

Enabling participation Integrated services for disadvantaged job seekers

The recent national commitment to social inclusion is driving a significant shift towards public services based on an acceptance that multiple barriers (individual, family and structural) prevent social and economic participation for many Australians. The Brotherhood's experience suggests that the best way to increase employment participation involves integrated services that place the disadvantaged job seeker at the centre of support.

There is growing evidence that the current model of contracting out employment services and imposing stringent accountabilities and narrow performance criteria may have limitations in this regard. A loss of policy expertise and practical knowledge within *governments* has been reported, for example in the Netherlands (Lindsay & McQuaid 2008, p. 363); and of quality service delivery knowledge within *contracted providers* in Australia (O'Sullivan et al. 2009). Privatisation has skewed resource allocation by providers away from service delivery to contract management, reduced worker skills, and resulted in a concentration of contractors (Eardley 2003).

The benefits of wholesale contracting out may be overstated. Unit costs may fall, especially for placing people who are 'job ready'; but contracting out services for highly disadvantaged job seekers, especially in areas of joblessness, may be false economy, as *sustainable* outcomes could be improved through integrated local service responses, not easily orchestrated through current funding models. As

Lindsay and McQuaid (2008) conclude from studying the UK, Denmark and the Netherlands:

Genuine partnership-working requires the ceding of authority and sharing of resources and responsibilities. Where implemented, such partnerships can deliver rewards in terms of enhanced knowledge sharing, improved efficiency and greater legitimacy for activation through a sense of shared ownership among stakeholders. Such shared ownership has proved difficult to establish and maintain in all three of these vanguard active welfare states (pp. 363–4).

Efficiency versus effectiveness

A key question is whether Australia has the right balance between efficiency and effectiveness in respect of disadvantaged job seekers. If local partnerships depend on pooling resources and working collaboratively, is the current JSA system able to deliver this level of integration?

Australia has gone further in its complex streaming and contracting of assistance than most OECD

countries. The resulting model may be too inflexible to accommodate the dynamic modern labour market.

As social inclusion principles become more widely understood, there is greater acceptance of the need for a balanced set of macro and micro level policies to resolve structural barriers and build individual capabilities to enable take-up of job opportunities.

The community sector has led the way in introducing local initiatives to integrate the array of services that respond to individual needs, for example, intermediate labour market approaches using social enterprises (Mission Australia 2008; Mestan & Scutella 2007) and YP⁴, the young homeless job seeker trial (Horn 2003; Grace & Gill 2008). Such innovation has largely evolved outside the universal employment services system.

Fostering active participation

Advocates for public sector reform based on participation principles have rightly pointed out that

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universal employment services have underplayed the importance of core human needs (connectedness, autonomy and feeling productive) in determining active participation. Parker (2007, p.107) notes:

Participation needs to be framed in terms of a renewed understanding of citizenship, and a renegotiation of where power and responsibility lies in society. It is emancipating people to play an active role in shaping their own lives, and the world around them.

This should not reduce government responsibility by shifting the onus to individual behaviour. Rather, public services must be underpinned by collaborative strategies that engage and enable people to follow their aspirations for a better future. Governments bear a responsibility to remove external barriers or disincentives faced by job seekers, such as financial hardship, lack of housing or child care or inaccessible health services.

Integrated services

A Commonwealth Government initiative, Local Connections to Work, exemplifies this emerging direction for employment assistance. Through an interdepartmental taskforce, an Australian version of the New Zealand Community Link is now being trialled at four sites, serving highly disadvantaged job seekers who are young adults or have been unemployed for five years. Integration is achieved through co-locating in Centrelink offices a wide range of employment, training, housing, health and

financial services. A key element is joint meetings between the relevant staff and the job seeker.

Job seekers are far more responsive to this approach, as they feel caseworkers are working together for their benefit, they feel less judged and they get more timely and consistent assistance focused on their barriers and aspirations. Over time, the collaboration between co-located workers breaks down barriers between contracted programs.

There is great potential to learn from these innovations in considering additional reforms to active labour market policy that apply social inclusion principles through adequate investment in integrated services.

The emerging evidence will continue to raise questions about the efficacy of the current employment services arrangements and the assumptions about 'customer' behaviour which prioritise compulsion over engagement. The challenge will be reconfiguring the governance and contracting of employment services so as to enable the delivery of more effective assistance for disadvantaged job seekers.

Michael Horn
(03) 9483 2496
mhorn@bsl.org.au

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

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Brotherhood of St Laurence
67 Brunswick Street
Fitzroy, Victoria 3065, Australia
ABN 24 603 467 024

Telephone: (03) 9483 1183
Facsimile: (03) 9417 2691
Email: publications@bsl.org.au

From the General Manager

At a recent BSL workshop convened by Brian Howe to consider citizen participation in urban planning and community development, there was a remarkable consensus that Australians are rediscovering their social voice and taking responsibility for community issues. This was seen in action on issues like homelessness and social isolation of the aged by faith-based communities and service groups such as Rotary; in more intentional community organisation around issues such as climate change and refugees; and in stunning large-scale initiatives such as the 1000 young people who trekked in April from all parts of Australia to Parliament House in their campaign to 'Make Poverty History'.

How these movements evolve will be critical for the future development of the inclusive society agenda in Australia. For some time the research community has been inclined to think that the only voice worth listening to in policy development is the 'expert'. Truly policy has to be evidence-based, but that evidence has to be grounded in people's experience and aspirations. As Michael Horn writes in our front page article, we need a new dimension in policy and program development which is underpinned by the proposition that people are not passive consumers but active citizens and co-producers of the society they value.

User perspectives

The Brotherhood has a proud history of giving voice in its research to disadvantaged groups who too often go unheard, and this issue of *Comment* features insights from people using Brotherhood services. Dina Bowman reports on participants' experience of training courses, highlighting the need for training to be complemented by ongoing support, if disadvantaged job seekers are to move successfully into continuing employment. Sharon Bond's interviews show vividly

how dental problems can prevent people from gaining paid work and maintaining rewarding relationships.

Similarly, the research described by Helen Kimberley involved asking older people what is important to their wellbeing, instead of presuming that 'others know best'. The resulting capabilities framework will be used in evaluating the Brotherhood's own aged care in residential and community settings.

Other research priorities

In June we convened a successful roundtable on the emerging topic of flexicurity in Australia. Nine presenters and 30 participants representing business, government, academic and community sectors agreed that here is a 'big idea' which offers a framework for rethinking how we can link concerns with social security to the need for labour market flexibility. Further Brotherhood research and planning for a conference are under way.

The Brotherhood is expanding significantly its capacity in the area of financial inclusion. Research manager Zuleika Arashiro writes about the need for a multi-pronged approach which not only assists individuals through matched savings and affordable loans, but also targets the structures that compound financial exclusion.

Our research about young people, especially those who feel alienated from mainstream schooling, informed two recent policy submissions to the Victorian Government. As Geoge Myconos and Emily Duizend explain, the Brotherhood highlighted the need to resource diverse learning environments, skilled staff, and strong career and support services to ensure that young people move confidently from school to further training, study or employment.

In relation to climate change, our team has commenced a study of the potential benefits of replacing inefficient refrigerators in low-income and private rental households, for the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

Seminars and conferences

Our weekly lunchtime seminars have been very well supported. If you are unable to attend, you can access the presentations and audiofiles soon afterwards on our website.

RPC staff have presented papers both here and overseas. Paul Smyth spoke on the British social policy legacy in Australia at a symposium on 'Colonialism and Welfare' at the London School of Economics. Dina Bowman presented on the economics of inequality, and Sonia Martin on young people and activation employment policies, at the World Congress of Sociology in Gothenberg. We were well represented at the Australian Institute of Family Studies conference by Janet Taylor presenting on the Life Chances study, Tony Barnett on the national HIPPPY evaluation, and Eve Bodsworth on the Making Work Pay research.

New appointment

In September, we will welcome Professor Simon Biggs. Simon has been Professor of Gerontology and Director of the Institute of Gerontology at Kings College, University of London. He will take up his joint appointment as Professor of Social Policy and Gerontology at the University of Melbourne as well as Senior Manager for Retirement and Ageing in our research and policy centre.

Paul Smyth

(03) 9483 1177
psmyth@bsl.org.au

Of finance and fairness Programs and policies to address exclusion

Over the last two decades, economic liberalisation has been accompanied by the erosion of traditional welfare states. This structural transformation has raised individual levels of financial vulnerability, at the same time that citizens have faced an increasing pressure to accept the individualisation of responsibilities and risk (Denney 2008). It was within this context that 'financial inclusion' became a popular term. Still, like 'social inclusion', financial inclusion can be applied to very different views of how the interaction of social, political and economic forces shape exclusionary contexts (Levitas 2005). Ultimately, the transformative effect that financial inclusion policies achieve will depend largely on their capacity to address sensitive questions, such as who in our society is privileged by the current allocation of government tax concessions and benefits.

The Australian community and corporate sectors have partnered in the development of innovative microfinance programs to assist financially disadvantaged groups, including microloans, and the first Australian matched savings program Saver Plus, among other initiatives. The Australian Government's financial support for these programs, announced in 2009, and more recently, its support for community development finance institutions, point in a positive direction. However Australia still lacks a policy vision of what financial inclusion could mean in our context.

This absence of a well-established policy vision can be converted into an opportunity. Australia is in a privileged position from which it can advance alternatives on financial inclusion which will have social justice as a core value. But transformative, as opposed to conservative, financial inclusion

policies will demand actions that not only provide individual and community-based assistance but also target the systemic barriers that feed the process of financial exclusion (Arashiro forthcoming).

Financial exclusion indicators

In developed countries, the fact that some people still operate their finances without a bank account is an obvious sign of exclusion. But even when almost everyone has a basic bank account for daily transactions, effective access to appropriate credit, insurance, savings, and other financial services has also become essential to reduce individual financial vulnerability and insecurity.

Burkett and Sheehan (2009, p.3), who provide the most recent analysis of the national challenges faced in microfinance, define financial exclusion as:

a process whereby a person, group or organisation lacks or is denied access to affordable, appropriate and fair financial products and services, with the result that their ability to participate fully in social and economic activities is reduced, financial hardship is increased, and poverty (measured by income, debt and assets) is exacerbated.

Like the notions of poverty and social exclusion, financial exclusion needs to be contextualised. Inequality in income distribution in Australia is below the OECD average (OECD 2008). However, within Australia, income inequality in 2007–08 was greater than in 1994–95 (ABS 2009).

Moreover, inequality in wealth distribution is high and reinforced in part by the regressive effect of government tax concessions. From some \$74.4 billion that the government distributes through housing-related tax concessions and benefits, and superannuation, the

vast majority goes to the wealthier Australians (Brody & McNess 2009). A Reserve Bank of Australia report (2009) also suggests that unequal wealth distribution deserves attention. Using data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey conducted in 2006, the researchers identified that the majority of people who registered *no change or reduction* in their non-financial assets—that is, primarily real estate properties, vehicles, and business assets—did not own a house. As in the UK (Hills, Sefton & Stewart 2009), wealth inequality in Australia may be expected to increase if the rising prices of major assets such as housing continue to create unequal opportunities to accumulate assets. Since lack of assets as a buffer in a financial shock is a major cause of vulnerability and insecurity, the implications of wealth distribution for financial inclusion cannot be ignored.

Policy options

Initiatives to stimulate asset building and develop financial capabilities have become core financial inclusion policies overseas. In the UK, US and Canada, these have included government matched savings programs such as the Saving Gateway and Individual Development Accounts, and specific saving incentives attached to children. In Australia, the first matched savings program to be supported by the Commonwealth is Saver Plus, which has been now expanded to 60 sites.

The stimulus to individual asset building and development of financial skills is positive but not sufficient. If governments adopt these instruments as a means to *individualise* the problem of financial exclusion, with less attention placed on the structural

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causes for exclusion, they will at best provide palliative care.

In 2007–08, some 12.5 per cent of Australians were living in households with high financial stress (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2009). An earlier study of those living under financial stress in Australia (Worthington 2006) also identified socio-demographic characteristics, such as having children, number of household dependants, income, age of the household head, and being a recent migrant from North Africa and the Middle East, as variables associated with higher stress. Single parents were estimated to be two to three times more likely to face financial stress than couples. It is worth noting that single parents and immigrants of non-English speaking background also rank amongst the most affected in measures of social exclusion (Scutella, Wilkins & Kostenko 2009).

The Brotherhood's research points to the need for a transformative approach to financial inclusion, one that is able to address individual and structural factors, by combining:

- correction of the distorted distribution of tax benefits, which maintains the disparity in opportunities for asset accumulation and privileges wealthier people
- sustained work to achieve effective and fair access to financial products and services for the financially disadvantaged
- financial education and free advice services, supporting people to maximise their income, optimise their financial decisions and exercise their legal rights
- both private and public savings and asset-building initiatives

- partnerships amongst the public, corporate and community sectors to reach scale and sustainability in existing financial inclusion programs.

It is possible for Australia to pave the way to link financial inclusion with fairness. In order to avoid viewing social and economic systems as static blocks in which individuals have a fixed place, financial inclusion needs to be seen as a process which explicitly recognises the human dignity of those who have been excluded, through a dynamic interaction in which the mainstream itself is transformed. This will not solve all the challenges of the social policy agenda, but it is certainly a requirement if we are committed to social justice.

Zuleika Arashiro
(03) 9483 1380
zarashiro@bsl.org.au

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Shaping future education and youth transitions to work

In recent years, Australia's approach to education and assisting the transition to work has undergone significant change. State and federal governments aim to increase educational attainment by setting targets for Year 12 completion, raising the school leaving age, and promoting school–community–business partnerships. The Youth Compact—the cornerstone of reform—guarantees training places and withdraws income support for unemployed early school leavers who are not in education or training. We have also witnessed better access to vocational training, and indications that 'flexible learning options'—typically provided by community organisations for 'at risk' students—will increasingly complement mainstream education.

More young people are opting for educational programs that emphasise 'adult' and 'applied' learning. Senior secondary enrolments in the Victorian Certificate in Applied Learning (VCAL) have risen steadily, from 14,093 in 2007 to 17,699 in 2009 (VCAA 2010). Enrolments in vocational education and training (VET) diploma qualifications increased by 17% from 2008 to 2009 and in Certificate IV qualifications by 15% (NCVER 2010).

The research community is attuned to these developments (Barnett 2005; Blake 2006, 2007; Edwards 2007; KPMG 2009). Recent Brotherhood research has focused on learning support initiatives (Bond 2009), the cost burden of education for low-income families (Bond & Horn 2009), the experiences of early school leavers (Taylor & Gee 2009) and youth disengagement (Taylor 2009 unpub.). An evaluation of the Brotherhood's 'pre-Community VCAL' course based at the Frankston High Street Centre highlighted the effectiveness of flexible programs for disengaged youth (Myconos 2010).

The program contrasted sharply with approaches in mainstream schools. It featured more student autonomy, small classes, less regimentation, applied learning principles, and close collaboration between educators to ensure effective pastoral care and career guidance.

This research has informed recent Brotherhood submissions to government including a response to the DEECD's directions paper on flexible learning options (DEECD 2010). We highlighted the need not only to de-stigmatise the flexible learning sector, but also to encourage mainstream education networks to look upon the sector as a resource, and the staff as specialist professionals with valuable knowledge.

A perennial concern shared by providers of flexible learning is the lack of access to resources and training made available to teachers in schools. Hence there is a need for an accreditation system so that those providers catering for 'at risk' young people can access comparable resources.

It is clear that government must promote teaching in community settings as a legitimate career path and work to increase remuneration and to help retention in the sector. Similarly, teacher training courses should incorporate modules that develop the skills needed in non-mainstream settings, notably literacy and numeracy teaching skills, and include these settings for teaching rounds and fieldwork. For teacher re-registration, government should prescribe a minimum amount of professional development about better understanding student disengagement.

The Brotherhood's submission also called for changes to ensure schools commit to more rigorous use of individual student learning

plans, taking into account barriers to participation. We envisaged a system that would give external providers limited access to this information, as well as to information gleaned from the new Victorian Student Number regime.

Our evaluation of the pre-Community VCAL program highlighted the need to increase funding for disadvantaged youth who opt for flexible learning options. Significant changes to the existing Student Resource Package model are required so that allocations reflect the varying needs of young people. Also important is a more centralised approach that removes the frustrations and inefficiencies associated with maintaining contracts with each school that refers students to non-conventional, vocationally oriented programs.

Youth transitions

A second submission, to the DEECD/DIIRD's *Stronger futures for all young Victorians* discussion paper, focused on services for youth moving from school to training or work. Presently there exists too much fragmentation and overlap, with different accountability and reporting obligations compromising effectiveness. Consolidation is required that streamlines services provided by the Youth Transitions Support Initiative, Youth Connections, Reconnect, Youth Supported Accommodation Assistance Program and Family Mediation, and the Local Learning Employment and Networks. An expanded Youth Connections Service is needed, with greater funding for triage and data collection, and increased capacity to broker flexible learning provision for clients. Youth Connections should also have access to family support, improved support for young refugees and migrants, and access to the Office for Youth Advance program.

There is a need for an accreditation system so that those providers catering for 'at risk' young people can access comparable resources.

There is need for systemic funding for learning support programs for young people in school, TAFE and university (Bond 2009), and pastoral support for young people to complete their certificate, apprenticeship or a degree. The Brotherhood's service experience and research has identified a need to restructure school management systems to create a legitimate place in every school, separate from teaching and administration, for student welfare and careers pathway transition support. This would enable better management of the Student Mapping tool, welfare support and the implementation of Managed Individual Pathways. A state-wide roll-out of the Parents as Career Transitions Supports (PACTS) program, as well as the creation of free community careers advice and resource services, would help young people to make informed choices.

There is a need to plan for, and fund, more varied senior secondary education options so that the needs of disadvantaged and 'at risk' students are met. Such reform would include providing more adult learning environments in all regions, as well as including academic pathways within such settings. Local planning would be strengthened to better assess local needs, and broker diverse options, leading to a greater choice of learning environments, and qualifications, and access to flexible learning providers for those young people who are at risk of disengaging.

We are witnessing a re-appraisal of the way education, training, and support services for young job seekers are provided. A number of questions arise:

- How might education planners reconcile the increased numbers of students remaining in school with the need to provide

suitable learning options for this diverse cohort?

- Do rising VCAL enrolments for post-compulsory age youth also indicate a growing preference for applied learning among younger groups? If so, how might this affect our understanding of 'transition' thresholds from school to work?
- How can the plethora of services and programs be streamlined and made more user-friendly?

It seems clear that schools cannot solve the challenge of poor attainment in isolation. There is a growing awareness of the importance of combining adult and vocational education principles with conventional teacher-centred, classroom-based pedagogies, and of preserving connections between disengaged youth and education. Similarly, there is a growing awareness of the need to improve transition support for those moving out of mainstream education, and into further training or employment opportunities.

George Myconos
(03) 9483 2439
gmyconos@bsl.org.au

Emily Duizend
(03) 9483 1392
eduizend@bsl.org.au

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Schools cannot solve the challenge of poor attainment in isolation.

A life that I value Investigating capabilities and social inclusion of aged care clients

The Social Inclusion and BSL Aged Care Research Project constitutes a strand in the Brotherhood effort toward creating a more inclusive society in Australia. Reflecting the three aspirations of the federal government's social inclusion agenda, it seeks to reduce disadvantage, increase social, civic and economic participation and develop a greater voice and greater responsibility among people living their second fifty years of life. Our research examines, from the perspective of Brotherhood aged care clients, what older people value in life and what enables them to lead fulfilled and happy lives.

At a time when the rights of older people in Australia are often undermined by social stereotypes that equate ageing with deficit and by well-intentioned social and care services that, in a risk-averse environment, often curtail independence and choice, the Brotherhood decided to examine its own aged care service delivery from a capabilities perspective.

The value of the capabilities approach, an approach to understanding social inclusion that is growing both in Australia and internationally, is that it goes beyond orthodox economic indicators of poverty and disadvantage which concentrate primarily on income, arguing rather that there are many dimensions which interact to cause deprivation. As an early adopter of this approach, the Brotherhood analysed dimensions of poverty and disadvantage in Australia in each of four life transitions in its Social Barometers. The dimensions used in *The Brotherhood's Social Barometer: living the second fifty years* (Kimberley & Simons 2009) are: employment, education and training, economic resources, housing, physical health, mental health, safety and social participation.

Capabilities and freedom

However, such dimensions alone do not satisfy the capabilities approach to understanding and combating poverty, deprivation and social exclusion. In his conception of capabilities, Amartya Sen, a Nobel prize-winning economist, envisaged capabilities as the freedom people need to be and do what constitutes a good life in their culture, in their society. That is, people need to be free to choose a life they have reason to value (Sen 1999).

Drawing on Rawls (1976), Sen pointed out that in order to be free to be and do what they value, people need commodities or primary goods, which are the 'general-purpose means that help anyone to promote his or her ends', and include 'rights, liberties, opportunities, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect' (Sen 1999). But people need not only 'goods'. They also need 'the relevant personal characteristics that govern the *conversion* of primary goods into the person's ability to promote her ends' (Sen 1999).

At any given moment a person has a set of what Sen called 'achieved functionings', that is, the various things a person does and is. But are these achieved functionings what the person really values? Or are there other functionings that the person aspires to or would aspire to if they had greater freedom to choose? (Sen 1999).

Essential capabilities

Sen himself has refused to specify the capabilities people need to live a life that they value, arguing that these vary vastly among people of different cultures living in very different societies. However, he also contends that governments should be judged by the extent to which citizens are able to realise their capabilities. Martha Nussbaum, on the other hand, argues that since

the bases of good life are freedom and justice, there are essential aspects of living that need to be included in our consideration of capabilities, and she names ten.

Capabilities and services

Within a social inclusion framework, our interest at the Brotherhood is to find out what our clients value, to assess our aged care services from our clients' perspectives and build a new understanding of how to provide services that foster the lives that clients value. This is certainly consistent with current 'active ageing' policies and practices and may constitute a further development of 'person-centred care'.

Applying the capabilities approach enables us to identify ways in which BSL's aged care services can work best for older people to achieve their own definitions of 'the good life' (McCormick et al. 2009). This is especially relevant given the increasingly diverse lives of older people.

Such an approach is also supported by an increasing recognition that 'capabilities do influence health and well-being' (Anand 2005). The debate is thus increasingly focused on *how* to measure capabilities, rather than whether to use capability frameworks.

Using a capabilities framework for aged care service evaluation will improve understandings of the interconnected factors that facilitate social inclusion, enhancing opportunities and choices for older people. In particular, responding to individual capabilities identified through this research will ensure that older people are at the core of validating their own capabilities and so in a position to counter the dominance of professional perspectives.

Our research examines, from the perspective of Brotherhood aged care clients, what older people value in life and what enables them to lead fulfilled and happy lives.

In line with Nussbaum's and BSL's principles of enhancing human freedom and individual capabilities, Nussbaum's ten central life areas have been used as the basis for a participatory, 'bottom up' approach, including focus groups and questionnaires, to gather data on older people's 'experiences, preferences and views to inform future developments' (The Allen Consulting Group 2005). The capabilities distilled from this information constitute the rich and diverse elements of a multi-dimensional framework against which BSL's aged care programs and services can be mapped.

A capabilities framework

The dynamic and relative nature of the capabilities framework is critical to assessing the extent of inclusion and exclusion (Boese & Scutella 2006)—specifically, how far BSL's programs and services address people's valued capabilities. The capabilities include some material variables, but go well beyond these, reflecting the view that, while sufficient financial and material resources are crucial, they are 'not the most central resource' for older people to determine their quality of life, to exercise freedoms and choices or equal participation (Gilroy 2006).

More specifically, our capabilities framework encompasses *enabling* capabilities, indicating the extent of life possibilities and across personal and societal factors. The framework is structured using Nussbaum's ten life areas, from 'bodily health', 'bodily integration', 'senses, imagination and thought', 'emotions', and 'practical reason' to more social dimensions, like 'affiliation and social interaction' (e.g. with family and friends), 'self-respect and dignity', 'the natural environment', 'participation and activities' to 'political/material control over one's environment'.



It is important to note that pairs of apparently mutually exclusive capabilities such as 'doing things by myself' and 'doing things with like-minded people' occur both within and across these life areas and need to be retained in the framework to allow for the relative and sometimes contradictory nature of what individuals value.

People's differing concepts of what makes 'a good life' for them will certainly have implications for mapping BSL's aged services against a framework sufficiently flexible to encompass current person-centred and consumer-directed orientations to aged care. It will prepare the way for evaluating services from a capabilities perspective and give us the basis for identifying where there are gaps or where some specific services may need to be enhanced, enriched or even abandoned in pursuit of assisting all clients to build their capabilities.

Helen Kimberley, Robert Gruhn & Simon Huggins
(03) 9483 1306
hkimberley@bsl.org.au

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Training for work Insights from trainees

Vocational training has received much attention from both federal and state policy makers, yet recent research such as the analysis of the Productivity Places Program by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2009) suggests that training does not necessarily lead to employment.

In this context, our Training for Work study (Bowman & Souery 2010) had two main aims. The first, relatively modest, aim was to analyse the characteristics of the students and trainees involved in programs run by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. The second aim was to examine the trainees' perspectives on vocational training, including their motivations for doing training. We wanted to know what worked well and not so well. We also wanted to identify the factors that helped or hindered successful completion of training and the transition from training to paid employment.

Trainees

The Brotherhood's training services meet the needs of a very diverse population. Women aged over 35, who were not born in Australia, and who speak a language other than English predominated among enrolments in 2009. A total of 23

languages were represented, with English (58%), Somali (9%), Arabic (7%), and Amharic (5%) the most common preferred languages. While most trainees came from Frankston or surrounding areas, Fitzroy and Collingwood or Craigieburn, others lived across metropolitan Melbourne.

The main reasons interviewees gave for undertaking training were to gain or upgrade qualifications and to find employment. Overall, they spoke very positively about their training experiences. They highlighted the combination of committed teachers, support and a tailored approach as aiding successful completion of training.

Support before, during and after training

Our analysis suggested that where individuals had strong social networks and resources, training and formal credentials assisted them to secure employment. However, for many other students, training is only part of the solution. Without support and mentoring, a certificate or qualification is not sufficient to enable them to get and keep a job.

With tighter eligibility criteria for publicly funded places in accredited courses, matching

training with individual preferences is especially important, to avoid locking people into fields of study that do not match their skills or aspirations. The interviews suggest that some students and trainees need more preliminary support to ensure that the training is right for them—literacy and language assessment is important here, and not only for those of non-English speaking backgrounds. It is also essential that trainees and students understand any prerequisites, such as a driver's licence, before enrolling. This may require information to be provided in several formats, and to be repeated.

Next steps

We chose to focus on the perspective of trainees and students because understanding their motivations, aspirations and experiences is fundamental to the development of appropriate programs. Future research should examine the experience of trainers and employers to assess the effectiveness of training and vocational education from different perspectives.

The Training for Work research will inform the delivery of training and associated services by the Brotherhood, including the development of innovative approaches to delivering integrated services such as the new Centre for Work and Learning, Yarra.

Dina Bowman

(03) 9483 1373
dbowman@bsl.org.au

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Without support and mentoring, a certificate or qualification is not sufficient to enable them to get and keep a job.

Case study

Isaac* lives with wife and five children in public housing. He was born in southern Sudan to a family of nomads and cultivators. As a young boy he escaped the war in the South and completed secondary school in northern Sudan. After leaving school, his employment opportunities were limited. He worked as a hotel cleaner and later, in Egypt, he was active in working with the Sudanese refugee community.

Isaac completed a Certificate III in Community Services with the Brotherhood of St Laurence. The one-year traineeship was an opportunity to gain formal knowledge, skills and work experience, and a qualification. It was his first job in Australia.

When interviewed, Isaac was unemployed. He was contemplating future study, but for that, he noted, he would need a part-time job. He was using a job search club to look for work in community services as a cleaner. Isaac suggested trainees need more support after training, especially in seeking work.

* Isaac is a pseudonym.

A history of decay Time for the government to put teeth first

Dentistry holds a tenuous position in the world of health policy. The traditional separation of dentistry from medicine, treating the teeth apart from the rest of the body, is reflected in the exclusion of dental care from Medicare.

Political bickering over public dental care has continued for decades. The Labor Government's short-lived mid-1990s national program was replaced by the Coalition's Enhanced Primary Care dental program, available only to those suffering chronic and complex illness. The new Labor Government's 2008 attempt to replace that was twice blocked in the Senate, while a 'Denticare' proposal from the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission adds to the confusion. At state level, Victoria (for example) provides subsidised dental services for low-income groups but the waiting lists are years long.

One survey of welfare recipients found almost 60 per cent could not access dental treatment (Saunders 2007). The consequences of poor dental care are felt by one-quarter of Australian adults who have untreated tooth decay, one-fifth with moderate gum disease, and over one-tenth with inadequate dentition. These conditions are even more prevalent among low-income groups (AIHW 2007).

On Victoria's Mornington Peninsula the wait for public dental care is up to 41 months for general care and 29 months for dentures (June 2009). The Brotherhood's 'Teeth First' Trial provided treatment to 35 highly disadvantaged people whose poor dental health affected their ability to go about their daily activities (Bond 2010). Three-quarters had had a problem for two years or more. Unable to afford private treatment, they paid the price in terms of

their broader health and wellbeing, social and economic participation.

Human impact of dental problems
The majority lived in pain, and half took regular medication. Antibiotics were required to manage frequent infections. Mark regularly pricked his gums to drain pus. Joshua, homeless at fifteen, was driven to 'self dentistry', seeking relief with a hammer and chisel. Many Trial participants lived on restricted diets of 'sloppy' food. Beyond the nutritional effects was the impact on festive occasions, and the loss of simple pleasures like sharing a plate of nachos with friends.

Embarrassment caused by unsightly or missing teeth affected participants' self-esteem and relationships. Stephanie covered her mouth with her hand when talking; others tried to avoid smiling or laughing altogether. Matthew had plenty of mates but his teeth made it difficult to meet girls. Sue received dentures through the Trial and described her 8-year-old's amazement when she saw her mother with teeth for the first time.

Dental problems were a barrier to the long-term unemployed clients' participation in training and employment. Mark was passed over for jobs because his appearance was deemed off-putting to customers. Joshua said he needed to be 'presentable' even for factory work, but he felt he 'looked terrible'. However, soon after receiving treatment, one participant was working, two expected to find work quickly and one was to undertake training.

Policy imperatives
The failure of successive governments to provide timely public dental care shows disregard for the dignity of low-income Australians. Such dental care is essential if we are to become

an inclusive society that enables people to participate in their communities, study or work unhampered by poor oral health.

Also, it is bad economic management to have 650,000 Australians (Department of Parliamentary Services 2007) on dental waiting lists. This puts strain on the health system through doctor and emergency room visits, and bandaids solutions like antibiotics. It also costs our economy through sick days and welfare benefits.

The Brotherhood calls on the federal government to treat the teeth as part of the body and include dental services in Medicare. It's time to put teeth first.

Note: Participants have been given pseudonyms in this article.

Sharon Bond
(03) 9483 2495
sbond@bsl.org.au

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Embarrassment caused by unsightly or missing teeth affected participants' self-esteem and relationships.

National evaluation of HIPPY

Building a solid evidence base

The national evaluation of the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) aims to assess the effectiveness of the program in preparing 4-year-old children from disadvantaged families to be as ready for school as their average Australian counterpart. We are now just over halfway through tracking the progress of 220 HIPPY parents and children from their commencement in the program in early 2009 to ‘graduation’ at the end of 2010.

The primary method for evaluating the effectiveness of a social intervention is the Randomised Controlled Trial (Oakley 1998; Chalmers 2003; Rutter 2006; Petticrew 2007). However it is not always possible to do an RCT. Propensity score matching has in recent years become the preferred method for establishing a comparison group and setting up the experimental condition when randomisation has not been possible (Melhuish, Belsky et al. 2008). To our knowledge the national evaluation of HIPPY represents the first time the

propensity score matching method has been used in Australia for the evaluation of a social intervention.

Encouraging signs

Preliminary findings about HIPPY are encouraging and resemble those of other studies in Australia over the last 10 years. For example, one measure of the child’s school readiness uses the booklet known as ‘Who Am I?’ which is completed by the child at three points in the study: baseline, 1 year and 2 years. As Figure 1 shows, the overall trend is very positive indeed. After one year, all HIPPY children who completed ‘Who Am I?’ showed improvement (four children did not want to do the task at this point).

Comments made by HIPPY parents also suggest that the program is having a positive impact on families:

At the beginning of the year, I could hardly keep him here for five minutes, now he’ll sit down and concentrate a lot more, at least half an hour.

[Before HIPPY] I used to be impatient and get angry or cross

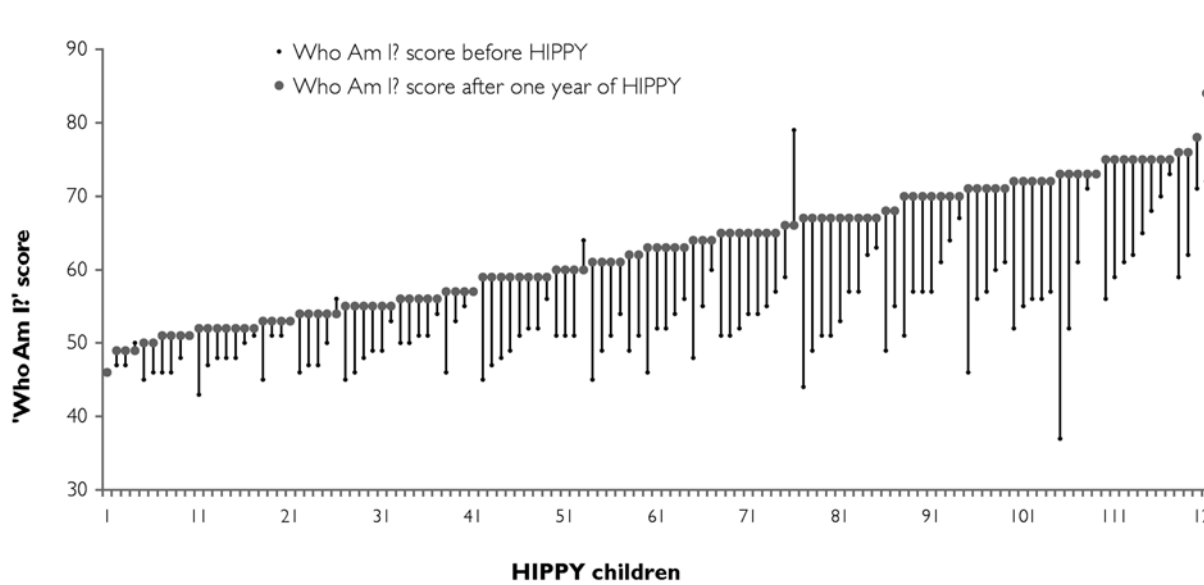
easily but now HIPPY taught me how to start a change.

Statistical rigour

The improved ‘Who Am I?’ scores could, in theory, be a result of child maturation. In order to more accurately assess the effectiveness of HIPPY, we need a comparison group who have the same characteristics as the HIPPY group at the start of the program but do not take part in HIPPY. In this way we can attribute any change in outcomes for the HIPPY group after two years to the program, given that in all other respects the groups were the same. If we are to be able to say that HIPPY causes an improvement in child school readiness, we have to know what happens without HIPPY.

But it is essential that the two groups allow valid comparison. Under a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT), eligibility and exclusion criteria are established up-front and all measurable and non-measurable differences are by chance equally randomised and assigned. It is then highly probable that the groups will look the same at the outset.

Figure 1: HIPPY child ‘Who Am I?’ scores before HIPPY and after one year of the program



It is not always possible, however, to do an RCT, even if it is logically and ethically the preferred method for making claims of causality/effectiveness of an intervention. Fortunately, for the HIPPY evaluation we were able to look to the sample of parents and children involved in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children as a comparison group. This is because LSAC studies 4-year-old children and collects information on the same outcome measures that concern us in the study of HIPPY: school readiness, parent-child relationship, parent wellbeing and social inclusion.

Nevertheless, the HIPPY and LSAC groups are substantially different. For example, in the LSAC sample 51% of parents have the lowest score (0) on a 'hardship scale' from 0 to 7, compared with 33% of parents in the HIPPY group, and this is a statistically significant difference.

Differences such as these undermine our ability to make claims of causality. In effect, if the two groups are not matched at baseline, all we are really measuring is the difference between the two groups.

So how can we get a meaningful comparison? If we combine the HIPPY and LSAC data sets we can use propensity score matching to establish the probability of any parent/child in the combined data set sharing the same household and socio-demographic characteristics as our HIPPY parent/child sample. We then select the LSAC parents/children who, based on the propensity score, in theory had the same chance of being a HIPPY parent/child but who are not in the HIPPY sample. Thus we find our matched comparison group.

Table 1 shows the *p* values for the test of significant difference between the HIPPY and LSAC

Table 1: Difference between HIPPY and LSAC groups before and after propensity score matching

Variable	Before propensity score matching	After propensity score matching
Hardship score	<i>p</i> = 0.001	<i>p</i> = 0.56
SEIFA index of area-based disadvantage	<i>p</i> < 0.0001	<i>p</i> = 0.27
'Who am I?' score	<i>p</i> < 0.0001	<i>p</i> = 0.43
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	<i>p</i> < 0.0001	<i>p</i> = 0.29

groups on four variables, before and after propensity score matching. The two groups are significantly different (low *p* values) before propensity score matching but are no longer significantly different afterwards, which will allow us to make more valid claims concerning probable effectiveness of HIPPY.

The propensity score matching technique enables researchers seeking to test the effectiveness of social interventions to make use of large-scale, longitudinal studies when an RCT is neither practically nor politically possible.

Assessing the results

Because LSAC does not collect data for children at 5 years, we are not able to make a precise comparison at the mid-point of our study. We are looking forward to completing a full analysis when the HIPPY children are 6-year-olds at the end of the two-year study period.

Tony Barnett
(03) 9483 2471
tbarnett@bsl.org.au

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Research briefs

Reviewing the outcomes of the Myer Foundation 2020 Vision for Aged Care in Australia

In their joint preface to the review of the Myer Foundation 2020 Vision for Aged Care project (Reynolds 2009), Mr Baillieu Myer and Sir Arvi Parvo asserted that ‘the launch of the Brotherhood of St Laurence’s 2020 Vision Outcomes Review could not be more timely’. This proved to be prescient, with the release soon afterwards of the Productivity Commission issues paper, *Caring for older Australians*. The *Outcomes Review* is a close assessment of progress toward achieving the Myer 2020 Vision. Sadly, Astrid Reynolds reports, policy advances in aged care have been very slow. However, she also finds:

- the project made important contributions to reform processes in community care in particular
- the background and research papers commissioned by the

project provided valuable new documentation of the issues associated with population ageing

- the project raised awareness and stimulated discussion within the philanthropic sector about its role in influencing ageing policy and funding.

Reynolds also concludes that the vision and directions outlined in *The Myer Foundation 2020: A Vision for Aged Care in Australia* remain very relevant, and suggests three high-order issues that could usefully underpin thinking about possible focus and directions:

- The views of older people need to be better understood.
- Multidimensional issues influence capacity for independence and positive ageing.

- Old stereotypes and negative attitudes are not acceptable or helpful.

The findings of this review will be an important source for the Brotherhood to consider in preparing its response to the Productivity Commission, as no doubt they will be for the Myer Foundation and other philanthropic organisations in Australia, especially the members of the Philanthropy Australia Ageing Futures Affinity Group.

The report can be accessed at http://www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/Reynolds_Myer_2020_Vision_for_Aged_Care_outcomes_review_2009.pdf.

Helen Kimberley
(03) 9483 1306
hkimberley@bsl.org.au

Evaluating the High Rise Public Housing Recycling Project

Research staff recently completed an evaluation of the High Rise Public Housing Recycling Project (HaRP) which has been funded by Sustainability Victoria in the Fitzroy and Collingwood high-rise estates since late 2006. The Brotherhood’s Community Contact Services team took the lead in establishing the recycling service and have coordinated day-to-day operations. This has involved close consultation and educational initiatives with residents.

The evaluation estimated that the program, which provides part-time employment for five residents, collected an average of 2.7 (metric) tonnes of material per month from the Collingwood estate, and 5.1 tonnes per month from the

Fitzroy estate. The achievement is significant if one considers that no recycling program had previously existed in these communities. It is all the more impressive given that many estate residents are from CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) backgrounds and these include people recently arrived in Australia experiencing dislocation and ‘culture shock’.

The report recommended:

- making outreach and education a more systematic and integral component of the service
- considering staged integration with the estate cleaning services
- reviewing the decision to exclude paper and cardboard collection

- reviewing the positioning of bins in the drying rooms
- providing more resources for routine cleaning of recycling bins
- making contingency plans to enable the service to function well during large-scale renovations.

The report *Recycling rising high: an evaluation of the High Rise Public Housing Recycling Project* will be available on the Brotherhood website.

George Myconos
(03) 9483 2439
gmyconos@bsl.org.au

New information on poverty, social inclusion, life transitions and critical social issues

Following are selected items recently added to the Brotherhood Library catalogue. Search the online catalogue or contact the library staff for more information about the collection (phone and email details below).

ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS
Altman, J 2010, *Income management and the rights of Indigenous Australians to equity*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Canberra, <<http://caep.r.anu.edu.au/Publications/topical/2010TI3.php>>.

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MIGRATION ISSUES
Australian Human Rights Commission 2010, *In our words: African Australians: a review of human rights and social inclusion issues*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney, <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/review/in_our_own_words.pdf>.

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Information services for the public

The Brotherhood of St Laurence library offers a specialist focus on issues such as poverty, unemployment, aged care, social policy and welfare, taxation and housing.

The Library is open to the public by appointment. Please contact us to arrange a suitable time. Library hours are Monday to Friday 9 am to 5 pm (closed public holidays). Books can be borrowed by the public through the inter-library loan system (enquire at your regular library).

To find out whether we can help you, ring the Library on (03) 9483 1387 or (03) 9483 1388, or email <library@bsl.org.au>.

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

Chelsea Seniors Access IT Project

The Chelsea Seniors Access IT project is being run by Chelsea Community Renewal in partnership with the City of Kingston, the Brotherhood of St Laurence and AccessCare Southern. Funded by the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development, it will provide computers and internet access at home, with intensive training and support, to twenty seniors.

The residents have been identified as socially isolated or at risk of becoming isolated due to their own health or their role as a carer. Participants will be able to socialise in a relaxed atmosphere at an informal lunch provided at each training session. This innovative approach will not only facilitate seniors' access to information technology and training but will also increase opportunities for social networking and community participation.

The RPC will be evaluating the project until May 2011. Qualitative and quantitative methods will be used within an action research model, in which all stakeholders are engaged and able to reflect on the program while it is running. As a result, the evaluation team can inform continuous improvement.

Bonnie Simons
(03) 9483 1379
bsimons@bsl.org.au

Recent policy submissions

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

- Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the DEEWR tender process to award employment services contracts, May 2009
- Submission to Australian Treasury regarding the National Consumer Credit Protection Bill 2009, May 2009
- Submission to the Review of Alternative Education in Victoria, May 2009
- Submission to the Community Affairs Legislation Committee regarding the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Pension Reform and Other Budget Measures) Bill, June 2009
- *Religion, welfare and the new social contract in Australia*: submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into the Contribution of the Not for Profit Sector, July 2009
- BSL Response to the Aged Care Complaints Investigation Scheme Consultation Paper, Department of Health and Ageing, August 2009
- The contribution of the not-for-profit sector: submission in response to the draft report of the Productivity Commission, December 2009
- Submission to the Senate Committee Inquiry into Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment bills, February 2010
- Submission to the Family and Community Development Committee Inquiry into the Adequacy and Future Directions of Public Housing in Victoria, February 2010
- Response to Australian Energy Regulator (AER) issues paper on retail energy pricing information guidelines, April 2010
- Response to Treasury options paper on unfair terms in insurance contracts, April 2010
- Joint submission by Melbourne Citymission, Brotherhood of St Laurence and Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service to the review of the implementation of Securing Jobs for Your Future – Skills for Victoria, May 2010
- Response to the DEECD Directions Paper *Pathways to re-engagement through flexible learning options*, May 2010
- Response to the *Stronger futures for all young Victorians* discussion paper on the youth transitions system, June 2010.

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