

DROPPING OFF THE EDGE: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia

The latest research of Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia on the distribution of disadvantage in Australian communities.

FOREWORD

Speaking in March 2006 on the occasion of his 10th anniversary in office, the Prime Minister, John Howard, challenged us to find ways of breaking down entrenched poverty when he said:

We need to find innovative ways to break the vicious cycles of poor parenting, low levels of education, unemployment and health problems that can afflict some individuals and communities. We need to find ways of restoring order to zones of chaos in some homes and communities – zones of chaos that can wreck young Australian lives.

With the publication of this report, Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia provide Australia with an important tool to address this challenge.

This research report, *Dropping off the edge*, identifies and describes the complex web of disadvantage that ensnares generations of Australians. The entrenched, intergenerational patterns identified could easily lead us to abandon any hope that public policy might be effectively deployed to address these problems. However, the report also identifies how and where public policy can be used effectively to overcome these long term problems. The report demonstrates that our strategies must be well targeted, multi-faceted and coordinated, sufficiently resourced and sustained.

Jesuit Social Services has completed two previous reports on the geographical distribution of social disadvantage in New South Wales and Victoria in the last ten years. While this report now provides a national picture of the extent of disadvantage in this country, it also builds on the knowledge we have already accumulated about these two states.

Dropping off the edge has been prepared because of our commitment to a more just society, a society in which the value and dignity of the lives of all Australians can be recognised. To quote the words of US Bishops in their statement “Economic Justice for All:

The prime purpose of this special commitment to the poor is to enable them to become active participants in the life of society. It is to enable all persons to share in and contribute to the common good. ...The extent of their suffering is a measure of how far we are from being a true community of persons.

If we are to advance our community together it is incumbent on all of us – churches, citizens, policy makers and governments at all levels – to do all we can to ensure all people share in the prosperity and comfort that Australia offers.

Julie Edwards
Chief Executive Officer
Jesuit Social Services

Frank Quinlan
National Director
Catholic Social Services Australia