



Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria

A response from Catholic Social Services Victoria to the

Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in
Rural and Regional Victoria

by the Rural and Regional Committee of the Victorian Parliament

Contact:
Denis Fitzgerald
Executive Director

Tel (03) 9287 5569
dfitzgerald@css.org.au

April 2010



Contents

Contents	2
Executive Summary and Recommendations	3
1. Introduction	5
1.1 <i>Catholic Social Services Victoria</i>	5
1.2 <i>Scope and spread of services provided</i>	5
1.3 <i>Development of this submission through consultation</i>	6
1.4 <i>Catholic Social Teaching – our framework for analysis</i>	7
2. Issues	8
2.1 <i>Scope of disadvantage and inequity</i>	8
2.2 <i>The challenge of perspective and the tyranny of analysis</i>	10
2.3 <i>Four Central Themes</i>	10
2.4 <i>Priorities for action emerging from consultations</i>	11
2.5 <i>Employment creation</i>	13
2.6 <i>Current Programs to investigate further</i>	14
References	15
Attachment 1 – <i>List of CSSV members</i>	16
Attachment 2 – <i>CSSV Consultation Workshops</i>	17
Attachment 3 - <i>Report from St Vincent de Paul Society</i>	18



Executive Summary and Recommendations

Catholic Social Services Victoria (CSSV) is a peak body for Catholic social service agencies in Victoria. A list of our member agencies, which range widely across the social services sector, is attached to this submission. We work with member agencies, as part of the Catholic Church in Victoria, to fulfil the gospel imperatives to stand with and serve those who are poor, disadvantaged and marginalised, and to work for a just, equitable and compassionate society. Further information about Catholic Social Services Victoria can be found on our website:

www.css.org.au

A list of our member agencies is at Attachment 1 to this submission. These agencies work across Victoria, and encounter at first hand the issues that particularly concern rural and regional communities.

Our policy analysis, and our response to marginalisation and disadvantage, builds on the principles of Catholic social teaching. These are based on gospel values and the collective reflection and experience over time of the application of those values in working with those who are poor, disadvantaged and marginalised. They form an integral part of the overall teaching of the Church. Our members continue in this tradition in applying these principles to contemporary issues.

A key plank of Catholic social teaching is that the inherent dignity of each person must be respected, and another is that the interests of any one section of society cannot be effectively advanced unless all members of society are able to achieve their human potential. This leads clearly to a focus on the needs and opportunities in rural and regional Victoria – our community as a whole cannot turn its back on those areas that are more in need.

This submission refers the Committee to the work of Professor Vinson in quantifying regional disadvantage (Vinson 2007), which adds to the substantial list of reports etc that starkly outline the challenges faces in rural and regional Victoria.

The submission is based on consultations with personnel of member agencies across Victoria. It corroborates the received wisdom of a sense of the complexities and costs of dealing with Governments and others whose main focus is on metropolitan centres. In that context, the consultations themselves, and the interest of the Parliamentary Committee, were seen as positive steps.

The recommendations that emerged are listed below.

We ask that Catholic Social Services Victoria be included in public hearings associated with this enquiry.

Recommendations

Effective community consultation: There is a general sense that Government needs to be more effective in talking with and listening to local community leaders about the priorities and best service delivery modes to address local needs. Greater devolution of the development of local responses to community issues will empower local communities and generate greater leverage for dollars spent.

Effective design for Government programs: Specific guidelines for funded Community Service programs need to be developed in discussion with rural and regional communities. Short term contract funding creates uncertainty for agencies and workers, many of whom move on as they can't plan their own families' lives around uncertain conditions. Competitive tendering in smaller regions is not the best way to utilise local resources.



Health: The desperate lack of Mental Health facilities and personnel in rural and regional areas needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. This was the most common need mentioned in all of our consultations.

Lack of access to health services, exacerbated by the high cost of transport, was also a key issue, and needs comprehensive attention.

Rural community workers: Better supervision and support for rural community workers would lead to greater job satisfaction, increased productivity, higher staff retention and more cohesive team development. Given that these are the people who are committed to change for their clients and have developed flexible and creative ways of serving them, they need to be better looked after both in terms of remuneration and support.

Allied to this is the extraordinary service given by legions of volunteers, who need to be better resourced and supported.

Neighbourhood Houses: These present a simple, low cost way of touching the lives of those who are marginalised from society in a positive and useful manner, so it makes sense to strengthen and better resource them. The Neighbourhood House network generally has great credibility, with local management and strong relationships with participants.

Affordable housing: Government in particular needs to resource creative ways to address the acute shortage of affordable housing and crisis accommodation.

Primary Schools: A renewed focus is needed on the central place that primary schools occupy in the lives of families in regional and rural Victoria. It is clear that many families are struggling economically to make the most of the school environment.

In addition to the need for further family financial support, there were repeated views that poverty and disadvantage could be addressed at a systemic level by investing in primary schools as community hubs for the delivery of other support services.

Employment: There was strong support for investment and employment initiatives that build on the strengths that exist in rural and regional Victoria, and which will have a positive impact on those that are marginalised within existing communities, including:

- niche production / processing of food products for export, using our 'green' credentials
- innovation in training services, equipment etc based on our bushfire experience
- Tourism activities based around bringing city students to 'working' farm properties
- Health and rejuvenation options based around the tranquility of rural life

Follow up support for programs and initiatives that have been shown to work: Too often good programs are not followed up, usually because of resource constraints. Over the long term, however, the cost to the community of this neglect could be very significant, so additional resourcing is needed. Examples for follow up that were identified include:

- 'Compeer', providing companionship for people living with mental health issues
- Grandmothers' Music program in East Gippsland, to support mothers and children
- SNAP managed housing for the intellectually disabled, in Bairnsdale
- 'Birchip Cropping Group'
- Young mothers mentoring group run by Centacare Ballarat volunteers
- Eaglehawk Community Hub
- Wendouree West Neighborhood Renewal Project
- 'Exodus' community in Wendouree West.



1. Introduction

1.1 *Catholic Social Services Victoria*

Catholic Social Services Victoria is a peak body for Catholic social service agencies in Victoria. Our members deliver a wide range of social services across the State. We work with member agencies, as part of the Catholic Church in Victoria, to fulfil the gospel imperatives to stand with and serve those who are poor, disadvantaged and marginalised, and to work for a just, equitable and compassionate society. Further information about Catholic Social Services Victoria can be found on our website: www.css.org.au

1.2 *Scope and spread of services provided*

The services that our member agencies provide support the dignity of the members of our community, particularly those who are disadvantaged or marginalised. This is evident from a partial listing of these services:

- Adoption and permanent / foster care
- Aged care and support
- Care and support of the dying
- Chaplaincy Services (including Prison, AIDS, Mental Health and Youth Welfare)
- Child support, including out of home care
- Disability care and support
- Drought counseling and relief services
- Drug and Alcohol counseling and support
- Employment services and support
- Family and Relationship Services (counseling, family dispute resolution)
- Family support case management
- Homelessness: accommodation and support for adults and youth
- Indigenous support programs
- Loss and Grief Counseling and Peer Support
- Marriage and relationship education
- Parenting education (community and school-based)
- Pregnancy counselling
- Refugee and settlement services
- School wellbeing, individual student counseling and cognitive testing
- Youth justice services

A list of our member agencies is attached to this submission. While the location of these services tends to follow population centres, taken together, our member agencies provide services across Victoria.

Some of our members are particularly focused on support for regional and rural communities. In particular:

- The Society of St Vincent de Paul (www.vinnies.org.au) provides support to the community from its conferences, which are based in most Catholic parishes in Victoria, as well as from a range of other programs. Its Opportunity Shops, 50 of which are spread across non-metropolitan Victoria, are a source of supply for those in need, as



well as generating funds for use by regional Councils of the Society; and a range of special programs are located in Moe, Mildura, Camperdown, Warrnambool and Bendigo.

- Centacare Ballarat (www.centacareballarat.org.au) has offices located at Ballarat, Mildura, Hamilton, Horsham, Swan Hill, and Bacchus Marsh, as well as its outreach to other locations.
- CentaCare Sandhurst (www.centacare-sandhurst.org.au) has office-based operations located in Bendigo, Wedderburn, Echuca, Cobram, Wodonga and Shepparton
- Centacare Gippsland (www.centacaregippsland.org.au) has operations based in Warragul, Sale, Morwell, Bairnsdale and Berwick

A number of member organisations offer services to all of Victoria, from a non-Metropolitan location. Examples include:

- 'Blake Cottage', a hospitality program run by the Sisters of Charity in Castlemaine offers accommodation to family members to facilitate the visiting of prisoners in the two prisons located in that area.
- Corpus Christi Community Greenvale, a home for more than 80 men who do not have alternative arrangements

And a larger number of other members deliver a range of services outside of metropolitan Melbourne and Geelong. Examples include:

- The post-bushfire community development work of Centacare Catholic Family Services (www.centacaremelbourne.org) is focused on the communities around Kinglake and Marysville; and its adoption and permanent care programs are delivered state-wide.
- The Brosnan Centre of Jesuit Social Services (www.jss.org.au), meeting needs of young offenders, operates from Morewell as well as from parts of Melbourne.
- Melbourne-based aged care operators have residential facilities scattered throughout the State – Villa Maria, Nazareth House, St Vincent de Paul Society, Mercy Health, and Catholic Homes are among these.

The Catholic social services sector in Victoria, including aged care services but excluding health care agencies, spends around \$350 million a year on service delivery. This is equivalent to around 14% of the not-for-profit social services sector in the State. (ABS 2008, 2009)

1.3 Development of this submission through consultation

In light of the breadth of issues raised by this enquiry, this submission was developed through a review of some of the seminal material that is widely available, and through a series of consultation workshops involving member organisations.¹

These consultations, conducted during March 2010 in Bendigo, Ballarat, Trafalgar and Bairnsdale, involved personnel from member agencies, and others whom they work with, who

¹ Thanks for the success of these workshops are due to the individuals who took part, their organisations and colleagues; to Terry O'Shannassy, Member Support and Projects Coordinator at Catholic Social Services Victoria, who conducted the consultations; and to Gavin Duffy, Manager, Policy & Research at the Society of St Vincent de Paul and Dick Pepper, of St Vincent de Paul in Gippsland who facilitated coordination.



are engaged in reflection on the issues that affect the communities that they serve. Attachment 2 to this submission lists groups that participated in workshops

This consultation process was marked by the commitment and compassion of the participants, from the humblest volunteer to the most qualified professional. The stories revealed as much about these workers as about the deprivation and distress among their communities – our interlocutors were local witnesses to hope.

It became clear that the inventive and creative ideas of these interlocutors, actioned with care and sensitivity, have changed people's lives. Despite the extensive needs that were identified, there was a wonderfully calm resilience in many of the speakers. They had benefited from of sharing their needs with their peers and working with each other in helping their communities in difficult situations. This was particularly evident in smaller cities, where competitive tendering had the capacity to divide groups doing the same sort of work.

The consultation exercise has proven to be a real blessing, providing a forum for the challenging of preconceived ideas, and enabling a demonstration of the ability of men and women of goodwill to manage the direst of circumstances with dignity, respect, hope and humour. In that context, the Parliamentary Inquiry has already had a positive impact.

1.4 Catholic Social Teaching – our framework for analysis

Our policy analysis, and our response to marginalisation and disadvantage, builds on the principles of Catholic social teaching. These principles form part of the overall teaching of the Catholic Church. They are based on gospel values and the collective reflection and experience over time of the application of those values in working with the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalised. Our members continue in this tradition in applying these principles to contemporary issues.

Respect for the inherent dignity of each person is critical to the mission of our members. This dignity implies that each human person has rights and obligations that are central to their identity, and must therefore be respected by others.

Also important to our shared mission is that the promotion of the common good of our society is in the interests of all - that no one section can truly flourish if other sections of society are unable to achieve their human potential. Anything that diminishes the lives of individuals also has a limiting effect on the wider community. Jesus said, 'I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full.' (Jn 10:10)

Building on this gospel imperative, Catholic Social Teaching has long upheld the rights of all peoples to share equitably the wealth and resources of the community. In his encyclical, *Mater et Magister* (1961), Pope John XXIII wrote:

It often happens that in one and the same country citizens enjoy different degrees of wealth and social advancement. This especially happens because they dwell in areas which economically speaking have grown at different rates. Where such is the case, justice and equity demand that the government make efforts to either remove or minimise imbalances of this sort (n150).

Much of this vision is shared by governments and the wider community. It therefore provides a useful framework against which to analyse the actual situation in rural and regional Victoria.



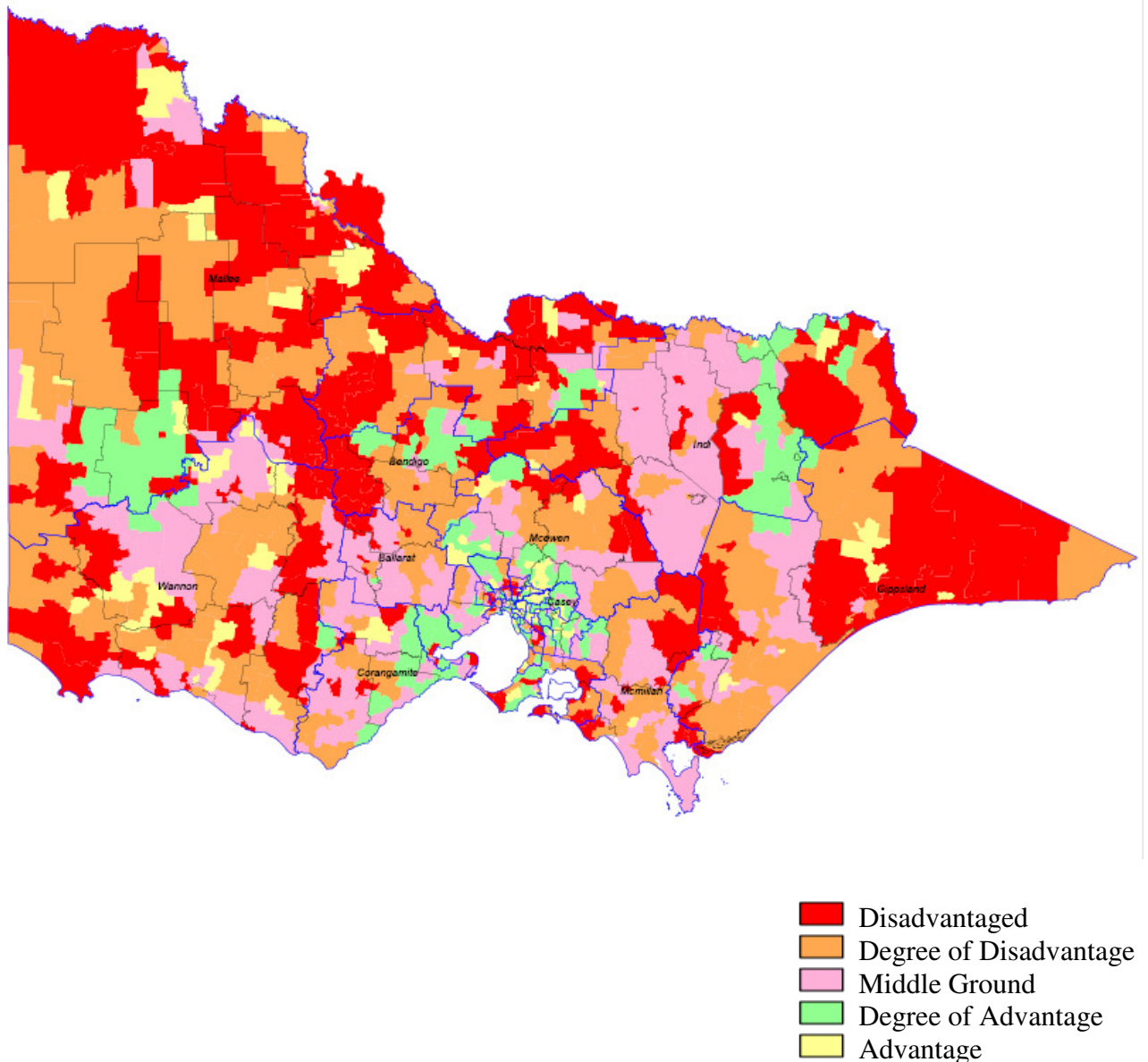
2. Issues

2.1 Scope of disadvantage and inequity

The scope of disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria is very wide, touching on most aspects of life in these areas.

The geographical incidence of this disadvantage and inequity is illustrated in the following map, which is drawn from the landmark 2006 study *Dropping off the Edge*, produced by Professor Tony Vinson for Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia (Vinson 2007). On the basis of an analysis of 26 available indicators of social disadvantage, the report distinguished areas of geographic concentration of disadvantage, as shown in the map.

Map 1: Distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria, 2006 (Vinson 2007)





The indicators that fed into this analysis give an overview of the issues that are at play:

Social distress

Low family income
 Rental stress
 Home purchase stress
 Lone person households

Health

Low birth-weight
 Childhood injuries
 Deficient immunisation
 Disability / sickness support
 Mortality
 Mental health patients treated in hospitals /
 the community
 Suicide

Community safety

Confirmed child maltreatment
 Criminal convictions
 Prison admissions
 Domestic violence

Economic

Unskilled workers
 Unemployment
 Long-term unemployment
 Dependency ratio
 Low mean table income
 Computer use / access to internet

Education

Non-attendance at pre-school
 Incomplete education (17- 24 yo's)
 Early school leaving
 Post-schooling qualifications

As the map indicates, the incidence of disadvantage is far from uniform. So, while all of these issues are very real and in the public arena, their impact varies depending on particular local circumstances.

Dropping off the edge categorises local postcode areas, and these are the building blocks of the map shown above. The detail of that analysis is recommended to the Committee, but, for ease of reference, the following table shows the postcode areas that comprise the most disadvantaged areas:

Table 1: Most disadvantaged postcode areas (Vinson 2007)

postcode	localities	Metro?	population
3047	Broadmeadows, Dallas, Jacana	Metro	19,327
3523	Heathcote and surrounds	Non-metro	3,459
3520	Korong Vale, Kinypanial	Non-metro	252
3465	Maryborough and surrounds	Non-metro	9,631
3595	Nyah West	Non-metro	653
3940	Rosebud West	Non-metro	4,355
3019	Braybrook and surrounds	Metro	6,888
3984	Corinella, and surrounds	Non-metro	3,812
3177	Doveton, Eumemmerring	Metro	10,554
3517	Inglewood and surrounds	Non-metro	1,498
3887	Lake Tyers and surrounds	Non-metro	559
3995	Wonthaggi and surrounds	Non-metro	8,280
Sub-total from listed metropolitan localities			36,769
Sub-total from listed non-metro localities			32,499

Table 1 highlights a key finding of this analysis, namely, that, as the map has already shown, non-Metropolitan areas are very well represented among most disadvantaged areas.



It also indicates that populations affected are quite significant, although, were the analysis to be extended further down the ranked list of post code areas, the total population numbers in affected metropolitan areas would soon outstrip those in rural and regional areas.

And while there is a general picture of regional and rural disadvantage, Map 1 shows that there are pockets of advantage evident around some regional cities. Shepparton is a good example of this. Seeking out the reasons for this relative advantage is as important for policy making as is analysis of the needs of less favoured areas.

2.2 The challenge of perspective and the tyranny of analysis

Professor Vinson's approach is based on available data, and, indeed, involved working with authorities to develop a number of data sets that has not previously been available for local areas.

Many others have devoted time and energy to studying these same broad issues.

Some, like the present enquiry, have focused on the issues of disadvantage and inequality associated with the non-metropolitan areas of Victoria and Australia (for example, CSSA 1999, Australian Senate 2004), and these have firmly established areas to be focused on, which are largely reflected in the consultations reported on below.

The Productivity Commission, in its 1999 study of the impact of competition policy reforms on rural and regional Australia, focused systematically on causes of change, and came up with three main conclusions (Banks, 2000):

- the forces driving change have had quite varied effects on Australia's regions, with some faring a lot better than others;
- long-term forces — largely beyond the control of governments — have been the main drivers of change; and
- competition policy reforms have been a lesser influence, but on the whole have brought net benefits to regional as well as urban Australia.

To some extent, these findings challenge the perspectives of many who are affected by the changes that have taken place - competition policy is still identified by many as part of the problem rather than as part of the solution.

But these findings also validate many of the voices of those who are immersed in the issues faced by people in rural and regional Victoria, and which emerge in the consultations reported on below. The Productivity Commission's identification, for example, of the need for continued action in relation to skills development, infrastructure, and local initiative and leadership (Banks 2000), would still be welcomed across Victoria.

And that is as it should be. The Commission visited and met with many communities, as have the many other enquiries over recent years. This analysis and consultation has led to many areas of agreement on the need for action. A key challenge facing the current enquiry, and a key demand of Victorians, is that this agreement be translated into the actions of Governments and leaders at all levels in our society.

2.3 Four Central Themes

The CSSV consultations underlined that long-term trends and recent crisis decisions have converged to exacerbate the level of disadvantage and inequity in many areas of the state.

Government, Economic, Demographic and Climate issues that emerged from the consultations have each added a layer of negative consequences to the living situation of many country people. The issues under these headings overlap, but can be characterised along the following lines:



Government

- micro economic reform in Australia has had a clear downside for regional and rural areas, with a range of decisions to withdraw government services
- closure of country rail lines, leaving little and expensive public transport
- limited access to all services, particularly health, and a dire lack of mental health services
- decisions affecting local services made in Melbourne
- program guidelines and success measures are designed for capital cities
- programs do not take any account of sparse populations and distance
- program performance issues are often inappropriate, and evaluation requirements can be costly and ineffective.
- program guidelines demand economic benefits before social improvements

Economic issues

- reductions in protection of locally produced commodities and weaker commodity prices have the effect of reducing the income of rural areas
- limited employment opportunities
- lack of local leadership and community development
- shortage of affordable housing and refuge services
- currency fluctuations increase income uncertainty
- banking, commercial, Church and community services have often been withdrawn
- farm and transport costs rising faster than incomes
- reskilling / training options very limited in rural areas
- Education costs beyond low income families
- communications technology not evenly distributed.

Demographic

- diminishing birth rate in almost all areas of Australia
- departures as a result of economic decisions, people leave as jobs go
- declining options for health, education, family support and recreation
- rehousing of Melbourne 'welfare' families into poorer country towns

Climate

- marginal rainfall areas become less profitable, water costs rise
- social stress as fewer players and no water closes sporting clubs
- tourism suffers as areas become less attractive and facilities decline
- bushfire risks keep people away

2.4 *Priorities for action emerging from consultations*

Ideas that emerged from the Ballarat consultation included:



A call for resources to be put into a Framework for Community Development Projects that better enables local communities to meet, share, listen and develop their own plans for their future which government could then look at supporting. Development of local leaders and support for existing local initiatives was seen as a priority along with the development of mentoring options. Among current successful local initiatives were listed the Wendouree West Neighbourhood Renewal Project and the work of the Birchip Cropping Group, whose initial farm focus had spilled over into a range of positive community initiatives, and provided exceptional leadership.

A Centacare Family Services program centred on providing volunteer mentors was another example of a simple way of widening the relationships and broadening the skills of mothers of small children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This work empowered the women in their relationships with their children, enabled them to address some personal issues within their own lives, and brought good adult role models into the lives of the children.

There are management issues concerned the difficulty of reconciling Melbourne-centric program guidelines with the realities of distance and spread of population in rural areas. Local welfare agencies feel that they are far better placed to decide how best to service the needs of clients to whom they are committed, rather than being bound by some possibly inappropriate guidelines. A local manager commenting on one set of program guidelines said, 'The economics don't work'.

A further insight coming from the gathering was the central role that Primary schools can occupy within a small community. Because parents readily gather to support their children's initial education, they tend to gather around school activities; fund raising, maintenance, social, cultural and sporting. This is evidenced by the fact that Government directions around Family Hubs have often focused on co-locating with school and child care centre sites. This strong local meeting point could provide the impetus for other allied community development projects, ongoing learning opportunities for parents and the wider community.

Homelessness and a shortage of affordable housing were factors that impact on community well being, where the market showed no indication of offering a solution.

Deficiencies in mental health services were evidenced by high suicide rates in rural areas. Difficulties attracting qualified staff exacerbate the need for a new approach to resource provision.

The Gippsland consultations

The consultations in Gippsland highlighted a number of issues which indicate the need for a review of significant Government policy and funding settings, including:

- Mental health issues and homelessness, which often overlap, were the major issues of inequity and disadvantage.
- Health care generally, including the lack of access to specialist services and the high cost of travel to attend services.
- Low school retention rates and the increased costs of post compulsory secondary education and of TAFE courses all contributed to greater inequity and disadvantage, the very things that education is supposed to wind back.

Community development was a theme. The group called for greater community leadership, greater opportunities for participation, and for mentoring programs for local people.

Program design and monitoring again emerged as an issue. Some participants spoke of feeling dis-enfranchised and far away from where decisions affecting them were made. They also spoke of the difficulty of working to achieve particular program assessment goals, with workers pressed to exceed targets to guarantee roll-over of funding. How useful a measure of program effectiveness is simply the number of clients seen?



The work of the Drought counsellors in the Gippsland area was particularly noted. After initially struggling to connect with rural people, they formed a small network to share their experiences, and developed a supervision arrangement. They saw their work grow significantly but only after a substantial learning curve. Their reflections are instructive for future welfare initiatives in rural and regional areas

Bendigo consultations

Common themes of homelessness, health service access, and the cost of transport in the absence of public transport, were to the fore. It was pointed out that Bendigo does not have any refuge accommodation for crisis situations: one motel and one caravan park will reluctantly accept referrals, and those who find themselves homeless are often offered a train ticket to Melbourne. Centacare pointed out the rise in the threshold for accessing Family Support Services has left a growing group at the lower end of the system floundering without support.

There was again a focus in discussion on the potential for well-resourced primary schools to act as a hub - while parents are actively engaged with these user-friendly organisations, it is possible to deal with a range of education, family and community issues. St. Vincent de Paul workers felt that many later emerging issues could be pre-empted by a coordinated attack on the poverty and disadvantage that dogs the progress of too many primary age rural and regional students. They recounted the significant amounts of money that had been distributed to families struggling to manage the cost of Government school education; and the pressure on some Catholic primary schools to write off uncollected fees for a significant proportion of pupils.

Particularly vulnerable sections of the local communities were seen as including:

- Mental health clients
- Low income families and individuals
- Older farmers on unsustainable farms
- Unemployed youth, older retrenched workers
- People trying to access health care
- Students - primary, secondary, vocational

2.5 Employment creation

The consultations acknowledged the centrality of employment to family and community wellbeing, and there was acknowledgement of the work that Governments have been doing in this area. There are, for example, impressive lists of initiatives shared by the State government and rural and regional bodies. These projects cover a broad range of industry developments all growing out of existing natural strengths and resources - food and wine industry groups, for example, are exploring product development, export options and marketing opportunities (Regional Development Victoria, 2010). There is also plenty of scope for developments linked to the tourist industry to service local and international visitors.

Rural support workers, however, were skeptical of the real impact of some of this development - how many of the poor were benefiting? It was suggested that few of those on the margins found work in this area and none could afford to patronise these establishments.

There were a number of ideas for regional/rural employment creation that would make an impact. Many of these were consistent with the intention of government and regional programs, but they all suggested a focus on making a real difference to the lives of those who live in the target areas, and not just on job or wealth creation.

Building on the strengths that exist in rural and regional Victoria, areas of focus that were supported included:



- niche production / processing of food products for export, using our 'green' credentials as a leading marketing emphasis
- Our bushfire prevalence and our long history of innovation suggests a regionally based body could refine and develop training services, technology and equipment in this area for export
- Tourism activities based around bringing city students to 'working' farm properties – for example, a school camp that extended over five days and moved to a couple of different places could be a real learning journey, and create income and employment opportunities. Learning activities could be centered around climate change and water use, soil degradation, rehabilitation of land, crop science, food science, bush cooking, animal husbandry, machinery technology, aboriginal history, Australian literature, and the history of settlement
- Health and rejuvenation options based around the peace and tranquility of rural life - relaxation, centering activities/spiritual growth, healthy exercise and diet.

2.6 Current Programs to investigate further

The consultations revealed many local programs that are making a significant difference to the life chances of those that participate in them. Many of these are replicable in other areas; many could make a greater contribution if more resources were available.

The following examples are listed:

- 'Compeer', providing volunteer companionship for people living with mental health issues, managed by St. Vincent de Paul - <http://www.vinnies.org.au/compeer-vic>
- Grandmothers' Music program in East Gippsland, run by Anglican parishes to support mothers and children
- SNAP managed housing for the intellectually disabled, run by Baptcare in Bairnsdale
- 'Birchip Cropping Group', a not-for-profit agricultural research organisation led by farmers in the Wimmera Mallee region, involving local community leadership – www.bcg.org.au
- Young mothers mentoring group run by Centacare Ballarat volunteers
- Eaglehawk Community Hub. Post bushfire support and community development. <http://www.accessemployment.com.au/community/index.aspx>
- Wendouree West Neighborhood Renewal Project - www.wendoureewest.com
- 'Exodus' community in Wendouree West, who continue to promote Neighborhood renewal - <http://www.ballarat.catholic.org.au/parishes/default.cfm?loadref=510>



References

ABS 2008, Australian Bureau of Statistics 5220.0 - *Australian National Accounts: State Accounts, 2007-08* at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/5220.0> accessed 2 July 2009

ABS 2009, Australian Bureau of Statistics 8106.0 - *Not-for-profit Organisations, Australia, 2006-07 (Re-Issue)* at [http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/8106.02006-07%20\(Re-Issue\)?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/8106.02006-07%20(Re-Issue)?OpenDocument) accessed 2 July 2009

Australian Senate Community Affairs Committee (2004) *A hand up not a hand out: Renewing the fight against poverty (Report on poverty and financial hardship)*, at http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/completed_inquiries/2002-04/poverty/report/, accessed 15 April 2010

Banks G 2000 'Meeting the challenge of change in regional Australia', An address to Renaissance of the Regions', address to 'Renaissance of the Regions', a symposium organised by the Institute of Public Administration Australia, Melbourne Exhibition Centre, Victoria, Thursday 9 November 2000, at <http://www.pc.gov.au/speeches/?a=7833>, accessed 15 April 2010

Catholic Social Services Australia 2000. *A Litany of Disadvantage – Rural Communities of Australia*, at <http://catholicsocialservices.org.au/node/32/print>, accessed 15 April 2010

Pope John XXIII, 1961, *Encyclical letter Mater et Magister*, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/John23/j23mater.htm> accessed 14 April 2010

Productivity Commission 1999 *Impact of Competition Policy Reforms on Rural and Regional Australia*, http://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0003/32439/compol.pdf, accessed 15 April 2010

Regional Development Victoria 2010 *Annual Report 2008/09* Regional Development Victoria, Melbourne

Vinson T, 2007, *Dropping off the edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services, Catholic Social Services Australia, Richmond Victoria, Curtain ACT



Attachment 1 – *List of CSSV members*

Bethlehem Community
Catholic Chaplains Association for Health Care
Catholic Homes
Catholic Solo Parents
Centacare Ballarat
Centacare Catholic Family Services
Centacare Gippsland
CentaCare Sandhurst
Corazon
Corpus Christi Community
Don Bosco Youth Centre and Hostel
Early Education Program for Hearing Impaired Children
Edmund Rice Camps
Frankston Pregnancy Support
Good Shepherd Aged Services
Good Shepherd Youth & Family Services
Jesuit Social Services
John Pierce Centre for Deaf Ministry
Justice and Peace Unit, Archdiocese of Melbourne
Kewn Kreestha - Rest Home for Mothers
Keysborough Learning Centre
Larmenier
MacKillop Family Services
Marillac
McAuley Community Services for Women
Mercy Health and Aged Care
Mother Romana Home
Nazareth House
Project Dreaming Tracks
Sacred Heart Mission
Shekinah Homeless Services
Sisters of Charity Community Care
Society of St Vincent de Paul
Southern Cross Care (Vic)
St Mary's House of Welcome
Villa Maria



Attachment 2 – CSSV Consultation Workshops

Ballarat - 15 March 2010

Centacare Ballarat
St. Vincent de Paul Society
Catholic Education Office
Diocesan Planning Office
Exodus Community, Wendouree West

Bendigo - 23 March 2010

CentaCare Sandhurst
St. Vincent de Paul Society

Trafalgar, Bairnsdale - 19 March 2010

Centacare Gippsland
St. Vincent de Paul Society
Kilmany Uniting Care,
Quantum (housing and community services)
Anglicare Victoria
Salvation Army
Catholic parishes



Attachment 3 Addendum from St Vincent de Paul Society



St Vincent de Paul Society
 VICTORIA
good works

St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria Inc.
 ABN: 28 911 702 061
 RN: A0042727Y
 Email: info@svdp-vic.org.au
 Website: www.vinnies.org.au/vic

COMPILED REPORT

Based on the working knowledge of

experienced St Vincent de Paul Society Members
regarding

INEQUITY & DISADVANTAGES
AFFECTING & CONCERNING THE RURAL & REGIONAL AREAS
of
LATROBE BAW BAW REGION
DROUIN WARRAGUL TRAFALGAR MOE MORWELL CHURCHILL
TRARALGON & DISTRICTS

Public housing: Across the region there is a shortage of public housing & private affordable rentals. Private rentals seemed to have risen to take advantage of Government rental assistance.

- *A family of 4 adults sleeping in a car for 6 weeks before house was allocated.
- * A family with 4 children wanting to rent privately, finding it difficult because of the perception that 2 children was acceptable but 4 was not. This family had a record of caring well for previous rentals. Unable to find an accommodating Landlord, the family, out of necessity had to move to another area in Victoria, away from the extended family.
- *Uni students paying private high rentals & sharing 4 to a house because of finances unable to cover cost of units on campus also in short supply.
- #PublicUnits & houses are needed, if there is a good supply, rental prices drop in the private market, and landlords are more accommodating.
- #Aged Care units will be much needed in the future, so now they should be built.
- #Suggest a government incentive for singles, couples living in 3 bedroom + houses to move to unit housing, making family houses more available on the market
- #More flexible criteria for Youth allowance benefits than the proposed 15hr per week paid employment during the gap year, considering the shortage of employment opportunities. Each geographical area should have criteria adjusted according to opportunities available.

Employment: Lack of, has lead to situations of families without any income when they do not fit the guidelines of Centrelink. *Effects on the employable when no work is available, has been seen in low self-esteem, depression, violence in the home, mental illness & suicides throughout our region. Drought & bushfire have also taken their toll and caused financial hardship.

- #Incentives to industry, eg low power rates, apprenticeship assistance, employee invested interest in the industry per Govt grant may help.
- # Continued concessions & supports healthwise & financially for people suffering hardship until they are re-established on a regular income.
- #Mens' shed, community gardens, craft groups to be supported by Govt funds.
- #Establish Research centres emanating from Monash University in the region..



Page 2.

***We have known people who find it very financially difficult to travel in order to properly seek employment. It can be quite an expense out of their basic income entitlements, and does not encourage active job seeking. Work available is often part time and of uncertain duration, sometimes causing the family to be worse off financially.**

#Newstart clients are in need of a Centrelink increase of income to enable proper sourcing of employment, which involves extra costs, mainly travel, clothing & setting up their CV.

#With chronic unemployment sometimes basic life skills are lacking & providing more support for neighbourhood houses where these skills can be learned would be worthwhile.

Medical & Mental services: *More Doctors needed to service the needs within reasonable hours of consultation. Specialists provide only limited services as they visit across the region. This means that appointments are limited and people must travel to Melbourne for the service, shouldering the burden of extra cost both in transport & travel time. We have known cancer patients making these trips to access appropriate services.

#Provision for more Specialists / Resident specialists, ideally, for the region are needed and a funded transport support service provided for referred patients.

#Volunteer services eg Red Cross could be better supported to supply this transport service to the community.

Elective surgery cancellations have caused trauma & hardship. **One patient travelled to have open heart surgery and was turned away three times, having made the journey to Melbourne with all the necessary preparations & emotional strain that accompanied this.**

#Better means of informing the patient earlier so that the trauma is lessened for them is essential.

***Support units (housing) after Patients are accessed in the Psychiatric wards of our hospitals are few in number when**

patients need ongoing support & assurance for them to see & understand the benefit of medications if side-effects of the drugs have to be dealt with. After discharge from hospital they are vulnerable # and need ongoing education as to the management of their illness, so that the professional investment caring for them in the expensive hospital environment, continues when they leave, to ensure the desired well being of the patient.

***We see patients who have neglected their medication, because they feel well, or don't want the side-effects of the drugs, which bears out what was mentioned above, they need ongoing support & advice.**

#A Medicare Office is needed in each town so that patients are not bearing extra expenses travelling to major centres for rebates etc. Patients are often required to pay for X Rays & Ultrasounds & other services before the service is rendered.

This can be an unreasonable burden on low income earners and

#should be available bulk billed without this pressure being placed on the patient by the provider.

#Petrol could be exempt from tax when people suffering hardship must travel by car for their health services.

#Maybe doctors, social workers & agencies could be authorised to distribute fuel cards with this tax exemption.



Page 3.

Aboriginal – Koorie Services: **We have heard these services being adversely criticised by members of that Community as not addressing their real needs.
#Maybe a survey to check effectiveness of the services may be required.*

Dental services: **We have dealt with people who are on waiting lists for more than 12 months for needed dental work such as fillings & dentures.
#Services need to be more available for basic dental care*

Drug Rehabilitation Centres: **We see people on the home rehabilitation program, usually Methodone and without a supportive family or friends it is a very long process interrupted by many regressions.
*We see people who have to leave the area to undergo a two week program and this is often repeated many times before real progress is made.
#We would like to see long term rehabilitation Centres in the Region. We have had contact with a Doctor Hall in the Moe area, he has a professional interest in the rehabilitation of people addicted to drugs. He has compassion & understanding of their difficulties, physically, mentally, emotionally & financially. Doctors like Dr Hall could be the ones to consult about setting up a suitable, ongoing supportive Centre/clinic that would be instrumental in restoring peoples lives as achieving citizens, which is of great benefit to the whole community.*

Basic life skills & educational concerns: **We see young parents particularly & others, who have benefited from programs that provide interactive learning skills, cooking, budgeting, childcare, creative crafts, restoration of furniture, retail training, literacy & numeracy skills etc. These programs have been provided by Neighbourhood houses, skills-share, Gest projects, Community centres, Anglicare & our Vinnies Centres.
We have learned that people need someone to really listen to their concerns & needs.

#We would want to see emergency phone services improved... ..when a caller requiring assistance does not fit the criteria of their agency it would be very beneficial if the service providers were trained to refer those people to an appropriate agency, or suggest an alternative. This could alleviate anxiety & stress that often overwhelms people when they are trying to find a solution to their problems.

- **We have seen that people sometimes need an advocate, who can help them seek the help they need or talk to the agency on their behalf. People can be lacking in literacy skills or have never understood that there is help available from the many services provided in the community.*
- *#Experienced people (volunteers) in the community could be encouraged to attend a basic training course with agencies already involved in community services to be assigned as advocates where assurance is needed.*

#Information needs to be in simple language so that it is readily understood by all. This we would like to see improved with all application forms.



Page 4.

***People need reliable & reasonably priced internet connection for educational purposes. Services in rural areas frequently fade and need to be more reliable.**
#Assistance for internet connection for families with schoolchildren.

#Infrastructure that sustains a good connection to rural areas.

We know of difficulties with school bus services in our region. This occurs when the needs of a student are not being met in their zoned area and the parents find a suitable school in a more distant area.

#There needs to be some flexibility to allow students to travel on school buses out of their specific zoned area. Maybe an authorization could be arranged when the welfare of the student justifies the change of school.

***We have found many students disadvantaged when they cannot afford the excursions or other activities promoted through the school because it is costing the parents on limited income.**

#We would want to see provision made by the Government to address this inequity in the name of quality education free for all students. These students are probably the ones that need these opportunities most of all.

Compiled by Marie Rooney Regional Council President Latrobe Baw Baw Region of St Vincent de Paul Society Vic Inc.

*Marie Rooney
59 Old Traralgon Road,
Jacob Creek 3825*

Phone: 51653240 mob: 0408508743