important reductions in benefits taper-rates that were aimed at reducing the effective marginal tax rates of low and middle income people to increase their incentives to work.

### Changes in inequality

For the analysis we used data from the Surveys on Income and Housing conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics between 1994 and 2009. This includes information about the income sources and the demographic characteristics of Australian households. Data on income taxes and transfers is derived using the Melbourne Institute Tax and Transfer Simulator (MITTS). The MITTS is based on modules containing the complex details of the tax and transfer system, allowing the computation of income taxes paid and benefits received by each household through

application of the official rules and eligibility criteria. Table 1 shows in columns 2 and 3 the changes in the inequality of market income and of disposable income (market income plus transfers minus taxes). We found an upward trend in the inequality of disposable income: the Gini index<sup>1</sup> went up from 0.28 in 1994 to 0.3 in 2009. Importantly, this increase took place despite the concurrent reduction in market income inequality, especially in the 2000s when the Gini index dropped from 0.51 to 0.47. As the two right-hand columns show, the impact of taxes on redistribution remained roughly constant from 1994 to 2009; interestingly, however, the redistributive impact of transfers significantly declined, especially after 2000 where the index fell from 0.15 to 0.11.

Figure 1 presents Shapley values, which show the marginal impact of eliminating a particular component of disposable income on the overall level of equality. Thus, for instance, a contribution of 0.3 means that removing that component would increase the Gini index by 0.3 points.

<sup>1</sup> The Gini index represents income distribution on a scale between 0 and 1, where 0 means everyone has the same income and 1 means one person has all the income and everyone else has zero income.

The figure shows a similar trend for taxes and transfers: although the two factors contribute positively to equality, this contribution declined over the period under analysis, particularly in the last decade where each contribution fell by about 0.2 points.

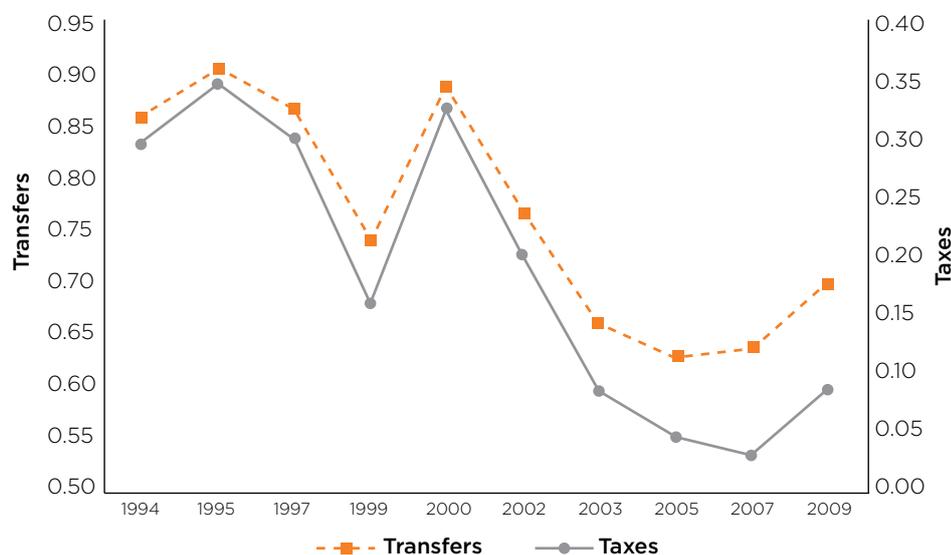
How can we explain the fall in the distributive impact of taxes and transfers? Welfare and fiscal policies influence the distribution of income in different ways. First, the tax-transfer scheme determines the amount of taxes paid and transfers received by different groups. Under a progressive system, the tax burden and transfers are distributed in such a way that the inequality of disposable income is much lower than the inequality of market income. However, it is important to recognise that market incomes also depend on, and react to, the tax-transfer system. Hence, income redistribution and progressivity are affected by changes in the distribution of market income, some of which may be induced by tax reforms.

More concretely, taxes and transfers help to determine market income inequality as they influence individuals' decisions. Among those, labour supply choices have received the most attention in the literature. Recent empirical evidence suggests that how much and whether people are engaged in the workforce is affected by the tax-transfer regime, especially in the case of married women and lone mothers (Saez, Slemrod & Giertz 2012, Meghir & Phillips 2010). Hence, any attempt to explain changes in progressivity must consider the impact of taxes and transfers on the distribution of market income.

Yet most of the existing literature on income redistribution focuses solely on the capacity of taxes and transfers to reduce disposable income inequality and overlooks the impact on market income inequality (Kasten, Sammartino & Toder 2004; Dardanoni & Lambert 2002). These approaches provide limited insights into the factors underlying the changes over time and, in particular, the role of behavioural responses to tax policy reforms.

Our project proposes an approach that will allow us to quantify the

Figure 1 Shapley contributions to equality (Gini), Australia 1994–2009



contribution of tax reforms and of changes in labour supply (whether induced by the reforms or not) to the decline in progressivity and the redistributive impact of the Australia tax-transfer system in recent decades.

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## WORKING TOGETHER FOR EXCELLENCE IN AGED CARE

### The TRACS project at Sumner House

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is leading a consortium which will create a Centre of Excellence at Sumner House, our residential aged care facility in Fitzroy. One of 16 national Teaching and Research Aged Care Services (TRACS) projects funded by the Department of Health and Ageing, our project involves RMIT University, the BSL Research and Policy Centre, the BSL Registered Training Organisation, the BSL Centre for Practice Knowledge and, of course, Sumner House itself.

TRACS is defined by the Department of Health and Ageing (2012) as:

aged care services that combine teaching, research, clinical care and service delivery in one location to operate as a learning environment to support clinical placements and professional development activities in various disciplines.

Each TRACS project is designed to develop an innovative model that can be shared across the aged care and training industries.

#### Evaluation

Evaluation is a key element of the TRACS initiative. The external evaluation of the projects by WISeR, University of Adelaide, is expected to generate valuable information for the aged care industry about 'what works' and 'what doesn't work' in terms of:

- › developing formal affiliations between the aged care sector and academic/training sectors
- › developing strategies, processes and infrastructure to support teaching, learning and research activities on site
- › providing education and training to multidisciplinary teams in various aged care settings
- › ensuring quality clinical supervision and mentoring for students
- › improving staff capacity to take part in teaching, learning and research
- › creating synergies between education, training, research, clinical care and service delivery to deliver benefits to staff, students and care recipients

- › creating links with the acute/primary care sectors to ensure well-rounded clinical education in aged care
- › accessing complementary funding sources
- › promoting research into areas of practical concern identified by aged care staff
- › application of research findings to improve day-to-day practices.

#### Progress

The BSL/RMIT TRACS Centre for Excellence at Sumner House has been collaboratively designed by the 15-member project team and governance structures have been established to ensure clear communication and integrated timelines. With its emphasis on resident wellbeing, the BSL approach is unique among the 16 TRACS projects. This is reflected in the key outcomes (see panel):

The Research and Policy Centre team has completed a literature review of residential aged care facilities as centres of excellence and an information technology needs analysis of Sumner House residents. The RMIT training team has conducted a Sumner House job analysis, mapped profiling data to the relevant training package, validated assessment processes and tools, implemented a skills audit and identified skills gaps.

Research proposals for the Process Evaluation (the internal action research conducted by RPC) and 'Establishing Core Competencies for Change in Sumner House Residential Aged Care' (conducted by the Centre for Global Studies, RMIT University) have received approval from the BSL Human Research Ethics Committee; and work has commenced.

At Sumner House the orientation procedure and handbook for students on placement have been revised and the mentoring model is being developed.

The BSL/RMIT TRACS project team is excited about the contribution this work is making to resident wellbeing through excellence in residential aged care research, learning and practice.

## PLANNED OUTCOMES

#### FOR SUMNER HOUSE RESIDENTS

- Needs and aspirations of residents are identified
- Services respond effectively to resident clinical care needs
- A process is in place to enable residents to engage in planning
- A model is in place for best practice in resident choice making
- The resident advocacy model is working effectively

#### FOR THE SUMNER HOUSE WORKFORCE

- A workforce capability map
- A workforce and training plan
- Review of the current Certificate III Aged Care
- A dual aged care/HACC Certificate III/IV
- Regular well-designed workplace training
- Mentoring and reflective practice
- Clear pathways between aged care, HACC and nursing qualifications
- Confidence and energy based on competence and support

#### RESEARCH

- A complementary research agenda
- Identified projects completed

#### EVALUATION

- Internal and external evaluations
- Sustainability factors identified

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## MOVING INTO THE DIGITAL AGE IN A RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE SETTING

Information technology provides opportunities for older adults in residential aged care to engage in activities that contribute to wellbeing and add meaning and value to their lives. With the rapid development of new technologies such as smart phones and tablets, it is important to understand how older Australians can benefit from their use.

Among the biggest deterrents to older people using information technology were the complexity of the computer hardware, operating system and user interface (Haukka 2011). Small trials conducted with iPads in Australia and overseas to determine the suitability of tablets for enhancing social connectedness of older adults have indicated that they remove many of the barriers previously inhibiting these people from using computer technology and accessing the internet (IBES 2012; Werner & Werner 2012). Not only does the iPad's user-friendly touch screen interface enable use by older adults without previous computer skills, but also its size and portability make it ideal for use in a residential care setting where health and lack of mobility can prevent individuals from accessing fixed IT locations.

### iPads in residential aged care

Increasing attention is being paid to the benefits of using tablet devices with aged care residents across a wide spectrum of cognitive, physical, frailty or mobility conditions. An evaluation undertaken at the University of Worcester (Upton et al. 2011) indicated several advantages of iPad use for residents in aged care settings, such as improving quality of life; supporting reminiscence; increasing interpersonal relations with family, other residents and staff; and intergenerational communication. The increased interpersonal interaction was found also to have a positive impact on the wider care environment. While context-specific difficulties were identified, including ergonomic issues, physical and cognitive conditions, and staff skill levels, these were overcome by providing assistance to residents according to need and providing appropriate staff training.

The current BSL and RMIT TRACS Centre of Excellence project at Sumner House (see page 6) is building an integrated learning environment and a highly skilled workforce to enable forward-thinking service delivery, and to provide new ways of meeting residents' care needs. As part of this commitment the project is assisting residents to transition into the digital age by supporting them to use iPads for communication and other activities, either independently or with supervision and support.

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*Increasing attention is being paid to the benefits of using tablet devices with aged care residents across a wide spectrum of cognitive, physical, frailty or mobility conditions.*

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### Residents' responses

While iPads have to date been used by a small number of residents at Sumner House, their acceptance of the technology, enthusiasm and eagerness to have a go, defies the often-accepted view that older adults are either not interested in using, or are not able to understand how to use, new technologies like the iPad (Reardon 2012). Residents have been supported to engage with distant relatives using Skype and to research their interests and hobbies. The iPads have also been integrated into group art, cooking and meditation activities. Families are enthusiastic about the expansion of iPad use which will engage residents in meaningful activities, extend their opportunities for communication, promote a sense of belonging to a community with shared interests and encourage a renewal of their interest in the world around them.

The next step for the project is to develop a skills acquisition program which accommodates the residents' diverse learning needs and personal circumstances, and which trains staff and volunteers to assist residents to

make use of technology with a focus on wellbeing, fun and friendships.

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## THE ROAD TO DIGITAL INCLUSION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

### Some words of caution

It is commonly claimed that 'digital inclusion' may not only mitigate economic inequality but also foster greater civic participation. The assumption that digital methods—e-learning, e-portfolios, distance learning, social media, and smartphones, tablets, lap-tops and desk-top computers—produce such positive outcomes has led to the use of information technology in numerous community services. However close examination suggests this is not a quick fix.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence's education programs for disadvantage youth are making use of digital technology and provide some helpful insights. For example, they support the conclusions of Hattie (2009) that computers in classrooms are most effective when diverse teaching strategies are used; there is pre-training in using computers as a teaching and learning tool; the student, not the teacher, is in 'control' of learning; peer learning is encouraged; and feedback is optimised.

In addition, the students warmed to online learning as it enabled them to engage with activities and catch up with work after severe disruptions to their lives. This was particularly important as many had disengaged from mainstream schools because of their inability to progress at the same rate as their peers (Myconos 2013).

#### Face-to-face matters

Other BSL evaluations—notably of a vocational training program which relied on the use of iPads by young people facing homelessness—underscore the importance of periodic face-to-face engagement. We cannot assume that a digital approach will be effective if the participants are dispersed geographically and have little affinity with other clients or staff (Myconos forthcoming). Miller and O'Neill (2011) have similarly noted how effectiveness relies on substantial investment in training for teachers, and initial technical support for students to learn to use the devices and e-portfolio platforms.

Combining the physical with the 'virtual' is affirmed in research into using information technologies to

mitigate homelessness. Woelfer and Hendry (2009, 2012) found great potential for connecting homeless young people to support agencies: the provision in public spaces of technology to access social network sites can help them explore their identities, foster new and strengthen existing relationships. Yet here too a common physical setting to facilitate web-based communication is important.

*This warns against an uncritical reliance on new communication technologies without substantial face-to-face support.*

#### More than access

Karabanow and Naylor (2010) found that while most of the street youth they surveyed used computers daily (at libraries, shelters or 'learning and employment centres'), they were not necessarily adept or 'literate' in such technologies. Access alone does not guarantee meaningful interaction.

As Bonnie Simons (see page 7) emphasises from her research with older adults, diverse needs and abilities produce varied perceptions of desktop computers, lap-tops and iPads: this can be understood in terms of perceived 'usefulness', 'ease of use' and 'intentions of use' (Shroff, Deneen & Ng 2011). This warns against an uncritical reliance on new communication technologies without substantial face-to-face support.

Researchers must adjust to new forms of interaction. Evaluation methods are slowly being re-assessed to deal with the difficulty in developing benchmarks for competency, as well as reconciling the ephemeral, instantaneous nature of virtual interactions with the slow, considered enquiry needed to assess change.

There is no doubt that new technologies can assist 'hard to reach' groups to access services and acquire the social capital needed to effect positive change. Yet the commitment to using information technology

should be tempered with an appreciation of the continuing value of face-to-face interaction.

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## ENRICHING CHILDREN'S EARLY LEARNING

### Implementing HIPPY in more Indigenous Australian communities

The expansion of the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) provides scope to help close the gap in early childhood learning opportunities for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. Developed at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, HIPPY was introduced as a pilot program in Australia by the Brotherhood of St Laurence in 1998 and since 2008 has been rolled out by the Australian Government to many communities across the nation.

The government has committed \$55.7 million from its 2012-13 budget to expand HIPPY to another 50 communities across six states. In addition to extending the program in the 50 existing HIPPY sites, this funding will help support some 2000 additional children living mainly in Indigenous communities. Twenty-five of the new sites were announced in July 2013 to commence in 2014; the remaining 25 sites will be selected in 2014 to commence in 2015.

The implementation of HIPPY in the 50 new sites, with an emphasis on Indigenous communities, will help target areas of disadvantage, especially remote communities. HIPPY's approach of empowering parents as their children's first teachers and building community strength makes it a good fit for the federal government's focus on increasing school engagement among Indigenous children.

#### Indigenous Australians and early learning

Despite some improvement, preschool attendance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is still low compared with that of non-Aboriginal children. According to the Department of Education, Employment and Work Relations (DEEWR 2011), in 2009 approximately 64 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were enrolled in an early childhood education program in the year before full-time schooling, compared with 70 per cent of all children.

In addition to low preschool attendance, data from the Australian Early Development Index (2012) showed that Indigenous children

were more than twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable as non-Indigenous children on one or more of the AEDI domains (43.2 per cent compared with 20.9 per cent). The greatest difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children was on the language and cognitive skills domain, with Aboriginal children being more than three times as likely to be vulnerable on this domain (22.4 per cent compared with 5.9 per cent) (Australian Government 2013).

#### HIPPY impact in Indigenous communities

The 2011 national HIPPY evaluation included five sites that served predominantly Indigenous communities, and the evaluation showed promising signs of the program's appropriateness and positive impacts as well as areas for development. Aboriginal families involved in the evaluation reported benefits such as:

- › increased confidence to teach their child
- › increased confidence to talk to their child's teacher
- › improved parenting skills
- › improved relationships between parents and child
- › improvements in 'quality time' spent with the child
- › increased social connectedness from meeting other parents
- › the child becoming familiar and confident with schoolwork
- › more insight about the school's requirements and expectations
- › better awareness of their child's skills, abilities and academic needs
- › pride for both the parent and the child in the child's learning and achievement (Liddell et al. 2011).

#### Community consultation and selection process

Selecting the new sites involves several steps including consultation with short-listed communities. As part of this process, HIPPY Australia has consulted with communities across the country to provide information

about the program directly to community members, and also to gather information from elders, service providers and local residents in order to gauge the desire of the community to implement the program.

The consultation process was an important opportunity to explore the connections between the agencies which had submitted expressions of interest in delivering the program and the local Aboriginal community, and to develop an understanding of the nature and potential strengths of these relationships—which will be crucial in the HIPPY rollout across these new sites. To date, some 30 communities have been consulted.

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## BREAKING THE BACK OF PERSISTENT DISADVANTAGE

This article first appeared in *The Conversation* 12 July 2013

On weekdays, around 40 school-aged children from public housing estates in Fitzroy, Melbourne, attend a breakfast club organised by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. The room is always busy, as milk and sandwiches are dispensed and pancakes flipped. The modest initiative has proved a boon for children, mostly recently arrived African refugees.

Teachers from local schools anecdotally report that the children who participate in the program are more alert and responsive in the classroom and have better attendance rates. It underscores how small but sustained investments can make a difference to the lives of people who are deeply excluded from society.

On a larger canvas, the recent Productivity Commission report into disadvantage highlights more than ever the need for greater government investment in Australians living in the margins (McLachlan, Gilfillan & Gordon 2013).

The report found 'deep and persistent' disadvantage continues to affect the lives of a small group of Australians despite a general improvement in living standards for many Australians over the last decade.

Disadvantage is shown to be more than simply life on a low income: it involves a lack of opportunities, and social exclusion. For these reasons it is also difficult to measure.

The report emphasises the need to focus not only on the depth of disadvantage, but also the dynamics—that is, how it changes over time. While around 5 per cent of Australians are estimated to have experienced deep social exclusion, fewer experience it for more than five years. Only 1 per cent of the population experiences very deep exclusion, or deep exclusion for more than seven years.

The report finds a range of intersecting and compounding factors at the root of disadvantage. Our environment—broader social and economic structures and the community in which we live—intersects with individual

biographies—negative life events, family circumstances and individual capacities. This supports the Brotherhood's research which shows if your environment is characterised by income poverty, uncertainty, violence and lack of decent housing, schools and resources, not to mention a nutritious breakfast, it will have a lasting impact upon your wellbeing and your longer-term life chances.

Some would like to paint poverty in Australia in ever-simplistic terms, distorting the findings of the Productivity Commission to make exaggerated links between genes and life chances. That, of course, will serve the purposes of creating a tabloid headline, as for example in the *Daily Telegraph* (Bita 2013). But the reality is the causes of disadvantage in our prosperous country are multi-dimensional and mutually reinforcing, creating a vicious cycle in the lives of some people. The relevant question for us all should therefore be 'how to break the cycles of disadvantage'?

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*Disadvantage involves intertwined issues across the course of a person's life and therefore requires solutions that are innovative and intersecting—or 'joined up'.*

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The Productivity Commission report draws on the Social Exclusion Monitor (BSL & Melbourne Institute 2013) to suggest that while most people who experience disadvantage are able to move out of poverty reasonably quickly, a large number of Australians find themselves on the margins and a smaller number are trapped in deep poverty over longer periods. This is despite our record of economic growth (Azpitarte 2012). These deeply disadvantaged groups include those reliant on income support, the unemployed, lone parents and their children, Indigenous Australians, people with a long-term health condition or disability, and people with low educational attainment.

These findings are cause for concern—but they should not invoke despair. Instead, we need policy initiatives that address how we create a society in which our children are offered the same chances regardless of their postcode or family background.

Here, the Productivity Commission points to three key areas: the importance of children's early years in shaping their life chances; the fundamental importance of education in shaping the trajectory of young people's lives into the future and the importance of jobs as a pathway out of poverty for many people of working age.

Understanding that disadvantage involves intertwined issues across the course of a person's life therefore requires solutions that are innovative and intersecting—or 'joined up'.

In the early years, for example, we know that affordable access to high quality early childhood education and care services can improve family economic and social stability, as well as educational outcomes and life chances. Australia's comparatively high rate of income poverty and inequality among children, and our low numbers of three and four-year-olds enrolled in early education, indicates work still needed to ensure Australian children do not fall further behind.

But growing numbers of young people are also disengaging from school and finding themselves unable to link into work or further study. Re-engaging these highly disadvantaged young people requires investing in programs tailored to recognise their strengths and meet their learning, wellbeing and other needs: that means more money for TAFE, not slashing funding.

The Productivity Commission's report also highlights the importance of employment. The truth is the mainstream employment services system is broken when it comes to steering the most disadvantaged into work. We need more flexible and responsive services providing better pathways to work—and that includes serious investment in skills development and harnessing



## RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

### Evaluating youth foyers

employers in the quest for work. The inadequacy of income support payments also has very real consequences, forcing people into poverty and making it harder, not easier, for people to find employment and support their families.

The causes of deep disadvantage are complex—but there are ways forward. Short and longer term solutions require political leadership and investment.

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The development of three new 'youth foyers' in Victoria includes an important research project to evaluate an integrated form of support to young people who are unable to live at home and are at risk of homelessness

The Victorian Government has funded the youth foyers in collaboration with Hanover Welfare Services and the Brotherhood of St Laurence. The first foyer at Holmesglen Waverley campus opened in June.

Foyers provide student housing for up to two years while residents undertake education and training studies to gain the skills to transition to independent living and employment. A key component is individualised support to address barriers to participation and build capabilities.

The Foyers project is driven by a desire to address the stubborn levels of homelessness and transience experienced by disadvantaged young people. Almost 4,000 Victorians aged 15–24 years are homeless on any given night; and specialist homelessness services see nearly 17,000 young clients each year.

Despite increased expenditure on homelessness services, young people are more likely to experience multiple episodes of homelessness, leading to deep social exclusion. Relying on 'housing only' does not necessarily build sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

Youth foyers have been successfully run in the UK in particular, with over one hundred in operation. A very small number of foyers or foyer-like supported accommodation models have been developed and run in Australia over the past decade. To date there has been very limited evaluation of the outcomes and benefits of Australian versions of the foyer approach.

Distinctive elements of the new Victorian 'education first' foyers are:

- › education and skills development as a priority, rather than supported transitional accommodation
- › emphasis on participation in mainstream education, training and work experience activities

- › sufficient scale to be financially viable in the long term
- › the Open Talent approach focused on 'advantaged thinking' to build young people's capabilities
- › governed through 'top down' and 'bottom up' partnerships between key stakeholders
- › informed by a robust program logic and theory of change developed through consultation and evidence and driven by progressive and summative outcome indicators.

A comprehensive evaluation will assess the foyer model's fit for purpose, value for money and potential for replication. The three components are:

- › documentation and assessment of the education first foyer model and its practice approach
- › measurement of intermediate and longer term outcomes for students in comparison with a representative sample of young people using the current form of supported transitional housing
- › an independent financial analysis to measure cost effectiveness and estimate long term benefits.

This research will strengthen the evidence base in support of further reforms to assistance for socially excluded young people, which may lead to more substantial reductions in the level of homelessness.

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# RESPONDING TO THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Barry Pullen, RPC Honorary Research Fellow, comments on current challenges.

The evidence that the earth's surface is warming rapidly is now exceptionally strong, and beyond doubt (Will Steffen, Climate Commission May 2011).

This quote about climate change echoes other reputable assessments but the general public remains unconvinced. It is becoming evident that the reasons for inaction go beyond scientific skepticism to encompass basic beliefs and attitudes which negate the scientific message (Hulme 2009).

Without clear support many democratic governments are struggling to take the coordinated action a global problem requires. Ironically part of the problem may be that the focus on the science that has alerted us to climate change means that the links to actual social effects on communities have less prominence (Laukkonen et al. 2009).

## Broader issues for the welfare sector

In Australia welfare agencies are among those that are raising social issues related to the impacts of climate change. Their emphasis has been around social justice and fairness, particularly on issues with the potential to impact on the most vulnerable. The direct energy costs and flow-on price increases from government and business efforts to reduce emissions have received a lot of attention. At the same time, household energy efficiency, adaptation to heatwaves and adaption by community service organisations has been investigated (see Johnson, Sullivan & Totty 2013; Mallon et al. 2013).

More, however, needs to be done to increase the emphasis on the social impacts of a changing climate. Rather than focusing on measures including adaptation for the most vulnerable, welfare organisations could contribute to wider community education and changing public attitudes because they have experience in community development processes.

Examining some international experience may be helpful.

Actions to reduce the progress of

climate change are usually called mitigation, and those designed to alleviate the impacts are designated as adaptation. In practice there is considerable overlap.

Obtaining high-level agreement on overarching mitigation measures is proving difficult and we are seeing more emphasis on multiple solutions, on decentralised governance and on adaptation as a tool of engagement (The Hartwell Paper 2010).

Adaptation activity is occurring internationally and in Australia at local and regional levels, with valuable educational and community development components. Proactive measures include making changes to homes and other infrastructure, to industry and to agriculture, in anticipation of serious climate change impacts.

## Co-benefits and connections

Co-benefits is another potentially helpful concept. Many high priority needs of individuals and communities to preserve and lift their standard of living can be linked to adaptation and mitigation programs. For example, citizens in the Mekong delta have replanted mangroves for storm surge protection which also restores the natural environment (Laukkonen et al. 2009). In Australia, there are opportunities for 'green jobs' in renewable energy and other sectors linked to a de-carbonising economy (The Climate Institute 2009).

There is also a serious need to draw out and quantify the positive and negative connections between policy actions (IPCC AR4)—for instance, health costs with disease vectors, heat waves and heat islands in cities with planning and building design, increased vehicle emissions with urban design and investment. In Australia with our population concentrated in cities these will be critical considerations.

On the whole more weight is now being given to recognising climate change as a complex problem that requires a pluralistic solution. Integrating adaptation and mitigation actions can produce better outcomes

and gain community traction and support (Ostrom 2009).

This changing context creates greater opportunities and challenges for organisations principally concerned with social justice. Using their expertise in community development, early intervention and seeking multiple solutions to multiple impacts would enable them to make a bigger impact.

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# BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES

## A workshop on inclusive growth

Robert Kerr, Honorary Research Fellow, arranged and facilitated this workshop with Paul Smyth.

Following the recently released book *Inclusive growth in Australia* (eds Smyth and Buchanan), the Research and Policy Centre at the Brotherhood convened a workshop to explore the bridge between economic and social perspectives in social policy development. Twenty distinguished academics, journalists, public policy experts and government officials debated issues such as 'the next big agenda for social policy' and the challenges and limits of weighing up costs and benefits of ideas that have uncertain pay-offs many years ahead.

The free-flowing workshop discussion (held under Chatham House rules—no attribution of views to individuals) will help the participants' own work and inform the Research and Policy Centre's research program. The need for greater transparency about the effectiveness of current social programs, and opportunities for exchanges of information between governments and different parts of government, resonated with many. Some thought that Australia had gone backwards here, perhaps because the political cost of failure inhibited the appetite to learn by doing.

### Assessing policy proposals

Improving cost-benefit assessment of social policy proposals is clearly desirable, and consistent evaluation criteria would help, as would using public inquiry processes for major questions (as undertaken by the Productivity Commission for the National Disability Insurance Scheme). But some pointed to the limits to an economic framework: not every social policy goal should be argued on productivity grounds (take palliative care, for instance), and respecting the role of informal supports is a counterpart to the limits on what governments can do, particularly in a complex and changing society where disadvantage is sometimes only clear in retrospect.

For most, economic growth was itself inclusive and employment was a key. But some research noted that growth was 'pro poor' in only a narrow sense. Amidst complexity, many choices to extend the benefits of growth

to the most disadvantaged might be suggested. Surely proposals for inclusive growth should themselves be developed through inclusive policy making processes, consultation and public assembly of evidence. Citizen panels to debate ideas were also possible.

With less certain world economic prospects and constrained budget circumstances at home, our policy choices will need to include what to keep as well as what to change. Social policies in Australia are relatively highly targeted, but being clear about the targets for inclusive growth needs to go hand in hand with improved indicators for social inclusion.

A high 'hurdle rate' for investment, including social investment, may be the norm. Economists argue that seeking to grow the pie and to grow jobs needs to avoid 'rent seeking' and job protection.

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*With less certain world economic prospects and constrained budget circumstances at home, our policy choices will need to include what to keep as well as what to change.*

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It was noted that government policy instruments to promote inclusive growth are not limited to spending. Regulation at all levels of government is important, and it operates not only as a facilitator (e.g. for access to services) but also as an impediment (e.g. to starting a small business which creates new jobs). In the same way that disadvantaged people are not necessarily well-resourced to make best use of markets, they may also struggle to navigate through government agencies for intended support, especially when those agencies do not communicate well among themselves.

### Challenges and opportunities

The ageing population raises issues for inclusive growth policies. Cultural

adaptation is needed. In order to have fulfilling later lives, we need to identify what older people are good at and what contributions they can make. Employment is a key dimension, and a focus not only on sticks (extending pension age) but also on carrots (job design) would help. Circumstances may lead better employers to adapt but government has a role, including developing age-friendly cities.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme was considered as an example of the policy development process, from making the case for change (language describing the current system as 'broken'), to the effective combination of economic and social arguments. The targeting of the NDIS made it more appealing to the electorate, but the risks of its broadening out will need careful management. The informal system should complement the formal, and fostering informal support systems may have unintended positive consequences, such as promoting employment.

In debates about improving inclusion, we should not overlook how full the glass is—our human capital shows considerable gains. In the same way that economic growth is more than GDP, so individual progress is more than income growth and accumulation.

**Robert Kerr**

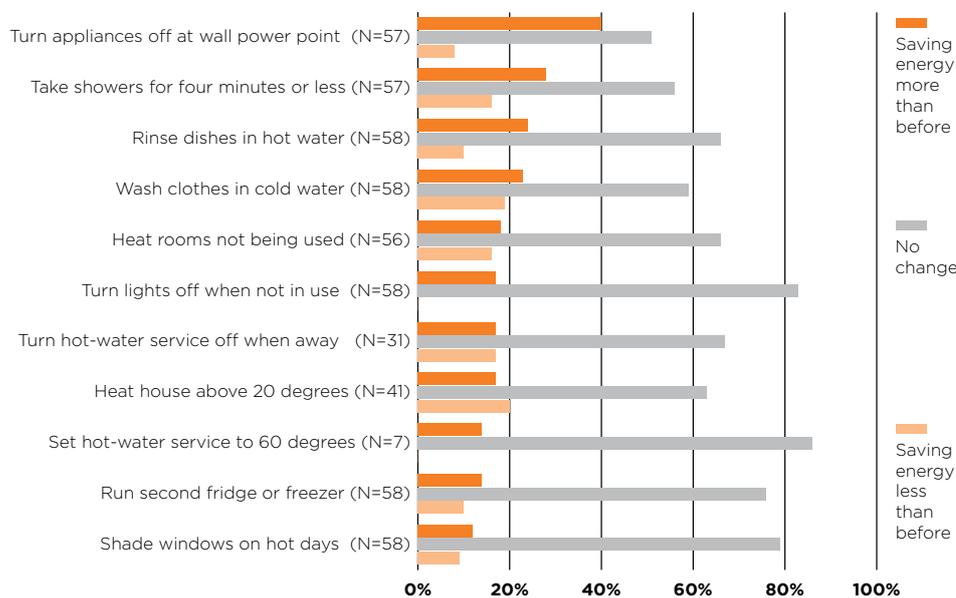
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› from page 1

Figure 1 Change in energy-use behaviour score: energy-saving behaviours



**Energy use and energy bills**

Participants reported energy savings, and those who received more retrofit items saved more energy than others. MEFL calculated a deemed annual saving of around \$77 per household. WHCH participants also adopted more day-to-day energy-saving behaviours following the program (Figure 1).

Participants reported that the advice and information had helped them understand their energy use better. Many also took action beyond that offered by the program to improve their home energy efficiency.

Almost half of the WHCH participants felt the program had helped them save money on energy bills:

Cutting down costs. It's good to know I've got everything under control, so now I don't have to worry so much and keep an eye on everything.

However measures of financial hardship did not show improvement. This may relate to the sharp electricity price increases during the study period.

**Thermal comfort, health and wellbeing**

The majority of WHCH participants experienced significant improvement in the thermal comfort of their homes and the proportion reporting draughty homes decreased from over three-quarters to less than one-third (Figure 2).

The results for changes to health and wellbeing were mixed and tended to vary according to the severity of the health issue. The international evidence of improved health and wellbeing from deeper energy efficiency interventions suggests the need to trial comparable interventions in the Australian context, in order to assess their impact, particularly for people experiencing chronic or severe health problems.

**Barriers to upgrades**

Despite many people reporting an intention to upgrade an appliance or fixture that would improve their home energy efficiency, almost a third

**Research about program impact**

The first phase of research examined impacts of the WHCH energy audit/retrofit program on energy saving, as well as non-energy benefits including home comfort, health and wellbeing, and reduced financial hardship. Such non-energy benefits are an area with a growing body of evidence internationally, but little in Australia. The research was planned to address this gap.

The WHCH research engaged 85 people in pre-participation and post-participation interviews. Tested, normed, quantitative data and qualitative data on participants' experience were collected, and compared with participants' actual energy use and energy audit data.

The WHCH program scope and mode were changed midway through delivery. The second phase of the program, Concession Assist (CA)—unlike WHCH—did not include insulation in its offer. This redevelopment meant the program did not achieve the depth of intervention the research was designed to evaluate, and restricted the interview sample size. This limited the ability to measure program impact, but also created an

opportunity to explore participants' views on further action required to improve their household energy efficiency and energy management, and their plans and capacity to undertake these improvements.

**Participants' experiences**

Taken together, the two phases of research represent the views and experiences of 199 people in the WHCH or CA programs.

Most people joined to save money and save energy. Many also wanted to learn more, to take advantage of the expert advice, and to make their homes warmer or cooler. For example:

To get advice about the best and simple ways of being energy efficient and how to save on my energy consumption.

My house is very cold in winter and hot in summer and I was hoping we could work out some strategies to help with this.

Participants were positive about their experiences, citing energy and bill savings, improved home thermal comfort, useful advice and the friendliness of program staff:

Bills improved and usage down; that's financially AND morally positive.

reported obstacles. Some people are unable to afford their energy bills, but cannot afford to take action to bring their energy use (and associated costs) down:

I can't afford it, to do it myself. For a long time on my water bill it used to say, 'You can save water by getting a plumber to do this, or that'. But how much does a plumber or electrician cost? Sometimes people want to do the right thing but can't afford it. In the end, it comes down to the crunch. It's the bloody dollar.

Renters experience an additional double-bind of having less disposable income and less capacity to make changes to a home they do not own:

As a renter I have to rely on the landlord to do this, unfortunately [there is] no legislation in place to make landlords improve the efficiencies of their properties.

### Conclusion

The results of the Moreland Solar City research suggest that the programs had some success in addressing known barriers to energy efficiency action in homes: cost, information and trust. The research also indicates a significant appetite for further action on energy efficiency; however, cost and rental tenure are holding people back. More needs to be done to support people in achieving their energy efficiency goals, and addressing rising energy costs, the impacts of climate change and greenhouse gas emissions.

The full report is available at <http://www.bsl.org.au/Research-reports>.

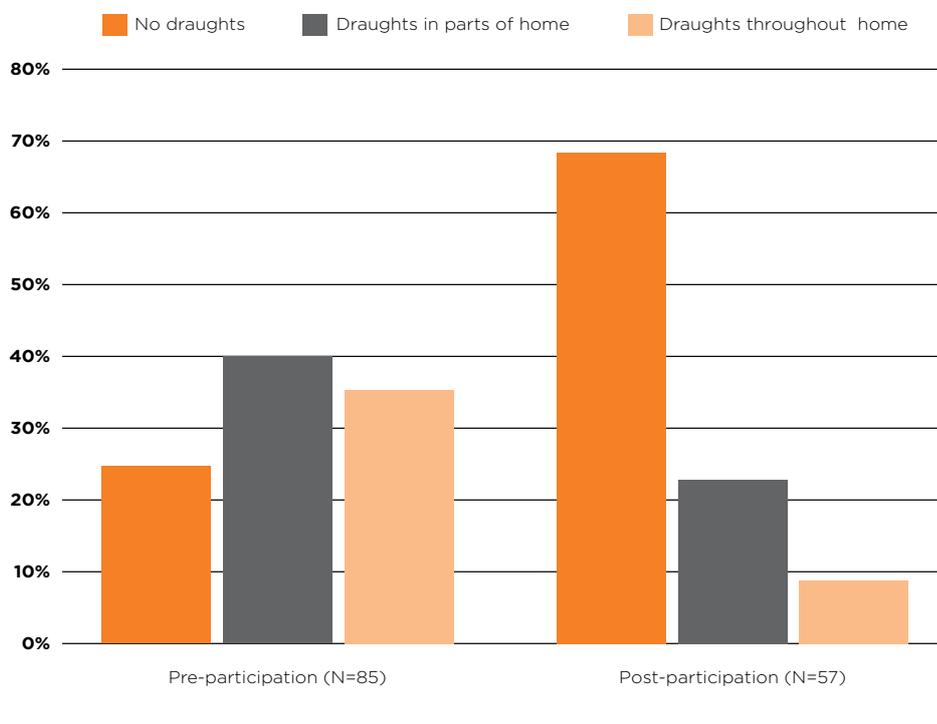
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Figure 2 Draughts in the home



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## RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS NEWS

### Inclusive growth in Australia: social policy as economic investment

Paul Smyth and John Buchanan (eds)

Published by Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

This book overturns two decades of assumptions that social policy is wasteful and a source of dependency. With contributions from national and international experts including Marian Baird, Grant Belchambers, Gerald Burke, Saul Eslake, Roy Green and Peter Whiteford, *Inclusive growth in Australia* shows that welfare spending is as much an economic investment as a measure of social protection. Its contents will interest policy makers, the corporate and community sectors and students of social policy.

Available as a printed book or ebook.

### Meanings of a long life

Ashley Carr, Simon Biggs and Helen Kimberley

This working paper examines the meanings accorded to older age in different historical periods, cultures and belief systems in order to broaden contemporary understanding, and so to challenge the one-size-fits-all mentality of policy related to ageing.

It is the latest in the series of [Social Policy Working Papers](#) published jointly online by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Centre for Public Policy at the University of Melbourne.

Paper *Meanings of a long life: cultural, social and historical perspectives* [↗](#)

### Stepping up and over

Eve Bodsworth

This progress report about Stepping Stones, a program for refugee and disadvantaged migrant women in Melbourne run by the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC), indicates that more than half the participants have started or developed their own small business. Women learned about the complex Australian regulatory system for small businesses, as well improving their confidence and skills in business planning, financial management and English language.

Report *Stepping up and over: interim evaluation of Stepping Stones, a micro-enterprise program for refugee and migrant women* [↗](#)

### Improving the energy efficiency of homes in Moreland

Victoria Johnson, Damian Sullivan & Jo Totty

This study investigated the impact of energy efficiency activity for households that participated in the Warm Home Cool Home (WHCH) and Concession Assist (CA) programs in a northern suburb of Melbourne. The two programs aimed to address cost, information and trust barriers faced by these residents in improving the energy efficiency of their homes.

*Improving the energy efficiency of homes in Moreland: Warm Home Cool Home and Concession Assist social research final report* [↗](#)

### Like juggling 27 chainsaws

Eve Bodsworth

Published by the Consumer Action Law Centre.

The Brotherhood was commissioned by the Consumer Action Law Centre to undertake a study of the experiences of people faced with court orders related to unpaid debts. Analysis of court data as well as interviews with debtors showed that the causes of debt are complex and are related to other forms of disadvantage, and that the debt recovery process is difficult and stressful for debtors to navigate.

*Like juggling 27 chainsaws: understanding the experience of default judgment debtors in Victoria* [↗](#)

Summary of *Like juggling 27 chainsaws* [↗](#)

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