

Reflection on participation in the 2020 Summit – Julie Edwards CEO

“By 2020 Australia should be known throughout the world for its diverse, fair, compassionate and respectful society.... andAustralia should be an inclusive society with an economy, not the other way around.”

This key statement from the ‘Strengthening Communities, Supporting Families and Social Inclusion’ stream of the 2020 Summit resonates with the vision and values of Jesuit Social Services.

I was a member of this working group which was co-chaired by The Hon. Tanya Plibersek, Federal Minister for Housing and Rev. Tim Costello. The group had a real commitment to affirm the importance of inclusion for everyone and to define how social inclusion can be realised particularly for the marginalised and disadvantaged.

The shared commitment to tackling disadvantage meant that delegates made a real effort to think beyond their own individual or organisational interests. There was a real sense of openness to new ideas and a strong passion and commitment to building a more just society.

This vision got grounded as delegates thought through many of the practical ideas and recommendations that were generated. These included a new Charter of Human Rights and a National Action Plan for Social Inclusion with the development of tools to track how, as a society, we’re progressing against these goals. There was a determination to tackle homelessness, to boost the real life chances of people living in the most disadvantaged areas, to provide integrated services for people so they get the help they need and to reform the way government engages with the community sector and the broader community. These are just a few of the ideas that emerged from our deliberations.

The Summit created a space for people to discuss vision and values that underpin the ideal society we want to be – one that cares for and welcomes the contribution of everyone.

One thing that struck me at the Summit was the reality of Australia as an egalitarian society. People from across the community, from all walks of life, ages and perspectives shared the common space and the public floor. This broad level of consultation, participation and mobilisation engendered a tangible feeling of hope that we really can build a more inclusive and just society.

But with the vision comes responsibility - the work has just begun. The 2020 Summit was a conversation with a call to action – the weekend was only the beginning.

We eagerly await the government’s response to the Summit’s recommendations. Meanwhile Jesuit Social Services will continue to ‘stand in solidarity with those in need’ - the young people, families and communities we work with - and to advocate for the kind of society that gives everyone a fair go.

Julie Edwards, CEO