

M I C A H

Issue No.13 Quarterly Newsletter of Catholic Social Services Victoria April 2004



Fr Kevin Mogg, Paul Linossier, Sr Kath Tierney

Annual General Meeting 2004

By Karon Donnellon

"I am delighted to look around and to see the variety of service that you provide to your sisters and brothers in our community. The formation of Catholic Social Services has enabled us - in hospitals, counselling centres, prisons and places of outreach into the community - to see and emphasise the dignity and beauty, often somewhat obscured, in a person suffering, yet made in the image and likeness of Christ."

"Catholic Social Services helps us to realise together what we are able to do and how to enrich the service we provide and render it more effective." So began the homily of Archbishop Hart at the Annual General Meeting on March 4th.

As people gathered from the various agencies, it was indeed evident that through the CSSV network the church offers an extraordinary service for those who are marginalised. The complexity of the network was highlighted in the address given by the chair of CSSV Council, Paul Linossier.

The formal meeting was chaired by

Sr Kath Tierney who is the deputy chair of the Council. The minutes were passed and the Annual Report of CSSV presented. Paul Linossier outlined the activities of both Council and Secretariat, including advocacy, research, research partnerships and many forums on mission development and Catholic social teaching. Paul also described the areas of responsibility for the Standing Committees of the Council and some of the activities related to each.

As people entered St Ambrose's Church for the Eucharistic celebration a bold banner presented the call from

Luke 4:18-19:

The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor

to proclaim liberty to captives

to the blind new sight,

to set the downtrodden free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's

favour'.

The challenge remained with us throughout the celebration. The chaplaincy teams from Catholic Prison Ministry and Juvenile Justice are to be thanked for their extraordinary work in preparing the liturgy. Once again through the generosity of the parish

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2004

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The purpose of the magazine is to promote communication and information sharing within the Catholic welfare sector of Victoria.

The Editor welcomes contributions from those in member agencies, associates and parishes.

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priest of St Ambrose's, Fr Michael Casey, we were able to hold the Eucharist in a prayerful environment.

Dinner was then served back at Brunswick Town Hall and the evening concluded with a provocative and entertaining speech from Judge Michael Strong. Michael Strong is a County Court judge who is a passionate advocate for children and young people. He is chair of the board of Berry Street Victoria.

Judge Strong spoke of his work with Berry Street, his work on the bench and concluded with his personal love –



Karon Donnellon, Marg Casey, Carol Vale



Paul Linossier, Denise Lacey, Johanna Snelleman

singing! All were entertained by a wonderful rendition of the Noel Coward song: The Bar at Piccolo Marina where love came to Mrs Wentworth-Brewster. Of most interest however was his sharing of the writings of his great grandfather and the impact of these on his own life. A clergyman with a deep commitment to the disadvantaged and to justice, Judge Strong's great-grandfather could well have been describing the world of today, not the Melbourne of 100 years ago. (We are seeking permission from Judge strong to publish the sermon in full for your interest in the next issue.)

As with all major events there are many people who contribute to the success and Fr Kevin Mogg and the Secretariat would like to thank all who are a part of the CSSV network and the Council of CSSV. It is the hard and consistent work of each that



Mary O'Shannassy, Monica Weedon, Peter Walsh

enables the Archbishop to say so confidently: "Catholic Social Services helps us to realise together what we are able to do and how to enrich the service we provide and render it more effective." *

Senate Inquiry into Poverty

By Joe Caddy

After nearly twelve months of receiving submissions and hearing evidence, the Senate Select Committee for Community Affairs in mid-March tabled its report on the inquiry into poverty. The report shines a light into some of the dark corners of deprivation in Australia's so called prosperous society.

In doing so it exposes amongst other things the shameful and unacceptable reality of children living in poverty and families that are homeless.

In shining a light it also exposes the myth that has driven much of economic and social policy in Australia for the past fifteen years. That myth says that if you create good enough economic conditions then wealth and opportunity will trickle down to all.

The inquiry and the report have exposed that myth for the falsehood that it is. Despite a decade of record economic growth and prosperity, groups of Australians have fallen further below an acceptable level of opportunity and standard of living. Indigenous communities, those living in depressed rural and urban regions and families, especially families with larger numbers of children, are just a few of those groups.

No doubt there have been significant economic gains in growth, employment and net wealth in Australia over recent years, but there is no cause to be smug about those results because they do not represent the true measure of how well Australia is travelling as a society.

Rather, the plight and the conditions of those who are the least well off

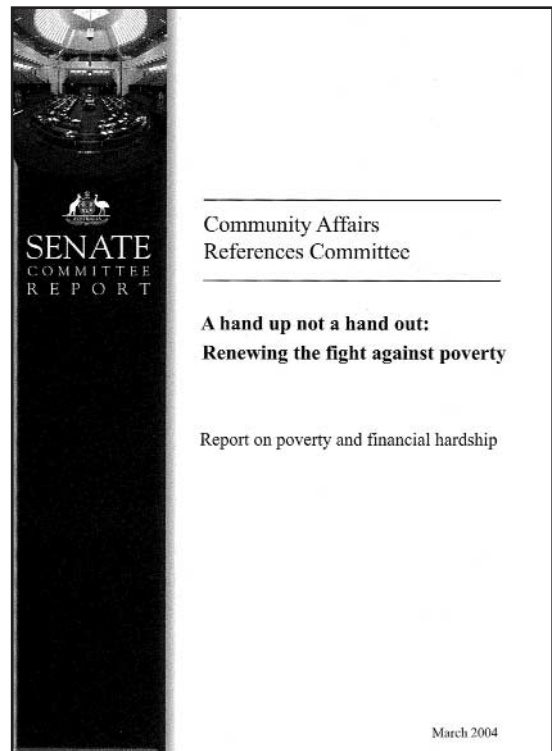
provide the true measures of how Australia is performing and the results as seen through the report are shameful.

If even one child goes hungry, or if even one family is denied the opportunity to gain access to work, education and training or basic health services, especially mental and dental health services – as long as even one group suffers from these levels of deprivation, then we are all impoverished as a nation.

The fact however, as has come to light through the inquiry, is that hundreds of thousands of Australians are struggling through such hardship.

One pleasing result of the inquiry process is that it demonstrated that as a nation we are well disposed to deal with the disgrace of poverty in our midst. The fact that there were more than 350 written submissions and almost as many witnesses who presented to the inquiry is testimony to the fact that the anti-poverty agenda cannot be lightly dismissed as simply the agenda of some elite welfare lobby. The fact is that there is a groundswell of concern about poverty among responsible people across the nation.

Given this groundswell of concern it represents an enormous pity and wasted opportunity that the members of the Senate Committee failed to reach agreement in the report. The Committee divided, with the Labor-dominated majority presenting a report which, while it contains many



excellent recommendations, is written in such a way that Government members could not have agreed. Consequently there was also a minority report that also has some good recommendations but is in turn overly defensive of the Government record. Sadly, on an issue as central as that of poverty, narrow political party interests were allowed to prevail over the national interest. This is always the hazard in releasing a report as sensitive as this in a pre-election environment.

Catholic Social Services Victoria and many other groups and individuals called in their submissions for a national strategy in Australia to combat poverty. It is pleasing that this was taken up as a key recommendation in the report because poverty in Australia will take a generation to remedy and it will require the cooperation of all political parties, of all states, of local government, business, unions and a range of community representatives.

The economic cost of addressing and remedying poverty may be high but the economic and social cost of ignoring it will be immense. *

Community Adversity and Resilience

A new report has just been released by Jesuit Social Services, Community Adversity and Resilience. It is the sequel to the early report: Unequal In Life (1999). Both reports are authored by Professor Tony Vinson.

The report measures social disadvantage by each postcode in Victoria and New South Wales according to fourteen different factors and illustrates by three case studies how entrenched social disadvantage can

be addressed.

As the Senate Inquiry into Poverty recently revealed, poverty and social disadvantage are deeply entrenched within Australian society. While many Australians have enjoyed an extended

period of unparalleled economic prosperity, a growing number of Australian families have been left behind.

Poverty and social disadvantage in our communities can no longer be ignored. It's time for the Federal Government to rethink its approach and commit to a national strategy for the reduction of poverty and social disadvantage in Australia.

This new research report gives the hard facts about where poverty and disadvantage is most concentrated in today's society. It takes the focus off individuals and families and looks at the bigger picture, examining the forces against which "the little people" have to struggle.

A unique feature of this new report is its focus on resilience, and how it is to be found in many Victorian neighbourhoods and local communities, including those that are severely economically disadvantaged.

The report, including an attached CD Rom, is available for purchase from Jesuit Social Services for \$30 including postage and handling. It contains detailed information on more than 1200 postcode areas in Victoria and New South Wales and three case studies that illustrate how communities can go about building social capital and social cohesion.

This report is vital reading in the lead-up to this year's Federal election for those committed to helping shape a more just society for those in need.

"Community Adversity and Resilience" can be ordered through the JSS web page: www.jss.org.au, or by calling: 03 9427 7388.

Community adversity and resilience:
the distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales and the mediating role of social cohesion

Tony Vinson
The Ignatius Centre
for social policy and research
March 2004

Jesuit Social Services

Study by Tony Vinson sharpens picture about distribution of disadvantage

By John Honner

Tony Vinson, Community adversity and resilience: the distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales and the mediating role of social cohesion. Melbourne: Jesuit Social Services, 2004.

Tony Vinson is an Emeritus Professor of Social Work at the University of New South Wales. This study is the sequel to his well received *Unequal in Life* (Jesuit Social Services 1999) which itself traces back to Vinson's 1975 study of crime and disadvantage across 75 minor suburbs of Newcastle.

Vinson's approach is very simple. He correlates a range of data from available indicators against postcodes. The indicators from the 1999 survey included health, unemployment, low birth weight, child abuse, childhood injuries, education achievement, psychiatric admissions, crime rates, income, and poverty. In this latest survey further indicators of disadvantage have been added: mortality rates, sickness and disability support, imprisonment, early school leaving, and disconnected electricity supply.

More significantly, however, in this latest study Vinson also explores some indicators of social cohesion against postcode: participation in organised sport, volunteering, and availability of informal help.

Two findings emerge. The first finding is the depressing but also confronting picture of the continuing concentration of disadvantage in particular localities. There has been little change since 1999 (though the fact that some change has occurred deserves further exploration). The second finding is that there is no immediate correlation between social

cohesion scores and disadvantage scores. In other words, areas of disadvantage can have reasonable levels of social cohesion and remain areas of disadvantage.

It follows that social cohesion is a necessary but not sufficient element to overcome disadvantage. So, while community organisations and governments are variously and rightly putting energy into community building projects, more is needed if disadvantage is to be addressed. Other elements needed include, clearly, education, work skills, and employment opportunities.

The data is open to many interpretations and should be treated with caution. Readers have to be aware that population sizes and samples can vary greatly from postcode to postcode, and within postcodes there can be particular pockets of disadvantage. Nonetheless, the reader only has to look at the maps to see that patterns and clusters of disadvantage emerge either on the under-resourced fringes of capital cities or in regional areas undone by declines in industry and agriculture.

While governments of all persuasions currently talk about building social capital, the fact is that they are still driven by mantras of good economic management and greater productivity. Unfortunately, however, a society that focuses on becoming more productive and competitive ends up as a society that creates winners and losers. The losers inevitably fall into areas of disadvantage from which their children, no matter how talented, will struggle to escape.

On the positive side, Vinson includes a case study of planned community-

strengthening in the Newcastle suburb of Windale. It shows that governments can make a difference. But when will such effort be extended to other suburbs? In Victoria the newly established Department of Victorian Communities is also setting about pilot community-building projects and trying to address the way services are provided in areas of disadvantage, but that effort is only beginning and is handicapped by other arms of government deregulating the labour market, privatising public utilities, and making cuts to the community sector through so-called "productivity savings".

Some of the big ticket social indicators – like health, employment and education – involve both federal and state governments. When disadvantaged regions lack adequate health or education resources, for example, it is all too easy for one government to blame the other. Meanwhile, disadvantage remains unaddressed.

Tony Vinson's research shows that there are long-term entrenched areas of disadvantage in Australia and confronts governments with the inadequacy of their current social policy. It also shows that foundations of social cohesion exist and that commitment and vision can achieve change, if better social policies are put in place. This will make not only for a fairer Australia, but also for a better Australia.

John Honner is Director of Practice and Policy at MacKillop Family Services. He is also a member of the Board of the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS). *

Mark Latham on social policy: the influence of ‘Third Way’ politics and of Amartya Sen

By Bruce Duncan

Since becoming leader of the Australian Labor Party, Mark Latham’s ideas on social policy and welfare reform have attracted renewed interest and debate. Though the ALP is yet to detail much of its social policy in the run-up to the next federal election, undoubtedly Latham will be drawing on his reading and writing to help shape a new Labor platform.

Giddens & the ‘Third Way’

Latham has been strongly influenced by the so-called ‘Third Way’ views developed especially by Anthony Giddens, Director of the London School of Economics and Political Science. A prolific author, Giddens has attempted to move beyond the old polarities between communism or varieties of socialism on the one hand, and an assertive capitalism based on an acquisitive individualism.

Two ideas permeate this ‘Third Way’ thinking:

- first, that individuals have to take more responsibility for their lives, and avoid the trap of excessive reliance on welfare or State intervention;
- and secondly, that the free market has to be transformed to meet human needs more adequately, especially by devolving power and responsibility throughout society.

Giddens brings these key motifs together in his vision of a rejuvenated social democracy.

In the 2001 book he edited, *The Global Third Way Debate*, Giddens commended the essay by Latham outlining the Third Way, indicating Giddens’s considerable regard for Latham. Latham’s chapter was taken from his 1998 volume, *Civilising Global*

Capital, but he has been developing his ideas since then, especially in his 2003 book of essays, *From the Suburbs: Building a Nation from our Neighbourhoods*.

Latham has made considerable efforts to rethink Labor philosophy in the new context of globalisation, drawing heavily from the debates over the Third Way, not just in Britain but in Europe and the United States as well. The significance of this effort is that it involves not just minor modifications in Labor views or decking out old policies in a new language, but a fundamental reworking and critique of social philosophies.

Latham’s critique of the Welfare State

Latham argues against six ‘myths of the welfare state’.

1. *The myth that welfare spending alone is enough to transform depressed and impoverished regions.* Based on his experience in Werriwa (NSW), he says that people distrust government agencies, and have become disempowered. Instead he argues for the re-energising of community groups to spark local and individual initiatives.
2. *The myth of government intervention.* Latham argues that governments cannot substitute for the links between people that create

trust and a sense of community. ‘We need to put the “social” back into “social justice”.’ (From the Suburbs, p 86). ‘Government’s new role must be to identify and nurture successful community projects. This is what we call the enabling state.’ (p 87).

3. *The myth of ‘Pity the Poor’.* Latham rejects the paternalism of government policies that assume the poor have little capacity to help themselves. ‘We need to work on the assumption that the answers to poverty lie within poor communities themselves.’ (p 88).

4. *The myth of static poverty.* Latham writes that ‘For most people, poverty is not a permanent condition’, but that about 30 per cent of the population endure periods of poverty, with 5-10 per cent experiencing long-term poverty. He argues that the welfare system needs to be redesigned to support people more adequately in this context.

5. *The myth of public administration.* Latham recognises that poverty has become more concentrated in regions and hence more entrenched and difficult to alleviate. Part of the problem is that various government departments do not coordinate their activities, and hence are unable to meet the needs of localities in a focused way.

6. *The myth of abstract rights.* Latham argues that socially responsible behaviour is more important than social rights. Community participation and involvement is vital. 'The core demand in disadvantaged areas [is] ... to ensure that people act responsibly and respect each other's interests.' (p 91).

Such views may seem surprising coming from a Labor politician, since they are critical of the workings of the welfare state, and place great weight on individuals and groups improving their own circumstances without allowing in any detail for the structural and economic constraints on such people. Conservative political opponents may readily take advantage of Latham's rhetoric against him to amplify their neo-liberal criticisms of the welfare State.

Moreover, some of Latham's views have long been standard in the work of community development and social welfare, especially to help people regain fuller control over their own lives and circumstances.

Influence of Sen

A further influence on Latham has been that of the Nobel Prize-winning economist, Amartya Sen, whom Latham invokes often for his views about 'capacity building' or enhancing the abilities of individuals and communities to do things for themselves, and take greater control over their own futures. Sen has argued that wellbeing should be assessed not against notions of economic 'utility' or opulence, but in terms of 'capability to function, i.e. what a person can do or can be' (See his *Commodities and Capabilities*, 1999, ix.).

Sen has also developed a major critique of the discipline of economics itself. In particular, he is critical of the ethical implications of economics. Sen castigates the 'engineering' approach in recent economics which has tended to overlook the social aspects of economic policies. Against the free-market libertarians, he has

particularly argued that social and distributive justice need to be given a larger role in economic planning and reintroduced as a constitutive dimension of economics.

Sen has been a leading contributor to development economics, and especially to the understanding of famines and why they should not be allowed to happen today. His ideas on development economics share much with other leading development economists like Paul Streeton. Sen has played a key role in the thinking behind the UN Human Development Reports since 1990, and the UN Millennium Goals for the rapid reduction of hunger and the worst forms of global poverty.

With the help of the Aristotelian philosopher, Martha Nussbaum, Sen has helped establish clearer criteria for achieving goals in social development and human wellbeing that have won widespread international support (see Sen and Nussbaum [eds.], *The Quality of Life*, 1993/2001).

Sen and Nussbaum have developed a collaboration of great sophistication and depth. They challenge not just economics to find sounder philosophical foundations, but also rebut philosophical relativism as basically a dead end which can offer little guidance about how to improve human wellbeing throughout the world.

It is not immediately clear how closely Latham has followed Sen and Nussbaum, who are certainly concerned about transferring adequate material resources to struggling groups in developing countries or generating such resources for these groups. However they insist that the



Mark Latham

aim should not be exclusively to transfer material resources, but how well these promote the total wellbeing of people, especially their expansion of freedom and personal agency. Sen and Nussbaum are definitely not opposed in principle to the type of minimal welfare state that exists in Australia. Instead they would argue strongly for a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities for disadvantaged groups even in Australia, but with closer attention to the interplay between material resources and human agency.

Critiques of Latham

Some commentators have pointed to limitations in Latham's views. Philip Mendes at Monash University considered that Latham might be able to involve community groups more in social service delivery, but nothing could replace the welfare state itself. Moreover, Mendes said it was a mistake to blame the welfare state in principle for the deficiencies in service provision, especially for the lack of opportunities and jobs. Moreover,

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Mendes recognised that community groups could also act unjustly, by excluding marginalised groups. (see *Arena*, February-March 2004, p 31-35).

In *Australia's Welfare Wars: the Players, the Politics and the Ideologies* (2003), Mendes argues that Latham 'makes little reference to structural causes of poverty and inequality. His intervention appears designed to reinforce the ALP's gradual abandonment of traditional interventionist and redistributionist ideas' (p 109).

Robb Watts from RMIT also has strong criticisms of Latham's views, fearing that they will reinforce middle-class resentment against welfare support for low-income groups, undermining political support for the welfare state and for universal entitlements. By highlighting the lack of social skills or capital as the prime source of inequality and poverty, rather than access to financial resources, Latham risks reviving a discourse of 'blaming the victim', for in his view passive welfare gives people 'something for nothing'.

Watts also rejects Latham's 'structuralist' and determinist assumptions that globalisation is an inevitable process. Watts insists that Latham ignores how economic restructuring is a political process that advances certain interests against others (Robb Watts, 'Australia's Welfare Policy and Latham's Third Way: a Critical Response', *Southern Review*, 33, 2, 2000, p 143-64).

These are serious criticisms, and it will be interesting to see how ALP policy makers will assess them.

Resonances with Catholic thought?

Nevertheless, a curious thing for many people in the welfare agencies is how aspects of the thinking of Latham and Sen are close to ideas traditional in Catholic and Christian social thought. In his 1967 social encyclical, *Development of Peoples*, Pope Paul VI talked of development as *having* more in order to *be* more, in terms akin to the capability terminology of Sen and others. Moreover:

- The Church has long defended concepts of *social and distributive justice* as central to its philosophy.
- It has long opposed neo-liberal or *laissez-faire* versions of capitalism, insisting that the economy needs to be *wisely regulated* to ensure that everyone has *equality of opportunity, along with access to education, work and ownership*.
- It has long *opposed the philosophical individualism* underlying much of

his considerable practical knowledge and political involvements, he does not bring depth in terms of philosophical rigour or detail in terms of social or welfare policy. He instances some good examples of rebuilding local communities, but the question is: are these the results from charismatic individuals and groups in special circumstances, and what can be generalised from these experiences as a basis for national policy?

His views have a certain immediate appeal, and he has undoubtedly sparked a conversation with the Australian public about issues which concern many people immediately and deeply.

recent economic thought, and called for greater social responsibility.

- By identifying the principle of *subsidiarity*, the Church has long urged the *devolution of economic and political power more widely* throughout the community, so that people can assume as much responsibility and control over their own lives as possible.
- By insisting on *solidarity* among all people, the Church has urged that those living in poverty and acute disadvantage deserve urgent priority attention.

How to move forward?

Despite his publications, Latham does not claim to be a philosopher. His views have a certain immediate appeal, and he has undoubtedly sparked a conversation with the Australian public about issues which concern many people immediately and deeply. He has also established some important markers about how the conversation should develop. Particularly to be welcomed is the renewed interest he has aroused in questions of equity and social justice, and his willingness to tackle robustly some of the neo-liberal ideology.

But to some his own writings appear superficial, as if he is cherry-picking key ideas from other thinkers. Despite

It is perhaps unfair to expect a busy politician personally to possess the time and ability to develop a clearer social philosophy and more detailed social policies, but certainly Latham needs people around him who can do such work in a cogent and contemporary way.

Meanwhile, Church and community groups, along with others, need to bestir themselves to contribute more incisively to the debate about social policy, particularly in the area of social welfare. Where is the vigorous philosophical defence of the principles of social and distributive justice in the current debate about social policy and globalisation? What would be the detailed consequences for the shaping of welfare policies?

Much time has already been lost. What is it about us Australians that makes us so languid when it comes to rigorous thinking about the future of our society? Catholics in particular have a considerable tradition to draw on, but one suspects there is far too much forelock-tugging and tokenism, and too little serious wrestling with that tradition to develop it insightfully in a robust conversation with our contemporaries. *

A Compassionate Response to Child Protection

By Theresa Lynch



Theresa Lynch commenced work with CSSV in January on a 6-month contract in the area of policy and research.

The research and experience of Catholic Social Services Victoria inform us that not all families are coping with the increasing pressures of economic and social restructuring and changes in current welfare services. It is within this framework of change, which identifies welfare dependency as problematic, that vulnerable, poor and disadvantaged individuals and families now find themselves excluded and at the margins of life, struggling to cope and targeted as 'at risk'.

Public discourse emphasising individual freedoms and choices, self-reliance and responsibility, shifts on to individuals an excessive degree of liability for social problems, including child welfare and protection. It has also encouraged welfare interventions to manage and control those who are defined as unable to conduct themselves in responsible ways. However, the structural pressures are very real on families and it is the view of CSSV that they should not bear the burden or be blamed for not coping. Rather ALL families should be provided with the resources and support to love, cherish and provide for their children.

and inclusion will drive the reform needed to protect children from abuse and harm.

Rather than blaming families and pathologising their parenting skills, we need to ensure they receive the optimum in care and support. In the experience of CSSV and its member agencies children primarily love their parents and want to be with them. Therefore, the protection system must aim to work in partnership with families so that children do not feel abandoned and further afflicted by interventions. This should be our collective commitment to all children.

In reply to the government's recent review into child protection, CSSV encourages the formation of different government arrangements to support the development of partnerships and networks that facilitate the sharing and integration of supports and services. A differential approach to the provision of services and improved access to intensive family support, both key elements of reform recommended in the government report, are also supported by CSSV as critical components for an effective response to child protection. However, agencies need to be adequately resourced to provide the

In responding to children needing protection, there is an urgent challenge to find ways which restore the capacity of the system to support poor families from disadvantaged backgrounds. In our aspirations to create strong and resilient families, we have to build structures that enable them to be connected in more positive ways to each other and their communities. Creating relationships based on trust, equity

continuum of care required to respond appropriately to the unique and varied needs of parents and children.

In the current arrangements of child protection, the rights of children and their parents tend to be polarised and interventions primarily adversarial. It is our view that in deliberating on and considering various models, solutions should be sought, which empower and encourage parents' participation in the decisions affecting their lives. Constructive change can occur when collaborative efforts are made to align with parents' aspirations and strengths. At the heart of any truly compassionate and socially just response, children's rights and interests must also remain paramount.

Rather than compounding the struggles of vulnerable families with punitive and reactive responses, collectively we have a responsibility to rethink radically how we can shape our social policies to expand their life opportunities. This includes access to employment and educational training and resources, fair and equitable access to affordable accommodation, and access to health resources and support. It is this type of structural response, which will provide the necessary prevention efforts for empowering our most fragile families, who are the primary target in our child protection system.

As a society we must work hard to redress the profound and unacceptable experiences of families damaged by disadvantage and poverty. We see our responsibility as assisting to restore hope and helping to create environments where families are welcomed and cared for. Importantly, society needs to demonstrate its care for children, particularly for those whose lives are fractured through neglect and deprivation. It is our strong view that those in greatest need require the greatest and most compassionate of responses. *

As We Approach Easter

By Sr Mary Kavanagh and Joy Nix

As we approach Easter we recall the journey Jesus took, ending with his death and resurrection, responding to the needs of those around him and challenging the structures that created those needs. This reflection comes from MacKillop Family Services. Sr Mary Kavanagh and Mrs Joy Nix were involved with a residential programme for young women with complex needs who were pregnant.

In remembering our experience it can be likened to tending a garden. Bringing to birth colourful blooms require

- preparing the ground well
- sowing good seeds
- fertilising and watering
- weeding and pruning
- sunshine and rain.

We prepared the ground by providing a safe and homely atmosphere of care and companionship for

challenges to old ways of being and relating.

The sunshine of non-judgmental care and tough love brought warmth and security in the peace and quiet of awaiting motherhood.

Cleansing rains of concern helped wash away fears and anxieties of past hurts and abuses awakening possibilities of a brighter future for the new family of mother and child blossoming into life.

A garden brings new life and growth and blooms of many colours with ever changing beauty and fruitfulness.

But sometimes it is drab, dry and overgrown with weeds. There are setbacks, slow growth, failures and even death.

Sometimes the work of gardening is exciting, fruitful, rewarding and relaxing.

At other times it is wearisome and a burden needing painstaking effort and the providence of sunshine and showers to bring about change and growth.

And amongst the beautiful roses there are thorns.

So it has been in the lives of the women, staff and clients, who have called here 'home'

The women have come bringing the bloom and colour of many flowers in their variety of cultures,

life experiences, skills and talents, personalities and backgrounds ...and have borne beautiful babies.

We thank them for the privilege of supporting them during long, short, difficult or easier labours and being there for the miracle of birth. We recall with trepidation the near misses when we only just made it to the hospital and the 'sacred seat' of the Ford Laser in which a baby was born in the hospital doorway!

A particular and poignant memory is of being with a young mother for the birth of her profoundly disabled baby, supporting her while she cared so beautifully for him and being present

with her as he died six weeks later.

We applaud those who joyfully accepted the challenge of caring for their newborn. And in awe, we honour those who made the courageous and heartbreaking decision to relinquish their babies. We remember also those who needed the support of protective services involvement.

The weeds were present in the form of many differing issues faced by the women, addictions, mental and physical illness, intellectual disability, homelessness, domestic violence, criminality, rejection by partner, family or culture.

Sometimes weeds were eradicated, at other times they became overgrown. Painful conflicts, unacceptable behaviour, and unwillingness to address issues occasionally resulted in women being asked or choosing to leave.

Boyfriends, partners and families brought a mixture of fierce storms and gentle rains. Our security on occasions was threatened and new growth destroyed. Nurturing rains of support, however, brought revitalisation and the birth of some two-parent families.

In her family support role Joy formed budding relationships with the women and assisted the blossoming once they moved to their garden of independent housing. She assisted with replanting, nourishing the soil with care and parenting hints as roots were deepened and links formed in the new neighbourhood.

Our last resident who moved on three weeks ago, reminded Mary one night that when she came here she was 'screwed up tight in a ball and trapped in a cage.' Then opening her arms wide she said, 'Look at me now Mary, I have blossomed like a flower'...and she has...and continues to bloom where she is now planted.

We will miss her and her singing on the verandah, as will our neighbours, who have been the very best of neighbours.

We will miss this garden of women, or most of them, and we will miss all the babies. *

The women have come bringing the bloom and colour of many flowers in their variety of cultures, life experiences, skills and talents, personalities and backgrounds...and have borne beautiful babies.



women whose life experience had been darkened by aspects of homelessness, rejection, vulnerability, deprivation and aloneness.

With them we sowed seeds of hope, trust and self-esteem, educating and skilling them towards independence and fostering a joyful anticipation of parenting.

We fertilised and watered with liberal scattering and spraying of respect, compassion, encouragement and acceptance to promote vibrant and healthy growth.

We weeded and pruned, enabling productive change, through planning, guiding, goal setting and creative

Aged Care and the Marginalised

By Anne O'Brien

Through the experience of many of its member agencies who support older homeless people, Catholic Social Services Victoria (CSSV) has recognised that the needs of this very marginalised group in the community are only being partly met by agencies across the Catholic aged care sector.

Within Catholic aged care, there are few facilities targeting the most marginalised. We believe that the need for appropriate service provision is growing at an alarming rate.

While there are some excellent examples of agencies and services within our Catholic network responding holistically to the needs of this group, there is a great deal more to be done.

In order to establish the best way of addressing this unmet need, I have been appointed as project worker to explore the dimensions of current and potential support available to this special group of older people. Through the development of the project I will also facilitate the documentation of a coordinated Catholic response to this community of people in need.

The people at the heart of this study can be identified by a number of factors:

- They have experienced homelessness and/or have lived in insecure housing over a long period.
 - They are financially disadvantaged, that is, their sole income is a government benefit such as an aged or disability pension.
 - They are socially isolated, with few, if any, family supports and limited friendship and community supports.
 - They may have complex needs relating to one or more of the following issues: mental illness, intellectual disability, acquired brain injury, and alcohol and drug misuse.
 - They are 50 years of age or older.
- The project brief is to undertake a



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scoping exercise with each of the following tasks:

1. A literature review of relevant research and reports, exploring Catholic service developments, state and federal government policy initiatives and models of best practice.
2. Consultations with significant people in the Catholic Church, Government, and Service and Community Sectors with relevant knowledge.
3. Interviews to be conducted with Catholic residential and community-based aged care service providers.
4. A forum with CEOs from Catholic Aged Care and other relevant service providers, to brief them on the emerging themes of the study

and invite their participation in the development of some possible models and approaches.

A central consideration in all CSSV's work is to respond to the most isolated, excluded and disadvantaged members of our community. We understand the extent of disadvantage experienced by this group is considerable and believe this is a critical area of work. The vision behind the project is that CSSV and Catholic Aged Care providers will advocate together, developing creative and compassionate policy and services for some of the most vulnerable and forgotten people in our community. *

CSSV - National Welfare Agenda

- In December 2003 Fr Joe Caddy, Director of Policy and Advocacy at CSSV, took over as Chair of Catholic Welfare Australia. At one level, this means that some of Joe's time is taken up with national business and attending meetings in Canberra. At another level, however, it extends the influence and interests of CSSV and its members into issues of national importance.

CSSV members are well placed to have significant input into the national policy agenda. In his responsibility as Chair, Joe has spent significant time in Canberra visiting federal parliamentarians and advocating on issues relevant to CWA and CSSV.

- In January, Catholic Welfare Australia convened a national meeting in Canberra of key Catholic social welfare providers and

policy advocates (both members and non-members of Catholic Welfare Australia). That meeting identified some of the major issues facing our nation in addressing poverty and disadvantage. The meeting decided as a matter of priority that Catholic advocacy in this election year would focus around the diminishing opportunities for people to break out of the poverty cycle. It was decided also that Catholic organisations would be well placed to illustrate poverty and inequity in Australia through drawing attention to both entrenched locational disadvantage and the lack of access to decent employment opportunities for long-term unemployed. This framework is guiding the direction of the Catholic Welfare Australia advocacy agenda. CSSV was represented by Joe Caddy and Bruce Duncan.

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