

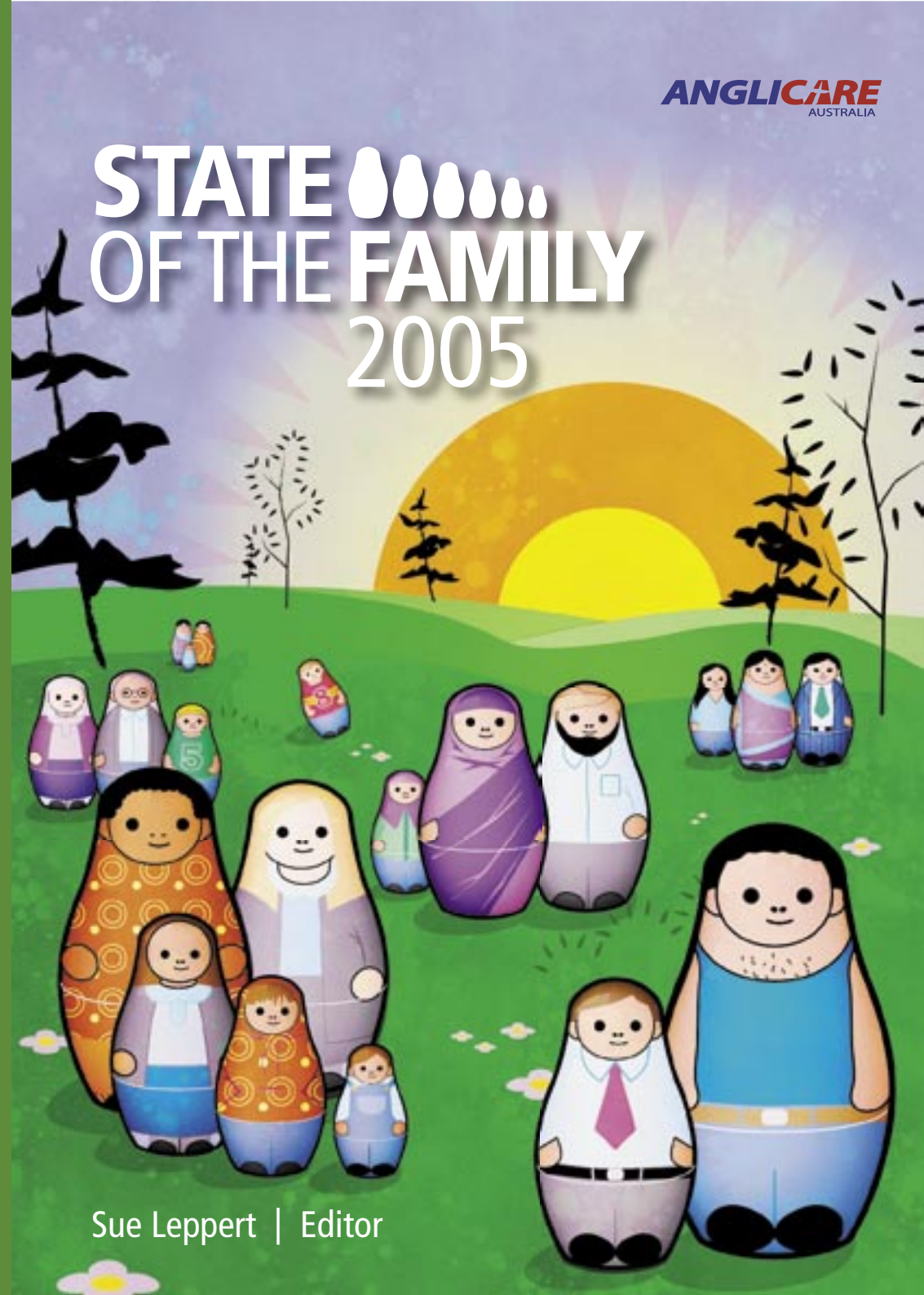
# STATE OF THE FAMILY 2005

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Sue Leppert | Editor

The mid 20th century definition of the 'nuclear' family no longer adequately reflects the contemporary reality of household structure and formation. Marriage patterns, work patterns and fertility rates have changed dramatically over the last thirty years, and 'family' can no longer be assumed to mean a household consisting of dependent children and both their biological parents. At the same time, rapid social, economic and technological changes add a dimension of uncertainty to family life – regardless of how 'families' are configured.

Anglicare Australia's State of the Family Report 2005 reflects on the implications of the changing nature of families in Australia today – on our communities and social fabric, and in particular, on families who experience particular disadvantage, risk, stress or marginalisation. And it gives real life examples of how Anglicare agencies are sensitively working with families to ameliorate disadvantage – and to inject hope for the future.



# STATE OF THE FAMILY 2005

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Particular thanks to the contributors listed in Appendix 1, the members of the Anglicare Australia research network, and the members of the Anglicare Australia Council – for their inspirational work with families and for sharing their insights and experiences with hope and optimism.

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Anglicare Australia is the national network of care and social justice agencies of the Anglican Church in Australia.

The 43 Anglicare Australia member agencies invest over \$500 million each year to provide assistance to families, young people, children, aged, unemployed and homeless Australians, as well as working with Indigenous Australians to overcome disadvantage.

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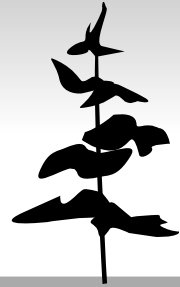
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# Foreword



Anglicare Australia has released a 'State of the Family' report each year since 2000. Our first report in 2000 drew on the experience of Anglicare agencies around Australia and focused on three broad areas of Anglicare's work: supporting families in their caring role; helping families in conflict; and assisting families who are struggling just to make ends meet.

Our 2001 report put a human face to the research and statistics about the inequalities and injustices facing so many Australian families. It examined processes that cause ordinary Australians to be excluded from the economic resources and social relationships we normally take for granted. Case studies illustrated typical examples of these processes and gave insights into how financial and social exclusion can be halted and reversed.

Focusing on the one in five Australian children who are growing up in poverty, our 2002 report painted a clear picture of why Australians should be concerned about our increasingly unequal society, and a growing proportion of children affected by poverty, unemployment, poor health, lack of education, disability, inadequate housing and homelessness. It raised fundamental questions about the future of

Australian society and challenged government and the community to provide a stronger future for all Australian families.

Our 2003 report highlighted regional and locational aspects of disadvantage. It addressed the increasing inequality between job-rich and job-poor areas and focused in particular on nine different localities across Australia, exploring what Anglicare agencies are doing in these areas to work with families to build stronger communities.

Young people, particularly those who are unemployed and troubled about their future were the focus of our 2004 report. Examining the transition from school to work, the Report illustrated what Anglicare agencies are doing to assist young people, especially those experiencing homelessness and Indigenous and rural young people who face the added barrier of remoteness.

Our 2005 *State of the Family* Report explores the dramatic changes that Australia's families and the social and economic world in which they live have undergone over the last thirty years. Drawing from the work of the Anglicare Australia agencies, this year's Report explores



the challenges, struggles, hopes and new possibilities for families at a time of critical change.

The basis for this 2005 report, like the earlier ones, is the Christian theology of hope: God's profound love for all humankind. This is our Easter faith. It means we believe nothing can ever separate us from the love of God. As St Paul writes so vividly in Romans (a letter which has transformed many lives):

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No... (for) I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord”.

(Romans 8: 35–39)

This Easter faith compels us to reach out in God's practical love towards all people in need. This Easter faith means we want to stand alongside people who feel separate, unwanted, devalued, in hardship or distress. And we want to help in ways that respect everyone's dignity and uniqueness.

Given that we believe all are made in God's image, the fact that the nature of family life changes over the generations isn't itself a matter of great significance. (We know from history and cultural studies that family life has taken all kinds of shape and texture over time). What doesn't change is that all are created by the one God. In that sense, amidst all the changes that happen in families and family life

in contemporary Australia, what endures is that we are all children of God, together on a tiny planet, spinning in a vast universe of God's creation. Accordingly, in another letter, St Paul writes about how, in wonder and gratitude, he bows his knees before God “from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name” (Ephesians 3: 15).

These enduring truths give us a secure base from which to look at changes in Australia, and then to respond in ways that we pray bring good news to people's lives. You will see in this *State of the Family 2005* thoughtful elaboration of these matters.

May I convey a word of gratitude to our new executive director, Ms Sue Leppert, who has skillfully gathered the material for this report, drawing on the expertise of the highly committed individuals and agencies that make up the Anglicare Australia network. We hope that this 2005 Report, in association with the many good initiatives by governments and other agencies, will contribute toward a helpful understanding of the 'state of the family' in Australia. 🕊

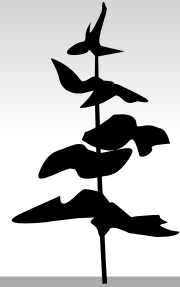
With every blessing,

**Bishop Philip Huggins**  
Chair, Anglicare Australia

April 2005



# Introduction



During a recent overseas holiday to the UK and Germany, my partner and I availed ourselves of the hospitality of various relatives and friends. This included a wide range of household types: a married couple in their seventies with grown up children living locally and overseas; a de facto couple both previously divorced, aged in their mid to late 50s and with children living locally and overseas; a male same-sex couple in their late 30s; a married couple in their late 20s with no children; another married couple in their late 50s with children overseas, and finally a household of two adults and four children, comprising a de facto couple (male early 60s, female late 30s) both previously divorced, with a teenage daughter from a previous marriage, two foster children aged 12 and 8, and their own daughter aged 3.

Peter Burke, Manager of The Magdalene Centre, Adelaide  
(Anglicare SA)

This anecdote provides an example of the diversity of household types found in contemporary Western societies. There is also an increasing number of alternative household types not included in this example. These include single adult households and single parent households with one responsible adult caring for one or more dependent children. Households where grandchildren are raised by their grandparent/s, intergenerational extended households and childless married/de facto couple households are also not mentioned.

The anecdote does however provide a reasonably broad illustration of the contemporary complexities which surround the way we live now and how our understanding of family is being redefined. This leads us to ask the question: which of the above households constitutes what we understand to be a 'family'?

The so-called 'nuclear family', perceived as a two generational household comprising a mother, father and two or three children, certainly fails to adequately account for all the above-mentioned possibilities. Perhaps the broadest definition possible would be this: *a family is any combination of two or more people living in a domestic household comprising a minimum of two adults, or one adult and one child.*





This definition still contains exclusions, including single person households or a household of two or more children. In the latter case concerns for child protection suggest that every household with children comprise at least one adult.

Any definition should also include reference to permanency and commitment, especially where the care of children is involved. A household of two or more adults living together, such as a student household or a boarding house, would not generally be seen as a 'family'. While it is clear that we should continue to support notions of 'traditional family' values which uphold the necessity of one or more responsible adults caring for one or more protected children, we are now living in a changing environment where such responsibility and protection is sometimes provided by those not necessarily bound by blood or kin. There are also increasing numbers of households not based on the protection of children which still demonstrate the characteristics of responsibility, nurture and support.

Three or four generations ago more families were 'extended' rather than 'nuclear' – they were more likely to include three generations rather than two, and additional single adults such as relatives or lodgers. As the experience and definition of families continues to change, the mid 20th century definition of the 'nuclear' family no longer adequately reflects the full contemporary reality of household structure and formation. The word 'household' itself is often preferred because it is more open-ended and less value-laden than the word 'family'. This is because there still seems to be broad agreement that the word 'family' denotes a household which consists of two responsible adults and one or more protected children. This is seen as the bedrock upon which our society is built. While single parenthood is now much more prevalent than it was thirty years

ago, the 'ideal' of family life is still portrayed as being based on two parents and specifically a mother and father.

Anglicare Australia's *State of the Family Report 2005* takes the opportunity to reflect on the implications of the changing nature of families in Australia today – on our communities and social fabric, and in particular, on those individuals and families who experience particular disadvantage, risk, stress or marginalisation.

We know that Australian families and households are getting smaller and that sole-parent and single-person households are becoming more common, brought about in part by lower fertility rates and higher divorce rates. This all has a significant impact on what constitutes 'a family'. Chapter 1 explores these social trends and the characteristics of 'new' family types that have arisen as a consequence.

Having established the social framework, *State of the Family* then considers the economic, social and spiritual context in which Australian families find themselves. The Australian community at large hears that in 2005, the economy remains buoyant, unemployment is low and Australians are more prosperous and living longer than ever before. However, 21 per cent of Australians live on less than \$400 a week, and around one in five children live in households where there are no adults in paid employment. (Community Affairs Reference Committee, 2004). Chapter 2 identifies the harsh reality facing some Australian families. It considers the particular needs of families which do not experience economic prosperity or social and emotional stability.

Chapter 3 brings together the stories of families with whom the agencies of the extensive Anglicare Australia network work every day. The staff and volunteers working in Anglicare agencies across the country witness firsthand



the disadvantage and distress experienced by families and individual family members. These include those who do not share in the nation's wealth and those who are not equipped to cope with the pressures associated with parenting, relationships, balancing employment and caring responsibilities (for older family members as well as children) and participating in community life. These glimpses into the 'state' of particular families demonstrate the complex struggles which many families face on a daily basis. They also highlight the ways in which families may be assisted through encouragement and support to regain dignity and hope and rise to the challenge of engaging with relevance and purpose in their local communities.

Chapter 4 considers the changing state of families from a theological perspective. Attitudes to family and household formation, gender and sexuality have changed over the 2000-year history of the Christian Church, resulting in debate and reflection and the ongoing challenge of how to relate meaningfully to the ever-changing diversity of families and the communities in which they live.

The Report concludes with a reminder that the Anglicare agencies stand at a place of risk-taking, challenging injustice and promoting communities of hope and inclusiveness. At a time of constant change, nothing can be taken for granted. It is through listening, standing alongside others and respecting diversity and difference that we will most constructively contribute to the social and political influences that shape an inclusive Australia where all people and all families can fully participate. 🍓

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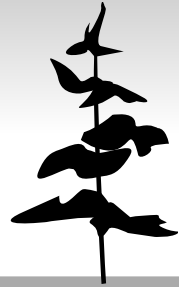
Community Affairs Reference Committee (2004) *A hand up not a hand out: Renewing the fight against poverty*, Australian Senate, March 2004.





# Chapter 1

## What do Australian families look like today?



In the past when people thought about families they thought about the people who were connected by blood or marriage. In Australia, the notion of family centred on the nuclear family: parents and children living together in the same house, with extended family networks encompassing grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins living in separate households. The notion of family also contained strong assumptions about the care and support family members gave each other. Families were an important source of financial and material assistance. Good times and happy events were shared and celebrated with family members who also provided emotional support in times of crisis or struggle.

However families exist within particular social contexts and, as societies change, so too do families. Reflecting the changes that have taken place in Australian society, the Victorian Department of Justice has extended the concept of family beyond the traditional notion of people connected by blood or marriage, to include any relationship where care and support are provided (Campbell & Charlesworth, 2004:A1-1). As noted above, the idea that family members look after each other has always been central to ways of thinking

about families. The strength of this belief is seen in the high level of support older parents continue to provide to their adult children.

Over the last thirty years, the major social trends that have impacted on the family fall into two broad categories - changing marriage patterns and changing work patterns. These changes have had significant impact on family formation and structure, with several new 'types' of families emerging. The characteristics of three of those family types are explored here in some detail. Unless otherwise specified, supporting research for this chapter is drawn from the work of the Australian Institute of Family Studies (de Vaus, 2004).

### Major social trends impacting on families

#### CHANGING MARRIAGE PATTERNS

The common perception of marriage is that it is an institution in decline. While it is true that in 2001 only 54.6 per cent of the population aged over 15 were legally married compared with 65.4 per cent in 1976, marriage is more popular at the turn of the twenty-first century than at the beginning of the twentieth century





when only 46.5 per cent of the population aged over 15 were married. The relatively low marriage rate in the early 1900's reflected a greater sex imbalance (115 men for every 100 women, compared with 96 men for every 100 women in 2001) and the expectation that couples should not marry until they could achieve a 'respectable' standard of living. With the country still suffering from the effects of the severe economic depression of the 1890's, many couples delayed marriage or did not marry at all.

Today marriage rates reflect a different set of economic and social trends. The age at which

people marry for the first time is increasing. In 1966, 58 per cent of women in their early twenties were married. Today almost no women marry in their late teens and only 12.6 per cent of women in their early twenties are married. For those in their late twenties, marriage rates have halved since 1966 when 84.5 per cent of women and 68.8 per cent of men were married. In 2001, only 43.2 per cent of women and 29.8 per cent of men in their late twenties were married.

With the exception of age, where the pattern of men marrying women younger than themselves continues, like generally marries like. Individuals tend to marry within their own ethnic or cultural group and partners are likely to indicate similar religious preferences. Married couples tend to have similar levels of education, although where there is a difference, it is much more likely that the male partner has a higher level of education than his female partner. The tendency for men to marry 'down' (that is, marry women who are slightly younger and have slightly lower levels of education, income and occupational status) and women to marry 'up' is called the marriage gradient and has been used to explain declining levels of marriage over the last thirty years. A decline in the workforce participation rates of men, particularly men who are looking for manual, low-skilled work, and an increase in the education levels and workforce participation rates of women has led to an increase in the number of men who are unable to attract partners because they have low levels of education, income and poor work prospects. Similarly, there has been an increase in the number of women who are unable to find a partner because there are too few men with a sufficiently high level of education, job prospects and income.

Based on data on employment, income, education and marriage rates, unemployed men (regardless of age) are the least likely



to be partnered. Similarly, for each age group, the higher the man's income, the more likely he is to be partnered, while men with any post-school qualification are more likely to be partnered than men who have no post-school qualification.

Living together without getting married (cohabiting or de facto relationships) has become more common over the last thirty years. Most couples now live together before they get married and a small minority of couples choose to remain in a de facto relationship. Cohabitation is much more prevalent among couples aged 15–24 years (63 per cent of all live-in relationships), with only 25 per cent of couples aged 25–34 and just over 10 per cent of couples aged 35–44 cohabiting. The likelihood of cohabitation decreases with increases in the income and education level of the male partner. For example, regardless of age, partnered men and women who are unemployed have the highest rates of cohabitation, and men in management, administrative, professional or higher level clerical, sales or service jobs have relatively low rates of cohabitation.

Roughly one-third of all marriages end in divorce with couples marrying in their early twenties at greater risk than those marrying later in life. If 1997–1999 marriage rates continue, 58.2 per cent of divorced males and 48.7 per cent of divorced females will re-marry. Divorcees tend to marry other divorcees with 53.7 per cent of all divorced men who re-marry marrying someone who is also divorced. Those who are separated or divorced are much more likely to be living on their own (46 per cent) or living as a lone parent (40 per cent) than cohabiting. However, those who are separated or divorced are more likely to be cohabiting than those who have never married.

## CHANGING WORK PATTERNS AND FERTILITY RATES

As noted earlier, workforce participation rates for men have fallen over the last twenty-five years, while participation rates for women have increased. In 1978, 81.4 per cent of men of working age were employed, and in 2003, 76.4 per cent of working age men were employed. Participation rates for working age women have been rising steadily over the past fifty years. In 1954, 29 per cent of women aged 15–64 were employed. This figure had risen to 47 per cent by 1980 and 62.2 per cent by 2003 (Campbell & Charlesworth, 2004).

As workforce participation rates and education levels for women rise, fertility rates fall. In 1982, the total fertility rate (that is, the average number of children a woman would have during her lifetime) was 1.94. This figure had fallen to 1.75 by 2002 (Campbell & Charlesworth, 2004).

One reason for this decrease in fertility rates is that women are waiting until they are older before having children. On average, women delay childbirth for up to 10 years after completing full-time education (Tsfaghiorghis, 2004:69). In 1986, 67 per cent of women aged 20–24 and 40 per cent of women aged 25–29 had not had a child. By 2001, these figures had risen to 73 per cent and 56 per cent respectively. The decreasing number of women having large families and increased rates of childlessness also contributes to falling fertility levels (Campbell & Charlesworth, 2004:17). In 2001, 12.8 per cent of women aged 45–49 were childless. If current rates of childlessness remain constant for those women who were in their early twenties in 2000, it is estimated that approximately 28–30 per cent of those women will not have any children.



## Three family types

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### LONE PARENT FAMILIES

One consequence of rising divorce rates is the increasing number of lone parent families. In 2003, lone parent families constituted 22.3 per cent of families with dependent children. This compares with 7.1 per cent in 1969. However, this increase is not solely due to divorce or the breakdown of cohabiting relationships. Some of the increase in lone parent families is a result of women choosing to have a child outside of any relationship.

Nevertheless, the image of the single mother as an irresponsible young woman who becomes pregnant while still at school is far from reality. Sixty per cent of lone mothers were married before becoming a lone parent, and of those who had never married, the majority were in a de facto relationship when their child was born. Lone parenting is most prevalent amongst parents aged 35–54 and 70 per cent of lone mothers with dependent children are aged 30–49. On average, lone fathers tend to be older than lone mothers and have older children living with them.

Lone parents experience lower rates of employment than couple parents, with lone mothers less likely to be employed than lone fathers. For example, in 2002, 60.5 per cent of couple mothers and 87.7 per cent of couple fathers had paid work, compared with 47.9 per cent of lone mothers and 67.6 per cent of lone fathers. The employment gap between couple and lone mothers narrows as the children grow up, as does the education gap. For example, in 2001, 74.6 per cent of lone mothers had no post-school qualification, compared with 65.6 per cent of couple mothers, but this trend had been reversed by the time the youngest child was 18 with 51.2 per cent of lone mothers having no post-school qualification, compared with 54.7 per cent of couple mothers.



However, in one respect, lone mothers rarely catch up with couple mothers. Lone parent families are over-represented among poorer groups in society, with lone mothers experiencing much higher levels of financial stress than lone fathers. For example, in 1999, the average weekly taxable income of lone fathers was \$538, compared with \$321 for lone mothers and lone mothers scored more highly on all indicators of financial stress than lone fathers or couple families.

### STEP AND BLENDED FAMILIES

For most children whose parents separate or divorce, living in a lone parent family is a transition phase before their parent re-partners. Many initial recipients of the Parenting Payment (Single) move between Parenting Payment (Single) and Parenting Payment (Partnered). However this transition phase (or phases) may



last a number of years with the average period of dependence on Parenting Payment (Single) being at least twelve years. When one or both parents re-partner, step or blended families are created. The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines a blended family as one consisting of two or more children, at least one of whom is the natural child of both members of the couple and at least one child who is the natural (or adopted) child of only one member of the couple. Step families occur where one (or more) children are the natural (or adopted) children of one member of the couple and there are no children that are the natural children of both members of the couple.

In 2001, 4.4 per cent of all couple families with children under the age of 18 were blended families and 5.5 per cent were step families. Cohabitation is more prevalent among step and blended families than intact families. In 2001, 53 per cent of step family couples and 39 per cent of blended family couples were cohabiting compared with only 8 per cent of couples in intact families. While financial support from the non-custodial parent often ceases when the custodial parent re-partners, those who re-partner after divorce tend to suffer less financial hardship than lone parents.

Children living in step or blended families are at a higher risk of child abuse and neglect and mental health disorders than children in intact families. For example, 6.6 per cent of male children and 5.1 per cent of female children living in a step or blended family experience a depressive disorder, compared with 3.2 per cent of male children and 2 per cent of female children in intact families. Similarly, substantiated child abuse is twice as high in step and blended families than substantiated abuse in intact families. However, it is important to recognise that higher rates of mental disorders or child abuse in step or blended families does not mean that the step family or blended

family is the cause of the depressive disorder or that it is the step parent, for example, who is the perpetrator of the child abuse. Causal factors may be connected to the family's economic or social environment or the earlier background of individuals in the step or blended family.



## SAME SEX COUPLES

In Australia, the Marriage Act of 1961 does not recognise same sex marriages. However, de-facto relationships are governed by State rather than Commonwealth legislation and the ACT, NSW, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia do not distinguish between heterosexual and same sex de facto relationships. Same sex couples make up a very small proportion of all couple households. In the 2001 Census, 0.26 per cent of couples identified themselves as gay couples and 0.21 per cent as lesbian couples. However, this self-reported figure is likely to be an under-estimate of the actual number of same sex couples. A more accurate estimate can be made from the Australian Study of Health and Relationships which asked respondents whether they had a regular sexual partner with whom they were living. Using this information, it is estimated that 1.3 per cent of all couples aged 16–59 living in the same household are male same sex couples and 0.9 per cent are female same sex couples.



Same sex couples are not evenly distributed across age and socio-economic groupings. The highest percentage of same sex couples are found amongst couples aged 20–24, with the incidence of same sex couples decreasing with the age of the couple. Same sex couples are more likely to have higher educational qualifications and work in professional occupations than heterosexual couples. For example, 33.2 per cent of the men and 41.2 per cent of the women who identified themselves as a same sex couple in the 2001 Census had a degree or higher qualification compared with 16.6 per cent of men and 17 per cent of women in heterosexual couples. Similarly, almost 31 per cent of gay couples and 38 per cent of lesbian couples had a professional occupation compared with 20 per cent of heterosexual couples. Not surprisingly, given their higher educational and occupational profiles, on average, same sex couples have a higher income level than heterosexual couples.

One in five female same sex couples have a child living with them and a much smaller proportion (less than 5 per cent) of male same sex couples have a child living with them. Most of these children were born when their parents were living in a heterosexual relationship. ●

## References

(NB All references in Chapter 1 relate to de Vaus 2004, unless otherwise specified.)

Campbell, I & Charlesworth, S. 2004, *Background Report: Key Work and Family Trends in Australia*, Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT University, Melbourne.

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Tesfaghiorghis, H. 2004, 'Education, work and fertility: a HILDA survey based analysis', in *Australian Social Policy*, Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra



## Chapter 2

# What is the real world like for these families?



As noted in Chapter 1, changing marriage patterns, work patterns and fertility rates are part of a bigger picture characterising Australian life today. The context, as suggested by social commentators such as Hugh Mackay and Richard Eckersley, is nothing less than a cultural revolution. Eckersley describes the 20th century as a time when Western societies embarked on a 'bold experiment', turning away from traditional values and instead adopting values that fitted more comfortably with the new requirements of economic growth – in particular the need for ever-increasing consumption (Eckersley, 2003).

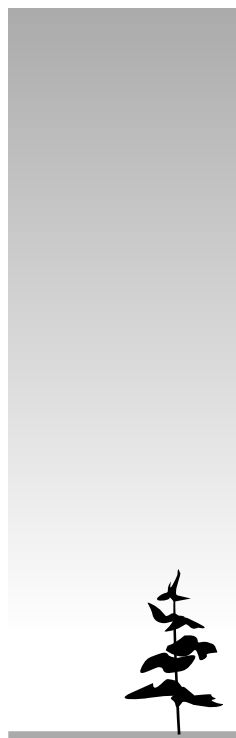
Mackay suggests that individual values are overtaking shared values, goals and identity. He maintains that in rapidly changing times people are more likely to withdraw and look for simple answers, and less likely to be interested in the affairs of the nation and the 'common good'. There is increasing intolerance and less compassion, and people feel uncertain, insecure, alienated and cynical. Many Australians are suffering from the anxiety, stress and insecurity that are the inevitable consequences of having to adjust to radical social, cultural and economic upheaval (Mackay, 2005). A recent national survey into insecurity and wellbeing revealed

a high level of insecurity in Australian society, with two-thirds of respondents having only moderate or low levels of trust in others outside their immediate family and work colleagues. 'Others' included governments, the legal system, banks, private sector companies and the media (Hughes and Bellamy, 2004).

For many, poverty and unemployment are entrenched and intergenerational. Work is less secure for a growing number of people, but working hours are longer for those who do have full-time jobs. In 2002, 2.8 million Australians were on income support, representing over 20 per cent of all adults of working age. This had more than doubled during the past 20 years (cited by Minister for Family and Community Services, 2002).

Despite having a low unemployment rate, Australia has the third-highest level of parental joblessness across 17 OECD countries (Bradbury, 2003). Between 1982 and 1997–98 the jobless rate for parents increased by 4.8 per cent, from 9.8 to 14.6 per cent. Both the increase in joblessness within family type and the increase in lone parenthood contributed to the overall rise in joblessness (Bradbury, 2003). In 2000, around 680,000





children were living in families with no adult working – one of the highest rates among developed countries, equating to almost one in five children living in a household where no adult was in employment (ABS, 2000 and 2001). Estimates of the total number of children living in poverty had risen to between 800,000 and 1.3 million by 2004 (Community Affairs Reference Committee, 2004).

During 2004 two Anglicare Australia agencies (the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne and Anglicare Sydney) participated in a study of trends in the incomes of low-income families, commissioned by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (Macnamara, et al, 2004). The results were released in time for Anti-Poverty Week, 17–22 October 2004.

The study divided all families with dependent children under 12 years into five equal groups – from the bottom 20 per cent to the top 20 per cent – based on their disposable income, adjusted to take account of family size. It then compared disposable incomes for the bottom and middle income groups of families over the period 1997 to 2004, taking into account the changes to family payments and tax cuts announced in the 2004 federal budget.

The study found that in 2004 there were approximately 424,000 families with children in the bottom income quintile. This included 838,000 children. The average disposable income for these families was \$554 compared with a median disposable income for all families with children of \$972, indicating a



substantial gap between Australia's poorest families, and the average family.

The average income of low-income families had risen by \$87 per week in real terms from 1997 to 2004 (a rise of 18 per cent). The main cause of this was the increases in family payments in the 2000 tax package and 2004 budget.

Without these increases, low-income families would have fallen well behind average income growth rates.

However, increases in family payments had an uneven impact on the living standards of low-income families. The largest increases in 2000 were for single income and sole parent families with a child under five years of age. The \$600 per child payment announced in 2004 especially benefited larger families. Families with older dependent children (over 16 years) missed out on both increases in family payments, and many of these families experienced falls in their living standards. Income support for a low-income family with two older children is up to \$73 less per week than for a similar family with two preschoolers, even though the cost of raising older children is much higher.

The study showed that children in Australia's poorest families are more likely than the average child to live in sole parent households, to live in families where the head of the household is unemployed or out of the labour force and where the main source of income is income support (Centrelink payments). The proportion of children living in low-income sole parent households rose between 1997/98 and 2004, and while unemployment among household heads in the bottom quintile dropped over this period, this did not translate into full-time jobs for this group, with many families in the bottom quintile remaining jobless or relying on part-time work.

The study reinforces other research, including that developed for Anglicare Australia's *Break*

*the Cycle* campaign (Anglicare Australia, 2003), which has found that many children would be raised out of income poverty if their parents obtained full-time jobs. However, the research also suggests that joblessness among families with children is unlikely to be reduced rapidly and on a large scale, especially in the case of single parents.

Financial pressures and job insecurity are not the only difficulties faced by many Australian families – across the range of household types. Australian families must also deal with the various pressures of balancing work and caring responsibilities and dealing with issues of relationship, identity, belonging and security. However, many families lack appropriate support to deal with these. When the stresses of daily life are compounded by economic insecurity, physical or mental ill health, children's developmental or behavioural challenges, social isolation or trauma, people are even more likely to feel stigmatised, ostracised or ashamed. Support services may do their best to provide assistance, but are often under-resourced, fragmented or isolated, as well as brought in well after the problem has become entrenched, rather than given the opportunity to work on preventive interventions at critical transitional stages in individuals' and families' lives.

Where whole communities are characterised by poverty, disadvantage and poor access to basic services, the challenges multiply. Families with children, and in particular lone parent families, are most vulnerable to financial hardship. For organisations called on to provide a level of assistance to disadvantaged families, the issue of social diversity of households becomes a very real one.

The stresses on Indigenous families are even more marked. For Indigenous families, material poverty measured through social indicators such as income, employment, housing, health, education and criminality is secondary to the



more deep-seated deprivation arising from the loss of children through their removal, the loss of identity and spiritual and cultural heritage, the loss of contact with the land and the loss of dignity and self-respect through oppression over generations (Choo, 1990).

Different but equally sensitive responses are required when community agencies work with families from diverse cultural backgrounds, including refugee families whose history is one of severe trauma, dislocation and loss of family members and even whole communities. 🍓

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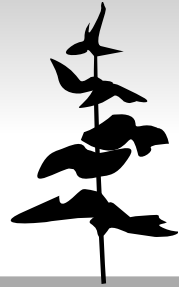
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# Chapter 3

## What are the Anglicare agencies doing for families?



How do organisations such as those comprising the extensive Anglicare Australia network respond to such social diversity and the related economic, emotional, social and spiritual challenges?

The starting point is to listen to what families are telling us. It is clear that the complex nature of the issues facing many families requires more than counselling and individual support. The combination of poverty, inadequate housing, high unemployment, locational disadvantage, limited social capital and natural networks of support requires engagement with the whole community. Strong, robust and supportive communities are the key to nurturing the formal and informal relationships which underpin a functional society.

Anglicare agencies nationally provide a diverse range of programs of support for families and children in crisis or experiencing long-term disadvantage. Families turn to the organisations that make up the Anglicare network for a variety of reasons – financial hardship, domestic violence, parenting or relationship difficulties, mental health concerns, homelessness, employment assistance, gambling-related issues, abuse and neglect, loneliness and social

isolation. For many, their request for assistance reflects a compounding of serious issues, often over years and even generations.

Regardless of family or household ‘type’, the pressures of modern living can appear overwhelming for many Australian families. The following experiences offer a glimmer of hope.

### Families facing complex problems

**Anglicare SA** has been an active service provider in the northern suburbs of Adelaide for the past 40 years, providing innovative solutions to complex problems at individual, service and system levels.

The northern suburbs of Adelaide have been identified by state and federal governments as one of the most disadvantaged areas in South Australia in terms of unemployment, poverty, public housing concentration and other social indicators. The region is characterised by low educational attainment, a low skilled workforce and high numbers of young families and children. There is a strong perception in the local region that there are no jobs and, therefore, there is no point to education and



training, and many families are now experiencing third and fourth generation unemployment.

Homelessness for young people, both those who are experienced at living on the street and those who are not, appears to be increasing. Additionally, many homeless young people in the region move frequently between family and friends' homes, exacerbating their inability to form connections with education and employment.

Anglicare SA's Family Centre North recognises that the issues contributing to disadvantage for families in the north are complex and multifactorial, manifesting themselves in different ways for each family and necessitating individualised and flexible service provision. By listening to families, Family Centre North has developed a flexible model of support that encompasses life skills training in communication, conflict management, budgeting, literacy and numeracy, group work to build confidence, resilience and competence,

assisted referral/brokerage to obtain specialist support services (such as domestic violence services, and disability assessment services), assistance to obtain income support entitlements and to obtain housing, counselling, mediation, advocacy and information provision, re-connection with appropriate education/training facilities/ programs and access to work experience and volunteering opportunities.

The key to supporting and enabling families is to recognise, affirm and strengthen the interconnectedness of family and community.

## THE WORK BANK

The Work Bank is about linking unemployed and under-employed people in the Playford area with fragmented (a few hours or days) and short-term work opportunities. There is work out there, but work seekers and employers don't always know where to find each other. Employers use informal networks to find someone to do a few hours work for them or their business, and work seekers do the

### CASE STUDY ONE: MEGAN

Megan is a 19 year old single mum with two children. She left home at the age of 15 due to the violence and poor communication within her family. Megan was required to, and expected to, act and think like a responsible adult, even though the child in her still wanted to be looked after and cared for. Since leaving home Megan has been exposed to violent relationships, high levels of debt and homelessness. She has struggled to keep her self-esteem and confidence along the way.

The courage to break free and take control of her life, and the lives of her young children, came when she showed the strength to ask and allow someone into her life to help. Megan has worked towards gaining stable accommodation, is attending a personal development course ('Managing My Affairs'), and a driving course. Megan's confidence is growing, and she is looking forward to training in a local pharmacy, with the possibility of a part-time job now on the horizon. She is working on gaining positive relationships with her extended family and feels she can be a better mum. Life is steadily improving – for Megan and her children.





same to find this kind of work, which is great if you have those networks.

Part of the project brief is to work with government agencies to help overcome barriers within the system so that Work Bank members can earn a truly livable income or supplement benefits (for example, for people on parenting benefits). The program offers support and links to training opportunities, together with strategies to document the work skills that members develop so that they can use these for future applications. The aim is to support both work seekers and employers so it is a positive experience for everyone.

## Improving the family support system

**Anglicare Tasmania's** Counselling and Family Support state-wide stream is responding to the changing nature of families. Counsellors for some time have been reporting a sense of contraction within the client group. Not only are families becoming smaller, but so too are their support networks. The family support system itself has experienced a form of contraction and separatism, with privacy and confidentiality laws reinforcing the professional one-to-one exclusive relationship between counsellor and client. This may well be an indicator, indeed a contributor, to the individual

expressing a sense of isolation, even when they are reporting healthy family relationships with little conflict.

One challenge for community service systems in this current environment is to design and implement best practice models that involve the client in a participatory and partnership framework: to design a system that builds their capacity to engage and problem solve with a broader social network; to manage the risks of co-dependency and relationship breakdown in an atmosphere of shared responsibility.

In working towards this, Anglicare Tasmania has taken a number of steps to build its capacity to work collaboratively, inclusively and congruently. Clients are involved in the development of accredited training in family-inclusive/family-sensitive and participatory practices. Partnerships with other agencies have resulted in improved collaborative practices, lessening the sense of isolation that people may feel when seeking counselling and family support. In addition, Anglicare Tasmania utilises a 'results-based' accountability framework that has potential to more accurately measure the key influences on an individual life from early childhood, and compare those with later influences. This assists counsellors and family support workers to more effectively capture information about the changing state of families and individual relationships.





## Focus on Indigenous families

Media articles depicting the double disadvantage faced by Indigenous families often cite staggering statistics: the life expectancy of Indigenous men is 56 years compared to 77 years for other Australian men and 63 for Indigenous women compared to 83 for other Australian women; Indigenous babies are four times more likely to die before their first birthday; unemployment is 2.8 times higher for Indigenous

people than other Australians; and the suicide rate for Indigenous people is nearly three times that of other Australians (ACOSS, 2004).

What is harder to measure is the resilience with which Indigenous families support each other to overcome significant problems. Indigenous family networks are extensive and largely cohesive, and **Anglicare WA's** approach is to work alongside individuals and their extended families to further strengthen connections and build community capacity.

### CASE STUDY TWO: NICK

Twenty-three year old Nick and his two-year-old son were referred to Anglicare WA by the local Aboriginal Health Service. A widower, Nick lived at a nearby Aboriginal village with his parents and extended family. While Nick needed assistance to find a job, it soon became clear that there were a number of complicating factors. Nick's living arrangements were far from ideal. His parents' home was overcrowded, and there were no vacant houses at the Aboriginal village where his extended family (who could help with child care if he did find a job) lived. Regardless, there were no employment options in close proximity to the village except through Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP). Nick had trouble budgeting, giving most of his income support to his mother to cover food and utilities, and still owed money on debts incurred in a previous public housing tenancy. His son Jody needed ongoing healthcare for an asthma condition and had never been immunised. Personal hygiene and dietary concerns impacted the health and wellbeing of both Nick and Jody.

For eight weeks Nick worked with Anglicare WA, who also consulted with a local church elder. They learned that a nearby mine site had recently been required to employ six Indigenous workers. Nick was considered for a position, and would be offered a two-bedroom unit close to the mine site if he was accepted for the job. Jody was looked after by his grandmother while Nick did the training, underwent a health surveillance test and a drug test and obtained a current police clearance. The Anglicare support worker provided assistance on the home front, including cooking lessons, and soon not only Nick and Jody but also various extended family members were sampling homemade hamburgers and vegetable-filled pasties.

Nick completed the training successfully, accepted a job offer and moved into the unit with his son. Child minding was arranged with a neighbour, and Jody spent weekends with his grandmother, maintaining his contact with the extended family and his cultural connections. Six months later, Nick was still employed, had cleared his debt and had consistently maintained



his current rental. He took pleasure in cooking a variety of nutritious meals and gave priority to good hygiene. Jody's immunisation schedule was back on track, and he began attending 'Best Start' (a WA Government initiative focusing on education, health, parenting and cultural activities for Aboriginal children aged 0–5 years). Nick is now involved with his community in promoting men's health. He has much improved budgeting, shopping and parenting skills and now accesses the resources of the Parenting Information Centre. He is saving to purchase a vehicle and has started a Christmas Club account so he can be prepared for next Christmas. Nick and Jody have a much stronger relationship as a small family unit, and maintain strong links with their extended family and community.

On the other side of Australia in the NSW coastal town of Mogo, **Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn** provides support to local Aboriginal families through the **Boomerang Meeting Place**. The Mogo Aboriginal community is characterised by a large number of families with children, including extended families, single parent households, grandparents raising grandchildren and households including more than one family, additional adults (friends, extended family). Many urban Aboriginal people are nomadic, moving from town to town, and an Aboriginal family will always make room for one more person.

The Mogo community faces similar issues to those identified in Nick's story, above – limited access to affordable and appropriate housing, health problems, lack of employment and training opportunities, domestic violence and misuse of alcohol and other drugs (which can lead to further violence and relationship difficulties). The use of drugs and alcohol is a factor in a very high number of welfare and criminal justice interventions and is associated

with incapacity to care for children, violence and lack of money for food. Mental health is of increasing concern, with the incidence of mental illness on the rise through drug use and other substance abuse. Families and extended households are obliged and at times burdened to look after their young people who are experiencing incalculable trauma, depression and major mental health issues.

In the words of Boomerang Meeting Place leader Pastor Tom Slockee, "Aboriginal children growing into young people have many and complex challenges. Households are under extreme stress in dealing with their sons and daughters as they grow into young people. The Aboriginal children are facing many challenges as they try to contend with the ways and values of the dominant society. Many have lost their way, losing respect for themselves and others. There would not be one Aboriginal household that is not affected by a family member being in trouble with the justice system and ending up in court, jail or juvenile detention".



### CASE STUDY THREE: ROSE

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Rose is a young Aboriginal girl (now about 15) who has not attended school since she was about nine years of age. She lacks self-esteem and confidence. She is paranoid about people. She locks herself away in her house for days, at times weeks. Drugs now dominate her life and she and her mother are constantly fighting. Her brothers show no respect and there is always some argument or conflict going on in the house. Her mother is a Christian and tries hard to live by what she is taught in the Bible, but feels she fails at times. Rose is mistrusting of people and has faced the brunt of racism, even at a very early age. Rose's mother was in a de facto relationship with a white man but he emotionally and psychologically abused the mother and children. There was also physical abuse at times. He denigrated the mother in front of the children and made the mother feel like an unclean, unloved and unwanted 'Aboriginal lowlife'.

Both brothers have been in prison and juvenile justice detention centres. They bring their mates into the house and stay for long periods of time, until they wear thin the patience and good will of the other family members. These young people don't have jobs – they are part of the region's 'long-term unemployed'. They are likely to spend their Centrelink benefits on alcohol and drugs and rarely contribute to the expenses of the household. The family has several dogs and cats and these animals cause the house to be in a very unhygienic state. The house and grounds are not looked after and there are always repair and maintenance issues (eg broken windows).

A small grant from Anglicare is made to go a lot further by the care and support of the Boomerang Meeting Place workers and volunteers. Food is bought for the family at various times, and Rose's confidence has been built up by paying her to do small jobs, buying her lunch and taking her out to the movies. Assistance is provided to cut the lawn and clean up the rubbish that constantly builds up in the yard. Support for the family includes giving the mother respite at times, facilitating counselling and advice about how to better manage their lives, and driving the family to visit the family members in detention and generally giving support in prayer and other physical needs.

The journey to healing and regaining dignity and hope continues for Rose and her family, with the Boomerang Meeting Place and Anglicare offering faithful companionship and a source of consistent, reliable support.



## Focus on refugee families and asylum seekers

### CASE STUDY FOUR: JOY

*Rough Edges*, based at St John's Anglican Church in Darlinghurst, Sydney, welcomes a number of people who are seeking asylum in Australia. Most are single people who, by the time they get to St John's, have exhausted their own savings, are homeless or living in refuges and require the help of the charities for even their most fundamental needs.

Joy, on the other hand, was the breadwinner and spokesperson for a family unit consisting of her 15 year old son and 80 year old mother. In many ways their situation was unique, but their predicament highlights the extreme social, psychological and financial pressures that asylum seeking families are experiencing in our country.

Joy and her family, like many people who have applied for Protection Visas when already in Australia, were surviving on Bridging Visas that did not allow them any right to work, entitlement to Medicare or entitlement to any Centrelink payments. They were not even entitled to the financial support that is available to some asylum seekers through the Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme that is administered by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) through contractual arrangements with the Australian Red Cross. Joy was receiving \$330 a month toward the care of her family through another Red Cross program which uses Red Cross emergency funds to help people experiencing extreme financial hardship. At the time she came to St John's a nearby church was allowing them to stay in a church property with several other asylum seekers and Joy was scraping together what other resources she could to clothe and feed her mother and son. Amongst other things she was going to the markets to take discarded vegetables from the bins.

Joy's son, Lyal, having experienced horrifying trauma over five years in his own country was struggling to make his way in an Australian high school. He had become increasingly isolated and depressed as he coped with the stresses he was under. He never explained his situation to his peers partly through fear and partly through embarrassment and so could not tell them why he could not, for example, afford to travel anywhere by public transport, could not go on school excursions, could not chat on the computer, could not ask anyone home. He completed his final year of high school but did not, of course, participate in any of the normal 'rite of passage' events and although he sat the exams he could not receive a Higher School Certificate. His prospects on leaving school were even more depressing since he was not entitled to work. He agreed to do some much-needed data entry for *Rough Edges*. When offered assistance as a way of saying thanks, he requested a pass to a local swimming pool. He also mentioned he needed sandals as he had no summer shoes. (*Rough Edges* had found him some second-hand school shoes some years earlier.)



Over the three years that Joy came to Rough Edges she fought to maintain hope that she would eventually be granted asylum in Australia. This was largely because all the legal and immigration professionals who had had anything to do with her case were always very positive about the obvious validity of her need for protection. Nevertheless she remained on a Bridging Visa and after three years here was finally told that her application would not be considered and that she would have to leave the country.

By the time Joy left both she and her mother were in poor health. Joy required surgery that she had been unable to have in Australia and was exhausted by the ongoing effort of trying to care for the physical and emotional needs of her family. Her mother had fallen and broken her hip some months earlier but had had no treatment beyond an initial diagnostic X-ray and a recommendation from the hospital doctors that she go home and take Panadol for the pain.

Joy, her son and her mother struggled here for three years and then left. However, it is almost as if for the period of time that they were in Australia, they were 'non-people', a 'non-family'. They will be registered in the DIMIA data base among the many that came here asking for our protection and failing to receive it, but in terms of social security statistics it is as if they were never here. Social security, in every sense of the term, was never granted to them.

Joy's experience highlights just one of the possible scenarios for families who seek asylum here. There are others where part or all of the family is in detention centres and other families who are surviving under the uncertainty of Temporary Protection Visas. In Sydney, organisations such as the Asylum Seekers Centre and the House of Welcome see many such families and do what they can to support them. Resources however are always terribly limited. No doubt similar agencies all over Australia are attempting to support families in the same distressing situations with the same shortage of facilities.

People like Joy and her family, while not legally citizens of our country, are very much part of the communities in which Australians live. Their bravery and tenacity in the face of unimaginable trauma and insecurity continue to move the people who have worked with them long after their files are marked 'closed'.

## REFLECTIONS OF A FAMILY THERAPIST

Muktesh Chibber is a family therapist at the **Brotherhood of St Laurence's** Ecumenical Migration Centre who works with refugees from diverse backgrounds in Melbourne. Knowing from experience that it is a struggle to successfully engage refugee families with a traditional, office-based, individual or family counselling approach, Muktesh's approach is to

encourage families to narrate their stories in their own terms. This often requires 'reading between the lines' – listening to their use of the English language within their cultural context (either directly or through an interpreter), and recognising their evasive coping mechanisms around traumatic incidents. A first response is often to provide practical assistance as a pathway to engaging people





and building trust and rapport. An integrated problem-solving framework to address settlement issues such as housing, benefits, social support networks, schooling, employment and linkages to services evolves, but it is not long after their initial settlement phase that families begin to experience mixed and confused feelings and reactions.

Refugee men often find themselves losing status and their role as the breadwinner, primarily due to unemployment and language barriers. This not only impacts on their self-esteem and confidence but often strains their relationships leading to incidents of family conflict and violence, subsequently impacting on the family dynamics.

The impact of family conflict has been well researched and documented – however, the impact of family conflict on a refugee child is unique and particularly detrimental to the development of the refugee child. It can be very hard for a refugee child to know whom to trust, even within his or her own family. The sense of confusion is compounded at school, particularly for the children from African or traditional Muslim backgrounds. It is not difficult to gauge the enormous struggle and confusion in coping with a new environment, shouldering the responsibility to ‘fit in’ within the two cultures (with sometimes contradictory

mainstream and ethno-specific family expectations) and experiencing peer pressure, which can make the experiences of school devastating for the refugee child. Sometimes their experience of exclusion is exacerbated by racism.

To gain an accurate understanding and awareness of the true impact of family conflict and cultural pressures on a refugee child, there is a need for further research and analysis. Academic research must be informed by the experience of practitioners working with the affected communities.

The intense pain and sadness of bereavement, grief and loss of dear ones overseas has a debilitating impact on the confidence and self-esteem of refugees. It is not uncommon for Muktesh to have had male refugees sit in her office grief stricken, holding their head in both hands, trying to cope with the sad news of the death of a dear one. Worse still has been the impact on them when a family member they were in the process of sponsoring dies while waiting for a visa to be approved or while trying to organise finances to purchase air tickets for family members to make the journey to Australia. The challenges of working with refugees are complex and specialised, and yet the resilience and coping mechanisms of refugees in the absence of their own families



can be incredibly inspiring and contribute in their own unique way to the healing process. Many have told Muktesh that the hope of reunification with their families dominates their thoughts. Focusing on family reunification is therefore an important part of the healing process.

The underlying theme of loss of sense of belonging, particularly prevalent among male refugees, appears to pervade all aspects of their lives. To quote some of them, “Muktesh, we have a roof, money, community, a clean country, no trouble, but deep down we feel something is missing.” They echo themes of displacement, be it related to culture or home: “It’s not the same as in our country, it’s not like back in our country and culture.” They do not feel there is a genuine inclusion on a social, cultural and emotional level. Their existence appears to be superficial and lacking purpose or meaning, thus they are not ‘fully alive’.

The family service program at the Ecumenical Migration Centre is able to elicit the family’s trust and utilise family therapy to provide culturally sensitive support. However, there remains a bigger question about the different layers of responsibilities residing with the individual, families, their ethnic communities and the larger host Australian society: to what extent can or does the broader service system genuinely engage with refugee communities and their specialised needs?

## Focus on young people at risk from disconnection from their families

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**Anglicare Sydney** operates a number of programs that are particularly targeted at young people at risk of disconnection from family and/or at risk of homelessness. The Juvenile Offender Support Program provides support within juvenile detention centres after release and within the community for young people of Indo-Chinese background and their

families. This support takes the form of family visits and mediation, personal support and encouragement, organising centre-based cultural activities with referral to appropriate services, support through the court process and assisting clients in meeting legal requirements. Interagency collaboration is also important through the Commonwealth Government’s Reconnect program which is committed to providing young people aged 12–18 years and their families with the support and assistance they need to achieve family reconciliation and enhanced involvement with the wider community. It targets young people who are experiencing difficulties and have recently left home or are thinking about leaving home. The service centres on family reconciliation, education, employment, accommodation, legal and health issues.

Education and employment are critical pathways to re-engagement with community. The Job Placement, Employment and Training Program is a free service that works with young people to help explore their options of employment, training or returning to education. It is targeted at 15–21 year olds who are homeless or at risk of being homeless, who come from a refugee background, who have been an offender or a ward of the state and as a consequence are experiencing barriers to education and employment. The services include finding suitable accommodation, information on options, development of skills in writing up resumes and interviewing, assisting with training and support to assist in reducing the barriers to further education or employment. The targeted outcomes are placement in employment – part-time, casual or full-time. The program thus far has had a very high success rate. This has been achieved over a number of years along with evidence of improved living skills, community participation and healthier lifestyle – of which has contributed to a considerable improvement in the personal wellbeing of clients.



For those young people who have already disconnected from their families and are homeless there is the Street Outreach program. The program works with young people between 12 and 25 years of age in Sydney's Parramatta area. The service deals with young offenders and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For a multitude of reasons, most of these young people are homeless. The most common reasons for this include some form of domestic violence, personal or parental drug and alcohol problems or parents' relationship breakdown. The aim is to achieve reconciliation with their parents and/or increase skills to enable independence.

Anglicare Sydney has also established a residential program called Caramar/Early Interventions which provides accommodation, education and support to pregnant young women and parents aged 16–25. The vast majority state that accommodation is their primary reason for making contact with the service. However the service also provides non-residential support in the form of regular casework, home visits and group work which attempt to improve parenting and living skills and reduce social isolation. The group work in particular is a mechanism for developing supportive peer relationships and provides a positive social outlet.

In a series of focus groups in 2004 Anglicare Sydney youth workers noted a number of positive outcomes across the range of these programs. Perhaps of greatest significance was the improvement in client self-esteem. For the Early Intervention team this meant equipping the women with effective parenting skills and assisting them to establish positive relationships with their children. Further, such programs were seen as developing positive social support networks and were an effective means of linking clients to essential support services. This is particularly the case for those from non-English speaking backgrounds. For homeless young

people, knowledge of services and liaison with Government departments, particularly Centrelink, can be a daunting experience. The youth workers also act as advocates, helping to sort out the issues that keep clients bound in their current situation.

Young people at risk often find it difficult to establish goals and directions in life. The programs outlined here offer the kind of support that enables the possibility of an independent future to become a reality. When young people are able to build resilience, forge career paths and develop necessary life skills, they are much better able to articulate and ultimately achieve their goals.

## Focus on single parent families and single person households

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**Anglicare Illawarra** (a service of Anglicare Sydney) finds that of the plethora of family 'types', life can be toughest for those 'flying solo'.

The experience of this Wollongong (NSW) based service is that a single person living alone, or a single mum, dad or grandparent raising children alone is more likely to seek out the emotional, social, spiritual, financial or material support provided through Anglicare's services than any of the other groups that live in the community.

A survey of the financial exclusion experience of Anglicare Sydney's Illawarra emergency relief service confirmed that single person households, followed by single parent households, were most likely to experience financial hardship and be unable to participate in the mainstream financial system. Just over 11 per cent did not have access to a basic savings account, 10 per cent had no access to EFTPOS facilities and 70 per cent had borrowed money in the last twelve months from non-





bank/financial institutions such as friends or family, Centrelink, high interest loan sharks and pawn brokers (Anglicare Sydney, 2004).

A second survey of clients accessing financial assistance for electricity accounts also revealed that of 628 Anglicare clients across Sydney and the Illawarra, 41.7 per cent were single parents and a further 30.6 per cent were single (Anglicare Sydney, 2004). Access trends from Anglicare Illawarra's service data in 2004 also revealed that single people, with or without the care of children, figure prominently in services like counselling, emergency relief, community outreach programs (eg cafes, art workshops) as well as Christmas programs and early intervention services (Anglicare Sydney, 2004).

Service trends from the past four years show an increase in single people accessing services as a consequence of multiple or complex issues

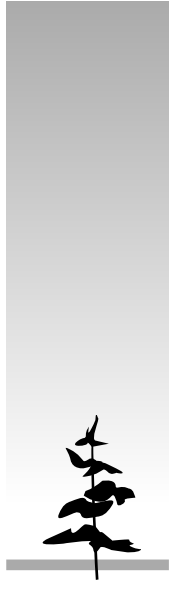
which require a long term commitment from Anglicare. These issues include mental health, drug and alcohol addiction, disability and chronic illness. Living securely or living well as a single adult, with or without children, especially with Centrelink benefits as the main source of income, is a struggle. 🍷

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## CASE STUDY FIVE: STEPHEN

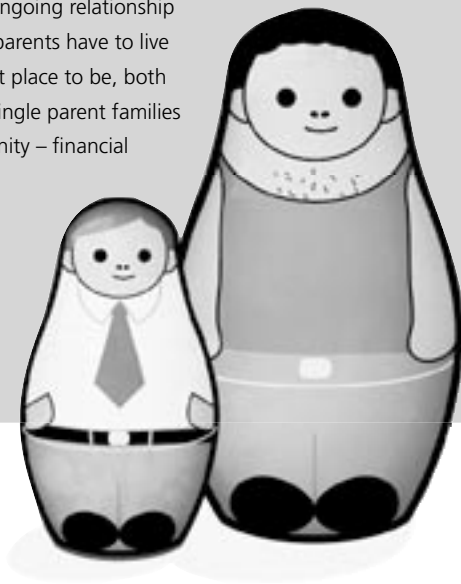
Stephen is a middle-aged father of two children, both teenagers. A kind and motivated father, Stephen walks a financial and emotional tight rope. His wife died several years ago. His main source of income is derived from Centrelink and occasional casual work, which is limited as a result of long standing health difficulties. Stephen provides a safe, secure home for his family although he and the kids continue to grieve the untimely death of their wife and mother. Stephen worries about the kids as they are pushing boundaries at home and have issues at school.

Stephen is a proud man. While he is supported by Anglicare and is grateful for the services that support him as a solo dad, he works hard to return the support by sharing his skills with various community programs.

Despite living frugally Stephen finds it impossible to pay all the bills and still feed, clothe and educate his kids. Stephen is cautious about credit and loans realising how difficult it would be to meet repayments. When something goes wrong, the old car or fridge breaks down, a child gets sick or there is an unexpected event, there is no reserve, no money.

Stephen is finding this financial tightrope increasingly distressing, especially when he works casually and then contacts Centrelink to adjust his income.

Stephen's situation as a single dad and his ongoing relationship with Anglicare illustrate the struggle single parents have to live securely. Living alone as an adult is a difficult place to be, both economically and emotionally. Support for single parent families is critical to the health of the whole community – financial exclusion can mean a loss of participation in community life, with associated social costs.





# Chapter 4

## The changing role of families – theology and reality



Throughout the entire period of biblical history, the family or household has played an important role in the structuring of society. There is, however, no one biblical model of the family, for its size, structure and nature varied greatly during different periods of history.

The word 'family' is not the only way of describing communal and relational living in the Old and New Testaments. The concept of household is also a common term, and it links closely to the idea of God's covenant relationship with his people. Households, like family life, vary in shape, size and community context. In reality, they often provide the best method for experiencing and expressing the covenant relationship of nurture and commitment.

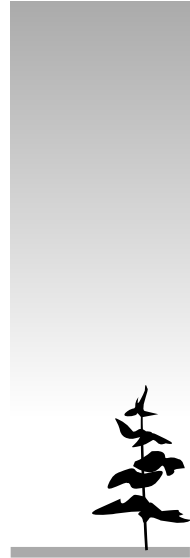
A close examination of Scripture suggests that it was the household, involving extended family members, blood-related or not, slaves and visitors, which was more the norm than the exception. The widespread adoption of marriage as we know it today is of recent arrival and has as much to do with the issues of inheritance and lineage, as it does with family formation or the development of relationships and the nurture of children. The idea of the nuclear family is also only a recent development of the

last two to three hundred years. Families of earlier generations were larger and more diverse than is often understood or acknowledged today.

Today, there are churches of all traditions and many Christians who are struggling with the changes taking place in family life. The increasing independence of women, family planning, rising divorce rates, the rights of children and the demands of employment are often viewed as detrimental to a view of family life – once held as sacrosanct – even when relationships had broken down and violence and neglect were the order of the day. These changes are often viewed as the reasons for moral decline and the break-up of traditional family life.

Culture, economics and religious values have all exerted an influence in determining the shape of family life at various times and today there is no one model of family life. Variations in culture, economics and religious values still result in variations in family life, and it is not without significance that Jesus did not seek to develop, even in theory, a model of family life which could be transported from one culture to another. The family therefore may be permanent or temporary, nuclear or extended,





married or otherwise, but it will normally include households of both sexes and, in the majority of cases, it will be a place where children live, grow and develop.

Family or household is somewhere you belong, which you identify with, in which you develop and build relationships, nurture your potential and learn social skills. The Church and its theology need to proclaim the essence of membership of this community or household, of nurture and security, recognising and affirming the values which enrich relationships between adults and children. That place is a place of sustenance and fulfilment, an environment for risk-taking, learning, safety and opportunity.

Christians believe the Church is the ultimate family or household and community of faith to which we are called, and yet in practice the Church can sometimes be accused of suppressing and excluding people. Just as society has recognised and acknowledged that

family life continually changes, so must the Church. The Church cannot ignore the emerging forms of family or household patterns, for they are already with us.

No amount of wishing, praying or wringing of hands will change the statistics nor the fact that families have changed and will continue to do so. The once prized nuclear family will continue, but will not be the only model. Rather than decry and judge other forms of family, the Church needs to recognise the importance of relationships, compassion, forgiveness and justice as integral to any form of family formation, and seek to equip and encourage those responsible for the nurture of children in this task. While the Church continues its emphasis on a narrow nuclear family model, it continues to exclude thousands.

Pastoral ministry must respond to families in their individual situations and seek and develop systems of support. Pastoral ministry will need to affirm families or households in their



differing forms as the most effective and sustaining unit for the formation of relationships and in its nurture of opportunities for children. At the same time, adequate housing, education, health care, nutrition and social interaction are essential if the family unit is to fulfil its role. The Church and its community agencies must advocate for these services to be provided for all families, but in particular, for families under stress.

Like all societies, our society is witness to social, political and economic injustices. In each local congregation or community, there are the opportunities to look around and offer in the spirit of loving compassion the good news of abundant life, filled with Christ-like love. This is not a life of rules and regulation, but of love. Love expressed in the values of compassion, forgiveness, inclusiveness and joy. Love which seeks to nurture and affirm each individual's potential, preventing abuse and neglect. This is the most constructive and effective contribution that each of us has to bring to family or household life. It can both nurture and affirm the values of a just and compassionate community in the lives of each individual and see them as vehicles for the sharing of God's grace.

New forms of family present many challenges and opportunities for the Church and its community agencies in the exercise of servant ministry. To simply wish for the past and to ignore the realities of modern-day family life, and to blame all the current anxieties of today's world on the breakdown of family, or more particularly, the nuclear family, is unrealistic and cannot be sustained.

For Christians, following the footsteps of Jesus requires a commitment to proclaiming in word and deed God's kingdom of love and forgiveness wherever families find themselves. While it is important to hold to ideals we are also called to be as compassionate as Jesus.

Throughout the Gospels Jesus forgives and acts with compassion while not compromising God's standards or hopes. For Christians Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the new creation, the sign of God's unending generosity, unconditional love and promise of hope. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are confirmation of God's unconditional love and grace. Jesus Christ is the revelation of God's grace, the sign and face of God's on-going connectedness, involvement and commitment to all that has been created. In the end, Christian hope is the realisation of all that God has planned for his creation, and his disciples or followers need to find ways of making God's plan central to life. At a time of changing families and households in Australia this still remains central to the mission of the church community service agency.

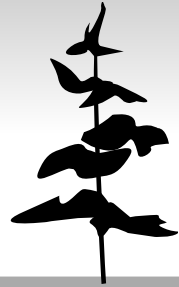
The wellbeing of our country, and the wellbeing of individuals, require strong families or households. It is important that the Church continues to give witness to the importance of healthy relationships that enable children and young people to be nurtured, and for the fulfilment of human compassion. Central to this are values - values that express the grace and hospitality of God and contribute to the building of God's community for all times. 🕯





# Chapter 5

## Conclusion



*State of the Family 2005* has taken the opportunity to reflect on the implications of the changing nature of families in Australia today – on our communities and social fabric, and in particular, on families which experience particular disadvantages.

The nature and structure of families cannot be separated from the rapid and far-reaching social and economic changes of the last few decades. In particular, changing marriage patterns and work patterns have had a significant impact on family formation and structure, with new types of families and households emerging.

The social and economic reality for many Australian families can be tough. Despite the buoyant national economy, economic prosperity and material wealth are not shared by all Australians in 2005. Many families, as the Anglicare agencies testify, are already vulnerable to poverty. Some have been for generations. Vulnerable families need support if they are going to benefit from the opportunities that many Australians take for granted. Not all families have ready access to child care, education and training, employment, affordable housing, health care and aged care. Not all

families can rely on extended family or informal community networks of support. The Anglicare stories tell us clearly that without an injection of these kinds of support, some families simply don't get a chance.

Anglicare agencies, and indeed the parishes and other agencies of the Church have a role to play in meeting the physical, social and spiritual needs of those who do not share the nation's wealth or advantages. They also have another role – to decry the unjust structures, systems and ideologies that give rise to inequity, pockets of concentrated poverty, disadvantage and fragility – especially where these stand in stark contrast to economic prosperity, opportunity and security.

The changing nature of 'the family' presents both challenge and opportunity to the Church and its community agencies as they exercise, in a variety of ways, a ministry of loving service. The message of Jesus is one of good news of God's universal and eternal love for all humankind, within which 'family' is one significant social construct. The love that seeks to affirm and nurture is a source of strength for both families and communities.





In working with those families most at risk, the Anglicare agencies can take nothing for granted. The only constancy is change – and the first step to respectfully and sensitively deal with change is to listen. The ‘agency perspectives’ depicted in Chapter 3 reflect years of listening in order to work creatively and flexibly alongside families at times of crisis, trauma and often chronic disadvantage. For the staff of these agencies, it is a great privilege to be trusted to work with families at such critical times. At the same time, it is an enormous challenge, because with the sharing of trust comes a significant responsibility.

Yes, the Anglicare agencies are funded by governments and through their own fundraising efforts to fulfil the social welfare charter they have accepted. However, their work goes beyond a contractual or moral obligation. It is inspired by hope. Hope is essential for transformation, and the work of care and redressing injustices must place hope at its forefront if individuals and families are to move forward and live life to their full potential.

Faced with rapid change, agencies of care and support are themselves adapting to change as they assist families to deal with the economic and social changes and challenges of our times. In order to work effectively and respectfully with families in all their diversity and complexity, the Anglicare agencies are listening to what people have to say, and rising to the challenge of adapting procedures and practices to the changing scene.

This work at the ‘raw edge’ of human struggle, and these deep reflections into the nature of family, community and humanity, have much to contribute to research and debate, and to the shaping of social policy and ideology in Australia today.

*State of the Family 2005* has taken the opportunity to reflect on the rich diversity that describes ‘families’ today, and offers insights into working constructively with change and helping people to confront the issues in their lives in hopeful ways. Central to the expression of that hope are the principles of social justice – equitable sharing of power and resources, respect for the intrinsic worth of all people, belief in people’s innate potential, and compassion. Social and political commitment to these principles will surely result in a more optimistic future – for stronger families as they are supported to work through life’s complexities, and for functional and compassionate communities in which all individuals and families are enabled to participate in respectful and empowering ways. ●



# Appendix 1

## Contributors



### Introduction:

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**Mr Peter Burke**, The Magdalene Centre, Anglicare SA

Contact: The Magdalene Centre 08 8305 9381

Peter Burke is a social worker and theology graduate, and has worked in the past as a social worker at St Mark's Fitzroy (1981–83), a parish community development worker in the Diocese of Melbourne (1984–90), and a project manager with Ecumenical Housing, a commission of the Victorian Council of Churches (1991–97). Since 1998, Peter has been the Manager of The Magdalene Centre Adelaide, a co-operative venture between three inner city Anglican parishes and Anglicare SA. The main focus of Peter's work is the active engagement of the community of faith with the needs and aspirations of those who are poor, homeless or marginalised, particularly in inner urban areas.

### Chapter 1:

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**Dr Ann Nevile**, Asia Pacific School of Economics and Government, Australian National University, Canberra

Ann Nevile's research interests are broadly focused on social disadvantage and

governments' responses to it. She has recently completed a book (co-authored with her father, Professor John Nevile) evaluating the effectiveness of Work for the Dole in terms of helping participants to secure a job. Ann is a regular contributor to Anglicare Australia's *State of the Family* annual report.

### Chapter 2:

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**Ms Sue Leppert**, Anglicare Australia, Canberra, ACT

Sue Leppert has been the Executive Director of Anglicare Australia since 1 July 2004. Prior to this Sue was Executive Director of Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn.

### Chapter 3:

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**Ms Muktesh Chibber**, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne VIC

Muktesh Chibber is currently the Family Services Team leader at the Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC), Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne. Muktesh has a background in education, social work and family therapy. She has extensive experience teaching sociology and politics in educational institutions, child



protection case management, family counselling in drug and alcohol and family violence (contribution to Korean Family Violence system in South Korea), and community development and research with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. The Ecumenical Migration Centre works with recently arrived emerging communities, as well as longer settled disadvantaged groups, for their full access and participation in the benefits of Australian society.

**Ms Helen Connolly**, Anglicare SA Family Centre North, Adelaide SA

Helen Connolly holds degrees in Economics (University of Adelaide) and Social Work (University of SA). In 1993 she joined Anglicare SA, and currently manages the 27 innovative programs provided by Anglicare SA's Family Centre North. These include life skills training, group work programs, referrals/brokerage for specialised support services, assistance to obtain income support and housing, counselling, mediation, advocacy and information provision, access to work experience, volunteering and mentoring.

**Ms Jane French**, *Rough Edges*, St John's Anglican Church Darlinghurst NSW

Situated in the heart of Sydney's Kings Cross area, St John's Darlinghurst is a church that literally has the needs of a diverse community on its doorstep. With a rich history the area is home to artists and millionaires, sex workers and the street community, with issues of addiction, poverty and mental health problems a daily reality. To meet this need, St John's has set up *Rough Edges* – a nightly drop-in centre, the Community Assistance and Partnership Program, interest based groups, a Legal Service and counselling. While employing a number of staff to manage these programs, their success relies on the involvement of all of the parishioners of the church, who volunteer, contribute management skills, pray and support the work financially.

**Ms Josey Hansen**, Anglicare WA, Perth WA

Josey Hansen is a Nyoongah woman from WA. She is the manager of Aboriginal Services at Anglicare WA. Josey is committed to being a messenger who listens deeply to what the community says, and then relays the way Aboriginal people prefer to do things internally and externally. As well as managing services within Anglicare WA, Josey acts as consultant to Anglicare programs ensuring that Aboriginal Ways are considered. She sees her role as walking with her feet in both worlds; one being in the sand (as a member of the Aboriginal community and educating the community on Anglicare WA services) and the other being in the concrete jungle (bringing community and programs together in a cultural respectful way).

**Mr Gordon McDonald**, Anglicare Tasmania, Devonport Tasmania

Gordon McDonald is Manager of Anglicare Tasmania's Counselling and Family Support Services. This state-wide service is in the process of developing and testing a range of responses to the contracting nature of the family support system.

**Mr Michael Mittwollen**, Anglicare Illawarra, Wollongong NSW

Michael Mittwollen is the Manager of Anglicare Illawarra Welfare Services, a part of Anglicare Sydney, which provides community services throughout the Illawarra, Shoalhaven and Southern Highlands regions of NSW. This region of the south coast of NSW is diverse and incorporates city, urban and rural communities. Anglicare Illawarra's principal expertise lies within the program areas of family and relationship counselling, community development, emergency relief, group work, early intervention services for families and humanitarian settlement.



**Research and Planning Unit**, Anglicare Sydney.

The Unit researches social policy issues which are of major concern to management and the wider community and also provides extensive demographic, mapping and statistical support to both the Anglican Diocese of Sydney and to Anglicare Sydney. Anglicare Sydney assists over 400,000 people in the Sydney and Wollongong area each year by financial and/or material assistance through a range of services related to aged and community care, children, migrants, the homeless, those in prison and those suffering financial hardship.

**The Rev'd Tom Slockee**, Boomerang Meeting Place, Mogo NSW

Tom Slockee is a highly respected community leader and activist and has represented his community in many organisations and conferences at a local, regional, state and national levels. Tom helped establish the South Eastern Aboriginal Regional Management Service (SEARMS), a co-operative of several Aboriginal organisations on the NSW South Coast. Its goal is to improve the management of the community-owned rental housing, and bring about better housing and health outcomes for the people.

The Meeting Place supports Indigenous families and young people to develop their self-confidence, upgrade their skills and overcome issues of dependency. In partnership and with funding assistance from Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn, the Meeting Place also provides emergency relief and social support.

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## Chapter 4:

**Canon Dr Ray Cleary**, Anglicare Victoria, Melbourne VIC

CEO of Anglicare Victoria and a leading community spokesperson, Ray Cleary believes the current political and economic climate has produced new tensions for Anglican welfare agencies as they seek to define their mission and partnership with government and the community in the new millennium. He views the task of Anglican welfare agencies to be faithful to an inclusive, compassionate and just vision of society, where the common wealth is shared. Anglicare Victoria provides a range of services to children, young people and families, including foster care, food and material aid, care for children with disabilities, family and financial counselling, assistance for victims of child abuse and neglect, parenting advice and support, residential and crisis accommodation for young people and parish partnerships.

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## Photographs:

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# Appendix 2

## Anglicare Australia member agencies



<i>Member agency</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Phone/email or web site</i>
<b>ACT/South-East NSW</b>		
Anglicare Canberra & Goulburn	GPO Box 1981 Canberra ACT 2601	02 6230 5113 anglicare@anglican.org.au
<b>NSW</b>		
Anglicare, Diocese of Sydney	PO Box 427 Parramatta NSW 2124	02 9895 8000 www.anglicare.org.au
Anglicare New England North West	Rusden Street Armidale NSW 2350	02 6772 4491 asstobish@northnet.com.au
Anglicare North Coast	PO Box 401 Grafton NSW 2460	02 6643 4844 director@anglicarenc.org.au
Anglicare Riverina	PO Box 10 Narrandera NSW 2700	02 6959 1648 rivdio@dragnet.com.au
Anglicare Western NSW	PO Box 23 Bathurst NSW 2795	02 6331 1722 anglicare@ix.net.au
Child & Adolescent Specialist Programs & Accommodation (CASPA)	17 Keen Street Lismore NSW 2480	02 6621 5446 caspa@ceinternet.com.au
St John's, Darlinghurst	PO Box 465 Kings Cross NSW 1340	02 9360 6844 rector@stjohnsanglican.org.au
The Buttery	PO Box 42 Bangalow NSW 2479	02 6687 1111 www.buttery.org.au



The Samaritans Foundation	Locked Bag 3 Adamstown NSW 2289	02 4969 0000 www.samaritans.org.au
Work Ventures	Level 10 418A Elizabeth St Surry Hills NSW 2010	02 9282 6966 www.workventures.com.au
<b>Northern Territory</b>		
Anglicare NT	GPO Box 2950 Darwin NT 0801	08 8985 0000 ceo@anglicare-nt.org.au
<b>Queensland</b>		
Anglicare Central Queensland	PO Box 1394 East St Rockhampton QLD 4700	07 4999 2500 anglicare@anglicarecq.org.au
Anglicare North Queensland	PO Box 214 Bungalow QLD 4870	07 4032 4971 stjohns@anglicare.org.au
Anglicare Southern Queensland (including St Luke's Nursing Service and Anglican Care of the Aged)	PO Box 307 Nundah QLD 4012 PO Box 167 Stones Corner QLD 4180 Level 2, 369 Ann St. Brisbane QLD 4000	07 3260 6461 admin@anglicarebrisbane.com 07 3421 2800 www.stlukesnursing.org.au 07 3835 4555 info@acota.org.au
Anglicare Whitsunday Region	PO Box 1617 Mackay QLD 4740	07 4771 4175 anglicarewhitsun day@bigpond.com
Parish of Heatley	PO Box 4008 Vincent QLD 4814	07 4779 2434
<b>South Australia</b>		
Anglican Community Care Mt Gambier	PO Box 1842 Mt Gambier SA 5290	08 8724 9211 rob@accinc.org.au
Anglicare SA	18 King William Rd North Adelaide SA 5006	08 8305 920 www.anglicare-sa.org.au
Anglicare Willochra	PO Box 96 Gladstone SA 5473	08 8662 2249 diowillochra@westnet.com.au
Laura & Alfred West Cottage Homes	C/- Anglicare SA	08 8209 5422
St John's Youth Services	GPO Box 2063 Adelaide SA 5001	08 8359 2989 stjohns@chariot.net.au
<b>Tasmania</b>		
Anglicare Tasmania	GPO Box 1620 Hobart TAS 7001	03 6231 9602 www.anglicare-tas.org.au



Christian Care Group	PO Box 38 Rokeby TAS 7019	03 6247 7527
Clarendon Children's Home	8–12 Jerrim Place Kingston Beach TAS 7050	03 6229 5199 clarcare@iprimus.com.au
Glenview Homes	2–10 Windsor Street Glenorchy TAS 7010	03 6277 8800 ceo@glenview.org.au
OneCare Ltd	PO Box 843 Burnie TAS 7320	03 6433 5155 michael.powell @onecare.org.au

### Victoria

Anglican Diocese of Gippsland	PO Box 928 Sale VIC 3853	03 5144 2044 registrar@gipps anglican.org.au
Anglicare Ballarat	PO Box 89 Ballarat VIC 3353	03 5331 1183 accounts@ballar atanglican.org.au
Anglicare Victoria	12 Batman Street West Melbourne VIC 3003	03 9321 6133 www.anglicarevic.org.au
Benetas	PO Box 5093 Glenferrie South VIC 3122	03 8823 7900 www.benetas.com.au
Brotherhood of St Laurence	67 Brunswick St Fitzroy VIC 3065	03 9483 1183 www.bsl.org.au
Diocese of Melbourne – Social Responsibilities Commission	c/- Anglicare Vic, 12 Batman St West Melbourne VIC 3003	03 9321 6133 www.melb-anglican.com.au
St Luke's Anglicare	PO Box 315 Bendigo VIC 3552	03 5440 1100 www.stlukes.org.au
St Mark's Community Centre	250 George Street Fitzroy VIC 3065	03 9419 3288

### Western Australia

Anglican Homes	PO Box 63 Cottesloe WA 6011	08 9383 1088 www.anglicanhomes.org.au
Anglicare South West – Bunbury	PO Box 15 Bunbury WA 6231	08 9721 2100 office@diocese.geo.net.au
Anglicare WA	PO Box C138 Perth WA 6839	08 9325 7033 www.anglicarewa.org.au
Province of WA – Social Responsibilities Commission	PO Box C138 Perth WA 6839	08 9325 7033 www.perth.anglican.org
Parkerville Children's Home	Beacon Road Parkerville WA 6081	08 9295 4400 pch@parkerville.org.au





**National & International**

Mission to Seafarers	PO Box 729 Townsville QLD 4810	07 4772 2774 secretary@mts.org.au
Mothers Union of Australia	c/- P O Box 52 Caloundra QLD 4551	07 5491 1866 wdcrossman@bigpond.com
The Selwyn Foundation	PO Box 44-106 Point Chevalier Auckland New Zealand	09 846 0119 www.selwyncare.org.nz

