



Submission to the Social Inclusion Board

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About St Laurence Community Services

St Laurence Community Services Inc was created in 1996 after the Brotherhood of St Laurence divested its Geelong region operations, establishing St Laurence as a new and innovative regional orientated charitable organisation.

We are Public Benevolent Institution that delivers a range of human services including Residential and Community – based Aged Care, Disability Support and Further Education Services, Disability Enterprises, Retirement Living and Employment and Training Services.

Our 500 staff and over 300 volunteers operate from 24 sites spanning Lara, Colac, Warrnambool and the Western Victoria-Wimmera Regions

St Laurence is proud to serve over 10, 000 clients and their families across our local communities.

Our mission is to *help people help themselves*, and our vision is to innovate and build resilient, inclusive communities to help people achieve their full potential.

About Bethany

Bethany's mission is to support and strengthen communities. We work to build better family relationships, support parents caring for children, assist people who are homeless or at risk and those affected by family violence and problem gambling.

Bethany first opened its doors in May 1868 as the Geelong Female Refuge and was established to provide refuge and rehabilitation to the poor women of Geelong.

As political, social and economic trends changed so too did the needs of the community. Over the years Bethany has responded to those changes and has provided services that have included: baby's home, adoption agency, mother craft training centre, kindergarten and day care service.

Today Bethany's mission is to *Support and Strengthen Communities* and we are a dynamic and diverse human services organisation employing 100 staff and 60 volunteers. Bethany has a significant presence in the Geelong community and the wider welfare sector and has a strong history of commitment and provision of high quality and innovative services. Each year more than 6000 individuals and families experiencing difficulties in their lives access one or more of our services.

Introduction

This submission seeks to highlight the application of social inclusion principles to the Barwon South West Region of Victoria, with a particular focus on two significant social issues which contribute to cycles of disadvantage – homelessness and employment.

These two issues have been used as examples, but should not distract from a more holistic or multi dimensional approach to addressing disadvantage. We argue that all issues of disadvantage or exclusion are interrelated and need to be addressed by interventions and policies that work from the bottom up and the top down. Interventions, that can break the cycle of disadvantage need to not only focus on disadvantage but focus on ‘what works’ and how the middle class are faring. Policies aimed at disadvantage can often perpetuate the cycle they are trying to alleviate.

Interventions can only begin to break cycles of disadvantage with: joined up human services; stronger partnerships between business, government (local, state and federal) and the community; meaningful collaboration moving from a welfare to wellbeing model and working to best practice from a strong evaluative evidence base. Only with this as a long term vision will we be able to substantially change the face of disadvantage.

Regional Demographics

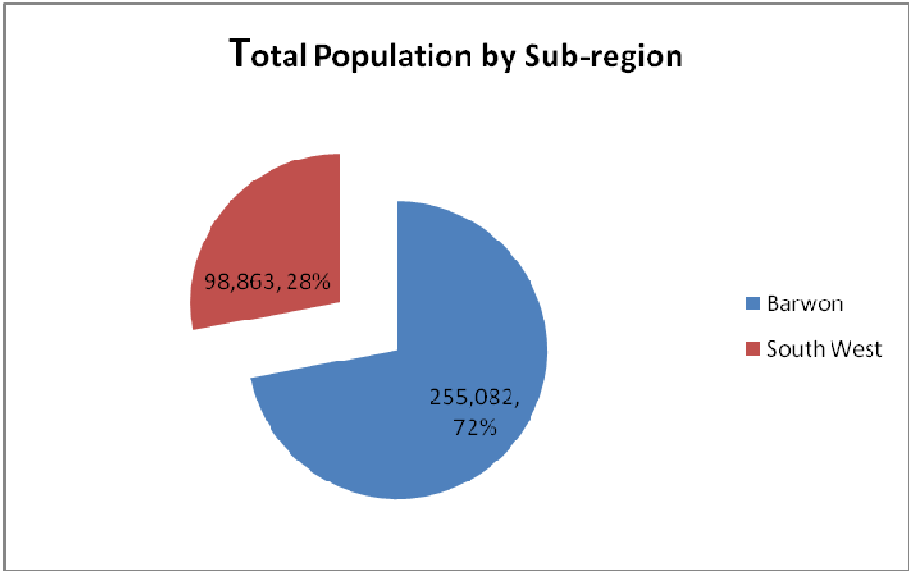
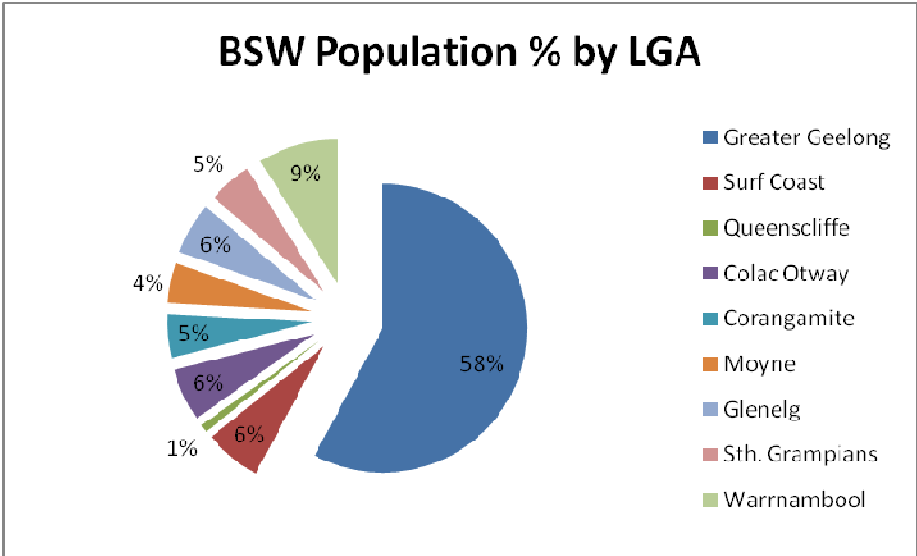
Barwon South West encompasses Geelong in the east and extends along the south coast to Warrnambool, Portland and the border with South Australia in the west. The Barwon South West consists of nine Local Government Areas (LGAs). The Barwon South West traditional primary source of employment has been manufacturing and agriculture with the change in economic climate and relocation or termination of these industries traditional employment is being replaced by academic and government services.

The following demographic information provides a summary of data obtained from the ABS 2006 census and from the population projections obtained from the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD).

Population as at 2006 Census

The total population of the BSW Region in 2006 was 341,423. Of these, 174, 212 were females and 167,274 males.

Population by LGA	
LGA	Population
Greater Geelong	197,478
Surf Coast	21,773
Queenscliffe	3,017
Colac Otway	20,297
Corangamite	16,617
Moyne	15,452
Glenelg	19,759
Sth. Grampians	16,639
Warrnambool	30,391
TOTAL	341,423



As can be seen from the above data, the City of Greater Geelong has more than 50% of the regional population and with the addition of Surf Coast, Queenscliffe and Colac-Otway, the Barwon Sub-region has 72% of the regional population and the South West has 28% of the population.

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)

SEIFA is an index used to rank localities based on their relative social and economic well being. It draws together a number of indicators including income, educational achievement, unemployment and occupational type. An index score of 1000 indicates the medium ranking, scores less than 1000 indicate an area is relatively disadvantaged compared to the medium across Australia while scores greater than 1000 indicate an area is relatively advantaged compared to the medium.

The SEIFA index for Local Government Areas in the Barwon South West makes identifies areas of disadvantage within Barwon South West Regions the relevant SEIFA indices for 2001 and 2006. A noticeable trend seen between 2001 and 2006 overall has experienced an approximate 3% increase in its level of relative advantage. This has been reflected across most of Local Government Area with only three areas showing an index over 1000 which shows that six Local Government Areas are experiencing disadvantage.

Area	SEIFA index 2001	SEIFA index 2006
Glenelg	934.4	962.0
Colac Otway	943.6	967.3
Corangamite	951.3	989.5
City of Greater Geelong	972.7	992.9
Warrnambool	967.7	993.5
Sth Grampians	963.3	996.1
Moyne	960.1	1012.6
Queenscliffe	1054.9	1048.8
Surf coast	1034.4	1065.0

The SEIFA index serves to highlight the diversity of the Barwon South West area and the relative disadvantage across LGAs. As well as being low on the SEIFA scale the Community and Healthy Wellbeing Profile (2009) identifies that the G21 disadvantaged areas have 'poorer determinants of health outcomes, have higher levels of physical and mental ill health, and have higher rates of chronic disease and lower life expectancies'.

Housing as a way to break out of the cycle of poverty

The causes of homelessness include a shortage of affordable housing, long term unemployment, mental health issues, substance abuse, financial difficulty, family violence and family and relationship breakdown. Homelessness includes people who are sleeping rough, as well as people staying in temporary, unstable or substandard accommodation. Many people who are homeless cycle between homelessness and marginal housing and people are staying in crisis accommodation for longer because they have nowhere else to go. The impact of homelessness is a critical and complex community responsibility.

The affects of homelessness and disadvantage and its impact on individuals, families and society is well documented. In Australia, around 105,000 people are homeless on any given night. While the overall rate of homelessness has been relatively stable over the last 12 years, increasing numbers of children, families and older people are experiencing homelessness. Indigenous people are currently over-represented in the homeless population.

Several Commonwealth and State government programs that seek to address homelessness are funded in the Barwon South West Region. This region has successfully implemented the Opening Doors initiative in centralising intake for crisis homeless services. There are also a variety of housing services, such as Supported Assistance Accommodation Program (SAAP), Social Housing Advocacy Support Program (SHASP) and Homeless Outreach Mental Health Services (HOPS) whose main focus is on short term service delivery and this lack of long term vision restricts the opportunity to build community capacity and work collaboratively to permanently break the cycle of disadvantage.

Affordable and accessible housing is fundamental to achieving long-term, sustainable social inclusion, promoting quality of life. Social inclusion is also essential for health wellbeing and the dignity of our service users. Providing access to safe, affordable housing is only the first step in helping break the cycle of homelessness. This needs to be sustained by connecting people to strong, well funded and well informed support services which support clients with

long term support in accessing and maintaining housing such as a new Victorian Government initiative A Place to Call Home and Families at Risk of Homelessness. As the Victorian Homelessness 2020 Strategy (2009) highlighted ‘social inclusion means making homelessness a community issue requiring an integrated response’.

Employment as a way to break out of the cycle of disadvantage

The focus on employment as a solution to breaking the cycle of disadvantage is a narrow one. By stating that work equals inclusion sends a conflicting, perhaps unintended, message regarding those who cannot access paid work (i.e. to pay taxes) as being outside the mainstream – such as those who volunteer, those with caring roles for children, sick family members and ageing relatives or, people with disabilities or mental health issues.

The current iteration of employment policy being operationalised through the Job Services Australia (JSA) contract continues to reinforce the neo-liberalist understandings of poverty such as participation and capabilities of the individual rather than addressing the structural issues, which a social inclusion/exclusion framework should and can seek to redress. The policy focus assumes that social problems can be ameliorated by economic participation and the contract lacks the flexibility to address the multi-dimensional disadvantages of unemployment.

The JSA contract is not a social inclusion policy shift in employment but is a re-badging of mutual obligation and the subjugation of structural issues responsible for unemployment. Structural issues such as the disappearance of traditional work for the working class (for example the decline in manufacturing as seen in Geelong), as well as failing to redress the increase in middle class occupations has shifted focus away the shifting labour market and pathologises the individual who is seen as a ‘dole bludger’ and that being unemployed is a personal failure (Jamrozik, 2009).

The change in the labour market and how people access it has led to further inequalities in Australia. Specifically the casualisation of work and the increase in those who are only able to access part-time or seasonal work, as is often the case for young people. There is no silver bullet for unemployment, but if anything is to alleviate this, a response to structural issues needs to be based on the ‘allocation of human and material resources’. Allocation of resources should be placed into education – to improve the quality of the labour force; used to bolster the public sector and those who perform unpaid work (such as volunteers) should not be devalued nor should they perform work in the public sector or related organisations that can be conducted by paid workers. (Jamrozik, 2009:176-178).

The JSA contract can perpetuate the exclusion of job seekers when they are forced into courses or work that do not want to undertake under threat of losing their payments (Carney, 2008). This runs contrary to the Australian Government’s Social Inclusion principles of having a voice – one they cannot use and imposing opportunities which may run contrary to the aspirations of the job seeker. Courses and work must be meaningful to the individual and the individual’s aspirations must be heeded.

Aspirations are important for all people- disadvantaged or not – to help them achieve and envisage goals which motivate them to move forward. The facilitation of such aspirations needs to encourage and is generally an intensive process for those who have had little self-determination and have been discouraged by systems that dictate their lives such as Centrelink, the Department of Human Services or even the Department of Health. Empowering people to have the confidence to have aspirations are vital to any policy addressing cycles of disadvantage.

Interventions – what is needed?

There is a currently a disconnection between the rhetoric of the social inclusion board and what is happening in practice. St Laurence Community Services & G21 Geelong Region Alliance – convened a conference in Geelong

earlier this year to introduce the concept of Social Inclusion to the region. The conference brought together a wide range of human service agencies, both government and non-government, to discuss what social inclusion might mean for the Barwon South West Region. We discovered that while the Social Inclusion Board has been operational for over two years, there is little understanding of what it means operationally in the region. The concept of social inclusion while promising 'joined up services for joined up social problems' has delivered little to aid the breaking of the cycles of disadvantage. As Paul Smyth (2010) states social exclusion allows us to stop 'thinking about poverty primarily in terms of the single dimension of money but rather engage in a wholesale reconsideration of the ways in which our labour market and social services either enhance or constrain the life chances of Australians'.

To work collaboratively is often difficult as many agencies tend to focus on outcomes as most service agreements are input based e.g. number of hours delivered. Thus agencies are funded for delivery of services and not for development or capacity building activities. This makes the creation of authentic collaboration and partnerships difficult as agencies do not have time away from service delivery to reflect, engage with clients about their wants, and evaluate their practice and interventions. By not having this time away, we do a DIS-service to our clients and our community.

At the conference we asked delegates to consider how we leverage off social inclusion. The theme that emerged was around the capacity of agencies to join together to integrate service planning, enhance interventions, develop partnerships and strengthen interagency partnerships.

A number of human services agencies are presently engaged in a combined effort to bring about increased momentum to ongoing investigative and collaborative conversations identifying how social inclusion can help our local communities address disadvantage in this region.

In the Barwon South West region the G21 Geelong Region Alliance is the formal alliance of government, business and community organisations working together to improve people's lives. It is funded through the local governments of Colac Otway, Golden Plains, Greater Geelong, Queenscliff and Surf Coast. It is divided into Pillars which represent – Arts & Culture, Economic Development, Education & Training, Planning and Services, Health & Wellbeing, Transport, Environment and Sports and Recreation. This alliance is taking a geographical and issues based approach to the regions concerns. G21 as an alliance of businesses, government and community organisations are beginning to understand how all these issues are interrelated and that disadvantage cannot be tackled by just focussing on those who are disadvantaged. As Marmot *et al* (2008) state:

Community or civil society action on health inequities cannot be separated from the responsibility of the state to guarantee a comprehensive set of rights and ensure the fair distribution of essential material and social goods among population groups. Top-down and bottom-up approaches are equally as vital

Conclusion

The ability for agencies to access funds which allow them to adequately deliver services, network appropriately to create partnerships, so they can meet the needs of their clients is integral to being able to address the cycle of disadvantage. Without funding to build the capacity of agencies, issues such as homelessness and unemployment will continue to plague communities and perpetuate disadvantage. Interventions need to be targeted and well funded. Community agencies tend to be focussed on service delivery and outcomes which leaves little time to reflect and build their capacity to work more strategically in the community.

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