



CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR  
**JUSTICE,  
DEVELOPMENT  
& PEACE**  
MELBOURNE

*A new vision of development is emerging. Development is becoming a people-centred process, whose ultimate goal must be the improvement of the human condition.*  
(Boutros Boutros-Ghali)

*Democracy is based upon the conviction that there are extraordinary possibilities in ordinary people.*  
(Harry Emerson Fosdick)

### **Occasional Paper Number 9, October 2000**

## **GROWING THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER? WHY AND HOW?**

*Two small children and their mother die in Port Lincoln in September 2000. The children die of thirst and hunger after their mother, a twenty-one year old sole carer, experiences a seizure while alone with her children in her home, as her partner serves a sentence in prison. Without medical assistance a woman with epilepsy, such as this young mother, was likely to die. The neighbours do not raise the alarm. In the end it is officers from the Aboriginal Housing Trust who do so. It is reported that the power to the family's home had been disconnected prior to the deaths.*

*How can we work to prevent such isolation, poverty and redress the lack of support that such a case reveals? What role does the community at large, local neighbourhood, governments at all levels, business and community agencies and associations have to play to prevent such tragic consequences?<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Source, *How Can We Let a Mother be So Alone?* Tracey Bretag, The Age, 27 September 2000

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## Introduction

There has been a focus on the effects of globalisation. The increasing disparity between the world's wealthy and its poor is underlined by statistics in Australia which reveal that from 1982 to 1996-97 the average incomes of the most affluent 10% of Australians increased by almost \$200 a week. This was three to six times more than for those at the bottom of the income distribution.<sup>2</sup> The average income of the poorest 20% of households is \$159.62 per week whilst the wealthiest 20% receive \$2000. Almost 13 times as much.<sup>3</sup> A call was made before the World Economic Forum in Melbourne 11 – 13 September 2000 from many sectors for a greater consideration of social, labour and environmental factors in the dialogue and public policy setting frameworks which exist. There was also an articulated plea for greater consciousness among those who hold economic and political power to ensure that there is consideration of the needs of the most vulnerable in our society, their voices heard and that greater equity and dignity can result.<sup>4</sup>

Amongst some of the delegates at the forum, matters concerning the social, environmental and labour rights carried some weight<sup>5</sup>, for others there was a view that as a result of continuing market forces the poor would receive some benefits as a by product<sup>6</sup> and that the concept of largely unregulated free market forces ought be embraced<sup>7</sup>. There were views reflecting on the one hand that corporations did not exist to fulfil social responsibilities and should be left to go about their business unhindered<sup>8</sup> and on the other hand that corporations had a role in ensuring ethical conduct in their mode of operation<sup>9</sup>. Clearly, there is considerable divergence of views and approaches but it is encouraging that that the dialogue and debate is occurring.

It is unfortunate that many fail to reflect on the history and original meaning of the concept of globalisation. The concept of globalisation first gained attention not in the context of free market forces but rather in the context of universal respect and adherence to human rights and the need for a central role for the *United Nations Declaration on Human Rights* of 1948.<sup>10</sup> However, in the current exchange about globalisation it is the discussion about the human rights of citizens which is often subjugated to the new definition of globalisation which is seen as pertaining mainly to the role of the free market often to the exclusion of involvement or consideration of the rights of citizenry articulated in the

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<sup>2</sup> Research commissioned by *The Australian* from the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), Canberra, *The Weekend Australian*, 24 June 2000 and released by *The Australian*, 19 June 2000.

<sup>3</sup> *Survey of Household Expenditure*, 1998-1999, Australian Bureau of Statistics, September 2000

<sup>4</sup> Letter to the Editor, *Herald Sun*, 11 September 2000, *Economic Forum Must Broaden its Agenda*, p.18

<sup>5</sup> Editorial Opinion Piece, *Shouters in the Street Won't Help Find the Answers*, Claude Smadja, Managing Director of the World Economic Forum, *The Age*, 11 September 2000, p. 13

<sup>6</sup> Editorial Opinion Piece, *Open Markets Keep Poor in the Race for Riches*, Prime Minister Mr John Howard, *The Australian*, P. 11, *Gates Says IT Can Only Be Good for the World*, *The Age*, 13 September, 2000, p.8

<sup>7</sup> Editorial Opinion Piece, *Protesters Misread Plight of Global Poor*, Christian Gillitzer, Convener, Free Trade Youth, *The Age*, 9 September 2000, p. 9 and see Editorial Opinion Piece, *Free Trade, for Our Sake*, *The Age*, 12 September 2000, p.15

<sup>8</sup> *Speaker Accuses Forum on Closing Doors on Critics*, *The Age*, 13 September 2000, p.9 reports that Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates stated, "If you block world free trade, the big losers will be poor nations."

<sup>9</sup> *Speaker Accuses Forum on Closing Doors on Critics*, *The Age*, 13 September 2000, p.9 reports that Julian Disney, President of the International Council of Social Welfare who spoke at the Forum as calling for engagement with differing views in civil society. Also news report *Companies Warned on Greed*, *The Age*, 13 September 2000, p.9 covering speech of the President of the ACTU, Ms Sharan Burrow calling for corporate responsibility and ethics in the face of dangerous division and alienated communities.

<sup>10</sup> *The Peace of Westphalia*, 1648 –1948, Leo Gross, 42 *Am. J. Int. L.* 20 (1948), *Interrogating State Sovereignty*, R.B.J. Walker, *Contending Sovereignties: Redefining Political Community*, in Walker and Mendlovitz, p 1, *Chapter VI. Resolutions and Political Texts*, Oscar Schachter, *International Law in Theory and Practice* (1991) p 85

Declaration and other United Nations Covenants.<sup>11</sup> More thought is needed about providing balance in the response to globalisation to ensure that communities and individuals are not increasingly disadvantaged and excluded. The OECD has reported that, despite ongoing productivity gains and an increase in overall standards of living in Australia, unemployment, poverty and social exclusion have stayed widespread.<sup>12</sup> It argued for an active role for government in managing both economic and social capital in a competitive global economy.

Given this recent debate around globalisation, it is timely that the Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace (Melbourne Archdiocese) (CCJDP) has decided to devote the discussion in this Occasional Paper to examining the issue of inherited disadvantage and the need for greater program focus on community support, community empowerment and community building in Australia and Victoria.

It is by no means inevitable that global economic priorities will see an end to civil society and the capacity to care which makes us human. Community building at a local level, the empowerment of people to actively participate in civil society, governments at all levels which work for the common good with a focus on the protection of the vulnerable and businesses which work ethically and responsibly within their community and in partnership with it, can all provide positive frameworks which can be encouraged and fostered. In researching this paper, it became evident that community agencies often end up servicing the requirements of bureaucratic structures rather than those structures actually servicing the citizens for whom they are meant to exist.

One danger that has emerged is a tendency for some bureaucrats to see advocacy groups such as the Churches as "just another industry association" or pressure group, rather than as organisations trying to improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged people in society; working for a more caring and just society and transcending the self interest or self promotional notion that is implied in terminology such as "industry association." Church based agencies must be ever vigilant in resisting inappropriate labelling of their role. They must constantly evaluate whether their programs meet the needs of the disadvantaged people that they serve and contribute to the creation of a more just and cohesive society. Otherwise, they could, in competing for funding become captives of ideological or bureaucratic agendas which are removed from their *raison d'être*.

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<sup>11</sup> In the discussion surrounding the proposal to sign an OECD treaty in 1998 which was entitled the Multilateral Agreement on Investment one of the concerns was that the role of domestic laws and United Nations human rights standards adhered to by nation states in treaty undertakings would be subordinated to the interests across borders of multi national companies. The treaty was to provide a global set of rules on international investment. After significant concerns were raised in Canada about the scope and likely effect of the MAI both Australia and Canada postponed the decision to sign the proposed agreement. See *The Potential Consequences for Australia from the Matter Known as the MAI, ACTU Submission on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment*, 30 April 1998. *The Age*, 7 March 1998

<sup>12</sup> OECD 1997: 70-71

## A. The Context

Whilst having a Victorian emphasis, it is hoped that this paper will also be of some value in the setting of policy frameworks in other States and Territories and on a Commonwealth level.

At a time when there is high unemployment in particular regions, an escalating drug problem, a widening gap between the rich and poor and an increasing sense of disillusionment, this paper aims to make some suggestions to reduce the harm caused, to empower communities and to suggest both programmatic responses and public policy solutions that may find ways of addressing inequity and disadvantage. It is important to be reminded that many people do not live in formalised communities. Homeless people and others may not live in a suburb or in a home with family members. They may be transient and have few links with people but may form loose associations in a geographical context, for instance in metropolitan Melbourne where services may be concentrated. It is important to acknowledge that this is a form of community despite it not being formalised along typical suburban lines.

Often the most significant social investment of funds by governments is in statutory intervention such as in the area of the care and protection of young people or in the area of disability. This has occurred often because matters at the crisis end often create greater media scrutiny and embarrassment to government.<sup>13</sup> Whilst this paper is not suggesting that resources be taken from the statutory end of intervention, it will suggest that the current emphasis often ignores the value of and need for long term planning, early and purposeful intervention and empowerment which not only can reduce the number of instances of crises but can in the long term save significant expenditure on statutory intervention.<sup>14</sup> There is an increasing body of research and commentary identifying the value of social capital and building supportive communities. Community development strategies are critical elements in the building of social capital.<sup>15</sup> Later in this paper methods of incorporating the "well being" of people into structures, responses and indicators will be discussed; Swinburne University has done some valuable work in this area.<sup>16</sup>

If governments are serious about the alleviation of poverty then incremental change to policy areas such as housing or homelessness and social security is not enough. A whole of government approach is required which goes beyond rhetoric and transcends throwing money at problems. That approach will require greater understanding of the causes and symptoms of poverty and will work to distribute income more fairly, to create opportunity and to involve and dignify all citizens. If poverty is to be seriously ameliorated the policy approaches must reach into the mode of operation and relationships between Parliamentarians in all parties and public servants, business, local communities, community organisations, clubs, societies, educational institutions, media, individuals and families.

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<sup>13</sup> The Daniel Valerio case involving the death of a baby who had been left in the care of his parents after concern for the child's welfare had been ongoing saw the introduction of mandatory sentencing regimes in Victoria and greater investment of money in statutory child care interventions. Likewise in Victoria the nine deaths arising from the fire at Kew Cottages saw a response to long-standing issues relating to fire safety and a lack of contractual clarity. See *Inquest Findings, Comments and Recommendations into Fire and Nine Deaths at Kew Residential Services on 8 April 1996*, State Coroner's Office, Victoria, 1996

<sup>14</sup> It is noted that for every dollar spent on early childhood development and teaching of parenting skills for at risk children an average of \$4.75 is saved on the cost of crime to the community. Media Release, 13 August 1997, Australian Institute of Criminology. See also *Preventing Crime, Conclusion: The Effectiveness of Local Crime Prevention Funding*, Lawrence W Sherman. Contained in *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't*, A Report to Congress, prepared by the National Institute of Justice at the University of Maryland [www.preventingcrime.org/report/index.html](http://www.preventingcrime.org/report/index.html)

<sup>15</sup> *A Truly Civil Society*, Eva Cox, Boyer Lectures, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1995, Sydney

<sup>16</sup> *Community and Social Indicators: can citizens be trusted to measure progress*, Mike Salvaris, Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology for the New South Wales Government Community Services Association, May 2000, *Tasmania Together: Benchmarking Community Progress*, Mike Salvaris, Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology, 2000, *Measuring Civil Society: Citizenship, Benchmarks and Indicators*, Centre for Urban and Social Research, Swinburne University, 1997 Victoria

In last year's Victorian budget approximately \$1 billion was dedicated to infrastructure. This money could be used by the State Government to ensure a presence in the community at a time when the Federal government is withdrawing from the provision of adequate income support to the disadvantaged, when corporations are retrenching staff and when banks and other infrastructure are closing down. It presents an opportunity for the State government to gain a presence in local communities. In working cooperatively with local governments to build up communities, it can create opportunities for families and workers including more opportunities for work, leisure and the development of valuable alternative pursuits, and provide inducements for businesses to work with their local communities for improved opportunities. It has been predicted that Australia will experience an economic downturn in the next few years. On that basis more emphasis, not less, should be given to social expenditure. By building up communities the State government can insure against such a downturn. To do so involves support for early intervention and preventative work in communities to reduce harm thereby to reduce overall public expenditure. The improvement of access to services for all, the fostering of citizen participation which is real rather than tokenistic and concerted efforts to reduce inequality can all assist in reducing the effects of a downturn. The main areas of State responsibility that can strengthen equality and greater security are the provision of support for people with needs, the provision of affordable and appropriate housing, and the granting of concessions.

This Occasional Paper will concentrate on early intervention and prevention strategies including family support, skills development, access to opportunities, community involvement and other measures which address inequity, issues of access, poverty, inter-generational disadvantage and the need to treat all persons with human dignity and respect. The paper will touch mainly on areas of State government activity in the areas in which the Commission has already had involvement: care and protection, standards and duty of care, drug addiction, mental health, disability, employment, exclusion, juvenile justice, prisons (pre and post release), rehabilitation and diversion, housing, educational barriers and access to services. It will recommend the re-focussing of programs to incorporate qualitative results rather than only quantitative outcomes. It will also consider other approaches which foster and promote justice and which work towards the alleviation of poverty in more general terms.

Governments often speak of a need for an integrated approach in policy making. In Victoria the new Labor government has spoken keenly of such an approach to government. The reality is that often government departments work in "silos", working within their own particular area without taking a broader approach to public policy formulation. Attempts to acknowledge that a holistic approach to problem solving is most effective are met often with considerable resistance by department staff; either because they believe it is outside their area of responsibility, that traditional structural demarcations are too fixed to be overcome or because of a culture of trying to manage and control within a fixed paradigm. This approach has often led to brave policy initiatives being thwarted. Fragmentation of services, the inability of differing departments and services to deal with persons with multiple problems such as mental health problems, minor disability and drug issues is an example often cited by youth workers.

In recent times, there has been much discussion at a national level about unemployment and social security dependency<sup>17</sup> which has suggested individual responsibility for disadvantage<sup>18</sup>, rather than recognising the many systemic issues which often prolong and lead to cycles of disadvantage.<sup>19</sup> The discussion has often neglected the realities of day to day disadvantage and the human costs which impact upon families and communities. Lucy Sullivan, in a recent publication, claims that poverty is related to behavioural matters rather than financial. Her treatise is that the poor do not lack income but rather lack the capacity to manage their own resources. She laments that "middle-income taxpayers are forced to fund them" and calls for the winding back of welfare.<sup>20</sup> In the recent Australian Bureau of Statistics *Survey of Household Expenditure*, it was noted that low income households devoted more of their weekly spending to essentials including housing, food, heating and health, whilst higher income

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<sup>17</sup> *Participation Support for a More Equitable Society*, Final report of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform, July, 2000

<sup>18</sup> In a media release the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Jocelyn Newman speaks of encouraging "self reliance" of persons on welfare and the "trap of welfare dependency" *Report Sets Stage for 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Media Release, 16 August, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Submission by the Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace to the Reference Group on Welfare Reform, 9 November 1999, [www.melb.catholic.aust.com/agency/justice.html](http://www.melb.catholic.aust.com/agency/justice.html)

<sup>20</sup> *Behavioural Poverty*, Lucy Sullivan, Centre for Independent Studies, Sydney, 2000 p.2

households had more discretionary income to devote to the generation of further wealth, gym memberships, spectator tickets, cars, home help, furnishings, alcohol and dining out.<sup>21</sup> Research by the Brotherhood of St Laurence explored attitudes towards poverty and noted an increased fear and mistrust of the poor.<sup>22</sup> This apparent lack of understanding of the vagaries of ongoing poverty and its impact seems contrary to the body of research from the Ronald Henderson<sup>23</sup> Commission of Inquiry into Poverty in 1975 and the significant body of research since then.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps, as the divide between rich and poor increases and with the increasingly individualistic lifestyles people now pursue, higher income people are less likely to see the realities of poverty and the restrictions that limited income can impose. A recent study, *Child Poverty in Australia*<sup>25</sup> reveals that people with inadequate incomes have difficulty meeting basic costs including ability to pay for food, accommodation (in some cases absorbing 45-65% of income), clothing, education, health care, utilities, transport and recreation and trying to balance competing demands. Sullivan's analysis overlooks the cost of living for Victorian households with little or no discretionary income. These costs have been examined in an unpublished Victorian Council of Social Services document, *Relative Price Indices (RPI)*.<sup>26</sup> The author of *Child Poverty in Australia*, Alison McClelland, notes that the impacts of child poverty come under three main headings:

- material and psychological hardship and stress;
- isolation and exclusion; and
- long term impacts as adults.

Emeritus Professor Tony Vinson, author of the Jesuit Social Services research report *Unequal in Life*<sup>27</sup> has stated that "in no sense can residents be held responsible for the flawed planning and neglect which has helped to produce the concentrations of social need documented in this report."

The view emerging in the Federal government's social security response is to expect individuals who are significantly disadvantaged to bear greater and greater responsibility to the community and Department of Family and Community Services to demonstrate and sustain an entitlement to the receipt of a meager pension. This appears to overlook the rhetoric around the obligations being "reciprocal" Unemployed people for instance are required to meet stringent activity tests which include attending a prescribed number of job interviews per fortnight, taking part in training programs, participation in a number of "mutual obligation" activities and negotiation of preparing for Work Agreements.<sup>28</sup> The consequences of failing to meet the stringent requirements can mean the loss, delay or reduction of social security payments. This can have significant impacts on families or persons with mental illness, disability or in moments of family crisis. Governments still fail to pursue adequate solutions that address reduced opportunity; that build-up disadvantaged communities; that deal with low self-esteem from continual setbacks. The proper solution must emphasise not just job creation<sup>29</sup> but

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<sup>21</sup> *Survey of Household Expenditure, 1998-1999*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, September 2000

<sup>22</sup> *Growing Apart: A New Look at Poverty in Australia*, J Johnsons and J Taylor, Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2000, Melbourne

<sup>23</sup> Foundation Director of the Institute of Applied Economic Research

<sup>24</sup> *Poverty Then and Now*, Edited by R. Fincher and J. Neuwenhuysen, Melbourne University Press, 1998, Melbourne

<sup>25</sup> Alison McClelland, Social Action and Research Unit, The Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2000, Melbourne

<sup>26</sup> *Winners and Losers: Changes in Spending Power for Victorian Households, 1990 -2000*, Gavin Dufty, VCOSS, 2000

<sup>27</sup> *Unequal In Life: The Distribution of Social Disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales*, Tony Vinson, The Ignatius Centre, Jesuit Social Services, August 1999, p.45

<sup>28</sup> *Impact*, ACOSS, August, 2000, p.16

<sup>29</sup> The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures seasonally adjusted for August 2000 reveal 623,700 unemployed with job vacancies being at 119,300 (102,200 in the private sector and 17,100 in the public sector) This means there are 5 ¼ people for every job vacancy This does not include persons who are not registered as looking for work. 9,141,800 people have employment with 6,720,500 being in full time work and 2,421,3000 being in part-time work. Figures released by the ABS on Tuesday, 26 September 2000 show that in September 1999, 21% of part-time workers wanted to work more hours.

also the responsibility to develop strategies with corporations to keep people in work and must emphasise the role of educational opportunities of diverse kinds to improve pathways out of poverty.<sup>30</sup>

There is evidence that suggests that were it not for the provision of social security over the past decades poverty in Australia would be significantly higher. Australia has a proud tradition of child and family support. There has been a reduction in the number of elderly poor since the provision of higher pensions, and with more generous allowance of part pension where a person secures limited earnings, superannuation or investment.<sup>31</sup> In addition, in the period between 1982 and the mid- 1990s child poverty had fallen by nearly one-third as a result of social security reforms in the 1980s.<sup>32</sup>

## **B. International Human Rights Standards**

Standards surrounding economic and social rights are contained within a number of United Nations Documents to which Australia is a signatory. The first is the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights 1948, a largely aspirational document. These rights include the right to shelter and food (Article 25), educational opportunities (Article 26) to found a family (Article 16) and to an income (Article 22, 23). Australia has also ratified a number of Conventions agreeing to work progressively towards the attaining of certain standards in relation to social and economic rights contained in the *Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights* (CESCR) relevant to this paper include: Article 6 which discusses the right to work and opportunity to gain a living by work; Article 9 which founds a right to social security; Article 10 which discusses the right to protection and assistance for families; Article 13 which conveys the right to education for all; and finally Article 11 which contains the right to an adequate standard of living for all human beings. At international law by signing on to these Conventions Australia has agreed to work progressively toward the rights therein and to ensure that the States and Territories act consistently with the standards recognised at international law.

It is important to note that when Australia signs and ratifies conventions they do not automatically become laws in Australia unless they are incorporated into domestic law by an act of Parliament. However, they provide standards which Australia has agreed to meet and therefore they hold significant moral force. In addition, in Australian common law, it has been recognised that in cases where there is ambiguity surrounding the law, the courts can resort to not only judicial approaches to interpretation but can consider the existence of international treaty obligations by Australia as a tool in clarifying such ambiguities.<sup>33</sup>

Further standards for nation states in providing social relief are found in Chapter IV of the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (COR) and the *Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (CERD) and the *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW). Many of the provisions of these two latter conventions have been implemented as domestic laws in Australia through the enactments of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Commonwealth) *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Commonwealth) and the *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act*

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<sup>30</sup> Tony Vinson points out that a number of American studies indicate that the number of completed years of formal education is the most important predictor of good health better than occupation or income. People with higher levels of education also experience better mental health and is one of the most important determinants of individual's perceptions of well being. Studies also show that educational attainment have significant effects on physical and psychological well being. Vinson poses the question as to whether the fact that people acquire more personal and mental resources as a result of extended school education means that people have increased scope for personal control and associated problem solving abilities? See *Unequal In Life: The Distribution of Social Disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales*, Tony Vinson, The Ignatius Centre, Jesuit Social Services, August 1999, pp.15-16. See also *Social Benefits of Education*, N. Stacey, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol.559, September 1998, pp.54-64, *Social Stratification and Health: Education's Benefits Beyond Economic States and Social Origins*, JR Reynolds: CE Ross, *Social Problem*, Vol.45, No 2, May, 1998 pp.221-248, *Perceptions of Wellbeing by Metropolitan and Non-metropolitan Populations in the United States*, HN Mookherjee (1992) *The Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol.132, No.4,pp. 513-525

<sup>31</sup> *Impact*, ACOSS, August 2000, p16

<sup>32</sup> The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), Canberra, June 2000

<sup>33</sup> *Koowarta v Bjelke Peterson and others* (1982) 153 CLR 168

1986 (Commonwealth). In addition, States also have their own Equal Opportunity legislation and monitoring bodies such as the Victorian Equal Opportunities Commission.

Australia is also a signatory to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* which recognises that "the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding" and in Article 6 requires that "States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child". In Article 19 it requires that such legislative, administrative, social and education measures to protect the child from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse be undertaken and that protective measures through social programs as well as "other forms for prevention" from maltreatment be undertaken. It imposes on the State requirements as special protector when a child is removed or deprived of its family and in Articles 23 formulates standards for the care of children with a disability, high standards of health, (Article 24), rights to social security (Article 26) and a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, the rights of children to education, vocational guidance, regular attendance at schools and reduction of drop out rates (Article 28), protection from economic exploitation (Article 32) and many other social and economic standards.

### C. Catholic Social Teachings and Jubilee 2000

Pope John XIII<sup>34</sup> states,

" The common good is best safeguarded where personal rights and duties are guaranteed. The chief concerns of civil authorities must be to ensure that these rights are recognised, respected, coordinated, defended and promoted."

The Gospels, the various papal encyclicals and theological learnings can provide useful information on a vision for the world which can inform how society lives, and which we can create by being active rather than passive spectators.

The social teachings state that we are all made in the image of God, and so women and men have a pre-eminent place in the social order. That human dignity is to be recognised and protected only in community with others.<sup>35</sup>

Catholic social teachings also state that since we are made in the image of God we should enjoy inalienable rights which are socio-economic (eg food, shelter, work, education) and political legal (eg free speech, voting, migration). It is essential for the promotion of justice and solidarity, that these rights are protected by all the social institutions.<sup>36</sup> All members of society, but especially those in positions of responsibility, have a duty to work for the common good. The Catholic Church's social teachings also state that society ought to always give special attention to the needs of the poor. "Poor" is understood to refer to the economically disadvantaged whom, as a consequence of their status suffer oppression and powerlessness.<sup>37</sup> The Catholic Church's teachings state that the family is vital to society. There is a right to found a family, to a stable marriage, to social and economic security, to meet their needs for shelter, food, clothing and support and to protect children from harm.<sup>38</sup>

The teachings stress the role of the community and neighbourhood in promoting the common good by making it possible for all men, women and children to achieve their maximum potential<sup>39</sup>. Concepts such as subsidiarity require that responsibilities and decisions be attended to at the lowest **SCAVIBLE** level, primarily at an individual level, but where appropriate by mediating structures of families, neighbourhoods,

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<sup>34</sup> Encyclical *Pacem et Terris* (Peace on Earth), 11 April 1963

<sup>35</sup> *Peace on Earth*, 11 April 1963

<sup>36</sup> *Peace on Earth*, 11 April 1963

<sup>37</sup> *Call to Action*, 1971

<sup>38</sup> Charter of Family Rights, Holy See

<sup>39</sup> *Justice in the World*, Synod of Bishops Second General Assembly, 30 November 1971

community groups, small business and corporations. Local and federal governments should foster and participate in this.<sup>40</sup> The teachings note that larger governments have a role when greater coordination and regulation are necessary for the common good. There are messages of distributive justice and the importance of political participation of peoples in decision making as this is recognised as the best way to ensure consideration of the dignity and liberty of people.<sup>41</sup>

For Christians, the year 2000 marks the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the birth of Christ and the Great Jubilee. The notion of the Jubilee is discussed in the scriptures of Deuteronomy (reference) and Luke 4: 18-19. Values enshrined in the Jubilee can be clearly identified in more contemporary terms as:

- Redistributing wealth and resources so that all can live decently
- Restoring equality of opportunity
- Aiding the disadvantaged and dispossessed directly, as well as removing the conditions that cause disadvantage
- Implementing measures to enable families to own productive resources, and
- Extending practical means to exercise rights to economic enterprise, initiative and independence<sup>42</sup>

These values can be useful in formulating public policy responses which involve budgetary considerations, increase participation at all levels and provide a focus for the delivering of improved and accessible services for those who experience disadvantage in Victoria.

#### **D. Unequal in Life**

In 1999 the Ignatius Centre commissioned Tony Vinson, the Emeritus Professor of Social Work at the University of New South Wales, to conduct research on social disadvantage in postcode areas of Victoria and New South Wales (The Ignatius Report).<sup>43</sup> This Occasional Paper seeks to further the discussion following the publication of that report. It also seeks to highlight areas where a greater budgetary investment may address negative social outcomes for communities already experiencing inherited disadvantage. For many years, there has been a focus on reducing social expenditures, an increasingly user pays approach, reducing the taxation revenue pool which has traditionally provided much of the funding for programs, institutions. Coupled with infrastructure and the failure to consider the long-term implications of such withdrawals on multiply disadvantaged sections of the community and on crime prevention<sup>44</sup>. That focus has meant that a larger number of individuals, families and neighbourhoods are finding it a struggle to cope and are feeling excluded.

Using a number of disadvantage factors as indicators in the Ignatius Report, a picture emerged of postcode areas which experienced differing levels of disadvantage. The disadvantage factors used were mortality, unemployment, low birthweight, child maltreatment, childhood injuries, education, psychiatric admissions, crime, income and emergency relief. Some 24 years previously a similar study had been conducted.<sup>45</sup> Five of the suburbs noted in the 1975 study were listed also as the suburbs still

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<sup>40</sup> *Mater et Magistra (The Reconstruction of the Social Order)*, 1931

<sup>41</sup> *Pius XII, Christmas message 1944*

<sup>42</sup> *Fundamental Principles*, by Father Bruce Duncan, CSsR from *Not Just a Budget – A Just Budget: Issues for the 2000 State Budget of Victoria*, Prepared by the Social Action Committee of the Conference of Leaders of Religious Congregations in Victoria, 1999

<sup>43</sup> *Unequal In Life: The Distribution of Social Disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales*, Tony Vinson, The Ignatius Centre, Jesuit Social Services, August 1999

<sup>44</sup> In a press release from the Australian Institute of Criminology it was noted that the Institute has developed a process for mapping crime in regions and the patterns that may form. Although the Minister for Justice, Amanda Vanstone notes, this will be a "valuable tool" for "fighting" crime it is hoped that such an approach should also address the causes of crime rather than a responses which are purely reactive and exacerbate crime in the long term eg differential and discriminatory policing which often excludes and alienates communities even more. See *Mapping Crime – Atlas of Crime in Australia*, Media Release, 21 September 2000, [www.aic.gov.au/media](http://www.aic.gov.au/media)

<sup>45</sup> *Crime and Disadvantage, The Coincidence of Medical and Social Problems in an Australian City*, T. Vinson and R. Homel, *British Journal of Criminology*, Vol.15, No.1, January, 1975, pp.21-31

experiencing high disadvantage in 1999, thus serving as an indictment on the lack of action in relation to "persistent, localised inequities."<sup>46</sup> The overall picture of the Ignatius Report was that a relatively small number of postcode areas accounted for a large percentage of the locations which ranked highly on the ten social indicators used. The top 30 suburbs experiencing high rankings in social disadvantage indicators revealed the degree of geographic concentration of social problems, and the susceptibility of particular locations to an uneven share of those problems.

Of the 622 Victorian postcode areas, Braybrook was characterised by a number of economic problems, ranking second in the State on unemployment with high rankings also on emergency assistance, unskilled workers and low income. Nyah ranked 20<sup>th</sup> on both low income and unskilled workers indexes and, with the exception of low birthweight, ranked highly in areas concerned with children and youth.

The most consistently correlating variables were court defendants, emergency assistance and unemployment. The data also revealed that postcodes, which were generally high scoring on the indicators, still displayed considerable variations in the problems that are locally prominent. For instance one suburb had comparatively high disadvantage rankings on four indicators which were counter balanced by low rankings on four others. This difference highlights the dangers in "one size fits all" approaches to public policy making which fail to take account of neighbourhood differences and the fact that in some poor communities harmful indicators can be countered where strong social supports and relationships within the communities exist. There are significant dangers in paternalistic policy approaches which ignore the fact that some of the poorest communities can have strengths and which make assessments that are too generalised or seek to make simple models to resolve problems without taking into account community diversity. Care needs to be taken to not take steps in communities that could interfere with local networks, both formal and informal, which ameliorate social harm.<sup>47</sup>

In Chapter 1 of the Ignatius Report, Tony Vinson briefly outlines some of the research conducted into social deprivation that draws some parallels between absence of opportunities and disadvantage. Smith<sup>48</sup> cites Wolch who states, "Some local jurisdictions have far greater voluntary resources on which they are able to draw for service augmentation, public sector substitution and political action"<sup>49</sup> The World Health Organisation notes that people further down the social ladder usually run at least twice the risk of serious illness or premature death than those near the top of the ladder. Lower educational levels, lower income levels and lower positions in the labor market are also factors influencing premature death even in industrialised nations.<sup>50</sup>

The tendency over time has been to engage in high levels of social control and intrusive police measures with differential policing of particular neighbourhoods or ethnic groups concentrated in those neighbourhoods, especially in relation to young people and Aboriginal Australians.<sup>51</sup> Such policies are often justified by claims that differential policing is one method of dealing with limited police

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<sup>46</sup> *Unequal In Life: The Distribution of Social Disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales*, Tony Vinson, The Ignatius Centre, Jesuit Social Services, August 1999, p. 45

<sup>47</sup> In September 1999, the CCJDP released a Report funded by Caritas Australia, *It's not easy walkin' in there: Reconciliation, Towards Practical and Culturally Respectful Solutions*. The extracts taken from members of the Aboriginal communities in Victoria demonstrate that despite often being the most significantly disadvantaged communities in relation to health, education, housing and the operation of the criminal justice system the communities have often have strong support derived from custom, extended family support and cultural approaches which have enabled survival and in many cases resilience.

<sup>48</sup> *Geography and Social Justice*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1994 p.215

<sup>49</sup> *Unequal In Life: The Distribution of Social Disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales*, Tony Vinson, The Ignatius Centre, Jesuit Social Services, August 1999, p.1

<sup>50</sup> *Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts*, World Health Organisation, 1998, Centre for Urban Health, Copenhagen.

<sup>51</sup> In *Comparison of the Sentencing of Indigenous and Non- Indigenous Prisoners in New South Wales* it was found that an increase of 75% in the size of the NSW prison system over a decade was serviced by the more intensified policing of a small number of indigenous and poorer communities. See T Vinson, Uniya Social Justice Centre, November 1998, New South Wales

resources<sup>52</sup> The most disadvantaged suburbs provide a disproportionate share of those prosecuted by law. These suburbs also experience more than their total share of crime.<sup>53</sup> Although such responses deal with problems in the immediate term they also serve to alienate groups within the community leaving a sense that they have lesser rights than others in the community and fail to deal with underlying cumulative disadvantage often experienced in those same communities. Vinson points out that there is a degree of interconnectedness between crime and medico-social disadvantage and that it seems "lopsided" to emphasis controlling the former while paying scant attention to the latter.<sup>54</sup>

Increasingly there is a refusal to see that often disadvantage is formed not by individual behaviour or personal characteristics alone but often arises from a backdrop of complex forces beyond individual influence. These include ongoing cycles of poverty, lack of access to affordable services, marital breakdown, patterns of mental illness, infant mortality, low birth weight, notifiable diseases, exposure to crime either as victim or offender, inadequate educational levels across generations, disconnectedness, care and protection issues, unemployment, despondency and mental illness. The Ignatius Report highlights that issues of inherited disadvantage must be considered and addressed if government is serious about making inroads into the widening gap between rich and poor and is serious about crime prevention and community building.

### **E. Unemployment**

Tensions within cumulatively disadvantaged communities stem from financial struggles, stress, tensions and difficulties in family life. The World Health Organisation notes that unemployment can place health at risk in the families of unemployed persons. Health effects can flow from job insecurity and financial problems especially debt.<sup>55</sup> Levels of high unemployment within particular regions can mean that people within those same regions are less likely to have experiences of employment or have the networks available to them to enable them to access jobs or acquire the skills necessary for those jobs. There is also a level of shame and stigma which flows from such reduced opportunities and from constant retraining without prospect of, secured work.<sup>56</sup>

Often communities have been built up around companies which have provided and sustained employment for up to twenty years. Those companies in many regions have closed down or down sized leaving many families without the social interaction, employment and skills or versatility in later life to have the educational or language skills for retraining.<sup>57</sup> In addition, in some regions the level of unemployment is so high that there may be three generations that have not had the experience of involvement in work. The unemployed private rental group and the unemployed homeowners group have found that the cost of living is rising at a greater rate than the indexing of their pensions and benefits.<sup>58</sup> Such levels of cumulative disadvantage are liable to increase the level of conflict and decrease tolerance. Again the earlier observation in this paper that public policy responses and resources are often dedicated at the crisis end applies. Constructive interventions that build a community's resilience and sense of connectedness to the broader community are needed.

The current climate of blame can do little to address the fundamental root of the problems which are the lack of hope and lack of opportunities within communities. Alliances between State government, local business and local councils in building up employment opportunities, sustaining workplace participation and alternative activities that involve youth and are challenging and have value are imperative.

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<sup>52</sup> Response to questioning by the Victoria Chief Police Commissioner at an Institute of Criminology Conference, Canberra, February 1997

<sup>53</sup> *Unequal In Life: The Distribution of Social Disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales*, Tony Vinson, The Ignatius Centre, Jesuit Social Services, August 1999, p. 2

<sup>54</sup> *Unequal In Life: The Distribution of Social Disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales*, Tony Vinson, The Ignatius Centre, Jesuit Social Services, August 1999, p. 2

<sup>55</sup> *Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts*, World Health Organisation, 1998, Centre for Urban Health, Copenhagen.

<sup>56</sup> *Opportunities Lost: the Experiences and Costs of Long-term Unemployment*, Catholic Social Services and the Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace (Melb. Arch), December 1997

<sup>57</sup> *Budget 98: Time for 20/20 Vision*, ACOSS Paper No.94, January 1998.

<sup>58</sup> *State Budget Submission: Investing in Victorians 1999-2000* VCOSS, 1998

Some possible means to resolve these issues are contained in the sections later in this paper entitled, *Suggestions for Improved Responses and Key Suggested Budgetary Priorities*.

## **F. Budgetary Frameworks**

The new Labor government in Victoria has noted that its forward policy agenda contains these main planks:

- Responsible financial management
- Promoting growth across all Victoria
- And Restoring democracy through open and accountable government

The budgets for 2000/2001 are to combine "responsible fiscal management" and will "promote growth and raise living standards for all Victorians". It is within this context that the discussion in this paper below under the heading, *Key Selected Areas for Budgetary Priorities for the Year 2001-2002* have been formulated.

Key planks in the Budget for 2000 were the delivery of improved services, the fulfillment of its election promises that were costed prior to their introduction by the Centre for Economic Modelling and the "restoration of democracy".<sup>59</sup> Whilst these aims are admirable it is important to ensure that there is adequate social infrastructure and service delivery aimed at redressing cumulative disadvantage in communities that have long been in need of additional resources and development both socially and economically.

Many items in this year's State Budget in Victoria were welcomed. These included: improved transportation links to rural areas; the provision for funding for employers to hire 16,000 new apprentices and trainees; the establishment of a Youth Employment line; a framework for juvenile justice which emphasised diversion of offenders from unwarranted incarceration;<sup>60</sup> a range of options for increased housing, drug treatment and support; vocational training and support; pre and post release support programs; expanded sexual assault services; the expansion of crisis and transitional housing and service for homeless people; the development of low income housing options and physical improvements for public housing which had been significantly run down; the reintroduction of crimes compensation relief for victims of crime and additional support for vulnerable families.

Many of the items listed above fulfilled election promises but in some areas the injection of funds was not as high as is required to meet the needs and change the outcomes for many disadvantaged Victorians. For instance whilst committing \$33.8 million for capital investment in permanent prison beds over three years only \$4.8 million was dedicated to specific diversion programs. Such programs of diversion, if properly resourced and operated, can reduce rates of re-offending, increase community safety and reduce the significant outlays of public expenditure on prison beds which it is estimated can cost between \$55,000 - \$65, 000 per prisoner per annum. It is important to note that in many areas services, community organisations and support and schooling and health options have been significantly run down over the past decade and need replenishing.

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) in its budgetary submission for 1999/2000<sup>61</sup> and in previous years has a number of frameworks for a socially responsive budget. Their implementation in government structures and approaches is long overdue. Some of the items include:

- That all new government initiatives, both social and economic, be assessed in terms of their social impact
- That eligibility for human services are based on need, not upon value judgements or social perceptions of an individual or group's 'entitlement' to government support.

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<sup>59</sup> *Financially Responsible, Socially Progressive: 2000-2001 Victorian Budget Overview*, Department of Treasury and Finance, May 2000

<sup>60</sup> Many of the initiatives in the Juvenile Justice policy were particularly welcomed as they formed many of the recommendations made in the CCJDP Report, *What Makes a Good Juvenile Justice System*, January 2000

<sup>61</sup> See *VCOSS State Budget Submission: Investing in Victorians 1999-2000*, VCOSS, 1998, p. 22

- New investments be directed towards social infrastructure – meaning human services – rather than merely towards physical projects
- A whole of government approach is taken to ensure that cost shifting and budgetary savings in one area do not lead to long term unintended social and economic costs to the community.

The Ignatius Report lists some key approaches that need consideration. These include:

- measuring relevant changes in neighbourhoods
- setting goals for neighbourhood and resident improvement. The CCJDP would suggest that this should involve participation of community members
- developing models of neighbourhood change. The CCJDP would add that this should occur only after careful study of the community itself.
- Evaluating the likely impact of policies on neighbourhoods and their residents
- Measuring the nature and scale of resource inputs deemed relevant to the achievement of goals.

### **G. CCJDP Budgetary Submission for Previous Budget<sup>62</sup>**

The CCJDP reiterates its submission last year in which it was suggested that for every future additional budgetary provision for statutory services related to children and adolescents, e.g. child protection, a further special provision calculated at 50% of the total amount for statutory purposes be committed to community support services, e.g. family support, counselling; i.e. \$1 to community support programs for every additional \$2 to statutory (Children and Young Persons Act) intervention services. Base funding levels and reference points would need to be determined having regard to the need to ensure an appropriate initial injection of additional funding and regular adjustments to maintain the proposed nexus.

#### **Rationale**

Persons who are placed on statutory orders are often people who are most vulnerable, at risk, in need of support, and from disadvantaged groups. They include homeless young people, people with a mental illness, children under care and protection obligations, young people who are drug dependent and persons who experience other forms of social and economic deprivation. The linking of an extra 50% of budgetary allocations for statutory interventions to community support programs would contribute to further development of effective preventative and community development strategies to support those families, adolescents and children that are most likely to become the subject of statutory intervention. The provision of parenting development and support, support for street kids and young offenders, maternal and child health services, pre-school and educational support, comprehensive and accessible drug abuse services, counselling, carer support, case management and follow-up, and working with local communities to improve their quality of life would provide better opportunities for these people on orders and for their families.

The linkage to funding for statutory intervention would constrain both the negative impact of such interventions and the associated budgetary demands and address some of the policy constraints currently in place.

Under the proposal we would be seeking to prevent cost shifting from statutory intervention services to other secondary and tertiary level systems.

### **H. Suggestions for Improved Responses to Cumulative Disadvantage in Communities for the Future**

Addressing the needs of disadvantaged neighbourhoods requires:

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<sup>62</sup> *Submission by the CCJDP on the Budget* to the Office of Premier and Cabinet, February 2000

- local input, local ideas, local involvement, empowerment and community building. Recognition is required that this should not place additional burdens on local communities. Therefore this involvement should be adequately resourced and targeted. It should find ways of involving community members who are representative of all of the community, especially those who would normally be alienated or excluded from such engagement. Provision of childcare and interpreters are issues that require consideration. We note that the idea of a community Cabinet has been adopted in Victoria. This is one step towards greater community involvement and models could be adopted at a local community level. This would ensure localised community needs are discerned.<sup>63</sup>
- Effective evaluation of existing programs and new programmes which encompass both qualitative and as quantitative analysis. On current measurements some small programs would rate very low even though they have a positive impact, because they emerged directly from discerned community need, work slowly and closely over time with people. In addition, Swinburne University and others have conducted work in relation to measuring qualitative outcomes. Relationship building and wellbeing have for some time been considered too difficult to measure and therefore have often been discounted in the evaluation of programs. This has resulted in services that fail to take account of the importance for human beings of valuable interactions that can also have positive results and the importance of not reducing human services to commodity based measurements.
- Governments, including areas of Treasury and Finance, will need to acknowledge that where there had been inherited disadvantage and when communities have entrenched cumulative disadvantage results will not occur within short time frames. Rebuilding esteem and control and redressing chronic health and social problems that have become entrenched over time is a complex, difficult, challenging and brave policy response which has to be developed with a long term view. Nevertheless, Departments all need to be accountable for their involvement and their own performance needs ongoing evaluation and fine-tuning to increase public service accountability to the community they serve. The result of early intervention and investment in community should result in the reduction over the long term in expenditure and should provide saving in areas such as prison capacity and statutory interventions.
- Changes in policy on a Federal or State/Territory level have the capacity to either enhance community building or to detract from efforts made to alleviate poverty. The State, Territory and Federal Governments need to be constantly aware of this in formulating public policy. State Government can play a role in ensuring that in areas of joint responsibility with the Commonwealth such as health, housing, legal aid and so on these responsibilities are met so as not to compound disadvantage in their jurisdiction. Likewise the Federal Government has a role in ensuring that the obligations it bears at international law (discussed earlier in this paper) are met by ensuring that States and Territories act consistently with those internationally agreed and recognised standards.

### **I. Key Suggested Areas for Budgetary Priorities for the Year 2001-2002**

VCOSS has for a number of years advocated policy frameworks which are such as to take into account direct correlation to costs of living increases for specific household groups in specific expenditure areas. It has submitted that in order to address real issues of poverty and disadvantage the cumulative effect of cost of living increases must be acknowledged so that appropriate responses can be made to address social inequity.<sup>64</sup>

#### **1. Strengthening and building communities and responsive government processes and structures**

There are many strong arguments as to why a government should put energy and resources into community building particularly where there are communities experiencing hardship and disadvantage. Without a sense of community, and without a feeling that people around care, interaction between different and diverse groups in local communities and beyond alienation, cynicism, suspicion, exclusion, crime, increasing division and animosity can emerge. Currently, there is a dearth of good research and evaluation of programs that improve the actual wellbeing of citizens and actually meet their needs and promote their active participation in decision-making and society in general. In addition, there is very little data on how local communities connect and work with organisations in

<sup>63</sup> The United Kingdom and Denmark have implemented citizen panels and explored partnership arrangements with sectors of local communities including schools and business.

<sup>64</sup> See *VCOSS State Budget Submission: Investing in Victorians 1999-2000*, VCOSS, 1998, p. 39

their area and how such associations improve both access to services and the participation of the local community. Networks that have the potential to foster community involvement in decision making processes and in evaluating local community needs are provided by community based agencies such as community health centres, social service agencies, religious congregations, community legal centres, citizen action groups, clubs and local government. Our own commission undertook a two-year consultation process across Victoria recording the views of indigenous Victorians.<sup>65</sup> Their perspectives and insights form part of the CCJDP's framework for its work in promoting justice for Indigenous Australians.

The processes involved in such consultations and the methods used to feed community views into all levels of government, business and other institutions could provide valuable ideas on how to link community input into other decision-making processes. Similarly, the work performed by People Together throughout the 1990s on report cards on democracy and community consultations on services could provide useful ideas on how processes can be adopted to involve citizens. However, as society changes so too the methods of involving people must always be open to evaluation and change to ensure they remain relevant and responsive. Very little research has been executed at a grass roots level into what initiatives are in place in local communities, how those mechanism (formal and informal) foster community involvement and models that could be adapted and promoted in other areas to improve connectedness. As society becomes more competitive and individualistic and the struggle to stay ahead takes centre stage it is difficult for people to find "space" to think about others in their community. Governments have a role in fostering connectedness to ensure wider social cohesion.

In Victoria, the past decade has seen erosion of many community based organisations. Due to cost cutting priorities and funding requirements that caused organisations to focus on caseloads and throughput many other aspects of services have been lost. These include peer group education aimed at preventative measures and life skills, involvement in community campaigns befitting a participatory democracy, time for outreach and work accessing those most in need by finding innovative ways of improving their connectedness with the broader community.

Earlier in this paper, the need for the building- up of social infrastructure to counter negative impacts was discussed. There is a need to ameliorate the effects of unemployment, restructuring of industry, a down turn in the economy, the hopelessness that can lead to drug addiction, the need for family supports for those who struggle, reduced income support, social divisions and the closure of banks, businesses and post offices. Work needs to be undertaken to evaluate what mechanisms exist in communities that bind them. There is a need to build on the capacity of local organisations so that they can improve their expertise and responses to local communities and so that they can feed these responses into the policy frameworks to make them more realistic, flexible and responsive to need.

The linkage between community, local government and State government policy and bureaucracy can be improved and strengthened. Very little work has been done to find where these linkage points are and how they can be tapped so that the ideas, needs and participation of citizens in the most disadvantaged communities can flow through to the top levels and form part of the policy and legislative frameworks. As indicated earlier in this paper, collaboration and a proper partnership between the community and beaurocracy needs to be strengthened. The "top down" form of policy-making can lead to inefficiencies and additional costs because they are not adequately informed by matters occuring on the ground. As VCOSS highlighted in its 2000 Budget Submission, "Cross department indicators and accountabilities also need to drive fundamental cultural change. Too often innovative whole of government programs can founder for lack of supporting processes and systems."<sup>66</sup>

## 2. Drugs

There is a greater need to address causes and potential risk factors of drug abuse. The focus is often in relation to remedial action for drug abuse that can be too late once users are absorbed into the criminal justice system or overdose. There is a need for improved and effective treatment and rehabilitation

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<sup>65</sup> *Its not easy walkin'in there: Towards Practical and Culturally Respectful Solutions*, CCJDP, September, 1999

<sup>66</sup> *State Budget Submission: Investing in Victorians, 2000-2001*, VCOSS, 2000

while in prison and the extension of post release services. The high number of women prisoners dying shortly after release from prison is concerning.<sup>67</sup>

There is a need to provide resources for broad based prevention to encourage greater family, school, community, local government, peer group, State and Federal government involvement.<sup>68</sup> Evaluation and coordination of programs is essential. In addition, programs should be funded which address particular needs groups. For instance, programs that cater for young people with their particular developmental stages taken into consideration, programs for drug users with mental health and medication issues, chronic and abuse of licit drugs and so on. In addition, timely access to treatment is essential. There is no point in a young person being able to access a program after their positive desire to rectify their drug problem has passed.<sup>69</sup>

### 3. Housing

On the whole Victoria has had a proud history in initiating public housing programmes and this ought not to be allowed to decline. There is a need for publicly available data on housing provision, levels of unmet need and the effectiveness of responses to the homeless. The announcements around the Strategy on Homelessness are encouraging but homelessness can not be resolved without an understanding of its causes and the factors that work to prolong it. The failure to ensure affordable, appropriate and accessible public housing by both Federal and State governments has been an ongoing concern of the CCJDP.<sup>70</sup> The method of resolving a lack of funding commitment has led to tighter targeting of priority housing lists. Recent decisions to reinvigorate existing public housing and not to sell off housing stock in inner Melbourne are a start. However considerable work on planning is required in improving and committing to public housing and reducing the impediments to poor and disadvantaged people in accessing private rental without loss of income needed for other essential services. There is a need to understand that with rising unemployment, an increase in part-time and casualised work and an increase in the number of working poor a housing crisis is emerging as the lack of sustainable income levels and rising costs create financial strain.<sup>71</sup>

Funding for appropriate accommodation for persons with a mental illness must be provided as many of these people live in squalid conditions in boarding houses, often because of discrimination in other rental areas.

Housing is an area where the State government could work more closely with local government on planning and integration issues and ensuring that these are underpinned by social justice concerns and community development approaches.

### 4. Broadening Concessions

This can be an effective means of offsetting price increases that erode overall purchasing power. It is directly within the power of State government to make a difference in household expenditure on essential items vital for well being and often for subsistence. Areas for concessions include water, rates, and the education maintenance allowance. Again the VCOSS Relative Price Indices (RPI) can be a useful tool for detailing costs and services and the costs impacts as experienced by particular households, structures, life cycles and lifestyles.

### 5. Education

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<sup>67</sup> *Dying Outside: Women Parole and Post-Release Mortality*, Sandy Cook and Sue Davies, La Trobe University, 1999

<sup>68</sup> *Victorian Government Drug Strategy, Turning the Tide, Interim Report, 1997*, pp. 144 -145

<sup>69</sup> See the comments of the young men in *What Makes a Good Juvenile Justice System*, CCJDP, January, 2000 pp 41-46

<sup>70</sup> See *The Voice of the Silent Strugglers – Towards a Socially Justice Housing Option: Non-ghettoised, Affordable, Safe, Secure, Appropriate, Balanced Options*, A Joint Report by the Catholic Commission for Justice Development and Peace (Melb Arch) and Catholic Social Services, July 1997

<sup>71</sup> *Winners and Losers: Changes in Spending Power for Victorian Households, 1990- 1000*, Gavin Dufty, VCOSS, 2000

Where poverty, social problems, learning difficulties and home conditions impair achievement then more concerted and intensive support is required. The provision of the Education Maintenance Allowance and its adequacy are critical. This is in line with Australia's obligations under the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and with the thrust of the *Children and Young Person's Act 1989* (Victoria)

School based youth services in disadvantaged areas need expansion, as schools are often a place where problems can be detected early. With family support, appropriate intervention and counselling services available within schools or in close partnership with local services often problems can be overcome before they spiral. We are aware that some initiatives for better counselling in schools are envisaged and would argue these need to be adequately resourced and supported. A key method of benchmarking social justice outcomes may be to examine the ways in which schools are sensitive to the needs of people on a low income and the mechanisms that exist to ameliorate that disadvantage. Good community networking from these school-based focussed youth services is imperative; for example, families with financial difficulties could be assisted in accessing the financial counselling service nearby.<sup>72</sup>

A major issue that needs addressing is the need for more schooling options that are not merely mainstream. Schools should be resourced to enable alternative schools offering trade and skill programmes and to offer options for children and young people who do not flourish in a mainstream school environment. (Eg. Collingwood College and the former Ardoch School and Technical Schools.)

A fund should be dedicated to the promotion of greater understanding in the community of the impacts of poverty to ensure ongoing public support for programs that address inequity.

## 6. Health

The establishing of targets to meet the needs of particular disadvantaged population groups and regions are needed in addition to the development of preventative health strategies and public access in areas requiring urgent attention.

Currently resources are overstretched. There is a need to make a realistic response in light of aging populations and demographic changes. Long term planning is required to ensure that over time the health and hospital system has sufficient health professionals and to ensure that places exist for proper care to be administered. Often there are not appropriate family networks in the community to provide the adequate levels of care that are assumed in programs.

There must be sufficient flexibility in solutions to cater for the actual needs of the patient. The vital preventative role of maternal and child health care must be acknowledged. Family support and the detection of early stresses on family can prevent problems emerging further on down the track as serious issues or crisis. Cross referencing of the data from hospital admission rates and patients seen by different services can assist in the identification of whether illnesses or health issues are prominent in particular areas and lead to the development of particular prevention or intervention programs in those discerned areas. Privacy protection issues must be a part of this response.

Monitoring of the impact on priority populations of particular health measures and risks to their health status, (eg smoking, physical inactivity, and poor diet) is a way of ensuring that programs are tailored to reduce the likelihood of health problems emerging.<sup>73</sup> Education and harm minimisation strategies for people, especially young people around HIV/Aids and Hepatitis C, needs to be ongoing to target different groups including children as they grow older, drug users, people with a mental illness, family members and the broader community. The recognition of different service approaches and levels must be developed to cope with complex care issues.

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<sup>72</sup> Catholic Social Services recently released a report into education that may be a useful resource in improving outcomes for disadvantaged young people and retention difficulties. See *Keeping our Kids in Class: School Attendance in the Western Region of Melbourne*, Dr Mary Stainsby and Marilyn Webster, CSS, Melbourne, 2000

<sup>73</sup> See *VCOSS State Budget Submission: Investing in Victorians 1999-2000*, VCOSS, 1998, PP 116-119, 124-125

On discharge from hospital, after-care and support services that take account of people's social and economic circumstances, including the capacity of family to provide care, need to be taken into account. An elderly person without a family may need help with mobility and food upon early discharge. Issues of the quality of care given need to be addressed.<sup>74</sup>

## 7. Community Services

Proper provision of community services can reduce the escalation of health problems if done wisely.

The availability of family support services for vulnerable families is essential, not just upon referral from the Department of Human Services but also from other community-based sources where difficulties and serious needs are detected. Over time, priority has been given to Department of Human service clients which has made it difficult for community service agencies/ schools to ensure adequate responses to their clients' pressing needs.

In 1997-1998 there were 33,151 notifications to child protection services. This was an increase from 31,707 in 1996-1997 and the number is likely to keep increasing. Often with more family support and assistance with life skills, and with access to greater support services, some interventions of care and protection services could be averted. In addition, delays through adjournments of cases in the Children's Court could be averted if directions to the Department were met promptly. That would not only reduce court and legal costs but also more importantly ensure that where children are removed from families the cases are dealt with promptly thus serving the best interests of the child as the *Children and Young Persons Act* proscribes.

The numbers of abused children and those under supervision and guardianship orders remains high. Sexual abuse, incest, physical abuse, violence and prolonged issues of fear, suffering and cyclic repetition in some cases remain issues of great concern. If these issues are not sorted out then the risk of the cycles being repeated remains. There must be a growth in resources to ensure that the State acts as a full and proper parent by ensuring stability, assistance to children to overcome the trauma, security, educational opportunities and good life experiences for these young people. Currently the provision of such assistance is often wanting. The care and protection of these young people is a core function of the State government and with proper intervention and appropriate support significant life opportunities can increase.<sup>75</sup> The rise in the use of illicit and licit drugs and chroming amongst children in protection is a natural step where there is little supervision, a deficiency of relationships of a positive and ongoing, caring nature, and, the absence of mentors often is a setting of previous significant traumas such as abuse, incest, parents with addictions and a lack of hope.<sup>76</sup>

Community based agencies often have to 'top-up' funding for items that are a government responsibility. Components for salaries are often inadequate. It is encouraging that compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) for community services has been abandoned. The process encouraged secrecy between agencies and competitiveness in making the services cheaper which compromised the level of service provided to the public. Funding of these agencies needs to ensure that they are responsive to community needs and do not overlook the need for nearly intervention, adequacy of resources, opportunities for community strengthening and for prevention. Tight targeting can lead to inflexible program requirements and a stifling of innovative responses.

Young people leaving care also need further support to establish them in independent lives. Their integration should ensure a connection with their communities, ongoing contact with a person who can play a significant and ongoing role in their lives, assistance in saving, paying rent on time, joining local societies, further education, job training and obtaining work.

Youth in crisis need support not only where there is established protective status provided or statutory intervention in place. This restriction is too narrow. Often young people without statutory orders can be

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<sup>74</sup> *Acute Health Care Sector Under Casemix: A Case of Mixed Priorities*, Auditor General Special Report Number 56.

<sup>75</sup> *A Dossier - Rights of Passage: Vulnerable Young People Turning the Corner*, CCJDP with the assistance of Catholic Social Services, March, 1999

<sup>76</sup> See the extracts taken from young people in the Juvenile Justice System in January 2000 in the report, *What Makes a Good Juvenile Justice System*, CCJDP, January 2000 pp 38-46

neglected. Those who have suicidal tendencies, chronic drug abuse and chronic, violent episodes, mental health issues are considered unsuitable for these programs. There is an urgent need to address the gaps in the intensity of support for these young people and prevent problem escalation.

The high rate of indigenous children in care in proportion to the rest of the population remains a matter of concern. It is hoped that the Aboriginal Justice Plan will have an impact in reducing this and supporting Aboriginal families and recognising cultural differences such as the role of extended family. The Plan must ensure ongoing input and feedback from the indigenous community as to its progress and as to areas that can be improved in addition to providing adequate resources to address this over representation and address the underlying reasons for it. The recommendations from the *Bringing them Home* Report<sup>77</sup> have importance in such responses.

There is a need to ensure not only the trial of pilot programs for parenting support, prevention and early intervention but that where effective they can secure continued funding and lose ongoing funding. This was a problem with funded pilots under the Community Support Fund. Evaluation and development of such programs ought to occur on a continuum (See later discussion on evaluation of programs).

Families who have children with a disability also need a responsive system. The diversity of need for children with a disability can be significant. They may involve behavioural strains on families or additional tools, from wheelchairs through to educational tools. A neglected issue is the need for appropriate support and access to services for children who sit on the borderline of assessment for intellectual disabilities and for those who have multiple disabilities that compound difficulties.

Services to people with disabilities must be geographically portable and culturally appropriate. Multiple disabilities create problems due to the fragmentation and criteria of different services. A culmination of disability can in fact create more impediments and should not be seen in isolation. Active advocacy support is also critical for this client group and needs full recognition and resourcing. We note there have been some recent and encouraging initiatives in this area from the State government.<sup>78</sup>

Protocols have been developed between the police and Department of Human Services but proper mechanisms to ensure that these protocols are actually implemented in practice are required. Mental health workers/ambulances should be used to transport mental health patients, not divvy vans or police vehicles which can be distressing and stigmatising for people with a mental illness.<sup>79</sup>

The ongoing need for support and recognition of the work of carers is required with the provision of respite services, home help and attendant care. This however should not replace the need for government to provide appropriate services and the need to recognise the sacrifice, isolation and hard work carers undertake. There should be acknowledgment of the vital role they play as often they are taken for granted. This is important also in the area of recognition of the valuable work of volunteers in agencies and the need to energise and encourage younger people to be involved in volunteering.

People who work in community services experience many of society's most confronting social problems. ACOSS in a recent survey notes low levels of morale and burn out.<sup>80</sup> There is a need for proper support both within the Department and in the community service agencies contracted to provide services. Training, support, experienced staff and decent pay and conditions can reduce the levels of stress on service providers and ensure that they are better equipped to deal with the challenges of their work place. It is noted that in the 2000 budget provision was made for this to occur but more resources are required to ensure this can be followed through.

## 8. Criminal Justice

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<sup>77</sup> Report of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, June, 1997

<sup>78</sup> Ministerial Announcement: Minister for Community Services, Mrs Christine Campbell, Friday 15 September 2000

<sup>79</sup> See *VCOSS State Budget Submission: Investing in Victorians 1999-2000*, VCOSS, 1998, p. 131

<sup>80</sup> *Australians Living on the Edge Part 3: A Survey of the Community Services Sector*, ACOSS Paper Number 109, September 2000, Sydney

Recent years have seen a significant problem emerge with overcrowding of Victoria's prisons. There are many reasons which have compounded to produce this result. They include: changes in sentencing laws, closure of some prisons and prison cells, an increase in the level of drug abuse and reduction in resources in community based corrections. The tendency in politically charged environments is to deal with crime by imposing harsher sentences or increase aggressive policing rather than addressing the underlying causes of crime which have been outlined at length above. Over the years Victoria, whilst maintaining the lowest crime rate, has also sustained a low level of imprisonment by comparison with other States and Territories in Australia. New South Wales has a similar crime rate to that of Victoria and yet has a higher imprisonment rate.<sup>81</sup>

It is often an easy public policy response to take a "bricks and mortar approach" in dealing with increases in prison numbers rather than to seriously tackle underlying causes and break the cycles that lead to offending behaviour. Such an approach has a significant implication on the public purse in view of the high costs of incarceration, money which in the case of less serious offending and drug related offences could be better spent on alternative diversionary measures, effective rehabilitation and early intervention. The provision of legal aid is also an important factor in ensuring adequate representation and that the appropriate interventions are put to the judiciary both during a case and at sentencing.

It was noted in the CCJDP's report on juvenile justice<sup>82</sup> that an estimated 43% of juvenile offenders had been in protective services. If better responses are made at an earlier age perhaps a significant reduction in offending can occur. The domestic and international research reveals consistently that imprisonment is more likely to lead to reoffending patterns and reduce community safety over the long term. This Budget should see an immediate increase in resources for support services for people with drug, mental health, borderline behavioural problems, mental health, housing problems and excessive gambling to prevent these groups from entering the criminal justice system.

As stated, we are encouraged by the Homelessness Strategy but real outcomes must emerge which lead to greater social inclusion, better standards of accommodation suited to people with specific needs and linked to greater pathways of opportunity and escape for the poverty cycle. For instance, homeless people may need additional and ongoing support to secure long term housing and coping skills. The story does not begin and end with the finding of temporary accommodation. Without addressing the underlying causes of criminal behaviour and implementing policies of intervention and prevention the issue of community safety and addressing criminal activity will never be seriously addressed. The safety of the public is advanced by the rehabilitation of offenders.

A greater effort is needed to rehabilitate prisoners. Although this is one of the stated aims in section 5 of the *Sentencing Act* 1991 (Victoria). This has been a long neglected area. The Minister for Corrections, Mr Andre Haermeyer pointed out at a forum of prison chaplains in August 2000, that whilst approximately \$65, 000 is spent on prisoners per capita per annum only \$300 per annum per prisoner is invested in their rehabilitation. With ratios of parole officers to prisoners at extremely high levels it is unrealistic to expect any real inroads will be made to address offending behaviour. When a breakdown of time alone and caseloads is made only several hours at most in an entire sentence will be spent with the offender.

There is a desperate need for more statistical research and data on the impact of correctional services in Victoria and the tracking of prisoners to ascertain what programs work with what people. Input from prisoners themselves has often been neglected in many areas of the current programs. Prisoners can have insight into what works with prisoners and what doesn't and why. Current responses are often ineffective due to a lack of resources, proper case management, and genuine efforts at rehabilitation and of other programs.

Proper resources, support and training are required to extend and improve case management both within the prison system and in community correctional. As stated, the rehabilitative aim of sentencing receives only scant attention. This is not in the long term interests of community safety and can exacerbate the overcrowding problems in prison. People under community correctional service orders reach higher tariffs due to a lack of purposeful interventions in a somewhat fragmented system.

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<sup>81</sup> *Statistical Profile: The Victorian Prison System, 1995-1996 to 1998-1999*, Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner, Department of Justice, 2000 p. 1

<sup>82</sup> *What Makes a Good Juvenile Justice System*, CCJDP, January, 2000

Compliance enforcement roles may be inconsistent with case management and ought to be pursued by a different party in view of the perception of conflict of roles that can be created. Caseworkers also require strong community linkages. At the very least these ratios of offenders to staff need to be reduced with more staff and a manageable caseload that enables constructive work and follow-up with prisoners.

Greater alignment of social policy and the justice system to deliver policy goals is desirable. More real and practical efforts for an integrated approach are required under which community corrections is placed in the broader context of community if inroads are to be made into the actual causes of crime, often founded in cycles of disadvantage and drug addiction.

A greater investment needs to be made at the community service end that presents a valuable opportunity for purposeful intervention that is often lost. People are often imprisoned when they have reached the limit of the tariffs available in community services. It is thus in the long-term interests of the public purse to make further investments in the community services system as it may reduce the expenditure on prison beds in future provided the legislative penalties for imprisonment remain stable. The latter aspect requires significant political will.

Currently, offender supervision and case management of moderate to high-risk offenders receives low priority and this should be addressed. The processing of persons on orders related to penalty notices/fines seems to consume much of the resources of Community Services that could be better utilised in other areas. Programs for the rehabilitation of criminal offenders are compromised by the quantity of fine defaulters in the community correctional services system. An alternative process should be used for these low-level offences.

In the 2000 State Budget money was allocated for home detention. At a recent forum of stakeholders in the prison system run by the Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner the issue of home detention was raised. Concern emerged when the criteria for home detention were discussed. It was revealed that models required a satisfactory home environment, the non-commission of serious offences, and lack of many prior offences to be eligible. If, as is often stated, home detention is to be used as an alternative to imprisonment, then, if most prison sentences are imposed for serious offences and on offenders with a great number of priors it would appear that either home detention will have very few recipients or that it will in fact be used as a net widening exercise. In addition, it would appear that it would be mainly used for white-collar criminals raising serious issues of equity and justice. In view of the high level of resources home detention would require for an apparent low number of recipients, it is suggested that the money could be better spent on other diversionary areas.

Home Residential Drug Treatment is desirable. A much more concerted effort is required to address drug issues given the high proportion of drug offenders or drug related crime in the community. Issues of equity must be paramount in ensuring appropriate services are also offered to homeless people. Bail hostels, transition hostels and advocacy support are required urgently and also seem to fit in with the government's proposed strategy around homelessness. The Minister for Housing should be linked into these proposals to ensure cooperation and reduce duplication. In the CCJDP's juvenile justice report<sup>83</sup>, young girls interviewed often stated they took drugs out of "boredom" but on further enquiry the word "boredom" was used as a metaphor for other factors present in drug consumption ranging from lack of hope, to escape from pain and trauma through to forgetting sexual abuse and incest. It is important that underlying issues for drug abuse also are addressed with appropriate support, follow-up and counselling. This may assist in overcoming the fragmented and uncoordinated systems and may highlight gaps so that the latter can be addressed.

Currently prison work often conflicts with prisoner access to education. Structured realistic work, training and entrees into work in the community plus educational options that cater for prisoner needs are required. Often the work relates to what the prison would like done rather than making pathways into work outside upon release. Also life skills and parenting support, better preparation for release and assistance in accessing services on the outside can assist in breaking cycles of crime and improving outcomes upon release. Funding needs to be invested in all these areas.

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<sup>83</sup> *What Makes a Good Juvenile Justice System*, CCJDP, January 2000 pp 38-41

The rhetoric about "crime prevention" on both State and Commonwealth levels is meaningless unless there is program expansion in all these areas. It is noted that Commonwealth and State offenders use the State prison system and so this may be an area for further cooperation from different spheres of government. It is noted that the State system is also holding some asylum seekers. Protocols need to be developed between the two spheres of government, Corrections and the Department of Immigration, to ensure that the holding of such persons in prisons does not breach Articles of the United Nations *Covenant of Civil and Political Rights*.

A critical component in the government attaining improved levels of community safety is the effectiveness of rehabilitative programs and early intervention and prevention. Community support for rehabilitation expenditure requires more resources to improve community education on sentencing options and outcomes. There is a significant misconception in the community about the impact of imprisonment on crime, not borne out by any of the research in Australia or overseas, and which works as an impediment in ensuring public support for the spending of funds in ways more likely to lead to the long term protection and safety of the community. Misconceptions in the community about levels of crime and the impact of incarceration on offenders are unhelpful. A concerted effort is required to redress the impact of media sensationalism and political advantage that law and order agendas often create. The overcrowding currently of Victoria's prisons is not totally isolated from such vagaries and involves a huge outlay of money that could be spent with better results in reducing levels of crime if used on preventative and rehabilitation programs.

#### 9. Creation of Opportunity in Disadvantaged Communities

Many of the other areas discussed in this paper overlap with this goal but it is important nevertheless to specifically note that many communities in Victoria are struggling after prolonged neglect and few resources. These communities need to have more opportunities and many of the items proposed for the 2000-2001 in this Occasional Paper can achieve this.

Certain disadvantaged groups of people require additional assistance. These include migrants and refugees particularly temporary visa holders who will have great difficulty integrating into communities due to the restrictions placed on their accessing certain services by the Federal government policies.

It is noted that in July 2000 the State government of Victoria launched its Aboriginal Justice Plan designed to address issues of disadvantage and justice in Victorian Aboriginal communities. The plan is a welcome initiative. However inquiries by the CCJDP revealed that in some areas little thought has been given for review and evaluation of whether the aims have been achieved within the police and some departments. More time and effort is required at this stage to ensure that the bold objectives of the integrated plan are actually attained across departments. Effective measurements of outcomes are needed to be put in place to ensure the real enhancement of Aboriginal involvement and the meeting of community needs are attained. Authorities who have agreed to cooperate in implementation must be kept on task and be accountable in ensuring the Plan has real impacts beyond the aspirational. All of this requires input and involvement in decision-making by the Aboriginal community itself.

Plans to encourage younger people and people from differing racial backgrounds to work in a range of community service agencies are required. Many of the staff in community based agencies are in their late thirties or older. It is important that those employed in these agencies reflect their client groups and that an environment to foster young professional people to enter those agencies exists to ensure coverage of future generations.

#### 10. Funding for full evaluation of programs and improved benchmarking

Additional funding is critical to enable agencies to measure outcomes and thereby assist in focussing their services. This should be an in-built component in funding all services. Equally essential is the capacity to follow-up such evaluations for improved and more comprehensive research data and responses which can meet emerging and changing needs. Often the administrative requirements placed upon smaller agencies have actually forced these agencies to close their doors to the public so that they can meet onerous administration requirements. The evaluation of programs has often been reduced to issues of throughput. (How many clients seen, types of problems, action taken). Such data, although relevant, is merely quantitative and contains little capacity for measuring the quality and overall

effectiveness of the service. What has occurred in many agencies is a drive to push as many "clients" as possible through the door. This does not ensure that the clients needs have been adequately met or that a holistic approach to other problems has been effected to prevent further escalation of problems. Ultimately this can lead to either dissatisfaction of the "client" and service provider or further calls on the services later on.

One of the difficulties with the compulsory competitive tendering of services was that it placed too much emphasis on the cheapness of the service, often leading agencies to under-predict the cost of services to secure the tender and increasingly placing agencies in a position where they had to bear the responsibility for "topping-up" services that were primarily an area of government responsibility. The process also led to a reduction in cooperation between agencies who became reticent to share information and improvement ideas for fear of the competition. It is reassuring that the compulsory competitive tendering of human services as ceased. There is an ideal opportunity at present in Victoria to ensure that improved and more comprehensive evaluation of services and the building on good ideas can occur. Models for funding of service delivery programs should not be based on simplicity for public service administrators nor on so-called "industry imperatives". They should reflect the needs of the citizens who use the service and, to that end, enable the agencies delivering those services to do so appropriately, effectively, in a supported way, with the flexibility which enables them to respond to emerging needs and to be able to tailor programs so that they meet the often complex responses that can be required in the area of human services.

The proposals for the development of community based planning projects using benchmarks and indicators to measure progress should be considered in the development of all future programs and funding arrangements. In addition, the public service ought to itself have to meet similar standards or benchmarks to ensure consistency of approach. VCOSS has listed some questions that should form the basis of policy making, expenditure and service program frameworks. Does the program:

- help to prevent people falling into poverty
- reduce the level of poverty
- ameliorate the effects of poverty
- have no effect on poverty
- increase poverty
- contribute to the achievement of targets to reduce poverty
- address inequalities that might lead to poverty
- reach identified target groups<sup>84</sup>
- We would add a further test: Does this program contribute to the dignity and promote the human rights of citizens.

There must also be comprehensive planning; not merely targets but mechanisms that actually ascertain qualitatively results being achieved.

The work by Mike Salvaris<sup>85</sup> in developing a series of benchmarks and indicators has noted that indicators should be initiated, developed and monitored through community participation processes, sometimes with the whole of community, at other times with citizenship participation and at other times specialist panels. Care however must be taken. Many of the people in society in most need are the very people who are unlikely to participate in such processes and are very often excluded or lack the skills, confidence and self esteem for such involvement.

Considerable work, resources and innovations are required to ensure community participation at all levels. In a democratic society often the satisfaction of the majority can see the subjugations of the minority/disadvantaged groups. Australia's experience with indigenous peoples' standards of living, and more recently the treatment of refugees, provide good illustrations of the need to implement special measures to overcome disadvantage and ensure active participation and representation of these groups who so often lack a voice. An illustration of involving those on the fringes occurred in the People Together Summit on the Widening Gap between Rich and Poor in 1998. The CCJDP was involved in

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<sup>84</sup> State Budget Submission: Investing in Victorian 2000-2001, VCOSS, 2000, p 18

<sup>85</sup> *Community and Social Indicators: can citizens be trusted to measure progress*, Mike Salvaris, Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology for the New South Wales Government Community Services Association, May 2000

the planning and organisation of this Summit. Effort was made to ensure that the people who use the support services were encouraged to attend. This involved in some instance these people attending with a support person and the waiver of attendance fees. Even so at the forum many participants were exasperated by the use of acronyms and other aspects of the workshops which they found alien. More could have been done to include a greater range of people. It was an exercise that demonstrated to many of those in attendance that often the needs and insight of people on the margins are never fully expressed or understood.

Much more is needed to give young people, the homeless, the unemployed, the indigenous, persons with a disability and so on a voice and expression of their rights as citizens to participate. Currently little is done to ensure this occurs in policy-making.

There has also been considerable work in other nations around "wellbeing" and working with "at risk" groups. Norway has a "Long Term Plan" that was developed in the 1970s and Ireland has a national development plan arising from the United Nations-sponsored World Summit for Social Development which was held in Copenhagen in 1995. In addition, through the United Nations, the OECD (The Social Indicator Project) and UN Development Program<sup>86</sup> and Eckersley's Genuine Progress Indicator have developed social indicators. These encompass far more than Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The GDP indicators, whilst measuring overall economic growth, may do little to increase the broader health of the community. They may involve serious social costs and reduce participation of citizens, and not distribute the wealth generated.

In Victoria, a recent document, *Improving the lives of Young Victorians in our Community*<sup>87</sup>, tried to match high risk groups and possible protective factors that may reduce their harm. This report relied on models developed by G. Catalano and others in the United States. Although the overseas models cited above may be useful, care must be taken to ensure that the attraction of transposing a model from somewhere else, that simplifies complex problems, does not ignore difference in local communities; does not improperly reduce complexities or lead to a system which is inflexible in responding to individual needs and is not grounded in ideas of citizen involvement.

The Senate Inquiry Into National Citizenship Indicators in 1993, an inquiry of the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee examined the possibility for a national method of measuring standards for the well being of Australians. The inquiry ran for a period of three years. Emerging from the inquiry was a decision of the Australian Bureau of Statistics to undertake the research. The Australian Bureau of Statistics is also in the process of trialing some of its well being indicators working closely with a community and academic panel. The outcomes of their work and suggestions should be monitored closely.

Salveris' work explores the indicators that can be used in a Victorian/Australian context. It looks at matters such as social capital, community health, participation of the citizenry and the health of democracy including matters such as transparency and accountability which will not be popular with some sections of government. His work explores through the development and refinement of consultative processes some of the elements of good governance which have been diminished, often with concern from community members who have felt powerless to express their concerns or to obtain responses that address their concerns.

His premise is that small or local communities need good measures for progress, as do governments and nations. These community members have views on what is important to them and need tools to enable them not only to convey their concerns and values but also, to participate actively in a manner befitting a participatory democracy. People have ideas about the sort of society they want to live in, the world they want for their children. Salvaris' next stage is for the setting of concrete goals and then standards to be set for the achievement of these goals and measures or statistics that will demonstrate that there has been progress in achieving these goals. The connection between the benchmarks and indicators are seen as pivotal but are themselves not to be seen as a new management tool nor as the end in themselves, he states. This is a salutary warning for people in policy making or involved in administering such policies who often look for nice, neat ways of tidying up a complex problem or

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<sup>86</sup> The United Nations Development Programme in 1994 stated, "Poverty is the greatest threat to political stability, social cohesion and the environmental health of the planet." UNDP, 1994, p 20

<sup>87</sup> Community Care Division, Department of Human Services, May 2000, Victoria

justifying cutting or enabling ongoing funding of programs. Salvaris argues that the outcomes of community activity, increased awareness and participation in a community and more empowered communities are all valuable. He notes that the role of local government is filled with opportunity but has been often reduced to the role of dependency or loss of opportunity. He sees local government as a valuable avenue for participation and support from citizens.<sup>88</sup>

During the "Growing Victoria Summit" in March 2000 the State Government in Victoria made a commitment to setting up a framework to enable the measurement of social benchmarks and indicators. It may result in the setting of goals and an audit of services but should reach more broadly into the goals of government and departments as well. A consultation process has been established, although it seems many Victorian agencies are unaware of it and its details.

Governments' consultation has often been not a genuine consultation but more an exercise in marketing of a program that has already been formulated and input from the community sector or "clients" has either been minimal or selective. Governments and public servants when engaging in consultation or in the "new language", "stake holder forums" need to truly engage with persons with direct experience with the client groups being targeted for the service and their ideas and input should inform the project at the outset. In this way, programs can have realistic aims and objectives and the strategy needed to produce outcomes can be better refined as it is not so removed from the reality. Again, this also requires efforts on the part of the community sector and research to be undertaken to ensure that programs and policy responses are connected with community need, what works and why, what does not work and why, or whether something works with certain communities and not others. This perhaps says something about the need for government and departments to think clearly and carefully of what consultation involves how to activate it and how to involve diverse and representative groups from all sections of the community.

Salvaris examines a range of topics and through questionnaires or focus groups and receives feedback on values and priorities. More general frameworks open for consideration include items such as: a fair society, an ethical society, individual health and well being, a secure and crime free society, good government and laws, a vigorous cultural life and many more. Some of the more general items for ranking in a questionnaire include: indicators around income, health, work, housing, education, culture, social stress, equity and environment. More specific items include: high standards of honesty in politics and public life, everyone treated equally and fairly by the law, basic human rights of citizens strongly protected, good quality basic services for all, local communities having good facilities, people feeling responsible to each other in the community, strong social protection, a strong free enterprise economy, minimal government, ability to trust people including strangers and so on. The work of Salvaris thus far has had a general flavor of what sort of society people value or want to live in and is worthwhile work to be pursued.

Throughout this paper a common lament has been the absence of quality measures in many evaluations. The indicators for well being whilst assisting in greater appreciation of these, will not necessarily be implemented as immediately as required to address the deficiency in current considerations by departments and agencies. The CCJDP encourages and supports the ongoing work on the development of well being indicators and the setting up of consultative processes to feed into policy-making and citizen action. The current gaps and deficiencies in the measurement of what makes an "effective service" may see many innovative and qualitative services undermined or discontinued unless there is interim action to discover qualitative benchmarking that can be incorporated immediately.

In the fields of the delivery of services to people such as community support, health and education, such relational objectives can be critical to well being. There is a need for such measures to be implemented across the board to redress some of the imbalance lost through the over emphasis of dollar value, so-called efficiency and effectiveness that was often achieved through the reduction and cutting back of services. Although features such as efficiency and effectiveness are attractive elements, the involvement of considerations of a more intangible kind that provided benefits have often been lost.

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<sup>88</sup> *Community and Social Indicators: can citizens be trusted to measure progress*, Mike Salvaris, Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology for the New South Wales Government Community Services Association, May 2000

These include items such as: the building of relationships of trust; equipping someone to cope better; enabling a person to form relationships in an ongoing way with people that has not occurred before; equipping a homeless person with skills to enable him to meet appointments more often; and the implementation of systemic solutions to address repetition of problems. These are illustrations of some of the qualitative items that were lost through goal setting that occurred in a vacuum in Victoria for many years.

Often service criteria was removed from the type of service being provided, was imposed without input from people at the coal face or contained requirements set by those working in the service in tight timelines, with little training or support for the new process. They often had regard to suggested line items from the departments that were quantitative rather than qualitative and were easier for an overstretched agency to adopt/approve especially if there was concern that ongoing funding might be at risk.

It is suggested that a process for the reintroduction of qualitative benchmarks for service delivery can commence immediately through communication and discussions with the service agencies. People who work with young persons with significant problems, if given the opportunity, could complement quantitative data with information about the elements necessary to create positive changes and assist the young people that are more qualitative and real. Processes need to be put in place to enable departments and agencies to discuss frankly what is working and why and research is also needed to explore this and feed into ongoing awareness and policy formation. This can not only assist in the setting of qualitative benchmarks but may also have policy-making spin-offs. It is also critical that the community service agencies ensure that they too are in touch with their "clients" and ensure that their service is constantly adapting to be more effective. The public service also needs to be conscious that fixed and rigid funding criteria in complex areas of diverse and changing human need although important for accountability purposes should not be so inflexible as to prevent responses that respond effectively to real or emerging need. Policy is not stone it needs to be fluid and responsive and if it is not then it may ultimately compromise that accountability it is set up to achieve.

## J. Conclusion

The alleviation of poverty and increased opportunities for citizens to participate actively in policy formation are essential elements to build community and ensure social cohesion and better understanding. Those vested with the responsibility of implementing and adopting policy, legislation and budgetary frameworks need to be responsive to community needs and ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to achieve this. In addition, this paper sees a need for a greater level of cooperation between Commonwealth, State and local government to ensure that disadvantage and poverty do not continue to exclude citizens from the life of the nation. The paper sees an important role for business working in partnership with local and state governments in the creation of opportunities in communities, especially those communities which are disadvantaged, so that cycles of neglect and low esteem can be broken.

It is hoped that some of the suggestions contained in the Occasional Paper will assist in the formulation of policies that can ensure improved social justice outcomes.

Liz Curran, Executive Officer on behalf of the Catholic Commission, wrote this paper for Justice, Development and Peace (Melbourne Archdiocese).

\*Friends of social justice are encouraged to use this paper.

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